

Speaker 1:

Leadership is more important now than ever before. The entrepreneurs are natural leaders. It's time step out, take control of your business, and decide to be your very best just a leader right now.

Mike Paton:

Hello, everyone. This is Mike Paton with the Lead Now Podcast. And today, I have the great pleasure of speaking with my friend, Rich Bahr. Rich is the CEO, group chair for Vistage, which means he helps CEOs achieve better results, grow their companies faster, and maximize their impact as leaders. Prior to becoming a Vistage chair, Rich has over 20 years of experience as the president and CEO of MGS Machine, a family business that he and his team grew into a successful multinational manufacturing company. He is also an author and the co-founder of Threshold to New Life, an organization which helps people in the Twin Cities bridge a temporary gap in their lives. Rich, thanks for being here. Welcome to the show.

Richard Bahr:

I'm happy to be here, Mike. Thanks for having me.

Mike Paton:

My pleasure. Do me a favor, tell us about your life today with Threshold for New Life and Vistage. Give the listener a sense of how you spend your days and weeks these days.

Richard Bahr:

Yeah. Threshold to New Life, first probably. So I got up at 3:45 this morning. I was downtown Minneapolis by 4:20. We serve breakfast to... Well, we're in a COVID era right now, so before COVID, it was about 100 homeless people a day, right now it's probably closer to 40. We serve up a hot nutritious breakfast and provide some other basic services to homeless people in Minneapolis. I'm also a volunteer chaplain, I support two shelters. Last evening, I got home about 9:30, actually working the streets and two shelters in and out. Again, connecting with men that are struggling, everything from having casual conversations, to prayer, to giving out hygiene kits, socks, jackets, things like that.

And my wife, Carla, who operates the housing side of what we do, she actually works with people that are struggling with their housing financially. We provide what we call a small... kind of a micro grant. So we match money that they can raise for the gap that they have, and when they raise their money and provide it to the landlord, we match it and we confirm with the landlord that they're in the clear. Last year, we did that 384 times. This year, it's going to be off significantly because of COVID. So that's a pretty big deal. So we're attacking at ground level tactically, like hands and feet, immediate needs, but also trying to reduce homelessness by helping people keep the housing that they have.

So that's the nonprofit, charitable stuff I do. My day job, if you would call it a job, is I have the honor of leading just short of a couple dozen local presidents, CEOs, business leaders through an organization called Vistage. It's an international CEO organization. There's about 24,000 members total, I think there's about 1,000 chairs. So I'm one of 1,000 people around the world that do this. And we meet monthly. I do one-to-ones each month as well. And it's really about helping leaders lead better, make better decisions and bring better results to their organizations, their families, and their entire life.

I was the benefactor of being a member of Vistage for 16 years. And so now the script is flipped, so I'm the old guy with the gray hair who supposedly knows some things so I can help try to be a guide to help people reach some of the goals that they have.

Mike Paton:

Awesome. So it sounds like you're spending 100% of your working time giving back.

Richard Bahr:

Yeah. I had a big shift in my life where I was pursuing success for a lot of years, and I took some time some years ago and decided that I wanted to shift from success to significance as being my filter for making decisions that I got involved in. I think of significance, I think about having an impact in people's lives, building relationships. And very interesting, so Vistage mentoring CEOs and working with homeless people, to me, both equally fit that same mission, even though they're very different markets, I guess if you would call it that.

Mike Paton:

I don't know. My stints as CEO has led me to feel like a homeless person quite often, so I totally get the connection. You can be out of sorts quite quickly in either endeavor.

Richard Bahr:

Indeed.

Mike Paton:

Rich, take us back to that change. That's a really interesting thing to share early in an interview like this. What was it that precipitated this change from a pursuit of success to significance?

