

Chris Carlson:

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Mike Paton:

Hello, this is Mike Paton with the EOS Leader podcast. And today I have the great pleasure of speaking with my friend, Chris Carlson, the founder and former visionary of Sportech, a leading design and manufacturing partner to some of the world's most respected vehicle OEMs. After successfully growing the business, building a world-class team and ultimately selling the company, Chris founded Envision Company, a family owned and operated firm that makes direct investments in privately held businesses.

In his role as CEO, Chris is able to apply his 25 years of experience building great companies upon a foundation of core values, a strong culture, and consistently exceptional performance. He's also been able to invest time and energy in his various passions, spending time with his family, running the family race team Carlson Moto, building a world-class race track and events venue, and spending time outdoors with friends, family, and team members. Chris, thanks for spending time with me today. Welcome to the show.

Chris Carlson:

Well, thank you. Happy to be here.

Mike Paton:

Start by telling me you caught the entrepreneurial bug as a young man.

Chris Carlson:

The bug. Yeah. I think that I was very fortunate to be raised in an entrepreneurial environment. My dad was that crazy wild-eyed entrepreneur. And one of the things he instilled in me from a very young age was you can do it better. You can do that. You can build it. And I think that's quite empowering for a young man, especially. I remember my teenage years, and we had a family business, just a small family fishing resort in northern Minnesota. And we were constantly facing problems and challenges where things were breaking and things were going well and he could always figure it out. And he said, "There's always an answer. There's always a solution." And it's interesting that today I look back on my career. That's basically what I've done is fix things. Right? I'm a problem fixer. I think I owe that to my dad.

Mike Paton:

I hear that story a lot on this show is that you've just spent your whole life doing something you were passionate about or good at. And you woke up one day and somebody started calling you an entrepreneur and you realized that's what it was. Right?

Chris Carlson:

Yeah, right.

Mike Paton:

That's great stuff. Was your dad the first person you noticed was leading something or was it, were there other influences in your early life that you watched as you developed an appreciation for leadership?

Chris Carlson:

Yeah, I think my dad was maybe one of the first. But I think I had a unique situation in that with this family resort again, we had people from all walks of life that were customers, that stayed there. And they were business owners and they came from all different areas and in different careers and different opportunities. And I learned a lot, and I was an inquisitive little rascal, and I asked a lot of great questions about, "What is it you do, and what do you make, and how does that work?"

And I met some really good leaders and they actually helped our us with the resorts. Some of these guys are running big manufacturing companies, and they would come to this little family resort and help us with process and how we were ... They taught me how to scoop minnows better, right. Optimize drilling holes for the fish houses. I think there were some good examples in some of the folks that I was exposed to.

Mike Paton:

Do you remember any particular story or any individual in particular?

Chris Carlson:

We had a guy that used to come to the resort that became a good friend. The guy really liked to fish. And he was this guy that owned a business. And I probably met him maybe when I was 13, 14 years old, built a relationship with him, spend some time fishing with him, met his family. And he really was just super impressive guy, the way he carried himself and the way he always seemed to have a really cool group of people around him. He was definitely an influencer and a leader. And I tried to learn as much as I could from him.

Interestingly enough, when I was in college and still guiding and hanging around, I spend some time with this gentleman. In my junior year, he offered me a job and I had known him since I was probably 12, 13 years old. And I wasn't crazy about working in the field that he was in, and didn't know anything about his business. I had much higher aspirations.

Mike Paton:

Of course.

Chris Carlson:

[inaudible 00:04:58]. Should I need-

Mike Paton:

A world to conquer.

Chris Carlson:

Right. But if I needed a backup, I would have that opportunity. And he said, "Well, the author's there." And I ended up going to work for him right out of college. It was a great experience for me as a young business person. I learned a lot. He had influenced me at an early age.

Mike Paton:

Some of the things he was doing that you wanted to emulate?

Chris Carlson:

You know what? It's amazing. I remember vividly that he was one of the best listeners I had ever met. And in fishing circles, that's not always common because we talk about fishing. I caught more or bigger. Talking about the experience and the emotion. And he was one that would just listen and smile and say, "That's great. That's awesome." And he had a way of extracting information from people. He would get their spot and get their technique and the presentation. And I remember just marveling at how he was polite, but was a great listener and asked really good questions, and that influenced me. He was a humble, pretty humble guy, and that goes a long way.

