

Mitchell Goldberg:

If we didn't adjust quick, if we were stuck in the middle and high levels of multiple bureaucracy, we would have died. Our sales were plummeting fast. You can't survive if you move like an elephant when there's a lot of cheetahs. You need to be nimble out there.

Mike Paton:

All right everybody. This is Mike Paton with The EOS Leader Podcast. And today I'm thrilled to be speaking with Mitch Goldberg, founder, CEO, and visionary at the Surgmed Group of Companies based in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, but with people and facilities all over the world. Surgmed Companies manufacture and distribute a diverse range of medical devices, surgical products and equipment to over 70 different countries.

Mitch started working at age 12 alongside his uncle doing punch and dye work in factories. That understandably inspired him to start his first business importing products from China no less at the ripe old age of 13. After running it successfully for several years, he sold the business at 17 to refocus on his grades, paid for school and bought a car.

After school, he briefly pursued a more traditional career in finance with a Fortune 500 company before seeing an opportunity in the med device industry and launching what would become Surgmed in 1992, thus fulfilling his lifelong desire to quote, "Do my own thing." Mitch, thank you for being here. I'm very grateful. Welcome to the show.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Thanks, Mike. I appreciate that introduction. Very nice.

Mike Paton:

My great pleasure. It made me excited just thinking about this conversation. So I want you to go back to the very earliest days of your entrepreneurial journey, your journey to be a worker, first of all, and walk us through the journey to get where you are today.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Well, you know, it's actually really funny, is that I started working in my uncle's factory at 35 degrees centigrade weather in a factory. I realized early on, I didn't want to work in a factory, but I did learn a lot work in the factory. He was importing from China. Well, importing from China was a challenge. It wasn't as it is today. People don't realize how you were blazing the wild west back then going to China. It wasn't just Googling and finding things.

And I saw importing, and it used to bring back these great trade magazines. Hong Kong Trade Development Council, I can't believe I remember that, HKTDC. It looked like a shopping magazine, and I saw some pretty cool gadgets. My uncle helped me coordinate it, communicate by telex, not fax, telex machine. And he helped finance me. He loaned me my first \$1,200. And I bought \$1,200 of these torch lights. People saw them. I showed them around to friends, brought them to schools, everyone bought them. Then I had the crazy idea. What about if I advertise, and went ahead and found myself a lock in at the back of the TV guide magazine, which for those that don't know what that is, that was the way you found what to watch on TV.

So I secured the back page, which is, I had to wait about two, three months to get it. They allowed me to do one test run and I sold out all my product within, I'm going to say about two weeks. And then I realized I had something there and I built a whole direct marketing business. Had I had maybe

Bezos says foresight of maintaining what I had going on, but we didn't have the internet or the power of distribution that exists today, but I quickly built up a pretty good card deck of direct mail customers, which back in the early eighties, had value because people that bought by mail were a very special group of people. And I can tell you, during COVID, a lot of us who are buying from Amazon today never thought about buying so much from Amazon until COVID. It was more of a novelty as opposed to a standard.

So from that point, I was able to build a regular base of business with the marketing clientele, the director of marketing clientele and a company called Canada Direct Marketing approached me about buying my list. And I'll tell you, honestly, this point, my grades were slipping. My parents were happy that I was making all this money, but they were thinking of my future and they, without forcing me, because my parents were very good at that. I think most parents would be forced to do the opposite. They gave me some good encouragement and they said to allow me to pursue any dream I wanted, but I decided I have to focus on school. And I found that I was able to sell my little direct, which is on a gray Cardex box. That little Cardex box turned out to be worth about \$35,000.

And that was a lot more than my father who was making at the time. I sold it and that bought a car and put myself through university and didn't need a part-time job.

Mike Paton:

That's awesome. What year was this, the year that you sold the company?

Mitchell Goldberg:

The year I sold this company was 1979, 1980, '99, 1980.

