

Economic Architecture Podcast

Episode 30 Transcript:

The following transcript has been edited for clarity:

Stuart Yasgur: Hi, I'm Stuart Yasgur, and this is Economic Architecture, the podcast. In this week's conversation, I had a fantastic talk with Marcus Sheanshang about his innovative work as the CEO of JBM Packaging. Located in Lebanon, Ohio, JBM is well run. They make the kind of eco-friendly paper packaging that you might find wrapping your favorite chocolate bar or the flower seeds you buy at your local nursery.

Stuart Yasgur: As the CEO of JBM Packaging, Marcus was faced with a typical challenge of any business: to find the right hires for his team. Marcus realized that there were many potential employees that he could hire, but to become true members of his team, some of the people had to overcome an obstacle of their own.

Marcus Sheanshang: During this process, one thing I asked all of our leadership team said, hey, whenever you're given the opportunity, please talk about what we're doing on the fair chance. And this is not to bring unwarranted attention to us, but to help soften people's perspectives as to what people coming outta prison are really dealing with.

Stuart Yasgur: Many members of Marcus' staff are people who have had an interaction with the criminal legal system. Many of them have been incarcerated. They may be great potential employees, but their situations can come with complications. They may have housing insecurity, or they

may not have transportation. They may have to report to their probation officers or meet the terms of their probation.

Stuart Yasgur: For many employees, there are things that they have to deal with just to get to work on time at the start of the day. And while employers have a vested interest in their employees' success, few employers have dedicated the capacity or capability they need to help their employees succeed. Marcus learned that if he embraced fair chance hiring, which means that he sought to select employees for their ability to perform the job, rather than their background with the criminal legal system.

Stuart Yasgur: And he found smart ways to support team members in dealing with the extra complications they faced. He could find the reliable talent he needed to grow his business, and through the process, fair chance hiring has become a central element of their identity, and it's a living reflection of their values.

Marcus Sheanshang: First of all, working through the prisons, the ODRC, which is the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, that's what runs the prisons in Ohio, and they're very interested in helping people coming out of prisons be successful once they get out. I'm assuming you guys know what recidivism is, but that's when people go back into prison once they get out.

Marcus Sheanshang: And, you know, a lot of that depends on how you measure it. But you know, since Ohio's 20 to 30% recidivism rate over a three-year period, and so we are talking more about this and talking, you know, again, to the church that I'm at. And you start to learn that there are other businesses in our community that have been fantastic, and the more you talk with them, the more that network of other companies and other facilities pops up too.

Marcus Sheanshang: So, one group called Nehemiah Manufacturing, Dan Meyer owns them. He wants a complete open book with us, and we

brought our entire leadership team down to his facility to understand how they do it. Some of the programs that they had, the processes that they had, we were trying to really get the message out about the Fair Chance program.

Marcus Sheanshang: 'Cause a lot of people, there's a stigma, and I had my thoughts as well on not, I didn't wanna hire anybody coming outta prison. That has always been my thought until we started learning more about that plight. And so, during this process, one thing I asked all of our leadership team said, hey, whenever you're given the opportunity, please talk about what we're doing on the fair chance.

Marcus Sheanshang: And this is not to bring unwarranted attention to us, but to help soften people's perspectives as to what people coming outta prison are really dealing with. So, through that process, I reached out to our biggest customer who's down in South Carolina and just said, hey Bob, gimme 10 minutes.

Marcus Sheanshang: Lemme just tell you about something we're doing that's pretty cool. And so, he was very kind. He gave me 10 minutes. I was on my soapbox talking about it. And he is like, Marcus, we've been doing that for years. And I said that's great. Can we come down and learn from you? 'Cause we have a lot of questions.

Marcus Sheanshang: And that opened up another group that we're now very much involved with, that's called Jumpstart. Jumpstart is a group down in South Carolina. We now kind of have the Jumpstart Ohio, which does ministry work in the prisons. I say all this to help kind of lay the foundation that there are a lot of other businesses out there, and if they're helping Fair Chance team members, we have found from our experience that they're very open with other businesses that wanna start these programs too.

Marcus Sheanshang: Because the more you learn about it, I'll say the softer your heart gets for people in these situations, anybody can have their

opinion on this. If somebody committed a crime and they serve their time... Historically, I didn't want to have anything to do with that. When you sit there and say, how can we be a good part of society if we're not being a part of the solution to a situation like this, and all of us being equal.

