

Transcript for #79. Charging Ahead with ChargerHelp! CEO Kameale Terry
Guest Kameale Terry, CEO, ChargerHelp!
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Introduction ([00:01](#)):

You're listening to Fueling the Future of Transport, hosted by Tammy Klein, the founder and CEO of Transport Energy Strategies. We'll talk all about the fuels and energy it takes to keep the world moving forward.

Tammy Klein ([00:17](#)):

Hi, everyone. Welcome to the show Today, I am so pleased to have with me today, Kameale Terry. Kameale is the co-founder and CEO of ChargerHelp!, and we're going to talk today about charging infrastructure in the US and what her company is doing. Kameale, welcome to the program.

Kameale Terry ([00:36](#)):

Hello. Thanks so much for having me, Tammy.

Tammy Klein ([00:39](#)):

It is my pleasure. So I first got to know Kameale a little bit through the Fuels Institute. We both sit on a council called the Electric Vehicle Council, which brings a lot of stakeholders together, interested in expanding and improving the charging space. And I first got to meet Kameale, I think it was December of 2021. She was a panelist at an event and she just gave some outstanding, real-world realities about charging and also what her company is doing. So, Kameale let's get into it. So for the listeners who may not be familiar, can you talk more about ChargerHelp!, what you all do, how you got started and can you talk about also what I love about what you're doing is fostering - I mean, really like for real - real fostering equity within the company and also out there in the marketplace.

Kameale Terry ([01:41](#)):

I appreciate that. Yeah, so I guess I started off in the industry, I think almost, I want to say almost eight years ago now, which is so cool because I'm very young, so that was a large portion of my life. But when I started out, I actually worked for a network provider, so someone who created software for charging stations and I was what they called "EV driver support." So essentially if you drive an electric vehicle and if you experience an issue or you've never charged your vehicle before and you need someone to help you, he would talk to me. And at that time I knew nothing about electric vehicles. I just needed a job. I just ended up in this space. And so I would literally like Google and Reddit everything. I was my gosh, how do you charge a BMW? Like, one moment please, I'll Google it.

Tammy Klein ([02:35](#)):

<laugh>. I'm sure there's a manual somewhere, <laugh>.

Kameale Terry ([02:39](#)):

Well, yeah because at that time, like some car O&Ms weren't necessarily explaining it to folks. Cause it was new eight years ago. I think we've had this super pickup in EVs, but back then there weren't a ton of EVs and a lot of folks just didn't know. So, so yeah. So I just went to Google University and learned everything <laugh>.

Tammy Klein ([02:57](#)):

Talk about in the trenches. Oh my gosh.

Kameale Terry ([03:00](#)):

In my last role at that company, I was something called the director of programs. And so my team deployed infrastructure EV charging infrastructure all across the US. We did some cool projects in Canada, in Australia, and just learned so much. And one of the things I did learn was that the industry had a very interesting ONM problem and I think it was honestly because I tell folks all the time, these charging stations are, IOT assets. They're smart devices, they're internet of things. And so we've never as a nation deployed <laugh> a whole bunch of smart devices and then nonetheless transitioned a fueling source. And so yes, there were going to be problems. And I guess as I wrap up the story, when I left that company, I started to talk to other companies that also were having ONM issues.

([03:56](#)):

And I knew that we could solve it in two interesting ways. One, I'm obsessed with data and I feel as though usually when computers have issues, there's a reason why you just have to find it, right? Usually the computers are malfunctioning. You can follow a bread trail to be like, it's right there. And so I was like, Oh, we can figure out why these stations are malfunctioning. We just need to collect a ton of data. And then on the other end of that, the issues aren't electrical issues. And so it did open up an opportunity of looking at how you transition workers into the space. And so from there, ChargerHelp! was born. We created a platform where we help technicians that's transitioning from other industries essentially are getting hands-on training as they work through our mobile platform. And then we're aggregating a lot of work order data and other data points, and in order to get to resolutions faster for these smart assets. That was a lot. But yes, that's what it is.

