

This transcript was exported on Nov 29, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Brian Sullivan:

Have the confidence in yourself to invest in yourself in The EOS life. My initial time commitment into it and the financial commitment into The EOS life to me was I was concerned. But once I had the confidence in myself that in our team that we could do it, man, [inaudible 00:00:19] started rolling. And I'm glad that I did. And our firm was probably a little small compared to most that start The EOS journey, but I'm glad we started it when we did. It really was great. So I think have the confidence in yourself and in your team that it is going to be worth it and that your family, your loved ones, whatever it is that you love doing outside of the office is worth getting that time.

Speaker 2:

The EOS Life is-

Speaker 4:

Doing what you love-

Speaker 5:

With people you love.

Speaker 6:

Making a difference.

Speaker 7:

Being compensated appropriately.

Speaker 6:

With time for other passions.

Speaker 8:

The EOS Life.

Mark O'Donnell:

Hi, I'm Mark O'Donnell, visionary at EOS Worldwide. And I'd like to welcome you to another edition of The EOS Life Podcast, where we explore the why and the how of entrepreneurs actively living their ideal life. Now, not later and not in retirement. The world of entrepreneurial freedom and the impact on those around you, hands on it.

Today I have the pleasure of speaking with Brian Sullivan. Brian is the founder of Sullivan Engineering, a husband, a father, and someone who's just a great caring human being. Brian is someone. I also had the privilege of observing his journey to live his EOS Life. Welcome to the show, Brian.

Brian Sullivan:

Thanks Mark. What an honor to be on here with you.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah. And it's great to have you. So Sullivan Engineering, let's dive into the business. What exactly does Sullivan Engineering do for our listener who has no idea what architectural building envelope engineering might be?

Brian Sullivan:

Yeah, absolutely. So we are in the niche of building envelope restoration. So we handle the repair of anything on the outside of a building, facades, roofs, windows, sidewalk, side walls, it's very exciting stuff, but it's a nice niche to be in particularly where we started, which was the New York and New Jersey area.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah. And so just so I have it straight, if a building is falling apart and it's dropping bricks on the street in New York, you're the company that someone should call to make sure that doesn't happen. Is that right?

Brian Sullivan:

Exactly. And moreover, we try to proactively, there's a law in New York City that every building greater than six stories has to be inspected to try to mitigate that and before that happens, because unfortunately there have been tragedies where that has happened and there's been injury and fatality. So there's a law that says that you have to hire a qualified engineer or architect to do that inspection and then design the repairs that need to be performed to protect the public.

Mark O'Donnell:

Nice. Nice. So Brian, I want to get into your entrepreneurial journey a little bit as it pertains to that journey to ultimately live your EOS life, your ideal life, knowing that it is a journey, it's continuous. So when did you start Sullivan Engineering? How did you get started?

Brian Sullivan:

Yeah, I started in 2010. I was working for a company in this niche for about nine years. When I finally realized it was time to try to hang my own shingle with my wife's support and friendly nudging, we decided that it was time for us to start down that journey and start Sullivan Engineering April 2010, which was a rough time in the economy, but in some ways, a really good time to start a professional services firm because people would look and say, hey, they're a little bit more cost effective and they could use us and work with us and take a chance on us. So I started in 2010 and we grew slowly for sure in the first few years and worked our way up till when we met you in 2015, we were 10 people.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah. So you mentioned your wife and her nudging. So tell me about the moment, the exact moment if you can remember when you said I'm going to start my entrepreneurial journey, I'm going to start a company.

Brian Sullivan:

Yeah, absolutely. If you don't mind Mark, I'll take that and talk about two moments. And I think the second one, but the first one was just where I was working before and being content with where I was and comfortable. But seeing a bigger future that was available for me and even those around me, those that reported to me and whatnot and wanting to be able to provide that bigger future and do it in my

own way. And I didn't have it identified as having core values or anything like that, but I knew that I wanted to do it in an ethical manner and in a way that helped encourage growth for everyone on the team, not just myself.

So that was something and I think my wife and I just had conversations over time and at one point she just said to me, she said, "I think now's the time for you to do it." And our children were young. We had three kids at the time. They were four, two and a newborn. And her comment to me when I pushed back and said, well, maybe we should wait a few more years was now's the time to do it. If they have to eat rice and beans, now they won't know the difference. If we don't go on vacation for a few years, they won't know the difference. The closer we get to college, the harder is going to be to start and to make that sacrifice. So she was wise in that. That was the first.

