



Episode 10: Alan Ostfield (LAW'90, Questrom'91), Live Nation President, North Atlantic

Host: Jeff Murphy (Questrom'06), BU Alumni Relations

After earning his JD and MBA from BU, Alan Ostfield (LAW'90, Questrom'91) went on to occupy the c-suite of legendary organizations including the San Diego Padres, the Detroit Pistons and now, the North Atlantic division of the world's largest live entertainment company, Live Nation. Alan explores the process of building his career, learning from his mistakes and his advice on how to pivot when the future of your career stretches beyond your control.

Podcast Transcript:

Jeff Murphy: I'm Jeff Murphy from Boston University Alumni Relations, and I'm your host for an interview series showcasing the career paths of our most interesting and accomplished alumni. Welcome to the Proud to BU Podcast. My guest today is Alan Ostfield, the president of Live Nation's North Atlantic division. Alan's a double terrier, having earned his JD from the School of Law and an MBA from the Questrom School of Business. He and I spoke about the extensive experience he's had working in the field of sports law and negotiations and the lessons he's learned from important mentors in his life like Larry Lucchino.

Alan, thank you so much for joining us today. We're really excited to have you on the Proud to BU Podcasts.

Alan Ostfield: My pleasure. Happy to join you.

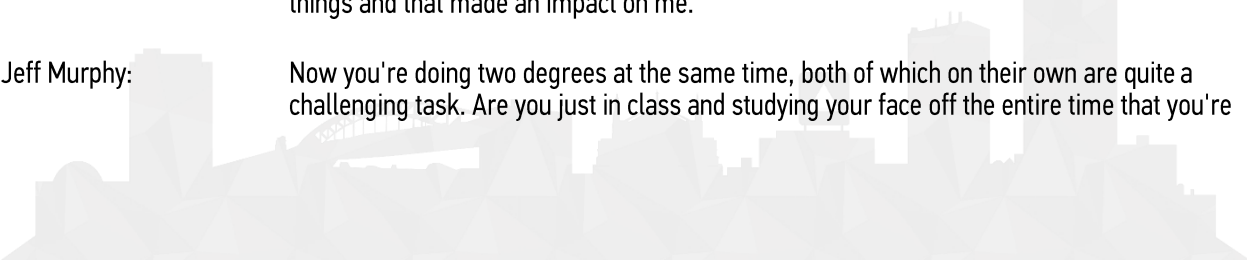
Jeff Murphy: I'm curious, I usually just start with a little bit of background information with all of our guests. Did you grow up on the East Coast? Where did you grow up?

Alan Ostfield: I grew up in Pittsburgh. I was in Pittsburgh until college.

Jeff Murphy: Got it, and I. You've obviously gone on we'll get into the details of you're really interesting career in sports management, entertainment, law. Were you an athlete or a musician as a kid? When you were growing up, did you have any idea that you'd end up where you are now?

Alan Ostfield: I loved sports growing up. I played every sport I could and that sort of all I did. I was never into music, which is ironic considering what I do now, but I love sports and was a big part of my life growing up. And still is from a recreational point of view.

Jeff Murphy: I know that you attended the University of Pennsylvania as an undergrad. Did you know at that time kind of, what your career path was going to be or where you're still trying to figure things out during those college days?

