



Liz: Hi everyone. This is Liz Bothwell from Waste360 with Kristin Kinder, Director of Research and Waste Stream Sustainability at WasteEquip. And she's also one of this year's 40 Under 40 award winners. Welcome Kristin and thank you for being on the show today.

Kristin: Thank you so much for having me.

Liz: I'm so excited to chat with you. So please tell us a bit about your background and how you got into this wonderful industry.

Kristin: I mean first, Liz, I have to tell you I love that question because most not all but most people didn't get into this industry on purpose. So, we all have interesting stories for that. And I'll say once you're here though, it's so tough to leave. I've been in the industry for about a decade now. So, this year has been a very reflective one for me. But when I really think about it. My story starts all the way back in kindergarten, and I promise I won't walk through every year of school, but that one was particularly important to me. I had a teacher; we know she really brought nature to life for us. We dissected owl pellets for mice bones. We've raised real salmon in our classrooms so we could watch how life changed. It was also the same year that they began curbside recycling in Seattle where I grew up. And so, I was totally that kid. My dad has memories of me walking out to the recycling and kind of barking at him directing where to go. But I was that kid where we say you know educate them in school and, bam you know, twenty-five years later they might make you different.

But I you know I kind of went on with my life. I never really thought of environmental issues as a career. I studied science in college, thinking I was going to go into the health field and again at that time there just there were tons of people I know now in the environmental field but at the time there wasn't a very clear connection for how to build a career. Looking back even my ecology courses really helped me and I really, I think about natural selection and what I learned in evolution all the time and I think it's so relevant really to what we're talking about with sustainability these days. But again, I still never thought of it as a career. Instead I actually moved to Germany to play soccer and I moved there knowing I just didn't know what I would find. And I ended up finding the entire inspiration for my career. As I watched the Germans, I could just I could see that their culture around consumption was so different from how we how we think of things here. And it really took being removed from my own culture for that long for a year to really be able to see, you know, I'd read all these facts that you things like you know the U.S. consumes a third of the world's paper but we're 5 percent of the population.

But I really couldn't relate to it until I lived in another country and saw it a different way. The Germans I lived with they had the family had four drivers, but they had one car. They had, you know, we used reusable napkins every night at dinner. And it was just it was a it was a different mindset. And so, after living there I was convinced that I wanted to make a difference for the environment in some way with my career. I didn't have a ton of direction or really know where to start and I was looking back on it, I was really lucky to find myself at Waste Management. I started there, actually in their operations and eventually worked my way and to education and outreach I even worked on their, you know, their national recycling campaign. "Recycle often, recycle right" in its early days. And I'm so glad I was exposed to so much at that company and I'm so glad that that's where I ended up in the first place. At the same time, I was actually taking an environmental law certificate program at the University of Washington, just to see if environmental law was something I might be interested in and comparing that with my experience from Waste Management. I actually quickly saw that I did not want to be a lawyer and telling people what they can't do I felt draining to me and I was able to compare that to an experience of working in, I'll say corporate America, where I felt like businesses could be part of the solution. And there's just when a business finds value in something, they have the ability to make change very quickly and that that felt uplifting and exciting to me.

I also spent a good amount of time at ENGIE Insight. While I was there, I got to do all of our dumpster dives which in this industry I am always hesitant to call it that because it's attractive, but I want to be clear we're very safe and don't actually dive in a dumpster. But I got to see, you know, you name the industry and I got to see the waste that comes out the back end and spend time in landfills and transfer stations and all these glorious places that, you know, most people in this country don't want to spend their time, but I find them fascinating. I also why I was there did a took a stint in product management, so I got to understand you know PNLs and strategy and I got more entrenched with the business side of things. And while I was there, I gave a TED talk on Circular Economy at TEDx Spokane just one of the most exciting things I've ever done. And from that are our CEO at WasteEquip contacted me with the I'll say the million-dollar question. What's your dream job. And I actually I know I had hoped someday I would earn that question, but I certainly didn't expect it at this point in my career. But he, you know, he helped me take my dream and then build an even bigger dream. So, it has been just the coolest experience getting to start this new role that I'm in. And I am just I am so excited for every day going to work.

Liz: Oh, that's fantastic. And I can really hear the passion in your voice and what a wonderful ride so far. It's been quite a decade for you. And it sounds like the roles that you've had over the past decade are very much focused on collaboration so you could probably teach us all something about doing this well. And any tips on how to collaborate well across teams' departments and functions that you can share with us today?

