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Changing Minds Changing Worlds

**KEVIN
MAYNE**



Transcript for *influencers!* Season 2 Episode 4: Kevin Mayne

Phil Latz: Kevin, welcome to Influencers.

Kevin Mayne: Thanks, Phil. Good to be here.

Phil: No worries. You're an Englishman who lives, who works in Brussels, and lives in a nearby village.

Kevin: Yes.

Phil: How has that experience of immigrating to a different country in a different culture been for you?

Kevin: I'm very positive about it. I've enjoyed my 10 years in Brussels as an odd reputation internationally because it's assumed it's a city of bureaucrats and politicians and lobbyists. Culturally it's a melting pot of different European cultures, Northern European, a bit of the Dutch, and then the French influence coming up. Belgium's a really interesting country, which I'm enjoying a lot.

Phil: Now, most people will assume Brussels, just down the road from Amsterdam, not too far, that would be like cycling heaven, but is that really the case?

Kevin: Belgium is divided linguistically, divided certainly a little bit politically from time to time. Our two major regions of Wallonia and Flanders have historically followed two different transport paths. North Flanders is one of-- possibly the bicycling capital of the world, actually, for regions. It's as good as in numbers. It's, at the moment, probably the sporting cycling capital of the world in terms of the number of pros per kilometer and that kind of thing. Home of other sports. Wallonia is much more car-centric. Much hilly, so harder to ride. It's beginning to catch up quite fast. Brussels itself was ring of the European capital cities, one of the worst traffic-congested, difficult places to ride.

For our political work, what you have had under the eyes of the political class, is growing from-- what would say, using transport [unintelligible 00:02:07] 0.5% to 5%, 8% to 20% in some hotspots. Cargo bikes are popping up, and they're being used by European Union officials to take their kids to kindergarten. The city of around us has transformed, and that's really accelerated in the COVID period. We have very proactive political leadership in the region. It's become probably not quite as flash as Paris at the moment for transformation, but people are coming into Brussels, and they're coming in on political visits and going, "Wow."

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As a backdrop to our work, it's extremely useful that it's on the doorstep.

Phil: Yes. Just for the non-geeks in there, those percentages you're referring to?

Kevin: They're mode shares of transport trips. Typically the states, Australia would've had the Point Fives, are your starting points. Then when you're heading for 20s and 30s, we've only ever seen those in Denmark and in the Netherlands, in any level. We talk in those bands to give us a perception of what we're seeing in front of us.

Phil: When you travel from your home to your office, are you in that-- whatever that was, 0.5% and now 5% or 10% yourself? Or how do you get to get work?

Kevin: I live about 25 kilometers from the office, and I'm an old Laker guy, so I will happily put on the Laker and the bags and bike in and have a shower and it's there. I could tell when I moved to Brussels, I would have a lonely ride through the forest, and there would be me and the deer and and a few rabbits, and it was great. I have to say there's all pesky cyclists now, a lot of e-bike assisted, as well as the speed pedelec category, the higher speed, because people on Belgium are increasingly comfortable doing 10, 15, 20k commutes using the e-bike. It's just extraordinary. It's a really great thing to be part of.

Phil: You say you're comfortable in Laker. What's your cycling background yourself? What do you enjoy doing most now?

Kevin: These days I mix up. I'm not no longer like many people full-time in the office. I am still going to Brussels, and I'm using city bikes, and I'll grab a bike, share bike, and we're talking here today in Frankfurt. I've been going around Frankfurt on the local bike share bike that I can just dial-up. That's a good part of my kilometers, and traveling internationally, bike share is my godsend. I turn up in your city and wow, it's just amazing. I can get a bike anywhere in the world for fun, bit of gravel, a bit of light curl. I'll do 100Ks on the weekend with a group of people I ride within a local club. That's where I grew up. My family cycled, my parents did racing cycling in the '60 when nobody in Britain cycle raced. I was a bit born to this because I was from a cycling family, and a family that was involved in things like local government. There's been a bit of cycling and politics right from childhood. Even though I had a business career for 15 years before I went back into the cycling advocacy world. It's always been there.

Phil: It's really in the blood. It's destined. Brussels does have a reputation, which you alluded to briefly before, as a bureaucracy, European Parliament, European Commission. What's it like? You've been a closer observer for many years now. What's your experience of it?