Mike Paton:

I felt like I had to interject that for the listeners who don't know what a telex is, and don't recall what the TV guide was. This was back when we actually had to get up to change the channel on our televisions, right, Mitch?

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yeah. Or if you had kids, your kids were in the remote control.

Mike Paton:

They were the remote control. That's right.

Mitchell Goldberg:

The father said, "Put the channel 12 on," and that we were remote controls.

Mike Paton:

That's right. That's right. Okay. So you go back to school, you get your grades back on track. You get through school, you take a job working for a bigger company as a financial analyst. What lit the entrepreneurial spark again?

Mitchell Goldberg:

Again, it was along the same lines. I worked really hard. I was working at... Can I say the company name?

Mike Paton:

Of course.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yes. I worked with Seagrams, the alcohol company.

Mike Paton:

Oh, sure.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Wine and spirits. Had a great career trajectory going on there. I was there for a little over three years. I was first in, last out all the time. The security guards knew me. I really enjoyed working hard. But in my third year, the company wasn't doing that well. And they went into an austerity program. At the ripe old age of about, I think, what, 23, what do you mean there's no raise, and you're giving me more work to do. And I realized, that's not a good career choice right now to be in my... well, not my prime. I was far from my prime, but I didn't feel it was the right career direction.

And so that made me leave. I went to become a stockbroker, which was a great experience. I did that for three years afterwards. And I really made a lot of money in my first few years. I mean, it was really a successful time, but then the crash of '87 hit. And that was okay. It was really interesting working through the crash. And I had the experience of working through that, which was, I don't know, something I'll never forget, and the experiences and hearing what's going on live in that market.

But I realized that I wasn't building anything. And I saw guys who were in stockbroker and they were in their 50s. They're my age now. And they had nothing. They lost their job because of cutbacks in the stock brokerage industry and the financial markets. They had no value to their career other than a sales person. Nothing's wrong being a salesman, but don't value... Even selling stocks, they're a very specific skillset. And when you're fired from a stock brokerage company, it's very hard to get to another one because the word spreads pretty quickly.

And I realized, I saw some of these poor guys and I said, "I have nothing tangible. I can build a value for myself." And a deal came up to help a medical company from Spain get started. I helped the private placement. I asked them if I can join the company as the interim operator. And they welcomed me because I knew the company inside and out. I had a finance background and they were looking for an operation person.

And so I helped them out for about a year. And from there I made some medical contacts in the medical device industry. Pretty much took my life savings and a promise of a little office, a little place. And the funny part of the whole story is I was pushing hard in medical for about a year. It's a tough industry. I was breaking down the old boys' network.

And I remember that as the day is long, I was down to my last thousand dollars in the bank. And the crazy thing happens. I got a call from a hospital in Nova Scotia, and they're looking for a special gynecological couch. And this is where the story gets really funny and very strange. And the couch is called the king's couch, which didn't make any sense, because it's a gynecological couch. It'd be the princess or the queen's couch, but it was called the king's couch. And it was provided by one of my suppliers in the United Kingdom.

And they gave me my cost. I called the hospital. It was like 20 something thousand dollars. But when they gave him the cost, they gave me their selling price in the UK, not my dealer cost. So I took a

full list price, marked it up and quoted it. They bought it for 20 and change but my cost was actually about four or five. So that chunk of change I got after a year, the actual like \$15,000 I made, I mean, I was starting to consider sending out resumes again.

Mike Paton:

One transaction saves you.

Mitchell Goldberg:

One transaction. Someone was smiling upon me. One transaction allowed me to continue in business and if it wasn't for that, I wouldn't be here today. It wasn't for that one. That's why you remember those milestone. You remember those tipping points. That one says my tipping point was a gynecological couch.

