

Kade Krichko Returns

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Tommy: Welcome back to another episode of “Northeastern Next.” On today's episode, we have Kade Krichko, an award-winning freelance journalist. We'll discuss the pillars of journalism, what makes a great story, and the meaning behind his upcoming print travel magazine. Let's get into it.

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Tommy: Hi, Kade. Welcome to the “Northeastern Next” podcast. How have you been?

Kade: I've been good. Thanks again for having me.

Tommy: Yeah, of course. So, when I initially called you a few weeks ago, you were in the Pacific Northwest, and now you're in New York City. Where are you generally based?

Kade: I would like to say life be like that, but it really isn't. Right now, I'm based in New York City for the next four months. Typically, I'm in the Northwest, Seattle area. I just moved to New York to spend the fall here and do a bit of my work from here because, as you know, a lot of work is really remote right now. So, I wanted a new city, a new atmosphere, and just jog some of those creative juices, I guess.

Tommy: Yeah, absolutely. No, I think that, first of all, that's very cool that you're able to do that. I'm sure there's a lot of people who would love to be in a position where they can just jump from city to city. I think it's a great way to explore the world, really, in the most generic terms possible. So are you working on a specific project in New York City, or is it really just for a change of scenery?

Kade: It started as a change of scenery but ended up being a specific project. That's just kind of how it goes in the freelance world.

Tommy: Yeah.

Kade: I kind of took on this big project that I think we'll talk about in a little bit. But I started a print travel magazine. And it just felt like the right time to be in an area where the whole world travels to this place.

And also, a lot of the world travels out from this place to see other parts of the globe. So, it just felt like a hub and a place where the energy kind of lined up. So already in New York City, I've been here for fashion week, which was very interesting, not exactly my cup of tea.

But again, people from all over the world coming in for a specific event. And then the week following or two weeks following is a climate week. So we have, again, the whole world coming to New York, so many different perspectives in one place.

I was lucky enough to pop into a panel that was called Regenerative Travel. It was a summit. And we had people from all over the world that are trying to make travel a healthier thing for the planet. So that was really interesting. And there's just so much inspiration here that really helps to drive any project that you're working on. So, I do see the value in New York City. It wasn't a place that I had ever really sought out before. But as far as creativity and people who are hustling and doing really innovative stuff, there's some merit to moving to New York City, I think. So I wanted to get a little bit of that, and here I am.

Tommy: Yeah. No, I mean, I completely agree to go back to your earlier statement about how there's just a specific energy in that city. And it's such a global city that, especially the field you're in, I can't even imagine how great it must be to get the creative juices flowing and everything like that.

Kade: Yeah. No, I feel really lucky. And like you said, yeah, job's not exactly totally normal, but while it is so remote, I do feel like taking advantage of it. And in a sustainable and not totally crazy bouncing around kind of way, it's just been good. It's just kept it fresh and helped me explore some new stuff and yeah, and see the world in a more realistic way, rather than blowing my travel budget every two weeks to go to Bali or whatever.

Tommy: Right. No, that definitely makes a little more sense financially. And at the same time, it's like you said, the whole world is within, I forgot how long Manhattan is. It's like a mile and a half across, something crazy like that. Everybody from the entire world is there on top of each other. That's awesome.

But if we could just go back a little bit, you know, do you mind giving us a little bit of background on yourself, you know, like what school you graduated from at Northeastern and how maybe you got into this field?

Kade: Yeah, absolutely. I graduated from Northeastern in 2012 with a journalism degree. I believe it was still the school of journalism at that point, or we had just shifted in into the school of media. And I loved journalism in school. I didn't really know how that would apply to life outside of school, but honestly, the internships helped really point me in a direction, not only by showing me what I wanted to do, but also kind of showing me what I didn't want to do.

And I quickly realized that the press box wasn't for me. I always thought that I'd be writing about sports, sitting in the press box above Fenway park and submitting my story at 11pm and seeing it run the next morning. I was really excited for that, but I found that I really actually enjoyed people and found a different avenue where I could explore sports and journalism and get closer to the athletes and the people that were pushing those sports.