- Alan Ostfield: At that point I knew I liked sports, but you didn't, you didn't focus on it then academically, I think the way students are now. A lot of students now or are focusing on sports and believing that there's a career in sports and getting a sports management degree. I was fortunate in the sense that the focus didn't exist back then, there weren't as many schools offering sports management degrees and the reason why I'm saying I was fortunate is because it didn't allow me to even think about that at that time, so it forced me just to get a good general education, which I think ultimately served me well.
- Jeff Murphy: And you majored in economics at Penn, is that correct?
- Alan Ostfield: I did. It was a good general business background, majored in economics and didn't want to focus too much on business because I knew I'd ultimately want an MBA.
- Jeff Murphy: And so you knew you ultimately wanted an MBA and it wasn't long before you found yourself on the BU campus, right? Was it immediately after college that came to BU?
- Alan Ostfield: Yeah, I took a few months off because I graduated college a little early, so I took a little bit of time off and at that point I had applied to law school. And then I knew I was also gonna apply to business school, the combined JD MBA programs were really just getting started at that point. It was in the late eighties. Now of course there's a lot of combined programs out there, but at that point it was pretty early on and when I saw the combination of law school and business school, it seemed like a perfect fit for me.
- Jeff Murphy: So was that the thing that drew you to BU or how did you make your decision to do your master's degree here?
- Alan Ostfield: I was driven in large part, at that point the law school was very highly ranked and Boston is obviously a great city and I was drawn in large part because of that. And then, as I started thinking about the business aspect to it, the business school was highly ranked as well and gotten even higher over time and the combination of that is what led me there over other schools I was thinking about.
- Jeff Murphy: So now that we've placed you at BU on your timeline, we've reached the portion of the podcast that I think of as the BU lightning round. So some quick stories about your time at BU. Where did you live when you were studying here?
- Alan Ostfield: I lived in Allston, Brighton area just right out down Commonwealth Avenue towards Chestnut Hill. Right off of Comm Ave. for a couple years. Actually, right off of Comm Ave. all the years, just in different houses.
- Jeff Murphy: And were there experiences, classes or professors that you had during your time here that really stand out as maybe having had an impact on your eventual career path?
- Alan Ostfield: I think the professor who sticks out most to me, Mark Pettit. Professor Mark Pettit in the law school, he taught first year contracts. He also taught evidence but I had him for first year contracts and he was a very, I mean obviously he was knowledgeable and educated, but he was also very practical and analytical and his classes had a way of making great sense to me. And to this day I remember just the organizational thought that he placed into things and that made an impact on me.
- Jeff Murphy: Now you're doing two degrees at the same time, both of which on their own are quite a challenging task. Are you just in class and studying your face off the entire time that you're
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in Boston or where they're student organizations, you got to be a part of? Other activities that you were doing that added to your learning?

Alan Ostfield: I studied a fair amount, but I was always pretty good at understanding how to get from point A to point B in the most efficient way possible. So, I studied a lot. I got ahead of things a lot. But I don't think I studied too much and actually my friends in law school used to kid me because I was always the one who said, "Who wants to go play baseball? Who wants to go play softball? Who wants to go play football?" So, I organized a lot of those sports, intramural wise with a lot of the guys I went to law school with. So I had a good time socially, athletically, and I was still able to get my work done for school.

Jeff Murphy: Did you have a favorite, I mean, as a grad student and I realize your experience might've been a little bit different, but do you have a favorite campus hangout or a secret study spot that you find yourself on Comm Ave. all the time?

Alan Ostfield: For studying, I think I studied mostly at home. The law school library was good too, so that's probably where we went. A lot of my friends went to the undergrad library, but I didn't do that much. In terms of hangouts, honestly, I can't even remember, now I'm dating myself. I can't even remember where, but I know we did. I just can't remember where they were.

Jeff Murphy: Sure. Well, we'll have to get you back to campus at some point soon so we can refresh your memory and we'll take you to some of those old hangouts.