Kristin: That's a great question. Yeah. You know I have a couple of thoughts on that from different angles. The first thing I will say, and this is one of the reasons I say I was lucky to find myself at Waste Management. The ability to learn the front lines of our business I think is key to anything you want to do to make change. You have to make the change relevant to let's say the curb and I was lucky to start there again completely accidentally but once you know operationally how things happen how the people in operations feel what they're being measured on it makes that collaboration much easier because you understand the basics of that. I always said when I was there you know they have 40 thousand employees. I have the ability to do whatever I want to hear if I can just find the right person. So, I think it is also just asking the right questions and understanding where the different departments are coming from. And then I'll see in my

new role I've been able to apply that as well. And I will say I feel like collaboration is actually one of the things that makes me the most hopeful about our industry and our future. When I was in school again, I didn't study business but there was this whole idea that business and the environment were two completely separate things.

When I was in school I didn't study business but it seemed like there was this conflict and that many companies wanted to keep their information to themselves. You know the era of non-disclosure agreements and I think just even in the last 10 years I've seen the collaboration become much stronger. And I'll see what I enjoy that I've enjoyed so much from this new role is that I get to reach out to different contacts and I've gone to conferences and gone up to the speakers after and just asked to get some time with them. And I've been so impressed with how much time people are willing to give me during their regular workday when they have other responsibilities simply because people care about furthering our industry. I will also say I've I started to get into the meat of a number of reports that have been put out, so I over the spring have been focused a lot on food waste and I've gotten into refunds report and NRDC and I've gotten such a great response by just reaching out and saying :Hey I loved your work. I want to make sure that I'm presenting it well. Do you have time to talk through it with me?" And I've been surprised that people are not only willing to take the time but they're thankful because they don't get many calls like that. So, there's so much information out there and we have so many great resources. And I found that simply by asking the question and wanting to reproduce their work well. That has really enhanced my ability to collaborate.

Liz: That's a great point. Like you said just asking the question and to your point this industry is so generous with their time and they do want to further sort of the greater good. So, I think that's one common theme that I found with everyone I've interviewed so far is this industry is generous and they want to help each other so it's fantastic. So, you talk a lot about communication and behavior change as keys to moving forward. Could you give a concrete example of how this has worked for you? I know you've worked with behavior change and I don't know if that was the "Recycle often, Recycle right" program or what. But if you could share a little bit about that that would be great.

Kristin: Sure. I think you know I got to take a training called community based social marketing. And basically, I would describe that as putting the scientific method and

applying that to behavior change. So, it's really you know it's about understanding your goal, looking at data for that, looking at data for you know understanding how the people that you're trying to influence feel about what it is you want them to do. And there's all kinds of tools for I'll say increasing the motivations and lowering the barriers but with "recycle often recycle right", you know, what we found people are talking about contamination today everywhere. And this was probably this was now about five years ago, and I think when I came on the ideas had been there for a little while as well. But this idea that we are missing the important recyclables, the recyclables that I'll say have a healthy recycling foundation supporting them. Your bottles cans are paper and at the same time, we're so focused on complicated messaging and having a long list of recycling. So, I think the first key with that program was really using data to figure out, what is the message we need people to understand, how can we simplify it and then how can we get that out there. And I know I haven't been working on that campaign, it's been now about four and a half years since I worked on it. But I'm just so impressed that that messaging is now even more relevant and more powerful today.

Liz: Oh, that's great. And you mentioned data and you've spoken about the value of waste to recycling the vast amounts of data in our industry. Do you think it's being used to its potential yet?

Kristin: I'll say that companies during my days with ENGIE Insight, I mean, we consulted with Fortune 500 Companies that has lots of sites across the country and the companies that took the time to get their data right are the companies that, I all say have succeeded in the sense that they know what to do next. So, some things they've tried have been successful. Some things weren't successful, but they know and they're able to make adjustments and try something different. So, I think it takes a lot of patience and it's probably uncomfortable to get that data together. But once you do, you're able to make progress much faster. But when comparing this with the industry I'll say I think there's a shortage of data. Or I'll say a gap in it even just we don't have a national reporting requirement. And I think that that really does. We have municipalities and states that are all recording their data differently which when we try to bubble it up and determine how much waste we actually are producing as a country we have lots of data points but they're not necessarily the same. So, the EPA has their methodology where they, from my understanding, they put together data on purchasing on what we

purchase in this country and how long it's supposed to last. They believe that we're producing about two hundred and sixty plus million tons a year.