So, I moved west. I moved to Seattle, and I started working with outdoor media publications and a lot of mountain publications in particular. So, Powder Magazine, The Ski Journal—or I'm currently also editor at The Ski Journal—Outside Magazine. These places that like go to these, you know, far flung corners of the earth with these amazing athletes. And I wasn't necessarily

going to those far flung corners, but I was sitting with them at their kitchen table talking about that. And it just, the access was incredible.

So that started as an experiment for like six months. I said, I'll try this as a freelancer and then I continued for the next ten years. It really has been my job since graduation is freelancing in the sports world, particularly in the mountain sports world and outdoor sports.

Tommy: Yeah, no, that's very cool. And I think that's a really great space to be in because just in my very limited experience in that world, never like within journalism or anything like that, but it's just the amount of passion that's in that world. You know, I'm sure that there are so many stories to come by and not only just stories that are good, I think they're just great. And they really kind of touch on the human condition a little bit. You know, that's really cool too, that like, you're so fascinated, for lack of a better word, with people, because I think that's a really perfect little niche area to be in for that.

Kade: Yeah. And it was kind of accidental. Like I said, it just, it was the first people who really kind of gave me a chance. And, and then you see that this was a whole avenue and a whole window into, into the human condition. Like you said, there's so many stories about that could be about skiing or about snowboarding or mountain climbing that are about mental health, that are about climate change that are, you know, about globalization. So I've been able to take this very small window and expand it into a way where I am telling the stories I want to tell, just maybe not in the traditional way that we were taught in school or, or showed by other mentors, because the media world's changing and you kind of have to change with it.

And this has been my way of changing. I always say there's no silver bullet, like there's no one way to do this. But for me, the mountains gave me the world in a way. So, I feel really lucky for that. It's been a lot of hard work, but I'm able to keep doing it. So, I guess that's a win.

Tommy: Yeah, that's awesome. So, kind of to touch on what you just said about how media is always changing, you know, it obviously, you know, in an industry like that, there's going to be a big sense of adaptability that you're going to have to kind of get used to. And I know you just said that there's no one right way to do it, but out of curiosity, do you have some sort of process that you use when you're looking for stories or when you're writing your stories, you know, just like certain pillars that are never going to go away, even though that maybe you're going to have to kind of pivot here and there?

Kade: Yeah, yeah, I guess I should say that there's plenty of bullets, there's plenty of ways to do this. And I think for me, personally, and I do teach a class on this, actually, at Northeastern, but I think media literacy is super important for young journalists and, aging journalists like myself, we need to understand which way the market is moving, what people are reading, and maybe what they're not reading. And if there's a way to get them reading.

So, I think, first and foremost, is start paying attention to what people are publishing, and see where you can fit within that realm of getting stuff out there. And that has really what's helped

me find avenues to find work. We have John Branch come speak with our class from The New York Times. And unfortunately, you know, The New York Times just got rid of its sports desk, and John will be shifting around, he'll stay with The New York Times, but he's made an entire career off of looking the other way, when it comes to a sports story. Like when we're concerned about the World Series, and the people on the field, he goes to hometowns, and he goes to areas that are just as involved with the story, but maybe don't get the same spotlight that others would. And through that he's found access, he's found additional stories, and he's created a career on that.

So, I think being able to think differently, and to know what is out there are two really good ways to kind of get your foot in the door and keep yourself doing what you're doing.

Tommy: I completely agree. It's just I know, it's such a generic adage, but really, like, you got to separate yourself from the pack.

Kade: Yeah, yeah.

Tommy: I can't even...especially in the journalistic world, I bet that's really something that you got to hold true, something that you can't really ever forget.

Kade: Yeah. And you don't need to be a super genius to do what we do. I think you need to be curious. You need to ask one more question.

Tommy: Yeah.

Kade: And you need to listen. And so much can come from just those three things. I really do believe that.

