

Meet Ann Dolin, Founder at Educational Connections, Inc.

Jim Ries: [00:00:00] Hello, and welcome to Java with Jim. I'm Jim Ries, director of business development at Offit Kurman. Joined here today with Ann Dolin, founder at Educational Connections. Ann, how are you today?

Ann Dolin: I'm great, Jim. Thanks for having me.

Jim Ries: Good. Good to see you. So Ann, tell us about Educational Connections, your role there, and from your perspective, what makes the company unique?

Ann Dolin: Well, I started Educational Connections in 1998. I was a teacher. On the side I tutored kids, and I just realized this is my calling in life. So I quit my job, started the company, and it's just been such an amazing ride over all these years. Things have definitely changed a lot. In the early days my tutors and I would go to kids' homes, and even though I haven't worked with kids probably in about 15 years, that was still our model up until COVID, and then everything changed.

We started seeing kids [00:01:00] remotely. We adopted new software. We retrained our tutors, and we found that we could deliver the service in just the same way actually and oftentimes it was even better. And so we kept that direction of the company. Now we've reached kids across the country. I think we have kids in 42 states.

We have students internationally, and that's allowed us to help a whole lot more kids.

Jim Ries: Yeah, that's fabulous. And we talked off-camera about executive function. Can you go into that just for a little bit?

Ann Dolin: Sure. What we do is a little bit different from tutoring, although we do that too. You need a calculus tutor or, an AP lit tutor, a fourth-grade reading tutor.

But executive function are the skills that aren't always taught in school, but we expect kids to have them, like being focused, sustaining your attention where there, when there's distractions, prioritizing what you have to do, making yourself get started on something when you don't want to do it. Those are all executive functions.

And so it's easy to see if [00:02:00] you struggle with those things, school is kinda gonna be hard for you. But the good news is they're teachable, and that's really our niche, is helping kids learn those skills, practice them, and make them part of the routine so that they're able to function independently.

Jim Ries: Yeah, and function as a family member and a community member as well, I'm sure. So Ann, when you think about Educational Connection, what would you say you're most proud of and why?

Ann Dolin: I think the number of kids that we've been able to reach along the way, but also the impact our work has had on families, as you just mentioned, Jim.

It's one thing for the student to have better skills or understand the content more and to get better grades, but I tell you the outcome in many families that we hear is like, "Oh my gosh, I have my relationship back with my child again. I'm not the homework police anymore. I don't feel like I'm nagging and I'm poking and I'm prodding to get them to get their work done."

They have better [00:03:00] habits. They're more independent. They're more responsible. And to me, that's a huge win.

Jim Ries: Yeah. Yeah, it is a big win for the entire family. What would you say you're most excited about as we're heading into the next six months?

Ann Dolin: I'd say that it's the role that AI can play in helping us navigate the next steps in the business.

For example, we use HubSpot as our CRM, also our sales and marketing tool, and we've been able to connect to Claude, and it's given us so many more insights than... It would've taken us days and days to get that information out of HubSpot, which is not really that user-friendly for reporting. And it's honestly, Jim, transformed how we look at the business and decisions we make.

So really looking at the company through a different lens, especially when it comes to marketing, has helped us a lot.

Jim Ries: So there's data there, and now you're able to actually extract the data, analyze the data, and use it for your continued [00:04:00] growth. That's wonderful. Yeah, great.

Ann Dolin: Thank you. That's exactly right.

Jim Ries: Um, All right. Here's the fun one. What's something about you personally that might surprise people watching today? And I have a feeling I know what the answer is.

Ann Dolin: It's probably that I like endurance sports, which I know sounds so strange, 'cause people say, "I can't even run a mile." But I tell you, once you get into it's addicting.

And I did my first triathlon in 1998, and then I took a break for 20 years when my kids were young. But I just picked it up again maybe six years or so ago, and now my youngest son, who's 24, he and I have been doing a lot of races together. We just signed up for Cozumel full Ironman in November.

So it is definitely something not everybody thinks is interesting, but it's become a big part of my life.

Jim Ries: I think it's great and not too shabby some of the locations that you go to for these races, right? So provides some good travel experiences as well.

Ann Dolin: Yeah.

Jim Ries: [00:05:00] Um, Well, that's great. Ann, thanks for spending time with us today. I know everyone's gonna enjoy hearing what you had to say, and I'm sure I'll be seeing you soon.

Ann Dolin: Thanks, Jim.

Jim Ries: Bye.