And if I can jump into the second one Mark, about seven or eight months into the business, when it was really... I was starting to self-doubt, was really creeping in more than had been already. She caught me one night sitting on the couch, working on my laptop and asked me what I was doing and I brush her off and said, "Nothing. I'll come up to bed later." And she knew as a wife does. And she pushed and she said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "I'm working on my resume." And she came over and she closed the laptop and she said, "No, you're not. You're almost there. You're almost there." And she closed the laptop and said, "Go to bed." And she knew I was just tired. I was exhausted. I was self-conscious. I was insecure about it. And thank God she helped with a friendly nudge.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah. Sometimes all it takes is a friendly nudge, isn't it? And I think a lot of entrepreneurs that I talk to have, and I know I've struggled with myself is really having a sense of worthiness. Am I good enough? Do I have what it takes? And I don't know if that comes from childhood or what that is, but we always are wondering, do we have what it takes? And it's those pivotal moments where you're thinking, Hmm, I'm just going to pack it in and take the easy way out or just thinking that, well, I'll just go get a job like everybody else.

Brian Sullivan:

Take the safe way, right? What we think is the safe way. And when it's somebody that you truly love and admire and respect gives you that push, that really helps the confidence, right? That worthiness to your point.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah. So you start the company in 2010, you're about to pack it in eight, nine months later, your wife gives you that gentle nudge to just keep going, keep at it. Did you have a sense of why you are starting the company? What is your why for going through the blood, sweat and tears of starting a company and all the time away from kids and family and everything that goes into starting a company, aside from your wife's gentle, maybe not so subtle nudging, what's the why? What's the why of Brian Sullivan?

Brian Sullivan:

So the why back then to start was really just wanting a better life for the family. Absolutely. See the financial rewards of entrepreneurship. That can't be understated. But also wanting to be able to go to work. And I talked to a lot of young engineers that come to work for us about pulling in the parking lot at work and having the ability to, or with being able to pull in the parking lot and look around. And if there's a car there that you see, it's somebody else from work, you're going to be happy to see them

because you can control who you work with. And having that ability and not being able to pull in and say, "oh, that person's here today. I got to work with them." And what I mean by that is just being able to surround yourself with good people who do a great job, take pride in their work and share the same values. So have that mindset too, as well as helping others grow has always been a push from [inaudible 00:08:04]. As we've grown and my wife and I's entrepreneurial journey, we've gotten a lot more clarity about that now as well.

Mark O'Donnell:

All right. So just surrounding yourself with people you love being with. The one of the five points of the EOS life is just that. So that's cool. And so with your entrepreneurial journey, my last question on that one is when you were growing up, did you always see yourself as becoming an entrepreneur as a business owner, someone who's the master of their destiny?

Brian Sullivan:

No, I didn't. When I was young, I didn't. I knew a few people who started their own businesses, painting businesses, contracting some of my dad's friends, things like that and admired that, but I didn't come from an entrepreneurial family. So it wasn't something I saw until maybe the latter years of college as an intern, working for smaller construction companies and seeing how it changed their family and see how they were able to empower people, started to light a spark in me, but it took about 15 years for that spark to turn into a flame.

Mark O'Donnell:

Right. And maybe someone gentle nudging, right?

Brian Sullivan:

Yeah, exactly.

Mark O'Donnell:

Right. Same thing for myself while I had intention of becoming an entrepreneur, I wanted to go to law school. That was my dream. That's what I wanted to do. So I was at Johnson and Johnson as an engineer. And for whatever reason, my brother kept poking me and saying, "Hey, we should start a company. We should start a company." And I was like, "Fine. If the worst thing that happens is I'll go get a job like everybody else I'll do it." And I actually just thought of it as a faster path to go to law school. I thought I'd build this company thinking of those financial rewards and of course they come a little bit slower than maybe you might expect in the beginning. But my thought is, I'm just going to go build a company for five years, sell it, go to law school. That's really why I started. So-

Brian Sullivan:

That's great.

Mark O'Donnell:

... it's interesting how everyone's journey to entrepreneurship is just very, very different. And I think entrepreneurs are born and it just takes a little bit of time to discover it, and sometimes it's 15 years or so.

Brian Sullivan:

Absolutely. Yeah. I love hearing the stories about the kids who had their lemonade stand and then they turned it into a lawn mowing business and then next thing you know, they're a landscaper in college. That was not me.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yep. I did have paper route though, and did mow some lawns, but it was not... And a furniture business too. Now that I think about it, but there were not businesses that were going to make it.

Brian Sullivan:

No great business plan.

Mark O'Donnell:

No. Not at all. Not a bit. So 2010 you start Sullivan and you're growing the company. And how long did it take for you to really hit a ceiling where things just were really frustrating? You knew wanted more, but weren't quite sure how to get there.

