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Podcast: The Placemakers

Episode: Dean Cracknell – Town Team Movement & Citizen Placemaking

Host: Stephen Burton

Guest: Dean Cracknell, Co-Founder of Town Team Movement

Stephen Burton: Today I'm excited to introduce Dean Cracknell. Dean is the co-founder of the Town Team Movement. He's a creator of placemaking education, an urbanist, a placemaker, and he's also worked in local government as an urban planner. Dean works and lives in beautiful Launceston, Tasmania. So thanks so much for joining us today Dean on the Placemakers.

Dean Cracknell: Thank you very much Stephen, pleasure to talk to you.

Stephen Burton: I'm interested in the Town Team Movement. I've come across it in practice and I believe it's an amazing initiative. Can you tell us more about Town Team?

Dean Cracknell: The idea started quite a long time ago in the inner suburbs of Northern Perth. A couple of local groups started doing things in their local area—businesses and residents who wanted to make change happen. I joined a group on Beaufort Street in Mount Lawley and Highgate. We put on a massive street festival with about 150,000 people. About four or five years on that journey, there were a number of us in different groups thinking, "We're all facing similar challenges and have similar opportunities, how could we help each other and work better together?" That's when the idea for a new organization to help these small community groups started. We formed Town Team Movement in 2016/2017 and formalized it in 2018. Our heroes are really the local volunteers in those teams. We want to inspire new people to get involved and help local groups do whatever they want to do in their local place. The only thing we ask is to align with a **Charter of Behavior**—six simple principles about being positive, proactive, action-focused, apolitical, inclusive, and focused on good ethics, integrity, and respect. We're up to 147 teams now, mainly in Australia (especially Western Australia), but we also have teams in New Zealand, Poland, and the UK.

Stephen Burton: What do you put that support down to? Where do you think that goodwill comes from?

Dean Cracknell: I think people like the **fresh approach**. We're not coming with particular agendas, we're not telling people what to do, and we're not pretending we know everything. We're genuine and authentic in helping local people create change. We call them **Citizen Placemakers**. We sit in between community, government, and professional circles, often acting as a translation role. But particularly, people love the practical aspects of actually being out there on the ground doing things rather than just talking about things.

Stephen Burton: So if you're a member of a local community and you want to make positive change, is that the kind of person that would be interested in joining the Town Team Movement?

Dean Cracknell: Absolutely. Sometimes people have never thought about this before—they don't know what placemaking is or have never thought about joining a community group. We take people who are very early stages in their journey. They might be interested in environmental action, social action, helping their local main street, or getting more sales in their local business. We have a bunch of resources available, including a Town Team Hub with lots of "how-to" guides. We've learned a lot of things along the way, and if we can disseminate that information and make it easier for people to act, everyone learns off each other.

Stephen Burton: Do they need to have money behind them to get involved in a project like this?

Dean Cracknell: Money is always good, but you don't need money to start off with. We've just produced a **20 Quick Wins Guide** (available for free) with 20 different ideas you can do without any money or with very little money. Often the best way to start is just by starting. Sometimes there's a tendency to start over-planning and over-analyzing, and the initial enthusiasm dissipates if you're just sitting around talking. If you can just get out there with chalk, or walk arounds, or catch-ups at the pub, that generates more interest and enthusiasm.

Stephen Burton: What's one of your favorite projects that you've done with the team?

Dean Cracknell: One that stands out for me is in a local suburb here in Launceston called Ravenswood. There was a small group of people interested in creating change. There was a set of shops that needed some love—it's a poorer part of Launceston and had a bad reputation, even though the people are very proud. There was a wall that had been badly damaged and graffiti-covered. With very little money, we got out there with some paint brushes and painted a design on that. We got a lot of curious looks, but pretty soon local residents saw that it was making the place look nicer. While we were doing this, a guy stopped us and said, "What are you doing? This is not your responsibility." He turned out to be a local bus stop contractor who had been looking after two bus stops nearby as a volunteer for 10 years. He asked how we could do something similar on those bus stops. We applied for some grant funding and got a street artist to work with local kids at a skate park and other community members to do some fantastic designs on these bus stops. From a small action, we ended up with much bigger outcomes. Over two years, none of the work we've done has been graffiti-ed. It's really well respected by the local people and starts to create that pride and confidence.

Stephen Burton: Can you tell us more about **Placemaking.Education**?

Dean Cracknell: I've been on this journey for probably 17 years now. It takes a long time to pick up a lot of tricks—who's doing what in the industry, who you can learn from. That's great when you're passionate or paid to do it. But how do you transfer as much of that information to a keen local business or resident who just wants to get cracking today? That's the idea behind Placemaking.Education—how can we curate some of that best information, advice,

tips, and lessons learned from around the world? We've reached out to fantastic placemakers like Brooke Williams, David Engwicht, Lucinda Hartley, Gilbert Rochecouste, and others. We've put together a package of courses and resources that you can jump online and do whenever you've got time. Another big driver is: How can we **democratize** this information? How can we have millions of placemakers in Australia doing this work? It doesn't mean everyone has to be paid, but there are plenty of people starting to think this way—they just need practical advice on *how* to do it.

Stephen Burton: Dean, the one question I ask all our guests: What do you think the most important ingredient is for creating a successful public place?

Dean Cracknell: I did cheat and listen to Brooke Williams talking about **people**, and I totally agree with that. People would be my answer. If we can get a few people to use or be attracted to a public space, they often attract more people. particularly if you can get kids and families there, or provide seats for senior citizens. Focus on the kids and sometimes the pets as well, and often that creates the activity.

Stephen Burton: Dean, you're an inspiring placemaker. Thank you so much for sharing your knowledge with us today on the Placemakers.

Dean Cracknell: Thanks very much Stephen.

Stephen Burton: Thanks for listening to the Placemakers.