



**Complete Transcript: HALO Talks with Tom Kiss
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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 or 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 out game plan.com. Check it out.

Pete Moore:

This is Pete Moore on HALO Talks NYC. I have the pleasure of having Tom Kiss from ATE. We're going to talk about the transformation of apps and getting you not to count calories, but to live a lifestyle you deserve. That's not necessarily quantitative, but it will change your life. So Tom, welcome to the show.

Tom Kiss:

Thanks. Thanks Pete. Thanks for having me.

Pete Moore:

Great. So why don't you talk about how your how you got into this you know, what your background and frustrations were personally, you know, why you kind of said, okay, I'm putting down a mark here and this is what I'm going to do to change the world.

Tom Kiss:

Sure, sure. So my background is actually IT and accounting. I was a consultant living the consultant, traveling lifestyle. I was also always pretty active played sports in college and high school. And so I, I was in good shape. I thought I was, you know, healthy and kind of living the life. And basically at some point I'm not really sure when I hit this downward cycle with my health, that the scariest thing is didn't really

notice. I felt the pounds coming on and you know, certain things I wasn't doing anymore, but it was just getting worse and worse. And finally, a few years ago after I got into a startup business, so stress was always also a component of it. But anyway, I, I, I get a wakeup call in a form of a panic attack, which scared me because I never had one.

Tom Kiss:

I didn't know anybody who had one before. And I drove myself to the hospital and ended up sitting in front of the hospital, unable to like go over steering wheel because I was cramping up already. And I'm like, what the hell is going on? Am I going to die here? And so anyway, that was my wakeup call of, of wait a minute. Maybe I'm not that healthy, you know, super debt. I thought I was and that I need to do something. So that was sort of my wake up call. And I went to down to a local gym to a, a, a trainer friend of mine and asking about, you know, what should I be doing? I was mostly focusing on my, you know, movement exercise, should I be changing things? And to my surprise, he's like, can you do, you know, journal for a week food journal?

Tom Kiss:

Can you, you know, I want to see what you're eating, what your habits are. And, and I was very surprised and also kind of found it very painful as I was going through that and, and journaling for a week. But that was my wake up call, sort of, that was my intro to journaling. That's when I realized how many bad or poor habits I had that I had no idea about. And, and I discovered so much more sense as we got into it. So that was sort of what got me to the food journaling or journaling space itself from consulting. And meanwhile, I kind of got tired of the whole corporation corporate world and got into startup world. I was working another project, which was homemade food sharing that kind of evolved and made all the startup mistakes. And so anyway, around that time is that was kind of falling apart. That's when this whole episode happened that got me introduced to this, you know, help and focusing on this.

Pete Moore:

Lemme, I think a lot of look at something the best with the best ideas come from a personal frustration. They're, they're trying to solve something in a certain way that actually creates a solution versus somebody that comes to us and says, Hey, I got this awesome idea. I'm going to put a, a, a spin bike with aerial yoga suspension, you know, training, and it's going to have a tummy tuck, you know, technology on it. Now you just trying to like mash together, like a compilation, like you know, Rick Ross on a, you know, on a, on a DJ board or like, is there a really reason why you're, you're coming up with this idea. So did you look at seeing, okay, what options are there for me to solve this? Or can someone else solve this for me with an app? And there isn't one out there, therefore I'm going to do it, or did you say, look, I'm doing this anyway, because I have an insight that is inevitably going to lead me to a better place that is going to have insight that no one else has.

Tom Kiss:

No, I, so I, I pretty much looked at all the apps that were available back then and, and found most of them frustrating, especially the ones that were well built and, you know, well designed, a lot of them were focusing on, on, on calorie, counting were introducing behaviors. So I, I knew I had issues with my behaviors, right. So I was trying to journal so I can learn my own habits so I can see if I can, if I can change them, if I can work on them. And for me to use an app and learn a brand new behavior to enable me to try to learn about my existing behavior, it just looked, and I tried a couple I've probably lasted a

day or two on him. So I was like, okay, this needs to be something that's super simple, something I can do on a daily basis.