Richard Bahr:

I feel like I have a small strategic windshield and a giant strategic rear view mirror. Most of the best strategic things I've ever done are usually from the result of reflection and looking back and going, "Hey, we got going down this path. Let's pursue that. That makes sense. Let's keep doing that." I was in a small group Bible study with a guy that decided to go down outside of a homeless shelter and start serving oatmeal out of the back of his van about 14 years ago. And because he was a friend of mine, I'm like, "Hey, Dave, how often are you doing that?" And he's like "Every day." I'm like, "Every single?" "Each day."

"Well, who's helping you?" "Well, I'm just doing it." I'm like, "No, no, no, no, no, you need some help. So let's figure out how to help." So me along with some other fellows decided to take some different days and step in and help. And it was a bit serendipitous because through that, that's what triggered the heart change for me to really find that I had been given a gift of being able to love people that the rest of the world sees as despicable, and I felt like that was so unique that I really had to exercise that. So I began to step into that more. And as I did that, it helped change my identity because up until that point, I identified myself as a husband, a father, a CEO, a business leader. I was leading another nonprofit at the time.

And all that stuff is well and good, but the reality is that those weren't equally weighted. And I put an awful lot of weight on being a CEO. And I knew that because my disposition on a daily basis changed based on how the business was doing, in my guts. Obviously, we give a degree of that, of ourselves into our vocational role. But I think for me, it was unhealthy, it was too much of it. And if I had spent more time thinking about, "Hey, I'm a good dad and I'm a good husband," and this and that, "The business faltering, but hey, we'll give it the level best and get a good night's sleep tonight."

That wasn't my life. And so when I reflected back on that, the move to the more benevolent things helped reshape my identity. And I think it put that CEO box or weighting in my life in the proper perspective. It still mattered, I still cared, but man, my life wasn't rattled if we had a bad quarter or some bad earnings or we didn't make a sales forecast. I wasn't like crawling up the walls and staying up at night looking at spreadsheets. Those days were gone.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. That's great to hear. Let's help the listener understand what your life as a CEO would look like. Tell us about the company you built and ran.

Richard Bahr:

Yeah, I was the SOB, son of the boss. My dad with a couple of other fellows founded design and build manufacturing company back in the '70s. And in the early '90s, we formed together a plan to buy out the other shareholders, which we did. And then in '96, my dad decided, and this is my recalling of it, his story might be a little different, but what I remember was that he didn't want to deal with people issues or money issues, which has a lot of issues. And I was pining for that top job. And so he basically turned the day-to-day control of the business over to me. So I was, I don't know, 26, I'm running this. It was a rather small manufacturing company with my dad, technically working for me if your dad actually ever works for you, but at least if you drew it up, that's the way that it worked.

Sibling, a brother and a brother-in-law that were both involved. And very interesting, at different times they were in leadership roles, but for the most part, and even at the end, neither one of them were part of the senior leadership team. We had to learn, and that's another topic that relates to family business, but we, I think better than a lot of family businesses that I've seen, we learned to be pretty good at switching hats. I mean, we understood when we were board members, when we were shareholders and when we were employees. And a lot of that is to their credit, my brother and my brother-in-law, that they really learned their place in that.

But anyway, that was a hoot. We did that for 21 years. I think, I went through three leadership teams by the time I was done. Can you imagine, the son of the founder, who's on the leadership team, all of a sudden now is your boss and he's not 30 years old. That must have been horrifying to those... I feel like I should be sending condolence cards or something like that to people that worked for me at the beginning, but it was a growing opportunity. We grew it and then figured out a way to exit the family a few years ago.

Mike Paton:

I'm going to interject here because you're being a little too humble. What I observed in the several years, I was lucky enough to work with you and your team is that you genuinely care for the people around you and you listen well. And so people can surrender control when they feel like they're being heard, is my observation, and you did that as well as anybody I've seen, Rich. So pat yourself on the back a little bit, if you would.