Tommy: So, I'm just wondering, you mentioned freelancing earlier, you know, I took a look at your portfolio on your website, and I saw you've been published in The New York Times, ESPN, Vice. How does that generally work? Do you have a story that you would pitch to one of those platforms? Do they approach you like through connections? How does it work? Or is it a little bit of both?

Kade: It's definitely a little bit of both. But starting out, you are your own engine, right? So, you are the one pitching everything. Hopefully, one day, you get to a point where they remember your pitch or the work you've done for one of these bigger publications. And they say, "Oh, this kid, he's really dialed into this part of the world. Like, let's hit him up for the story we really need." But that takes time. And that takes connections. And that takes you just need to build that, for the most part, you're pitching, you're hustling.

And I think, I mean, I'm not kidding, when I say in my bedroom, I have a wall with a couple sheets of paper with story ideas. They're just there. And I wake up every day. And I look at these stories. And where can we put this story? Where can the story work? And I know the stories are good. I know they're publishable. And the real battle is not writing it, it's finding where it can be

published. So, I think always having a story in your back pocket is a key as a freelancer. Whenever you're approaching an editor, like a cold call, like I cold called The New York Times, for example, to get that story.

Tommy: Oh, okay.

Kade: But I came to them and not saying, “Hey, I love your publication. I'd love to write for you.” No, no, I came with an entirely baked story idea that is like, “Okay, how can we make this happen? I've basically done the reporting already. And what are next steps to move forward?” And they responded to that. Some people say no, which also is a response, right? As soon as you get a no, you move on to the next one. But don't go to an editor, just saying, “Hey.” like, give them something to chew on. I'm also an editor. So, I'm talking to anybody who might want to pitch me is like, introduce yourself and introduce your story. That's a way better way to get a response.

Tommy: Yeah, no, definitely. I think that that is something that can be applied to all the young listeners out there, you know, not even in your industry, but I think any industry, you know, the cold calling that takes a lot of guts. And but once I think you get over that, once you're able to get through the cold calling, you got to make sure that you have something to actually pitch, you know, like you said, like, a nice full baked idea.

Kade: No, definitely. It's not just journalism specific. Lots of industries could benefit from that.

Tommy: So, I think I did read a couple of your stories. I thought they were awesome. You're very talented writer, you get your point across.

Kade: That's good.

Tommy: Well, not even like... I think what I'm trying to say is that it's like you said way earlier, it touches on the human condition. You know, it's not just about basketball. It's not just about skiing. There is there's a bigger story to it. And that the sport seems to just be some sort of vehicle to get to that point. Does that make sense?

Kade: Absolutely. Yeah, I think that is right on.

Tommy: So, I'm just wondering, do you have like a favorite story that you've ever written or like something you consider your magnum opus? Or has that not even happened yet?

Kade: I hope it hasn't happened yet. But I have looked back on some stuff recently, just kind of yeah, doing research for podcasts and stuff like this. And it's cool to see the breadth of work that has been produced. I think favorite...I wrote a mountain climbing story that wasn't really about mountain climbing at all for the Seattle Met about the 1996 Everest tragedy that was made very famous by “Into Thin Air” by John Krakauer. And he was somebody I looked up to quite a bit when I was writing and starting out Northeastern. And I met this, this woman at a party and we

were talking and she said she had to go home early because she was training to go to Everest base camp. And that it was a long story.

And I was well, turns out I love long stories. Can you tell me a little bit more? And she mentioned that her father was one of the climbers who passed away in that tragedy, and that she was going back to see his grave for the first time. She was five when he passed away. And I was pretty floored. And I put my foot in my mouth immediately. And I said, “You know, I’m so sorry. I read into thin air. And like John Krakauer is why I got into journalism.” She turned around and said, “John Krakauer ruined my life.”

And I was, again, just floored, didn’t know what to say to that, again, waited for her to speak. And she just mentioned that journalism and journalists in particular have a huge responsibility when they’re telling other people’s stories. And if something comes across in a way that, you know, infers or implies something else can really be damaging. And in this case, her family had to deal with that. And I ended up having to navigate past trauma with other journalists to write this story. And I feel like I grew a whole lot from that experience, just realizing that our words really do matter.