Marcus Sheanshang: We've had tremendous success with our Fair Chance program. We're in about the 10th year. We started in 2016, and we've definitely hit ups and downs, don't get me wrong. We've got roughly, I wanna say it's 65 team members of 150. That number kind of vacillates a little bit, but are fair chance, and we've got a number of people that are also in management positions with us, have really grown with us, been promoted a number of different times.

Marcus Sheanshang: So, it really is interesting to see how generational poverty, you know, strangely is impacted by this too. I don't think people think about that, but there's a lot of opportunity, unfortunately, for kids that their parents are in prison to go down that same path. So, if you can kind of stabilize the family unit, it really improves the chances that next generation's gonna be making better choices.

Stuart Yasgur: So you really focused fair chance hiring, thinking about hiring people who've had a previous interaction with the criminal justice system, criminal legal system, really because of a need that your business had, which is we need people, and we need to find, where are we gonna find new people?

Marcus Sheanshang: It really was. We were going through this process. We looked a lot at high schools first, because in our area, many of the high schools, a lot of the kids didn't go to college. And so, we thought, thought that would be a great area for us to kind of show that manufacturing, you can have a good career there. There's a good opportunity.

Marcus Sheanshang: We did not find that to be successful, and I'm sure, you know, we are part of that problem too, but it was just a, a lot of effort on

our side. The church that I go to mentioned doing ministry work in a prison around here, and I reached out to the campus pastor and said, hey, I work up there and would love to know more of what these guys are doing when they get out.

Marcus Sheanshang: Truly, that led to the start of this. I wish it was something more, you know, robust, you know, trying to do good and everything. And it didn't start out that way. Now that's changed, but it really did start out as a solution to a problem that we saw coming up.

Stuart Yasgur: Yeah. It's so fascinating to hear. So, help for folks who don't, who are just learning about JBM, help situate us.

Stuart Yasgur: So, Ohio, place is kind of geographically... because I think it's really interesting for people to think about Ohio, like industrial manufacturing, all of these as kind of the source of real job growth, which is not for people who are not spending a bunch of time in Ohio, that may not be their association.

Marcus Sheanshang: Yeah, no, we're in a great area. We're just north of Cincinnati, kind of in between Dayton and Columbus, and Place 11 and Ohio. And this area is growing real well. It's growing more so now than it has been in the past. But you know, one of the reasons why we moved out here was, was a good community, just didn't have enough people really to support our growth.

Marcus Sheanshang: And so that kind of led to the problem that we had in front of us. And the fair chance hiring has been a fantastic answer to those problems for a number of different reasons.

Stuart Yasgur: And so, you're seeing the macro trends we've heard in other conversations, we've heard about the macro trends.

Stuart Yasgur: There's a structural change in the workforce. There's gonna be labor shortages, like whatever's happening with the

unemployment rate on a day-to-day or weekly basis. Structurally, in the economy, there's gonna be a labor shortage. You're experiencing that firsthand in your own business, and you're kind of looking ahead and saying, okay, how do we make sure we have the talent we need to keep growing?

Marcus Sheanshang: We don't have an easy job that's automated. Maybe there will be in the future, I don't know. But right now, if we can get engaged team members, that's the best solution to this problem. And I think any manufacturer right now with whatever the, I don't know what the unemployment rate is, 4.2% or whatever the number is that, I mean, that's full employment is I think we all know.

Marcus Sheanshang: And so, for that. If you want to be a growing business, yes, you can get more productive, but hopefully, ultimately, it's gonna lead to more job growth for your business as well. And you have to have an answer for how you're gonna deal with that. A fair chance hiring for us started out truly as a solution to a problem that we were having from just a growth perspective.

Marcus Sheanshang: And we regularly do strategy work, as I'm sure many of your listeners do as well. And one of the issues that we saw coming up as any manufacturer, we manufacture basically environmentally friendly packaging, and we have 150 team members, and the demographics were in front of us. We knew that we were gonna be losing people in the future due to retirements and such.

Marcus Sheanshang: So, one of the areas that we saw as a strategic threat was really replacing some of the great people that we have working with us right now. And ultimately, that led us to a fair chance hiring, you know, something that started out as a strategic solution really changed who we are as a business, and we're a much better business for that.

Stuart Yasgur: Yeah, I think it's fascinating to hear you talk about it, and I'd love to just pick out a couple themes here, 'cause I think one thing is, it's almost a mirror image. I think people don't realize how many folks have had an interaction with the criminal legal system. Right? You know, we know the numbers are one outta three adults in the United States, which means pretty much everyone knows multiple people who are in exactly that situation, but may not know it.

