

Lisa Nichols: Today we welcome Marc Braun and John Kramer to the show. Together, they lead Cambridge engineering. Guys, I am so excited to have the two of you with me today. We've known each other for a long time, John and I have known each other longer, than you and I have Marc from different walks of life, or paths across over the years, and I've just always been so in awe of Cambridge and just the culture that you've built here, you guys truly are an exemplary when it comes to manufacturing companies and just such a pillar here in St. Louis. And so, it's a delight for me to have you.

Kramer: Thank you very much so and you've been quite an inspiration to me watching you lead and be totally involved in the community, not just business. So thank you.

Nichols: Well, I tell you, as I said, we're going to have more to talk about today, than we're going to have the time for... So, I don't want to waste any more time. So John, talk to us a little bit about the story of Cambridge.

Kramer: So, it's funny, but my father one day decided he and his brother wanted to go into business rather than selling life insurance. So, about 56 years ago, they started Cambridge engineering and trying to engineer different products, then my father decided to stick on one product, which is kind of the HVAC-focused commercial industrial, and so we're a 56-year-old startup company and I grew up the ranks working in plant cutting grass, then I started a customer service group doing industry recall, then grew up through sales, and eventually became the vice president of sales and then became president of the company, 2005. So that's kind of the story behind that. And my father and mother really loved me, love people and I really learned a lot of the generosity and care for people is there's a tremendous amount of loyalty that my father had for his employees. So just growing up, what that was really a great start for me.

Nichols: I always say, when the children of entrepreneurs, the dinner conversations are probably very interesting. And you and Brookie both probably got a little MBA didn't you do?

Kramer: And then we got told... I talk so much about business all the time during dinner.

Nichols: Mark, you're now the President of Cambridge. Talk to us a little bit about your journey. How did you actually get connected to Cambridge?

Braun: Yeah, actually, my family was friends with the Kramers and I was running a global sales leadership group for Coke and traveling a lot and would get together with John and would eat with them, and he would share meals with us and we would talk about business and talk about life. So, it wasn't a business connection, but we were friends. One day, he sat down with me and said, "You know what, I'm really building and growing this company, I want to build a growth-based company, and hold on all the family values and I don't hire friends. So we got a problem because my wife said I should hire you". And that was literally the conversation I was like, "Okay well, how does that work?" And so we spent the next few months just talking through what he wanted and what he really wanted to build, and we actually navigated severance before I came on board because we thought that the friendship was more important, than the business. And that was 11 years ago, it's been a special ride for the last 11 years.

Nichols: What a great story, I love that. And because you guys spent time as friends, you really did get to know one another and your value system and who you were at the core, right? And that is so critical, I think when you go into any kind of partnership or a hiring situation, the other thing that I think about that's packed in there is sometimes you need to listen to your wife. Right John? So, John, what led you to pick Mark, what was it about Mark that you saw?

Kramer: Ultimately, I had a view of really... I want to build and do something I don't just want to be... Now that I ran the company and the owner of the company, I want to do something more than that. I know that I want my people to thrive, people need to thrive and I'm a collaborative leader, which is really great, but they also need more direction and more focus. My natural DNA. I'm ADD. I'm dyslexic, and I love people and I love to learn, but the organization was getting whipped by my ideas all the time and so looking for someone that could really add in bolster and also help me focus. I love to learn to focus, I feel better with that but also, the people there love to be focusing so that's when I really saw Mark and his talents, and his abilities and helping me get to the next level, and helping other people, by helping them succeed and thrive. So that was kind of a lot of the story.

Nichols: So, there was a lot of self-reflection, and self-discovery during that time, right? John? To say, "I realize this is who I am, but I need this" and I just think about that. That takes some humility and a lot of humility.

Braun: Well, that modeling for me has allowed the team that we've built back at Cambridge. We're a 36-million-dollar company, and I'd put him up against any company three times, there four times the size. Because it's allowed me to do the same thing. The attract leaders in the sales and engineering and HR and finance and they've come in and they've been better than I am at those areas and that's been able to duplicate throughout the whole organization. So, everyone inside of Cambridge is literally looking for people that are better than them at their job, to be able to attract and train and grow and let them thrive. Become everything they were created to be. And so, that humility that desire and that passion from John has built an incredible growth engine underneath him.