Richard Bahr:

Wow, well, that's a high compliment, Paton, thanks. And as I was thinking about our conversation today in leadership, one of the things that I don't know, I don't see a lot written about or talked about as it relates to something core or central to leadership is really, I think it's a matter of the heart. I think really good leaders... I think you can be successful without it, and I think we've seen that... Well, first of all, it

depends on how you define success. We've seen people obtain worldly success, lots of things and money not having it be a matter of the heart. But I think when it is a heart issue, you really care about the people that are coming along with you, you really care about what they care about, you really care about what the customers care about, and then your whole network of partners.

Leadership is the we thing. When you look at a for-profit business, we had suppliers that we partnered with to loan them money to help expand their businesses so that they could provide better service to us. And in turn, the better services that they now have access to, they could sell those to other customers, and then they paid the money back on top of that. So it's like a triple win. That's the we thing in terms of leadership. I mean, versus just using a hammer to slash my prices and improve my delivery. Same thing with employees, same thing with shareholders, if we're in it simply for ourselves and our own gains, man.

I just think people are way too transparent, and I think that that gets smoked out in a nanosecond, and who wants to work for somebody like that? No A Players, no Level 5 leaders, like Jim Collins talks about.

Mike Paton:

Well, and I think my observation has been that you don't have to have ill intentions in order to struggle with what you just shared in that a lot of leaders are so busy they just don't take the time to slow down and really contemplate what the other people they're interacting with need out of a relationship, they don't take the time to ask and then listen to the answer and factor it into the strategies and decisions they're making. And so I couldn't agree with you more. Could not agree with you more.

Richard Bahr:

There is an intentionality behind it. I'll give you a quick example. One of the things I learned... This sounds pretty elementary. One of the things I learned was important in leading a business or a group of people is that celebration and recognition matters. And that sounds like, "Oh, thanks for the help on that one, Rich." But see, to me, I'm not a natural celebrator, it's not in my DNA. I mean, we win a big job, I'm not, high-fiving people, I'm relieved, I'm like, "Whew, okay. All right." And then like five seconds later, I'm moving onto the next thing.

Mike Paton:

Where I'm going to get the next one?

Richard Bahr:

Yeah. It's just gone for me. But I listened and I learned that it was really important, and that was something I was terrible at. So what did I do? I made that somebody else's job because I wasn't good at it. So I made somebody else responsible for managing a calendar. We had a steady stream of regular times that we gathered as a team, both leadership teams, small group teams, as a whole company to communicate, to celebrate everything from daily bars in the summer to blood drives, to pizza at the end of the quarter if we made our metrics, and everybody thought that that was so awesome about us, but the reality was, the only thing it had to do with me was me knowing that it was important and knowing that I didn't know how to do it.

Mike Paton:

Well, thank you for sharing that because what you did was not lock yourself into your own limitations, you built a mechanism in your organization, gave the responsibility to somebody else and augmented your own capabilities. And again, another really important leadership discipline, the ability to delegate. I want to keep on this subject. One of the things that intrigued me about this conversation is, you have extensive experience as a business leader, as a coach for other business leaders and as a spiritual leader. And so as a result, you get to see politicians, clergyman and women, business leaders, all kinds of leaders lead. And so I wonder if you might just share what you believe the common thread amongst all great leaders you've had the pleasure of watching might be amongst all those groups?

Richard Bahr:

Well, that doesn't put me on spot, Paton, thank you for that. It's an interesting question, because which way are we best to assemble that profile, by looking at the bad ones or the good ones?

Mike Paton:

And for the record, my follow-up question is, what are some traits that you see that people from all of those various forms of leadership typically struggle? What causes problems? So you can start at either way. I think we're going to flip the scale.

Richard Bahr:

Well, we were just talking about heart. We could begin there. I think that overly played self-interests which to the extreme end would be narcissism. And I got to be careful here because when I talk about success, I'm not talking about who has the most toys at the end wins, I'm talking about peace of mind, I'm talking about respect, I'm talking about lots of people lining up at the microphone at your funeral because they all have something that they just feel like they need to say. There's a lot of ways to measure success. And to me, it's not about the money. Having said that, yeah, of course, I would be trivializing it to say that... I was fortunate to be able to have enough success to be able to get in a position where we could make some lane changes in my life, and I'm grateful for that too.

