



## Tips For Creating Real-World Classroom Experiences with Zachary Johnson

Prep Period Podcast Episode #04

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ANNOUNCER: You're listening to prep period: the only podcast for teachers that's focused on quick wins and actionable tips that can be implemented in your classroom tomorrow. Prep period starts in three, two, one.

BRIAN: Welcome to the prep period podcast my. My name is Brian Bean. I'm your host as usual. Today we are going to discuss a couple things that should make our business teacher audience out there really excited. Okay we're going to talk about how to get students involved with local organizations and businesses as well as how to bring the real world into your classes. And our guest is Zachary Johnson from North Kansas, City high school. Welcome Zachary. So first things first let's get our listeners a little bit more familiar with you. Zach Zachary Johnson is a teacher at North Kansas city high school in North Kansas City, Missouri. He was named the 2020 Missouri ACTE new teacher of the year. Congratulations on that, that's fantastic. And a finalist for the 2020 region 3 ACTE new teacher of the year. So that so we that's fantastic man. Congratulations also a member of DECA high school program task force and presented this summer at the DECA advisor professional learning conference. So I am excited to hear what you can bring to our listeners so that's that's fantastic. Now before we dive in too much it's clear you are when it comes to business education you're very involved right? And I love that that's near and dear to my heart. I understand you've done some really cool things with your class as far as developing you call it a consulting firm. So tell us more about that.

ZACH: Yeah. So the kind of the short version of that is so we partnered with local businesses. Primarily small businesses and non-profits. We had them approach us and they brought problems they were having such as marketing or websites or social media. Students did a deep dive into those and kind of analyzed their business on everything. And it kind of keyed in on what they were actually wanting research done on or helping the problem solved on. And then they would actually present to the client in a formal setting and bring them in to be an authentic audience. And then that client actually took some of that information and actually implemented it in most cases. To get those teams they kind of operated as mini businesses or many consulting firms because they were working with different companies. The different teams. So they'd apply for different positions whether that be graphics or presenters or kind of a project lead and then they would apply for different positions. Then we did a draft actually. So they would draft their different teams and then they kind of have a mini-company that they would run.

BRIAN: And these are legit real businesses out there like in the community.

ZACH: So we had a my first year we did it we had a barbecue place. We had an insurance agency. We had a local like theme park. We had a couple more. Yeah but they'd come to us with problems they were having.



BRIAN: That's awesome. Now so obviously the first question comes to my mind like how did you get businesses that you know these are livelihoods on the line to trust these high school students? To be able to bring value and help actually solve their problems?

ZACH: So the first year I did it it was kind of hard. It was a lot of legwork for me. I emailed the chamber of commerce. I emailed different small business groups in the community that I was teaching in and pretty much just spammed everybody trying to get anything or any feedback. And then I got a couple small businesses that emailed me back and I mean they were small businesses. They didn't have a ton of money to pay to try and solve those problems. So they really had nothing to lose. It gave them good PR by students being able to help. Yeah I made sure to push the whole you know students are helping and it's going to give them lots of good authentic education. So try to push that aspect a whole lot well.

BRIAN: That's awesome. I love it so we're going to go off script a little bit because I just want to dive deeper into this because I think that's fantastic. Give me an example of one of the problems that your students solved.

ZACH: So with the insurance agency they were wanting to come out with a new program that they're going to try and sell where they're trying to reach like 18 to like 30-year-olds to teach them about like essentially personal finance. So how to create a budget managing investing. Like home buying. And they're trying to ask us how to promote or market towards those people. So we kind of created a marketing plan for them kind of house this is where we'd attack social media. This is when you should post. This is what graphics would look like. And just trying to help them appeal to that target market. So it's something that they if they went to an agency they'd be spending thousands of dollars for it but then my students were able to.

BRIAN: Yeah. That's not cheap consulting work right there sure. Have you had a chance to follow up with those businesses and see how the plans implemented worked out?

ZACH: Yeah. Some of them just kind of said thank you and implement a small portion of it. Some of them took the whole thing and completely implemented it and the ones that I've talked to have seen an increase in like traffic flow and click rates on the websites. And have increased profits due to it.

BRIAN: Wow that's I love it. That's awesome. Yeah and this is a program you just designed yourself. This is not part of DECA or anything like that. This is something you've done.

ZACH: So I try and stay up to date on a lot of the marketing and business stuff in kind of the real world. So a lot of Gary V and Seth Godin and I read lots of business books. I tried to bring a lot of that stuff in. I also worked in industry before I went into teaching. So I try and bring a lot of that kind of real-world environment into my classroom as well.



BRIAN: Yeah you know. So let's talk about that a little bit. Because as a former entrepreneur myself right you know if there is such a thing as a former entrepreneur, it kind of gets in your blood and never goes away right? I love the idea of getting students involved with small businesses and nonprofits anybody in the local community right? So I just think there's such value in those kind of out-of-class applications.

ZACH: Yep. Hands-on is a lot more applicable than just reading a textbook.

BRIAN: Oh for sure right? Absolutely. What about though kind of let's reverse the direction of the roads. It's not a one-way street. How do you bring kind of that real world into your regular class lessons? Like what do you do? What's your teaching approach to bring the real-world into the classroom?

ZACH: Yeah. Like I said I worked in business for about five years before I went into teaching in market research and in my own insurance agency for a little bit. And then I also worked in a commercial insurance. So I've got some connections. So I try and bring them in as guest speakers. Try and pull some of my knowledge and kind of implement that as a case study and then also just trying to bring in as many real-world examples as they can. So we're analyzing stuff that's going on the news working kind of picking a company as we're going over pricing and branding. And students are kind of redesigning their brand or picking up promotion for the company. So I try and you know front-load them with information and then just kind of act as a guide as they're going along and trying to do their own learning.