Tom Kiss:

Something that I could do continuously and gives me enough awareness that I, I realize, you know, I become more self-aware I understand my own habits kind of do some self-discovery and, and, and, and see where I am and what I need to change. And, you know, I didn't want to deal with trying to figure out, you know, how many calories are in the deep dish pizzas, or even what's underneath that layer of cheese. And I just wanted to remember that, oh, wow. I had, you know, pizza four times this week. Can I cut it down to three? Does it matter? What type of pizza? Not really just, you know, from four to three, that's a good change already and right. And you know, or why am I not having energy? Why am I in the gym and kind of falling apart, like, okay, let me see, you know, what I had for breakfast and I, what I had for, you know, dinner last night and what can I learn from that? So it really started out as a super simple journal that fits into everyone's life. That's not a pain to use that's, you know, joy to use and, and kind of evolved from there to what it is today from you know, a lot of learning, lots of feedback and some amazing mentors and advisors around us.

Pete Moore:

Right. So look, you, you know, how much it costs to build a consumer brand, you know, which is you know, not,

Tom Kiss:

I didn't know it back then.

Pete Moore:

<Laugh> yeah. Yeah. So when, when you, when you think about the app, you think about the different channels that you go through, whether it's you know, private label B to B rev share, whether it's partnering with a corporate platform, whether it's partnering with an insurance company or it's going out and saying, okay, let me get the platform down, let me get, get it scald. We'll prove what it is. And then go and raise, you know, 20 million bucks to you know, basically create a consumer brand and see where it goes. So how, how did you, how do you think about that now? And, you know, I use this, this too many times on, on my platform of the halo talks, but, you know, experience is what you get when you don't get what you want is what a guy told me a long, long time ago, Peter Brockway. So how have you kind of thought about, like, you know, maybe there's a better way to get this out there, or maybe this is what I want to do, and I want to see if there's an investor that believes in this and wants to, you know, create a, a, you know, a consumer brand that, you know, has really strong you know, Goodwill associated with it over time.

Tom Kiss:

Yeah. So when we started out and one thing we kept ever, since one of our core focus points is privacy and end user focus. So we build this for ourselves, for other people like us. And unfortunately there are plenty of us. And I wanted to make sure that that if somebody starts using this app it's, it's their data it's, they own their own journal. It's about them, not about others. So we were approached by white labeling were approached with the various partnerships, but in all cases, the, this ownership would've made it over to whoever wanted to partner with us, or whoever wanted to wide label us. And I wanted to make

sure that, you know, we're all different. What works for me, why not works for you? And I don't want our users to be forced in any direction because of that partnership.

Tom Kiss:

I want them to be able to discover, and if they want to try, you know, living a vegan lifestyle, go ahead. If they want to see, you know, something like keto works for them, they can experiment with that. So I wanted to keep it open, but I always keep the end user in, in focus. So that's been our focus early on, and we're actually about to launch our first partnership and the reason I'm super excited about that, because first of all, it's a very, very interesting partner that I'm unable to talk about at this point. But in a few weeks, we'll, we'll, we'll announce it, but also, we're very much aligned with what we're seeing and regarding the app and how it evolved just, just quickly about that. So right now, it's in early on, we, we realize how important this is for people, how important their privacy is and how important their, you know, their own journaling and their own feeling and how emotional everything we're touching. I mean, the, the core of the app is we ask people why they ate and not what they, right. So we go into emotions and feelings behind it. And so anyway, that was, that was important. And, and we also realized that we have to be careful not to trigger any negative behaviors for our users. And that's where mindfulness came in. That's where being, nonjudgment, that's sort whole body positive attitude. So we wanted to keep that all the way through the app. And eventually

Pete Moore:

If, if I was using your app and you said you saw like vanilla milkshake, then you know, I got, I got something I'm trying to, I'm trying to smooth over. That's my, that's my, here's my example. That's my crutch, bro. <Laugh>, here's

Tom Kiss:

My vanilla milkshake shake

Pete Moore:

Or, or five guys, not a halo lifestyle, but damn, that tastes good. And it makes me feel better.

Tom Kiss:

So here here's the key. I usually have cake as my example, but shake shack milkshake, right? So if that reminds you of a great time in your life, you know, cha whatever, and you stop by shake shack and you have a milkshake and you enjoy every single slur of it. Awesome. I want you to enjoy it. I want you to be proud of it. I do want you to remember that you had one, but great. If you're doing that Tuesday night while bingeing Netflix, probably not as good for you, but if it's, you know, if it's something that fills you up emotionally and reminds you of your C childhood, you know, enjoy that milkshake just don't do it three times a day. And that's what, that's what actually helps you.