So I'm not completely diminishing it, throwing it out, but we need to put it where it belongs. So that heart issue and that genuineness is a big deal. I'm going to use another uncommon word in leadership that I don't hear talked about very much, and it's vulnerability. When I think of vulnerability, to me, it's so closely linked to trust because it's unexpected. And if I'm a top level leader and I'm willing to be vulnerable with my team, and I'm not talking about missing a quarter forecast and then breaking down into tears, that's just creepy, but really sharing from the heart in an appropriate way at appropriate times.

What that does is it builds trust in the team. And the people that work for me, my immediate leadership team, I used to tell them that I had an 80-10-10 rule, and the math isn't exactly right, but it is to etch a concept in your brain. So when I hired you, Mike, if you joined my team, "I'd say, okay, Paton, excited be working together. You're on my team now. So look, Mike, when I hired you, I hired your intellect, your boyish good looks, your charm, your education, your experience, your contacts, your work ethic. I also hired your alcoholic step son, your mother with Alzheimer's, your bad hip." When we hire somebody, they're bringing the whole package with them, and the whole thing comes whence.

And so the thing I would instruct my team is that, "80% of the time, I need you to keep that all in balance. I need you to keep that all in balance. You've got stuff going on outside of work? Deal with that, and hopefully, deal with that mostly outside of work. And when you're working, be locked and loaded. And then 10% of the time, you're going to come to me and say, 'Rich, I need a pause. I need a break. I

need some extended time off. I need you to show me some grace on this.' And then the other 10% of the time, I'm going to say, 'I need you to step it up. I'm flying you to Timbuktu, I need you to be willing to stay there for three solid weeks, which means no returns over the weekends.'"

So there's these emotional deposits and withdrawals that we make. And I think that that's important. And so, that last 10% that we ask our team into, if they trust us, they're going to give us that 10%. And the reality is that if they trust us and they're really high performers, we're going to have to stop them from giving us a lot more.

Mike Paton:

Correct. Correct. Yeah. You mentioned something else and that is, I think, worthy of its own bullet point in this conversation with just grace. So genuineness, caring, love, compassion, listening skills. But grace, the ability to recognize that everybody's carrying baggage and every once in a while, it's okay to take the foot off the accelerator pedal and show somebody a little kindness goes a long, long way, a long, long way.

Richard Bahr:

I have a few examples that I won't bore the details, but a handful of examples over my career, where I was in the position to either provide grace or not, and I always lean towards grace and did that. And the truth is that there was a handful of those times that it really worked out and I had long-term people that would bleed our company's colors. There were other times where it ended up being a very imbalanced situation, and I guess if we were keeping score, we would say that I lost. But that isn't what grace is, right?

Mike Paton:

No.

Richard Bahr:

Grace isn't alone, grace is a gift. That's why I never loan money to family and friends. I'll give them money, but I'll never loan them money because the relationship matters. So if I want the relationship to matter and I'm going to show you grace, that's a gift. I don't expect anything in return for that. Just like if you're my brother and you're not going to be able to make your house payment, I want to make your house payment, I'm just going to make your house payment because the problem is that now there's an expectation that's attached that one of us is going to make a mistake and there's going to be a misalignment and there's going to be friction in the relationship. So it comes back to values. What do you value more? What do you value more? And if you put relationships up on top, well, then the other stuff matters less.

Mike Paton:

I want to summarize this for our leaders by quoting Simon Sinek on this subject. And I was the host of a talk he did here in the Twin Cities probably 10 years ago, and one of the questions he was asked from the audience was, "What's the one thing all leaders have in common?" And he thought for a minute, and he said "Followers." Which I thought was a brilliant answer. And what you summarized were a set of characteristics that make people want to follow you as a leader. And I've observed that people either want to follow their leaders or they don't, and you get what you pay for. And so for the listener out

there trying to incorporate this into your own approach, please spend more time asking yourself, "What can I do to be the kind of leader that people want to follow?" For what it's worth.

