I'm Mike McGuire, I'm the CEO Emeritus of Grant Thornton. I've spent nearly 38 years in public accounting. It's been a great career. I've worked the first 20 years with Arthur Andersen and since 2002 when Andersen went away, I joined Grant Thornton and have moved up through the organization, and most recently I was COO, Chief Operating Officer and then became the Chief Executive Officer, the CEO, about five years ago. It's been a great run and actually our firm is, we have a mandatory retirement age, which I'm zeroing in on, so I've recently stepped down as the CEO and in now in the title of CEO Emeritus, which essentially is helping with the transition to my successor as well as continuing to serve large clients, stay involved with our brand and continue to drive our business, which has been a lot of fun. And it's a good way to spend your last year of your career, so I'm really enjoying it.

You know I started out, it's always funny that people look at me, and like my friends from high school and college, they still can't almost believe that I spent a career in public accounting and especially that I've stayed at only a couple of firms, because when I was in college, I wanted to actually go to law school. And that was what I was doing and it's really almost, I ended up in public accounting literally by happenstance. And I was a freshman, I had moved into a dorm, I went to Bowling Green State University in Ohio. And I moved in the first day of my freshman year. One of the guys down the hall, a fellow named [Steve 00:01:44] [Baird 00:01:44] came down and he said, "Hey, Mike McGuire. One of my best friends from my school in Ohio," he went to Shelby, Ohio, he said, "One of my best friends is Kelly McGuire, and she's at Bowling Green too, you might want to meet her, see if you're related." Well I didn't think we were related, but I met Kelly.

So I got to be good friends with Steve, and sometime in the first quarter of school that year, Steve invited me to go to his house down in Shelby. They lived on a farm and his mom made a really nice family dinner for us. It was great because we were starving college kids. And so I got to know his family. And then a couple of weeks later, his brother, [Kim 00:02:26], his older brother said he was coming through Bowling Green and wanted to take us to dinner. Well Kim pulled up and he was dresse in a suit and I said, "My goodness, what does your brother do?" And he said, "Well he is a manager with [inaudible 00:02:44] Company in Cincinnati. He works on the Rubbermaid account and been very successful." And I just really enjoyed meeting Kim and I thought, "What is [inaudible 00:02:54], " and he said, "It's a big aid accounting firm." I did not know what an accounting firm was. I grew up in a really small town and the accountant was [Betty 00:03:06] [Ricks 00:03:06], who did our tax returns for my dad's grocery store, so I had no idea what it was.

But I was so impressed with Kim that I literally went into my counselor at the College of Business at Bowling Green and changed my major to accounting. And I just always say to this day that but for that happenstance of meeting Steve Baird and ultimately his brother, Kim, who knows that I would have done. But that's how I picked accounting and ended up in this business. I never took accounting in high school in or anything like that and really didn't know what it was, although I liked math, but here I am, became the CEO of Grant Thornton and never even started out to be an accountant, so you never really know what life has out, the opportunities it has for you if you don't explore and take the next step and take a few risks and be a little uncomfortable and explore the unknown. So it worked out for me.

I grew up in a really small town. A little town of 1600 people in Northwest Ohio. If you really ever watch the movie Hoosiers, that was the life I lived. My dad had the grocery store in town, so everybody knew you and knew me. You couldn't get away with anything because people would go tell your dad at the store if you were doing something you shouldn't be doing, but it was a lot of fun growing up and working with my dad. It was just an incredible risk that he took. He kind of grew up in the grocery business, produce manager, store manager with Kroger, Marsh Supermarkets in the Midwest and then ultimately the Foodland stores, which is a brand that's known in the Midwest. But I always thought it was funny with my dad that we had five kids, but we had three boys right in a row. Back to back to back, and in fact my older brother is not even a full year older than me. We're Irish twins. He's 360 days older than me.

But I think my dad, my dad always wanted to own his own grocery store. So much so that when we would go on vacations, we always took a side trip to a little town and went to look at a grocery store for sale. A lot of them were Foodland stores and things and that. Just to watch that dream of his and the passion he had for wanting to own his own store and setting out and having that goal, and we didn't have really any money, and my dad's dad died when my dad was I think 12 and then his younger brother was 10, so my grandmother had to raise him. And she was pretty entrepreneurial as well. She ended up opening up a cafeteria that was very, she's a great cook. Ran a business and then my dad and my uncle lived in an apartment upstairs, but they helped to the dishes. And so it was a little bit of what my dad had grown up with, working together in a family business.

And then in 1969 he got the opportunity to buy a grocery store. It's always amazing when you're, I was 10 years old at the time and I didn't think a whole lot about it. Later on I realized my dad really had no money and he ended up buying the building. When I'd go make a deposit at the bank I'd say, "Okay, put this in Mr. [Hill's 00:06:39] account," because that's who he bought the building from, "Put this in Mr. [Keel's 00:06:41] account," because that's who he bought the store and the inventory from, and that's the way we ended up doing it. And then he borrowed some money from his mom and he paid them all back. But he took that grocery store in the time that he owned it, our business erupted. It was over 500%, five times increase in revenues. I just remember the days around Thanksgiving, I mean the day before Thanksgiving our store was just busting at the seams. And what we had to do to be able to even manage that level of business.

He really turned it into a really successful business. And my three brothers, we all worked together. And my sisters were too young to really be involved in the store, but I talk a lot about all the lessons I learned in life at the corner of [Jackson 00:07:33] and [Main 00:07:34], working beside my dad and getting your jobs done, and what would happened if he didn't. My younger brother sometimes, he probably wouldn't like me to say this, but sometimes he would kind of forget some of the chores he had to have, like when you got done with your shift, you had to fill the milk and fill the bread, because we used to sell milk and bread so fast. My brother would go home. Rather than sit there and say, if I came in after my brother and say, "Well okay, he didn't fill the milk and bread so I'm not going to fill the milk and bread." At the end of the day, the customers need it. And my dad was always like, "Okay, well let's take care of the customers first, let's not get into a family spat here. You cover for your brother. We'll handle that later."

So what my dad used to do, talk about accountability, what my dad used to do is when he would give us our money, our pay, he went down to the bank and put it in. We did not just get the money to keep and spend. All of our pay went into the bank, and then if we wanted to buy something we had to ask him and justify it. But my dad would take some of my younger brother's money and put it in my account or my older brother's account if he didn't do it. So he was always holding everybody accountable. But it was a lot of fun to work beside my dad and watch his dream come true. He was very successful at it and sold the business and did it after.