Nichols: Well, so, obviously, you were attracted to John, you were attracted to him You were attracted to his values, you saw that there was a synergy there, but then you also were attracted to the company and what was it that led you to say Yes, I'm going to join forces with you.

Braun: Yeah, coming from a large... So, I started my career with a chemical large publicly traded and then a fairly large privately held and come into a small company. Family-owned, was scary. I was thinking about it processing with my friends and family and saying, "Hey is this the right move?" One of the things that I've fallen in love with is exactly that, the family business, and the ability to have purpose-driven and business combined, meaning that if they're not separate that you can actually lead the business in a way that has a bigger purpose in life and for the people that it's serving both internally and externally. Just it wakes me up every morning excited to come. The other thing is, is that Cambridge as a product company had transformed a market, so there was the technology, that's globally known as the HTHV technology has transformed warehouse distribution and manufacturing heating and ventilation. And so, whenever I was looking from a brand perspective, they actually had really solid—11 years ago—had solid penetration great market share, had elated clients, a great reputation for being responsive, reliable and easy to do business with. So there was already solid quality systems in the manufacturing side but they just weren't growing. And so I think about what you're doing here, which is telling stories and being able to help that story become known. The story is beautiful. And it was 11 years ago. But how do we get that story known and told? 'cause it can make a bigger impact.

Nichols: And the story can always be better. We always have to be looking for how can we make the story even better I think is what you guys have done a really good job at. Let's talk about what you guys implemented with your continuous improve, 'cause you're a lean

organization. Employ the tenants of lean. What did you do? Tell us that story about the videos on the continuous improvement.

Kramer: So I'm going to back up a little bit. The modern time of Cambridge, it really started in 2010, getting things to settle in place. With Mark being on board, but he'd take him different roles. But I love Jim Collins, *Good to Great* and Patrick Lencioni, and he was coming into town, and I actually, I got to be the day host chair for them when he was just releasing his brand-new book, *Advantage... How organizations help trumps everything in a business*. And that's really what I crave. I really wanted that and I know that I needed help with that. So I brought 20 people from Cambridge, to go listen to him and talk with him. And over that time, we started answering the six questions. Why do you exist? How do you behave? What do you do? How you succeed? who does what? Was that now and what's most more right now? So with that, we started pecking away at that in putting place holders. Also at that time, that was the same time that I'm learning, I'm growing and I need help, I want more than me, so I have hired coaches throughout my life. But I found this crazy guy, his name is Mark Thom. I had no idea who he was but I heard he was speaking and Mark went to go listen, for me 'cause I had a conflict that day, but we found more common, we immediately found synergies and he's been there done that. So many different ways, but it had just wonderful humility sweet spirit, but very clear and defining roles. These things that he learned things they had failed from and being able to share that, so that was starting that whole journey at the same time and getting clearer with that. So as we started to communicate because organizational health is communicate, communicate and over-communicate and recommunicate those answers to those questions. Then, as we started getting that engaged then we started in getting involved with Lean and in 2014 I think it was fall, I sent a team of three or four people from Cambridge to go visit my friend Paul Acres at Fast Caps in Bellingham, Washington, he wrote the book 2 second Lean and they came back blown away. Actually said don't come back if you don't learn anything. And they came back on fire. And so, that's really began the journey, and I have to really grateful for Mark, as you can. You learn something. But he helped them and himself integrate that into the organization very effectively by not going a company-wide mandate and edict that's kind of what they wanted, because that's what they saw, but we started really small, and created a vortex to attract people. Suck them in because it's so cool on the information. So it was a really messy and hard for a while, but it got better and better and they persisted and brought something out and they continued to learn from their failures and their messes and so I'm really proud of the team and what they've done to that lean. And Mark, you can explain a little bit more about what that is today.