Kevin: I think we've been through several waves of attention. There's a benevolence to cycling,

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I think in almost any government anywhere in the world. It's very hard to not be. It's green, it's nice, you can do it with the kids, and it's psycho touring. You very rarely got like a bad word, but you don't get somebody saying, "This is top of my list." Particularly for Brussels in our work, in transportation, and even in tourism, the perception is that their job was to do the international bit. It was for cities, governments, national governments, and even governments like in federal countries would say, "Hands off, local transport's hours." You guys worry about the rules for the single market, or you worry about the international trains and planes. That thinking has almost collapsed, because we will not solve our climate change problems.

We would not have had successful health lifestyle changes because we were forced to stay indoors during COVID. We will not get out of Russian oil in Europe unless we actually deal with local transportation, get rid of emissions from cities, those issues. Even the big international travel people, the system can be great to move your truck full of freight from one side of Europe to the other until you pass the city, and then you hit some horrible congestion when you pass the city and it messes up that system as well.

There is a real move now to tackle urban transportation as a source of emissions, as a source of congestion. You can't do that without bike. We've gone from being a slightly noisy irritant shouting for a bike, to being pretty strategically important. That's reflected just recently, we've had now have a commitment from the political sphere in Brussels to actually create a European cycling strategy, which is something I've been involved in lobbying for about 15 years. It was always not quite our job. Now the conversation is, "Look, we have one for automotive, we have one for shipping, we have one for, yes, we need one for bike." Secondly, with my job for cycling industry, in Europe, what's the industrial component? Can you bring jobs? Can you bring technologies? Can you bring greening, can you bring a whole bunch of stuff that we need as a European industrial system?

We're currently in a 6-month window of helping draft a new plan, a new strategy with both an industrial pillar and a mobility pillar. That would not have happened three to five years ago. Individual things were happening, like we could get some money released for tourism infrastructure as part of job development. To get it packaged in the way it is now, is really-- I'm very proud of my team and our colleagues and the community because we've transformed the way the political classes think about us.

Phil: You've been working at it for a long time. You just mentioned 15, but I'll look back, and it's actually about 25 years you've been leading cycling organizations. Cycling UK, European Cyclists Federation, now, Cycling Industries Europe. What would you say are some of your biggest wins or most satisfying moments over all those years?

Kevin: One could always be-- it's a cliché, so it's the best time of my life thing. There are moments, and I've said to people, I feel like I spent 23 of the last years training for the last two

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years.

It's like an athlete training all year to ride the Tour de France. Because certainly when COVID came, there's a two kind of experiences, and where it differed is the-- There have been other recessions. There have been other all crises. There have been other opportunities. We weren't represented by people or structures that enabled us to put our best voice forward.

When you walk in a room, have you got people that can present an economic argument, typical people who can present a social and environmental argument, and package it and put numbers? I think part of what I brought for my business career when I first went into the cycling advocacy world, was the sense of that you're talking. You would never market a new product without doing some market research. You would never have a sense of what's the potential of the market.

Those disciplines carry through. Those have been the disciplines when you are talking to a major multinational institution of the EU about what's your economic recovery plan, how many jobs can you bring, how many billion euros do you need to invest publicly or privately to deliver that outcome. That's the toolkit that I've built, but also surrounded by a brilliant team to really have those answers. That's been really, really exciting. There have been great moments historically and things I'm very proud of, particularly in the British scene, some of the wins we had on various topics, both legally and politically. I can say really is the best time is now. This is a pretty special field. This is an opportunity to do stuff, and I probably just underpin that. That's also because, for example, at a city level, a city like Paris, when COVID came, why did they deliver 600 kilometers of new bike lanes in five or six weeks? Because they already had a plan, and all they did is roll forward their five-year plan.

People who were organized had it ready to run. Those measures were not permanent. They needed fixing. Having a well-organized structured community, which we know ready to roll, was all actually part of that success story.

Phil: You've talked about a couple of things there. You've talked about having the data ready, you've talked about planning, and so on. You're working at the highest level. You're representing a European-wide body, and you speak at global events and so on. For the people involved in advocacy at the next levels down, like the national estate and the local grassroots, if you just have to recommend, whatever, two or three things that would help make them more effective, what would you recommend?

Kevin: I actually do quite a lot of coaching of advocates. One of my jobs I did when I first came to Europe was I'd been coaching in 18 countries of grassroots advocacy groups, and that's so inspirational. What we were doing is trying to create a tool kit of methodologies. One of the simple things is a tool which is called stakeholder mapping. It's just people standing in a posted

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note in a room going, “Well, who do we know?”