Once we went to college I think he kind of lost, it wasn't quite as fun, because he had his three boys in there and we were all off to college and then he was just having to hire people to do the work and I just think that he got an opportunity to sell it and so he did and got out of the business and moved back to Indiana. But it was a great 10 year run when he was doing that. One of the things I learned is that work can be fun. And work is collaborative. And the relationships you build, you know I watched my dad hire people and how many people just, I mean we just didn't have people come in and start to work for my dad. They stayed.

And I remember there was a restaurant in town and the husband and wife who owned it, they sold it and they were retiring, and [Loris 00:09:57] [Briggan 00:09:57] knew everybody in town, and everybody loved Loris. And my dad hired her as a checkout, and he was always getting these people in this little town that were so well known, so highly respected, beloved people, and if they were on the market, he would bring them in. And [Liv 00:10:12] [Degrof 00:10:12], who's husband owned the bakery across the street from Loris' business, so when they sold that, Dad hired Liv Degrof. We had kind of iconic townspeople working at my dad's store. And it always stuck to me that business can be fun and that people matter and relationships matter. And the kinds of people that would flock into the grocery store.

But I remember playing sports, and it was just I mentioned, it's just like Hoosiers. [Ivo 00:10:51] [Daff 00:10:51] drove the school bus. We'd be driving through corn fields and going to these little cracker box gyms that were so loud, sometimes on a Saturday night, it might be Monday before your hearing would start to come back because they were just really small gyms, but they were just loud. And I just remember going to those places, but we'd come back, and sometimes we would go to the store. Take the bus ride back and walk up to our grocery store, because it wasn't very far from the school. And we would be processing a side of beef for a customer. We'd finally get out at I don't know, one o'clock in the morning, and then we'd go home and clean up, and then of course in the morning, no matter we worked until one o'clock in the morning, knock, knock, knock on our room, we weren't going to miss church. My mom was, I don't care if you worked until two or three in the morning or pull an all nighter, you better get cleaned up, we got to be at church the next day. We're like, "Can't we get a day off or something like that?"

But it was all fun, and we really enjoyed being successful in that organization. And that kind of took me, kind of built a foundation of the way I believe that businesses can be run. You can be very successful take care of people, and frankly have fun doing it. And we still, we lost my dad a few years ago, but even when he was sick and we just sat there talking, I just said, "Dad, you taking that risk and buying that grocery store, it just changed our lives completely. It allowed us the ability to get a lot of experience in business and see it first hand, how do you deal with people, how do you take care of people." I just told Dad, I said, "You're really smart because here you had three boys, nine, 10, and 11, we had a big grocery bill, so what does he do? He buys a grocery store so he can feed us at cost." And he paid us a quarter an hour for a long time. I used to always joke with him and I said, "Dad, we're going to have the child labor people come and take a look at you for back pay." And he said, "Your mom always said something, you need to pay those boys what they're worth." And my dad said, "Yeah I know, but I got to pay them something." So we had a lot of fun doing those things.

And one of the things I remember about my dad too was how he took care of people. We didn't have a lot. It wasn't like we made a fortune in this little grocery store. But he always had an eye out for people who were having a hard time on their... and I just remember he would say, "Okay boys, we're going to go out to so and so's house," and he would just show up the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, and we'd be loading bags of groceries into people's houses. Just somebody had been laid off or hard on their luck or whatever, something happened and somebody was sick or something like that, and we just went out and gave them free groceries. Not that we had a lot of money to give away, but we were certainly better off than those folks.

And watching my dad, we would go up and we just always knew that this isn't something that we talk about. That Dad didn't do it for the notoriety or recognition or anything like that. He just did it. And we would be loading those things in and I just remember people crying, just couldn't believe that they were now going to have a Thanksgiving dinner. And I just remember how I felt about that, I'd be in the sixth grade and I'd just be thinking, "Wow, what a dad. My dad is my hero." Those things kind of stick with you. So for the rest of my life.

One of the things I think that people ought to think about is sometimes opportunities something come to you when you don't really see how big the opportunity was at the time. You can't really overthink a lot of stuff. I mentioned that when I was in college and I decided to change my major to accounting was also a time that, and there really weren't internships back in the late 70s or early 80s. And I was fortunate enough at Bowling Green to get to know the Chair of the Accounting Department, a guy named [Park 00:15:19] [Leathers 00:15:19], Dr. Leathers. And he's still alive. He sometimes when I speak at the University, it gets back to him and he sends me a really nice note, I heard you mention me and stuff.

But he was something that I really respected. And I felt like one of the advantages of growing up in my dad's grocery store is it gave us the ability to interact with a lot of people that were in a position of authority. [Malcolm 00:15:55] [Gladwell 00:15:55], I'm a big fan of Malcolm Gladwell, in fact I had him speak at our annual partners meeting last year. I got to meet him and spend some time with him in person. When he was doing an outliers, he was talking about how termites, they called them, the group of kids that were high potential and how he tracked them over a number of years, that cohort. And one of the keys to their success was the ability to interact with people of authority and not be intimidated.

And I think that having working in my dad's store, one of the things I look back on is just something that I never really thought about at the time, but all of our coaches and our teachers, the principal, superintendent, the mayor of the town, they all came in to our grocery store. I'd be sitting there, Coach [Dominic 00:16:48] was the high school football coach, and when I was in junior high and ultimately when I played varsity, but Coach Dominic was a tough guy. But I'm sitting here bagging his groceries and said, "Coach Dominic eats Sugar Smacks," or something like that. It got me to this point of saying, "Hey, Mayor [Blye 00:17:10] likes Braunschweiger or something, I don't know. But it just made them all people that I could interact with.

It's been that way really throughout my life and my career. Even when I was young, when I started out at Arthur Andersen, I would not be intimidated by going in directly and talking to the CEO, even as a brand new person. I wasn't being cocky or arrogant about it, it's just the way I was kind of raised. They're just regular people that happen to have been very successful. And I found that they were all quite approachable. But that happened to me with Dr. Leathers. I think a lot of people were intimated by him, he was the Chair of the Accounting Department, and we got talking and he said, "Hey. We're thinking about starting this internship program and I'd like for you to get the experience doing it." I was like a sophomore in college, getting ready to go into my junior year, and I did. And ultimately, it's kind of a funny thing that I had it, it was when Ernst & Whinney was the firm, it was kind of a co-op relationship, and so I worked with them and one of their large clients during school. And of course they paid me, which helped me because I didn't have much money.

