

CommonTime Pathways raises \$1.5M

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SUMMARY

Eton Worman, founder and CEO of Common Time Pathways, discusses the challenges faced by artists in college admissions compared to athletes and how his platform aims to bridge this gap. Common Time is focused on helping musicians and artists access scholarship opportunities and connect with colleges, leveraging the growing importance of soft skills in an AI-driven world.

- Common Time Pathways was inspired by Worman's frustration with the unequal treatment of artists versus athletes in college admissions.*
- The platform aims to help musicians and artists find scholarship opportunities and allow colleges to recruit students based on soft skills.*
- Worman emphasizes the need for musicians in various fields, not just music majors, to enhance the diversity of skills in higher education.*
- The company is currently raising \$1.5 million to expand its database and services, with significant interest from investors like Yamaha Music Innovations and Reach Capital.*
- Common Time plans to evolve beyond music to include other arts disciplines such as theater, visual arts, and dance.*
- The platform seeks to create a centralized database for arts scholarships, making it easier for students to find opportunities tailored to their talents.*
- Worman highlights the importance of early recruitment for students, especially first-generation college attendees, to foster their artistic passions.*
- Future plans may include international expansion and deeper integration of portfolio applications in college admissions.*

Hello. Hi. >> I am here today with Eton Worman, the founder and CEO of Common Time Pathways. Thanks for having me. >> Eton has a really exciting announcement to to get to about a fund raise that his >> Common Time is about to conclude. But before we get to that, I want to hear more about you, Eton. what how did you end up as founder and CEO of an edtech startup? what's what's your path? It's fascinating. EdTE was never really in my wheelhouse. I grew up in the Silicon Valley, so you know, tech isn't exactly outside of my ballpark, but I think that my inspiration really came from being a music teacher. I was a music teacher in the classroom, high school and middle school, band, choir, orchestra, God help me, orchestra, but also jazz and marching band and drum line and all the stuff that you hear about musicals and shows and theater.

And so the impetus for this was really me getting pissed off, which is a great reason to solve just about anything. But what I realized was that students who were athletes were receiving a lot more preferential admission and treatment and recruiting processes than athletes there, excuse me, than artists. And so for me, the important thing was to make sure that we could shift that dynamic. And the reason that it started happening now was

mostly because AI is really forcing higher education to start thinking about how they're seating soft skills as the reason that they bring students in, not just the hard skills that are being taught and that are being measured and the ones that are being controlled and taken advantage of. When you think about the 30-year push for STEM, which has been really relentless for the last few decades, and now that pendulum is swinging back towards liberal arts, towards humanities, towards arts education, empathy, education, creativity, education, but really what it came down to was my frustration that the more I dug into this, the more ridiculous athletics recruiting and scholarships became to the point of one of my, you know, phenomenal all-state musicians getting a D3 three benchwarmer fill out the roster scholarship to play at a school and then ended up taking their equipment to school which meant their French horn stayed at home. Even though they're a horrible athlete and a phenomenal musician, there was \$30,000 a year for that kid. I can't blame them.

Take the money and run. But the system is rigged against people who are not athletes. And I think that now higher education, especially with the enrollment cliff, is poised to try to find more students early. And there's a lot of energy behind how do we get those kids that we know are going to be AI resilient, not so much AI resistant, but also be able to see around corners as Jensen Huang would put it, right? The idea of these artists being really phenomenal human beings who can think differently and creatively because they're trained to do so, which that's the everything that we believe about at Common Time. So, it comes from me being pissed off, which you know, I mean, and I haven't met a single music teacher who wasn't pissed off. I mean, it's the athletics community is a wonderful community, but they bombard us with this messaging. I mean, my three-year-old was signed up for mini kicker soccer in our town in Massachusetts where I just told you I'm from, and I got a push notification on the app when I signed up for Team Snap.

Got to love Team Snap. I signed up, plug for for the sports app right here, Team Snap. But no, in the end, what happens was my three-year-old and my family, I mean, he doesn't have a phone, but we got a push notification on Team Snap asking us if we wanted to sign him up for college recruiting and scholarship opportunities. Of course, it was a blanket advertisement. It wasn't intended to go to a three-year-old soccer team, but man, 14 years in advance, I'm receiving early messaging about how college can be paid for by a sport. That's not something that anything happens like that in the arts.