Brian Sullivan:

It's probably 2014 is where we started to really see it, late 2014 into 2015. At that point we had 10 people all reporting to me. I had been starting to really devour business books from prior to starting the business, but never really found a solution that I thought I'd like, that made sense. You always hear of the bank teller that gets promoted to bank manager and then gets fired. And you're like, oh, well that's a terrible org structure, a terrible way to set it up. I just hadn't found a better solution. So probably late 2014. And then certainly in 2015, when we had 10 people reporting to me, I was the absolute bottleneck. And I was doing 40 hours a week of billable work in the field and then coming into the office at night and doing the stuff that later I return out to love but I was doing it at 11:00 at night, midnight 1:00 in the morning, doing it on Saturdays on Sundays and was resenting it because that's when I was doing it was pulling me away from the family.

Mark O'Donnell:

And so at that point, how many hours would you say you were working?

Brian Sullivan:

At that point, I was down to probably 85 hours a week.

Mark O'Donnell:

Down to.

Brian Sullivan:

Down to. When I started the business, we went back and looked at it, it was six days a week for sure, most of the time, seven days a week. And just a lot of that was just not good, useful time. So I was probably down to about 85 hours a week at that point.

Mark O'Donnell:

And how did your family feel about that?

Brian Sullivan:

They were supportive. My wife was unbelievably supportive. She carried a massive load with that. We had four children by then. She was very supportive, but it was absolutely hard. I distinctly remember the kids coming to the office one day and my three year old saying, dad is this where you live. And it's even still hard to not get choked up when they say that to you and you're like, "Crap, what am I doing? Why am I doing this? This is... Something's not right here. Something's broken." And then you try to find a way to fix it. And some of the ways you try to fix it, it gets worse and then eventually you find a way that makes it a whole lot better.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah. In my entrepreneurial career, I did travel a lot and my wife was very supportive. And there were certainly times where the kids were just like, hey, they started having their own conversations without me as I was sitting there. I'm like, well, I'm kind of part of this family too, but they're just saying, hey, you're here so rarely that they have their own inside jokes. They have their own things that they're doing and you're just not part of it. And for me in my entrepreneurial journey and pursuing that EOS life, those were some of the moments in time where I decided to make a change. And for me, that was ultimately selling my companies, but becoming an EOS implementer.

And so I'm wondering for you, so 2015, you and I met, we started implementing EOS. And for those of you who don't know what that is, it's the Entrepreneurial Operating System. What were some of the tools or concepts or inspirations, and it doesn't have to be an EOS tool, but what were some of the things that were like, hey, I need to start living in more balanced, more synergistic life than I have right now.

Brian Sullivan:

Absolutely. I think I can remember it in the fall of 2015 when we first met with you and we did the focus day and in the vision building day, one vision building day two and a lot of what we initially talked about really resonated with me. And if you think about my why that I talked about, was the purpose, cause and passion. Yes. Now we can have a purpose, cause and passion written down that everybody's makes it easier, the core values that make it easier.

And then you started talking about the processes. And even though I'm an engineer, you may or may not remember. I was like, "Oh, processes, really? What are we going to do?" And when you explained why we want to have the processes, you can have all your processes in place. It helps with training, it helps with onboarding, it helps with bringing people on board. And then I don't have to be the one having all the conversations, doesn't have to be verbal all the time about how this needs to be done, how that needs to be done and it saves a lot of the back and forth. Similarly, with the meetings, the level 10 meetings, when you explain that to us. Because the last thing I wanted to do was tack on processes and meetings and that's where I was digging in.

And when you talked about the level 10 meetings, and then we really started to dive in about how much time I would spend going to Kevin's desk to talk to him about something, then waiting till Mike was in the office and going to talk to Mike about something and then going to Adam and talk about Adam about the same darn thing that we could have talked about in a level 10 meeting, it started to click and say, wow, this is really going to give me some freedom. Did it click nearly as much as it

actually happened? Nowhere near? And I was like, oh, this is going to be nice. This is going to be good. And then once I actually got into it, it was unbelievable.

Mark O'Donnell:

So what were some of the... So we talked about the frustrations of working down to 85 hours, the kids coming in and saying, "Hey, do you live here?" Which is something we hear quite often in the world of entrepreneurship and that entrepreneurial journey. Were there any other frustrations that you were experiencing at that time that made you feel like you were going to give in and you're going to go update that resume again?