But through that I ended up working on a construction audit of a company's plant, that's LOF, Libbey-Owens-Ford, which is a Toledo based company, public company that did glass. They built a big glass plant in Laurinburg, North Carolina, and we were on the team doing the audit of the construction cost. And through that I ended up flying into Charlotte and we drove a rental car out to Laurinburg and I really liked North Carolina. And so a little bit later, when I Washington interviewing, I know remember telling Arthur Andersen's recruiters and others, I said, "I'd be interested in seeing if there are any opportunities in North Carolina."

Arthur Andersen offered me a job in Charlotte, and that's how I got here. I got to Charlotte. I didn't know a soul within six, 700 miles of Charlotte. And I just took a flyer and said, "I like the weather, I think it's a growing area, I can always go back. I'm single, this is probably the most flexibility I'm going to have, and I don't want to go through my life thinking, 'Well what if?'" Because I could have gone to all the other big aid accounting firms wanted me to work in Cincinnati or Cleveland or Toledo or Detroit or Dayton or Chicago, Indianapolis, kind of in that area. And Arthur Andersen was the firm that offered me to go anywhere I wanted to go, and so I took a job in Charlotte. I was actually pretty fortunate. Some kid from Bowling Green that most people didn't know if it was in Kentucky or Ohio or where it was, or had never even heard of it. And I showed up in a group that of the partners went to Ohio University, one of the managers or seniors went to Miami Ohio, another one went to Western Michigan, and another senior went to Kent State.

So I came in to Charlotte thinking everybody will have gone to Duke or Carolina or Wake Forest and not know anywhere, and all of a sudden in working around all these Mid-American conference guys. It's just almost serendipity, but you end you making your... you kind of make your breaks if you take a chance and trust your gut on things like that. I moved down there, like I said, I didn't know a soul within six, 700 miles of it. Didn't even own any furniture. I slept on the floor of my apartment and I had a sleeping bag for two or three months. And I'll never forget when I got my first bed, I think I slept for like 12 hours for one night because it was just so good to be in a bed. I remember everybody was complaining they went to the Arthur Andersen basic training school in Chicago in Saint Charles and people were complaining about the food and the bed and I'm sitting there thinking, "There's nothing wrong with this food and there's nothing wrong with this bed. I could stay up here for a long time because at least they were paying for the food and I had a bed."

But you get started on things like that and building the relationships and making your breaks I think is really a key thing, I would encourage anybody to do that. Don't let the stream take you wherever it wants to go. Set your own course and do these kinds of things. I remember I came in, and since I'd grown up in a family business, Arthur Andersen had what they called at the time the Small Business Division. And that was appealing to me. It's probably one of the reasons, besides the fact they were going to move me to Charlotte, one of the reasons I was really intrigued and that the team of people that I met, especially those from the Mid-American conference had made me feel at home.

But I got in, I'll never forget one day I went in to get my staffing schedule, see what I was going to be working on, and I was with a guy who started with me named [John 00:22:05] [Gianuzzi 00:22:05]. And John was from New York. I was a lifelong Cub fan, he was a lifelong Mets fan. But somehow we're still dear friends today. He's been very successful and we're still really, really good friends. But we went in to look at our staffing schedule and my heart kind of sank. I'm sitting there thinking, "Oh my Gosh, they put me on a hospital. I don't want to do a hospital audit. I'm going to spend my life trying to stay out of a hospital, I don't want to go in and audit one." And then John looks and he says, "Oh Gosh, I'm working on a company called Bojangles," which is Bojangles Chicken and Biscuits, and it was just starting out. I mean Jack Fulk had just started in 1977, this was 1982. He only had a couple of stores, and John says, "Oh my Gosh, I'm going to sit here and work on this entrepreneurial company, it's going to be messy. They're probably going to fail," and all this kind of stuff.

In our orientation they said, "Look, if you don't like what you're working on, just tell your coach." Well again, most people thought, "Oh that's a career limiting move. Who's going to go say they don't want to work on these clients? What are people going to think about us?" I said, "Well, let's just test it out." So John and I went and talked to staffing coordinator, I said, "Can John and I switch? He wants to work on the hospital, Mercy Hospital, and I want to work on Bojangles." And [Sherry 00:23:20] [Kella 00:23:21], I'll never forget her, she said, "Sure. We'll do it." And we're like, we didn't high five because I don't think high fives had been invented by that time, but we were all excited.

And then I went out to my first day and I met Jack Fulk, who has since passed away, but here he was. I wasn't afraid of talking to the CEO, founder, entrepreneur who started it. And I was really just because I'd had that experience in the dad's store, wasn't intimidated a doing it. And Jack's telling me how he's going to expand, he wants to take it public, he wants to have a coast to cost chicken and biscuits. He wants to franchise, all these things, and I don't think I slept when I got home that night. I was so excited. And that really started my career at Arthur Anderson.

But the funny thing about that was when Andersen went away in 2002, I was on the national team at Arthur Andersen, which we called at that time the Enterprise Group, we changed it from Small Business Division to Enterprise Group, but at that time I was on the national team for the entrepreneurial business Enterprise Group, and John Gianuzzi was running the Carolinas Healthcare Practice. So that day, when we were sitting there looking at our schedules and we flipped, it set John's career, and he's been very successful in healthcare, that started on the day that we went in and changed and I ended up serving so many entrepreneurial, middle market companies, which is one of the reasons why I ended up at Grant Thornton, was because Grant Thornton was focused on the middle market and that was a lot of my experience.

So I think it just goes to show, rather than just sitting there and saying, "Gosh, let's not go out and ask," that one day really changed, that's one of those things. You look back at your life and you think about it wasn't that big of a deal to me to go in and ask to be switched, but it set the course of two people's careers who are still, you know John's still in public accounting and like I said he's doing very well. He works for Deloitte right now. But we're still like brothers. We're dear friends and we cheer for each other, and we have done that for nearly 30 years, so it's a lot of fun.

Sometimes as life takes its turns not everything always ends up working out. And you're always going to be tested. I think it's how things happen and how do you see through, if very is going well all the time, you maker partner and gosh, all is going well, I was married and [inaudible 00:25:55] my wife of nearly 30 years. And it all goes well, but sometimes things happen out of your control, and that happened when Arthur Andersen went away. For a long while, you're sitting there thinking, "This is going to cost some money," it was on the news all the time. And we were planning and keeping everybody together and doing a bunch of stuff, but we never really thought it was going to end up the way it ended up. But it became pretty clear when the firm was indicted in March of that year that things were not going to go well.

