Rebekah Grmela
We're live. Good morning, everyone. Welcome to Ask Right + Good. We're so glad that you could join us today. If you are not watching this live and watching it after the fact, Ask Right + Good is a new conversational experiment that we're hosting where we have conversations with people we like talking to her doing cool things out in the world. And that is why we brought you Eliza today.
So, Eliza Erskine, Erskine, please I'm sorry, is the owner and founder and head honcho at Green boy consulting, she works to help you know, high growth businesses with your S G strategy and B Corp certification. So I've just learned that it's B Corp month coming up and the timeliness of all of our conversation I think will be really relevant. I'm also really excited to get into this topic because I think a lot of small and medium sized businesses are a little intimidated by the idea of going through this process. And I would love to squash that myth for everyone. So welcome, Eliza, I would love to have you introduce yourself and tell us a little bit more about your work.

Eliza Erskine
Thank you. Thanks for having me. I'm excited to be here. So I started Green Buoy in 2018. My background is in responsible investment and I was always interested in sustainability. I studied business and undergrad and someone from Walmart's sustainability program came and talk to us and I was just like edit on my seat. This you can do this for businesses, you can do environmental stuff for businesses. Yeah. And my friend was dead asleep next to me like nobody else was excited about.

Rebekah Grmela
Your like nerdy Eliza in the front row, like so excited raising your hand.

Eliza Erskine
Yeah, I called my parents and I was like, This is what I want to do. I want to help businesses become more environmentally friendly, like, oh, it's such a good college. So but then in college, like this was two, I was in college in 2006 2007. And there was no sustainability. Sure, anything like it was I studied environmental policy as a minor. But like I had professors that said, I don't believe in corporate sustainability. So we're not going to talk about it like it was such a kind of like small part of what was happening. And then after college, I worked in responsible investment. MSCI is a big ESG data provider. Now they're probably the top one, they do ESG research, for investments. So what I was doing was looking at smaller companies, at that point, small companies meant under a billion dollars. So I was looking at all these small companies and looking for ESG data. And there was no there was no data, there was nothing because you didn't have to talk about it wasn't cool to talk about it. And then I did the Harvard Extension schools master's degree program. I started that in 2014. And I started consulting as a school project, I needed a final business idea. Yeah. And I kept thinking about the small businesses, everything we were talking about in school, and I think this is still true. Now it's becoming less true that it's big businesses that are doing the sort of CSR. You know, it's Walmart, it's Unilever. And I kept thinking, who's doing this? For small businesses, small businesses run the economy, like in the US, especially, it's such a huge driver of economic growth. So many people work at businesses that have less than 100 employees. That's the majority of workers.

So I became really small business under I mean, I, I kind of defined it, how the client defines it. If somebody comes to me and says, I have a small business, then it that sounds good to me, from a consulting sort of client perspective, my range now is I usually say less than 1000 employees. Okay. I feel like talking about it from an employee perspective is a good way to do it, because revenue varies so much, but if a company has less than 1000 employees, and usually my sweet spot is about between 206 100

Rebekah Grmela
Okay, interesting. Yeah, I mean, I think that when I think small thinking like 50 and under employees, right, so just depending on the type of work you're doing, how much that can vary. I think, like you said, letting it be defined by the client is such an interesting way to think about it, because that says so much about their frame of mind for how they want to implement work, right.

Eliza Erskine
Yeah. And I think it's still pretty rare that a small quote unquote business is really thinking about sustainability. Usually if they are it's very, very early on Um, so that's can be another way to define a client and figure out kind of what stage in their sustainability journey. Definitely on

Rebekah Grmela
to. What's interesting about? Well, first of all, I'm realizing maybe not everyone in this call totally knows what the before B Corp certification is. I do think our audience probably way more familiar than most, but I'm really curious, like, how do you define that? And how does you know brand go about deciding we're just talking about size might be part of the decision? How do they go about, you know, understanding if it's a good fit for them? Because I think some or at least the history, like you said, when you learned about it, the history of sustainability was like, almost purely, like CPP, and fashion brands right. expanded so much like, I'd love to just hear your thoughts on that. That ethos in general.