Brian Sullivan:

Some of the other frustrations was, is where doubt really crept in on leading and managing. And I loved doing it, but I didn't really... Wasn't looking at the right information to be able to do that. And some of the frustration that the team had, and I didn't know how to solve was we try to turn field reports around pretty quickly. And that's what we used to say to our client, "We'll get you your field reports quickly." And that was a lot faster than our competition. But we didn't have a real clear way to do that, but then internally in the office, if we couldn't turn it around, it was because so and so was slow. And now I'm trying to lead and manage and how could I manage it somebody's slow. There's nothing you really you can do that's very subjective. And I can't see be less slow. And so I was running up against that and saying, man, how there's got to be a better way. How do I have these conversations in an intelligent way? We have an awful lot of really, really smart people. How do I keep them motivated? Keep them fired up where it's not always just these verbal conversations where you've got to use your intuition and try to translate what somebody means by slow.

And I don't know if you're one of the first things that EOS did to impact for us was that we had an administrative assistant who used to be very frustrated with one particular project manager who was slow. And once we rolled out the scorecards and we could track field report, turnaround time, we now got to see what slow meant. And where everybody else could turn their field reports in in a day to a day and a half, this particular person was taking three to three and a half days. And now we can sit down and have a conversation, say, why can everyone else do it in a day to day and a half? What's the issue here? And it's not that you are slow, it's what's the issue.

And the issue was that she was trying to do a great job by being in the field for three straight days and then would come into the office and write all the reports. And boy, that's an easy solve. But let's just look at your calendar and figure that out so you're not in the field three straight days. And so the conversations very quickly went from instead of just stopping less slow, and now this poor young woman would've spent her evenings cranking out field reports to saying, why don't we just adjust when you're in the field? Because we talked about an issue and not the person or personality.

Mark O'Donnell:

It wasn't personal. It was just an issue and you open up the hood and look at what that is and free up time for her, free up time for yourself, do what you said you're going to do for the client, everything starts to work better.

Brian Sullivan:

Get rid of frustration in the office. And we had the metrics, but now we had the tool, the metrics to solve the issue.

Mark O'Donnell:

So you start implementing EOS, you create some processes, you free up some of your time. And for those listening to this podcast, they don't necessarily know what we're talking about when we say in the quadrants. So the delegate and elevate tool is four quadrants and it's part of the entrepreneurial operating system, EOS. And in the top left are things that you love to do and you're great at. In the top right is things that you like, and you're good at them. In the bottom two quadrants, the bottom left, is you don't like those things, but you're good at them, you have a certain level of skill with them. And then the right bottom is things you don't like, and you're not good at. So Brian, you were going through and you're using processes, you're using tools to move those 10 reports, move the 85 hours around on those quadrants. Did you find that you were able to free time up and when you did that, did it give you energy? Tell me a little bit about how that went.

Brian Sullivan:

Yeah, my delegate and elevate tool as it evolved through the EOS process is a case study in and of itself. So there were certain things that I had in my love great initially that were there either because I felt like they should be. As the owner of an engineering firm, I better have technical review of documents up in my love great, otherwise we're in trouble. Or that, you know what, I have to put it up there because I got to do that. Nobody likes to do that, so I should just put it up there. And, yeah, I'm okay with it so I'll just do it. And I would put it in my love great.

And then as we evolved and I started to see that other people actually had things like that in their love great, it was powerful and it gave me permission. But right off the bat, seeing people that had things in their top half that were in my bottom half just is unbelievably freeing. And we distinctly remember all of us on the leadership team talk about a conversation we had with you where you said some of the stuff that we have in our bottom half, we fall on the sword for, and we do it. And we do it just because we think we have to. But when we delegate that to somebody else, it's new responsibility for them and it gives them energy that we trust them enough to delegate that to them. And especially if it's in their top half, their likelihood and their love great is really powerful. So for me, for sure, there was quite a bit. Right off the bat, we knew that finance was in my bottom half. There was no denying that. But review of technical documents was something I felt I had to keep up there. Even management was something that it took me a couple of years before I moved that from love great for good, because I felt like I needed to. So you have to be willing to really get vulnerable and trust it but that's a very, very powerful tool.

Mark O'Donnell:

It is. And I came to a point in my journey where my entire business dropped to the bottom two quadrants, where the entire thing that I spent 10 years building nearly every component of it dropped to the bottom two. And that was the moment in time. I decided to leave the day to day, become an EOS implementer and pursue that. So now fast forward to today, Sullivan Engineering, you sold the company about a year ago or six months ago. When did that happen?

Brian Sullivan:

Feels like a year ago. Seems like six months ago. It was just two months ago today.

Mark O'Donnell:

Oh, wow. That's more recent than I thought.