Stuart Yasgur: And so, there's a real awareness gap that we need to become more aware of it. And on the flip side of it, you know, there are all these businesses who are making progress and learning how to, to overcome the obstacles of fair chance hiring, but that we're also not as aware of that.

Stuart Yasgur: I think it is really starting to kind of, as we start to become aware of it, you start to see it around you. You start to see both sides of this and the possibilities that it presents.

Marcus Sheanshang: Anybody we've found has been fantastic, and we've been through, met a lot of different businesses across the country that really see themselves in a great situation that they can have an impact on.

Marcus Sheanshang: One individual that can truly be exponential, if you think about this, it'll take a while just with generations, but really have an impact. So, I do feel like there's a lot of businesses out there trying to do the right thing for the right reasons.

Stuart Yasgur: Yeah, I think that's right. And I think the other thing that, that people start to recognize when you learn how much people are doing is.

Stuart Yasgur: There's real longevity here. I mean, you're doing this nearly 10 years. There are others who are doing it longer and kind of different magnitude. These are serious people running businesses with, you know,

accountable to the success of those businesses who are actually also figuring out how to do this in a way that, as you talk about it, it's aligned with your values.

Stuart Yasgur: So, you wouldn't be doing this if it doesn't also make business sense?

Marcus Sheanshang: Yeah, I mean, we joke and say without profit, there is no purpose. And you know, I don't mean to be coy with that, but it's like in that sense too, we just had our Christmas dinners yesterday with all of our chefs, and you know, we're having a great year, and like you said, one in three people are impacted by, you know, the justice system, and we still had a lot of team members that I don't wanna work with those people, you know?

Marcus Sheanshang: And we were very open with that. One thing we screwed up on, 'cause we were trying to be very respectful of people coming in, is we didn't share that information with our managers frankly. They provided feedback saying, hey, why are you guys keeping us in the dark here?

Marcus Sheanshang: It's like, that's a fair point 'cause they want to know. And to be honest too, it's like people can Google these things, and it happens very quickly. You can figure these things out. But you know, I think the value of communicating with all you know, all your management team, as well as your team members as well, really does help people acclimate.

Marcus Sheanshang: People are gonna get used to these things on their own timeframe as well. I don't think this is something you wanna do without sharing it, because people, if they're not educated about that, they're gonna think of the worst possible things. We've had people say, you know, their spouse did, they didn't want him working here.

Marcus Sheanshang: It's like, time out. Let's just talk about this. Let's talk about what the crimes really are that we're talking about, 'cause we've got criteria set around who we hire. So no crimes against women, no crimes against children, no sexual crimes. We look closely at violence. So those are the four criteria that we have around our Fair Chance program, and that way it helps people at least understand kinda what the situation is.

Marcus Sheanshang: And last one, we look closely at violence because I was a stickler on that one. And our team brought somebody that had murdered somebody. I said, well, that's not within our criteria. They're like, yes, and this man is 55 years old. The crime that was committed was when he was 15.

Marcus Sheanshang: He's been in prison for whatever, 25-ish years. He would, he had been out for a little bit and so, and he was vouched for, from somebody on our leadership team. I said, well, sure. You know, it's like those are things, like some of the, the hard and fast rules there are, like the no sexual crimes. That's a pretty, that's a tough one.

Marcus Sheanshang: I'm not judging the crimes, but those are ones that stigma around that is tough, and there are still some things that we need to make sure our current population is comfortable with these, with the crimes too, 'cause I don't want it to hurt the overall program.

Marcus Sheanshang: So, there are ones that we are pretty black and white, on other ones we wanna know more about what the situation was, so that we can kind of add an educated perspective to it.

Stuart Yasgur: And, and part of what I hear you kind of pointing out is that it's your business, in this case, it's your business. Ultimately, you have executive decisions, but it can't only be an executive decision, right?

Stuart Yasgur: You have to bring, everybody has to go on that journey together. And when you do, you know, you also, they, you might be pulling

them, but they also might be pushing you at times, right? Like and that's a...

Marcus Sheanshang: That's a really good point. And, you know, we've got very much an open-door policy.

Marcus Sheanshang: Anybody has any issues, and I haven't had that many. I probably had three or four different people that have come in here and said, I don't wanna work with these people. It's like, let's just talk about this. And by the end of it, you know, I'm like, do you know anybody that's in prison? Yeah, my uncle, you know, and so it all gets into, and all of a sudden you start to help people understand that this is not too far afield, that we've got great team members that have made a mistake 10 years ago.