Richard Bahr:

You might ask yourself, "Who do I want to follow?"

Mike Paton:

Exactly. And what are their characteristics and attributes?

Richard Bahr:

Who would I like to follow?

Mike Paton:

That's exactly right. Let's flip the switch a little bit and focus on the things, the destructive behaviors. You've seen a lot, I know that you have a personal relationship with George Floyd having spent time with him for many, many years, and we're watching a lot of social change happen in this world at a very rapid pace. What are some of the mistakes you see in leadership that lead to such divide?

Richard Bahr:

Well, let's flip that around and pause for a moment. I think the best leaders at any level, and so if we're talking about the government, recognize their own shortcomings, they shore those up with having a great team. They listen to the team, they make decisions that are hard, even at their own potential detriment that might be unpopular, continue to listen to the constituency, and are constantly assessing, if I'm going to change my track, what's at the root of that? What's causing that? Is it because of pressure of popular opinion or is it because the experts are giving me new data? Because I think that makes a big difference.

In the political world, and this isn't news to anybody, it seems like the vast majority of politicians, it's a vocation, it's not really public service in my opinion, which means that there's a built-in agenda to get reelected, which flies in the face of sometimes making what might be an unpopular, but right decision. As a CEO of a private company, I had the benefit of knowing that the decisions that I were making that were unpopular, weren't going to get me fired. So quite frankly, it was like a 1,000 times easier to be able to make those hard decisions. And I'm not saying this to vilify any particular politician, it's an extraordinarily difficult job.

And I know even from the writing that I've done, when I look at the reviews of my books, I'll get X number of good reviews and I'll get one bad one, and all I want to do is read the bad ones, and just think about the bad one. And politicians, I don't care how popular they are, we're very tough on them in the public eye. So I think it takes a very special and unique person to be able to do that job, and unfortunately, it's maybe almost tilted to the fact that some of our best people in our society just don't want those jobs.

Mike Paton:

Right. Well said. What have you learned, I know you're a reflector and very introspective, what have you learned about your leadership and your role in the community based on what you've watched happen over the course of 2020?



Richard Bahr:

I have a lot of African-Americans friends, I'm deeply entrenched in that community, at the same time. I'm embarrassed to say that there's just things that I didn't recognize about the gaps between my life and upbringing and opportunities. And maybe many of my friends, not all of them, but too many, too many of them, I feel like I've not been racist, but I feel like I haven't been anti-racist. And I feel like to me, that's one of those things as a leader where saying that I'm anti-racist and what that means to me would make me unpopular to some people, maybe even some people listening, but as a leader, I'm willing to accept that burden that if you no longer like me, follow me, I'm okay with that because that's a difficult decision, a difficult thing for me to say that I believe is correct.

Mike Paton:

What are you working on personally to become more anti-racist? Give us an example of the kind of things you're not doing any more or trying to do more of intentionally?

Richard Bahr:

One of the things that I'm doing is I'm trying to learn more about unconscious bias. And I actually have a speaker coming in February, Valerie Alexander, I think is her name. And she's going to be speaking to my Vistage group about that. One of the great things about leading a Vistage group is that I pick the speakers, so it's my agenda. Now, granted, we've gone over this together, but I felt like it was very important in our community with those business leaders that I lead is to expose them to some different ways of seeing things and looking at things. And I'll tell you what, I feel like I'm pretty forward thinking guy, and I'm not a racist and stuff.

And I'll tell you what, man, I was looking at a video that she produced and she did this little thing and this test about unconscious bias. I was a miserable failure, I failed at every level and I'm just like, "Oh, my."

Mike Paton:

I think I know the video you're talking about, and so did I.

