

# Ep.3.34 - Lydia Michaels & Kevin Ketels

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## SPEAKERS

Kevin Ketels, Lydia Michael, Ed Clemente, Announcer

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### A Announcer 00:01

Welcome to The Michigan Opportunity, an economic development podcast featuring candid conversations with business leaders across Michigan. You'll hear firsthand accounts from Michigan business leaders and innovators about how the state is driving job growth and business investment, supporting a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem, building vibrant communities and helping to attract and retain one of the most diverse and significant workforces in the nation.

### E Ed Clemente 00:29

Hello, I'm your host Ed Clemente. And today we're fortunate to have two guests, Lydia Michael. She's the owner, Blended Collective, and author. And then Kevin Ketels, he's the assistant professor of global supply chain management at the Mike Ilitch School of Business, Wayne State University. Welcome to the show, both of you. [Hi Ed.] Hi. [Hello.] How you doing? So, let's start out with you, Lydia first, and kind of give us an overview of what the Blended Collective is and then you'll help us, how you're going to segue that into what Kevin is involved with too.

### L Lydia Michael 01:07

Absolutely. So happy to be here today. Blended Collective is a multicultural marketing and brand consultancy. I started the company back in 2017, with the goal of helping infuse culture and emotion into the marketing journey for businesses. And so you know, when we look at statistics from the US Census Bureau, for instance, we see that 50% of the US population 20 years from now is going to be multicultural. And that's really the basis of how we got started and what we focus a lot of our work on, and transitions nicely to Kevin as well, because not only did he have his own marketing agency back in the day, but he also currently is very active with

Wayne State University and hosts a study abroad program internationally. And so there's a lot of cultural elements that he brings to the table and a lot of value that he adds in his work whenever he comes on for projects with Blended Collective.

E

Ed Clemente 02:18

Okay, Kevin, go ahead.

K

Kevin Ketels 02:19

Yeah, thank you, Ed. Thanks for having us. So yeah, I'm a full time professor. But I've known Lydia for many, many years, I have a background in marketing, but also in supply chain management. I teach supply chain management on the full time faculty at Wayne State University right now. And having a global perspective is a very important component of the classes I teach. I also lead a study abroad to Central Europe, where we visit the Netherlands, Germany and Poland. And it's always interesting, the intersection of business, history, culture, when visiting these different countries. And I think we try to take this multicultural perspective. And I think Lydia infuses that with her clients in the guidance and work that she does with them. So I'm happy to support her whenever I can on strategic projects.

E

Ed Clemente 03:14

And so, Lydia, why don't you sort of give us a definition of what you think multiculturalism is, because I know we use the word a lot. And I learned it in probably social studies at some point. But what do you think the definition sort of that applies to your book as well as what you and Kevin do?

L

Lydia Michael 03:34

Yeah, absolutely. I think it definitely is a cross effort between diversity and culture, the way I look at it, right? And so it's understanding cultures beyond your own, and understanding the attitudes, the lifestyles, the behaviors, the thoughts and perspectives that other cultures have. And I think when you're able to do that, you are able to add tremendous value to the business of other people. Because not only are you applying this formula and marketing, but you also are bringing this knowledge and this understanding of culture to the table, which I think whether we talk about it or not, you know, whether you have your own business, or you're working for a corporation or a small business anywhere, culture has become an important value and how we work together on a day-to-day basis.

E

Ed Clemente 04:31

And would you think that, both of you can answer these, but are you talking more, because both of you, I'd wish you both would describe a little bit of your own international backgrounds. And why don't you start out with that maybe Lydia, where you come from and how you got to this position first?

L

**Lydia Michael 04:48**

Yeah, absolutely. And I think actually, my upbringing, had a lot to do with the work that I do now or that I've chosen to create over the past years. So I was born and raised in Germany to Middle Eastern Chaldean parents, and spent a good amount of my life in Germany. And so naturally, I was navigating two cultures my entire life until I came to the US in 2005. And that's really when a third culture was added to the mix. And while you might think that made things a lot more complicated, it also made them more rewarding, because now I feel really confident going into a room and meeting with people from all sorts of different cultures. And not only understanding the way they navigate in business, but also how I can help them and what value I can provide. And I think again, that was sort of the motivation or the inspiration to start Blended Collective at the time also, because I saw a need, and a gap in the Michigan market to provide those types of services to businesses. A lot of times we see cultural marketing and these types of services offered to corporations, specifically in the automotive industry here in Michigan. But my question initially starting out was who's helping the little guys, right? Who's helping the startups and the small businesses. And that's sort of where we got started, and it has really evolved since then.

