



**Complete Transcript: HALO Talks with Alison Rootberg & Steve Feinberg
Posted May 27, 2022**

Pete Moore:

This is Pete Moore. I want to tell you about a company that is going to change the entire recruiting in the halo sector companies called game plan. We are game plan.com. What they do is they connect employer brands with D one D two D three athletes across the country. The power of the software that allows these employers to get in front of tens of thousands of athletes. If you watch the NCAA tournament, the hustle, grit, preparation, determination, and absolute desire to win, embodies every athlete out there. Now you're going to be able to put your brand in front of those athletes. Start to get them to understand after their college career, they can get into the halo sector, go work at a studio, a health club, fitness equipment, company, supplements, anything related to this industry. They can now parlay those skills and bring it into the sports and fitness industry that we are going to have the best athletes become the best employees and create the best companies. And that is the future of halo. 1, 2, 3, halo. We are game plan.com. Check it out.

Pete Moore:

This is Pete Moore on HALO Talks NYC. I have the pleasure of welcoming, Steve & Allison wellness for everyone. You're going to be intrigued with how these programs are being rolled out, affecting kids nationwide and tapping into government money and passionate donors. And so on, on, so forth in order to make sure that we bring people into the halo sector from day one and they change their mindset, their behavior, and we're going to solve obesity, loneliness, and diabetes in the next 30 minutes. So let's get rolling. If you got a tank top, you might want to put it on for this podcast. 1, 2, 3, let's roll. Steve. Allison, give us the background here. How'd you guys meet up and align with this purpose.

Alison Rootberg:

Wellness for everyone was founded in Chicago and we primarily provided programming to students. Pre-K through high school. My background is as a professional dancer, and so I kind of went on a journey in fitness, from dance to yoga, to running, to marathons. And then when the pandemic hit, we had a lot of challenges because we had to shift to virtual programming. And when that happened, I got synced up with Steve in New York, and I'm going to pass it over to him to talk about how we started working together.

Steve Feinberg:

Cause it's a fun story. So for those of you who don't know me, I'm, I'm an international fitness presenter and I've been on the national circuit for several years now. And I've made a lot of relationships in different cities. I have a protege and a mentee named Rena who runs studio fit Chicago on Armitage in

Chicago proper. And she hit me up one day and said, I'd like your help with this Instagram live. If you could pipe in from New York and co-teach with me and let all your people know a sweat life is doing this thing for wellness for everyone. And we're raising money for, you know, to continue the programs during this very difficult, critical time when the schools were closed and nobody knew what to do. So I tuned in and we did a back and forth where we split the screen and taught my hip box program, the power music, cardio boxing program that I created.

Steve Feinberg:

And it, we raised a small pile of money and that's 45 to 60 minutes. And that left an impression on Allison. And she remembered me when they needed a virtual boxing teacher. So I began coaching to Chicago from New York and we continued to acquaint ourselves. And then when she wanted to expand, I became the person to do it here. That's amazing. So as, as you kind of rolled forward and saw, you know, the frustrations in the market and, and the, kind of the quality of the programming that, you know, these kids are getting access to, you know, did you put together a business plan? Did you kind of run some numbers? Did you say, look, this is so obvious. You know, I'll put some slides together, but you know, I'm really going to start focusing on these grant programs that yeah, I'm sure a lot of people don't know about it. So kind of explain, you know, one the initial frustration and what, what said to you both, you know, Hey, I could fix this and then two, here's like a very interesting way to actually get it funded.

Alison Rootberg:

Yeah. So I would say the initial frustration was that we saw a huge need for improvement in Chicago, Chicago, public schools. But now we work with New York public schools and New Jersey public schools. And, and really what's happening is the public school systems do not have funding for these programs. So students are not receiving art, music, dance theater. And what we discovered after working with these schools for years to provide arts programming was that physical education was the most underserved least funded programming. So that's why boxing became really important. And just getting kids excited about physical activity and you see a change immediately, a one hour workshop, like the kids' eyes light up, and you can tell that their whole perspective has changed.