Marcus Sheanshang: We have a lot of celebrations too, because I don't, I hate saying a hundred percent, but it's damn near a hundred percent is all drugs. And whether it's crime, theft, or burglary, it's for drugs. So that's really the issue is really, when people are battling addiction and stuff like that. So, people, when they can take a step back and have a conversation about it, most are pretty comfortable with it.

Marcus Sheanshang: I'm not saying everybody is. We've got an Ask JBM box out there where you can write anonymous questions to it, and I've had some, I mean, I don't know how many years into the program it was, but this was a family-owned business. My dad started, and I bought it from him.

Marcus Sheanshang: So, the question was, I don't wanna work with those people. I want, I like this place better when your dad ran it. So like, okay. So, we had our company meetings, and you know, we read all those letters to all those questions as well. And I said, look, this is the company we are now. We weren't this a few years ago, but this is who we are now.

Marcus Sheanshang: If you don't wanna work with those people, that is your choice, but it's also my choice to hire these folks too. This might not be the right place for you anymore. We're not, I'm not trying to be all challenging there, but it's like we just had to make it very clear, like, this is something we're doing.

Marcus Sheanshang: And again, I would say the vast majority of people right now are very proud of it, as well as very supportive of it too.

Stuart Yasgur: And you know, and it has really grown, right? Let's see my quick math, but 150 some odd people, 60 some odd folks, fair chance hiring, that's 40% of your current team members have this kind of, have a background.

Stuart Yasgur: And so, how are you succeeding? What are the kind of key insights there that are driving this level of success?

Marcus Sheanshang: Well, it would be very interesting to me if we did not have fair chance hiring. I don't know where we would be right now. Because if you think about that 150 people, 65 or fair chance, you know, we would be working our team members into the ground on overtime.

Marcus Sheanshang: And granted, a lot of people do like overtime, but nobody likes it when it's mandatory. So, those are things that have allowed us to grow the different things that we did for the program that we learned over time too. And again, this has worked for us. I'm sure there are other ways of doing this as well, but one big area for us that made a tremendous difference was when we hired like a full-time life coach.

Marcus Sheanshang: And that life coach, change coach, meets with all of these Fair Chance team members for the first six months. It's mandatory, once a week, and they can help be kind of a pressure release valve. And what I mean by that is when people are coming outta prison, it is super tough. Most of the time, they're on parole, they're coming out, they're living

in a halfway house, which almost everybody says is actually worse than prison.

Marcus Sheanshang: One guy that came out, he was taken to the halfway house, and they were pulling somebody out in a body bag that had OD'ed earlier and died obviously. And so this is what he is coming to. It's like, okay, great, thanks. So, they're coming in a tough environment that's tough with sleep, all those different things.

Marcus Sheanshang: So there's a lot going against them, and most of them don't have driver's licenses. So that change coach is really there to add stability to their world. And you know, again, mandatory for the first six months, and this is all clearly communicated to them in the beginning as well, because we've had people say, I don't wanna do that.

Marcus Sheanshang: It's like, that's fine, you don't have to do that, but then we're not the right place for you. Because we have found this to work well, and it has really helped our team members being successful through this process. So that's a, that was probably the biggest one. In the beginning, we were trying to kind of do it with a part-time person.

Marcus Sheanshang: They come in and work three shifts a day, so it's hard to straddle all three shifts and finding the right person there that had the right heart. We had somebody who was a more of a social worker that was kind of judgmental. So, finding the right person that fit the culture took us probably two or three hires in maybe the past two years.

Marcus Sheanshang: We've started working with more of a temp agency that has, I'll say, a heart for fair chance hiring as well. So, we've worked really well. I was not for this, by the way, so my COO and the HR team had to convince me, and they were absolutely right, and so I was wrong

Marcus Sheanshang: And it's been great because the other big issue that a lot of these team members have is transportation. So, we are constantly

trying to figure out, okay, how do we get a van going back and forth? We had had a solution for a period of time. This temp agency actually does all that shuttling back and forth. That's been great too. .

Marcus Sheanshang: So, housing's still an issue, but we've got a great network of felon-friendly landlords in our area. Not perfect, but all these little things, they really do add up, and you know, and a lot of it really comes down to making sure that people know when they're coming in. Like we wanna make sure that we communicate really well to this potential team member, what they're getting into.

Marcus Sheanshang: Just make sure that we're both on the same page.