Richard Bahr:

Yeah. It was a TEDx Talk. I'm super pumped about having her in here. And again, I don't like all these labels, white privilege and this and that, because the problem is it seem like those labels or Black Lives Matter, that means something to you means something to me, and if we're not perfectly aligned on that, now we've got this friction about it. So I try to stay away from the labels, but I try to hang my hat on the concepts. I want to be more inclusive with my brothers and sisters that don't look like me. And really anybody that is on the have side of the have, have not equation, I think has a duty and a responsibility to reach our hand out, to try to help other people.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. When you were talking about the shortcomings that might contribute, fuel to the fire of divisiveness earlier, one of the things I've noticed is we seem to live in a soundbite world, not a concept and deep conversation about important ideas world. And as a result, what I see, and I've seen this on leadership teams for 13 years doing this work as an EOS implementer, when a team is aligned on the underlying concept, it's propensity to argue about the label or the name or something they don't align



around is massive. And so I'll always say, you appear to be in violent agreement, meaning they're arguing like hell, but they really agree on the path forward.

And so that's my observation as well, Rich, is that if we could just all quit taking everything so personally and focusing on these little labels and soundbites and get in a room and say, let's just love one another and try and make things better together, a lot of problems would seem less intractable.

Richard Bahr:

Yeah. I'll give you an example. As a pastor, I pastor people of all kinds of backgrounds and faiths and don't discriminate from that. Jesus really told us to do two things, love God and love others. It's pretty simple. Even in that venue, I oftentimes don't introduce myself as a Christian because even that label now in this day and age has got baggage attached to it. And so that might be a pretty negative thing to a Muslim immigrant that came here that's been indoctrinated about what that all means. Just like people that are evangelical Christians here, Mike, you say Muslim, hair in the back of their neck stands up.

Again, another label, we package these things up when we shove people into that box, that mold, and it's not fair. So I don't even... People say, "Oh, are you a Christian?" I say, "Why? I wouldn't say that," which is a great way to straighten a conversation. "Oh, I thought you said you were pastor?" "Oh, I am." "But you're not Christian?" "Well, you've heard of Jesus, right?" "Oh yeah. Sure." "Well, so I have studied his teachings and I believe what he said is true and I'm doing my best to follow him." "Oh." And it's interesting because almost anybody from any background of any faith can accept that explanation. Again, we've defined it.

Mike Paton:

But they have been conditioned to put a label on it that might reek as misaligned from my own beliefs with a lot of people who wouldn't argue with that belief, right?

Richard Bahr:

Yeah. And I'll tell you what? There's a lot too many terrible, terrible examples of Christians in the marketplace, and I don't have the time or desire to defend them.

Mike Paton:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Nice. I want to go back to something you said very early in this conversation, which was that your work as an author and in your nonprofits has involved spending a lot of time with people that others look at as despicable. Talk to us more about where that word and feeling comes from and how we might as listeners contribute to changing that perception.

Richard Bahr:

I've sadly been told too many times by people living in the homeless community, I've been asked the question, "Do you know what it feels like to have somebody try not to look at you?" So I get it now, Paton, we're on Zoom and gear up and I'm up and we're making some eye contact or you stop at your local barista and they'll make eye contact. So it's like the most simplest form of humanity that we exchange with each other, is that simple contact of eyes. And most of us, and I have been guilty of this most of my life, is that we avert our eyes from those situations, people that are uncomfortable, or we might be in a supermarket, we see somebody with special needs and we try not to look, and it hurts.

That's what I'm told is that it really, really hurts. And so, as I understood that better, I just completely changed my tact. And when I get the opportunity to talk to people just like this... and there's

reasons that we don't make eye contact. And to me, the chief reason is that, because we're not prepared. We're not prepared. If I make eye contact, am I setting up some a contract between you and me that there's going to be some sort of exchange? Smile or God forbid some money or a food item or whatever? Is there going to be an expectation attached? Are you going to assault me? What's going to happen? So we're setting up this potential transaction that is gray water that we don't want to walk in because we can't see the bottom of it.