Eliza Erskine
Yeah, so B Corp certification is given by a third party called B Lab, and B Lab as the one that gives certification, they make sure that you checked all the boxes and everything. So to become B Corp certified, you have to fill out an assessment that B Lab provides, it's about 200 questions. It's industry dependent, so it looks at your size and your industry. And the assessment looks at your business in five main areas. So we'll look at workers, governance, customers, community and environment. And then the way that you answer those questions gives you a score to become B Corp certified, you have to score higher than 80 points on that the median score for a company, according to B Corp is like 50.9. So 80 sounds low. But when you look at the questions and look at it, it can be a pretty big jump for a lot of companies. So the other part of becoming a B Corp is you have to legally change your business status. So if you're an LLC, S corp, C Corp, you have to become a benefit corporation, which is a distinct, I think part of B Corp that one really affirms it for a lot of people or makes people kind of go the other way. The reason that the legal change exists, I think and this is part of what I've read, I'm not a lawyer, I have to say that. Because you when you become a benefit corporation, you are legally saying we will equally consider people planet and profit into consideration. And from a capitalism perspective, most models are profit at all costs, making money at all costs, where V Corp is saying, we think that you should be considering the environment and your decision making, you should be considering employees health, all these

different factors. So once you do the legal thing, you fill out your assessment, you meet with B Corp, they go through your assessment. And while I'm saying it is questions, you have to show proof, so it's not just oh, here's you know, our policy for this, you have to upload the policy and be corporate use it. So it's pretty robust. It's definitely can take a little while.

Rebekah Grmela
Yeah, how, how long does it take? And like, where do you come in with helping with that process?

Eliza Erskine
Um, so how long does it take as the most common question I? Also the one that I feel the worst answering because the answer is it depends. Sure. Like, it totally depends on your business. The there's two parts to the kind of how long does it take conversation. The first part is how long it takes you to complete the assessment. Okay, so for most companies, that's four to six months. That is the bulk of my work is helping kind of project manage that process, figuring out where those documents live, creating them if necessary, putting all those things into that one document and kind of keeping everybody moving along. So you're really

Rebekah Grmela
helping them prepare for the audit. That is,

Eliza Erskine
yes. Okay. Yeah, to make sure that everything they said on the assessment is true. And they're, it's true, and that they're actually on it now that it's not just a policy that sits and is pulled out for B Corp whenever B Corp comes in as Yeah, but it's something that's being used in employee engagement and that kind of that kind of angle. The second part of the How long does it take is because B Corp has become so popular. There's a wait now like there's a queue on the worksite to review. So that can be anywhere from another four to six months on their end to review it. So some The biggest kind of size question as I have, I've talked to businesses that are, you know, two or three employees. And for them, it can be challenging because you know, you're a business of Yeah, it's hard to find time to do what you have to do must find time to get, you know, certified and pulled together all these different different things. So whereas a bigger company sometimes can say, app can allocate it to a team, or even I've seen allocate it to an intern. Point out, there's different Yeah, different ways to budget. But yeah, that's the hardest. Well keep it moving forward. That's the hardest part.

Rebekah Grmela
Sure. But that's also really interesting to me, because, you know, we talked so much right and good about public participation and community forward engagement. So the same principles, but on the marketing income side. And, you know, it's one thing to hire a you or an internal team liaison to help move the ball forward. But what's coming to my mind, as you talk about that is, okay, it's a struggle it is it's an unique effort to get that certification, but also you're implementing those processes into your team. So you know, how much stretching has to happen for a company to make sure that there's accountability for those things, and that that's implemented long term so that the certification isn't, you know, for not, because I'm assuming it's an ongoing certification, it's not a one and done situation,

Eliza Erskine
you recertify every three years, okay. But it's definitely designed to be robust, and things that are in practice, like, if a company is not doing this, they're not gonna get the score, they're not gonna get the credit. It's not, it's not easy to kind of say, well, you know, we're kind of doing this like, it's, the question is very much designed to give points for what it's designed to give points for. So you can go on and see it. The other good thing that I think is interesting, the B Corp is doing is the assessment is free for anyone to use. Okay. So any business that's curious about, you know, what is this? What does it mean to be sustainable? What is this entail can use the assessment for their own internal measurement for their own use, and not apply at all? Yeah, so I've seen, especially for a smaller company, or a newer company to set their own points, cool. Maybe they get to 60 points this year. Or they say, we're going to look at what B Corp recommends in workers. And we're going to try and set up some of those practices within our own business, and then maybe they get certified in three or four years, maybe they don't know. But it's enough. It's just a good tool to use for a company. That's kind of curious.

Rebekah Grmela
Yeah, I really like the idea of that because especially for organizations where you said they might be at capacity, or it feels intimidating to them, they can test those waters on how to start implementing those practices. Without the formal certification. I think sometimes, I mean, I know I'm guilty of it, any sort of change in your organization feels like all or nothing in the fact that you cemetry bubble progress, there is really nice to hear.