It’s like, “Okay, my friend’s cousin’s brother dah, dah, dah knows this person.” We do have a friendly journalist who rides a bike to work, and we do have that. Then imagining those posted notes beginning to move, but moving away where support grows. Sometimes realizing there’s a key decision-maker in there, and you actually have no idea how to move that person. It gets people thinking actually, “We can shout all we like,” but ultimately our job is to move that person’s decision, and they might not even know we exist. Drawing lines of access is one tool we do a lot.

Then the other is almost what I said, [unintelligible 00:14:49] sometimes you are not the solution. What you want today is just not politically viable. No matter how good cycling is, we will concede there’s a day, there’s a moment, there’s a situation, there’s a city, there’s a politics. I tell of an anecdote of our Italian Citizens Association, great people, very straight, very good.

They were sitting there in the 2010s with Silvio Berlusconi as prime minister, and they basically said, “Our entire strategy is to wait until he’s replaced,” because to be [unintelligible 00:15:35] We’ll work with mayors, and we’ll work with cities, but at national government level, as long as he’s prime minister. Then there was a change in political fortune, and they were. Then we organized and we’d done some work together, and they started to have conversations with a new political leadership from different parties. Italy released €100 million of funding for psycho-tourism routes and so things started to happen. They didn’t have what we call a political window. That’s true. I think it’s true at street level, and it’s true at [unintelligible 00:16:09] level. You organize for when the window opens. You organize your coalition, you organize your solution, you organize your media, and you might have five campaigns in your toolkit.

There’ll be a day there’ll be a horrible accident, if we’re being negative, or there’ll be a local storm in the media about congestion, or there’ll be the politician buys an e-bike and you write, “That is my moment.” That’s partly about what we need to do as lobby professionals, is to share that toolkit, but even help build it. That’s why I would say to a company, you need a few people around. Just as you would hire an elite cyclist to win a race for you, you hire the best designer to do your marketing, you’re effectively hiring into advocates. Nobody likes being called a lobbyist. When we accept that, I don’t want to be called a lobbyist, but you’re hiring into a toolkit on a set of experiences on how to pull levers, and really, that’s what we do.

Phil: We’ve just talked about the grassroots a little. Let’s talk about industry now, in particular bike industry, but you can allude to more broadly. You used to be the head of the, or development director, I think of European Cycling Federation, Cyclists Federation, and then you set up Cycle Industries Europe, but you still support the ECF through that. Why did you see it important to set up a new separate organization for industry?

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Kevin: The founding purpose of what we then call the Cycling Industry Club in 2011, was because a group of companies first felt they weren't doing enough to support grassroots. They just weren't doing enough in Europe to get bike lines built and get safer conditions. That's a business interest, of course, because that creates conditions for great sales, but it's not intervening directly in a process that's about the industry.

Exciting times. We start with seven companies. We grow to a group of 30, 40 companies. We build up a portfolio of lobbying work, so we're helping grassroots activists in 18 countries, and that's great. The more the companies work together, the more we were having other conversations about our technologies, about our business relationships, about how the bicycle business sector needed to evolve and could evolve and could be more impactful.

In all sorts of ways, it's not right nor proper, nor appropriate, nor is it good governance to ask a Citizens Association to sort out your industrial problems. That doesn't mean the Citizens Association are not doing great work. When we effectively spun off what was called the Cycling Industry Club, we have a long-standing agreement that says, "Look, this is not about taking money or industry or support away from the mission of better places to ride in Europe." In fact, we're expanding it. This year, we're actually moving to provide financial support and logistical support to the mountain bike sector in Europe, an association called [unintelligible 00:19:54] Europe, which is one of the international off shoot to mountain biking, and we're now doing the same thing, because we really believe there's a skillset and a resource that the industry cannot have and probably shouldn't have.

Equally, we've spent the last three years really working on what we call the ecosystem. There's two parts to that. Actually, the industry in itself does have a role in growing the market that's beyond infrastructure, access to products, financial accessibility, things like tools sharing and leasing. What are we doing about the digital layer? People love the idea of looking at other bike on their phone to get one, or they quite like a smartish bike and in the future maybe bikes will talk to cars and to traffic lights and there's pilot projects. There's a whole bunch of stuff that makes for better cycling, but equally, our members want to be as green as the product, and as sustainable as the product.