I was running the audit division and audit practice in the Carolinas, which was four offices. And I remember we had to start thinking about what happens if this thing, what if we don't make it? And I was raised to be an optimist. My dad was an eternal optimist. He raised me as a Chicago Cubs fan for God's sake, and I just remember my dad, the Cubs would be down 10 to nothing in the bottom of the ninth and Ernie Banks would be up, two outs and an 0 and two count them, he says, "He's going to start a rally and we're going to come back." Of course it didn't happen very much. But the optimist in me kind of started thinking, "This isn't going to happen." But then it got to the point that we really had to start thinking about what could happen. And just once especially it started to fall apart, we decided that we were going to stay together. Because all the firms came calling and they wanted certain people or certain practices. Some just wanted some of the partners, some wanted just partners.

And I remember telling the folks in the Carolinas that we were going to find a deal, let's just stick together. If we stick together, there's value here, because it's a very good practice, we've all worked together, a lot of meetings that we had, I mean we were almost communicating daily with our team. And I was trying to find a deal that I sat down and I wrote my guiding principles on. I still have it. I just sat down one day and I wrote down my guiding principles of what this wasn't going to be about me, it was going to be about how do we keep everybody there. And the other thing I wanted was I wanted to make sure that whoever we went to didn't just take everybody then start cutting them. That they were going to get a chance to get back on their feet. And I remember negotiating with firms and it was just brutal because it was almost like you feel like you're trying to get a bank loan and you've been turned down 20 times and then you go to the 21st bank and this one is going to work.

But for them to take 350 people or whatever it ended up being out of the Carolinas and essentially agree not to cut anybody for a period of two years was something that not all the firms were originally willing to do. And I said, "Look. It's like the Titanic sinks and now you pull the people out of the water and before the rescue boat gets back to South Hampton you say, 'Well we don't have enough food,' and you start throwing them back overboard again." I wasn't going to be a part of that. So we ended up negotiating and that was, most the firms weren't interested in something like that. And I wasn't going to sit there and take all of our administrative people and say, "Hey, stick together, come with us, help us get through all this stuff and then we don't need you anymore." Because like I said, I felt like it had a lot of value and it was the right thing to do.

And Grant Thornton actually came through. And since they had just opened up in Charlotte, bought a smaller firm, they really needed the whole package. So they agreed. And we had a deal. And that was like on May 31st of 2002, so things were falling apart rather quickly. And I remember on the Monday we had all of our people and a meeting in one of the hotels in Charlotte, and as amazing as this is, we don't have any clients. Because the clients were still Arthur Andersen clients. We had to convert all of them. Of course all of our competitors were going after them as well. So we got 350, 400 people and we have no clients.

And I remember taking all the partners into a room and I told them right at the very beginning, I said, "Look. I know we don't have a brand." Nobody knows at the time who Grant Thornton was because they just opened up in Charlotte. Obviously we had a lot of cash outflow to our new firm and it was just a difficult time. But I told the partners, I said, "Listen. If we're going to sit here and think," I said, "Let's assume that this room is white board. Ceiling, floor, and four walls with white board, and we had an unlimited supply of magic markers to write on it. And we started by going on a wall and writing every reason that this will not succeed." I said, "I will tell you one thing. If you guys, when we leave this room, the walls will be completely black. Because there are a lot of reasons that this isn't going to work. But I want you all to think about picking up the magic marker and writing on the wall how this will succeed. There will be a lot of white space on the wall. But if we're going to go in and start thinking about all the reasons this isn't going to work, and then we might as well just get the white flag out and wave it and quit and start to unwind this thing and get everybody out. But I think we can make it."

And so we actually took that white board and we actually put it into a document. We actually did it on a white board, put it into a document. It was things like obviously converting our clients was number one. Keeping our people going out and telling the Grant Thornton story to bankers and lawyers and all of our friends and influencers in the business community and the newspaper, the bx journal, all these kinds of things. Number one, without any clients to serve we had to have something to do. Because idle minds, everybody would be starting to worry about it. And I knew my partners and they're just great people and boy did they just went out after it, and we started converting our clients.

Then we started winning new clients that we didn't even have. And then the most remarkable thing was we went on, I remember telling our regional managing partner that we were going to continue recruiting at Wake Forest and Chapel Hill and everywhere normal recruiting schools, Appalachian State, others, and I can't remember what the number was but I said, "I think we're going to hire something like 35 people or something like that. We're going to go on campus and hire 35 to 40 people, whatever, just like nothing had happened. Just like we were Arthur Andersen." And he was like, "Well you have 400 people and no clients." I said, "But we cannot be void of a year. We've got to go back and do it." And to his credit, he said, "Do it." And we had that year probably one of the best recruiting years we had ever had.

I talked to some of the folks at some of our competitors and I just didn't think that, I don't think they took us seriuosly, and people liked the story. And now some of those people from that original class are now partners at Grant Thornton. It's remarkable how it worked. But we just started going and then within a very short time frame we got to be profitable. And within a few years, I don't know the exact time frame, maybe three years or so, we were the second largest practice in Grant Thornton in terms of revenue. Second to New York. We were bigger than Chicago. And we had the highest operating profit percentage, second in operating dollars. Everybody, and this is really a credit to the entire team. It was remarkable.

I remember telling them after two years, that's when we were negotiating, I said, "Okay. In two years, we will be the this level. And if we're not at this level, I get it. We'll have to to make some adjustments. We'll have to right size the business." Well that level was let's see... it was probably close, maybe a little more that four times the size of the Dallas office at the time. And I gave them a number that I thought we could hit. I wasn't like just shooting for the moon, but I thought we could hit it. But again they were so skeptical because it would have been almost four times, probably what the size of the Dallas office was at the time. But I said, "If we hit that number, you don't cut anybody after two years." They agreed to do it and we blew through that number. We were higher in people and doing it.

So I knew I had a great group of partners and employees and all of our administrative team. We work together. I mean even today there's still, I got some report a few weeks ago, and so we started in 2002, so it's 17 years, how many of our administrative team is still there from 17 years ago. And some of them have retired. We really haven't had a whole lot of folks leave. My assistant has worked with me for now 25 years. So we've been together for eight years I guess when Andersen went down, and it's fun to see people retire and have their retirement and things like that.