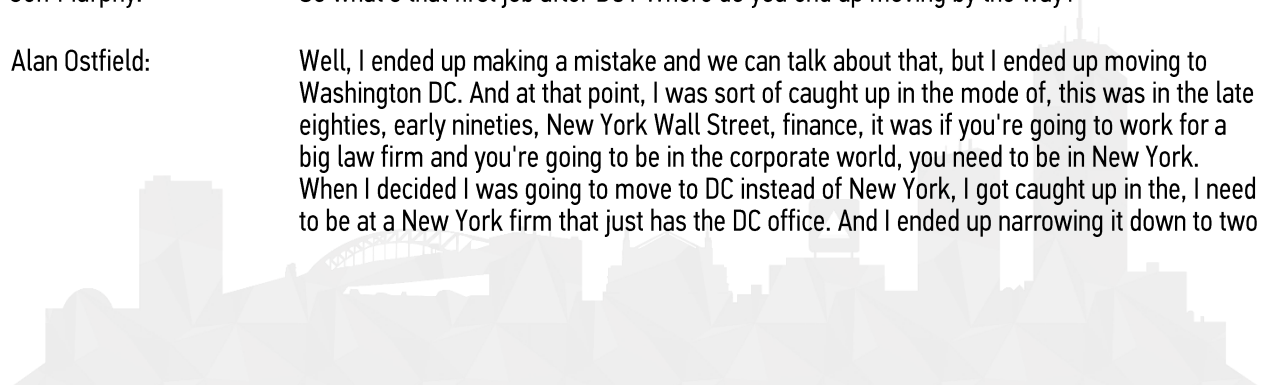
Alan Ostfield: That would be great.

Jeff Murphy: So you wrap up your law degree first and then it's finishing the MBA. While you're wrapping up your final year here, what kind of decisions do you need to make? What are the things that you're considering when you're sort of trying to figure out what that next step is going to be once you're ready to leave Comm Ave.?

Alan Ostfield: At the point that I applied to the dual degree program, I didn't know if I wanted to be a lawyer or a banker or a consultant. I knew that it would create some options for me if I did well at BU. Once I got to law school, I was one of the odd people that actually liked law school. It was the first time in my academic career that I enjoy learning. I enjoyed the way it forced the wheels in your brain to turn. I enjoyed that it wasn't regurgitating facts. That it was more, how are you thinking about this problem and how are you solving this? So I liked law school. And as a result perhaps I did well. And once you do well in law school at a school like BU, a lot of doors start opening up for you. So what ultimately ended up happening is because I liked law school and because doors were opening up for me, I ended up looking at a lot of the big law firms. So I was just at that point trying to think about what city do I want to be in, what kind of firm do I want to be in, what kind of practice do I want to be in? And then once you start going through that and you do your summer associate positions, things start to narrow for you and become a little clearer.

Jeff Murphy: So what's that first job after BU? Where do you end up moving by the way?

Alan Ostfield: Well, I ended up making a mistake and we can talk about that, but I ended up moving to Washington DC. And at that point, I was sort of caught up in the mode of, this was in the late eighties, early nineties, New York Wall Street, finance, it was if you're going to work for a big law firm and you're going to be in the corporate world, you need to be in New York. When I decided I was going to move to DC instead of New York, I got caught up in the, I need to be at a New York firm that just has the DC office. And I ended up narrowing it down to two



firms, Wilmer Cutler & Pickering and Skadden Arps. And, I ended up choosing Skadden Arps in large part, I mean, I liked my time interviewing there, but because it was a New York based firm and obviously it was one of the best firms in the world. So I was, I was honored to have been given an opportunity there as I was at Wilmer. When I went to Skadden though because of I had to finish business school, almost 20 months had elapsed between when I accepted my job offer in the fall of my third year before when I was actually going to start work. And the market had turned substantially. There was a big downturn in the corporate work, so Skadden did the right thing and wanted to honor its commitment to its hires but they had to put us in different departments. So I was placed in the energy project finance department, which ultimately would have made me an energy lawyer. So after a few months I realized this was not, this was not the place I wanted to be. So I had to make some changes.

Jeff Murphy: So you mentioned making a mistake. What was it about that that you feel that you made a mistake? Just that you had accepted a job that waited so long before starting?