The Environmental Research and Education Foundation, they've used what we call bottom up methodology, where they're collecting data from actual facilities and they're measuring something more like over 300. I think it's like 350 million tons a year... And so, to be able to reconcile there, I mean there's a gap there. And I think if we could understand that and have sound methodology in between us I think that would help our industry make educated decisions.

Liz: Definitely. And as the resident expert on we stream improvement at WasteEquip. How much of what you're doing is changing WasteEquip approach to business. Do you feel like you're having a big impact yet?

Kristin: I do actually. I'm really fortunate. I get to report directly to our CEO and with my role, we're start we're talking about sustainability at WasteEquip as well. So, we've had sustainability in our products. One of our wasteful companies invented the first CNG equips roll off truck, our towed cart, so the plastic carts that you might find at a residence of ours are the most durable on the market, there are about 15 to 20 years, compared to the average 10. My role is intended to bring objective unbiased information from the industry so that we can continue to innovate on our existing products and honestly create more, actually it's probably a better way to say it but I think we what I'm most heartened by is that we've started looking at our own sustainability operationally and internally.

So, I chose to work at this company because of the integrity of the leadership and because of that I'm confident that the actions we land on will truly make a difference. And we're certainly in the process of defining what those should be further right now and doing it in a way that's not greenwashing, which is important. And I've just said again I think if you have that integrity and interest from the top which we're so fortunate to have you can make that change quickly and then it's just a matter of fitting it in with messaging and the certifications that already exists, so that we're speaking the same language as, you know, the rest of the industry and other companies we're doing business with.

Liz: Sure. And so, what's next for you in your role? What are you most excited about diving into is that some of this sustainability stuff, is it product development?

Kristin: Yeah. So, and actually I should probably clarify a little bit more about what my role actually is. I get to be our connection to the industry, so I get to study in depth what are the pertinent relevant topics today. It's really important that my work is unbiased for two reasons. The first is that we want to be basing our product development on trustworthy sound information. And the second is that I get to, I'm completely blessed to share what I'm working on and what I know with the industry to move us all forward. And so that that unbiased nature is really important because I want to be a trustworthy, I'll say expert and resource for the industry. So, I'm still kind of pinching myself. I get to do this. So, my role I certainly expect I'll be involved in product development, but I don't own actually developing the products I own bringing back the quality information. And so I'm most excited. This year I am the product manager and me of this fall put together a list of 25 to 30 topics. It's continuously growing but of all the things that are important in our industry right now and all the different ways we can approach it. And after doing a rigorous scoring system and all of that. I came up with the two topics that I think I could have guessed on day one if you'd given me 30 seconds. And that's I'm getting deeper into food waste and then understanding how are recycling programs and systems are changing and impacted by the changing markets.

Liz: Got it. Oh, that's exciting though.

Kristin: It's really exciting.

Liz: And speaking of food waste you moderated the Scrap your Food Waste Panel at WasteExpo. What did you learn from that insightful discussion? I just I just listened to it myself and I learned so much I'd love to hear it from your perspective.

Kristin: Yeah, well the first thing that I got very lucky on, but we had just such a diverse group of panels. For anyone listening who wasn't able to attend, we had Ned Foley of Two Particular Acres. He is a farmer and a composter, and he also hauls material in Pennsylvania. We had Charlotte Pitt from the City of Denver who's been part of their program since, before it started about 10 years ago a little more than that. And then we had Dave Vaughan from Ecology, and he's been working side by side with the City of

San Francisco with their program. Ecology has a number of composting facilities and their own hauling. So, we had just this wonderful diverse representation of voices on our panel which made the conversation really rich. One of my biggest takeaways and I'm going to steal this from Dave, I should give him credit for it but says begin with the end in mind. So, think about building the markets and making sure that there is a vehicle, no pun intended, for your door materials and that they have a place to go and start strengthening that. The other thing we loud and clear was the focus. We talked a lot about the quantity over quality and if Dave could go back and start again, he would definitely start focusing on quality vs. adoption because I think the way I've heard it explained you can train an infant, it's really tough to train a teenager. And so, I think there are a number of programs that are trying to train teenagers on unclean composting.