Mike Paton:

That's great. Fast forward to the start of your Sportech adventure. Walk us through how that all happened.

Chris Carlson:

Yeah. Sportech was founded with a single product idea, and back to my father, who was the wild-eyed entrepreneur. He was a commercial designer by trade. He was a craftsman, worked with his hands. He was a classic artist, right? The guy could paint pictures and paintings and it was very ... could do sculptures, but was a commercial artists too. There's not only wild creativity, but there was some viability to it too. There was some commercial viability. We had always had ideas and things we were working on it. He had an idea for the snowmobile headlight cover. It occurred while we were out riding [Somervilles 00:06:47] at night, one time. And there was a recessed headlight on these old Polaris that we wrote. And we would dive into a snowbank or go off the trail, and the snow pack in, and you'd lose your headlight.

You're going at a high rate of speed and it just went black, and it was a problem. And people talked about it. It's like, "Man, you got to really watch it." He designed a little ... We're standing on the side of the trail and said, "What if we just made a little plastic piece that slid behind the windshield and popped in here. You wouldn't need fasteners or anything." I remember taking the manual out of the back seat of the snowmobile, kind of sliding it in there and thinking, oh yeah. And that was it. That's how it started, and we started as a home-based business with one product and then went to more. And so primarily just through aftermarket and then caught the attention of the OEMs early on. And that's really what drove the growth is when we started to build those OEM relationships. And they saw that we had some level of innovation that they desired to be a part of, and we built some trust early on. And that was the way it all took off.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. And you exited the business in 2019, late 2019. Is that right?

Chris Carlson:

2019. Yeah.

Mike Paton:

From your own home-based business designing the initial product to how many employees?

Chris Carlson:

I think we were 425 roughly at the end. Yeah.

Mike Paton:

And lots of different products to lots of different types of OEMs. Yes?

Chris Carlson:

Yeah. But best known for cabin closures for off-road vehicles. So everything from side-by-side utility vehicles to forklifts, to golf carts and anything in between. If they needed a windshield and a roof and door systems, and they got quite a complex at the end, these were automotive doors basically that had power windows and a lot of features. And they were going on these side-by-side utility vehicles that are \$30,000 machines. They were fairly complex, but started out very basic. And I think the innovation that really grew the business in the beginning was there right to the last day. And that was really our linear for us that separated us from our competitors is that when we were great manufacturers, and we could participate in that space and be competitive. But the thing that really set us apart was, the differentiator was that creativity, the ideas, the [inaudible 00:09:07].

Mike Paton:

And the problem solving. Instead of going back to the earliest days of sitting alongside your customers and solving problems with them, as opposed to providing them with a product they had already figured out they needed.

Chris Carlson:

Yeah. And that's ultimately what it is. There's an issue. And that's what the customer does is they come to you and say, "Hey, we're having an issue with this. We need some help." And that's what we did. Yeah. And it's fun and enjoyed it very [crosstalk 00:09:33] much.

Mike Paton:

You and I have spent enough time over the years. I know you've had some highs and some lows, and I want to talk about a little of both of them. Take me to the first time you remember that spectacular success that you experienced as a leader of that business. What was it? What happened? What'd you learn? How did you celebrate?

Chris Carlson:

Oh, I think the first moment that I really realized that this thing was going to take off was just one of the OEMs that we were working with early on. We came to them with a bunch of really good products. They took them out to their dealer network and did dealer some shows and the response to these products that we designed for them with their brand and their logos on it. When they hit, the response was amazing. And when the orders started coming in, they called me into the office and they said, "Hey, we need to put in a significant order." And we were probably million in revenue at the time, right? Maybe 800,000 working out of my home and beat up old forklifts and a pool shed. And I had another business and full-time job. Sportech started.

I had a little time in between jobs and went in there, and we slid across the purchase order that was, it was \$700,000 for these, just these recent products that we developed. And we had only done a million in revenue the prior year or less. And I remember thinking, first of all, oh how am I make ...

making all those parts. That's a lot of plastic, and I don't think I have enough tooling. But then I just remember thinking that's pretty cool.