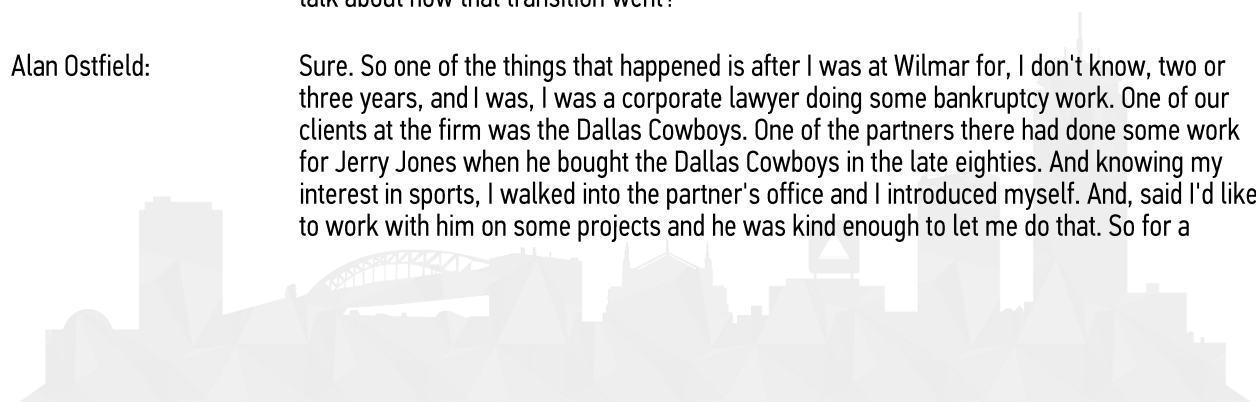
Alan Ostfield: Well, I guess when you put it that way, it wasn't a mistake I made. It just turned out to have been a mistake, is probably a better way to phrase it. I ended up at Skadden and the market had changed and the department I was in wasn't something I wanted to be. And if I stayed there, and I was working with good people and I was working on good things, but I was going to be an energy lawyer and that's not where I wanted my career to go. So I needed to make a change several months in, which is not an easy thing to do. Especially when the economy wasn't running as a highly as it was when I was coming out of law school.

Jeff Murphy: So those, you know, those forks in the road, those identifying an opportunity and a need to make a change are themes that come up again and again as we're doing this podcast. How do you make that change? Is that when you move to San Diego?

Alan Ostfield: No, that's what I'm. No, I was, I was only at Skadden for about six months. And, I still needed to be a lawyer. I still needed to be trained as a lawyer. I still needed to get the big firm experience as a lawyer. So one day I literally called Wilmar, so two years after they offered me a job, I called the hiring partner and I reminded him who I was. I reminded him that they offered me a job two years ago. I told them the decision I made. I essentially had rejected them and went to one firm and I said I'd like to change my mind. I said, "This isn't turning out the way I wanted it to be. I like to change my mind and if they would see their way to having me, I'd be happy to make that change." And fortunately for me, they were very busy in the department that I wanted to be in and they hired me. So, I look at it as a good second chance of going to Wilmer. Which turned out to be, I think, four or five of the best years of one's professional career. A phenomenal law firm, trains you to be phenomenal lawyers, phenomenal professional, and really one of those goof forks in the road that just worked out very well for me.

Jeff Murphy: So at some point you, I'm guessing that you still have this sort of sports management idea in the back of your head. You end up getting a great job with the San Diego Padres. Can you talk about how that transition went?

Alan Ostfield: Sure. So one of the things that happened is after I was at Wilmar for, I don't know, two or three years, and I was, I was a corporate lawyer doing some bankruptcy work. One of our clients at the firm was the Dallas Cowboys. One of the partners there had done some work for Jerry Jones when he bought the Dallas Cowboys in the late eighties. And knowing my interest in sports, I walked into the partner's office and I introduced myself. And, said I'd like to work with him on some projects and he was kind enough to let me do that. So for a



couple of years there I was able to do work for the Dallas Cowboys which proved very valuable because it gave me the ability to say that I had sports law experience. A lot of people have an interest in sports, but I was able to actually say that I had some sports law experience. And then ultimately I was able to come in contact with a guy who was also a former lawyer at a big firm in DC, a competitive firm that had just taken over the San Diego Padres as President and through a connection here and there. Actually from Wilmer, they connected me to the guy who just took over the San Diego Padres. And he ultimately hired me as special assistant and then became general counsel.