And that, yeah, it’s important to respect everybody you talk with. It was a really hard story. And I think it came out pretty good. It was nominated for some national awards that led to a bunch of other work. And it all came from going to a party, asking a question and listening. So, I think that just the whole process of that is something I’m really proud of.

Tommy: That’s a fantastic story. First of all, thank you for that. And second of all, I think that what was really what really stood out to me from that story is that not only did like, I guess, professionally, it led to more work, and it was nominated and everything. But I think it also sounds like there was just some growth there too, that went beyond journalism. But at the same time, that kind of growth could be applied to the journalism itself. It seems like that’s just like one of those. I don’t know if you saw the new—I don’t know, I hate to reference it—but the new spider-man movie where they’re talking about like canon events and everything.

Kade: I did. Yeah, absolutely. I actually was so surprised—in a good way—about that movie. It’s fantastic.

Tommy: Same here. Yeah. But yeah, that just kind of sounded like, you know, to sound trendy, that sounded like a canon event. And that’s very cool. And thank you so much for sharing that.

Kade: Yeah, thank you for getting me back on trend. I appreciate it.

Tommy: Of course, but just to kind of transition a little bit, going through your website. Again, I was reading about the game plan, and it has some ties to Northeastern, right? Oh, can you explain a little or elaborate on that a little bit?

Kade: Absolutely. I was approached by some ex-faculty now, but Chuck Fountain, legend of the sports journalism game at Northeastern, and Aleszu Bajak, who is just an absolute data icon in

my mind. He's just a great data journalist. He went on to USA Today after working at Northeastern. So, he didn't take a step down.

And they wanted to do something that was basically like pulling back the curtain on sports journalism, similar to what Nieman Lab does over at Harvard. So, I created this platform that brought in student journalists. And we basically talked about media news in the sports world, but also went out and found media professionals, like John Branch, Bill O'Shaughnessy.

We went and interviewed them. And we basically wanted to know, okay, what is the formula that is making you who you are? So, we took we talked about as like an under the hood investigation of sports journalism. But I also saw as a really cool way for students and something that I always wanted while I was in school, to connect with these active professionals.

And you're not just interviewing John Branch, you have John Branch's personal email and phone number. Like you are talking to this guy about what he does. And you can turn around and ask him for some advice. So, Northeastern is so good about plugging people into the professional world. And I felt like this was just an added bridge we could provide to help students out. Some students really, really took advantage of it. Some students I'm actually actively paying to write stories for me at The Ski Journal, and hopefully at Ori, this travel publication. But like those bonds are started early, I found, and I wanted to create something that that would foster those.

So, it's been really fun. We definitely are looking to grow that in the future, maybe through grants or some other type of funding. But I would love to get some students paid work to start. And I also love to make it a little more sustainable on my end. And I just think there's a lot of room for growth there. Like people love knowing how things work, right? And we're essentially telling people how the sports page works, which is super nerdy, and sorry to dive into it. But I've really enjoyed it. And I've learned a lot. As a writer, you only see part of it, like writer, editor, publisher. We're looking at all of it.

Tommy: That's cool. That's a really cool project.

Kade: Yeah. It's pretty niche, but like, some people like it.

Tommy: Well, I mean, I can tell you that I'm going to read it. That's like my bread and butter right there. I grew up a huge sports fan. So, like just learning the mechanics of it.

Kade: Yeah.

Tommy: That's awesome. That's something I've always been curious about.

Kade: Yeah, me too. And yeah, Northeastern is a good platform for exploring it again. I hope we can grow it.

Tommy: Yeah. So, does that tie into your media literacy class that you teach? Or is that just sort of like, I also do this, and I want to give Northeastern students this opportunity?

Kade: I like to tie everything together.

Tommy: Yeah.

Kade: So, I started Game Plan, and then Game Plan actually became the class.

Tommy: Oh, cool!

Kade: So, we just finished up a semester and we do a lot of work building towards writing a sports feature. And then we then go and feature students work on the website.