Tammy Klein ([05:02](#)):

So you decided...I mean, you went from basically working in one of the centers to deciding to go off and start something on your own or with your partners, I mean, what was that like? I mean, how did you take that leap, you saw the gap and you decided to go for it, but a lot of people don't do that. So I'm kind of fascinated with what that process was like for you to decide and just go do it.

Kameale Terry ([05:36](#)):

Yeah. I think the interesting thing is that I ended up leaving the other company not to start this company, but because my mom was really sick. My mom had always had cancer and her cancer had progressed more. And I don't know, I just knew that I wanted to be home more and just wanted to be more helpful. And, and so that's why, because at that time period, that other company, I had a very senior role and a lot of responsibilities, and I was young, I'm still young. It was like, okay, I should probably spend time with my mom. So I actually was just not working and helping my mom and I was volunteering at this organization called the LA Clean Tech Incubator. And I had just written a curriculum on everything that I had learned from the industry, things that I had Googled, and like everything.

([06:27](#)):

I just wrote it all down and they were looking for a workforce training program. And I was like, "hey, have you heard of charging stations and operations and maintenance. Here's this curriculum that I've built would you all be interested in teaching it?" And they were like, Yes. And so, it kind of naturally progressed that way. I've actually never wanted to start a company <laugh> entrepreneur, and it just seemed very painful...

Tammy Klein ([06:55](#)):

That's true. One entrepreneur to another. But I think that the... but look where you guys are now. And I mean, that's what's so, so amazing. So you all have done studies that have centered around the challenges of maintaining charging stations. So that's what really got me. When I first heard you speak in December of 2021, it was like, "what, I can't believe this" in terms of what you all are finding about charger reliability and what's really going on out there in the field. So can you talk about what you guys have been finding what you found then and what you continue to find? I mean, the stats that you've come up with and you've talked about or the company's come up with and you've talked about from your studies is just amazing. And the key thing for me is, what do we do to make it better? I mean, is it policy? Is it something else? You know, what can we learn and improve on? Especially as infrastructure really begins to roll out.

Kameale Terry ([08:05](#)):

Yes. I mean, one of the things I knew that we had to do was to get data, because anecdotally, you could talk to an EV driver and they're like, "yeah, these stations don't work." But I never like stopping there. I'm like, 'Okay, well, let's visit the station. Let's understand what doesn't work. Let's explore this.' And so, we went out to about 5,000 charging stations across, I think it was about 45 or 47 states. And we were saying that a third of the infrastructure was inoperable, wasn't dispensing electricity. And, we finally had the data to just back up what I knew anecdotally. And that really drove us to start developing partnerships with some of these network providers and manufacturers to say, "hey, you have a problem and how can we look at solving it?"

([08:55](#)):

And I guess to answer your last portion of your question, one of the things I took away from the Fuels Institute is just I think the industry, the EV charging industry could do a better job of working with other fueling entities or even convenience store operators, just folks that have been dealing with fuel, whether it's electricity or gas or whatever. We don't have to reinvent the wheel. There are some things that we can learn and we should understand, and we should be more inclusive instead of exclusive. So that's one of the things that I really love about being a part of the Fuels Institute and going to the events and just learning and listening and this is how this experience should be and how do we get there.

Tammy Klein ([09:43](#)):

So one of the stats, and I don't know if I'm going to remember it correctly, that you, you talked about, you've talked about before, is it's something like of the stations that you all surveyed at one point in time, which I now can't remember what that is, but it, it was something like 30% or more of, of the L2 stations were not working and had some kind of problem. so do you think that's a, a situation that you're seeing as the company develops your workforce is out there, charging's rolling out, you know there's much more attention on reliability is that a statistic that you see improving now or that you, we will begin to see kind of an improvement in the next few years or so?