And to be completely honest, it's hugely frustrating for not just parents, but music teachers in particular when we find out two kids in Denver, Colorado in 2024 got full college scholarships to go play cornhole. That's not a joke. It's not a punchline. I'm sure those kids deserve a scholarship, but cornhole, I'm not trying to say they didn't deserve a scholarship, but cornhole. And so I think that there's some kind of a of a situation here that Commontime was address trying to address and I think it's all wrapping together and you know that's really the story of how I got frustrated and how the research into it got me more frustrated and how in the end it was just kind of inevitable. I had to I had to create something that would help music kids find out where college scholarships exist for musicians and then give college recruiters the opportunity to find kids younger the way that they can for sports.

Yeah, I you know that story resonates with me pretty deeply. I am the son of a professional photographer and graphic design firm owner. >> Amazing. >> Who grew up in the sports ecosystem and went to college for sports

and have >> went to college for sports, got a sports degree >> for soccer. >> you know, I think it was it was a huge factor in my college process, right? >> Yeah, sure. Yeah, absolutely. And yet later in life, I'm realizing like, oh, I have all this sort of latent, you know, artistic desire. whether it's taking a ceramics class or absolutely >> you know that, you know, my wife and I are are building out our our house.

you know, congratulations. Big step. >> Yeah. Yeah. You know, and she's the daughter of architect. So I think like >> good luck >> realizing that there there was sort of a latent design sensibility in myself that wasn't fostered >> particularly well in in my otherwise very sort of charmed childhood. so, so I think your story resonates and and I think like the question for me is how do you do it and and >> what what can you talk to a college about? You know, with sports it's sort of obvious that sports drives revenue, right? And and I think >> there's a big myth that I could talk to you about for a while, but go on.

>> Yeah. Well, I I I think we can we can save college sports for another day, but >> what I'm more interested in is is how can a is maybe maybe 10% of colleges it's a revenue generating endeavor. Everywhere else it's a student life and student retention endeavor. >> Right. Well, I think it's direct versus indirect revenues. Again, let's save that for another day. Okay. what I'm more interested in is is how can colleges activate on the arts side and and recognizing that you know just teaching people how to do calculus is probably no longer sufficient >> to remain in existence and and I could totally see a path where the arts help solidify their place in the world. So So you know absolutely is that something that y'all are involved in?

>> That's literally the gap Common Time is trying to fill. We're trying to create a situation where VPs of enrollment strategy at universities can seed their student bodies with musicians and artists, people who are divergent thinkers, not just to go be music majors and arts majors, but ultimately there's no football degree. There's no bachelors in lacrosse. These people are everywhere and they need to be everywhere. Musicians need to be everywhere in nursing programs and in psychology programs and in physics programs and in engineering programs and in sociology and Spanish language programs. We need musicians and artists to be across an entire campus. And there is no way currently in existence. Now there is one where VPs of enrollment at universities or enrollment leadership at universities and at small liberal arts colleges can actually recruit based on soft skills which are the skills that are required.

They are essential skills in an AI enabled world. >> And what so what are what are you specifically doing to ameliate that? Like what does comment do? >> We enable hightouch recruiting, >> okay, >> in the arts sphere the same way it exists in the athletic sphere. And it already happens on the ground, but it's not codified in a higher ed system. You constantly find high school orchestras and jazz bands being visited by college professors. You have music faculty from universities teaching at summer camps all the time. And there's a lot of hightouch relationships that come through that. But none of that gets translated into a higher ed enrollment strategy that stretches from when a kid is 14 to when a kid is 24. And so that's what Common Time enables. We allow the hightouch experience to be codified and then leveraged in a way that it's not just the music major that that professor is interested in talking to. It's the 10 kids on the left and the 10 kids on the right that are prime for recruiting to a university or a college. And Commontime nationalizes that pool of applicants and gives everyone the ability to go and find the best fit kid and lets every kid find the best fit college.

>> And can you give me an example of like what the student profile looks like? Like you know I know a little bit about sports, right? Where you have the star system and the star rankings and I know like first and second chair of of orchestras which you know apologies for my ignorance but what does that look like when you're building a profile? How do you how do you represent that to a school? Yeah, it's not as granular or first or second chair, but what we do when we onboard students onto Common Time is we ask them to not only upload a performance video. We also ask them to write a personal statement, we ask them to volunteer their GPA information as well as their SAT scores. And sometimes if they want to, they can also indicate financial needs. So if certain students are first generation and they need a full ride, they can indicate that. So the college knows who they're reaching out to and they can make those decisions and they can figure out what's the best fit for them in that way. But ultimately we also ask them things like did you get into your all-state ensemble? Did you audition for your local ensemble? Do you have and the performance video honest to God is the most important thing. That's the video of you playing soccer that made it to a coach who then called you and said come play on my team. It's the same thing with an orchestra or a band or a modern group or an acapella group or soon to be uncommon time a theater troop or a dance team.