We should be as proud of our business ecosystem as we are of people riding bikes. People are, there's a belief in bike companies, but there are things you have to do to deliver on that. We work on sustainability, reliability of our supply chains. We don't want to be embarrassed, and that kind of thing comes with that. That's the new dimension to our work, and that needs a trade association approach, and an industrial think tank approach and data sharing and things you do as an industry.



Phil: Well, it seems to be working that approach, because I think you're up to 100 members now, so it's grown quite a lot. Is that right?

Kevin: Yes, we started with 25 in 2019, and we're now cleared that. We're happy to welcome our hundredth member, and it's interesting the way it changes. The hundredth member is a battery recycling and refurbishment company. It's the new business we would never have seen as part of our industry, and that I really like, and we have about probably 70% of the European bike sharing market as members contributing something very different, doing a lot on cargo bike and other areas. It's very positive.

Phil: With all these new players, batteries, bike share that you refer to, what now do you think your potential membership might be now that you're drawing from a broader?

Kevin: Oh, I'm told this 1,500 exhibitors of this year's Euro bike, so why should I be embarrassed about saying all 1,500 should join? To be honest, joining is more than just collecting the names. Joining is about contribution of expertise. It's about your company being comfortable saying, "I am part of this, and that I want my brand to be, even some company, do I quite want my brand to be political?" Feels uncomfortable in some cultures in some countries, and not natural.

We are just gradually building up that community of people, and some people, I meet a CEO, a company owner, president, and they just go, "Sign me up. It's time that my company was visible in this space." Or another one say, "Actually it's just about the practicalities. I need to know what the sustainability strategy is for this industry, and I need to be part of it, and I want to be in the room before some legislation or industry standard hits me." There's a trade of an emotional commitment to the cause, and then there's a brutal practicality about needing to know what's coming.

Phil: There have been a lot of upheavals and turmoil for the industry in recent years, and I want to touch on three of them. Two of them I guess you could call more defined events, and one is an ongoing, as they say, existential threat, and those are COVID-19, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and global warming.

Looking at each of those three, you can look at them as a group or individually, perhaps, what have been the impacts on cycling in Europe and your industry members of those three?

Kevin: Coverage is not history, but the cycle we've been through is clear and on the record. I guess what's less clear is what we were doing behind the scenes and understand the dynamic, but it is very clear in spring 2020, and the advice we are clearly giving people is don't fight this, don't try and stay open. This is bigger than us. Where we can, we fight to keep bike shops open, but we will prepare so that when, the phrase I used before, the political window, because we

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understand there's only so many things governments can do in terms of economic levers, and they are going to need industries that can grow jobs. They're going to need industries that can be in a positive place. They're going to need to know that there are local solutions before international transport at least recover.

I'm very proud of that component because we got everybody organized. There was a phrase, cycling is essential, translate it to anyone, [chuckles] but just drop it into every community, drop it to every-- Prepare that ground and then be there with that political access, with that storytelling. Behind what people see now, which is sales up cycle use up, was a really strong political program to place that there. I think we've learned from doing that, but we are out of that in Sydney and European terms in a really good place because the politicians are looking around and going, "Who delivered?" You wouldn't want to be in cruise ships right now, you wouldn't want to be in aviation. It's tough, and even automotive, it's down a bit, but they're also, they're having problems because they've got to electrify.

We look pretty robust. We look like a good bet. What that has done, going back to early on about confidence and speed in this country, is when the Russian oil crisis comes. For the first time ever, I've got political officials, civil servants in the commission as part of our conversation going, we need you. What have you got? We're going to have to get out of Russia. It's now a policy. We're out of Russian oil in two years, a high proportion is diesel, we're going to need the cargo bikes, what have you got? That you get, you ready to respond, but it's a totally different level of just cycling is essential and they say, "No, cycling is so essential, we need you." Those are very, very much linked.

Climate change is hugely important on the European agenda, but some of the climate change work got knocked backwards inevitably because of COVID. The smart political voices are doing the same as us. They're pointing out that everything you do here actually makes the climate change stuff easier. If we're going to get out of fossil fuels, let's just get out of fossil fuels, because we need to do that anyway. We have a good relationship with some of the key green people and leader of the European Green deal, and the narrative on green jobs, and we position ourselves into that, but those three major things in our work are just flowing into each other.

Phil: Cutting to the bottom line, if you like, one of the bottom lines is money. It's measurable. How has it looked? Do you keep a tab on the total funding in Europe for, say, cycling infrastructure or whatever, and how are those numbers looking compared to 10 years ago, 5 years ago?