Kameale Terry ([10:42](#)):

I mean, I think that the attention will help. I, I think that there has to be a switch of how we understand reliability. Today most of the infrastructure was installed through rebates and essentially some of these small businesses are essentially the site hosts and should be responsible for O&M. But how we structured the rebates and how we think about reliability and even how we understand the problems of the stations, I think it does prevent us a little bit from truly getting to a more reliable infrastructure. I hope that just through education and we've been reading some of the responses from the NEVI bill and

how people are thinking about O&Ms but I think that we really need to set the site host up, which are typically small businesses or cities or utilities. We just need to set them up for better success of maintaining these stations.

Tammy Klein ([11:42](#)):

What does that look like? Is that sort of engaging with you all to do that work? Or what does success look like here?

Kameale Terry ([11:54](#)):

Yeah, I think top of mind for us is definitely looking at what are the service level agreements between all of the entities. So one site host, they might have a software provider that they bought that they got these stations through a reseller. So you have like a reseller, you have a software provider, and then the manufacturer might be different than the software provider. And then the payment system, while there might be different than all of those people, and there aren't really any SLAs for all of those entities to properly work together. And the site host does have a role to play because when you're going out to solve an issue, you need the site host to know where the breaker box is. You might need the site host to turn off the station. You would need the site host to prioritize fixing that site.

([12:41](#)):

So I think that the first set is establishing service -level agreements among all of these entities. If we want to drive mass EV adoption, and if these stations are truly for the public, we have to make sure that everyone's on the same page. Because one person not prioritizing the station getting fixed can now have that station offline for 30, 40, 90 days, Right? Because one person didn't do their parts. I think that's one piece. I think the other piece is definitely whether we have some type of help for operations and maintenance. You realize a lot of these site hosts get stations for free and if they've never operated a charging station and they got it for free, they may not actually have a maintenance budget. They may not have even thought about when the station breaks, how am I going to pay for it if it's not a parts issue that's solved by the warranty.

([13:34](#)):

And so how are we setting them up for success like that up front? And I think the last thing, Tammy, honestly, which I guess is less about site hosts and more about the ecosystem as a whole, we see a lot of communication issues. We see a lot of telecom issues, and I don't really see the telecom industry really a part of the EV industry. Like your Verizon Mobile, all these folks, how are they being helpful to ensure that there's strong communication in these areas so that the stations can communicate and properly perform?

Tammy Klein ([14:11](#)):

Wow, that's a real eye-opener for me. I never even...that's not something I've really considered myself, but you're right, because things will be more and more wireless and where are these guys? I don't think I've ever seen one telecom. I mean, maybe they're part of NARU or other groups, but I've never seen one group that's telecom company that's really kind of engaged in this area.

Kameale Terry ([14:43](#)):

And we've tried, and the thing is, they don't have a key person. They're just like, it's just like the utilities customer. No, you need someone that's thinking about this holistically, especially as we lead into smart

cities and autonomous vehicles. These are all connected devices, and if you don't have a T-Mobile dead zone, the cars aren't going to go there. I mean, I don't know, it's very interesting to me.

Tammy Klein ([15:11](#)):

Yeah. There's somebody at T-Mobile in AT&T with their own electric vehicle manual somewhere back, at their home. Please. You know, So That's actually such a good point. I mean, you're right. I mean, they are not in it, but it will depend on the success of charging will depend more and more on what those entities can and are able to do. And it reminds me so much in the beginning dealing with the utilities. Now many utilities have their own dedicated electrification groups or the convenience stores. So many fuel retailers and convenience stores, they have their own dedicated electrification units now. And I guess maybe in time we'll see that with the telecom companies, but yeah, we aren't there now.

Kameale Terry ([16:06](#)):

Right. Yeah.

Tammy Klein ([16:07](#)):

You're the first person who has ever, ever in my sphere, who has really ever pointed that issue out.

Kameale Terry ([16:15](#)):

Yeah.

Tammy Klein ([16:15](#)):

Yeah. So how do you see...we have the investment, the infrastructure act last year we have the Inflation Reduction Act this year. It's a lot of incentives for both charging and for electric vehicles. So from your standpoint, being in the industry, how do you see charging and the EV market here in the US evolving over the next 10 years? And what does that mean for you all at ChargerHelp! besides more growth?