One of the reasons too that we went to Grant Thornton other than the fact that they were the first one to come up and do the deal that we had on the table was Grant Thornton had a 62 retirement age and Andersen at the time was 56. And most of the firms were 60 to 62, but I had a number of partners that were 54, 55, one was 56., and I'm like, "Gosh, he just lost all of his retirement and all of his capital in the firm and he needs a runway." So with that individual, he was 56, but he had an opportunity to work for another six years and start to build it back.

So it all worked out. And it was just total teamwork, just like going back to my dad in the store and I think that realizing that we're all in it together and failure is not an option, if we work as a team and look out for each other, good things are going to happen. I saw it from 1969 to 1979 in my dad's store, and I saw that from 2002 to today at Grant Thornton and where it is today. So it's been a phenomenal, but I really give all the credit to all the people that worked so hard to make it happened. The nice thing about it was I didn't have to sit down and worry about the details of the business because I had so many good people worrying about the business and putting the plans together that I was able to be out in front developing business and trying to grow it to get us to that magic number so we wouldn't have to start making adjustments.

I told our partners, I said it's like we were on some sort of tour ship, tour boat on top of Niagara Falls and it sank and we all ended up in the water. We all ended up over the falls, we pop up, and below the falls, we're all still alive, thank God. And let's not sit here and say, "Woe is me," and start worrying about look at our bad luck, we just went over the falls, wait a minute, look at your good luck. You're alive. So let's not sit here and lament what happened. Let's swim to shore and let's get out of this water and then let's figure out what we're going to do. And one of the things we're not going to do is try to swim back up the falls and do something that's impossible to do. Let's put a plan together and just put one foot in front of the other all the time and that's really what happened.

So that piece of it has been great. And the firm, Grant Thornton, has been exceptionally good to me and I've had a lot of mentors and folks that really took a chance and believed in us. And we've been kind of a talent factory to some extent for the firm. Because I've always believed in letting our people in our practice take on roles, national roles in the firm and even move to other offices and help lead and do those things. I don't look at them as my resources or Carolinas resources or whatever. I look at them as the firms resources and it's been great because a lot of folks have really had a meteoric rise in their career. So it's been a good thing.

With respect to the firm, one of the things I've been really happy about is, and I use the work intentionality a lot and being intentional and I mentioned that I put my guiding principles on a piece of paper. You sit down and your intentionality means putting those things down and then periodically looking at them. I think it's good to set some goals and periodically say, "Okay wow." I've always found a lot of times that when you do that you actually look back at it and you say, "Wow. We've gotten more done that what we even thought. Here are a couple areas that we're not doing what we should be doing or not performing as we should, why not, let's focus on that."

I believe and just sitting down and putting up stretch goals. Achievable goals. Sometimes people think that they're unachievable, but don't put anything out there that I know I'm not going to go play in the NBA, so I don't put that down. I'm kind of a prisoner of gravity. So even though when I was in like sixth grade I wanted to play for the Boston Celtics, I realized pretty quickly that I didn't have the talent to do that. I might have had the desire, but that wasn't going to happen. So you got to make sure that your goals are achievable, but not not something that's easily achievable. Something that's going to make a different.

So when I became the CEO of Grant Thornton I put together a five point plan and laid it out in a white paper what we were going to do, and one of it was around audit quality, another was just around growth and what we wanted to do with our brand and things like that. So we had five big goals as what we wanted to hit. And I have a great team and the all the partners rallied together. We wanted to go from the now to the new Grant Thornton. And part of it just a transformation of the business, and everybody just did a great job. I mean we're now number one in the PCAOB, the way they do it, part one findings, we are the fewest part one findings of any firm. Any firm, regardless of size of the PCOB or the large firms, we're number one. And so essentially we're number one in audit quality, which I'm really proud of our audit team and they've just done a great job of doing that. But at the time I think we were seventh. So to go from seven to one and say that number one was the goal, I remember telling the head of the PCOB, the Chairman of the Board that we were going to be number one some day, and we did it.

And then our brand has been another thing that we've invested a lot in. But again, being very intentional and we decided to get into golf. We hired Ricky Fowler to represent us. Put a lot of time into that, we wanted to make sure that it was the right brand for us, it fit with our culture, and Ricky has just been a great ambassador for us. We invested in the The Players Championship, which is premier, they call it the Fifth Major, and I've got a great Chief Marketing Officer, [John 00:42:32] [Harnling 00:42:33], who just does a phenomenal job, him and his team. And we moved our brand up several thousand basis points, which is a big move. And we feel really good about where we are.

And another one is our talent. I think we're recruiting from the top programs in the country and we just got an incredible group of people that have started with the firm last five, 10 years and they really do the work. They really do a lot of the work. I just happen to get some of the credit for it. But they come in and they're very creative, innovative, and it's just a joy. I just love working with them, I love spending time with them and texting and email and all day long, they're just doing great things every day. But speaking of intentionality, we were very intentional about our culture as well. Every company has a culture, whether it's a bad culture, a good culture, or just a culture that's just kind of, okay it's there, they have one. And I just felt like we had a really strong culture at Arthur Andersen.

The thing about Grant was we had grown through so many acquisitions over the years, and then every year you're hiring 500, 600, 700 or more people from different colleges and universities from different backgrounds and it's really a melting pot. What we really said is we want to be intentional about our culture and say what does it mean to be Grant Thornton? What does it mean to work for us? Not just putting posters on the walls around our culture and our values, but making it come to life and what does that really look like.

In order to be intentional about it, we hired Senn Delaney, which is run by Larry Senn. Larry created culture shaping about 40 years ago. He's kind of the grandfather of culture. Culture is now a real bi buzz word. Pick up the Wall Street Journal today and a article about hiring to culture and all that stuff. But Larry was doing it 40 years ago. And so we hired Larry. That was part of being intentional about it was hiring Larry to help us put the program together, and it's just been remarkable. It's just pulled the organization together, so I'm really proud of that because you've got so many people in different service lines and different offices and to try to pull all that together so you're marching to the same drum in terms of the things that we want to accomplish and what it means to work for Grant Thornton.

I'm just really proud of all of our people in all levels of the organization for how they've embraced it. We called it a culture journey because we it's something that almost never ends. You don't just go there and check the box, say, "Okay, we're done, and we ignore it." It's got to continuously involve, you got to hire to culture, unfortunately sometimes you've got to fire to culture if people aren't behaving in alignment with the firm's culture and values. Those are hard discussions, but as Larry Senn would say, that's where culture is actually, that's where it really grows. Because if you've got something that's not living your culture and values but you're tolerating it, then you look at it and you say, "My Goodness," then it's kind of just words on a page. You're not really living it. But when you make the decisions I think people then say, "Okay, they're really serious about it."