Pete Moore:

Yeah, well, three times a week, which I did do, I just did it once. So what kind of team did you put together to get this going? And how much did you outsource? How much did you insource?

Tom Kiss:

We did everything internally. So basically from my previous startup, my co-founder Mickey, he, he joined me. He's an amazing tech guy, he's, our CTO. And so we, a couple of people from the team came over and my other co-founder is no longer with us. He was helping with, with the designs. And so the team kind of built, we had that core team from my previous startup and then Esther, who's our customer success responsible our customer success. She was actually our first beta tester. And so that's how we kind of built up the team from, from, from sort of users and then just reaching out and looking for people who, who believed in the idea. I mean, our four, four HS, our four core values are, you know, honesty, happiness hungry and humble is our four HS. So we wanted to make sure we find people who, who, who fit into that category. And the funny thing is all our angel investors the same way. All of them are actually users of the app. We start chatting on the support channel and, and at some point I don't even know, it's like, Hey, do you guys looking for investment? I'm like, I guess we are. And they invested. So it was that's how I kind of everything built up.

Pete Moore:

Yeah. I be hungry, but, but in a work standpoint, not in a food intake standpoint, so in

Tom Kiss:

A work, in

Pete Moore:

A work put like an asterisk on that one on the on values and mission statement, you know, so as, as you think about being an entrepreneur, let's just talk about past, you know, successes and failures how you were able to communicate with your team that, Hey, look, things are going to go, things are going well, you know, I got to be optimistic at the same time. You know, the sales cycle's slower than I thought, you know, people are asking for more bells and whistles. You know, the revenue model is kind of morphing in different directions. So maybe to the entrepreneurs, they're listening to this you know, it's a pretty lonely place and I'm one and I have been several times. And you know, how do you kind of calibrate transparency with optimism, with you know, your personal beliefs and, you know, you're an athlete. So look until the, until the clock stops, like I'm probably going to win this game. Right. So, you know, I say in business, there is no end of the game. So it's not as easy to determine, you know, how long we're going to run this. And, and when, when is my milestone points hit. So how do you think about that? There's a little insight into your entrepreneurial brain.

Tom Kiss:

Yeah, that that's interesting question. So first, all we're a fully remote team. We were fully remote before COVID. So when COVID happened, we're like, okay, we'll just continue on as we're doing things which makes communication so much harder. A lot of that little chatter that would happen around the office is obviously you kind of have to make it happen through zoom or, or other calls. What I found is we're trying to be as transparent as we can about anything that's coming up hardship. So I found hardship much easier to share if, you know, if we're running low on, on runway, if things didn't, you know, if, if revenues lower than expected, that's much hard, easier to share than, than potential successes. I don't know if that makes sense, but when I know that there is something in the pipeline that could be life changing and it's coming, it's coming, but it's being delayed a bit.

Tom Kiss:

And I'm like, should I share it with the team? I don't want to get their hopes up. And then when it was, it felt like, okay, this is happening. I shared with them. And then it falls through. And then I have to explain, like that fell through on the other hand, if, if I'm sitting on an info like that for months, and then all of a sudden tell them that yesterday we signed this contract, then I feel like I'm not being honest with them. So sharing those potential huge wins or not sharing when to share them. I find that so much harder than, than the, you know, we lost the user today or something happened today, or there was a bug. Those are sort of easier because we know we need to tackle it. We need to fix it. We need to work on it and keep going. And the other thing is when you know something potential's happening and you're kind of all waiting for it, it is hard to focus on the day to day, cuz you're kind of waiting. Like, did you hear back from them? Did you hear back from them? And it's like, right. So those positives are so much harder to deal with and, and share with the team. So that that's, that's what I

Pete Moore:

Interest insight. That's really interesting. Like what, you know, I do you know, our firms being focused is doing mergers acquisitions, which, you know, are capitals, which even though you say like, yeah, we get, find the right investor and you'll get a deal done in 60, 90 days. It just, you know, it always takes six to nine months. It's just how, how it works. Basically like creating a business marriage and people getting antsy. And you want to you want to say, look the company, like we were working together and you're like, Hey, you know, I'm doing a \$20 million cap raise and you and I working together and you're like, Hey Pete, you know, we've only got two investors out of like your hundred, you know, calls. I'm like, yeah, Tom, but we're only looking for one. So like, you know, yeah, we got two right where somebody else might say you know I don't feel like this is going well. I'm like, well, you know, we, at least we got somebody interested at the same time. You want to kind of manage their expectations. But yeah, I, I find that tough as well because you know, the probability of something getting done is always, you know, something that one of your employees might say, well, right. If that's in the, in the pipeline, you know, at some point it's going to close and yeah, that, that's an interesting insight where you want to share the growth opportunity, but you also don't want to, you know, depress them that doesn't come through.