Eliza Erskine
Yeah, the all or nothing thing. I mean, it's I think it's why a lot of people kind of hesitate to start, and it's just seem overwhelming. And it is a lot of work. I mean, that's the other hard part of any sort of sustainability, this whole ESG thing, I can't lie and say, what's gonna be really easy, it's gonna be super smooth. Like, when I hire you, it's gonna be long, it's gonna be probably something that you're like, you know, we didn't think about this, or what are the trade offs we need to make and what do we need to? But yes, to your point, that is why it helps to have an outside person or an outside, you know, partner to kind of guide and to make it less intimidating. And just to kind of start moving. I think there's a lot of just backlash about like greenwashing and just different things that I think are kind of paralyzing to a lot of companies have just like, Yeah, I don't want to get in trouble for this, or we, you know, we don't want to do this. Well, both

Rebekah Grmela
paralyzing for the company, and also, you know, as a consumer, yeah, I think about you know, I buy my coffee or anything really, at this point, and I say the little tea with a circle at the bottom of the bag, which is really great. But then there's like eight other circles depending on where I buy coffee from. Right. And I bring up coffee in particular because for those less familiar with the ESG world coffee and fashion Yeah, we're kind of like the first products that really entered the ESG space but what other kinds of certifications are up Third Do you ever touch those? Like, what what do you think is kind of just a name only versus actually useful maybe to pay attention to?

Eliza Erskine
Um, I think there's a newer push so I mean when you said like circles on coffee like you think Fairtrade organic 1% for the planet

Eliza Erskine
1%. Yeah.
So Fairtrade, organic, those are true certifications, something like 1% for the planet. Anybody can sign up for? Hmm, interesting. You can sign up for that you pay your fee. And as long as you say we're going to give 1% of our sales to these designated nonprofits, you can be part of that. Hmm. I've seen other interests. And that's something I'm interested in, too. And I think it's a good option and something like climate, the Climate Neutral Certification. Which I mean, I guess I would call that a certification. But again, that's just if you go through their platform, it tells you what your emissions are, does your full carbon footprint, it tells you where to reduce, and then how to offset and how to move toward a that neutrality. And then I mean, fashion, there's Hagen, there's this butterfly mark, like some of those are learned a lot lately. Yes. And some of the Yeah, I think the difference between sort of like certifications and standards, like I think a lot of the fashion that's basically are you up to the standard, or no, are you in this? Or no, but now there's different you know, something like the Climate Neutral that you pay to be a part of, and then you obviously have to go through the assessment and fill it out. But there's anybody, you know, could do that, as long as they're willing to go through the steps. Yeah, to do the footprinting and everything, which I think is really neat. And as makes it accessible for a lot of

Rebekah Grmela
great companies. Well, it's this fine line that I think I think about a lot when I consult with people who want to do the right thing. And it always comes back to you. How do you avoid virtue signaling and create effective change and some of the certifications you just mentioned? It's it's like a first step, and then it allows more accessibility for businesses to get involved. But it isn't maybe as stringent of watchdog on certain things, as other certifications are, you know, I just really wish a lot of, I don't know, countries would get together and say, Hey, we're gonna all hold hands and decide that these are standard acceptance standards, but we have a lot of other international things to worry about right now. And you know, yeah, I just think that's a really interesting kind of ongoing conversation, because consumers are also smarter. And they're saying, I feel good about my purchase, because I see these labels, but you still have to do your homework to see what some of those mean. Yeah, going on.

Eliza Erskine
And I think there's been a shift that I think is really neat within B Corp is now it's not just consumer companies. Yeah. The companies are doing agencies about that,

Rebekah Grmela
like kind of kind of small shop like me apply for beef. Nation.

Eliza Erskine
Okay. Movie card. Yeah. Yeah, I mean, it's just a newer, I think the way that people are doing businesses kind of is driving a lot of it, just like there's all these technology companies. And now there's so much b2b business, for lack of a better word happening. So for a company, to say we hold this B Corp certification, and that matters to our suppliers, it matters to our partners, those different things, I think, are driving a lot of B Corp certification. Now, the other thing that is making a huge, huge difference in B Corp and kind of across the ESG sustainability landscape is employees.

Employees want to work at a place that shares their values internals here, if you're a software engineer, you can work wherever you want. Yeah, and if you say I care about climate change, I care about this. Here's a B Corp, that means that you're going to pick the B Corp, and your company isn't going to match up. So just those types of things, I think are becoming we're becoming more aware of them. They're tracking statistics and B corpse. Now. They're more profitable, they have lower turnover. They have higher employee engagement. And there's, you know, B work is a job board.

Eliza Erskine
That's only I've seen with the lab.
Yeah, I mean, and people are talking about that as a reason to get certified that they don't have to go and search for talent finding sourcing Keeping talent at such a huge, huge cost for companies. Yeah. So if you can reduce that even a little bit and makes such a big difference.