Jeff Murphy: So now you've combined these aspects of your life, this interest in law and management with your interest in sports. Is it different at all from what you expected once you, once you enter that industry? Are you happy as soon as you are sort of working for the Padres? You ended up being there for, for a few years, right?

Alan Ostfield: Yeah, I was there for four or five years and very happy. It was a great experience. Personally, professionally I worked for a guy named Larry Lucchino, who a lot of Boston fans.

Jeff Murphy: Fairly well known to Boston fans, yeah.

Alan Ostfield: So, Larry is one of the greatest executives in sports. He was also a former lawyer so he knew what lawyers could do and would not in any way pigeonhole a lawyer. So working for Larry was to this day, in fact, I did it this morning with someone here who works for me, to this day I refer to lessons I learned from Larry and how they've stayed with me now and how Larry's management of me helps me manage other people. So working for Larry was phenomenal. He let me do everything, literally everything. I would help negotiate player contracts with the general manager. I would do business things. I would do legal things. Larry and I negotiated the contract with the mayor of San Diego for the development and use of Petco Park. Larry had me do everything so his willingness to expose me to everything and his being a perfect role model in the sense that he was also a former lawyer who started out as general counsel, ultimately became club president. Was a perfect person for me to work with.

Jeff Murphy: So you're, you're at the padres for four or five years and at that time you also, I think I saw on your LinkedIn profile, you've also been teaching along the way. How does that fit into your career path?

Alan Ostfield: Yeah, I did. So, I was in San Diego. I was general counsel of the Padres. And you start to realize how unique your career is and how fortunate you are to have those opportunities and of course, everything that I accomplished in my career was the direct result of the education that I was fortunate enough to have. And then you start to put two and two together and realize wouldn't it be good if I could share some of these experiences with other people? So, I started thinking that it'd be great if I could teach and there's not a lot of general councils of major league sports teams and I was able to get to be an adjunct professor at USD law school, teaching sports law. Obviously, I was general counsel of a baseball team so it was a natural fit to teach sports law. A lot of work, people have no idea how hard professors work to prepare for class. So everyone should be nice to their professors know, but it was wonderful for me to get that experience. And to this day, I've continued that experience. I've taught there, I taught in Michigan, I taught at NYU and actually right now I'm designing a course and I'm going to start teaching at Columbia in January.



Jeff Murphy: Oh Wow, that's great. So one of the things that strikes me about working in sports and sports management is that so much of your potential for success is kind of dependent on who's hired you, who's at the top of the organization, who owns the company. I don't remember the timeline exactly, but is Larry Lucchino leaving the Padres how you ended up leaving the padres as well? Or am I off with my years?

Alan Ostfield: I left before Larry did. I left in, I guess the end of 1999 and I don't know exactly when Larry left, but I think it was a year or so after that. But yeah, so much of what we accomplish in life and what we are fortunate to be able to do is a direct result of those that we have the opportunity to work for. And like I said before, those four years with Larry are worth 20 years.

Jeff Murphy: Yeah. So you then go to the Pistons in Palace Sports. What made you decide to pack up and leave San Diego for Auburn Hills, Michigan?