Tom Kiss:

So yeah, I mean,

Pete Moore:

Get

Tom Kiss:

Insight. One example is we had a, we had a, a, an air, a pilot with the us air force, which was amazing. So we went through Techstar in 2019. And right after that, we got connected with the USA air force with F works and applied for this grant and went through phase one, phase two, it was pilot. It was amazing. But so all, all good things about them, but you have to say that it's government, and it does move a little bit slower than anticipated. And I knew it was going to be slow, but not as slow as, as it happened. And, and that was really hard with the team because obviously it was a, it was a big pilot, big contract you know, it changing life changing for us. And, and when you have months between two emails and that's like two months after our email, they wrote back, they're like, we're super excited to continue. You know, after three weeks in a startup, I'm already like, oh, I shouldn't have told the team I kind of gave up. And then we completely like, forgot about it. And all of a sudden there's an email that let's move

forward. We're all excited about it. And so that was just painful and it's very hard to maintain, focus across the team when you have things like that happening. And, and there's some other cases, similar ones that happened since which is, yeah. It just not easy,

Pete Moore:

Interesting ING. So, you know, in closing here, why don't you give you know, just a summary of the app where, where people could find it, you know, what's unique about it. Obviously we put everything into the show notes you know, what, you know, the next couple months look like, you know, whether it's on the investor side or what kind of partnerships you're looking to do.

Tom Kiss:

Sure. So basically what we built a platform on is we believe that everyone is on an inner journey to become healthier and happier. And we think the building the inner curiosity about your choices and habits is the key to sustainable change. So the way we build eight, which is a mindful food journal and coaching dashboard is to help ignite that curiosity within people and try to support them on their health journeys. So we're, we're mindfulness based, nonjudgmental all by body positivity. We have a coaching dashboard for health professionals that are trying to reach their clients and be able to support them this way. And it's photo based. It's super simple to use. Our users are loving it. We have over 10,000 five star reviews in the app store. And you can find us on both on iOS and Android.

Tom Kiss:

It just search for eight 80 or through our website@ua.com. And we have some exciting roadmap we're building out around, around the coach platform. Also some partnerships we are building out this behavior engine where we're trying to understand people's behavior and help them and their coaches kind of pinpoint what they can work on. And currently we are kind of looking for the right partners. So it is fundraising. We're, we're looking for the right partners, both to kind of extend our resources so money as those startups need, but also bringing their expertise and help us reach more people and make a bigger impact in the world. I mean, we've been growing nicely. We grew about 300% in the last, last six months revenue and, and, and user wise. And so it's, it's, it's very exciting, very but what really gets me is the number of lies we're changing already and the impact we have on people. I mean the feedback from customers is just absolutely amazing and that's pretty much what motivates us the team through, you know, good or bad times when you have some great stories. So,

Pete Moore:

Yeah, well look, appreciate that that you jumped into the halo sector with reckless abandoned. And you know, we say that, you know, the changing lifestyles at the end of the day is just one person at a time, and that just becomes a domino effect and creates a halo effect. And that's kind of why we're, we're using that term. We'll send you a copy of the book time to win again, because I think you'll love the sports analogies and the business analogies there. So they will shoot that out to you. It's like a caricature of like good to great meets wears Waldo. Some of the things that you've referenced here or different chapters in the book by you know, communicating with your team and focus on today's wins. Don't focus on like, you know, next season, like where we're playing now in this game. So it was a pleasure talking to you and look forward to success and hit us up with that partnership if it hits soon before we launch the podcast and you know, let's keep in touch and see if we can get you into some of the health clubs in the studios that could be potential partners along way.

Tom Kiss:

Sounds good. Thank you for having

Pete Moore:

Man. Have a good trip. Take.