And it really had started to scale. And when you're working, you have another job and another business and two little kids in diapers. And all of a sudden this one opportunity, it was evident to me this thing was going to take off. And that's when I sold my other real small business and helped fund our first building. And I quit my other job. And my wife loved that. "You did what?" [inaudible 00:11:39] with all the benefits of that guaranteed paycheck, sold the other business. Here we go, baby. But that was it.

Mike Paton:

To sell some normal mobile parts?

Chris Carlson:

Yeah. Snowmobile parts. But that was it. There's no question. That was the beginning. And what it does, what it did for me anyways, was really gave me the confidence I needed to take the leap. Right? There were a series of gigantic risks that I took in the coming months and years on commitments to equipment, commitments to people and hiring our first employees, commitments to facilities, mortgages contracts with these major OEMs to supply them. I think that was the piece that really gave me the confidence like, hey, this is going to happen.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Well, it's not like saying no to the \$700,000 purchase order was an option. Sometimes not really feeling like you have a choice is the key to your first giant leap. Right?

Chris Carlson:

Well, yeah. I don't think saying no would have been an option, but I think there would have been some that maybe would have had trouble delivering it on time or committing to the resources that it was going to take to get that done. We were all in. And I think that was the reason that I got the next order, which was three times that large, because they're saying, "Hey, we're going to test this guy operating out of his pool barn if he can fill an order like that within lead time." And we did. And then they gave us more and more and more opportunities. That's really what it was right up to the final day. They were testing us. I never felt like there was a day that they weren't testing us.

Mike Paton:

Of course. And that's the juice, right? That's like being in a race.

Chris Carlson:

Right.

Mike Paton:

Somebody's got to finish first, and somebody's not going to finish first. What are the leadership skills you relied on and/or wish you had in those early days that got you through or would have gotten you through with a few less bruises?

Chris Carlson:

That's a great question. It's interesting for me to answer that today because I'm sitting in the business that we just purchased, and this is day two, and it's a business that's much smaller than the one that I sold and not nearly as finished. It's a little messy. It's got some, so I'm back doing things today. I'm out walking the floor, and I'm resolving issues that, similar activities that I did 20 years ago. Right? And I think back to how I did it then and how I do it now. And I think there's some similarities, but I'm more patient. I think that as a younger man, there were times when I ... We all want to get things done, and I'm impatient by nature. I told you that I once passed an elderly woman on a salad bar, who was picking away at the peas and the corn in the little cup, that I went around her to the peaches and salad dressing. That's how impatient I am. But I remember being impatient to the point where it made people uncomfortable and it was really not that productive.

I think I'm a little more patient today. And I think I can accomplish more with just a little more patience and maybe just doing a little more encouragement. I think the one thing that I know now more than ever is that it's about people. You can talk all you want about process and systems and they're invaluable, but if you don't have the right people, boy, that's an EOS deal and it was invaluable.

Once you get that leadership team in place, it sure makes life a lot easier. And that's where I'm at here now is we just don't have that yet. I find myself when I discover there's an issue, I want to go find my CFO. Well, I'm going to talk to my CFO or I'm going to go to my VP of ops, or I'm going to go to my VP of engineering. Well, guess what? They aren't here. People are really, really important at all levels. And I'm much more cognitive of that and aware of that than just focusing on putting the right people in the right spot.

Mike Paton:

Yes. For the time being you're in a place where you can't delegate because you don't have the right people. And mission one as we've discussed is to change that over time so you can rely on other people.

Chris Carlson:

Yeah.

Mike Paton:

That's one of the observations I made about you and our journey together is that I thought you were as good or better a delegator than anybody I've ever seen. And it took real joy in watching people take on responsibility that was hard for you to give up and supporting their journey through both the success and the failure, which is the really hard part, when somebody screws something up that's important to you. How'd you learn to do that? I would imagine there were some fits and starts along the way.

Chris Carlson:

I think that's one of the hardest things that leaders and business owners have to deal with because by nature we're driven, we're Type As, we're impatient. And we can do a lot. I think I was decent at a lot of things in business. To your point, when I had to turn that responsibility over to someone, it was tough. But I know that after I did it, a couple of times, a couple of things occurred. When I had the right people, they came in and killed it and did a better job than I was doing, which is awesome. And that's gratifying, but it keeps you a little bit too and say ... because we all have an ego. We can either admit it or we can deny it. But I mean, it's like, I thought I was pretty good at that. And it turns out this guy is even better. But there's some great joy in saying, but I did put him in that position, so I recognize that. I mean, and that's powerful.