>> Okay. So, I want to get more into this. Right. So, you know, my my wife sang a capella in college. My my roommate also in in college became an a capella group leader. >> but that was all student managed. So, like how how is that changing? Are these becoming more formal? nothing. I mean, they were serious. They were more than a full-time job singing in these groups. So, how does how do those groups work now in in relation to the college admissions process?

>> So, what happens with acapella groups in particular, even in student le ensembles, there's always a faculty representative, a faculty manager. There's always somebody who's responsible for it. And if a university or a college is interested in seeding enrollment for these programs, they need to throw money at it. When you start a marching band, that's great. It's not going to look like the Ohio State University marching band in its first season. It's not. It's just not. But when your university says, "We need to start a pep band to go play at football games and basketball games." What they need to do is then throw scholarship money at it so that that professor is then entitled to say, "Hey, if you come to play at this un if you come to this university, study whatever you want.

Play in the pep band, play in the marching band, play in the jazz band, play in the mariachi ensemble, play in whatever it is that that university is trying to leverage as an enrollment boon." and then actually go out and recruit it. Right now, there's no way for those universities to tell everybody where that scholarship is. I had a professor from Texas, middle of middle of the state, Texas, professor of a smaller college messaged me on Facebook in July of last year and said, "Hey, I've got \$250,000 in scholarships or 25 kids to help us start our marching band. Can you connect me with those kids? Band Camp starts in 3 weeks." And I said, "Dude, these better be full rides because you're asking someone to go ahead and forget the deposit they just made to this other university. They just told everyone for the last four months that they've been accepted to.

So, no, I can't help you for marching band camp starting in 3 weeks, but let's get online and let's talk about next year. Why not? Let's talk about next year. I've got freshman, sophomores, and juniors who would be desperate

to meet you. Let's go." But the person, that's the thing. There's no way to get the information out there. And and is the focus just music? Is it just music for now? Where how do you see this evolving over time?

>> So because I was a music teacher and my co-founders were also music people, it was very easy for us to start leveraging our relationships and conversations. And as entrepreneurs, you know that founder fit is enormous with regards to starting something because you need to be able to speak the language and understand the the field just to avoid the potholes forget actually go anywhere. And so music was where we felt comfortable. It was where we felt confident and we've had a lot of wonderful relationships that have helped us along the way in the music sphere. But all those people at the enrollment level are now also saying to us, hey, why are we doing something different for music? Or if we're going to do this, can we also do this for visual art? Can we also do this for dance? Can we do it for theater? Can we do it for film and photography? Can we do it for culinary art and architecture?

Can we do it for anything that requires a portfolio? And the answer is eventually yes. The trick is it's the bowling pins behind the first bowling pin, right? The first bowling pin is where we're comfortable, our market fit. It's music. Bowling pins two and three and right behind it are probably theater and dance as performing arts adjacent. But then we have visual art, film, photography, ceramics, graphic design, everything else. And it's really exciting to think that we can actually start leveraging these relationships to become a clearing house of scholarship database information that exists nowhere else.

>> It exists nowhere else. And it's impossible to say to your parents, "Oh, I can get a scholarship to go be a ceramics kid because they say,"-huh, sure, where?" And you don't know. But if it's existing as a database on Common Time, they can simply say, "I play the French horn in the state of New York and I want to be an engineering major. What has a scholarship for me?" And Common Time gives you that list in a moment. And then you can make an educ Oh, excuse me. You can make an educated decision about what you want to do. And I and I think that speaks to something that we know is true, which is the number one sort of like killer of dreams is if you don't have a role model or a obvious venue to continue pursuing whatever your passion is, right? If you don't >> Every first and every first generation student comes without that privilege.