Brian Sullivan:

Yeah, absolutely.

Mark O'Donnell:

So what part of your decision making process, how did you decide to sell the company?

Brian Sullivan:

Looking at our team, looking at who we had, looking at the skillset we had, there's just a tremendous amount of opportunity for our team in what they love doing and are great at in the company that acquired us. In looking specifically and selfishly at my love great, this was a really phenomenal way for me to be able to get to work in the areas that I love doing, they're great at. To take a good bit of risk off the table and to take a lot of those other things and offset it like HR and IT, and those functions and have this larger entity worry about that. That's not in one of our leadership teams love great or anyone we had in the organization in their love great. And we tried solving that on our own and were unsuccessful on it. And this became a really quick way to solve that, to solve those issues that we were having and that we kept bumping up against and weren't able to solve. We tried internally marketing was something we tried internally. We weren't able to solve. This solves that very quickly.

And then looking at where our team is and where they can be down the road and knowing their skill sets and their strengths, this was a great way to set everyone up on the team for tremendous success.

Mark O'Donnell:

So really selling the organization was a way to delegate and elevate and get everything out of your bottom two quadrants all at once.

Brian Sullivan:

All at once. It's a massive dump of the bottom half. Yeah, for sure.

Mark O'Donnell:

Very nice. If I remember correctly and what I've always noticed about you, Brian, is that you've always cared for people in a very genuine way. And even in the sale, in the conversation we're having with the sale, you've always wanted to provide opportunity for your people to grow and to achieve something. Is that continuously your why is that? What drives you still?

Brian Sullivan:

100%. Yeah. Whether it's my kids and wanting something for them, whether it's some charitable organizations we have or whether it's our team, I get so much energy out of that and really enjoy it so much more way more than even my own success or talking about success that the business had. It's more so the team itself and when there is an acquisition, it's a long process. So the initial conversation started in June 2020. And there was a short conversation there that lasted about a month and a half. And then I spent the good winter starting plotting out and looking at the opportunities that would've been there for the team and how it really would've been easier. And when you have a company recruit 47 people, so your leadership team is putting in insane amount of hours. They're carrying a lot on their shoulders. And many of them had young children and saying, man, I don't want that for them. I don't want their kids coming in and saying, dad is this where you live? Right? So thinking about that and

saying, hey, is there a better way to do this, be able to get some mentorship within the organization. All of that was definitely an impetus for it.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah. And so what was the moment in time in... You saw this opportunity, what was the emotional part of deciding to sell the company, talking to your wife who said, "Hey, close the laptop. Let's go." How'd that make you feel? Did you feel excited, worried, freaked out, neurotic, insecure, worthy?

Brian Sullivan:

Yes. Yes. All of them. Yes to everything. I mean, for my wife and I was a little bit more of a gradual process when we had the first conversation last year, it was during COVID when COVID was going from a sprint to a marathon. And I said, "Hey, you know what? We spent so much time on this. Let's make sure we protect it for the family, protect it for our team. Let me have the conversation." Did move forward with that and then gradually over those months, my wife and I were talking about, "Hey, what would life be like for us as a family? What would life be like for the kids if we had taken the acquisition? Would I have more time with the family? Would I just frankly, be a happier person if I was working more in the stuff that I love doing and not getting pulled into the stuff that I don't?"

And then the same thing looking at the family and looking at the team and seeing what it's like for them. And then there was just a moment in April where there was just a lot going on and so much seemed to be pointing in that direction where, hey, that's the right move. And as you know, I'm a religious guy and I got woken up in the middle of the night a couple times and really felt like it was God talking to me saying, this is the right path for you, for your family, for your team. And that was ultimately what sealed the deal.

Mark O'Donnell:

So when we met, you had three kids and you've grown the family since. And so you've adopted a few kids. How many are you at now?

Brian Sullivan:

So we're at six and hopefully within about a year, seven. Four biological, two adopted with us now and we're in process for another.

Mark O'Donnell:

Very nice. And how are they doing? Are the kids excited for this new life, this new chapter of more dad at home?

Brian Sullivan:

They are. The oldest ones, especially get it. The oldest one's now 15. My 15 year old son, my 13 year old daughter, 11 year old daughter, they get it. And the nine and eight year olds, maybe they didn't get it at first, but they've seen it. I'm dropping them off for school now. I'm around. I'm going to my daughter's volleyball games. I'm doing that stuff. And at even [inaudible 00:27:26] football on Sundays, I'm at. So they're seeing the difference and they're loving it. Yeah, so far it's been great.