Pete Moore:

So talk, talk us through, you know, the magnitude of these grant programs and then how you, you know, actually like, get this out there. Do you have, do, do certify, you know, trainers, artists, instructors, how, how does that, how does that work?

Alison Rootberg:

I'll talk about the funding and I'll let Steve talk about the staff. So we founded wellness for everyone to create a new funding source. So yes, we apply for all the grants and government funding that other organizations are utilizing, but it's not enough. So we host monthly fundraising events. That's what Steve and I met doing one of our boxing fundraisers. And we also work very actively to find strategic partners that want to provide programming to the community. And this can literally be anybody from a college student to a large corporation because the funding is very affordable. So every program it's \$4 for one kid to have a one hour class. So lots of opportunities for everyone to get involved. And we also work with really high quality instructors. So I'm going to let Steve talk a little bit about that.

Steve Feinberg:

Yeah, so we, we call our people teaching artists because they really are artists at what they do. They go through thorough background checks. We're a, we're very responsible to the quality of services we provide from yoga to dance, to breathing and meditation, to adult programs for the community like informative cooking classes so that they can manage their household in a healthier way. And then the kids have their own cooking segment and we get parents and kids doing things together, which is a really beautiful thing. This, the most important part of what our teaching artists do besides provide a wonderful, positive professional exercise experience is we make sure that we address their socio emotional learning you know, the, the, the socialization, the way they react to each other, especially in such a creepy virtual time, like COVID really was locked down in the beginning.

Steve Feinberg:

Getting Hollywood squares to participate was a unique challenge that even I, as a professional had never faced before. And I, I thought I'd see everything in the fitness industry up until then. So that's something that we're, we're particularly proud of the way we empower kids to love movement. It's not just about burning calories or getting moving it's about inspiring them to continue to do it. Mm-Hmm <affirmative> let me ask a question. Just I'm thinking back to my high school at WSPA Clark and there used to be, you know, some teachers that were so protective of like what their, their area was, you know, and, and, you know, I thought, I can't remember the name of the class, but used to go in like, used to know, teach how to, you know, make a, a tuna melt and a, you know, sewing and, and art.

Pete Moore:

There was some overarching name for it. I can't remember what it was called. But like that a whole home ack whole neck dude. Thank you so much. I was thinking economics, economics. What's the first, yeah. Whole me dude. I love that class. And I was like, you know, you know, I'm a finance guy now, but like, I, I felt like there was like a creativity, like button that kind of went on. He like buttoned, it kind of went off or got like, was kind of being nurtured through home EC. And, and back in the day, you know, I was like the captain of the basketball team. So it wasn't like, what's your favorite class home EC, like, you never said that. Right. Cause you couldn't, now you can say it as much as you want cuz people will understand and I'm sensitive to my emotions.

Pete Moore:

Right. But not back in the day, Mack was like, yeah, I'm going to whole Mac, I'm making a, you know, Turkey melt or something. And I'm, I'm sewing a, a, a sweater or scarf for my mom or my grandmother, but I really liked it. That's not what I was going down, but thank you for reminding everyone. What home EC is. My question is when you bring these teachers in, are they kind of coming in as like the ninjas of the SWAT team or as like the, are the rest of the teacher population kind of embracing this? They're like, oh, awesome. We got these experts coming in or like, oh, like, oh, oh, they got a grant and you know, they're coming in here and they know more than we do. Like how have you kind of managed through that? Or is it over time? Do they people understand like, Hey, whatever's best for the kid. Like, let's just get these experts in here and stop like putting up these like barriers or, you know, you know, obstacles to bringing in the best.

Alison Rootberg:

It's interesting because before the pandemic we received a lot of pushback and staff in schooling, usually administration was on board. And so we would set up a meeting with all the classroom teachers, but they usually had like a lot of resistance because they wanted to do what they usually do. Mm-Hmm

<affirmative> and then after a few weeks they would be totally sold into the program. But what's fascinating is that currently the school climate is so challenging and students reintegrating back into school has just created a whole new dynamic. And it's literally like, we're the superheroes coming in to save the day. And they're like, please, anything you want to do tell us what we need to do. And so we're getting yoga mat donations and we're getting all sorts of cooking supplies and really just working with each school to see how we can build each of these. And we are getting a ton of support from the schools. And really it's just about finding more funding now because the schools on board, we have all this staff and we're just really excited to keep expanding and bringing this to, to more schools.