Mike Paton:

That is weird and funny. You kept your promise. So give us a sense of size and scope today at Surgmed.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Today we're a privately held company. I'm the sole shareholder of the business. We're just shy of about a hundred employees. And we are in the plus \$10 million range. I will say last year was our record year. We did over 40 million, but that was a lot to do with COVID and the opportunities that we were able to capitalize on, but also assist our governments, our different governments throughout the world. It was a lot at work. It was working... I mean sleeping maybe two, three hours a night for months trying to put everything together, because we had a lot of things we had to change fast.

So we have a great trajectory ahead. This year, we're probably in the \$15 million range today. And our trajectory is even greater than that. And I'm only mentioning our Canadian operation. We also have a factory in France as well, which is separate to this business model, but they manufacture a lot of products for us. They're also a distribution point for us in Europe as well.

We're that level. In fact, we just made an offer on another building. So we're going to have a fourth location. We just acquired it. We purchased another building about, I think it's about, 30,000 square feet. So we're going to be... We wanted to buy a bigger one, but trying to consolidate all the different locations. But, it just wasn't possible. I don't believe in renting. I like to own my buildings.

Mike Paton:

I don't blame you. And the real estate market is even tougher to figure out today than at any prior time too.

Mitchell Goldberg:

It's absolutely crazy.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Nobody knows what's going to happen.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yeah.

Mike Paton:

So let's pivot a little bit off your personal journey and your company and talk about leadership in general. I'm wondering when, as a young man, and you started in business younger than most, but as a young man, what was the first recollection you had of someone leading where you went, "That person is a leader," and you watched them as a leader.

Mitchell Goldberg:

You know, my role models are two very different. One was very old-school, my uncle. Remember, we're going back into the seventies and eighties. There weren't a whole lot of regulatory rules in place governing our behavior on that and there was a lot of things missing in this world and the way people communicated. So I learned my tough knocks from my uncle. I mean, he was rough around the edges. I introduced myself and someone would say, "Oh, is that your uncle?" I would say, "Yes, it is, but don't hold it against me." Because his reputation was, he was tough. He loved his family, respectful, caring, but don't cross him.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. A little bit of a temper, maybe some colorful language from time to time.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Colorful is polite. It was very different. And ironically, I don't like people. I swear. I'm not. Swearing jokes, swearing humor, swearing at people is just something I don't practice, but he did teach me the element of when you need to be tough, you need to be tough.

Mike Paton:

Right.

Mitchell Goldberg:

But I always prefer being more like a stealth bomber. I don't like to see that. I would rather them not see me coming. If they know you're going to be an ass before they have the meeting with you or before they [inaudible 00:13:12], then they're prepared already. If they don't see you coming and you turn on them-

Mike Paton:

There's more impact.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yeah. And then my career at Seagrams, dealing with proper senior executives... I had the opportunity to work with the president of Seagrams and many of the vice presidents directly, even the owner at the time, Charles Bronfman, I had the pleasure of meeting him several times, and I got a flavor of the two polar extremes. Both on their own, I guess, had their merits and benefits, but both have serious shortcomings. My uncle would never survive a day today at this moment. He'd be out of business in no time at all.

And the other side, the bureaucratic side, it's over. Too much bureaucracy. You can't survive if you move like an elephant, when there's a lot of cheetahs. You need to be nimble out there. If you can't adjust, then move. Like I was talking the story about the COVID. If we didn't adjust quick, if we were

stuck in middle and high level was a multiple bureaucracy, we'd have died. Our sales were plummeting fast. If we did not adapt and make changes to our production and be able to ramp up the products that were needed, I'm telling you, I was having discussions with the president of our company and I was talking to her and saying, "You know what, what's the plan?" First, it was calm. But then when we saw sales drop off of 20, 25% leading up to the end of the month of March, I mean, the last two weeks, we were down 25%. Like I said, that's when costs overrun profit.

Mike Paton:

And at the time, we didn't know whether that was going to last another week, another quarter or another year.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yeah.

Mike Paton:

It was crazy.

Mitchell Goldberg:

I don't know where you're based, but in Montreal we're quasi-lockdown. We still have a curfew.