And for my 15 year old son, especially, he's got a business mind. For sure, he loves it. So I talked about the deal with him as we were going through it. So he loved that part of it and there was a little bit of pride from him and dad was able to do this and that was a cool moment and I think certainly started

the spark, at least for him, for what's down the road for him. And so that's been a lot of fun. But they're seeing it now. Having dinner with dad has been great. And I think what's more important is COVID, I was around to have dinner with them during COVID but I wasn't present. I was at the table. And where your kid we're excluding you from the conversations, I was excluding myself from the conversation. I was there, but I wasn't fully focused on it. Now it's almost like a light switch where that certain levels of stress have come off and I'm present and I'm there. And I'm still working and I'm still putting the time in and when they go to bed, I'm still working again, but I'm present when I'm with them and a lot more control over when I'm working and why.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah. And I suppose that's the power of living in your love great, the things that excite you might really feel like if you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life. I'm not quite sold on that being a thing, but because sometimes even... I like cake, but you can have too much cake.

Brian Sullivan:

For sure. Well, that's a great point, Mark because last night at 9:30, I picked up my laptop to work on something, but it was because I wanted to. Previously I was picking it up, even as the entrepreneur working on a lot of things that weren't in my love great that I hadn't fully gotten rid of. And as going through the entrepreneurial journey, I didn't get everything out of there. So working on some stuff that I had to work on. And I think that's unbelievably powerful and is what's been the big change for me in the last two months now that we talked through it. Hadn't really thought about it to be quite honest.

Mark O'Donnell:

So it's a little bit like a shift from, I have to, to I get to.

Brian Sullivan:

Yes. Very much. Very much.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yep. As you think about your entrepreneurial journey and now you've got time freed up, what does future success look like for you? How will you know you're done?

Brian Sullivan:

When I'm daydreaming now about work, what I daydream the most about is the opportunities that I see. And what's interesting is learning the EOS process and the language. The visionary is often the founder of the company and then there's the integrator. And something I didn't realize I had a skill for was being the visionary and seeing down the road. So that happens to be something that now I'm aware that I have a skill at. But seeing opportunities for our team within the larger organization to me is phenomenal. I love daydreaming about that. Daydreaming about coaching my kids' teams, which was something I had to give up on pretty early on for the older kids but getting back into that. Playing golf with my sons. That stuff is to me is exciting, is liberating. We're able to do some stuff for some charities that now, and a little bit more time to be able to dedicate to that.

So that's really exciting and that's to me something that I likely could have accomplished if I brought in the right who's and added more who's to the organization. So I had the right who's. I needed to add more to the organization to get rid of some other things that we spoke about what got essentially

delegated to the company that acquired us. But maybe I wasn't comfortable enough financially doing that and that's what led this to happen. So for me, I think just being able to do all of those things is exciting.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah, definitely is. Not many people can achieve that. And I suspect that it is a journey. Living the EOS life, living, doing what you love with people you love, making a huge difference, being compensated appropriately with time to pursue other passions, it is a journey. Has there ever been a time where you thought you were there, but you woke up and you weren't there anymore, for whatever reason? What are those things that just knock you off even today, post acquisition? What are the things that knock you off the path, the journey to living your EOS life?

Brian Sullivan:

For me, it's probably all people issues. So as we went through and there's various, the term I think you often use for those are ceilings of complexity. And we would get to a spot where I would feel like, hey, this is great. Our team is cruising and then something would happen where we had a mis-hire, brought in the wrong person or we didn't put the right training in place. I'm like, "Ah." And it's that little step back. And there was part we did based on our [inaudible 00:32:17] just really great people. Occasionally, you get someone that sneaks by and says they share the values and then you see that they don't and they're now mistreating people within your organization. And to me, that's where it would trip me up and say like, "Oh man, maybe we shouldn't grow." And that would be a momentary lapse, but where I feel like, oh man, now I'm further from my love great than I was last week. Or I feel like I'm further than that direction. Those types of things are what I think along the way, tripped me up. And now we're in a really good spot with the team, like I said, but still even when there's certain people issues or things that pop up, that's what sets me back.

Mark O'Donnell:

It reminds me of Jim Collins who said, the moment you feel you have to manage someone you've made a hiring mistake.

Brian Sullivan:

Yeah. That resonates with me a lot. Because managing is not in my love great.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah. It's not in mine either. What do you think your unique ability, your God-given talent is?

Brian Sullivan:

So as identified, I had identified it, it's really motivating and inspiring others with profound integrity to accomplish more than they ever thought they could.

Mark O'Donnell:

How does it make you feel when you observe your unique ability, your God-given talent coming out and being realized?