Stuart Yasgur: I want to play back to you part of what I'm hearing, but in a different description. So, we look at economic architecture, we look at structural innovation, structural problems in our market. And I think one of the things you're... so I wanna play back a description of part of what you just said that I think points to a structural problem, which is if somebody is just returning from being incarcerated, they have to find a job.

Stuart Yasgur: They haven't done that job before, probably. So, they have to learn. Maybe they've learned through some of your programs before getting there. But they have to learn how to do it. They have to meet a bunch of new people. They have to figure out what, like, what their new routines are. They may be living in a town that they never lived in before.

Stuart Yasgur: They might be living next to somebody or sharing a room with somebody that they've never met before. If they have to go to meetings with parole officers and all of those kinds of things. They have to deal with their healthcare stuff. They might have kids, family members, other kinds of folks who may be dependent on them, and they may be wrestling with, you know, as you mentioned, substance abuse issues.

Stuart Yasgur: That's a lot of things for any one person to focus on, and not to mention, you also talked about sleep, right? Like sometimes when you're in these very stressful situations, it's hard to sleep and eat right and take care of all these kinds of things. And if you don't do that, it's hard for anybody to show up with the best of yourself.

Stuart Yasgur: So that's a lot of things to put on the shoulders of somebody who's not well supported to be able to do it, right? You might not be surprised that they may have difficulty juggling that kind of, with all those kinds of things.

Marcus Sheanshang: One thing that we were trying to communicate to other businesses in our, the industries that we participate in, 'cause I've spoken a lot to different association meetings and stuff like that about this.

Marcus Sheanshang: Again, trying to get the word out there, and I've had a lot of different people say, we tried that, and it didn't work. It's like, okay, can we talk about what did you do? Well, we hired three of those people, and they weren't successful.

Marcus Sheanshang: And it's hard, because I respect the fact that they are trying, but we really are very clear, like the life coaches, being very empathetic to the situations that they're in, working on the transportation for them. You have to do all those different things. You cannot just flip a switch and start saying, okay, we're gonna hire, you know, we're a felony-friendly now.

Marcus Sheanshang: It's like, yes, but we do regular drug testing because again, we found that to be very important. There's, you know, we don't cut it off if you test positive, we will give you a final chance, based upon the situation. But there's a lot there that people, that if you get into this, you need to understand this is not your standard person.

Marcus Sheanshang: And there's a lot of benefits to it, but frankly, there are a lot of costs with it as well. So, you just need to go into something like this more with open eyes and a clear mind to understand what you're getting into.

Stuart Yasgur: That's a kind of also a great setup for me to go to this next part of my question to you, which is, in some ways, I look at that, you know, we look at that, and we say, are we as a society placing the costs in the right place here? Right?

Stuart Yasgur: Like, we're asking that person to do all of these things. And one way that I understand what you're doing is, as their employers, you're saying, well, wait a second, we have a vested interest in their success.

Stuart Yasgur: And we think that, you know, actually there's some shared capabilities that they need, and we could provide that for 60-some odd people. One FTE, and then that one FTE can make sure can help all 60-some odd people be that much more successful.

Marcus Sheanshang: Yeah, no, you know, there's something here. It's like this can be mutually beneficial.

Marcus Sheanshang: And when I say all that, this looks, when you have somebody coming on board here, and you understand, I'll say the power. And the potential of this program, but you need to support it correctly. It's naive to think that you can, that your shift supervisor will be able to handle these things out 'cause they're not prepared for stuff like that.

Marcus Sheanshang: But, so yeah, there's definitely, there's big businesses that are also involved with this too. But again, you have to understand that a little bit of additional cost goes a long way, though, 'cause you guys are economists. You understand opportunity costs. You understand what happens. You know, if you need 10 people to work, you've only got five.

Marcus Sheanshang: You could be making a lot more revenue if you had those other roles filled. You know, you can only work overtime so much with people before you're running them in the red, productivity, safety, quality, all that stuff goes down.

Marcus Sheanshang: So, yeah, I think you gotta think long term and understand that there's cost and in front of this too, but, if you really look at the cost of turnover, if you really look at the cost of not being a fully employed company, those are much, the hard part there, it's very easy to quantify the salary of a life coach, and it's kind of harder to quantify the turnover cost and not having a full team member staff. I hundred percent agree with you.

Marcus Sheanshang: I think businesses, it can be very helpful, but they need to understand that.