E

**Ed Clemente 06:22**

So Kevin, how did you get on this path, internationally, too, and I guess with supply chain as well?

K

**Kevin Ketels 06:28**

I've always been interested in having a global perspective, I had a marketing agency before. And so I became connected with Lydia actually, in the classroom. She was one of my students a very long time ago. And I've been watching her work, and she's invited me to help her on some of the projects that she's done with clients, and when I can offer a perspective. And so I find this very important work that she does here, I think it makes a difference for her clients to recognize their own value and their diversity. And for companies to recognize the diversity that exists within their own customers. And so I think that she provides an important link for that.

E

**Ed Clemente 07:19**

So how did how does that, Kevin, sort of blend into what you teach as well, I would guess, right?

K

**Kevin Ketels 07:26**

Right. So I teach global supply chain management. And one of the things I talk about is managing suppliers across the world. And so we have suppliers that exists in Asia and Central America, and to recognize the differences that exist between us so we can optimize our relationships, and so that there's mutual understanding and benefits. And good transparent

communication. But it's not that we need to change for everyone. But we need to understand those differences, so that we can work together in the best way. And so that's part of an important lesson for students. And also part of what Lydia talks to her clients about is recognizing those differences and communicating in the best way possible.

**E** Ed Clemente 08:19

So do you have an example of any, like when you're giving a lecture, when you would tell students of like, how miscommunication has caused problems for not understanding other people's cultures?

**K** Kevin Ketels 08:31

Sure, well, as an example, one of the things that we really liked to talk about is different types of cultures that are more individualistic versus collective, Asian culture tends to be more collective, and they tend to do things together, whereas American culture tends to be more individualistic. And so kind of our values of what's important and how we work in teams and operates. It doesn't mean that it's bad, what we do in the United States, or reflection on that individualism, it also makes us more creative, as an example. So there's positives and negatives to culture in each part of the world and we just have to be aware so that we can adjust and make it the best way possible to collaborate, lead and also to communicate with our customers.

**E** Ed Clemente 09:27

Yeah, and I should have asked you, Kevin, like, are you born in Michigan? Are you from Michigan originally?

**K** Kevin Ketels 09:32

Yes, I was born in Dearborn, Michigan, but [Oh, yes.] my mother is Filipino and my dad is of German-Celtic heritage.

**E** Ed Clemente 09:42

And did you did you have to learn another language growing up or no?

**K** Kevin Ketels 09:48

You know what, my mom spoke Tagalog, which is a Filipino dialect, but she never spoke Tagalog to me, and I never asked why but I assume because she just wanted me to be American and I think for people of that generation and their children, and especially immigrants, they wanted their kids to be assimilated as much as possible. So I understood, although I wouldn't mind if she taught me she just didn't.

E

Ed Clemente 10:12

Well, I had the same experience somewhat, but my folks came from Italy. But, we spoke Italian in the house, but they really never wanted to teach me. I always assumed they wanted to talk about stuff they didn't want me to know. You never know. So, Lydia, so you speak three languages, then?

L

Lydia Michael 10:32

Yeah, so obviously English, and then Arabic and German. And I grew up speaking both actually.

E

Ed Clemente 10:40

Obviously, Michigan is a very attractive place. For Chaldeans. Obviously, we I think we have one of the bigger populations probably around the world, I guess. And did your family come here to work in the automotive industry? Or did you move here on your own? How did that happen?

L

Lydia Michael 10:57

No, not at all. Actually, people always assume that because obviously, that's what makes sense. But we came here for the simple reason to be with our families. So we've had both my mother's side of the family and my father's side of the family have been here for decades. And we were sort of the only family in Germany. And so we wanted to be with everybody and decided to come here. And that was sort of our our way over from Germany.

E

Ed Clemente 11:23

And so could you give me a couple of examples like with your clients, to where you talk about multiculturalism, where either there's things that people didn't think about, or something you would use with a client to give as an anecdote to say, Hey, this is what you want to think about when you're dealing with, like, this particular group or something?