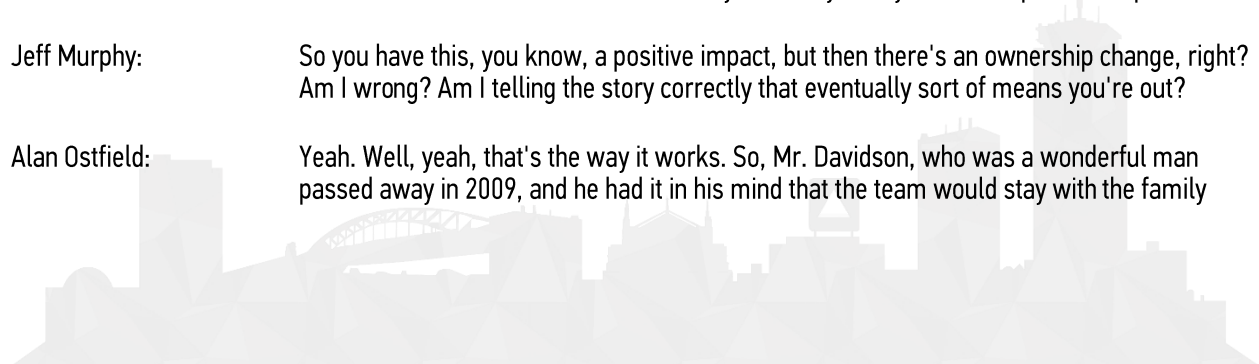
Alan Ostfield: It certainly wasn't the weather. At that point I was, I was probably in my low thirties. I was probably 34, 35 and I loved San Diego. I loved the Padres. Just as a sport, baseball was my favorite. So there were a lot of reasons to stay. Ultimately though I needed to just continue to grow and sometimes to grow you have to move on. And I knew I wanted to do a few more things. And then when the opportunity with Palace Sports came up, it struck me as a very great opportunity for me in the sense that at my law firm I had worked for the Dallas Cowboys, so I had experience in the NFL, obviously with the Padres had experience with Major League Baseball. Then with Palace Sports we owned the Pistons in the NBA, the Tampa Bay Lightning in the NHL. I'd be able to have experiences sort of at the highest level working for sports in the big four professional sports leagues. Plus at that point the Palace had, they're running two arenas, two amphitheatres. It was a full-fledged sports entertainment organization. So the breadth of that, ultimately within a year or two I became chief operating officer. So the breadth of being there in a general business role, basketball team, hockey team, arenas, amphitheatres, it was sort of too broad of an opportunity to pass up.

Jeff Murphy: So you end up being with that organization for, I think it's just about 11 years and you work through several titles and I know you mentioned being a coo, but you were also a ceo, president. What did you feel like you knew about sort of the skills, the personal characteristics that you needed to be successful and advance up the ladder in that organization?

Alan Ostfield: It's been the ability to step into an organization at a high level, integrate yourself, fit in, be welcomed, and yet still have and make a positive impact. Those are hard things to balance. A lot of people can come in and sort of just get along with people, but maybe they're not forceful enough to make a difference or you can come in and be a bull in a China shop. And then maybe you can make an impact, but you're not going to be welcomed in or become part of the team. I think that the ability to do both of those, to blend both of those is what allows you to fit into an existing organization that had very senior, successful people and yet still make a difference. And that's something that the people at the palace allowed me to do and I was able to do and I think that ultimately led to my ability to make a positive impact there.

Jeff Murphy: So you have this, you know, a positive impact, but then there's an ownership change, right? Am I wrong? Am I telling the story correctly that eventually sort of means you're out?

Alan Ostfield: Yeah. Well, yeah, that's the way it works. So, Mr. Davidson, who was a wonderful man passed away in 2009, and he had it in his mind that the team would stay with the family