Braun: Yeah, so the concept of two-second lean is just how do you build a culture around people that... Everybody's engaged in conducive proven activities. And so, the simple concept is, how do you learn to see waste in your own life struggle challenges? What is it about your life, that's struggling, how do you fix that and how do you build to where all the people are working on fixing that, see what bugs them? Fixing what bugs you? And then the videos you mentioned, it's a pretty weird concept, it's not a normal... I guess, you take a short self-video, 30-second to one-minute and you share that. And so our people 150 now strong and 100 whenever we had started the program, they have been doing that now every single day they've been learning to see waste in their own life, they've been fixing that—fixing what bugs them about their own processes their own challenges and then making short videos, improvements videos to date. We have just over 7500 videos, these are videos that are documented improvements that are our people have made a 100 plus people in Cambridge. And it's unbelievable what that has done to the process.

Nichols: It's been a total mindset shift, I'm sure.

Braun: When John moved back to the Advantage seven years ago, that was getting some of the leadership aligned. But what, two-second lean allowed us to do is to bring that to the floor have it engaged every single day and have that same story, and the story strengthening and strengthening and broadening and broadening, and impact. And so, literally, it's gone around the world. Those videos have been watched thousands and thousands and thousands of times around the world our people in 75 names right to the front that have made massive numbers of improvements and they're transforming people's lives around the world enriching lives around the world because of them.

Kramer: What's so cool though about this is that people actually learning to solve problems and fix things that bother them. Everybody has got a span of control even in a highly regulated industry or whatever, we all have a span a control. How we do things and if you learn how to make improvements, make your job easier, make somebody else's job easier and solve things rather than complain about them. You're going to take that home with you, you're going to take that same attitude until you're going home. And we're saying people who can sell problems at work, will go home, being better mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters. When you get that, you get healthier families, healthier families create healthier communities. We never even thought about that but we're seeing that in spades and it's just so rich and rewarding to watch that happen.

Nichols: Well there's just so many things that I'm thinking about because John, I love it that you sent a team to listen. It wasn't John and it wasn't Marc. You sent a team. Because oftentimes, I think that's what we try to do. We'll go listen and take in these insights and new ways of thinking and then you come back and try to inspire your team. But it's nothing like being there and you guys are so much about people development. I love it, and I know that you've taken people through Dale Carnegie and I love the story, Marc, you tell I think about somebody on the machine for that went through Dale Carnegie. You said you know that it was totally uncomfortable for him. But did he grow as a person? Did he grow as a leader in the organization?

Braun: The whole organization to the people that surrounded him and loved him exactly where they're at. One of our core values is an unconditional love. It's written on the pages and people are like, "How do you do that?" Well, when somebody's scared and they're saying, "I don't know if I can do this Dale Carnegie Training." You sit down and you say, "What's going on?" and you learn about them and who they are, who they were created as and what they're created by and what's been holding them back in life and to be able to just be okay with that conversation. Our HR group, the leaders inside the manufacturing organization... It was George and I love George, and I think he wouldn't mind me sharing it, he just came to me and he said, "I'm still concerned about this training," and I said, "That's okay." Just to be okay with it. And then George came to me and he said, "I'm just still not okay with this." And we said, "It's okay, you don't have to be okay with it." And so to be able to do that and then to be able to just watch him grow it was a six-week training to watch him grow and to hear his story back and forth, and he won the breakthrough award. He won the highest award of the event, and it was just to be able to have him stand up and say, "I never thought I would be up here. This is the scariest thing, but I'm here, I'm standing tall in front of you." It brought tears to my eyes then and right now it does, again, it's amazing how if you can allow people to be accepted for who they are, loved where they're at, and then they can be allowed to grow from there. That's what I'm after.

Nichols: It's so much good when we're going take a quick break and then we'll be back with John and Marc.

[Commercial Break]

Nichols: Well, welcome back, I want to jump in. Now, this is Something Extra. So I want to talk a little bit about that. I know we have a lot to talk about here, as well, but talk to us about the

something extra, like in your team members and we've already touched on your culture which is so phenomenal, but I want you guys to unpack that a little bit.

