Dr. David C. Munson, Jr.: Hello, RIT alumni and friends. Once again, this is President Dave Munson. This time, it's great to be in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, as I continue on my Alumni Tiger Tour. Tonight, I am chatting with Brad Tuckman, a 1995 RIT alumnus from the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences' professional photographic illustration program. Brad is the founder and a board member of CreativeDrive, a technology-enabled content creation company with over 1,000 full-time creators and 100 studios globally. The company, founded in 2015, offers integrated creative services, including brand and content strategy, as well as photography and video content creation.

In June 2017, Brad shifted his focus to his efforts as a board member, and he relaunched Scales Gear, a manufacturer of fishing apparel, as its chief brand officer. Brad's entrepreneurial journey began in 1997, when he founded his first agency, Studio FX, a company that combined world class photography with advanced knowledge of the pre-press industry, color management, and workflow strategies. He then merged Studio FX into a new venture, OneKreate, in 2001. As its chief executive officer, Brad grew OneKreate from a retail and catalog photography business to a leading provider of visual content and software for the nation's top retailers and manufacturers, including Rubbermaid, Walmart, Hilton Hotels, and Kate Spade. Brad now serves on his board. Thank you so much for joining me this evening, Brad. It is really a pleasure to meet you.

Brad Tuckman: How's it going, Dave? Thanks for having me.

Munson: It's going well. We'll see how these questions go. I've got a series of questions I want to ask you, and let me begin by saying that since joining RIT in July, this is in my case, I've recognized that the university has uniquely positioned itself at the intersection of technology, the arts, and design. That's different from other universities. I've also seen a hefty dose of entrepreneurship around campus. Your career trajectory seems to encompass all of this and then some. My question is, what about your RIT experience helped position you to found and lead these cutting-edge agencies?

Tuckman: I think when we started RIT back when, out of high school, you're growing up. So, I think you have to have a foundation or a good environment to actually become a kid that is actually going to grow up a little bit over the next couple years. At the same time, from an educational standpoint, I chose RIT, it was the best. Besides being the best, it was also a little bit on the technical side for me and allowed you to have a little more artistry. For myself, my
personality and the type of person I was, I felt much more comfortable in that environment. Over the time, the teachers were amazing professors, supportive all the years. Back then, we were still put in dark rooms, and so they—

Munson: Those were the days.

Tuckman: Yeah, they were fun. So, the education was great. Then, honestly, outside of even normal classes, working on campus, and I think for me, developing myself, my personality, my business skills, all that, was actually working on campus in the food service department in the dorms.

Munson: In the food service department?

Tuckman: Yeah.

Munson: Wow. So, that's where you got your start?

Tuckman: That's where I got my managing start. I learned to Excel there, also.

Munson: So, another question is what do you think it is about your agencies in particular that has made them successful, where others may have tried and failed?

Tuckman: I think there's a little bit of luck in everything in life, but I think from a leadership perspective and empowering your people to do the best they could, but at the same time, traditional agencies typically are top-down. They're big ideas, they're charging lots of dollars for not actually producing stuff. They make money on media buys, they make money on all these other areas, where we built our business from the bottom up. I was originally a photographer, so luckily, the way the world has evolved, content became everything, and right place, right time. So, we actually make things. So our services, our fees, the way we treat our customers is about getting the work done and doing right by them. I've had clients for 15 years now, and large clients as well.

Munson: Good.
Tuckman: So agencies typically come and go. With us, our business, typically, we become part of their team, an extension of their team. And I think that's just really treating people with respect, being transparent with how you actually do the work for them, how you build them, and honestly, understanding every day could be your last day, and do the best work you could.

Munson: Wow. Okay. Speaking of all of these customers and your career, what would you say are some of the biggest highlights that you've had in your career so far? What is kind of memorable?

Tuckman: It's funny because I always used to say, or, I still say, actually, that there was never really that aha moment. I always remember the difficulties. At the same time, the wins are never automatic. They're over a long period of time. So, I think maybe once or twice ever did we get that call we won. Normally, it was this painful process of getting across the finish line and winning. Bu you know, there's certain times, your first job, to your most difficult job, to your failures. You know, I think to that big project you win that you didn't expect in December. That was the end of the year, and a major year. I think for me, I had the experience of being a photographer originally, so I got to travel the world, you know.

Prior to my wife and I adopting our daughter in China, I literally was on the road for 30 days, I'll never forget, and I was—New York, California, New York, Florida, New York, Hawaii, middle of the country somewhere, Turkey, New York, and then China—so, there was a lot of…I'm probably wrong, a little bit, there, but it was something like that. I mean, that was pretty much life, and that was exciting for a brief period of time, but the reality is, building a business and having teams and having people, they weren't employees, they're family. They're people you have to treat with respect, and for me, that's the highlights of the years, of being able to provide that environment for people. So, for me, you do good work, everything else comes.