Kevin: Yes, we work a lot with the European Cyclists Federation, so we have a relationship with them that's more, a lot more than funding. It's about intelligence gathering and sharing, and they're doing a lot of the investment tracking for us, and providing that actually part of our think tank work. Helping companies know where the growth markets might be, but that underlying

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thing. We know 1.2 billion was committed to new cycling infrastructure in the nine months at the end of 2020. Absolutely. Done by grassroots activists, people sending in saying, “My city’s just announced this, my country’s announced this, my government, the EU has announced this.” We could show 1.2 billion, and we can show how many kilometers were created. Not just new infrastructure, but fast track, streets closed, bollards put in, those kinds of stuff. We could track money and kilometers really, really fast.

Now we are working to do similar kind of things, and so there was a European COVID recovery fund. We know 1.7 billion euros was given by the European Union to national governments to give to regions and cities explicitly for cycling.

Phil: Wow.

Kevin: Yes. In fact, when they’ve tried to do programs on the ground, some governments have found that the cycling bit is so much easier to do. They’ve even increased that. We just recently heard the Spanish government had put an extra from their fund, taken an extra 300 million for cycling infrastructure. That’s coming. We are told that instrument is also going to be the instrument to distribute support funding for getting out of oil. Joking aside, we said to the commission people, “We’ll just double it.” Just double it. In fact, more than double it. Because you have an instrument, but there are countries that took nothing.

We’re in Germany today, where I’m talking to you. German government has already put a lot of money aside for support for cycling. Their problem is combination of both engineers and urban planners and political processes. There’s money in Germany for something interesting. They’re just blocked. Citizens are riding more. The bike demand is there. It’s a great industry here. It’s simply. We’re actually, there are other conversations. It’s quite simplistic to just throw money at it, but at least we can track what’s being released. We can track what return on investment that should deliver.

Phil: That’s certainly encouraging figures and trends. Looking at the future, not just money, not just policy, even technology or new forms of product and so on. I know you’ve been speaking about cargo bikes a little, but you take it anywhere you like. What do you think are some of the most exciting developments we’re going to be seeing in the next 5 to 10 years?

Kevin: It’s fascinating because I think for a long time, our industry’s energy in design engineering products, was to some extent driven by sport. Great technologies index gears, things that cascade down to your daily city bike or they came when mountain biking arrived, this kind of stuff. That’s not going to stop, and the passion for those components. What’s really interesting is, and I think most important, is how we re-engineer access to bikes. By that, I mean that it is just not realistic. If you live in a huge housing block on low-income, no matter what the government does with tax breaks or what we do with bikes, that you could have an e-bike parked on the street. It’s going to

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be stolen, it's going to be damaged. Their life expectancy's not going to be great even if you could protect it.

What are we going to do on sharing? What are we going to do on digital access? What are we going to do on having a shared cargo bike in every street in Europe? We work with a wonderful company called [unintelligible 00:33:13] the founder talks about my ambition, he says, "There's 11 million. Because I think there's 11 million streets in Europe where I could put a bike."

Underpinning that is bikes to the people. We've actually set our targets based on a number of new people riding.

We say that we think realistically by 2030, our target should be 50 million more Europeans riding. Now, there are not 50 million more Dutch people can ride. There are not 50 million more Danes can ride. They can ride more. It is about countries where cycling is not currently accessible. Then we should be saying, "How do I get a bike in that person's head? How do I show them that electric assist stops it being sweaty, stops it being hard, do I put some digital tools in there? It makes it less scary."

Of course, is there an infrastructure between my kids' school and our house or the park or on the mountain biking side, we talk about trails close to home, places you can bike to with the kids and play on bikes. Start with there's 50 million people. Then ask yourself, "What do they need?" Do they need a bike? Do they the infrastructure. If they're in a work situation, does the bike need to carry a load? That's where I'm excited because I've got more and more companies and innovators and new entrants who are innovating on access.

They don't always call it that. I've got great products for connectivity, obviously, and I get excited when I think-- Yes, I can see how a new person might be inspired to ride. I don't want old [unintelligible 00:35:11] like me, who can't possibly ride anymore. There are enough days in the week for me to ride anymore. I'd have to retire first. It is genuinely my neighbor who's, we live on a hill, just couldn't imagine biking up our hill. That I think can also unite the whole industry, because we can all unite behind people. That's really exciting.

Phil: Kevin, please don't retire anytime soon. Thanks for being an influencer.

Kevin: You're very welcome, Phil. Good to talk.