Liz: I understand that maybe a little too well. That was a great panel and jumping subjects a little bit. I heard you speak about Rent the Runway a lot and I'd love that. Yeah, I love that company for a lot of reasons, and one is because it's a woman led company. But what do you like about it from an ability perspective?

Kristin: So, I one of the things you know going back to when I was in college, I felt like there was this this unknown unspoken principle that, you know, business and the environment cannot co-exist. You know there's an inverse relationship for one to succeed, the other has to fail. And the thing that I love the most about Rent the Runway is that just valued at a billion dollars. They are thriving, improving as a company that you can be successful and make money and have a lighter impact. Now as a consumer, the biggest question I have about things like that is, if I'm ordering clothes and they're being shipped, is the lighter impact then? I'll say throwing them away even though, I would never do that. But you know you're starting to show in their data that that is a lighter impact. So, I'm heartened by that as a customer as well. And I guess what I love about it is, you know, for those of us who. How do I say this? I've wanted to be what I would call a stylish environmentalist. You know, I've never seen myself living off the grid or, you know, wearing the same pair of Birkenstocks for 30 years. The way we've traditionally defined environmentalist and I think businesses like Rent the Runway are providing environmentalist like me who also enjoy the feeling of being able to express themselves and kind of the artistry of all say new clothes with the ability to have a sustainable option which to me as a customer is so exciting.

Liz: That is exciting. Are there other organizations that you think are doing good things? Whether it's in the products are creating their light footprint their sustainability efforts, etc..?

Kristin: Absolutely. I mean I think before I get into any specifically, I think you know again where we ended in the last 10 years where kind of the story is yet to be written. I think that the acknowledgement from the business community about how important sustainability is, is just it's getting so much. And you know I think in 2011 about 20 percent of the S&P 500. Births by 2017 that was eighty five percent. And I feel like there's just this huge acknowledgement that sustainability matters for businesses to be able to continue and to let it be in the future.

One of my personal favorites that I get home right now is Imperfect Produce. So, they take produce, that was all I'll say is off specs that are a little bit too small. Your potatoes might be, you know, a funny shape, not the perfect shape. But it's the best tasting produce I've ever had and what I love about it is there. This is food. This is food that at some point would have been wasted a lot.

So, they're finding new distribution for that. And one of my biggest my biggest complaint or the only thing that I found a little disappointing about imperfect produce was that it comes in this beautiful cardboard box that I that just as an environmentalist say I didn't know what to do with it because I knew it should be reused. But it was it just it felt bad. And just this year they've they now in my area have started taking those cardboard boxes back and reusing them in their distribution for food banks which is just to me a really exciting evolution and also an acknowledgement that businesses aren't perfect but they're trying to solve the problem and it takes phases to get there and so it was nice to see that they're aware of that challenge and you know working to make it better.

Liz: I agree. And I know you said earlier when you were first coming out of school that you know tying science to business and there wasn't really this track for sustainability. I feel like this industry has been elevated so much lately. It really feels right for attracting young smart professionals like yourself. What advice would you give to professionals entering the industry now?

Kristin: I think I'll echo something I said earlier but I think the first thing I would say is learn the front lines. I would recommend not in any industry, but the front lines of this industry are so important, and I think that again most people aren't quite as strange as I am and may not find transfer stations and landfills at interesting places or comfortable places. And so, I think there's a tendency to want to shy away from that side but it is such an important part of our business that I highly recommend wherever someone were to enter to learn the front lines how recycling centers work. You know, what landfills look like what it feels like to be there. So, I highly recommend that, and I think I've found that it's showing any bit of interest, people are more than willing to help you with tours or things like that.

Liz: That's great advice.

Kristin: Yeah and I would also say one of the things I've learned I've worked for a publicly funded company, I've worked for a private equity funded company, and for a I'll say subsidiary of an international make a company and I think it's important to recognize that the financing of the organization you're with is suddenly controls your experience there and your abilities to make change. So, you know, I think non-profits have a very very important place in our industry. I accidentally found myself in corporate America. People to know and understand that you can work in corporate America and still make a difference. So, for people like me who know they want to make a difference who have this, this passion and just know that that you can make a difference in corporate America. And I saw that first in my days at Waste Management. They have over 20 million entities that they serve and that's quite a way to have a voice.

Liz: Oh it isn't so. That's great advice.

