

What's Next? podcast

Mike Whitten - Minisode

[Bouncy theme music plays.]

[Introduction] Welcome to the What's Next? podcast. Let me just start off by saying. Not everyone has the same background. There is no road-map for success. Life begins at the edge of your comfort zone. Leaning into your curiosities. It does suck when you grow up. We're all still figuring out who we are. You can't just sit back and be silent. Black lives matter. It is the little stuff that makes the biggest difference. Do you have another hour? [Laughs]

[Bouncy theme music fades.]

Cody: Hello, Beaver Nation, welcome to the What's Next podcast. This is our minisode between seasons two and three. Today's guest is a senior adviser at Crissa, an international real estate advisory firm, and he's also one of the founding members of [OSU Next](#), the young alumni council behind this podcast and a lot of other events and opportunities focused on keeping young Beaver alums connected to Beaver Nation. He's a 2012 OSU grad with a degree in speech communications and a minor in business and entrepreneurship. And we are thankful to have him. Joining us on the podcast today, Michael Whitten, thanks for joining us on the What's Next? podcast.

Michael: Cody, it's great to be here and great to be on the podcast chatting with you.

Cody: So, I want to ask you a few things about being in real estate during these COVID times, and I also want to talk about some of the whys behind this group, OSU Next, how it came to fruition. But first, I wanted to give a quick shout out to the hometown, Medford, Oregon. Michael and I, although we didn't actually know each other, are both natives of Medford, Oregon, Mike South Medford Panther. I was a black tornado, but fierce rivalry right there. Just wanted to give a shout to the hometown, but maybe you could start there. What was your favorite part about growing up in southern Oregon?

Michael: You know, it was just a good spot. We moved from California, from the Bay Area in third grade. So, I wasn't born there.

Cody: Not a native, but a “grew up”.

Michael: Not a native, but I hit the 20-year mark of living in Oregon, so I feel fairly qualified; that's debatable, I guess. But it was a good spot. I mean, it was pretty tight knit community. High school sports are huge. You just think of, you know, the big Friday Night Lights and, you know, even different rivalries schools kind of knowing everyone for the most part. And then, you know, just growing up and being enjoying camping and watersports, snow skiing and all that stuff. I mean, there's so many opportunities to do that sort of stuff. In high school, we spent a lot of time wakeboarding and half boating it in Chasta lake just to our south. So, I mean, honestly, it's a beautiful area. My wife grew up in Jacksonville area. So, people that know Jacksonville, it's a pretty historic town. So, it's always fun to go back there. But I think just all the recreational opportunities made it super cool spot to grow up.

Cody: Yeah, definitely, and maybe to transitioning from there, giving us a little background on your high school and growing up experience, but then switching over to OSU, we've been asking our guests these past couple seasons to highlight maybe a couple favorite OSU memories are or things that are especially formative during your time there. Do you have any like a couple of things that pop into your mind on that question as far as what made your OSU experience what it was?

Michael: Yeah, I think there's a lot of a lot of great things there, really, and I don't think this formed it per say, but one of the things I always think about in Corvallis, and Oregon State, and it was a bit unique, was just mom and dad's weekend. For whatever reason, my parents and a lot of the roommates I had, you know, both parents would show up. It was a huge event and had all the games and everything set up, and I just thought that was super cool because there's a lot of schools that mom and dad weekend doesn't, you know, isn't popular and no one shows up or it's just in the Greek life. But I always remember just the biggest and the most fun weekend, you know, having was mom and dad's weekend, everyone showing up and playing golf and hanging out. And also, for some reason, that just always sticks out to me.

Cody: Yeah, I even had friends who went to UO and I remember coming back like during holidays and my freshman year and talking about, like, yea moms, dads or parents' weekends. And it didn't even seem like it was as big a tradition down there, so I was also pretty thankful for those. And I think another interesting thing about those weekends is college is such a formative time for you. It's like your first time, like going away from home. Also like, you know, you're developing these new friend groups away from your parents or away from your family, etc. And so, for me, when you when you just told that story, like it clicked that it was an interesting, like where you have these two separate worlds that are kind of separate and then they all come together. And it's really cool to, like, share that with your parents.

Michael: Yeah. And it just the whole vibe on campus changed and yeah.

Cody: It was it was full of people. Yeah.

Michael: Super unique.