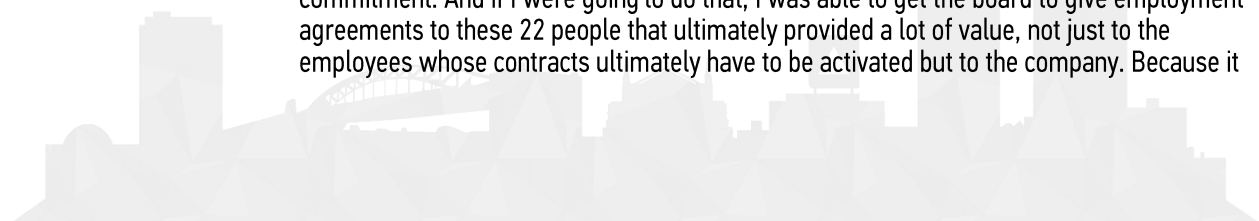
forever. Unfortunately, other people had different views and they ultimately decided to put the team up for sale, which prompted several years of transition related issues. And it was not easy to be sure. I mean, the organization was going through a lot of changes. It was a chaotic time. The economy was not good. The team was unfortunately not good at the time. It was a perfect storm of challenges hitting us. In hindsight, it proved to be one of the better experiences in my career, in the sense that I was called upon to help me and my colleagues help us all navigate through this. And while it might have been more pleasant not to have been called upon to do that, it was a phenomenal experience to have had the opportunity to do that. So you do that, you know, going in knowing that you're going to be sold and knowing that your position is such that it might cause you to move on and that's just the way it is. And you go in knowing that and not being a quitter and doing the best you can and I'm hoping for the best and of course as Davidson always said, "Prepare for the worst and hope for the best." And that's what I did and it worked out just fine.

Jeff Murphy: So, I mean obviously you talked about just sort of going into it with a positive attitude and doing the best that you can. Are there other lessons that you would share with somebody who, I mean not obviously not everybody's going through the same exact experience that you are, but somebody who's going through that kind of a transition that isn't necessarily have their own deciding. What do you tell people who are going through something similar?

Alan Ostfield: Well, I think, look the first thing is don't ignore that you're a human being and have natural human being emotions. And it's I think we're, I think people in the corporate world are taught to fight through things and ignore certain things. I really don't believe that. There are natural human emotions of concern with change and excitement about change and fear about certain things and natural trepidation about certain things and it's okay to recognize all of those things and deal with them. And that's really the way that I talked to my colleagues that were there, that to put our head in the sand and pretend that the change was not happening, that's not a business plan, that's just sticking your head in the sand. So, so we all knew what was on the horizon. We all knew that we should do our jobs well. And the chips are gonna fall where they may and we could choose to behave one way or we can choose to behave in a productive way. And the people that stayed and fought through it, I think most of them chose to do that. And embrace the change for the experience that it will provide for them.

Jeff Murphy: Were you tempted at any point to just jump ship? It's admirable to hear that you sort of felt this sense of responsibility to the other employees and things like that. Are you putting out feelers? Are you really just committed to doing the job that you're in and doing it to the best of your ability?

Alan Ostfield: No, I mean, a little bit of both. Yeah, I was tempted. I was tempted probably every hour of every day. A, it was not a fun time and B I was virtually certain how it was going to end for me. So you put those two things together and you're naturally aware of that. On the other hand, I had a contract that allowed me the security of fighting through it. And I don't say that from an administrative point of view. I say that because that created a dynamic where I didn't necessarily have to worry about my family and being able to provide for them if and when the ultimate resolution happened. And because I knew the comfort that that provided for me. One of the things that I did when I first took over and I knew we were going through a sale is I got employment agreements for my top 22 people and I did that for the exact same reason because they didn't have employment contracts and I knew what could ultimately happen to them and I was asking them to make a sacrifice and make a commitment. And if I were going to do that, I was able to get the board to give employment agreements to these 22 people that ultimately provided a lot of value, not just to the employees whose contracts ultimately have to be activated but to the company. Because it



allowed for this successful transition. So all were committed, but we all were sufficiently protected, which is really the fair thing all around.

Jeff Murphy: Unfortunately, we're running up against our time a little bit, but I certainly want to talk about your current role. You've got this really great position with Live Nation after leaving Detroit. You've been at Live Nation for I think about seven years now. Tell me a little bit about your role as president of the North Atlantic Division and kind of over the years the things that stand out that you're most proud of, the things about your job that make you happy.