Kameale Terry ([16:56](#)):

Yeah, I mean, I think it's going to be really interesting. One of the things that happens when you put a lot of money towards things doesn't mean that quality increases. It means that you have more folks that are going to try to participate. And so I am excited for new players because I definitely think that we haven't solved how we should charge. I don't think that there's a premium experience today. And so I'm excited for one of the existing players to become more premium and for there to be more premium players in this space. I am excited for that. But on the other end, it does cause a bit of concern just to think that we're just going to have so many new people in flooding this space and not like underneath this flag of greenhouse gas reduction, but more so under the guise of you can make a lot of money, which is like no shade to those people, but it's just interesting <laugh>.

([17:58](#)):

And then for ChargerHelp!, I think for us, what we really want to play at and sit at is, we just want to be the premier O&M provider for the site host. We don't have to go directly to the network or manufacturer. Like I was driver support, site host support - those are the folks I empathize with. Like somebody that's never been a fueling operator and now you're a fueling operator and like, what does that mean? And it's a new type of fuel and like, how are you supported? And like who is making sure that you're having this like seamless experience for your drivers. So I'm excited for how ChargerHelp! could continue to support those folks because I often think that they're left out because they're not

necessarily the ones carrying the purse right now. It's not like the site hosts are paying for this, it's government funding or utility funding.

Tammy Klein ([18:47](#)):

Right.

Kameale Terry ([18:48](#)):

So, yeah. So for us, I'm excited to see how we can continue to support drivers and site hosts as this industry grows.

Tammy Klein ([18:57](#)):

So let me ask you both about, the whole ecosystem, EV ecosystem and the question of equity from an equity standpoint, do you believe we have policies, the policies that we have on the books now, and especially those that are reflected in the Inflation Reduction Act., do they do enough to foster, improve and grow equity and access to charging access to electric vehicles, access to being able to work with companies such as yours?

Kameale Terry ([19:40](#)):

Yeah. I mean, I think for me, I'm usually on the side of less rules and how can you impact the private sector to find value in naturally doing those things. And so, I think like that's more sustainable and I think that you're seeing it, right? I think from car OEMs, like the Lyric came out and they utilized R&B or hip hop artists and that's super cool because you're now exposing a whole different group of folks that may follow those people to electric vehicles, right? And that's just a natural way to be like, Oh, well there's money here, so let me create an electric vehicle and utilize these artists' platforms in order to drive EV adoption in this certain demographic or area. I'm excited about those creative spaces. Not to say that there are people can create rules all day, but for being in a private sector, private sector will also figure out ways to get around the rules.

Tammy Klein ([20:41](#)):

<laugh> that's so true!

Kameale Terry ([20:42](#)):

But yes. How do we figure out how do we identify the value, right? For ChargerHelp! we work with workforce development centers to staff and we look at certain communities to staff mainly because yes, it's equitable and it's also cost saving in the sense of workforce development centers already having recruitment arms. So as a business, I don't have to create a recruitment arm. You know, we find that folks that have some folks that came from oil and gas. We have folks that came from telecom field service. Those folks are naturally really good at being technicians. So it's like, yes, equity and these are also very sound business decisions that are adding value to ChargerHelp!. And I think that's a more sustainable way to think about it because if you don't find business value and equity, it's always going to be half done. And you'll see that people don't really care and they'll figure out ways to cut corners so they don't have to do it. But I think there is value in equity. We just have to expose that more to the private sector.

Tammy Klein ([21:49](#)):

I do think it's about adding that value and you're right. I mean all of those things that you're talking about, that's really not equity <laugh> at the end of the day sort of hopping around, hopping under so it's really about making the business case, so to speak.

Kameale Terry ([22:08](#)):

Exactly. Exactly.