Mike Paton:

Right. Yeah. I'm in Minneapolis. And I was on a call last week with the group of entrepreneurs from all over North America, including probably 25 Canadians. And it sounds like things are loosening up a little more quickly here in the States.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yeah. Yeah. The States are great. I was actually supposed to go to the US next week, but I canceled it because I just got a fear that we have quarantine. You have to go to a hotel for three days and then quarantine for two weeks. And I said, "No." As much as I wanted to travel, I'm going to wait until things loosen up.

Mike Paton:

Well, I've been to Montreal many times. Hasn't that always been the rule if you've gone to a Boston Bruins game, you need to quarantine in a hotel for three...

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yeah, exactly.

Mike Paton:

Okay. All right. I think I remember that. Okay.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yeah. That's the rule.

Mike Paton:

Okay. Sounds good. Just don't go to a Bruins game and you're fine.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yeah, exactly.

Mike Paton:

So you talked about your brusqueness of your uncle and the bureaucracy of proper executives. Flip the coin for me. What'd you learn from your uncle that you want to emulate as a leader and what'd you learn from the executives at Seagrams that you want to emulate as a leader?

Mitchell Goldberg:

Well, you know what, there, I learned that despite his mannerisms and how he conduct himself, he managed to be respected. When he walked into the warehouse, people respected him, partly because of his way, may have communicated. There was an element of fear, but also an alignment of respect. And I learned that you can't be their best friend in business, but you could be their friend and be caring, but know where the line is.

And he did take care of his employees that were hardworking and loyal incredibly well. And he also did teach me that you need to pay people well, and don't try to save. If they need 5%, you give them 2%, that 3% is going to cost you.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Mitchell Goldberg:

He taught me that. He really endeared that into me a great deal, to focus on your employees. Because also, he was much older and he said he made those mistakes when he was younger. Hire cheap, fire fast. And he said, "No, that didn't work," until he realized employees are your most valuable asset. And so he was pretty rough on the people that he... I guess he has a manner where if you were not on the A-list, you're on his shit list.

Mike Paton:

There were only two lists.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yeah. So I really learned that from him. I learned how important it is to take care of your employees beyond just a simple phone call that really demonstrating that they mean something. And they do, every employee here. And I always say this regularly during our quarterly meetings. We're announcing someone's ten-year anniversary. It's heartfelt. Someone gave me a decade. And now we have multiple. We have like a decade team. Now we have people to 15 and 20, 25 years now.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. I just heard you say something magical that I want to zero in on. You said somebody gave me a decade. And I think looking at the employees that have been with you for a long time, as though they're

giving you a gift of time they could have deployed elsewhere is a really valuable asset. I really appreciate you pointing that out. That means a lot to people. And I don't think many of us pay enough attention to that.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Oh, absolutely. In fact, we have one employee, that's our bookkeeper. She just hit 19 years. And even now, my hairs on my neck stand up when I think about it, that she's with me for 19 years. Like I said, we have a lot 10, 15 and 20 plus years. You will not be where we are today, if they weren't as loyal, and if they kept switching them out and the cord just kept changing. Like you said, time is the greatest gift we all have.

Mike Paton:

You know, I think sometimes we have a tendency to view ourselves as more alone than we really are. Because as the hundred percent owner of your company, you feel alone in that role. But your 19-year bookkeeper has seen the twists, the turns, the scary moments, your highest highs as a leader, your lowest lows as a leader. And for them to stick with you, that's truly something special and worth recognizing.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Oh, yeah. We do. We really do our best to recognize that. It's an incredible thing when you see you have that much time with somebody. It changes everything, you know?

Mike Paton:

That's neat. So what are the most important leadership lessons you learned from the Seagram's experience? What are you hoping to emulate as a leader based on what you learned there?