Versus, if we anticipate that and say, "You know what, I heard this dude on this podcast. And I do run into homeless people from time to time, I'm going to think a little ahead about, and I'm going to be intentional about it, and I'm going to be ready. So that the next time I see a homeless person, I'm going to fill in the blank. I'm going to have a gift card ready to hand them. I'm going to have a pair of socks. I'm going to smile and wave." But we haven't anticipated it. So a big part of being a leader is about being intentional about things and not allowing life to just happen to us, but about being intentional about what's our response in every situation.

Mike Paton:

Wow. Rather than pretending it doesn't exist by averting your eyes.

Richard Bahr:

Indeed, yeah.

Mike Paton:

Really good stuff. Take me back to your early years. I can vividly remember when I first saw somebody leading or connected with the concept of leadership, can you remember that moment?

Richard Bahr:

Probably not. I've probably spoken too much dope.

Mike Paton:

And that's a wrap.

Richard Bahr:

Yeah, that's right. Caught. And maybe this is, I don't know how other people see this, I don't have super particular leaders where I hang my hat on things. I knew that somehow what came over me even as a youth was that... I guess the highest form of success or garnering some result was to have led people to and through it to achieve it versus having done it yourself. There's a certain amount of satisfaction in doing something yourself, but when you do it as a team, it's way better. And so I was an athlete, I was involved in things, and so had some experience, both as an individual and as a team to win and lose and have those experiences.

And so I became really attached to the idea that I want to lead and I want to lead a team. And I somehow knew, I was going to lead a company one way or the other. We were going to make that happen.

Mike Paton:

And what'd you do to groom yourself for that opportunity?

Richard Bahr:

I was self-absorbed, not terribly interested in other people's agendas, bad listener, impatient, pretty smart, not as smart as I thought I was. And I would say, and I'm not trying to be overly deliberate or humble here, and I wish I knew how to attribute this, but the one thing that I got right was that I knew I didn't know what I didn't know. I mentioned earlier that I now lead CEOs through Vistage, I was a 16-year member of Vistage. And I actually belonged to two other peer development, grooming, networking groups even before that. So literally, the entire time when I was a VP of Ops to president CEO, that whole span of my career, I was being mentored and developed. And I had places to bring my questions and I had people that could mentor and develop me and call me out on my BS.

So I had people, I had my own team that had my back, that were bringing me along for the ride. And I remember joining that first Vistage group as the youngest member with one of the smaller businesses and feeling pretty small at the time. And seeing these other men and these other women running these successful businesses, it seemed like whatever the situation that came up, they had something to say about it. And I'm like, "I didn't even understand the question." And I wanted to be one of them to that group. If I could be a leader among leaders, what's better than that? And that was my aim.

Mike Paton:

Awesome. Have you ever felt absolutely stuck or flummoxed as a leader? What was the situation and how did you work yourself out of it?

Richard Bahr:

Oh, yeah. Lots of times, and never alone. The journey for my former company in the US would be a good example. We had had classic strategic consultants, a couple of really good ones, good smart people, we built great plans, grateful for the work that they did and we did at the time. And so we were like, this is like our third time around the horn in that process. And I remember on my giant whiteboard, I think out loud and I think visually, so giant whiteboard, colored markers, to, to, to, to. And I had this matrix up, and I had EOS up, and I had strategic planning, and I'm trying to figure out all the differences, everything from the time investment to the cost to whatever.

And when we met as a team, and I'd like to think I said it, but maybe somebody else said it, but it was a we thing. And it really came down, to which one are we more likely to have success with? A great strategic plan that we implement poorly or great implementation with a weak strategic plan? And it didn't mean that we were going to come out of with a weak strategic plan, but the reality was that our execution was C+ at best, even with some of the brilliant plans that we had. And it came down to, do I trust my team enough to think that they're just smart enough to not be so sort stupid to work on stupid things?