Alan Ostfield: When I knew I was leaving the Pistons, I sat down and tried to figure out where I wanted to go and I did this even before I left but I started to think about what would excite me for the next 10 years. And just like I was interested in going to the Palace Sports because it would further extend my experiences. I thought about companies like Live Nation that I could further extend my experiences by being on the entertainment side, the music side. Having been on the sports side for 20 years. I can now extend it by going into the entertainment side. I had had a relationship with people at Live Nation because they were our partner when I was at the Palace, so when they had this position available and wanted to talk to me about it was a perfect way for me to extend my experiences into working for the world's leading live entertainment company, overseeing two of our top markets. So I am involved in all of the concerts that we put on in New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia. About 900 shows a year, helping to do new business deals, working with politicians, working with venues, working with all the promoters here that work with me. I'm just helping the business run.

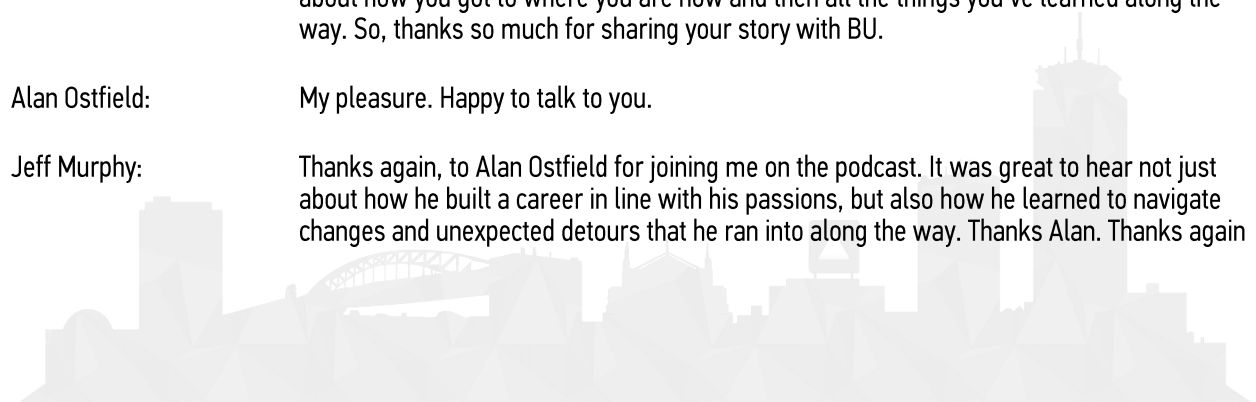
Jeff Murphy: You mentioned when you started out that there weren't a lot of schools that had a strong sports management program. When you look back over the years of your career, the different sports management positions you've had, now concert and entertainment in New York City what do you draw back on? What advice do you have to share with people who are interested into getting into sports and entertainment fields?

Alan Ostfield: There's two ways to do this. The first way is to be focused very early on in your career and get one of your first jobs at an entry level position, whether it's entry level marketing or in sports selling tickets, which is a common way to get in and work your way up. And that's a very common way. And from a numbers point of view, that's probably the most common way. That's not the way I did it. The other way to do it, which is similar to the way I did it is become educated, develop your career as a professional, independent of the sports world, independent of the entertainment world. And then you try to get in at a more substantial position. That's harder to do just by the sheer numbers of it, right? There's far fewer opportunities. I think when you do, or if you do I should say, it's going to be more rewarding for you. And if you don't, you still have a successful, hopefully, profession to fall back on. So I think those are the two ways. I don't think there's a right way or a wrong way. It all depends upon the individual person and what's important to them and what flexibility they want to have.

Jeff Murphy: Well, Alan, thanks so much for taking time to talk with us. It was really interesting to hear about how you got to where you are now and then all the things you've learned along the way. So, thanks so much for sharing your story with BU.

Alan Ostfield: My pleasure. Happy to talk to you.

Jeff Murphy: Thanks again, to Alan Ostfield for joining me on the podcast. It was great to hear not just about how he built a career in line with his passions, but also how he learned to navigate changes and unexpected detours that he ran into along the way. Thanks Alan. Thanks again



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