And then there's tremendous joy. One of my favorite parts of business in leading is empowering people, equipping them and empowering them and putting them, coming around them, coming behind them to support them and then watching them succeed. I don't know that there's anything that makes me happy. It's like when your kids just really, really start to thrive, and they get it, whatever age it is. It's just as a parent, I don't know if there's anything more rewarding than to watch your kid figure something out and then thrive. And it's similar in business. When you get an opportunity to help someone, you develop someone, you encourage them, you empower them. And then when they knock it out of the park, to me, that was man that was it. That was about the coolest thing I had ever experienced.

Mike Paton:

Well, and one of the things I wanted to touch on was the passion with which you started the leadership academy in Sportech, and how hard you work to help other leaders, even outside of the business, your round table group, and your group of entrepreneurial friends that you help and support. Where's the motivation for that? And what are the gifts you receive in return?

Chris Carlson:

I think the gifts are the same, whether it's your own employees or your friends. I really enjoyed the peer group experience. I'm in a CEO peer group. I've been in one ever since I started my first business. Never not been in one. Some of my best friends on this earth have come from that experience. But far more than the friendships and the networking, it's the accountability that comes out of there. And then the resources that you get from these other business owners and leaders. And to me, I enjoyed that tremendously because there was always someone. I try to get in groups where you're not the biggest, and you're not the smallest. There's always someone in there who's been through what you're fighting through right now. And there's usually someone that you're able to help who wants to benefit from experiences that you've had.

And I really enjoy sharing that. It's super rewarding for me and really adds that whole experience. To me, again, that's very similar. I guess that's the piece of leadership that's the most rewarding for me, is to see people flourish and know that maybe I was a small part of it. And sometimes it's just simple, right? It's just encouraging them. I had an employee that started with me when he was 16 years old. You know him very well. And he's one of the smartest young men I've ever met in my life, but he was a little short on confidence.

And I had to encourage him, nudge him, beat him in ... I mean, I had dragged him kicking and screaming with each promotion. But when he actually saw that he could do it and he started to thrive, it was just an amazing experience for him, but also for me. At the end, it was easier obviously, but he's top executive in the company now and does very, very well and very, very successful. But every time I look at him, I remember all those different stages, and it wasn't real fun for him at the moment, but it sure [inaudible 00:20:22] to watch him.

Mike Paton:

Well, two things about Caleb, and I'm going to use his name if you won't.

Chris Carlson:

Okay. You're going to get [crosstalk 00:20:27].

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Mike Paton:

I'm going to use his name. Number one, if he's not scared, he's not living.

Chris Carlson:

That's right.

Mike Paton:

And number two, the more confident he got, the more humble he became, which is a really rare thing.

Chris Carlson:

Isn't that something?

Mike Paton:

It is amazing. Let's play on this theme a little bit because you've seen many leaders and managers and supervisors and company owners and racers succeed and fail as almost anybody I know. I want to play a little word association game. When I say lousy leader, what are the characteristics or attributes that come to mind?

Chris Carlson:

Arrogance would be the first one. I think humility, if there's an absence of humility, it's nearly impossible to be an effective leader. Awareness, lack of. Right? I think the best leaders are keenly aware, and that's personal awareness. They're aware of themselves and the wake that they leave behind them and situational awareness. They can sit in a room. They can be in a group of their key leaders and understand who's struggling and who isn't.

You may or may not have a little bit of this awareness I'm talking about when you're standing there with your orange and black pens, and you pick up on it in the room and say, "Wait a minute, I want to go deeper on that." A lot of times you're identifying an issue, and we dig and dig until we root it out. Then that makes that whole experience with you so powerful. And that's something that I witnessed you do. I've tried to work on that my whole life, is try to be aware because people give you signals, right? And if you're not paying attention to that, it's hard to be a great leader.