But as we execute the things that they want to work on and we're nailing these things 80% stronger better, are we going to move forward? And that was where the switch flipped for me is that, you know what, EOS for me was really not about what I know, it's about what I do. And when I read the Traction book 10 years or more ago, or whatever, the first time I went through it, I flew a lot and I'm on a plane and I'm highlighting and whatever, whatever, whatever. And I get to the end and I'm nodding my head like, "Yeah, yeah. I know that. The score cards, yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah. Discipline, got that. Accountable, oh yeah." So I knew all of these things. I knew them all.

And I was on my next trip and I still had the book with me in my backpack and I took it out and I thought, "Okay. I'm not satisfied with my results. I'm reading a book to try to get better results." And all I

did was basically convince myself that I already knew everything. So what's the gap there? And I literally opened the book back up and I went through my highlights and I thought, "I'm going to ask myself this question about everything I highlighted, what do I know? And what do I do?" And that's what EOS for me does, is it closes the gap between what I know and what I do. So many entrepreneurs I talk to that look at Traction, it's like, "Well, it's not rocket science, just basic blocking and tackling." It's like, "Yeah. Is that what you do in your business?"

Mike Paton:

How's that working for you?

Richard Bahr:

How's that working for you? Right. And so that was where the switch went off. And the team helped me come to that conclusion that it's not about what we know, it's about what we do. We know a lot of things but we just don't have the discipline to do.

Mike Paton:

Yes, that's right. Well, it's about execution. One of your fellow Vistage chairs was the first person I heard describe EOS as a tool for strategic execution probably 10 years ago. And strategic planning is only valuable if it helps you execute better.

Richard Bahr:

Indeed.

Mike Paton:

Great concept. All right. I'm going to wrap it up with one last question. And the purpose of this podcast is to inspire, and inform, and educate, and improve leaders of all stripes from all different walks of life. And the best leaders I know are constantly wanting to learn new things and get better at stuff. So if you could give a young leader a gift that would help them become a better leader, what would you tell them to focus on or think about having listened to this podcast?

Richard Bahr:

Learn to listen without forming the response in your head.

Mike Paton:

Brilliant.

Richard Bahr:

I've been working on that myself, it's really super hard. And I'll give a tip, there's a way to actually get better at it. And the tip is to slow down and be willing to be uncomfortable with just a little bit of white space between that person ending and you beginning. Number one, it's so honoring to somebody else that they were heard. So honoring, back to the vulnerability, back to the trust thing. It's a way to honor the other person, and it also, what it does is it's like a mechanism that clearly demonstrates that I wasn't hurrying to simply respond to what you're saying, but I really wanted to give you the space to be heard. And it's amazing how as I've worked on this, and I got a long ways to go, it's super hard, but as I've been working on this, the recognition that I get from other people, they notice this, they really notice this.

So I think learn to listen, truly listen, and slow down and hold back on your response. And as a top-level leader, if you're leading a team and you've got all these brilliant ideas you just can't wait to lay on the team, speak last, let everybody else talk. And the reality is that by the time you give your answer, you already have all this other data that everybody's talked about, and you can sum that all up and lay on one little golden nugget on top of that, and everybody thinks you're a genius. No, you're a disciplined listener, is what you are.

Mike Paton:

Great advice. Thank you, Rich. This has been fabulous conversation and I know our listeners are going to be enriched because of the time we spent together, all because of you, I might add. Before I wrap up, the people who want to learn more about you and the things you're passionate about, where should I tell them to go?

Richard Bahr:

I've got a website, it's my name, richardbahr.com. So it's R-I-C-H-A-R-D and B like boy, A-H-R.com. From that, there's connections to our ministry, there's my blog, my books, all that stuff is there.

Mike Paton:

Awesome. Thank you very much. I can't wait to watch you work in the next part of your life, and I'm grateful to be able to call you a friend. Thanks for it.

Richard Bahr:

Thanks for having me. Agreed, me too.

Mike Paton:

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.