So I'm really proud of where the firm has come in terms of those areas of being intentional and intentionality of sitting down and whether it's your career or whatever it is you want to do, I mean I still do that even in my personal life. I have a little spreadsheet. Every time, pretty much at least once a week when I'm on a flight I kind of go look at it and I see kind of what some of those things are that I still haven't done. But I press myself on what some of these things are that you want to do and like I said, I go back and look at them and say, "Well I can't believe," I mean some of it could be just a vacation that you want to take or something you want to do with your physical health or physical fitness or whatever it is and it's pretty good. And you lay those things out and it's a good feeling because not only do you feel good that you actually got it done, but you actually see the positive result of having done it.

So I think it's important to set goals and stop for a little bit and reflect and celebrate. I remember telling my audit team and the audit quality team, I said, "My Goodness. Let's stop. Stop right here and just look back at how far we've come. You all did this. Sit back over the weekend and have a glass of champagne or do something and celebrate something that's actually happened because I think that's where the growth really occurs."

One thing I think that people, I get to ask this a lot, especially from students when they're coming in to interview. They always ask me one piece of advice. One of the things I tell them is to find a good mentor. And be intentional about finding a mentor. You can find multiple mentors. You can have somebody that's more like your raving fan and everything you do is like those little cartoon characters, Chip and Dale, and they're like, "Oh you're the best. No you're the best. You're the smartest. No you," that's nice, it helps your ego or whatever once in a while, or if you're ever down in the dumps it's nice to have people like that, but it's also find people that you're going to actually learn something from. And sometimes they're hard decisions.

I tell folks, I said there's a partner that always was so well organized. It seemed like he only had one piece of paper at his desk all the time, he was really fastidious and detail oriented. Orderly, I would say. But he also got a lot of stuff done. And I gravitated toward him because I want to learn how did he get to be so organized and he was always on top of his game. It wasn't he was working 90 hours a week, really smart guy, but what out of his style allowed him to have work life balance, be very successful in business, and always seem to have his life on one piece of paper. And he always knew what was going on and he's really good. But I really gravitated toward him as a mentor.

I ended up, on the difficult side, there was a guy who was really tough to work for. He was an administrative task master, teach you to delegate, I mean he was tough. And I asked to work for him. And the staffing person said, "Most people ask not to work for him. Why do you want to work for him?" I said, "Well he's really organized, he's a great project manager. If I could run projects like that, I'm going to be more successful and I'm going to have more work life balance." But he was a taskmaster and I worked for him on a number of jobs. In fact his son, I think he's a senior manger with us at Grant Thornton. So the family ties are there and I figured [David 00:50:35] is going to be really good because his dad probably taught him the same thing.1

But I remember, it got to the point where even though he was tough, it wasn't just one job. He actually enjoyed having me on his jobs I actually enjoyed working for him because I was learning so much. And we actually got along really well even though he had a reputation of being very hard to work for. And we're to this day still really good friends because I appreciated what he did to help me learn to delegate. I think a lot of times, especially in accounting, accountants tend to like to control things and do it themselves, and I think that that was something that I learned young from this guy. So I sought him out.

We also had another partner that nobody wanted to work for, but he was very technical. Very smart, very technical, and did a really good job of doing the technical side of the business. And I remember that I asked to work for him on a job, and it was tough. Oh my goodness, he was tough to work for. But he was fair. All these guys were fair. They just were demanding. And having played sports and stuff I was used to demanding coaches and people who were, I wasn't afraid of people being tough. I looked at it and said, "What can I learn from him?" And I did, and whether it was writing technical memos or getting the right answer and how do you manage that side of the business, which is obviously important.

So go out and find those people. If you don't feel comfortable speaking in front of groups, find somebody that is. And how do you do it? And help me and coach me and do those kinds of things and take those areas that maybe you're uncomfortable about, that you feel like you need to improve, and find people who master them. And what makes them good at it. Because one thing I've always found is people like to be a mentor. It's rewarding. And we always, I know our partners and folks, they want to be rewarded for them to succeed. Some have different approaches, some are a little tougher and more demanding, but at the same time they do, and those folks that I mentioned, they did embrace me.

And one of the things I did was I always managed to try to work for as many people as I could. Because sometimes you could have a partner that says, "I like this person and I want them on all my jobs because they do a great job and all this kind of stuff." And I would manage it to where I wanted to work for multiple partners because I always felt like what you do is you find out everybody, certainly me, I have things that I'm really good at and things that I'm not so good at. And what you do is the more people you get exposure to, you say, "Wow, that person is really good at this. I'm going to emulate that. I'm going to develop this. They're not very good at this." You learn something, you say, "Okay, I'm going to do what this person does, there are other ways they do things that maybe I'm not going to do." So whether the person you become is the picking up the good things or avoiding the pitfalls or whatever, the things that people aren't so good at, you build it that way.

But I remember when I was up for partner at Arthur Andersen. I'd worked probably at that point for almost every partner in the four offices in the Carolinas in some capacity on an engagement. It was like, "We all know Mike." And so that's how I made partner because it wasn't like, sometimes people get up, it happened, that people would say, "Wow they've only worked in this industry, they only work for these people, so over the next year let's get them exposure to more people so we can have more partners that can say this person is ready for partner." I said I wasn't going to wait for that. I was going to try to do that and I figured that even if I didn't make partner, by meeting all these people and learning how multiple successful people operate is probably going to be something good for me in the long run. So that's been a real positive.

I also think it's always helpful to push yourself a little bit and I think one of the things I like to do is I'm very entrepreneurial and I like innovation a lot. In fact one of my mentors always introduces me to somebody that I don't know, he introduces me, he says, "Mike is an entrepreneur cleverly disguised as an accountant." But I like that. I think that in our business, especially today through disruption and things like that, our industry was pretty well served, most accounting firms are close to 100 years. Grant Thornton started in 1924, so almost 100 years because the Federal Tax Act came in in 1913, so that started it. And then the 33 and 34 Acts after the depression with the Securities in Exchange Act and the 33 and 34 Acts, which required public filings, all that regulatory kind of structure kind of create the modern accounting firm.

But I think that the industry hasn't changed. Probably, at least in my time, one of the biggest changes in the industry was the computer. It sounds kind of funny now, but I remember when we got our first computer at Arthur Andersen. It was an Apple. And then we got an IBM PC XD AT and then started going. But I actually, when I was in college, I was an accounting major and a management information systems major. So that was one of the things. So I took at the time every programming language available. And then none of it's relevant today. There are a few people still remember COBOL, but yeah. Not many.