Stuart Yasgur: So, we talked to a tremendous number of people, and one of the questions that came up to us, I'm curious whether this has come up to you is, it's remarkable that you're creating this for Fair Chance employees, you know, and they are in a distinctive situation.

Stuart Yasgur: Many of these situations are compounded, you know, many of the costs that they face are, are challenges they face are compounded. You also talk about the fact that you're finding peer organizations that are finding new ways to do this, and that there's peer learning going back and forth. You mentioned learning from others and sharing the learnings that you're doing.

Stuart Yasgur: What do you think the potential of that is?

Marcus Sheanshang: Honestly, it's great. There's one thing that we've been talking about, and unfortunately, we've been very busy, so it's not, we've not had a lot of time for this, but a consortium that would be able to share best practices because again, all the companies that I know are very

open to what, you know, what works for you guys, what hasn't worked for you guys.

Marcus Sheanshang: And if we can bring, you know, I think a consortium would also allow new companies to come in here and say, let me just better understand what this is.

Marcus Sheanshang: And again, this would all be for the benefit of, wholly for the business 'cause again, this is a good business practice, but boy, you could really, if you could have 3, 4, 5 different businesses out there, additional businesses doing this, you're gonna be able to impact a lot of other people coming out of prison too. And if you could increase the likelihood of them being successful, it'll be obviously a better experience for everybody involved.

Marcus Sheanshang: The Fair Chance team members, as well as the business too. So that is a big area that, in my mind, and I think most of the other companies that we currently talk with, do like that idea too. It's just a matter of like, we gotta put some structure around it.

Marcus Sheanshang: I'll also say too, to that point, there's a great group called CityLink here, which is in Price Hill down in Cincinnati. They're kind of a great nexus for a lot of these different services that people kind of get back up on their feet. Not only fair chance, but you know, poverty-stricken people as well. I think more businesses just need to be open-minded.

Marcus Sheanshang: You don't need to think of all the ideas. Borrowing other ideas from other businesses is a great way of doing things. And again, I think once people that get into stuff like this, I do, like I said before, it softens your heart, it softens your mind, and I think you're a little bit less on the competitive side, and you're kind of more thoughtful when it comes to the impact that you can have, not only on the Fair Chance team members, but society.

Marcus Sheanshang: I'm not trying to be all highfalutin here, but you can really make, like, the City of Cincinnati, we would love, and we do talk about this, it's like there's great energy around a lot of the Fair Chance programs in Cincinnati because of what work we're doing. But again, Nehemiah Illo, C Link all those different groups.

Marcus Sheanshang: It's fun to watch.

Stuart Yasgur: It's really remarkable to see and to learn more about, you know, the consortium idea certainly seems compelling. You know, one, we've looked at this a little bit. We actually also think that there may be, could think there could be a good reason to do it as a consortium and a nonprofit in a structure.

Stuart Yasgur: We also think there could be a good business case here, that there could be a way to do this as a business.

Marcus Sheanshang: And one thing, like the Jumpstart program, that's something, it's a 501(c) (3). So we're very passionate about that because it's a 40-week program that does ministry work, but those folks that go through there, it's a pretty tough program to go through.

Marcus Sheanshang: But when they get through there, those are truly changed people. And it, you know, what we're excited about is being able, as Jumpstart, not JBM, but to be able to say these people have been trained, they're better prepared to enter society, and we're in five prisons right now. We hope to be at nine by the end of 26, and I think there's 18 that are realistic for Ohio just due to requirements.

Marcus Sheanshang: But that'll be something great too, because if you can say that these are people that are coming outta prison that are better prepared, I think it'll be easier for businesses to kind of open the doors for something like that, because at least they'll understand that there's been a lot of preparation for this person as they've been going through the final few

months of their incarceration to be ready to be at least better to adapt to a life outside of prison.

Stuart Yasgur: Yeah, it's a great example. Also, the fact that it's not just one touch 0.1 business doing this alone. There's all these different pieces of this that can be brought together to make this more successful.

Stuart Yasgur: And so many of us have a vested interest in making real progress here. And there are also resources to draw. From the JBM perspective, what are the biggest challenges you still face to doing this well? To growing it?

Marcus Sheanshang: We're learning every day. Like I said before, we changed the way with our temp agency approach.

Marcus Sheanshang: You know, we're trying, like right now it is, it's kind of, we're working on, we lost one change coach, and we're working on replacing that, 'cause covering that on three shifts is tough. You know, we're trying to get more into the office environment. We don't have anybody in the office environment, yet that is fair chance.