Cody: So, I wanted to ask, because you work in real estate, specifically with commercial stuff. So, these are times where I probably the commercial real estate industry hasn't faced a time like this or even seen, had to adapt to a time like this where a lot of companies are going remote or companies are figuring out hybrid models with offices and office space and considering like what does office life look like in the future? So, what's it been like working in the industry? What's your day to day and how is that world changed for you?

Michael: Yeah, yeah, it's a good question. And it's, you know, as I think we just hit on a little earlier, I mean, we're having a ton of conversations with a lot of different companies on what does the move forward plan look like? And, you know, part of it right now is just trying to be a resource for as many companies as we can and whether that's, you know, what the return to office looks like or strategy and how do you safely get people back and you need everyone back who can. You know, what employees can work from home and what employees need to be, you know, physically have a space there in the office. It's really for us. I mean, it's a tough time.

I think there's a lot of projects that that maybe got put on hold or just kind of doing short term extensions or, you know, some of those things. It's really a time for us just to build

goodwill and just be a resource for everyone we can. And I know the other piece of it too a lot of companies have too much space. We work with their large portfolio company, that part of their real estate team been talking about. “You know, we have too much space,” but a lot of the, you know, decision makers just don't believe in the remote and if that is going to be beneficial and productive and in all those things and whether we like it or not, no one's had it, no one's had a choice. Basically overnight, everyone had to jump into, you know, working remote.

And I think one of the takeaways from this is there's a lot of companies realizing, hey, this is actually working and we're being productive. Maybe not if you have three, three, three kids and grandkids. And then, yeah, there's a there's two sides to every story. And I think there's certain people that love it. It's great. But I also think there's also people that want to be in the office and being in the office creates quite a bit of culture, a lot of company culture's still very important to them. So, there's two sides of what's going to happen. But to your point, yeah, a lot of companies are just trying to figure out what does this look like? So that's the long answer to that question.

Cody: I saw a meme the other day that was like, am I working from home or am I living from work? Focused on the blending of those two spaces for a lot of folks who dove into the work from home world. And I know I definitely miss the office energy to air and sometimes struggle with creating that separation of here's my here's my workspace and next to me is my piano. Like, where's the line between, you know, like working from home or living from work, like which one is which one's overlapping in which one for sure.

Michael: And I think a lot of people too, that live in big cities. And, you know, in Portland, there's so much stuff going on. But I think when that smoke, we had all the wildfire smoke coming in, people realize, like I'm stuck in my house, like I'm here all day and I can't. I live downtown in seven hundred square feet, but I go to this park and walk here, go grab these people for drinks and sit outside. And so, I think, you know, there's no breaking it up, you know, when you are from home, so.

Cody: Right. Physically or mentally sometimes.

Michael: Yeah. Yeah. And that's a huge piece to think about as well.

Cody: So, I want to - thanks for sharing all that, too, I know that's like our crazy world and stuff that's changing. So, appreciate to hear how you're adapting and stuff to consider. I wanted to jump into a little bit about OSU Next. So, this group that folks who have been listening, you've probably heard me mention the group. It's the group that's behind this podcast. So, if that's all you've heard so far, we hope you've at least heard of OSU Next. But there's a lot more to it. And there's been a bit of a history the last couple of years of this group kind of getting started. And Michael is kind of been a force behind that and behind the origin. So maybe you can fill us in Mike, like where did the idea for OSU Next come from and what is it?

Michael: Yeah, for sure. I'll give the quick background, hopefully not too long, but yeah, I think, you know, it kind of hit me that there's so many awesome alumni and individuals working and living in the Portland Metro, that I'll have this awesome connection of being a Beav. But, you know, I realized, hey, why am I not kind of part of the alumni association and kind of giving back and connecting with all these other people. So, you know, when sitting down and joining this group, the Alumni Association, that is obviously a very large group, I connected with Aaron Kurosaki who's part of the OSU Next group as well. And so, we talked about some stuff and part of it was realizing, you know, there's a lot of different groups and a lot of great things are currently was. But it just seemed like there was a gap of kind of this young professional, out-of-school, learning the ropes of the real world and having a job and all these sorts of things. And so, you know, talking with Aaron was like, man, it'd be awesome to build this group.