Mitchell Goldberg:

Their structure.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Mitchell Goldberg:

I learned structure. I learned people have to have a job description. They have to have a role. Whether I'm [inaudible 00:19:54] to that well, I will say no. That was one of the things the US corrected us on, is that we had job descriptions, we had structure, we had a hierarchy chart, but was it well-run, well-managed? No. But I did learn that aspect from them, that structure aspect that I'm playing by the rules. Although big companies are guilty of doing all kinds of things nowadays, but it taught us, yeah, it made me compose an employee manual of conduct.

And this was well before it was acquired by ISO or even as the US model. It was, we were trying to stay ahead of that curve. That was one thing we tried to deploy as much as we can.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. When you go back to the clarity about people's roles, I think there's such a thing as so much structure, it all becomes blurry again.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yeah.

Mike Paton:

And there's such a thing as no structure whatsoever, and it's the wild, wild west. And what we're really trying to do in EOS is bring a little bit of structure, discipline, accountability, but it's got to be clear and simple because the more volume you throw at people, the more confusing it is.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yeah. I couldn't agree with you more. It's always a balancing act. It really is.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Good stuff. Can you remember a major success along your journey to build this amazing company you've built? What's the thing you've celebrated the most at Surgmed over the years?

Mitchell Goldberg:

Well, I'd say the biggest celebration came when we broke a hundred thousand in a single month. It's cracking that. Knowing you're on track now to having a million dollar revenue company, that changes things. And then when we hit the two and three million, I was really proud. Those are big moments. But I'm going to say that the biggest aha moment or the biggest change for us was really moving heavily into manufacturing. Most of our competitors were subcontracted to other manufacturers. Whereas I guess I'd say the experience I got from my uncle was not being afraid to buy machinery and have things manufactured.

Even still in Canada, which we're pretty much a rare breed as not many medical device companies based in Canada. We'll manufacture over 80% of our products here in Montreal. And manufacturing to me is just creating something and adding our own vertical and horizontal integration, was just a great accomplishment. It felt really proud to be able to take all the raw material and come up with a finished product. That was a big thing for us.

Mike Paton:

What was it that convinced you to take that plunge? What was the driving thought behind it?

Mitchell Goldberg:

Cutting costs, reducing our costs. How do I separate myself from everyone else? And also, I guess the other side of the coin is the more you, matter of fact, you're on your own, the less you're beholden to others. And God knows, we've all had bosses or how many people who are listening to this have two key suppliers and you lose one of your suppliers because they were purchased by another company and they already have a network.

Mike Paton:

Sometimes, the other key supplier.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Exactly.

Mike Paton:

Which is terrifying, right?

Mitchell Goldberg:

Exactly. Or even worse, your competitor bought your supplier and now you're in trouble. Or like other companies just have one big customer at Walmart and they decide that skew's no longer attractive to them.

Mike Paton:

That's right.

Mitchell Goldberg:

So what we're very proud of is that we minimize our risk of the supply chain. And more importantly, not one single customer represents more than 2% of our revenue. So it's a wonderful thing when you can fire a customer.

Mike Paton:

Yes, it is. Yes, it is.

Mitchell Goldberg:

It really is. We're not beholding to anybody.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. That's great. That's great. If I were to ask the people you spend the most time with in the business to describe your two or three best attributes as a leader, what would they say?

Mitchell Goldberg:

You know, I don't often think of myself that way. I guess it'd be that I'm very open and honest, and they will say one thing about me. And I said, if someone lies to me and they got caught in the lie, that person has to quit because I can't come back. That's one thing I don't tolerate. And even other employees will tell that person that wasn't lying said, "You should leave."

Mike Paton:

No kidding. Wow.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yeah. If you can lie to my face, then that's it.

Mike Paton:

You will never recover from that.

Mitchell Goldberg:

And maybe I'm wrong. Maybe it's a bad character trait, but you're not going to recover from my... Because I try to be as open and honest as possible. And if I don't get it back and someone lies, it costs us money or a really bad decision, but they could... I'd rather you own up to... I can forgive a mistake. How's that? And I've forgiven some really pretty big mistakes. I've forgiven guys who make 30, \$40,000 mistakes. And they stayed with us for 10 years afterwards.