Pete Moore:

So let me ask you a question because a lot of things related to, to grants or a lot of things related to any kind of financial investment, you know, everyone says, okay, show me what the return on investment in that was, you know, every dollar I spent, what's my cash flow. What's my EBIT dollar. What's the return on investment of this club or studio? How quickly is this ramp up? Obviously you can't quantify everything you're doing and what the results are. So have you been in a position where people say, you know, okay, you gimme some case studies and you can gimme some, you know, quotes or you can gimme some data, you know, or what, what kind of KPIs do you say? Like, Hey, look, I know this is good. You know, it's good. Like gimme a break on the metrics. So I'll tell you from my experience in the virtual space, when, when I did this, we had all of the students fill out surveys at the end of their six week sets with us.

Steve Feinberg:

And I did it. I conducted it as I was supposed to during the last day of their sessions that was supervised. And they were able to fill it out at the same time and the teacher was in the room. And you can, you can hear and see the comments and you can look at the data from a student when an 11 year old tells you that they wish they had another class next week, that they got a, it's a five out of five on excitement and participation that they, the teacher was a five out of five, their communication with their fellow students improved from week one at a two out of five to week five to week six at a five out five. Those are, those are real metrics. They may not be, you know, numerically oriented financially, but they certainly carry the weight of empirical data. And that's what we see. Yeah. That's great. And, and Allison, over time have you know, have donors or on some of these grants that you fill out, are they, you know, one, how, how long does it take to fill out a grant? And two, you know, is there a section that says, you know, you know outcomes and, you know, you know, conclusions.

Alison Rootberg:

Yeah. So we all, all the grant cycles are a little bit different. So I would say typically they're an annual cycle. We track three pillars. So we're looking for developing self-awareness skills, building community and creating inspiration. So just like you were talking about with home EC to us, our dance program is not about creating a professional dancer. If we do amazing, mm-hmm, <affirmative>, all of these programs are more about developing problem solving skills and learning to think creatively and working together. And so I, I would say another data point that really proves this is working is every year the schools expand their programming. So maybe one year they start with just two classes a week. And then the next year they want the program for everybody kindergarten through fifth grade. And then the next year we had sixth, seventh and eighth grade.

Alison Rootberg:

So we're in over a hundred schools right now, every week we have over 150 classes running in all of these different schools. And we, and we continue to add new programs almost every week now. And there is a big push because may is approaching. And we really just have like six to eight weeks before summer break. And a lot of these schools won't run, run programming again until the fall. So we do a big push in the spring and then over the summer, we really plan and prepare and fundraise. And then we go back in, in the fall and try to get as many new programs started as possible.

Pete Moore:

Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And then how many kids are you touching in these hundred schools in total?

Alison Rootberg:

It's over 10,000 students right now.

Pete Moore:

That's great. And then as you look at you know, areas of the country that you want to be in, you know, sometimes as a, as an analogy, someone will say you know, I've got health clubs in New York and in Boston and I want to go build, you know, clubs in every city kind of, you know, we're going to build 500 clubs and why don't go like go to Philadelphia and, and, and Pittsburgh, and let's say, come back to me, you know, how do you think about scaling this? Or how do you think about saying, Hey, look, we're going to nail this in, in two of the top five, you know, cities in the country. We'll get to a couple more. And then basically we're just going to give people a template. Like we don't this, we just need to the versus like template for success.

Alison Rootberg:

So, yeah, it's really, it's really interesting because originally I said, we will not expand to auto Chicago until we're in all 650 plus Chicago public schools. But then with the pandemic and the virtual programming and our staff relocating, it just seemed like a natural evolution that we should expand. So we launched in New York and New Jersey this year. We're super excited about that. On our back burner, we have Denver in mind as our, as our next city. And we're totally open to bringing this across the whole country. We see lots of opportunities in almost every city. We haven't interacted with a public school system yet. That is like, we have awesome programming running. It seems like there's a lot of need. And so we're going to continue to build our systems. And I don't know, Steve, do you want to talk about training a little bit? Cause we definitely have a big plan to continue to grow all of this.