Tammy Klein ([22:09](#)):

So last question, two-parter. what excites you most about this electrification space? You've worked in the space almost 10 years, which in this space, I mean, you're a total veteran <laugh>, even though it's a new space. You're a total veteran. So what excites you most about the electrification space and why, and where do you see...where do you guys want to take the company and where do you see the company in the next few years or so?

Kameale Terry ([22:39](#)):

Yeah, I am a sucker for design. Like, I love beautifully crafted things. And so me, I am <laugh>....I like, even though like I know the iPhone isn't like a superior device, but it's just very pretty. And so all my devices are Apple. Design to me is just really cool. And then also technology smart devices and not replacing people are getting like too crazy AI, but just really bringing the future forward, you know what I mean? I think that we have a cool opportunity to do that with electric vehicles that we may not have been able to do with gas powered vehicles. If you think about flying cars or autonomous vehicles, I think we're opening up ourselves to new stuff and I think as a millennial I'm like, Yes, <laugh>, show me more new things.

([23:30](#)):

And then for the company, I'm excited about two things for the company. One is that I truly believe in Detroit. I'm in Detroit right now. And they had an RFP out recently to have an electric highway. So when a car drives on the highway, the car is charging and I was talking to the young ladies because we're looking at doing some workforce development. And the fascinating thing is you would need somebody that understands how to repair that highway, but they will also need to understand software because there's a huge software component. And so when we look at the jobs of the future, we can't have all our software engineers who make six figures go fix highways.

([24:12](#)):

So then how do you bridge that gap? How do you find someone that's like totally fine with getting dirty, but also is understanding of software and how can technology helps to bridge that gap? And that's what we're really doing at ChargerHelp! We're saying, Hey, we can take field service workers and they can work on smart assets with the help of this platform. And this allows for there to be more people entering into the workspace faster. You're not going to school for three, five years. Have to have like good natural skill sets of like showing up on time, being a good employee <laugh>, but follow directions using a phone. And so that part is really cool to me. So those are the two things that I'm really excited about for ChargerHelp! is just this opportunity to further show that there is space for more people here to add value. And we could do that through technology and we could do it in such a way where it's not replacing people, but it's enhancing the experience and making folks better at their jobs.

Tammy Klein ([25:15](#)):

And it evolves your company over time, you're not just focused on...L2s are great and then we have DC Fast chargers and then they'll be something else like what you're talking about with electrified roads. So for each stage of that evolution and whatever comes beyond that you're positioning the company to be able to take advantage of those opportunities and grow right. along with the technology.

Kameale Terry ([25:45](#)):

Yes, absolutely.

Tammy Klein ([25:48](#)):

Well, thank you so much. It was so great to have you on the show. I hope you come back. It is, I mean, it's amazing and it's awesome what you all have been able to do and what you've accomplished in a short period of time. I mean, how many years is ChargerHelp! even been a company? It's just been a few, right?

Kameale Terry ([26:06](#)):

Yeah, we started January 2020. I had a {unintelligible} start a company before a pandemic <laugh>. Oh

Tammy Klein ([26:13](#)):

My gosh. I was thinking you guys were around longer than that. So Yes, I know exactly what you mean,

Kameale Terry ([26:17](#)):

<laugh>

Tammy Klein ([26:18](#)):

That, I mean, and so what you all have been able to accomplish and it in a pandemic and around the pandemic is nothing short of amazing. I think a lot of things are coming together on the policy side that really helps as well. Right company, right positioning, right time. So my hat's off to you.

Kameale Terry ([26:43](#)):

I appreciate you. Yeah, we're severely grateful and excited on how we can be helpful to the industry.

Tammy Klein ([26:49](#)):

Well come back again and talk to us more when and as things continue to develop. It's been a real pleasure.

([26:56](#)):

Thank you so much, Tammy.

Closing ([27:01](#)):

You've been listening to Fueling the Future of Transport. This show is hosted and edited by Tammy Klein, produced by Carolyn Schnare and engineered by Alexander Nikolic. To hear more great episodes of this show, learn more and sign up for a free biweekly newsletter, visit transportenergystrategies.com.