Brian Sullivan:

Man, it's just some of the greatest joy that aside from parenting that you can feel. And there's a lot of analogy to being a founder of a company and being a parent. And some of that is. And I think there was so much joy for me going through the acquisition process where other people could see the same thing in our organization. And then now that we joined their team and others can see it, is just amazing.

Sometimes unfortunately you can come off as being a jerk when you're trying to give people that friendly push, but I see something in them. I see they can do it and I want to help them accomplish it. I have to dial it back sometimes and say, well maybe don't push too hard or they're not going to want it or maybe they don't want it. And maybe I want it for them more than they do. But for me it just brings so much joy seeing people accomplish even more than they thought they ever could.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah. That some of the best moments are when you help someone achieve something that they didn't think possible. And that's making a huge difference, a huge impact. And if you can imagine a world in which you're doing that with your entire company, and then they start doing it for each other and with people that they come into contact with. I mean that's impact.

Brian Sullivan:

Yeah. Ripple effect would be tremendous.

Mark O'Donnell:

Tremendous. What have you learned about yourself through living the EOS life? You mentioned that you don't like management, but you like leadership. Are there any other discoveries about yourself that through your journey you've come to realize and that's been helpful for you in your journey?

Brian Sullivan:

Yeah. Yeah, I'd say there's quite a few, probably too many to come off the top of my head right now. And some good and some bad. And I happen to be a high fact finder and the next highest I have in Colby, excuse me, if you go through the Colby process is quick start. And recognizing that is awesome. And then recognizing that I'm low on follow through is really actually pretty powerful. Because follow through is something I wasn't good at, but often felt I had to do and follow up on things. And man, if I could just delegate that to somebody that's better than me, makes my life a lot happier. And I wouldn't have thought I was high on the fact finder side of it until you start comparing yourself to where other people are. I wouldn't have thought I was high on the visionary side. It just thought it came natural until you start seeing where other people's strengths are, that are different than yours.

Mark O'Donnell:

Do you think giving back is an important part of living the EOS life?

Brian Sullivan:

I, 100% think that it is an important part of living the EOS life for me, especially. And I was pausing just trying to think about whether I could say that for everybody. And I guess I can. I can only answer for me. But for me it is because there is a lot that you can do. And at any way, any point along the road of Sullivan Engineering, along the journey, I could have dropped it into neutral and had a very nice, comfortable lifestyle for my family and created a lifestyle business and played a ton of golf and coached my kids and helped the team grow. Knowing I wanted to do more and have more of a financial impact in

a charitable way is what really pushed me to continue to grow the company, which created opportunities for the team. And to me, I think EOS was pivotal in that. And then wanting that EOS life is fantastic.

Because there's another part to it too. If I held onto all those things that wouldn't be giving opportunities to our team, I wouldn't be giving leadership opportunities. If I continued to do the things that were in the bottom half of my delegate and elevate, and was bad at it, I wouldn't have given opportunities for team members of ours to grow into technical review roles and work now in their love great. But wanting to have that life both personally and professionally is what resulted in that.

Mark O'Donnell:

And a little bit of that, that's your why. You would have to have sacrificed your why in order to do that.

Brian Sullivan:

Yeah. Yeah. That'd be a shame

Mark O'Donnell:

That would be a shame. So how do you think being a child of immigrant parents shaped your thoughts on how you should live your life?

Brian Sullivan:

I think there's something to be said and I'm generalizing here obviously, but in what I've seen, both of my parents are from Ireland, but regardless of where immigrants come from, they stick together and they help each other out. And many immigrants that come into the country don't come with a lot financially, but they're the first to help each other out and to get each other through. And that was always something I observed even as a little kid and seeing my parents [inaudible 00:38:01] so and so... What I've observed, immigrants are unbelievably generous people and really do their best to help each other out regardless of where they are.

They're also scrappy and resilient. My parents, my dad at 18 got on a boat from Ireland with his brother to go see some aunt he'd never met and stayed with his aunt he never met. My mom got on a plane at 19 from England. She went from Ireland to England with her brother and then went from there. I mean, you have to have some guts to do that.

From there, they didn't have necessarily an entrepreneurial journey. They took some jobs that they needed to for their family that were more safe. But that's what they felt they had to do at that time and that made sense and it was the right thing and it's probably in their mind now if they would look at it a sacrifice. They took the safe job for their family, but boy, did they take a lot of risk leaving Ireland to come to the United States in 1960 and 1959. And that's very similar to the entrepreneurial journey. You take that risk at first and go that route.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah. That's great. So Brian, is there any questions that I didn't ask that you think I should have and what would be one thing that if you're talking to a fellow visionary entrepreneur or member of a leadership team, what would be your one piece of advice to them to get them moving, to inspire them to do better for themselves? What would be your one piece of advice to them?

