

# Hub Hustle Podcast ft. Dr. Werner Kuhr

**Taysha Williams:** This is Taysha Williams back this month with another Hub Hustle Podcast, we are in for a treat today as we introduce our new Associate Vice President of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Dr. Werner Kuhr. We're so excited to have you in Lubbock, Texas . So tell us a little bit about yourself and where you're from.

**Werner Kuhr:** Well I've been all over the place. I started on the east coast in rural Pennsylvania, moved to Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey then off to Indiana for graduate work, and then some work in Holland and Scotland as well. I ended up as a professor of chemistry at UC in Riverside, California then moved on to Denver, Colorado, where I've been for about 20 years.

**Taysha Williams:** Great. You know, Lubbock is unique, but you're going to love it here. I'm a little biased, but I believe this is going to be your favorite.

**Werner Kuhr:** Absolutely. Actually, it reminds me a lot of southern California. I really enjoyed my time out there. So far, it looks great out here.

**Taysha Williams:** So for those who aren't part of the university, explain your role and how you support our community in that role.

**Werner Kuhr:** Sure. It is really a position that encompasses both the academic side as well as the community side of developing research for commercialization.

What we want to think about is really how do we take that next step? There are a lot of researchers, the innovator, at the university that love what they do. They think only about the problems that they're trying to solve.

What they lack is an understanding of how to relate that work to the general public. How do I take my huge advancement in particle physics and then explain that to someone that has no background in physics. I certainly went through this in chemistry.

We try to do two things. One, we want researchers to be able to understand the value of the work that they're doing so that they have a better appreciation of how it fits in the university, in the community, and in the world.

And secondly, help academics explain the work that they're doing to the greater public. We can provide the means by which they now have the opportunity to take that research and find the commercial or social use for it.

That's what excites me. I like the idea of people going in that direction so that they have the opportunity to create the most value and the most impact for the work that they're already doing.

**Taysha Williams:** I love that and have seen that firsthand here. So we're really lucky to have you and your expertise. We do know you have experience not only as a researcher, but an entrepreneur. How do you relate to what our startups go through here at the Innovation Hub?

**Werner Kuhr:** Oh yeah. I think that's a really important point understanding both sides is difficult. As a researcher I spent 15 years at a university, developing a research program, going through the tenure process, teaching students, so the academic side is so complicated in itself it can be really hard to understand the business side.

Commercialization, most people think the line of I'm just going to get a a hundred billion dollar startup going and it'll be ready in two years, right? What's hard to understand is that the business process is just as time intensive and as difficult as the technical process.

For me, I didn't get into startups until I'd been a faculty member for almost 10 years. But what I had done is worked as a consultant for other companies. That's really what started to give me an appreciation of, "Hey, I'm doing all this hard work why not have somebody else use it? Why not take advantage of that and bring it to the community as a whole?"

On the community side, it's really important to think about impact. Most people immediately think of an entrepreneur as someone that goes straight for, "I want to make big bucks", but I think it's more realistic to think of the impact.

That's what I think drives a lot of the people here at the Hub. We want to think about how we can give people the opportunity to build a sustainable business. Can we make something that's going to stick around for a while? That means

you have to make a profit. Creating something that has enough value that you could do that is a difficult process.

**Taysha Williams:** That is what's gonna be successful is sustainability and learning. That's what our programs here at the Innovation Hub are all about.

I'm a little bias, but I think that being at the Innovation Hub, is one of the best places to work. So what are you most excited about for your new role?

**Werner Kuhr:** What I love about Texas Tech is the breadth of experience. One, your team, the Innovation Hub team, is great. You put together such a wonderful program and such a dynamic environment that it's hard not to enroll here.

The size of the university, the breadth of programs, the number of opportunities is just amazing in terms of what we can develop. One of the key things that we can do in the future is working with different departments that we can help them grow their opportunity.

**Taysha Williams:** Yeah. So speaking of growing opportunities what's on the horizon for new initiatives?

**Werner Kuhr:** I've only been here three months, so it's hard to be very specific at this point. What we want to do is integrate programs here that can be employed at the university. We can put together resources that will quickly identify opportunities and provide resources that are necessary to take them to that next level.

I think it's very important for us to look at all the opportunities that are here and provide the incentives for people to take that next step. It's hard to take on something new. Innovation can be scary because it's not well-defined in most people's minds. So providing the incentive for them to take that step, do something that's a little bit scary, but has potentially rich rewards gives us the next step of growth.

**Taysha Williams:** Well, I'm honored to work alongside you to make these new initiatives possible. Welcome to Texas Tech. We're excited about what we can accomplish together. Thank you everyone and Dr. Kuhr. We're joining us today on this special edition of the Hub Hustle. See you next time.