Mike Paton:

Isn't it true that one of the things a lot of people are afraid to do is just ask when they suspect there might be an issue. I can't tell you how often when somebody says, "Well, how do I know when I'm offending someone else or being an arrogant jerk?" Why don't you just ask?

Chris Carlson:

How about a qualifying question? Is that over the top?

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Chris Carlson:

Do you get what I'm saying or is that too much?

Mike Paton:

As simple as, hey bud, why the look? Did I just offend you? It wasn't intentional. I think we get in our own way sometimes. What else? What are the other things that you think can turn a team off or prevent people from being the best they can be as leaders?

Chris Carlson:

Yeah. I think just some really simple things that you shouldn't even have to say this, but how about demeanor? I mean, if you're just generally unpleasant. It's funny, right? But we all know leaders that just, you know what? They're nasty. They're mean. They're not nice. They're really not any fun to be around. People don't want to work for people like that.

The other thing too is that regardless of your capabilities and your pedigree and your long list of degrees and whether or not you can do calculus with one arm tied behind your back, don't talk about that. Don't make those that work for you or in any kind of a subservient role, they shouldn't feel bad about that. And I see leaders that love to pat themselves on the back, or they love to tie one on and money, how big their house is. And you're trying to develop people, and you're trying to earn their trust. I mean, it's just ridiculous to me.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Good stuff. There are listeners and quite frankly me. I work hard on all those things you just mentioned, some harder than others because I want to get better every day. What are the tools you think leaders who want to get better can rely on to figure out that they've got these blind spots and improve?

Chris Carlson:

To your point earlier, you have to ask questions. I mean, one of the things I do is I go to my trusted inner circle and these are deep, very good friends of mine that are leaders, that are business owners that are people that I know and trust and respect. And I'll just call them and just say, "Hey, am I missing something here? Because I'm owley about this." Or here's I have a situation. Here's my instincts. Am I missing something? And once in a while they'll say, "Yeah, you're being a dink about it and you maybe can ..." It's like yeah, that's what I thought. Wait. Come on. You know better. Or sometimes they'll say, "No, you have every right." Or, "You're going down the right path."

I think if any of us gets to the point, regardless of what our title is or how old we are, what we've accomplished, if we ever get to the point where we think we've got it figured out and we don't need any help, we're in big trouble. And I feel bad for people that aren't in peer groups or that don't have people, friends, resources they can lean on. You're not getting feedback, and you're missing things. And I think that's the most important thing for a leader, ask great questions. Be aware and make sure that, man, just pay attention to what's going on around you. And if you're not sure, ask for help and find those that are keenly aware in your organization. Don't ask the suck up that's going to tell you what you want to hear every time. Go to your friends that aren't afraid to pop you right in the chops once in a while.

Mike Paton:

Yeah, tough love for sure. From the start, family and business has been intertwined with you. Family, fun, faith and business has been intertwined with you. Talk about how you're able to blend all those components into a whole life when so many of your compatriots feel like they need to compartmentalize all that stuff.

Chris Carlson:

Yeah. That's a great question. I don't really know what to attribute that to. Probably just luck. But I've been a blender for a lot of years. I remember listening to people say, "Hey, if you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life." Right? We've all heard it a thousand times. Could it be any more true? I mean, you genuine ... I've asked you. How many days do you sit in this room and do this? And it's remarkable that you love what you do. And the people that are the very best at what they do, love it. And so I've been able to have been fortunate, blessed enough to be able to work in a field. When I owned Sportech, it's an industry that I just love. I love the outdoors. I love power sports. That was a blend, and we blended the racing component that tied in nicely with the business.

We owned ERX, the race track, and that Sportech benefited greatly by being associated with that. Our customers loved going out there. That was a blend. This new business I'm in, we're in the boat business. And I loved being on the water. I am a boater. I'm a fisherman, and I just love the product. And so I'm doing it again. And I'm with my family. From a value standpoint, that's very important to me, who I am. I have a set of core values that I use to guide me in my life. I've used those exact same values in my businesses. I'm introducing them here now. And I talk openly about my faith, talk openly about who I am, how I live my life, and that's a blend, right? And it just happens to add to absolute clarity.