Brian Sullivan:

The one piece of advice I think would be have the confidence in yourself to invest in yourself in the EOS life. My initial time commitment into it and the final financial commitment into the EOS life to me was I was concerned. But once I had the confidence in myself that in our team that we could do it, man, [inaudible 00:39:44] just started rolling. And I'm glad that I did. And our firm was probably a little small compared to most that start the EOS journey, but I'm glad we started it when we did. It really was great. So I think have the confidence in yourself and in your team that it is going to be worth it and that your family, your loved ones, whatever it is that you love doing outside of the office is worth getting that time. It's worth spending your time in your love great. The more I've spent in my love great, the more successful our company has been. The more the rest of the team spends working on their love great, the more successful they've been.

And the question around what if there was something that you should have asked or I wish you would've asked, to me one of the most powerful things about EOS is the VTO. The Vision Traction Organizer, the one sheet front and back. When we're recruiting, it is an unbelievably powerful tool that gets people to self select out and it helps avoid those mis-hires. Now our team does a really good job in hiring and putting people through the interview process, but if we're going to be honest, probably the most powerful part about it is the people that self-select out and they say why are you still talking to me about values? Why are you talking to me about where the company's going to be 10 years from now? I want to show you my portfolio for work. Again, we'll get to that. Let's talk about your values, let's talk about our purpose, cause and passion. If you don't share that, we're not going to be able to work together successfully. And they'll self-select that, and that is just tremendous.

Mark O'Donnell:

That really is. And when we think about that, the second point with people you love, I think it's great that you pointed out that having a shared, not only shared core values, but also having a shared vision is really how you surround yourself. Because it's one thing to surround yourself with people you love at work. We encourage people to make that a blanket thing. Whether it's the person at the gym that does working out next to you, have you extended any of that type of thinking, any of the EOS life components into your personal life?

Brian Sullivan:

Without a doubt. Certainly a lot of the time that we spent outside, my wife and I, outside the family or outside the business look at is this in line with who we want to be as a family? Does this make the most sense and do we need to be the people doing it? So almost informally delegating and elevating it to somebody else without them knowing we're doing it. So we've certainly did that, more particular in what we're doing, how we're spending our time.

You also just gravitate towards other EOS entrepreneurs when you're in groups of entrepreneurs and you know who's running EOS and who's not, because you have a similar mindset. And so that's been really interesting.

I think the funny part, the funny after running level 10 meetings now or being in level 10 meetings for six years, it's almost impossible to sit in a meeting that's not run like a level 10 with an agenda with a start on time, end on time. So some of the charitable organizations aren't great at running meetings and you want to just take over, but you can't.

Mark O'Donnell:

You can't. But you can opt out and [inaudible 00:42:55] surround yourself with people you love being with and that give you energy as opposed to take it away. So good. I'm just trying to think of, is there anything else for the listener, because I think Brian, some of your stories and I remember you told me at one point that your ideal future is that you spend time with the kids, you coach, you create tremendous opportunity for your employees and the rest of the time you spend at the Paterson Soup Kitchen. Is that-

Brian Sullivan:

100%. Yeah, absolutely. And it's so funny how that's all lining up right now. So my new role is VP of strategic growth. So in strategic growth in that organization, what do I get to do? I get to create opportunities for our team. And then [inaudible 00:43:48] it's the Paterson Food Pantry. And so we've been spending a lot more time over there every other week, every other Saturday morning, going over there and buying groceries and then giving it out to families. And at one point, it's a shame that that number climbed up to about 210 families who would come on a Saturday morning because they were in need of food to get through the week. And so the whole family goes, "All eight of us roll over there." And we spend from 8:00 AM to noon and it's so exciting to be able to do that. And now starting to talk with them about other ways that we can be involved over there is just so much fun. So I am really getting so much closer to that EOS life for sure.

Mark O'Donnell:

It is a journey. It is a journey for sure. Well, thanks again, Brian. It's great conversation and continue on that journey, living your EOS life.

Brian Sullivan:

Thank you Mark. This was an honor and a privilege.

Mark O'Donnell:

All right. If you want to find out more about Brian personally, or if you want to contact him about the food pantry, you can email Brian at bsullivan@sullivanengineeringllc.com.

Thank you for listening to the podcast. I hope you got value from today's episode. Remember to ask yourself how long will you wait until you demand the best for yourself? How long will you wait until you live your ideal life, the EOS life?