And he completely agreed. And part of that was just realizing, like, man, it would be such an awesome thing to start this kind of core group and grow from there and be able to watch people grow and change jobs and get married and have families and just be a resource over the years. So that was kind of the piece of, all the stuff takes time, but I mean, relationships are beautiful in so many different ways. So that was kind of the thought behind it. And from there, you know, I mean, I can go into more of the details, but Aaron and I got a suite at the Blazers, invited this first group of people and it seemed like a couple of those people stuck and other people kind of cynicism. I think they don't have the time to do it. And it seemed like it was a snowball. You know, you get a couple of good core people and it kind of snowball and have the right people on board. And that's kind of the makeup of it.

Cody And for me, when I first found out about OSU Next, it kind of fizzled, I guess, and I didn't even know if I knew this at the time. But a little bit of a void for me after college was you go from this time where you're at Oregon State and there's all these people who share that commonality with you. They're all either studying or they're teachers or whatever, but there's this community around it. And then you suddenly go into the job world or the real-life world and you're figuring out what to do. And but then also you've been kind of stripped of this community piece, you know, not necessarily stripped, but it's just not right there. It's not as easily accessible as it is when you're in Corvallis or you're in Bend or you're attending e-campus classes. And so, for me, it was kind of like a realization of like, oh, I've missed this kind of link to OSU. And this seems like a really great accessible way for me to get back into it. Is that kind of like the approach that the OSU Next has for helping folks kind of reconnect?

Michael: Yeah, I mean, one hundred percent. I mean, I think in your stories, I think one of the best, just about showing up and networking and finding jobs and just resources within the group. But I mean, the group of all of us within OSU Next, you know, it's a small family, so, one hundred percent, and to your point too, I think is your friends and your other OSU alumni peers grow up. I mean, people move. And I think of a lot of my core buddies, you know, they've moved and I don't hear from where they end up in different places. And so, this does kind of fill that void of putting others in your life and, you know, whether personally or through Oregon State or business wise or whatever. I mean, it's more really focused on just building good relationships with quality people and that's been really fun.

Cody: Totally. So, for folks who are listening to this and this is kind of piquing their interest of like, how can I get involved with this? What's kind of the structure there or how could you talk us through that? Like, do they have to join the alumni association, or can they just attend events and not be part of the council or how can you take that next level if you do want to be part of the council? Maybe you can give us kind of the structure there.

Michael: Yeah, yeah. I mean, we have a ton of resources. Rome, wasn't built in a day right. So, we are slowly just adding different pieces, and a LinkedIn page and obviously with COVID hitting, we've had to pivot a little bit. This podcast has been wonderful, keep people engaged. I think first, I'd say I mean, if you want to be involved at all, but not sure of your time commitment, I mean, there's so many cool ways to get involved. So,

you know, in the past, we had quarterly events and people can attend those and be part of the ones that interest them there. If they had further interest, they could apply and be part of the council.

You know, we're building out subcommittees of different ways, that are 15 to 20 person OSU Next council, are continuing to go out and within Oregon State and outside the organization and just connect and reach out to others. But yeah, I mean, there's a few different ways that you can be a part of it right now and kind of part of being on the council is making sure you're part of the alumni association and doing different virtual events. So, unfortunately, a lot of the cool things we were doing have been put on pause. But right now, I'd say, you know, we still have virtual events that are taking place. And then being part of this podcast is a good way. And then, you know, aside from that, I mean, we're just, I think the best part of this is everyone still can connect via Zoom and chat virtually as well. So, I think at the same time, if people just want to meet others and chat or have questions, opinions, we want to be a resource, I mean, there's always the opportunity to connect with any one of our council members.

Cody: And I remember attending an event last summer that was just a happy hour at a place in downtown Portland that had a little putt-putt area, and you could grab some drinks, some beers. And it was just a really nice way to get off of work and then have something right there of like, I'm going to step right into this community. It's a community of Beavs. I might not know the folks here, but having that Beaver connection was like such a refreshing way to just like kind of a happy hour session or have that social aspect in Beaver Nation back. And so, I think, like what you said, we're looking forward to a time where we can, again, have in-person events and meet in person. But for the time being, it's definitely a time where folks need support in different ways, whether it's looking for a job or maybe going through layoffs or coming back to the job world, having a family, like you said, for the first time, those type of things. So, I appreciate kind of how you frame that as, this isn't just a group. We can definitely help with career stuff and help you advance there. But we also want to be supportive in whatever way your life might need it right now.