Braun: Before we get started. I have to tell so just the morning story. So this morning, my wife, I was telling her that we were doing this, and I said it was with Lisa Nichols and it's on Something Extra and she said, I said Do you remember her and she said, "I know her very well, she's the one that does so much for the community, she's the one that has this beautiful daughter, and she's the one that has the daughter at Promise Academy and she does so much." And I was just thinking about the impact that your theme has on the community and on our wives and on our families, and so thank you for what you do. Just really appreciate that before we jump in to our side.

Nichols: Well, thank you for saying that, Marc.

Braun: So, you were asking a question, let me have you ask it again,

Nichols: Talk to us about something extra that you guys see in your team members. You guys have built an amazing culture there.

Kramer: So, we have daily rhythms in the morning meeting at 8:30 starts out and somebody leads the meeting and whoever they volunteer for it, and do the walk up music and tell us about themselves, and then after that is done, we stretch during that time but then we go grateful appreciation and we pass the microphone around. What are you grateful for? And so it could be anything that we hear some concert, someone is in town for a concert. It also could be something level where we had one young man, Josh, who had taken the Dave Ramsey's Road Economic Freedom course, that we offer... And he said, "You know, I just sold my dream pick-up truck and I bought a less expensive truck, but this is the first time I've ever been debt-free and I've had money in the bank from my family and me." So, that really brings me to tears by people learning and growing together and inspiring that. So his grateful appreciation is just wonderful and it's hard to have a really bad day or even a bad day, when you're counting your blessings and when you're inspired by others, and other people's stories, it is so rich and rewarding.

Braun: Yeah, I think about that daily habit. We've been doing it now every single day for the last four plus years, so our whole company gathers we have a slide up in front of it. All that's on it says grateful appreciation and we pass around a mic and people share with the grateful for. I

just think about that one little tiny something extra, if that could be in everybody's life in every company throughout St. Louis and every company throughout the United States and around the world. If everyone just shifted their focus into, "what am I grateful for?" What I like about grateful, versus thank you, thank you, is thinking somebody grateful doesn't require another person, it's just about some situation and they can be grateful in any situation if someone's attacking them, they can still be grateful. If the work is hard, if they're going through trials or tribulations, whatever it is they can be grateful. And when you look at it through that lens, everything can be turned and you can grow through it instead of shrink away from it.

Nichols: Could not agree more. And I know Marc that you have said you were just so grateful for all of your people. You and John are sitting here right now. Telling this story.

Braun: Oh, it's the whole group back there. There's 150 families right now that we're trying to represent here. But you would be so much more blessed if you could hear the stories directly from them. They're the ones that have been building the culture they're the ones that have been making the improvements they're the ones that adopted two-second lean they're the ones that have now gone out and done Carnegie. And so that's my biggest fear, if I just be honest with you, is that when we're talking out in this kind of setting, or on a stage somewhere, that they think it's us and it's not us, it's them, it's their stories, and they are the ones that are courageously moving forward with gratefulness and making this happen.

Kramer: They're very inspiring, it's just honoring and amazing.

Nichols: Well, talk to us a little bit about... 'cause I know that you say that courage is one of your tenants in the company. So tell us some stories around that.

Braun: Yeah, it was interesting once. So it is a core value of courage. And what I saw whenever John sat down with me 11 years ago, was courage. He's a risk taker. He is willing to risk his own personal finances, his own reputation his own, he's sat in front of you fully exposed authentic and saying, "Here I am." You just heard him share that he has ADHD, and dyslexia, those are not things that everybody is willing to share, but it's real and it is a part of him, and it allows him to do things that most people can't do. I call it a superpower. It allows them to think about things that are way off in the future, it allows them to create vision for the company, but that courage is modeled and then allows me to be more courageous and then allows everybody inside the organization. And so, I would say on a daily basis what we say is Travis Warren came to me and said, "I really think that we're helping people become comfortable with being

uncomfortable." Which just feels like such an easy way to do it. I think it was a blues coach that gave him that saying. But that's what courage is. How do we step out of our comfort zone and grow? It's the only place growth comes from, and if our people are driving the growth of the business, which we believe they are, they have to be able to courageously become comfortable with being a uncomfortable and step into that and grow.