Mike Paton:

Because they owned it.

Mitchell Goldberg:

They owned it.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. That's good stuff. If your teammates were bold enough to share with me a couple of things they wish were different about you, what do you think they'd say?

Mitchell Goldberg:

Well, this is probably George's fault now. I'm not here often enough.

Mike Paton:

Okay. All right.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yeah. I'm not around.

Mike Paton:

They want you in the office more than you are.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yeah. Yeah. [crosstalk 00:24:54]-

Mike Paton:

Anything else?

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yeah, that to me, I think is the big one or I guess sometimes they want me to focus more. I focus on what I want to focus on so they can send me emails and I don't respond to them quick enough.

Mike Paton:

Got it. Got it.

Mitchell Goldberg:

But that's because of George, that's because of EOS is that I have my own set of priorities and I manage my time to do what I need to work on. Because as soon as they... you think you're out, but they hold you, try and pull you back in.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Mitchell Goldberg:

So I worked so hard to get out. I don't want to go back in.

Mike Paton:

I'm one of several visionaries who got exactly the opposite feedback from leadership teams. We'd like you to spend less time in the office. So congratulations, Mitch, for being more valuable than me, but I'm sorry, because I think you would prefer the other.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yeah, no. Exactly. But no, I think it's my more relaxed state then they know I'm not... I'm not near as nervous or crazy as I used to be. The business moves into solid footing. The leadership team has taken ownership and I don't want to be dragged back into it.

Mike Paton:

Well, the needle we're all trying to thread is how do we make ourselves available as an asset that can be utilized by our leadership team members, but not meddle, for lack of a better term, not seize control. And that's a tough... There is some penduluming that has to go on where you're too disengaged and then you get sucked back in, and then you're too engaged. And so it is awkward. We're all on that journey together. I want you and everybody else who's listening, that's dealing with that to know it's not easy for anybody. [crosstalk 00:26:33]-

Mitchell Goldberg:

It actually isn't. It really isn't. They like me around. I think it's more of the presence is that I could go and talk to other employees and the morale and more of the motivator than anything else.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. That's great. Can you think of one big mistake you'd like to have over again, a decision you made or a project you kind of ran into the muck, anything you wish you could do over again as a leader?

Mitchell Goldberg:

As a leader, I'm going to say, I wish I was better structured as I am now. What we're doing now isn't reinventing the wheel. I wish I had better structure and organization at least 10 years ago, because I really think we'd be in a whole other element. I recognize my limitation was I was able to bring the company at one level. I couldn't get it past it. I was stuck. And I let my stubbornness not relent and not hire some heavy guns, not hire some people who are really smarter than me, and have a lot of other experience that they could bring in. And that's where I think I made my biggest mistake, is I didn't invest in other people who can help us.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. You viewed yourself as central to more deliverables and more decisions than was healthy for the business. And as a result, that was a constraint. Is that what I hear you saying?

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yeah.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Absolutely. How many owners of a business or CEOs, all of a sudden, they're looking at a bill on a desk for a thousand dollars and start calling the plumber themselves asking, "Why is that bill a thousand dollars? It should be 800."

Mike Paton:

That's right. Yeah.

Mitchell Goldberg:

And then you realize, that's just, A, either get someone else to do it, or just pay the bill.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. And so Mitch, my answer to your question, how many business owners are doing that is almost all of us. Because I've been there too, and everybody listening has been there and somebody who's listening right now is also looking at a stack of invoices on their desk and saying, "Oh my God, I got to get somebody else to do this work, for sure," which is why we do this podcast because we all need to know this is normal stuff and we're all going to grow together.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yeah, absolutely. Like you said, you just, you got to figure a way... And this is very hard. This is probably one of the hardest things there, to accept other people's mistakes and it will cost. But what is the actual cost to you and your business?

