

Ask the Expert Radio Interview

Date: December 13, 2018

Speaker 5: Time for a second cup of coffee with WICC's Tony and Mike in the morning. As another interesting guest joins the show, here's Tony's conversation piece on WICC 600.

Tony: I have with me here today, David Keeler, he's the general manager of New England Low Vision and Blindness, and it's a pleasure to have him here this morning. David, how you doing?

David Keeler: Doing great, thanks, Tony. Thanks for having us.

Tony: Yeah, always a pleasure to have you here. Tell the audience a little bit about your company, and what you guys do.

David Keeler: Sure. New England Low Vision is an assistive technology company that helps people who are blind or visually impaired with technology products and training services. And we have two locations, one here in Shelton, Connecticut, and the other in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Tony: Okay. Now when you say blind, you mean totally, or there's going to be a little something there in order for this to work? How does this work?

David Keeler: Yeah, we serve both client population. So if someone has no vision whatsoever, there are products available to help them, technology products. And the vast majority of our clients are typically impacted by age-related macular degeneration or similar type visual impairment, and those folks do have some vision. And so we're really trying to share products with them, to help them to optimize the remaining vision that they have.

Tony: Okay, so what's the first thing that you do? They come to you, they're looking for some help. What's the first thing that happens?

David Keeler: Typically, we will spend about half an hour to 40 minutes on the phone with them just to kind of go over their expectations and what they would like to use the products for, identify their goals, what they're using currently. So typically with customers, if they are using a hand-held glass optical magnifier and they're able to read with that, they really don't need our services yet, but when that's insufficient, that's when the time for them to contact us, and we'll go through and make sure that we explain what resources we have available, and we typically invite them into the showroom for a two-hour demonstration, where it's a hands-on, no pressure, no risk for them to come in. They come in with their loved ones and they get to experience the technology themselves and try it to see if it's going to work for them.

Tony: Now, do you work with eye care professionals?

David Keeler: We do, we absolutely do. So eye care professionals see many of the same clients that we see, and they're a great source of referrals; they often refer people to us when typical ophthalmic care is no longer working for them, so that means there's no longer the need for injections or drops, or they can't correct anything with spectacles or surgeries. Those patients become untreatable medically, and that's when they usually come to us and begin the journey with us.

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Tony: Okay. Now, I mean I'm picturing like goggles, something that you would put on your eye, wear like glasses. This is what I'm picturing. Is this what it is?

David Keeler: Sure. Well, there's traditional CCTVs, which is what they're referred to as, closed-circuit televisions; they look a lot like the old microfiche machines that you would have in a library.

Tony: Okay, sure.

David Keeler: And with those, anything that you place underneath that you can magnify on a large screen to a tremendous extent, in some cases, in excess of 50 to 60 times magnification. The latest in the field is wearable technology, which people get very excited about. It doesn't always work for everyone, but we do have both the wearable technology, traditional desktop technology and portable technology. So we have a lot of the video magnification, which allows somebody who has age-related macular degeneration to magnify something to such an extent that they can easily read it, and in some cases, if they're not able to do that, they can actually press a couple of buttons and have the device read that printed text back to them.

Tony: Wow, this is really miracle stuff. I'm impressed.

David Keeler: It's great stuff.

Tony: Yeah.

David Keeler: Yeah.

Tony: We're talking with David Keeler, General Manager of New England Low Vision and Blindness. This gives a lot of people a lot of hope. I mean losing your vision, it's like being put into a prison, it really, really is, and it could really make you depressed and make you feel down. It's really a terrible thing all the way around.

David Keeler: There are a lot of times where there's a lot of isolation and loneliness that goes along with losing their vision. And to your point, it's kind of like an oasis in the desert; when people find us as a resource and get to experience the technology themselves and regain some of that independence that they may have lost by not being able to read their own bills or look at family photographs or read the newspaper. So when they come to us and they find us and they begin to experience the technology, it really can be a life-changing moment for them.

Tony: Sure. I mean I had cataracts done a couple of months ago, and there was like two or three days there, four days there, where your eyes weren't working the way you thought they were going to work...

David Keeler: Sure.

Tony: And it's a panic situation, it really is. I mean, my wife kept hitting me in the back of the head, saying, "Don't worry about it, it's going to be fine. He told you about this." But for those three or four days, I was like, "Oh my god, did I do the right thing?" And then when it came back, it was great. Don't

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get me wrong, but I can only imagine somebody who's facing this day after day. Is this something that's covered under insurance?

David Keeler: Unfortunately, it's not. These products are not categorized as durable medical equipment. I think there's been a long-time lobby in Washington to get them categorized as DME, however, that has not been successful yet. So right now, if someone's a veteran, they can obtain these products through the local VA. They do have to go through the VA qualification process. And if not, most of our clients are paying out of pocket.

Tony: Alright, Dave, we've run out of time, but what's the best way to get in touch with you?

David Keeler: Absolutely. People can reach us through our phone number which is 888-211-6933, or they can check out our website online, which is www.nelowvision.com, that's the letter N, the letter E, lowvision.com.

Tony: Alright, David, Keeler from New England Low Vision and Blindness, thank you so much for taking a few minutes.

David Keeler: Thanks, Tony.