Nichols: You guys are enabling your people to step out with courage in another way and I love this about what you guys are doing and helping families that want to adopt. That can be really wouldn't even be a possibility because the cost is so high. Talk to us about that, what are you doing around that?

Kramer: I think something goes our core values. Unconditional love that we have and with courage and the team, the benefits team, the people sitting around this came up with that idea and they're the ones that were around all the people, so that was just amazing where that came from... And I was blown away.

Nichols: It wasn't your idea, it wasn't Marc's idea, and it was your people's idea, right?

Braun: They added a benefit, it's called the "adoption benefit," and it says If you're willing to courageously step out into this world and bring somebody in your family, I cannot imagine a more courageous act where you actually say, I don't know exactly what's going to happen. I don't know how to do this, but I'm willing to take that and I'm willing to bring that person in and love them as our own. We were able to provide some small financial benefit. We do it in two forms, we give them a little bit upfront and then a little bit when the adoption is finalized, because sometimes financials are the hurdle for families to doing this. And so, this just says "Here's some help and support. It's so small compared to their commitment to adoption, but it shows intentionality by the company. It says, "Let's support you through this. This is important.

Nichols: Alright, very good. And you guys have already talked a lot about unconditional love, but is there anything else that you want to add to what we've already talked about? With unconditional love being something extra?

Kramer: Yeah, it was kind of funny rolling that out, because we always talk about love is not a popular word in the workplace and unconditional love is what you use for a teenage son or daughter. And yet it's really all about life and how do you pause and try and figure that out? And its ability for other people to call me on the carpet. Am I being loving? And really how are we

processing this, whether bringing people in the company or people that we didn't bring in the company or people leaving the company? But it's also, how can they flourish? Just processing and thinking through that, because we're all work together. And how can you make a better environment?

Braun: How does that look in tangible ways? So it means you're not criticizing others or condemning others or complaining about that, passing judgement on others. So when somebody comes in as a manager and says, the person that is working for me, is really bad at their job and I don't like them at all, if they say that, I said "Well okay, how is that loving? Are you able to love them during this?" And so they rethink and then they think we can still take actions like discipline and we can still fire someone and unconditionally love them. It can be the most loving thing in the world to do. It's just like setting boundaries at home, or helping clarify expectations with a relationship with a friend. It can be very loving to set boundaries, but you have to do it out of love for them. If you're going to be in this culture and we're asking you to do that, and so it is high expectation to do that.

Nichols: It's truth with grace, it's what I call it. You've got to speak the truth but do it with grace.

Kramer: And I'm also very thankful that all these things, it's a journey on a destination and you've never really arrived. And that gives me hope and gives everybody help in building upon that, and also covers up when we make messes and you mess up. We can go back and address it, and say, woah.

Nichols: Well, do you guys have a story where something was actually missing in you? One of you?

Kramer: One of the things to look at in that area. Marc became president, two years ago. I promoted Marc to be president, and I wanted more for the company, and one of the things I had to do is, in order to get what I want, I have to... What I'm going to change about myself to get the results I'm looking for? And for people to thrive and be better, go home better every day. They needed a different type of leadership, and so I wanted that more. So, I fired myself and I promoted Marc to become the president and it was very rewarding. And then part of that too is just learning from that. I stepped out way back and we got sideways because we didn't have daily rhythms or rhythms as leaders, and how we communicated and so that's something that we learned, and we actually had a third party help us navigate these things because it was hard.

You want more than that. And you know, I never consider myself to arrive, it's just a journey, but I need help and along the way, and I want it.

Nichols: So, you actually engage a third-party facilitator person to kind of help you work through that, which is good.