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Empower your employees. If you don't have the trust to empower your employees, you have the wrong employees.

Mike Paton:

Yeah, that's right. That's right. And that's a dangerous three-legged stool. You need the right employees, you need to be able to trust and then you need to do it.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Exactly.

Mike Paton:

And those three things can all break independently or together. And it is scary. That's the letting go of the vine constraint. And I love it. One of my esteemed colleagues, one of George's esteemed colleagues stood up at our quarterly meeting of implementers several years ago and reminded us all that Peter Drucker once was famously quoted as saying, "The bottleneck is always at the top of the bottle."

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yes.

Mike Paton:

Helpful reminder.

Mitchell Goldberg:

No, exactly. So if I would have realized that earlier, I think we would probably be 10 times the size.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Mitchell Goldberg:

I really believe it because as I say, you know, we spoke earlier about my trajectory. We're 18 to 25% per year for the last three years. And nothing's really changed other than better management structure.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Well, there's always the next seven years.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Yeah, exactly. Listen, like you, I think our gray hair speaks for itself, but, you know.

Mike Paton:

Well, we're going to talk about sliced bread and walking uphill to school both ways here in a minute, if we're not careful.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Exactly. Exactly. No. we want to find ourselves in a good position. I think that I could have been better than we are today. Like, I mean, a lot better. I've always wondered why do some of my competitors go from 10 million to a hundred million so fast. And I didn't think they were smarter than me. And now I know why, they were better operators than I was.

Mike Paton:

A little more structure. A little more discipline. Yeah. For sure.

Mitchell Goldberg:

So it wasn't for lack of work, that's one thing.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Here's a question for you. With operations and customers all over the world, do you sense any differences between leadership styles, what works, what doesn't work from country to country, region to region, or do you think leadership is leadership no matter where you're located?

Mitchell Goldberg:

I will say it's very different. Culture is... if you go into, like when I'm in Japan, it's a very different sense of leadership in Japan. It's a very structured operation. I thought the Germans had a very structured business. When I went to any of my customers in Germany, their offices, their filing systems... I mean, if you saw it, you'd say, "This is so organized." I mean, they can find anything. Japan made the Germans look like amateurs. But then when you go to some other countries, England, not as much. But I will say the leadership styles were very casual, were very different. UK, very casual leadership. The people I've dealt with, very friendly, always want to go have a drink, where Japanese organization structure, very respectful. People spoke extremely respectfully to each other. You didn't get any sense of any casual, very casual communication.

Mike Paton:

Everything very formal, yeah.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Very, very formal. Like I said, it just varies in different parts of Europe, Asia. You go to Eastern Europe, it's very casual Eastern Europe, very casual management styles. In fact, they're probably a little more old school than we are. They're still in the eighties.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. I may head to Eastern Europe when this podcast is over. The more formal, the more nervous I get. All entrepreneurs tend to prefer a little bit of chaos from time to time.

Mitchell Goldberg:

When I visit my customer in Japan, and I'm trying to get him to go out, or try to have some fun, when I finally break him down-

Mike Paton:

Then it's fun.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Then we have a lot of fun. But when he's in front of his staff, it's I'm like, "Get rid of your employees. Let's go talk." Then we have a great conversation.

Mike Paton:

That's awesome. That's awesome. And then any common threads, like no matter what the cultural norms, if you're not this, that, and the other thing as a leader, you're going to fail. Is there anything like that, that you've noticed around the globe?

Mitchell Goldberg:

Oh yeah. Absolutely. It's managing employees. We all sit around and I'll often talk about how to organize the business, how to manage your team, how to get your team to deliver, or how do we get... what tool do we need to get the product to market. Those are all very standard issues amongst [inaudible 00:33:21]. We'll all sit around and complain about problems employees, or how would you handle this.