So, students not only graduate with a grade, but they graduate with a published clip that they can then use to get work outside of school. I think that's like a big part of getting started out is, all right, do I start a blog or a sub stack? Or do I write for a local paper? Like everybody says they need experience. And this is your way of showing an employer, "Hey, I have the experience. I've worked with an editor before, and I've done rounds of edits. I've pursued stories with sources all over the world. Here's what I got, like, give me a chance."

So again, this whole full circle idea is kind of what the class is built around, but they both feed each other, I guess, is a short answer to that question.

Tommy: Yeah, no, you said, like, it's a freelance world where you need the experience. And I think that's really great that you're giving back to Northeastern and giving students those opportunities too. So that's awesome. So is game plan, is that that project, that big project you alluded to earlier, is that something totally separate?

Kade: It's actually totally separate. So, it sounds like I'm doing way too much, but I swear I do have a life outside of work. One, the big project right now is actually...so we talk about media literacy, and where are these gaps to fill in our world that's changing so quickly? And I'm actually starting a print travel magazine in 2023, in the era of print is dead, right? Everybody is talking about this shift away from print, we're going digital. And I think that there is so much merit for the digital space.

But there's also people that are feeling like they want to slow down again. And I think print is the ultimate slowdown. We're actually calling our little project, the slow read movement, we want people to slow down and really savor what's on a physical written page. And to do that, we started this magazine called Ori, O-R-I, which is the root for origin, for original, for orient, it made sense for us as a marker to understand where we came from to figure out where we're going. And yeah, it's a travel magazine, but the travel magazine where we're tapping local contributors to write travel content.

So, we're not giving you top 10 lists from Mexico City. We're finding award winning journalists from Mexico City, award winning photographers from Mexico City. And we're having them tell us the stories are actually important to where they're living, as a way to inspire us to not only go visit these places, but be a part of these places when we visit.

So that started as an experiment. And it went so well, we figured, dang, we need to make this into a real thing. And that's, that's what our magazine is based off of. So we're calling it travel from the source, we're going to these places, we're talking with these people, and we're getting them to tell their stories.

And yeah, we've got a whole first magazine ready to go sending it to printer soon, it'll be out in November, we're taking pre subscriptions now. And presubscription is two issues a year, which again, was very intentional. That seems like “Oh, wow, you're I'm only getting two issues.” But I'm not sure if you or any of your friends subscribe to The New Yorker.

Tommy: Oh, I'm... yeah.

Kade: Yeah, it's the best. It is the top of the line journalism from all over the world. They pull in the best, but they come every week. And there's no way to finish a New Yorker before the next New Yorker shows up unless essentially, you're unemployed. It's just it's so much reading, it's amazing the output they have.

But I think for a lot of us, it's overwhelming. And we missed some stories in there. So, we don't want to say we're the anti-New Yorker, but we're taking a very different approach in the sense that we're doing intentionally two very big magazines, one in the fall, one in the spring, and we want you to read the whole thing before the next one comes. We want you to be we want you to be eager to receive that next issue.

So, it's a bit of a gamble. But it's something we've seen pay off. Again, media literacy, we've seen other small publications where that's worked. And we want to give that a shot. We want people to really absorb and get into what we're doing.

Tommy: That sounds like an amazing project. That's something you know, I'm gonna definitely take a look into that. Because that sounds like something....where can where can people subscribe? Where can people find the subscription for it?

Kade: So, we're on Instagram @ori_magazine. And then our website is the easiest way and that's ori-mag.com. And there's big old subscribe buttons all over it.

Tommy: Yeah.

Kade: Also, we've got a weekly newsletter that gives you some travel tips. And also, just like little essays from the road. That's been a lot of fun and a way to connect. And we're actually running a contest right now with our subscribers, a photo contest—we've set aside a page in the magazine, and we want our subscribers to tell us where they're going and what they think is cool in the world.

So, we're actually going to feature a subscriber's photo in our first magazine. So you're not only subscribing, but you're also part of this thing is, is really what we want to build. We want to build a community.

Tommy: I think that's great. I think that's a great idea. Because you know, that personal connection, that's always going to be something that people love. And that's going to get people interested.