Even though the code, the techniques are outdated, the things I learned by getting that additional major was harder, but it really rounded out the accounting side of me because it got me more into the technology side and thinking about it. And I tell people even today, I remember in my computer my programming classes, of course these were days when you used punch cards and got print outs. I said if there were 35 people in the class, everybody got the answer. It wasn't hard getting the answer, ultimately to program it, we knew what we were trying to program and get. But how people got it done was completely different. There would be people that would come in with a stack of cards like this with a rubber band around it and maybe a two page print out wrapped around and they would turn it in. And there would be somebody carrying like three boxes of cards and a printout that thick. Well guess who got the A and guess who got the C, right? We all solved the problem. Solving the problem, you didn't get an A for solving the problem, you got an A for being efficient in your coding.

And so that's what I always take that when I was coaching my teams, when we were doing client work I'd say, "If you get the technical answer in a week and a half, it's not as good as getting it in a half a day." You got to get through it and do it the right way, but the efficiency of the way you approach a problem and think about it and plan it out and get it done, there is value in terms of to your client and there was value in terms off the grade that we got. That really helped me think through and using technology and software to be able to solve problems, which I've never been afraid of technology, I've always embraced thinking like that. Today we were doing work with blotching and AI and I have this insatiable curiosity. I'm not the guy that's going to sit down on program, I'm not going to set up a private block chain, but I understand how it works and I understand how you can apply it in our business.

So with that, we stood up an innovation platform across our firm that basically anybody can contribute to. Thinking that sometimes ideas, if an idea has to wind its path all the way through various levels of approval, every gate of approval is a chance to shut it down, whether it's somebody doesn't agree with the idea, somebody doesn't understand the idea, somebody says, "Well we can't afford it, we don't have the budget for it." There are all kinds of of barriers, right? And I think that some people in life try to put up barriers to anything and I think you got to avoid that. I think again, like I said, I don't tell my people, it's like the same when Andersen went down and I don't want the 99 reasons that this is going to fail. I want to one reason that it can be successful. And that's the hard thing. If you listen to the naysayers all the time, then you're just going to, first of all it's pretty demoralizing, and secondly you're just not going to accomplish anything.

And so what I find is we have an incredibly creative group of people in the organization. It's not just the people who just started. I mean at all levels of the organization. People will say, "Well why are we doing it this way, and I've got this idea." Well what happens is it kind of democratizes the idea and it all comes together, and nobody cares who had the idea. It can be an intern team that has an idea and then once the idea gets out and starts to take on. Some people may not think that accounting firms are thinking in terms of innovation and ideation. We sure are. And I think it's exciting. Number one it's exciting, and it's a differentiator, but I think it's also necessary in today's enviroment. If you don't have innovation, somebody is going to innovate and it's going to put you out of business. You've got all kinds of of cliché business models like Eastman Kodak that's out there, that everybody looks at, but you're either in today's environment, you're either going to be like Eastman Kodak or you're going to be the digital disruptor that's going to do something a little bit different. And I think that our clients are looking for that and that's the kind of people we hire.

So I think challenging yourself to lean new things and how do you do things differently rather than just continuing to do the same thing and thinking of things differently. I use a lot of analogies, and what I teach people in lessons I say if you have a dog that's starving and all you have is a pantry full off cat food, don't just look at it and say, "It says cat food, I can't," and then lose your dog. Why wouldn't you just open a can? I guarantee a hungry dog would eat a can of cat food. Just because it says cat food doesn't mean, so take yourself out of the rut and think a little bit differently and sometimes those solutions will come to you.

Today I think that with those that we're hiring on campus I think one of the big things is analytics. It's always funny, for a while people say, "I think I want to get into analytics." Well we are. That's what accounting is, is a management information science. And that's who we hire. We're deeply analytical people. And I think that the other part of that is with what we're doing with innovation. I think that our folks today can contribute very quickly. When I started it was like, make copies of this. It was a lot of the mundane that was in there.

Today with digital documents and things of that nature and technology, all that base stuff is kind of gone. We've got, I'll give you an example, is when we do transactions, and even as early as a couple of years ago, if you're doing a three week assignment to do due diligence for a client, the first week was just getting all the data, getting it all loaded into spreadsheets and workbooks, and of course now you've got data visualization and things like that. That would take about a week. So you do a week of prep and then you would do two weeks of the work. Today we can almost scrape the data right out of the system and then electronically clean it up for a couple of hours and the next thing, you're operating. You're starting to do the work in a matter of a few hours rather than the second week. Which is appealing to people, right?

It's a little bit like, for people who don't like to cook. My wife and I like to cook, but for people who don't like to cook, go out and get a Blue Apron or one of those meals in a box kind of thing that you still get, it's good food, I guess, I've never ordered one, but from what I hear from people, and it can be very targeted to whatever you want to do, but it's already there. Now you can cook it, you know you already got it, but you don't have to do all the prep. It's instant offense, I like to call it.

And so I think it's a little bit different. I think in the old days, used to be like the sous chef cutting all the vegetables and all that stuff. Well if it all comes already ready, now you're immediately cooking. I think that's what happens with us. I think it's appealing to our younger folks coming in, right off of campus, to be able to get right in to doing the work and working very closely with our experienced teams. And I think they learn a lot faster. And I think it's a lot more enjoyable. When I was starting out at Arthur Andersen I remember I couldn't wait to get promoted. I felt like once I got to manager, all the mundane was going to be gone and I could actually then start to spend more time with clients and do the stuff that is a lot more fun.

We recruit so many universities, the quality, they're so smart. The quality of the students that we get, it's remarkable. But I don't think anybody wants, I guess if you think about college basketball today, back 20 years ago or more, regardless of how good you were, you had to spend four years in college program to be able to get to the NBA. Well now you've got kids jumping right from high school to NBA or they go one year in college into the NBA because they're ready and they go in and they star. Well the same thing can apply to us. Why hold them back? If they're ready and they can start contributing immediately, we don't have forced ranks. We have positions, obviously, titles in the firm, but people can move through that at their own pace. I actually think that it's going to get less and less around, you're at this level, you're private or you're lieutenant or corporal or whatever it is. As you move up to general or partner, it's a lot different that way. It's really move at your own pace.