I've been in business now for almost 30 years. So a lot of our international distributors have become friends and they were my network. Like if I had a problem, I would call [Lou 00:33:36] in Zurich or [Cherashi 00:33:37] in London, or [Marcus 00:33:41] in Austria. I would make these phone calls. They would call me. We have had regular conversations about how do we solve this problem? Or what should I be on this product? And the common ground was, we all wanted to succeed. We all wanted successful businesses and not work as hard as we're working.

Mike Paton:

Right. And figuring out exactly the right formula for how to reach each of the unique animals that is one of your employees to get the most out of them. I think one of the things I've noticed is there is no one size fits all approach. The best leaders and managers are the ones able to really discern what motivates each individual and reach them on their level. And gosh, the amount of inquiry and energy that requires exceeds most of our capacities, right? That's why we get stuck. That's why we get frustrated. That's really interesting.

One last question, before we close shop and let you get back to your business. If you were speaking to a young leader on the start of their entrepreneurial journey, think way back to your 12, 13, 14 year old self, and you had to give them one piece of advice that would help them show up as their best leader every day, what's the most important thing you think they need to hear?

Mitchell Goldberg:

Don't lose focus. Stay the course. You're going to have a lot of people tell you no, or discourage you. If you believe in it, work hard, do your best. Try to make it happen. So many people told me it wasn't working, to stop, to not push. Finding the inner strength to continue when you're fighting the odds.

Also, you have to know when to quit too. You have to know when it's time to... Like I said, when I've made that last sale, I was at the end of my rope. You have to know when's it time to push and when's it time to quit. I find a lot of people out there are quick to discourage.

What I tell my son who's unfortunately he's got my curse of entrepreneurial spirit, he's already on to his second business.

Mike Paton:

Awesome.

Mitchell Goldberg:

He'll find the one that works. He's done fairly well in his couple of endeavors, but hasn't found his perfect one yet.

But going back to what we said is that trying to encourage him as much as possible and also tell him, like you just said, never give up. It is that you really got to push and you got to be better than your competitors. You got to find your differentiating niche. If you don't find something differentiating, then you're not going to succeed. If you're going to be the next guy who can just paint a house, what makes you the painter they're going to select? You got to find what tool you're going to market that's going to make that customer select you over somebody else.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Love it. In your never give up thing, I think one thing you talked about earlier is when one door closes on a business, because maybe you don't have a differentiating niche. It isn't compelling. You're one of a million people who could do the same service. That doesn't mean you quit. That means you need to find another door to open.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Exactly. That's my point exactly, is that it took three businesses before I got here, before I found the one that worked for me. And the first one's not going to be... God-willing, it is. And I wish everyone the world of success, but it often takes a few doors to open before you find the right ones to walk through. It takes time.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Well, failure is the fastest and most permanent teacher. And nobody knows that more than an entrepreneurial leader. That's for sure.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Exactly.

Mike Paton:

Well, Mitch, this has been fabulous. If our listeners want to learn more about your company or about you personally, what's the best place for them to go?

Mitchell Goldberg:

They can go to our website at www.surgmed.com, S-U-R-G-M-E-D.com. Or they can reach out to me at my email address if they like, at mgoldberg@surgmed.com.

Mike Paton:

We'll put those details in the show notes. I want to say, thank you. I looked forward to and enjoyed this conversation as much as anything I've done on this podcast. You're a fabulous human being and a lot of fun to talk to. Thank you for being so generous with your time and helping us all become better leaders.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Thank you so much. It was a pleasure meeting you virtually. And I look forward to staying in touch.

Mike Paton:

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Yeah. And I hope we get to see each other in person real soon when things lighten up a little bit, prosper-wise.

Mitchell Goldberg:

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Sounds good.

Mitchell Goldberg:

All right.

Mike Paton:

Thanks again, Mitch.

If you got value from today's episode, do me a favor, share the episode with a friend. If you know someone who would benefit from the conversation I had today, make sure to share it with them.