Kristin: Tell people what you want to do. So, if there's something that you're interested in if there's something that you love it may not be the exact job that you have today but start telling people what that is. We all have this fear I think of putting ourselves out there or we make the assumption that you know our mentors, or our bosses will know and we'll kind of just guess what it is we want to do. So, I've been in sharing what I'm interested in, I've had more opportunities come back to me faster. And the last thing I will say, I had a soccer coach. He always told us if you want to be successful you have to be comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Liz: Yes.

Kristin: And that you know at the time related to doing an extra minute on my plank or, you know, running more wind sprints. But you know it then carried into moving to another country and starting a new professional life and taking on speaking engagements which doesn't have to be the thing that you choose to make you uncomfortable. But the more you can push yourself into those uncomfortable situations the faster you will learn and the more success or I'll say even just satisfaction you can get.

Liz: Definitely. And I think you nailed it. I think that's the key to real growth.

Kristin: Yeah absolutely.

Liz: So, what else should we be paying attention to in the world of waste recycling and organics?

Kristin: So, one of the things I am fascinated by and I think of. This is something we've been talking about in the industry for a little while. It's called the Changing waste stream or the evolving ton. Are those terms you're familiar with, Liz?

Liz: Yes, but please expand on those for our listeners.

Kristin: Yeah. So, the changing waste stream is this idea that our waste stream parallels powder trends in society. So, you think about you know today we've read so much online that the newspapers regenerate as a society, less than half the number of newspapers that we did 10 plus years ago. Or, you know, you think about how much we order online these days. And so it's this idea that as different technologies comes online for consumers, our waste stream changes. And I personally find that having spent so much time sorting garbage, I find that really fascinating and I think it's particularly important in our industry because we at this point have to be reactive. The technology that's in our recycling facilities was built. I think there's a lot of evolution and innovation happening right now. But your typical recycling center. Had technology designed to sort yesterday's waste stream so I think that if we as an industry can stay on top of what I'll

say the rest of the world is talking about in terms of trends and they sound very trendy like IO T you know what is I think an important one for us is 3D printing and what could that mean for the waste industry. If we can start to understand those trends that are coming down the pipeline and what they might mean as best as we can. I think that can help us adapt for the waste stream of tomorrow. And then I think being an active participant in the waste stream of tomorrow as well involves tighter stronger conversations between the waste industry and I'll say design manufacturing and distribution of our products. And I think that's something over the last 10 years that I've seen become much stronger there. You know, there's the American, there's this Sustainable Gene Coalition, there's the Alliance to End Plastic Waste. You know, I know the EPA has done a great job of convening different stakeholders in the process in the chain.

Liz: Yes. Great point. So, what keeps you busy outside of work. Are you still playing soccer at any level?

Kristin: I just played last night. I play as often as I can. I love some of the other sports out there as well. Hiking, beach volleyball every now and then I've gotten back into skiing quite a bit. I'm learning how to garden. This year I'm planting my first garden so I'm enjoying kind of learning the ins and outs of that. Kind of with your Rent the Runway question, I set a personal goal for myself to not buy clothes for the first six months of this year. So, I have yet to buy clothes for myself, which is a change. And the coolest thing is with this subscription from Rent the Runway, I have a kind of an ongoing stream of new exciting things. And then I mean beyond that I love music. Especially country music a go to farmer's markets. I pick blueberries every summer that's there's this farm outside of Seattle that's just my happy place. I love travelling. My sister and I actually started our own little side business. We can turn your handwriting into a font.

Liz: A very well-rounded woman right there. I'd like it.

Kristin: Yeah!

Liz: Oh, that's awesome. Good for you. All of that sounds amazing and you're lucky to be in Seattle. It's beautiful world there.

Kristin: So, it is I say, you know, we earn it all year but when it's nice here, there's just no one nowhere else on earth you want to be. We've got mountain, snow on the mountains. We've got water and everywhere it's just panoramic beautiful.

Liz: Oh it is. Enjoy that. Well this has been wonderful, Kristin. Thanks so much for talking with me. I can't wait for our listeners to hear all of your valuable insights.

Kristin: Yeah. Well thank you so much for having me. You've fulfilled a lifelong dream for me, or I guess in the last five years since podcasts became a thing.

Liz: Oh, that's awesome. Well thank you so much and keep doing so much good in the world and I really look forward to following your career and keeping in touch.

Kristin: Thanks so much Liz. Thank you. It. Ok keep up the great work at Waste360!

Liz: Oh thank you.