L

Lydia Michael 11:42

Yeah, I think a lot of times, it's just truly understanding how other customers behavior ticks, from specific cultures, right? I mean, there's, the Hispanic American culture, or even with Chaldeans, the way we buy and the way we do things, or the way we make decisions. I know, and this is something I mentioned in my recently published book Brand Love, you know, with Hispanics, for instance, they like to incorporate feedback from their families and friends before they make a big purchase, right. I think, also, the fact that a lot of cultures purchase based on emotion is something that customers or clients that we work with, sometimes don't think about is how can I integrate this emotional aspect into my marketing to really resonate with this

audience that I'm trying to reach. And it's not just based on culture, but also different demographics that you might be focused on. So whether it's Millennials or Gen Z, right, they all sort of have their own thoughts and reasons for purchasing and supporting brands and companies. And I think the more you understand that, the better you can position yourself and your products and services to really provide value and be successful.

A

Announcer 13:02

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E

Ed Clemente 13:18

Because America, I think this is from traveling a lot. But America is sort of unique. There's like maybe six other countries in the world that have had almost like total total immigration populations. But coming from Germany, what was the difference between, not that Germany is a mono culture, but it tends to be a little bit more so than the US. Like, was that a big difference, too, coming to America after living in Germany?

L

Lydia Michael 13:44

Yeah. And it's interesting, the way you ask the question, because even though it could have maybe years ago been deemed as a mono culture, I mean, definitely since 2015, there have been a lot of immigrants that have come right to Germany. And so that has diversified the country and the culture a lot more. But to answer your question, coming to the US and having lived in Germany, I see a lot of cultural differences every day. One example that I'll give you, and this maybe relates to how Kevin was describing the collectivist cultures versus the individualistic cultures, some cultures are a lot more high context, compared to others, that you can describe as low context cultures. And what that means is the high context cultures typically have a communication style that is based on body language and tone and really just overall context where you have to sometimes read between the lines and a lot of times the Middle Eastern cultures are like that. They might not be as direct and straightforward in their communication simply because that's just part of the culture. You don't say certain things direct to somebody's face for various reasons, whether it's respect or just the way you've been brought up, but in low context cultures, and definitely Germany is one of them, they're a lot more straightforward and explicit in their communication. And that's something, growing up, to me that was very normal to have very direct feedback, even when you're working, or when you're in school as a student. And then coming to the US, I saw that that was a little bit different and to me, is more high context than the culture in Germany, but then you have my Middle Eastern background, that's even more high context, if you compare the three. So I think that's been very interesting to watch, whether it's in personal settings or in business.

E

Ed Clemente 15:50

And this question, both of you can answer, but I'm going to ask Kevin first, though, but how does this affect like, obviously, with a global economy, and especially with the automotive kind

does this affect like, obviously, with a global economy, and especially with the automotive kind of context of manufacturing, that there's a lot of international companies here in Michigan, as you teach your students who probably, I guess a lot of might go into automotive, but how does that play out for you, Kevin, as to maybe miscommunications you've seen in the business industry, too?

K

Kevin Ketels 16:27

Right. That's why there's so many different countries that you might visit and deal with. And each one has a different cultural foundation and language and religion and context. As an example. It's more like, for me, it's more about teaching students about self awareness. And being aware of who you are, and how you act and how it might be different from others. And so what I teach them, is that when you go someplace, do your own homework and do your own research, so that you understand where you're going. And don't just be like a bull going in there and causing a lot of disruption and not aware of what it is that you're doing. So that you can be respectful of culture, and then so that there needs to be a little bit of a give and take, so that when you're doing a negotiation, as an example, and you have to have some communication that happens beforehand about something other than business, and others, you might need to get directly to business. So just create an awareness of yourself so that you don't look like an arrogant American.

E

Ed Clemente 17:47

Yeah, that happens quite a bit. I think sometimes, when other people intentionally mean to or don't meet, I see it with tourists and military installations around the world. So, this next question is, and I think I mentioned this is because recently we had on Hilary Doe, you might not know her, but she's been tasked with the governor, to try to grow our population. And obviously, one of the places it's going to have to grow is going to be external people sort of moving in, right? And so do both of you see this in the talent angle of what you're talking about, too, as well? Lydia, you can go first?

L

Lydia Michael 18:33

Yeah, I think it definitely depends on the different industries, but also, really showing the differentiation and the uniqueness of what Michigan has to offer. I think Michigan is a very unique place when we look at all the states in the US. And so whether it's the automotive industry, whether it's our economic development, the investment that's been going on here for years and the city of Detroit, I think all of that is very unique. And it has created a lot of awareness and a lot of attention for for our city and for our state. And whenever you are able to showcase to people why and how they can provide value in our supply chain and as part of our growth of the state and the city, I think that's the way to really attract people is showing them how they can be a part of the bigger picture is really important and how they can fit in and not just provide value, but also help grow our economy.