So, I know it is “Northeastern Next.” And at the end of the podcast, I always ask what's next. But I feel like we kind of touched on that just now. Do you have anything else coming up besides the magazine?

Kade: Well, I think there's a part of the magazine that isn't necessarily the magazine that is what I'm most excited about. And if you don't mind, I'd love to share this...

Tommy: Absolutely!

Kade: ...idea we've wrapped into this. So, I always joke that Ori, this new magazine is a product of my own frustration in the media world. And just seeing the things that are done right, and the things that are not done right, and having a chance to build, build off of that. And one big thing for us is that freelancing around the world is, is getting tougher, it's really hard to find funding, it's hard to, you know, manage budgets. And there are so many stories as a result that go untold. So, you just didn't get the travel budget for that, that bus trip that needed to get you to this place to cover this event. And the story just, it just withers.

We have set aside 2% of all of our subscriber dollars revenue and created our own grant. So, we're putting money in that grant. And as we get more subscribers, you know, that grant grows organically. And we have that set aside. And once the magazine comes out, we're turning around and asking our subscribers, “Hey, like, what did you like about this magazine? What was your favorite article? What was your favorite piece?” And you know, we're tallying up the scores and whoever quote unquote wins that little competition, we're giving them that grant money to fund their next creative project.

So that could be, you know, a writer in New York, it could be a photographer in Nigeria, it really will be based off of the content they produce and how our audience responds to it. And like you said, as far as involving subscribers, I think this is, again, closing that circle and bringing subscribers closer to contributors. Because contributors, I mean, journalists, we're real people too. And like, we love to talk about what we're doing, not only in print, but we'll sit down and have a conversation with you. And I want people to feel that connection to their contributors, where maybe after Ori, that person takes that money, and they go fund a story that ends up in The New York Times, I want our audiences to follow that writer throughout their career, read their stuff in The New York Times, go read it in The Guardian, go read it in the local paper, just follow these people because they're out there doing the work. And I think that's something that deserves a little bit of credit.

So, we're really excited about being a platform for that. And I think, yeah, that's kind of what's next for me is like transforming from just a writer into somebody who's creating a platform that

could be disruptive in the media world. I would love for a bigger publication to steal this idea, to go and do it on a grander scale.

Like, can you imagine if The New York Times set aside 2% of their revenue, and then gave it to a writer? That would be, I mean, that would probably be a million dollars. That would be a lot of money. And that would change somebody's life. So, I don't mind being copied doing something good. I hope somebody does it.

Tommy: And I think that on top of that, too, it really goes back to what really seems to be a foundational piece of this project of just building community and connections, especially personal connections with the writer, which is really just honestly, those are the best stories are the ones that you can connect with on a personal level. So, I think that's awesome.

Kade: Absolutely, man. Well, I'm glad that you think it's good, because I think it's good and now I'm out here trying to convince other people the same. And I do know we're on the right track.

Tommy: Yeah.

Kade: We're slowly building from zero.

Tommy: Hey, I think it's going to pique a lot of people's interests.

Kade: Awesome.

Tommy: So you know, I'm going to share this episode, especially with a lot of people in my circles, because I know I can think of a lot of people off the top of my head, who would be interested in hearing about something like this.

Kade: Well, that's awesome. And again, if anybody has any questions on the project, or anything Northeastern-related or professional-related, I am on Instagram @kadekrichko, just my name. Also, my email is on the bottom of the website for Ori. So please just feel free to reach out. If I don't get back to you in a day, it might be a week, but I will get back to you. Sometimes it's like that.

Tommy: Right. Definitely. Well, hey, thank you so much for spending some time with me this morning to chat. This was an amazing conversation, and I really appreciate it.

Kade: No, Tommy, thank you, man. This is great.

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Tommy: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of "Northeastern Next." Are you or do you know a Northeastern alum with a great story to tell? If so, email us at alumni@northeastern.edu to be featured on a future episode of the pod. I hope you enjoyed the episode, and I'll see you the week after next.

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