Steve Feinberg:

Yeah. And, and also we, I don't, I don't think Allison mentioned yet. We also have success in LA on the west coast. So we have been for technically by coastal organization and I'm going to, I like, I'm the director of partnerships for New York city, but I'm, I'm also like to call myself the director of boxer. I'm going to be creating. I created an outline for my boxing class for curriculum, which at the time we're going the art of boxing. And so we're looking at standardizing the way I have been for fitness brands for 20 years, the way I learned to under KettleBell Concepts with Dave and, and Vince Metzko, standardizing, and building out a curriculum and an exoskeleton and an outline, and then having an onboarding process and making sure that the time is spoken for in a certain way, not written to the minute or the letter of what an instructor needs to do, but having a timeframe for what should happen in the 75 minute class, when should the free play and the, you know, the, the, the kind of do your own part be

when should we do, you know, groups circle, or when should they interact with each other, when should they be working on the poses in yoga themselves?

Pete Moore:

You know, things like that. And being able to really divide it up so that we can have some quality control in our offerings so that when we do move forward and start to proliferate through other cities, we know that our offerings are going to be the same level of care that we, that we have applied thus far. And that's something I'd look forward to taking on. So, so lemme ask you, so what are some of the brands that you worked with on the partnership side? Me currently? Well, in, in the past, like actual, you know, sport brands I've worked with, I've worked with a lot, a lot of different brands. I've worked with TRX, I've worked with KettleBell Concepts. I've I created speedball, which is a, a global fitness brand. So, and then brands have worked with us around the world.

Pete Moore:

I have worked with I with power music, which is group RX is one of the leading instructor education services for fitness. Yeah. So let me ask you this question. So, you know, there's always been this there's always been this like church versus state, if you will, of like, Hey, like we don't want Nike or Adidas or under armor or all these, you know, brands, you know, like getting exposure to kids in the school yet they have no problem with doing a deal with like Coke or Pepsi to like provide product in there. And they don't have a problem with Microsoft, you know, giving them free, you know, PC. So like everyone's working off the PC operating system. So is there at some point, a tipping point where, you know, you go to like crunch fitness and you say, Hey, look, I got a hundred schools in New York city.

Pete Moore:

We're doing these programming. It's going to be powered by crunch, or it's going to be sponsored by crunch. We're going to bring one of your instructors in, at one o'clock in the afternoon. It doesn't have a personal training session. And you know, he's going to work under Steve. And like, let's just like use the money. I see where you're going and the resources and, and crunch will say, yeah, what I want to do. Good too. I wouldn't mind everybody knowing about crunch fitness. Cause I got one, you know, three blocks away. Maybe that's not cool. Maybe it is. I don't know.

Alison Rootberg:

So this is the exact concept that our company was founded on. So planet fitness was donating all of their old equipment to schools in Chicago. And we are very open to developing partnerships like this. We have schools that go on weekly field trips to gyms to work out because a lot of kids don't know what a kettlebell is, have never heard of a TRX. Actually let me break it down a step further when we start,

Pete Moore:

This is huge, by the way. Yeah. Everyone who's listening to this needs to understand. Yeah, we get, we get donations to the FD and Y with a million dollars' worth of fitness equipment. But every, I didn't know the planet donated to the school. That's awesome. Everyone on this, listening to this needs to think about that instead of calling their user equipment dealer two, getting kids into the gyms as a field trip, I've never heard that before. This is the first time I've heard that. Why would you not do that?