Michael: Yeah, yeah, 100 percent. And I know I missed a few things there, but it's continuing to evolve daily and weekly is, you know, I think like everything, whether it's your office space or your home, your group or whatever, everyone's kind of trying to figure out what the future looks like and how to best stay connected.

Cody: Yeah, and I know that all of us are having different differing levels of zoom fatigue of being on web chats, so I know that our group is totally looking to do some cool stuff virtually with things like Zoom, but also where I know in the back of our minds too, are thinking of other ways to engage and get out in a safe way and keep doing that. So, yeah, I'm looking forward to more stuff.

Michael: The other cool thing that I'll just throw in there and we've again talked about the OSU Next group, is that any finances or any kind of surplus money goes into a pool that we'll ultimately, as a council and group, get to give to someone or determine how we can give that as a scholarship or someone in need that needs it. So, it's kind of cool. We have the support of the alumni association, but a lot of autonomy, and in terms of ways that we can, you know, individually make an impact on select students or scholarships and all that sort of stuff. And then that's actually another good point to say, you know, one of the other big things about OSU Next is, you know, part of what the group was started for and what we are, is just to be a connector. So, if there's other groups within Oregon State or even other schools, I mean, shoot, we talked about that other school down south, you know, figuring out ways to connect with them or have some fun rivalry that, you know. So, whether it's, you know, certain groups that Oregon State or other schools, I mean, we just want to promote everything and just try to help as many people as we can in whatever way that it is or just be here to listen to or, yeah.

Cody: I think that's one of the things that when I got involved with OSU Next that really stood out was, you know, is we're all volunteers. We're not like on staff at OSU or anything, like we're just people who are, you know, passionate about sticking with this community and growing it. And so, what's really cool is that kind of opens it up to different folks, talents and different folks' visions for how they want to keep building the community in a positive way. And so, kind of what I'm trying to say, I guess, is there's a flexibility there. So, you mentioned like, doing something with U of O or whatever, and I think we're all excited and open to any ideas and excited for anything someone wants to take on.

Michael: Which is one way we can be kind of nimble and pivot and yeah.

Cody: Right, which is a wonderful partnership to have with the broader alumni association too.

Ok, so I appreciate you sharing all about OSU Next, and for folks who might want to get involved or at least just check out what resources are out there, we'll be sure to post some links in the show notes so that you can kind of check that out a little bit further. You can also join our LinkedIn group if you go to LinkedIn and search OSU Next, there's a bunch of content and conversations going on there and a great way to connect with other Beavs again around career stuff, but also around just like life in general. So, we invite everybody to check that out and get involved in whatever way you feel comfortable.

[Bouncy theme music plays.]

Cody: Hey, listeners, this podcast is proudly supported by your local Toyota dealers. As the official vehicle of Oregon State Athletics, Toyota is a proud partner of Oregon State, both on and off the field and congratulates all OSU alumni for their accomplishments and achievements. Visit your local Toyota dealer or [Toyota.com](https://www.toyota.com) to find the perfect vehicle for you.

[Bouncy theme music fades.]

Cody: Before we wrap up today, Mike, I also know that you and your wife welcomed your first child early this year so, big congrats.

Michael: Thank you, thank you.

Cody: I just want to know how Dad life treating you, how's it been so far?

Michael: Dad life has been good, you know, with everything you may think you know or you've heard it, or you can tackle it all. But everything in life, especially this one, is a learning curve, not necessarily all bad stuff, I mean, super awesome, cool stuff. But it's good. People always talk about how you can never love anyone more, you know, just the feelings you have when it's your child and watching them grow. And I can now attest to that. It's a pretty cool thing. So, we're feeling super blessed on our four-month-old now.

Cody: Wow. I am not a parent myself currently, but what's the moment like when you come home with this baby and you're kind of like, all right, like, I'm in charge of this thing now? What's that moment like?