Marcus Sheanshang: But we're excited for, we're starting a new contract packaging business that will provide hopefully more opportunity for more hiring as well as more promotion from within too. Our big opportunity really is to, how do we continue to grow, get team members on board here that can live our core values and help JBM become a better business.

Marcus Sheanshang: So, we're always looking to make the program better, and what we have found is that if we, like with the contract packaging, new business that we're pursuing is more straightforward. So, it's something you can learn in a couple of hours, and we can get somebody up to speed, they can be revenue-generating very quickly.

Marcus Sheanshang: We can figure out, can they come to work every day? Do they have a good attitude? Again, live our core value, help JBM be

better, and that business is really, so if they can do that for 30 or 60 days, showing that what they're capable of. We then use that person to be promoted into another part of JBM too.

Marcus Sheanshang: We're able to kind of flex up and down with the temp agency, and you know, we've been able to kind of manage the expense side of that really well, as well as add more people to it, double, really great people that are now managers of those different departments as well. So that has been, I'll say, a maturation of the business as well in understanding.

Marcus Sheanshang: 'Cause one thing, one learning that we did have historically was if we're going through a training program that's a three-month training program and the person's not necessarily ready to be back in society yet, 'cause they're like, like you said before, they're dealing with a lot of different things. You can spend 60 days training somebody, and they don't work out, and that's an expensive process.

Marcus Sheanshang: So, having something where they can be like a very entry-level role where, you know, I tell 'em, I'm like, we're not curing cancer here. I know that, but you're proving yourself even if it's just packing stuff in boxes. You are showing that what you can do, and there's more of an opportunity for you in the future.

Stuart Yasgur: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. And that's a critical kind of relationship, building trust, developing of trust as well. Yeah. If I zoom out to kind of what you're describing, so you're in Ohio, in a place, kind of manufacturing, kind of industrial area of the economy that is remarkable to see, that's growing, that's active, and it's growing.

Stuart Yasgur: You have a need for a kind of growing workforce. You figured out a way to kind of identify a whole pool of people who could really come and be employees for, you've kind of created a process to be able to do it that's flexible, but also flexible to your growth, but also kind of enables

them to gain skills as they're doing it and start earning income throughout that process, but also an income that can grow.

Stuart Yasgur: I mean, you know, as you say, you're not curing cancer. There's a ceiling to the level of kind of income growth, but also people might be with you for a while and then move on to other kind of steps in their career as well.

Marcus Sheanshang: Absolutely. That is now kind of the onboarding step, and they're not in those roles very long.

Marcus Sheanshang: So they proved themselves over a, a month or two, period, and then they're moving into more of the, I'll say it's not advanced manufacturing, but it's more kind of our, the next level up there too. Again, these are people that, I don't know how many different people that they, we didn't know that they had mechanical aptitude and the more you talk to him, like we had one guy that, we've got two printing presses and so he's working, I think he was working in the cutting department and we just, he's like, yeah, I used to run a printing press.

Marcus Sheanshang: I'm like, that's good to know. So now he's back on the printing press. So, he's making a lot more money, 'cause it's a more skilled role. And so, these are things too. It's like you said before, I think you phrased that really well when just all the turmoil of getting out all the, you know, like you said, you're not sleeping well, you're not eating well, your brains just got so much going on, it's hard to think straight.

Marcus Sheanshang: And once they have some stability here, you know, we've got another woman that we're, I'm super happy, she's in a more skilled role on the adjusting side, which is a meaningful step up. A meaningful step up for her. And it was something. We do different testing. We've got a recent test of a standard timing model that we can't put everybody through it because it is a little bit laborious, but as we get to

meet the people, as their world slows down a little bit, as they can breathe a little bit, they can be their true self.

Marcus Sheanshang: We learn more about what is their true capabilities and capacity, and it's been fantastic. You know, they've really been able to thrive in the environment and the culture, and they wanna make as much money. We wanna pay them as much as we can, but they continue to add value to the business, and it adds value to themselves as well.

Stuart Yasgur: How do you think about the future? How do you think about this time horizon, where this grows from here?

Marcus Sheanshang: Oh, this is a core part of who we are. I would imagine many other businesses, as they're talking strategy, there are people issues, and I'm not saying we don't have people issues, we certainly have people issues, but like the finding good team members is not high on our concern list anymore.

Marcus Sheanshang: It's not truly a threat anymore. And we actually look at it as a strength. If you look from like a SWOT analysis or something like that, I don't know how many different customers are blown away by this too. We're not trying to abuse this, but we say, hey, the business that you're sending us supports this type of program.