It's authentic. It's talking about who we are. I have friends that aren't as open, and they don't care to talk about their faith as an example at work. And I never understood that because while I'm not going to impose my beliefs on anyone, I think that I owe it to them to share with them who I am and what I stand for. And it helps them to know how I'm going to respond when they understand who I am and my core values. I'm more predictable. Right?

I mean, I think they respond under different circumstances. Yeah, I always try to blend family and faith and business and try to blend in industries that I love. And then when I'm working on things I love, because I know the other side for me is if I'm doing something that I really don't like, I just suck and I can't stand it. I get bored really fast.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. And for the record, I also suck at a lot of things I really liked doing. You're lucky in that regard. I'm going to synthesize what you just said. This is a summary you can agree or disagree with, but number one, be crystal clear on who you are and what's important to you. Number two, be genuine with the people around you about those things rather than hiding them or compartmentalizing them, because then it buys you the opportunity to just be you.

And also be aware that not everybody is like you and tolerate that they're their own individual as well. And expect them to show up as the people they are. And you're going to spend a lot less time worrying about how people are going to take who you are at the core.

Chris Carlson:

Yeah, that's a beautiful job. Yeah. And then specifically the predictability piece. I mean, I have great respect for people who have completely different views than I do on some big things in life. I mean, spiritually or politically. I really find it refreshing when we can have respectful conversations and understand where we each are coming from, and then know that that's where they stand. And then we just work [crosstalk 00:29:39].

Mike Paton:

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We just move on. And many times you let me know that you respected my completely wrong opinion, so that was great. Our relationship [inaudible 00:29:48].

Chris Carlson:

You were wrong a lot. I was too shy. No, I think you and I are a great example. I value our friendship, but I know we don't stand exactly toe-to-toe on a few issues, but it's not an issue. It's just like, that's fine. Whatever.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Well, for the record, I love collecting people with different perspectives. The last thing I want to do is have a group of friends who agrees with me on everything. That sounds awful.

Chris Carlson:

Yeah, you're right. You know what? That's a big deal. I couldn't agree with you more. In fact, I sometimes in the last year, I got to a point where everyone I know completely agreed with me on certain topics, politically, as an example. I had to call some of my friends that I knew had a different [inaudible 00:30:38] say, "Hey, straighten me out on this because I don't understand." [crosstalk 00:30:43].

Mike Paton:

I'm in a bubble here. I can feel the plastic walls.

Chris Carlson:

I'm in a bubble, yeah. I got to pop the bubble. Help me. [crosstalk 00:30:50]. They love doing it. It's like, yeah, you are so wrong.

Mike Paton:

I'm with you.

Chris Carlson:

Yeah. I'm with you. I enjoy that.

Mike Paton:

All right. Tell us a little bit about this next chapter with Envision Company. You formed this organization after selling Sportech and you're ... Well, why don't you say it in your own words. What's Envision Company all about? What was the motivation for starting this next chapter?

Chris Carlson:

Envision Company was created after the sale of Sportech, and Envision is a family office that serves as a holding company. We have a couple of small businesses in there now. Our family race team, Carlson Moto, and ERX racetrack. But our goal was to create this office and then to acquire businesses in the outdoor space. Right? Consumer products, outdoor arena focusing primarily on marine, hunting, fishing, and then related industry. Areas again, the blend, right? The blending areas that I love, areas that I'm passionate, areas that I have some level of expertise and my family. We're in this together.

I brought a few team members with from Sportech to form the family office. We've got some financial folks. We've got some HR folks. We've got some biz dev folks and facilities people. And we've been searching for a year and a half basically, and have looked at a number of businesses, and we just closed on our first deal last Friday. And yesterday was the first day. I met with all the employees, and we're on the ground here today doing battle. The business is a Premier Marine. They are a manufacturer of high-end luxury pontoons located here in Minnesota. And they've been around about 30 years, and it's a great brand, a great legacy.

And we're very, very excited about coming in and maybe applying some of the manufacturing techniques and approaches we've learned through the years at Sportech and some of the leadership things that we've learned the hard way and bringing some great people and equip them for success. It's a great brand that has a great reputation. And they've hit a bumpy stretch here, and we're just trying to come in and that's all we're doing now, is going back to ... reverting back to where we were 15, 20 years ago at Sportech and team-building and process and systems. It's actually kind of fun.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. I'll be watching carefully. I know it's going to be a fun ride with a couple of bumps, and I know you're going to finish first in the end. Good luck.