And then I think with this innovation platform, like I say, we've got a lot of the ideas are just coming from people that are maybe in their first or second year. They may be doing something that could be mundane and they think differently. I'll give you a good example. We were doing some regulatory testing for a bank and basically you're sitting down and you're looking at paper documents and comparing it and doing check, check, check, and if there's an error or an issue or a question, you know the protocol, how do you resolve it? Well team said, a couple year people said, "Why are we doing it this way? If we can scan all these or we get digital documents, we can have it automatically compare, kick it out. Instead of manually doing all this stuff, maybe we can do it with technology and we can get through these things a lot faster. And we can pass on some of the savings to the client and get through more saving the client a lot of money, not only in fees, but risk of regulatory penalties and things if things aren't done."

And they came up with it. And so we funded it. We have almost a little venture process. Garage is like the first piece and it just goes to various stages, and the idea comes up and we have different reviews where people can then, the firm will put money in, say, "Okay, well what if we do this." They say, "Well we can hire this company that can help get this done." And we did it and we put $250,000 or whatever it was in it whatever. We're almost seeding this all the way, and we did it. And then now you've got something you've done for one bank that now you can go to multiple banks and show them you got a referencible client.

But that all came out of the innovation out of a couple of staff people on the engagement and maybe a manager who was kind of sponsoring and said, "Yeah, that's good." And the nice thing is we're such a flat organization that they happened to be in Charlotte and there was a time the CEO of the firm, they wanted to spend an hour with me and they showed me and I said, "We'll fund it." That flatness and agility allows us to do things like that. And then I said, "Well listen. I don't want all these ideas to come to me all the time. At some point I'm going to be out of town and slow it down," so that's why we put in the innovation process got it in and then as they come out of that it goes into those various stages. And it's kind of pre-approved. Not pre-approved, but the check points have the authority to approve the funding. None of it has to go to me. I said I want to simplify this thing and get it moving.

So we're having some pretty innovating things coming out of the organization. But I would tell the students coming in is you can create anything and question anything. Just because we did something one way for the last 10 years doesn't mean that it can't be done differently. And frankly, I like that. I like that change in people thinking about new ways of doing it. The only requirement I have is that they share the knowledge and share the idea so it can be scaled, right? Just like that example on the regulatory testing. The fact that we did it on one, if it was one and done and that's all we did, from a business standpiont, it's not such a good thing to do. But all of a sudden you say, "Wow, okay. They identified 300 banks or something that could use this." And then we got our sales team and we taught people how to do it, we leveraged it, and then you start. Now you've got something that is very valuable.

And I did kind of a [ex 01:10:01] prize that we awarded last year and gave a lot of money. We didn't give a million dollars, for sure, but it was more of a recognition. But the team that won the CEO prize is what we called it, but essentially it was copied after the ex prize, but we had a number of teams that came up with very, good, transformative ideas. And these were two and three, and not all that. We had people had been with the firm for 30 years that came up with some great ideas. Really great ideas to transform the way they do their business. A lot of it is is that people just, if I think where the kernel of it is is people doing something and say, "Why are we doing it this way?" And saying, "Why am I walking 12 blocks? I can go get on this scooter and I can be there sooner. I can use this technology to get me there and think about how do I arrive at my destination differently?"

And so we encourage that. And I think that the size of our firm is, we're a major firm, so we're big enough that we can do those investments and make that stuff happen, but we're small enough and flat enough that we can make a decision and get it done. So I think it's a good balance there. And then we award people and recognize them. The team that one the ex prize last year, actually one of the people that were on the team had actually left the firm because she felt like she had a lot of things to do and at the time couldn't get some of that stuff done, so she got recruited away and that she thought she was going to have more autonomy and freedom to do what she wanted to do. It didn't work out that way, and then she came back and we had already started this innovation thing. She was just delighted, and she was on the team that actually won. She was a key contributor on the team that actually won the CEO prize last year.

And you know what, that was probably in November, and then February or March, that team wanted to have a follow on meeting with me of how they've taken that idea and really taken it even to a different level. And it's amazing. I think that about innovation sometimes, it's once you take that chance and you get it, then you start thinking of the enhancements. But you can never get some next generation kind of thinking until you have the comfort and security and support to be able to take that chance and get your ideas.

And then what I found about the teams that have done something innovative through the innovation platform is that then they just become like ideas factories. They're machines. They're just spinning it out all the time because [inaudible 01:12:43]. No it's really true. I mean we come up with these ideas, they want to hear them, they're going to fund them, and these things come out. Innovative people really get motivated by ideas and for people to take and help develop their ideas. So we're trying to become more of an idea factory in the business and then that structure allows us to really pick some of those items that we can say, "Hey, we can scale this into because even a new line of business or a new service or something like that, or improve something that we're already doing." Which obviously helps our clients, which is what we're in the business for too. So it kind of checks all the boxes.

I think for me, some of the lessons that I would say, number one is be intentional and set out to do things and sometimes just actually put it down. Write it down. And then go back and look at it, making sure that you're staying on course. I think another thing is just never be afraid of seizing opportunities. You just never know where they're going to come from and I think about my life has been a lot in business and actually my personal life is almost accidental. Things happened and they happened for a reason. You don't recognize it at first when it's happening, but when you step back and you look and you say, "Wow, there was a catalyst in my life or some time and some place that somebody pointed me in another direction or helped me think through something a little bit differently," and so always be open to those kinds of things.

And lastly I'd say just always be innovating. I've been in the business now 38 years and I'm still on a daily basis thinking about how to do things differently, how to keep yourself relevant. I think in our business, one of the things that's great for me is that I get to spend time with clients all the time, I get to spend time at universities, I get to spend time with our people that we've just hired in the last few years, and it just kind of keeps you updated. And the opportunities that all those things and all those different venues afford, you know you sit back and you look and you're sitting there saying, "Gosh, I really understand smart contracts and block chain and cryptocurrency and things of that nature." I'm not out investing in Bitcoin or anything that, but I start thinking about how do you apply these technologies to our business?

So always be curious, read, but also look for experiences and look for opportunities. There are so many people out in this world that are way smarter than me, and all I like to do is build relationships with them and learn how they think. And I always pick up some piece of knowledge that is going to help me in some way. If nothing more than just to satisfy my curiosity that I met somebody new and I learned something new. And I know my wife, it's funny, we'll go to events or cocktail parties and stuff, and we'll come home and she can tell whether I met a lot of people that have inspired me and got me thinking differently or it was kind of a average kind of a thing. I'm not someone that needs to talk about the deck I'm building on the house. I'm probably more someone that wants to understand something about technology or new ways of doing things and new ways of thinking and how to help people. So it's fun.