Munson: So, you do good work and everything else comes, but did you ever think “Wow, I'm not going to make it?”

Tuckman: Oh, I could tell you. I didn't pay myself for a year at a time.

Munson: Okay, well, that's not good!

Tuckman: So, you have to keep your employees employed. Cash flow, SOWs, RFPs. You know, you don't have the paperwork worked out and you're fronting huge costs for six months at a time. Early on, when I started really making the business successful, I put too many eggs in one basket, and next thing you know, I remember Sports Authority merges with Garts, I think it was, in Colorado, and they picked up and moved. Overnight, I lost a couple million dollars in revenue.
**Munson:** Oh boy.

**Tuckman:** So, I literally got back on the road and started shooting more so I can keep my employees on staff, because I was able to get higher rates for myself, until I was able to have the team secure a lot more new business. From that point forward, you didn't have the eggs in one basket.

**Munson:** Yeah. Oh my goodness.

**Tuckman:** Life's about ups and downs.

**Munson:** So technology certainly has played a significant part in what you do, and the question I have is how have you kept ahead of the curve? What advances do you see on the horizon that will better enable organizations to cultivate and share their brands with consumers? So, maybe this is a two-sided question. Technology keeps evolving, Somehow, you stay right with it, and maybe can even anticipate the future a little bit. Where's that take us?

**Tuckman:** Technology is a must. It's also, I'll say, a permanent bleeding hole if you're investing in technology as well. So, for me, you know, 2001 was the first time I started investing in technology. Back then, my business was focused mostly on Sunday circulars. There were 48 of them a year. We were doing a couple of companies, and the amount of product that just kept coming and going from manufacturers that never even touched our clients' hands. China to here.

So, we developed system just to track products. However, we built a system that was too refined, and we had to take it apart. So, over the years, we've just had to say, "How do we engage our customers better? How do we provide them better services?" Eventually, I think we have 60 people on our team now that are just technology. Developers, business analysts, all of that. So, we're constantly developing our tools to better interface with our clients, how they run their business as well, from a marketing operations side, to integrating with us. It's complex.

**Munson:** Yeah. You're on a treadmill.

**Tuckman:** It doesn't end. I think there was a project I started six years ago that we had so much technical debt that I think we just finished it now.

**Munson:** Oh my goodness.
**Tuckman:** You learn from your mistakes, shall we say.

**Munson:** Well, let me ask you a couple of fun questions. The first is, as I previously mentioned, you graduated with a photography degree, and so the question is, do you still sometimes get behind the camera? Or are you really mostly focused now on business and strategy?

**Tuckman:** I have a camera in my hands every day, which is my phone. I have a point-and-shoot, my Hasselblad point-and-shoot, and I use that every weekend, or I try to. I think that up until a few months ago for Scales that was the first time I actually picked the camera up in maybe five years that actually did something that was for a project. It was fun, up until...five years before that, I did one, and a couple years before that, but do I miss it at times? Absolutely. But at the same time, I learned early on in my career that I was a business person. Even though I love photography, I was good at it, I was better at business. So, I've shifted to that over the years.

**Munson:** Oh, good for you. The other kind of fun question is what is your favorite memory, or maybe memories from RIT, thinking back to those days?

**Tuckman:** I think I'd be killed tonight if I didn't say meet my wife at college. Howard LeVant arranged for an exchange program with the UK, and I met my wife through that. She was an exchange student. So, that's a good memory. Usually. And you know, yeah, I have a lot of good memories. I have memories when I was working at Nathaniel's and the Corner Store back then. It's not called that, and I don't even think it's there anymore. Great memories there with my bosses, the managers, the people there.

I have good memories of, again, Howard LeVant, John Retallack. He used to be a wonderful person. He helped me out at tough times, giving me extra paper, because I couldn't afford the paper. Kerry Coppin. He was my freshman year teacher, and I'll never forget, he had a four-hour seminar on how to cut a mat. At the time, I thought he was crazy, but it's a good memory now, because I learned a lot from it. Then Dennis Diefenbach. He, still to this day, he'll deny it, but he accidentally recommended me for a job, a summer internship, that I had no business having. And, I didn't say I had no business having it, and I went and did it, and that literally led to my entire career. I met the right people, it turned into everything in my life. So, you get a little luck in life, yeah.

**Munson:** Oh my golly. That's a great story. That's a wonderful story.

**Tuckman:** So, you asked me for one thing. I think I gave you four or five.
Munson: Yeah, well, that's wonderful that you have so many memories like that. Well, thanks very much, Brad, for your time today. I hope we will be able to see you back in Rochester sometime soon. Many thanks to our listeners for tuning in, and go Tigers!

Tuckman: Thanks a lot.