Rebekah Grmela
Yeah, that's a valuable point of just a lot of the do gooder things that I hope for the world has an impactful ROI. It just takes a minute, or has taken a minute to measure. People are seeing the results of that effort, right, which is really exciting. Yeah, I have a really good friend who her and her partner work for two very internationally recognized brands. And I love when they talk about work, because if one of them gets a benefit at one company, the other one mentions that at the other company. And inevitably, six months later, the other company also has their competitive, you know, certification benefit, whatever it is,

Eliza Erskine
they have had space now to that company,

Rebekah Grmela
I'm sure I'm sure they do. But I know, knowing these two companies without bringing them into this conversation, you know, I don't know where they stand on. I don't know if they'll ever be B Corp certified. But where do they stand on their environmental and sustainability practices? Because they could definitely make an impact there. And I think knowing that they have, you know, ERG and HR groups internally that are advocating on the behalf. You're right, like the employees are really driving a lot of the change for those organizations, which is exciting.

Eliza Erskine
Yeah, I think that that will only continue. But it's just interesting now. And I think this is what is finally getting the tide to turn with B Corp and just kind of broader ESG. Like now you're seeing it from all angles. Yeah, like Salesforce, saying they're going to require suppliers, like an accompany us to be able to say, our customers don't care about it. It's fine. Yeah. But if your clients are caring about it, if your suppliers are caring about it, if your employees are caring about it, there's no turn of like, oh, well, you know, and it's a cost savings and all these things that we've known to be true for 20 plus years. It's enough of now a push, hopefully, that people are moving

Rebekah Grmela
completely. I'll have to share in the show notes. And with you, Eliza, I'm so nerdy, but probably like a year ago now. I was Googling this topic. Maybe it was around the time that we met each other even and I wanted to know a little more. And I found a very fancy report that Deloitte put together. And it

was the first time I'd seen so many Collective's statistics around the plate, this space, like in one report, and it was just so impactful. It was like, quote, after quote, that's like, wow, let's just turn this into a pitch deck. And, you know, take this to your executive staff and say, Hey, this is why this is valuable for your business. But yeah, it's cool to see the tide turning, and I'm excited that there are people like you who are also focused on the the, quote, small people out there who maybe have me need your special support to make that happen.

Eliza Erskine
Thank you. Yeah, I mean, I yeah, I agree. I think now, the data is there. People have the data. It's just where do we start? Yeah, what do we do? How do we get something like this?

Rebekah Grmela
Yeah, you're you're professional. Therapist, you're there. ESG. Therapist, I think that's what your value to me, right? Yes, I might. Yeah. They I think companies when I work with them, sometimes it's like, they know what they need to do sort of, but they really feel comfort, knowing someone is competent, and understands the process like you and can help help walk them through it. So that's really great. Yeah,

Eliza Erskine
I think and accountability. I mean, I even think of my own stuff. Like if you pay for the gym, you'll go if you do that at home, you don't. So similar, you know, it just helps to pay for someone to put money and budget behind it, whether that's internal or external. Yeah. And then to say, Okay, we need somebody to be kind of pushing us to the next to the next level.

Rebekah Grmela
Yeah, the money talks. It helps drive action. So yes, yeah. Yeah. Well, thank you so much for joining us today. So we could talk about this. I know. You're kind of tangentially related to the services I provide. But every I think the people who work with me and ethical communications are the same values aligned, you know, people who work with you. And so anytime I can share, you know, additional resources. I love that. But do you mind telling everyone like, what's the best way to get involved with working with you? Or if they want to know more about core certification?

Eliza Erskine
Yeah, so you can find me on LinkedIn, just search my name. My website at the bottom of this? Yeah, yes, you can find my website which is green buoy. consulting.com. Just Google green boot consulting and I'll come up and Yeah, send me a message through my blog. excited we can talk about the court certification. We can talk about, oh, we've been trying to do this. And we finally just need to make make the leap. If you're in that position, you're not alone. Yeah. Everybody's in that position. Everybody's in a scrambling, what do we do? We need help. So don't feel like you're behind if you're just now in that in that place, and it helps to talk, you know, to a lot of different people and kind of see what is out there and what's available. So I'm happy to be a resource, a therapist and accountability partner. Oh, yes, for that.

Rebekah Grmela
Therapist, but she does have some tips.

Eliza Erskine
That's right. Yes. So yeah. Thanks for having me to record. This

Rebekah Grmela
is fun. Yeah. Very cool. Well, thank you, everyone. Again, if you got to join us live today. It's hard for us to talk and answer questions at the same time, but we'll follow up. If you're watching this after the fact. You can always tag us here live. And we're excited to bring you a future conversation. So just stay in the loop. And thank you, Eliza, again for joining us. Thank you. Bye, right