E

Ed Clemente 19:33

And I would imagine some of that has to do generationally, too, right? Like, different

generations might be attracted to different things and lifestyles and all those kinds of things.

L

Lydia Michael 19:43

Absolutely. Yeah. Kevin, you might have something to add, I'm sure.

K

Kevin Ketels 19:48

I think that it would be a positive. This is something we talked about in class this last week. Then if there was a lot of foreign direct investment it from a foreign country in the city of Detroit. Or if we had a lot of immigrants who wanted to come to Detroit or you know, Southeast Michigan, some people might think of that as a negative, I would think that as a positive, that means they want to come here that it's attractive place. And we want the best, we want everyone to come here. And that means the best and the brightest want to partake on these opportunities. And it would only, in my mind, it would only be a positive thing, if we're a magnet that attracts people that have ideas, and who want to work hard and accomplish their dreams, we want to make that our city and our region of the state.

E

Ed Clemente 20:42

So, both your answers sort of blend into the next question. But if you each could give me sort of one trend, you think for, what you do Lydia and what you see maybe Kevin for supply chain? Lydia, you can go first about what you might see what you see coming around the horizon?

L

Lydia Michael 21:01

Yeah, it's difficult to pick just one. Because [You can give me a couple.] I see a few. But, one of the key ones, especially this year, is the focus on customer loyalty, compared to customer acquisition with companies. So brands and companies are really focused on how they can keep their customers not just engaged, but how they can, really keep them happy. And I think that that is really essential during times of inflation, especially. Because, again, global companies are focusing less on acquisition and more on loyalty overall. And so the question becomes, how can you do that? And I talk a lot about that in my book, Brand Love that I just published about a month ago. And the focus is really the emotional journey in your business and in your marketing. How can you evoke the emotions of your customers and really tap into their hearts and minds to ensure that you're building this long term, journey and connection with them through different drivers, right, whether they're emotional or functional? And I think that that is one of the key drivers, why customers choose brands and companies over others, and choose to remain loyal.

E

Ed Clemente 22:19

Are you also talking B2B like business to business?



L

Lydia Michael 22:23

Yeah, that's a question I get quite a bit, you know, is it B2C is it a B2B. And while I focus a lot of the work and that topic around B2C it definitely applies to B2B as well, because anyone that you deal with in between companies, there's always people behind those companies that represent, and they have to make a decision to buy, right? And so at that point, it really doesn't matter. It's not a question of B2C or B2B, it's how can I make myself attractive to that other company or to that customer? To make them want to choose me? There's so many options these days, nobody has to stick with any company by any means. I mean, it's really easy to abandon and replace and substitute really now more than ever.

E

Ed Clemente 23:12

And Kevin, you get to give the last answer on any trends you see for supply chain, because obviously, Michigan is a heavily dependent supply chain state, probably one of the top ones in the country almost. So anyway, anything you see coming on the horizon?

K

Kevin Ketels 23:29

Yeah, we were just talking in class the other day about the impact of the move from the internal combustion engine to electric vehicles. And a lot of people don't see this coming, because there's not that many cars that are electric vehicles right now. And we don't have the infrastructure set up for this to happen. But 2035, the state of California, New York, the European Union, and China's all say that cars gotta be electric, or not gas or the internal combustion engine, that it has to transition to a new tech, and the wheels are turning on this, companies are investing and there is major, major change going on in the automotive industry. And then infrastructure will follow. So we'll get more charging stations, you'll see less and less gas cars that are introduced, more and more electric vehicles. And this change is indeed going to happen and the ramifications for Southeast Michigan and for the auto companies and all the suppliers, we won't need to build all these parts for all these gas vehicles. We're going to start transitioning to a new type of propulsion here, it's going to be electric. And so this is going to happen, and it's gonna be happening sooner rather than later and it will have a lot of implications here in southeast Michigan and around the world.

E

Ed Clemente 24:54

Well, I'm sorry, I know we could have talked a lot longer, but we're wrapping up. I want to thank again our guest, Lydia Michael. She's the owner, Blended Collective and author, and Kevin Kettles. He's assistant professor of global supply chain management at the Mike Illich School of Business at Wayne State University. Thank you very much, both of you for taking time to do this today.

L

Lydia Michael 25:18

Thank you for having us.

E

Ed Clemente 25:19

[Thank you, Ed.] My pleasure. Join us next week, our guest will be Rich Bowman. He is the director of working lands at The Nature Conservancy.

A

Announcer 25:29

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