>> Exactly. >> Because they don't someone in their immediate family who has gone through it. Yeah. That's right. Right. >> That's right. And that's why Giuliard and the New England Conservatory and Boston Conservatory and San Francisco Conservatory should be interested in Common Time. Many of them already are and already are on Common Time, but they're interested because they want to find that 15-year-old kid in the bayou of Louisiana who plays the cello in circles around some of their undergraduates whose parents have never been to college. They want to find that kid and say, "Come here." When the kid's 15, when the dad will actually listen.

I I you know I I sort of buried the lead at the start here saying saying y'all had had finished a or were in the process of finishing a funding round. >> Yeah. >> >> can you tell us more about the round and and how you think it'll help you potentially knock over a few more of those bowling pins? >> Absolutely. I mean our raise were very lucky. We just we already secured 1 million of what we're hoping is a \$ 1.5 million pre-money safe

note round and it's going extremely well having a lot of interest especially now that we've got the co-leads which is exciting and you can read about it in the press release but I'm assuming this isn't coming out till next week so I can tell you it's Yamaha Music Innovations and Reach Capital are the two co-leads. It's really exciting to have them with us.

One is specifically everyone knows Yamaha is the music industry kind of leader in terms of manufacturing but their music innovations fund also seeks to aim to develop musicianship and the role of music in the arts in the future. That's where we lined up with their mission and reach capital we all know wants to center humanity in an AI enabled world. That's what they're here for. They believe that arts need to be focused into the limelight as a companion to artificial intelligence.

that AI should actually stand for maybe artistic intelligence instead of artificial intelligence and the idea that we need to put those things front and center hand in hand otherwise we risk losing ourselves in the process. >> Yeah. and and you know from a not to be the sort of capitalist market guy but you know I think it it also tracks that the future of education is going to be a lot more about passions >> than about wrote technical instruction >> about ROI.

>> Yeah. >> Yeah. Exactly. So, so this this totally tracks with that and you know I think it it tracks that a university should be interested in in accessing these different types of students. >> you know, and I I I I bet that the barrier to date has been they don't know how to assess. >> That's exactly right. That's exactly right. There are 17 ways for a university to find a lacrosse player. 17. Not one for them to find a clarinetist.

>> Not one. >> Yeah. well I am super excited to to hear about the journey. I'm stoked that >> I definitely did sorry but I feel I answered half of your question about the raise. so the the ben just just throwing it back there. Yes, we're excited to have reach and Yamaha with us. The point of this raise is to get us to a point where we can then permutate the database into adjacent markets. Testing some international you know adjacent as well in terms of European college and conservatory admissions getting international students to come to the US. Yamaha music schools obviously could be a wonderful partner for that. We're not sure how that might develop but at the same time there is an enormous potential to connect the world through music and education and I think that's where we're aiming for. Obviously our usership is exploding which is really exciting but we want to make sure that we also leverage that as well. So it's partnerships, it's conferences, it's all the things including mobile app development because we all know app fatigue is just for old people and we also really want to believe the fact that there is a space where these people want to feel like they're valued and connected.

>> So yeah, there it is. That's that's that's the vision for how we spend the money is to grow that impact. >> I love that. And my favorite part about the early stage is there are a million different directions you could potentially go and you know your your work as >> yeah your work as a CEO is is to help sus that out right and and say this is what I know today and you know I'm leveraging the strengths that I have today to grow. but I also have all these exciting paths forward and you know hopefully when when you and I talk in 12 or 18 months you'll have a couple of more bowling pins to talk through with me.

>> yeah, I think it's going to be exciting and I think we're also going to shift lanes. I don't necessarily know if we're going to stay in the US in 2 or 3 years. it could be that we go straight into Latin America and Southeast Asia and Europe. It could be that we move into a more integrated approach on portfolio applications in general. It could be deeper diving into direct admission, which is something that's really exploding. I mean, what, a million kids got offers of direct admission this year, which is up an enormous I think it's like more than 100%. It's more than doubled this year. I think it was 400,000 last year, which is just wild to think about. But yeah, the this the it's all shiny things. The question is, what's the one that works right with what we're going to do?

>> Yeah. Well, I I'm excited to follow along. Please keep me updated. and, you know, hopefully we can do this again in in short order. >> Yes, please. Thanks so much for for responding to our inquiry, Matt, and thanks for putting us on Ed Sheet. It's a pleasure to be with, you know, in in conversations with you guys. And I'm certainly going to take much closer look at what you offer from now on as a as a new Edge Sheet subscriber. Click that button, y'all.

>> and congrats again on the round. >> thanks so much. >> Talk soon. Bye.