Alison Rootberg:

And it's

Pete Moore:

Never, I've never heard it, never

Alison Rootberg:

Heard it. We were like, this makes perfect sense. Like give them a professional experience and it does have an immediate impact. But what we've found is this is so extreme. Our cooking classes, we've been shocked. They're asking for EpiPens because these students have never tried a pair. A pair should be one of the most basic fruits you experience like the fact that they don't know what a pair is, is very alarming. And that's just like the tip of iceberg. It's like nutrition. And these should be foundations in education

Pete Moore:

Just real quick. I said, just saw another podcast the other day, but I was in the TWA hotel at JFK and I get a protein shake. Every time I go there. And the woman that worked there, she must have been 19 years old. And she's like, why are these people putting protein in these shakes? I'm like, you're asking me, you know, you've worked here and you're like 19 years old. Like how did somebody not teach you what protein does for your body and your, or even the person that owns that place? Why wouldn't you like sit down with this woman, you know, from, from the Bronx, cuz I talked to her, she get a friend of mine cause I got a couple of protein shakes consecutive days. And I told her all about protein and weight protein. How does, how do people not get educated on this? Oh, macros, come on. <Laugh> yeah. That

Alison Rootberg:

And the other thing that was huge is

Alison Rootberg:

We're going into schools and students did not know what a pep rally was because they don't have sports teams and they don't play sports and they haven't had exposure to these activities. And so they've never even heard the term pep rally. So these are very easily changeable structures.

Pete Moore:

I hear. So yes, Steven in. Cool. Go ahead. Yeah. So just when I was when I was running programs at Marymount high school and I had four or five instructors going in there multiple days a week doing, doing adjunct programs, we would get bused over to New York sports club and they would let us use their studio and we would run programs there twice a week, field trip. I brought entire groups of kids who were whose parents had suffered from addiction to our boxing gym, Mendez boxing. And we'd run my buddy boy and I would run clinics there, there are gyms who are willing to do so. And I will tell you, I'm maintaining a 21 year relationship with Equinox. I volunteer at camp Mariah for underserved youth every summer. I've been volunteering. We brought, we brought masses of kids into those studios and when the conversation comes time, I'm going to be knocking on that door on behalf of wellness for everyone we're ready for that.

Pete Moore:

Well, we use the term halo health active lifestyle outdoors. We're going to, unretire the word wellness because we love what you're doing, but you can call this wellness is now part of the halo effect. So in, in closing here, any words of wisdom other than, than we've already gotten out here about, you know, starting up a business, such as this, probably the perseverance and level of patience you need to have,

you know, to actually roll these things out. And you know, just the measured success that you know, is, is all, you know, somewhat, you know in lockstep, not necessarily exponential because you got to get in every class at every kid.

Alison Rootberg:

Yeah. I think my final thought is like, it's a marathon, not a sprint <laugh> and we might do some little sprints along the way, but we're, we're in it all the way to the finish line. And we're not going to see that finish line until all schools have access.

Pete Moore:

That's awesome. Steve, you got any parting words for us?

Steve Feinberg:

I have been saying for the better part of two decades since I ran a martial arts school in my youth and had kids from three and a half up that I want to put the E back in PE, I think it's been lacking for a long time. And although this is a business for us, for me, my focus is on the developmental stages of learning. And I'm telling you what they're getting fed and PE is not going to cut it. Methodology based movement, specialized movement, learning to control your body in space, kind of aesthetic awareness like boxing, yoga, and dance. These three particular, I believe in so much because it teaches the basic self-control that a body needs in space, which changes self-confidence. And self-esteem in the background dramatically without even having to attack it from the front.

Steve Feinberg:

So those are the things that we believe in a wellness for everyone. And that's why we want to continue doing what we do.

Pete Moore:

Awesome. Look, I think to our listeners here, like this is like, listen to this podcast twice and pick out a couple things that you can do in your local community or make the schools aware of it. Get your equipment in there since at the fire department. That's great. We'll bring it into the school if they'll take it and have room for it. Get these kids in there on a field trip. That is just awesome. And if you're a teacher or you got somebody in your family, that's a teacher and experts come in, welcoming in with open arms because the more experts and the more learning, you know, the smart everyone's going to be and they're going to make better decisions. So love what you guys are doing wellness for everyone halo for everyone. We'll see you guys soon. And now everybody can change out of their tank top and we'll do 1, 2, 3 halo. We'll do 1, 2, 3 halo. And then 1, 2, 3 wellness, 1, 2, 3, halo, halo, halo 1, 2, 3 wellness, wellness, wellness. See you guys soon. Have a good one. Thank you so much.