Chris Carlson:

Well, we hope so. I might have to call you a couple of times and scream and holler, and you might have to talk me off the ledge, but we'll get there.

Mike Paton:

All right. Here's my last question, and then we'll close and let you go. If you were patting a young leader on the back who's just trying to get better every day or grabbing him or her by the ears and giving them a piece of wisdom that they really need because they just screwed something up, what's the most impactful thing you could say?

Chris Carlson:

I think it's just that you have to pick yourself up and keep moving. I think that a lot of young leaders want to be perfect. We all do. They want to try to get through a business career and never make a mistake. And there's a saying that I'll probably butcher but, "Success is determined by our interpretation of and response to failure." The most successful leaders I know are those that have gone through the valleys, have crashed, have had problems. I mean, I sat in your office many times like, "We got a problem here." I mean, and I think the ability to get through it, put it behind you and move on.

A business advisor I had at one time said to me, and we came to them and it was this catastrophic problem where he's sitting with my team, and I'm describing this and the world's going to come to an end. He says, "Well, it's tragic Chris, but I don't think we can afford to dwell on it much longer so let's move on." I mean, at the time, I thought this may be the most insensitive thing I've ever heard in my life, but I use it all the time now.

When I see a young leader that has struggled or they're struggling or they failed, I try to help them make sure that they see that for what it is. It's a mistake. It's something that happened, and we have to move on. We can't dwell on it. And nor do we ever want to let that define who you are. So that's it? We're not going to go any further. Are you going to resolve this? Are you going to be going to beat it into oblivion and move on to the next thing? Every time we go through that, as you know, all of us old

guys know, you get stronger, it's get better. If you look at it correctly, if you see it for what it is, it's like, well, yeah, this is what happened. And by the way, here's how I screwed it up. Write it down, document it. Don't do it again or avoided at all costs. And then move on.

Mike Paton:

I couldn't agree more. Really good stuff. The change and reflection caused by the big failures in my life always, always, always have led me to a new level of clarity, understanding, capability, humility. I would be nothing without those failures. And so you learn to be more grateful for them than the falling backwards out of a boat and hitting water successes that you've had.

Chris Carlson:

Right. It's business, it's marriage, it's parenting, right? It's not just any one aspect. It's all aspects of our lives. That what that returns us to, what we first talked about is humility, right? It's that attribute of the best leaders I know, because for you to be able to look back on a tough situation, see your role in it and be able to say, yeah, I really ... Here's what I did. I screwed up. I should've done this. I made a mistake. You have to be able to say that. If you refuse, if you're either unable or unwilling to take ownership for your screw up, you will never get any better. And I see people say, "Oh yeah, we got through that. And we're much better now." But they never really see it for what it is. It's like well ...

Mike Paton:

If you're not looking at every failure as an opportunity to personally get better, because you're so busy trying to figure out who screwed you over or who really caused the failure, you're never going to grow.

Chris Carlson:

Right.

Mike Paton:

Never going to grow. Couldn't agree more.

Chris Carlson:

It's pretty common. These are not super difficult things we're talking about. It's just really simple, straightforward.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Simple doesn't always mean easy. I'm a living testament to that fact. Chris, this has been awesome. I could talk to you for another hour, but for the listener and for the two of us, I'm going to call the question here. For the listener who wants to learn more about you and the cool stuff you're doing, is there one place they can go online to find out more?

Chris Carlson:

Oh, I think pontoons.com is the website here at Premier. EnvisionCompany.com is our Envision family office website. And I think we do a pretty good job of telling the story. And then the Premiere story is just beginning. We're just really looking forward to that fresh start and implementing a lot of the things we've been talking about here. Like I said, it's not going to make me move at the speed that I would like, but we'll get there.

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Mike Paton:

Well, let's just hope it's not an old lady at the salad bar.

Chris Carlson:

Yeah. Right on. Yeah. And if she, oh I'm going to pass her.

Mike Paton:

That is exactly right.

Chris Carlson:

It is.

Mike Paton:

All right. This is Mike Paton with the EOS Leader podcast signing off after another great episode. Thank you all for being here. Hope today's episode makes you the best leader you can be.

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.