Michael: It's weird, I think bigger for me was when my wife had the baby, super late, I think like 11:30pm, and then they're like, "OK, great, we're gonna pick you guys up and send you down to, like to this other part of the hospital" We're like, "wait, we love you guys. Like, what do you mean? Where are we headed?" And shout out to St. Vincent's awesome nursing staff and doctors and everything is wonderful. But I think the crazy part is just like the first night when they put you in this other room and you're sleeping there and like there's this tiny little baby that was born less than a few hours ago. And it was just, like, that to me was kind of the part where I'm like, where's the nurse? Okay he's crying, what do I do? That part was kind of like freaky a little bit.

So, yeah, luckily, we had Audrey's mom came into town for like a week after we went back home and it was a pretty quick transition back to home, I think it was just that first night, just being in that other room in the hospital and being like, this is ours. What do I do?

Cody: Surreal moment.

Michael: Yeah, like, I don't know how to swaddle. What do you mean? Can you come back and swaddle?

Cody: Google searching swaddle.

Michael: Yeah. Yeah, but it's been a great experience so.

Cody: Yeah, that's amazing. What's been like, so it's been four months now, and looking back at that period of time, like what's been the biggest change? Or maybe too, like what's put the biggest smile on your face so far in that four-month period of watching your child grow?

Michael: That's a good question. It's always kind of fun when I hear people say, "oh, oh, she looks just like Mike. Oh, it's a mini-Mike." I'm like, "oh, yeah. Alright, mini me. Alright." Because you never know, and it's weird to think about what she's gonna look

like when she gets older, it's kind of another interesting thought. She's kind of hitting the cool stage now, you know, smile and kind of just kind of developing a cool personality, so that's been that's been super fun. Then I think, honestly, the whole soap, you know, for us in the silver lining, I think of the COVID is having a baby with you know, I would have been back to work in the office kind of Monday through Friday to 5:00, like, you know, a week and a half right after having the baby.

So, the fact that I've been working from home this whole time and I could just, you know, my wife's on maternity leave, I could go pop out, go see her multiple times throughout the day. I mean, that was super cool, and that's time you'll never get back. So, a lot of really not great things are taking place right now with everything going on, but, you know, I think it's always important to look at the positives and we always usually have more positive surrounding us than we realized. So, you know, to me, it's you know, I feel for all those all those people, but I also take the silver lining that, hey, this this gave me the opportunity to really spend these first few months just with her every day and with my wife. So that that was pretty awesome to me.

Cody: Yeah, that's you know, I think we hear like, yeah, during these times, it must be crazy to have kids, or also have a new kid, but like you said right there, like, yeah, that's time you'll never get back. And so that's awesome. Definitely crazy stuff in the world, but blessings along the way, too.

Michael: Yeah. The one crazy part would have been - they were talking about a chance of no one being able to be in the delivery room for a while and now it's kind of crazy like, that would not fly. That would be tough. So luckily, you know, we had to wear a mask kind of going in and out of the hospital, but then once we got in our room, we could take it off and that was great at first. We hadn't been on vacation because of the COVID stuff, we had a cool view at St. Vincent's, we were ordering our food, and I'm like, "oh, maybe watch a movie tonight." Then all of a sudden, the contractions came and it got real, but it was fun at first. But that was kind of the scary part, if they changed things up and said "she's got to be in here alone."

I had a nice, different experience, everything going on. No one could visit, but it worked out. There were doctors coming in every couple of hours, so it was like we had pulled off to see people, we wanted to get back home, which is, you know, two days, basically

some crazy times. But I didn't think I was prepared. I wasn't prepared. But the best way to learn is just going through it, diving in or figuring it out.

Cody: Great, well, I appreciate you sharing that about your personal life and then also kind of giving us a little overview of your career stuff and then, of course, we appreciate focusing most of the time today on OSU Next and how folks can get involved. So, yeah, again, really appreciate your time, Mike, and thanks for coming on.

Michael: Thanks a lot. Cody, great to catch up with you and look forward to seeing you at the next real event.

Cody: Sometime in the future.

Michael: You got it, buddy.

Cody: To all our listeners out there and Beaver Nation, this wraps up the minisode between seasons two and three. So, we will see you soon on season three, of the What's Next podcast.

[Bouncy theme music plays.]

Cody: Hey, listeners, our goal at OSU Next to the alumni association is to build community, and that includes creating connections and sharing these unique stories with the rest of the nation. If you found this episode of the What's Next? podcast valuable, you can help us achieve this goal by writing a quick review, leaving a rating and subscribing to the show in your preferred podcast player. We're thankful for your support.

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