Marcus Sheanshang: And they're like, wow. They want to help businesses that are doing stuff like this be more successful too. Now we've gotta be, you know, we've gotta do our job as well. But I think ultimately it is a feel-good story. Call it what it is.

Marcus Sheanshang: And those are things too that help us on the selling side because, you know, these are things like they, we have a lot of people that will also say, hey, this is the company that does the packaging for us, also hires Fair Chance team members. So, the end consumer cares about

it as well. So, a lot of people, the more they know about it, you know, I think the better they feel about it too.

Stuart Yasgur: Yeah, I think that's right. And you have to, you know, as you say, you have to perform on the business piece of it.

Stuart Yasgur: You have to deliver, and then the prices have to be right, and the timelines and all those things, but it's a way in which you're living your values and, and there's a strong values alignment for you know, people all the way through your clients, but all the way through to the end customers.

Marcus Sheanshang: Yep. Three of our bigger customers, one of the things they say, and again, like you said, we have to perform, but they say they love the fact that our values align with their values. That's a big deal from a relational perspective, really goes a long way. Yes, there's certainly transactional aspects of this business, but the relational side is more fun.

Marcus Sheanshang: And you know, those are longer-lasting business relationships too, when you feel, when it's just more than trading goods and money.

Stuart Yasgur: Absolutely. Marcus, if somebody's hearing this, somebody's either an employer, a team member, et cetera, and they're thinking, okay, wait. One, this is huge. They may know somebody who has had an interaction with the criminal legal system, or they may be facing a talent shortage and figuring out how do we start to wrap our head around it?

Stuart Yasgur: What do you recommend? What should people do?

Marcus Sheanshang: They can call me. I don't care. You know, and truly we're happy to talk about these things 'cause one of the areas that we're looking for, certainly visit our website. We've got a lot of information on the

website with this. If you contact us, hey, we'd love to learn more about the Fair Chance Program.

Marcus Sheanshang: We have a daily huddle. If you put that into contact us, I promise you, you'll be talking about it the next morning. Not only are fair chance people, you know, they're very obviously appreciative of their jobs, but I'll tell you too, it helps all of your non-fair chance team members too.

Marcus Sheanshang: 'Cause, of course, we need to pay people well, we need to treat them well. Of course, you know, those are kinda like table stakes, but the turnover of our great team members, there is no turnover. Because they love working for a business that's also doing good work. I mean that in the humblest possible way.

Marcus Sheanshang: I'm not trying to be a braggart here, but the work that we're doing, that it means a lot to our, to all the people here. Whether it's our account managers, whether it's our managers on the floor, sales, marketing, and so that helps us retain great players that I'm sure they could go out and get a higher-paying job.

Marcus Sheanshang: It's not all about that. So those, that's a big aspect of, I think, also with the generation coming up here too, that they want to have more purpose around their jobs as well. And businesses are purpose-driven, I would say, we are a purpose-driven business.

Stuart Yasgur: We spend the best part of our day, often at work, and it's important for that work to kind of align with our values and to be part of something that's moving in that kind of direction.

Stuart Yasgur: Marcus, thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us. We really appreciate it.

Marcus Sheanshang: Thank you, Stuart. I appreciate it as well.

Stuart Yasgur: Our conversation gave me a real sense of the potential for fair chance hiring to change the employment outcomes and corporate approach to hiring, but also the real complexity that's involved with adopting the approach.

Stuart Yasgur: After hearing Marcus talk about his experience, the conversation quickly moved from strategic considerations to speaking about having a heart for fair chance hiring. The work really starts to take on a deeper purpose that's reflected in how they pursue their everyday operations. From an economic architecture perspective, I also think that their work points to deeper structural issue and a potential approach to address it.

Stuart Yasgur: Fair chance hiring employees are often in situations that involve complications. While this might be especially true for fair chance hiring employees, it's not only true for them. If you look across the country, a number of employees have difficulty finding affordable housing, especially housing close to their work sites.

Stuart Yasgur: They have difficulty paying for reliable transportation, difficulty affording quality healthcare, or childcare. Have members of their families with problems that they may have to help with. They may face mental health issues or maybe wrestling with substance abuse issues. The pioneering work that firms like JBM Packaging are doing is good business for them.

Stuart Yasgur: It's creating a positive impact for their employees, and it may be showing us a new type of relationship between employers and employees. I'm Stuart Yasgur, and this is Economic Architecture, the podcast.