Braun: I just think it showed enormous courage that was missing for a little while and needed to be because of fear, was holding each other apart instead of getting closer. And our relationship is really critical to the health of the organization, and it's really critical to our relationship, and so it's just like any really strong relationship, an owner and a president or a CEO and president or your direct reports, you have a solid, you have to have a solid working relationship. So when it was sideways... And to be able to recognize that and to be able to say, "Let's get some help here," and not have to muddle through it. I just think about how many marriages are like, that, that need help and support and if people are just like... Well, I don't want any help. Well, it doesn't work that way. You need help, so I just love that you were willing to do that, I really appreciate that and it's just been really fun to reconnect as we have.

Kramer: It's rich rewarding, but it's hard, but it's wonderful.

Braun: Yeah, so the missing something extra was enough courage to do that earlier. Get help earlier.

Nichols: Well, what do you guys believe is this something extra that every leader needs?

Kramer: It's too easy to say, it's self-awareness, but again, what are you learning about yourself? And I think for me, there's something higher, than that. There's a faith, there's something bigger than who I am. To me if I don't have that, then it's all about me. It's all about me, and I am the be all end all. But having a faith in something bigger than who I am helps put things in perspective, keeps me more focused in keeps striving for something more that I can be because I believe everybody and the whole richness and that we look at a Cambridge is that I believe we are all born with the ability to be creative and I love to unlock the creativity with that and whatever that looks like. So again, it's learning about yourself, and then also looking at people as being creative and being able to solve problems and build and grow and thrive or be really good at what they do.

Nichols: Very good, I say. Look for the something extra in everybody because everybody like, you said has been endowed with something, right? And so bringing that out and I think the best leaders are the ones that can bring that out in people, their people.

Braun: Yeah, and I love our tagline of enriching lives, enriching the quality of every life, we touch and if you think about that for me, that gives me purpose, in my life that can carry me through a long time. This is the longest tenure I've had in that company is 11 years. I get bored, I could see doing this for the next 20-plus years and enriching lives in every step along the way. And a company that has ownership that's willing to aim for something a lot larger than profits. So the something extra for me is that purpose of being able to wake up every day and think that I get a chance to enrich someone's life in some small way and I know how much that my life is enriched by that. And to be able to have a company that gets to do that. Wow.

Nichols: There are many definitions of success, but I can't think of a greater one than that. I'm reminded of Bob Chapman, and he says, "You know, it's really about the lives we impact." That's what we're striving for. Well, I want to give you guys the opportunity is there something that you want to kind of plug or talk about and make sure that our listeners know and can dive into?

Braun: Well, first of all, we know that this journey is not something we can do alone, we'd love to be connected with St. Louis region and the United States regions that can partner alongside that want a purpose-driven business. And if you're leading a business, we'd love to be side by side with you shouldering that specifically an action item would be great. The St. Louis region—we're partnering with the St. Louis manufacturers specifically—because we would love to partner really closely with that. We're building a consortia of St. Louis companies that are in the manufacturing sector, that are wanting this kind of improvement mindset engaged workforce and being able to have a purpose that's bigger than just the profits. But it leads to good profitability, which is good. So, on August 15th, we're going to invite some of the manufacturers to Cambridge. To just have a conversation of how do we formalize that? The Association of Manufacturing Excellence has agreed to partner with us to do that and building a consortium of companies in St. Louis.

Nichols: So, if there's a listener out there that says, Yes, I want to be a part of this, how would they go about doing that?

Braun: So they can connect with me directly my email address you guys will post that in there, they can call me directly but all of our social channels are easy to access, YouTube or Facebook or LinkedIn, they can go directly to our website and grab us. Darley Gibson is heading up the administration of that she's our executive admin, and she will be able to answer any questions, and go back and forth and get him sign different. And the date again is August 15th, 8 o'clock at Cambridge. We're going to be doing invites. But would love for them to tag me, if they're interested and help them get inside that group.

Nichols: Well, thank you guys so much for being here, it's just been a pleasure. This has been so much fun for me, so thank you for making the time.