BRIAN: Ah that's too bad 2020 didn't have any noteworthy news things for you to play off of Well there hasn't been much. So if a teacher out there let's say there's a teacher out there that are listening to this and they're like man that's a really good idea I'd like to try and implement something similar to that since you kind of the genesis kind of came from you instead of pulling off of a pre-designed program that's out there do you have any advice for teachers that want to do that?

ZACH: Kind of the way I teach kind of the way I approach stuff is you know it's not gonna hurt to try. I mean even if it sucks it's still better than doing worksheets and looking through a textbook. So just getting out there and trying try and pick out some stuff that you like, maybe implement it in one unit or in one assignment and try that out. See how it goes and then as you if you like it continue it. If not scrap it and you're not any worse off.

BRIAN: No for sure. Is there any like what's the word I'm looking for here? So is there any advice you could give where you can be like okay I tried this. This definitely didn't work. You should avoid doing that.

ZACH: I guess I assumed students were by the time they were. Because I on my entrepreneurship class I guess I assumed by the time they were in a second and third year class they're a little bit more mature. So giving them too much freedom I'm happy to bring that back in a little bit and provide a little bit more guidance you know? If they're given free time



they're going to fill it with messing around or playing the latest game. Also kind of. I try and prep as much as I can beforehand but you never know what kids are gonna say when they're presenting to actual people and you don't want that to reflect on you badly. One of my first presentations where we were presented to a client I had a kid tell them that was the worst website they'd ever seen in their life. And as you know kids smile and start chuckling. He kind of feeds into that and keeps going and I'm just saying oh oh no please stop. Yeah.

BRIAN: That's not necessarily the feedback that you're hoping for. Yes! I love it. I love it. So you you've kind of given one example of with the insurance company where they put that together. Do you have one I guess you kind of alluded to the website thing but I'm wondering if there's any that just bond that was just like cautionary tale don't repeat this this project is not something kids should do.

ZACH: When we were talking to the the theme park they were wanting to implement some new stuff. They were wanting to try and get like some date nights and some other stuff because they were really appealing really well to like grade school kids but they weren't appealing well to high school kids. So they wanted to try and get some stuff. So we had some really good ideas that they really liked but then some of the other stuff we suggested and they're like oh we're already doing that or oh we had already had that in the work. So just making sure you do complete due diligence instead of just kind of cursory stuff.

BRIAN: Gotcha. Yeah that makes sense. That makes sense. Well I think it's fantastic what you're doing and I sure appreciate that it's always fun to talk to teachers that are doing things creatively. Going a little bit outside the box and a little bit beyond the norm and I just think it makes such a difference.

ZACH: It's a huge experience for them and great benefit to them. It's amazing to see them after they've you know presented or worked on a project such as this to see that confidence level go up. And also it helps them you know fill out that resume with real-world things that they've done.

BRIAN: Oh for sure. You know as you think I was thinking about that it's funny you mentioned because I was thinking similar kind of things. It's like you know the the takeaways from experience like this go so far beyond you know it's a fun project and I enjoyed the class. There's value in that but you think about what this could do for us a student's confidence level. About you know I did this when I was 17 you know. Where could we go from here? Have you noticed any students that really just enjoyed it so much that they started to look at their maybe their college plans differently as a result? Has had that kind of impact?

ZACH: I've had several students like you can see it click when they're presenting or when they're working on it. You can see that confidence just completely switch on. But several of them from this have actually started their own business or have decided that they wanted to be a business major going to school. I've had a couple reach back also and say you know everything that I'm doing in my first or second year is easier than what we did in class. You really prepared me. So this kind of real-world stuff is definitely giving them a leg up.



BRIAN: Wow. That's fantastic Zach. You should put together some sort of a program and then just sell it to different schools. I love it. I just think about how much fun that would have been if there was a program like that when I was in school. And I'm guessing you hear that all the time.

ZACH: I have a few times. Yeah. Yeah. Wishing I had it when I was in school.

BRIAN: Seriously. Right. Yeah. Yeah. It's always fun to be the teacher that's on the other end of that conversation and to think you know about your own life how my life would be differently if I had this. And then know that you're the person that's that's providing that experience for teenagers.

ZACH: Thank you. Well thank you so much for your time appreciate you having me on as a guest. Keep going good and I'm sorry I'm not gonna root for the Chiefs. I'm a Bill spend and I hope you lose. We'll see. We'll see. Have a good one. Thank you for having me.

BRIAN: So want to say thanks again to Zach for joining us on the program today. Like always if you or anybody that you know would be interested in being a guest on our show just have them email me at [brian.bean@stukent.com](mailto:brian.bean@stukent.com). It's brian with a bean just like the vegetable. So [brian.bean@stukent.com](mailto:brian.bean@stukent.com). As far as final thought for the day goes I couldn't help but think when Zach was talking about how much internal drive students have nowadays and the amazing things that they're capable of doing. But a lot of times they just they just need someone to point them in the right direction you know? I used to always say when I back before covid let stop me from going to conferences back when I would travel at conferences and speak I'd always tell teachers the same thing. That you know if you provide an environment of creativity students will create. And I believe that. And I think Zach's a perfect example of that. So teachers whether you teach entrepreneurship business personal finance or anything in general don't underestimate the creativity of your students. Find a way. It might take a little extra work but find a way to foster that kind of environment and they will blow your mind. So thanks for listening.