



EP280_Rick Hall

Lisa Nichols 00:03

Chromosomes, little strands of nucleic acids and proteins, are the fundamental genetic instructions that tell us who we are at birth. Most people are born with 46 chromosomes. But each year in the United States, about 6,000 people are born with an extra chromosome, making them a person with Down syndrome. If you've ever encountered someone with Down syndrome, you know that they are some of the kindest, most joyful people you will ever meet. They truly have something extra.

My name is Lisa Nichols, and I have spent the last 24 years as both the CEO of Technology Partners and as the mother to Ally. Ally has something extra in every sense of the word. I have been blessed to be by her side as she impacts everyone she meets. Through these two important roles as CEO and mother to Ally, I have witnessed countless life lessons that have fundamentally changed the way I look at the world.

While you may not have an extra chromosome, every leader has something extra that defines who you are. Join me as I explore this something extra in leaders from all walks of life and discover how that difference in each of them has made a difference in their companies, their families, their communities, and in themselves.

If you liked this episode today, please go to Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen and leave us a five-star rating. I'm excited to have Rick Hall on the show today. Rick is the Chief Information Officer of North America at Royal Canin. So, Rick Hall, thank you so much for making the time to be on this Something Extra Podcast today. I am delighted that you're with me.

Rick Hall 01:50

Oh, I'm so excited. I know we weren't able to do it the first time because of some travel and some business. But I'm glad we were able to reschedule. So, I was excited.

Lisa Nichols 02:00

I am glad to hear and I can't wait for our listeners to learn from you today. You and I have known each other for a few years now. And yeah, I've asked you a couple of times, Rick, come on to the podcast. I'm glad that we're able to make it happen. But we have a lot to talk about today. But before we really dig in, I would love to hear a little bit about how you grew up. Now, I know that you have a degree from Evangel. So, I was wondering, did you grow up in Springfield or did you grow up here?

Rick Hall 02:30

No, actually, I grew up on the east coast. So, I was born and raised in Southeastern Virginia. And so, actually, I grew up on a farm. My dad was a farmer and a mechanic. And so, I grew up and it was a it was a family farm that my great-great grandfather had established, and my grandfather took over. My dad took over, and we're out of the farming business now. But I grew up on a farm. We had livestock, we had plants, we had everything. So, and I went to a church there that really got me exposed to Evangel and had some friends that went there and went and visited at one time, and I was really wanting to get away from that away but really go to see another part of the country because I was born and raised there and I lived there my whole life in Southern Virginia. I'd maybe gone up to DC, but I've never really gone outside of the state of Virginia. So, I decided I was going to go to college outside of the state. I went to undergraduate there at Old Dominion my first year and then transferred to Evangel, got my undergraduate at Evangel, and ended up there.

Lisa Nichols 03:42

Yeah, spreading your wings, right? I kind of did the same thing, Rick, because I grew up in a small town in Kentucky, Paducah, Kentucky. Yeah. Okay. Well, I need to know how you know Paducah. Yeah, I always tell people if you, if you ever drive to Florida, I guarantee you've driven through there. There are three exits. My parents lived off the second exit. So, but yeah, I was kind of the same way I loved where I grew up. Obviously, I adore my family, but just was kind of ready to spread my wings. And that's what moved us here. But you know, so what did you like to do as a young

child? Because you did go on and you majored in mathematics? And were you like really interested in math, or were you counting the cows on the farm?

Rick Hall 04:34

Well, I think you naturally are drawn to things you're good at. And so, I was I was good with numbers. I was good with math. I was in the advanced math courses in high school, and one of my favorite teachers was a math teacher. And so, I figured that my next step was to get into engineering. So, I started the journey to get into electrical engineering and decided that, that really wasn't what I was enjoying. And so, I did that for a year at Old Dominion, then I transferred out to like, like, we talked about Evangel. And they didn't have an engineering school. So, I just, I did what I like to do. I did math, I did some computer science at the time. I took a lot of psychology. So, I actually minored in psychology, and ended up just getting a math degree. And so, like I said, it was something that I was drawn to, and I didn't want to do accounting. And back then, they didn't really have a major in computer science. But so that's, that's where I just kind of gravitated to.

Lisa Nichols 05:41

Well, I think study. Don't you think that mathematics is a great foundation, though? Or even computer science? I mean, I've done some studies on that. And when you think about processes, when you think about methodology, when you think about that concrete analytical thinking? You know, that all comes into play in computer, I believe.

Rick Hall 06:00

And I keep gravitating back to that. Because, you know, I was early in my career. I actually started my professional corporate career marketing. So, I was a marketing, marketing head for a retail company. That's what got me to St. Louis. I worked for Edison Brothers. Edison Brothers stores back in the day. And one of the things I didn't like about marketing is there was no black and white, it was all gray. It was all you could have the great greatest campaign, and it just doesn't work. And it just and I just gravitated back to the ones and zeros and the yes and the nos, and really got back to my foundation of mathematics and got into computer science. And then that led into some leadership opportunities within technology. And so, I just gravitated back to it because I didn't like the gray area.

Lisa Nichols 06:50

Ambiguity? Maybe the ambiguity of marketing. And I don't know, maybe today. There are a lot more tools to analyze the marketing and make sure you're getting an ROI on the spend and that sort of thing. But probably back then there was not. It was more about advertising, and like you said, campaigns, marketing campaigns. Well, you know, you've had a really extensive and diverse career, you've been a COO, a CTO, obviously the head of marketing, VP of Digital. Now you're the CIO for Royal Canin, and we're going to really dig into that. But how do you think? I love the fact that you started in marketing, and then you pivoted because, you know, sometimes I just tell people, really, if you will take every opportunity and try to learn and garner as much as you can. It helps you with the next thing, and I mean, really, truly your stepping stone. So how do you think all of those roles that you've had really shaped your approach as a CIO?

Rick Hall 07:54

Well, I think one of the things that did is it, I like to, I like to describe myself as not your typical IT guy. Because I like to have the conversations that aren't technical based with my customers. And my customers are really the leadership team here at Royal Canin. So, as I'm talking to the GM or the CMO, or the CFO, I can talk finance, I can talk marketing, I can talk sales if I need to, without getting too technical. And I remember when I stepped into this role, back three years ago, this current one that GM at the time, asked me if I could educate the executive team on technology, how to talk technology, I go, how about if I flip it? How about if I? How about if I stop talking about technology and start talking about capabilities? How about if I just talk about what you need and what you need enabled? So that you don't have to figure out how to talk technology with me, and I can build that roadmap for you. And I think what would help me to your point, in the marketing, I took a left turn when my first CIO role, and I, I took an operations role leading a call center and a warehouse because I wanted to learn how to lead people and learn and lead a lot of people and lead a big workforce. And so, in my career, I've purposely looked at the areas that I have gaps in and really look for opportunities to go and learn through experience on those gaps. And one of the reasons why I got my MBA is because I didn't know how to do finance. I didn't know how to do some of the other things. And so, I really wanted to learn that so that I can have that conversation with, with executive leaders.

Lisa Nichols 09:32

I love that, Rick, that I love what you just said, it really makes you a well-rounded leader. And I love the fact, and we're going to talk about that because I know you've done a lot with this business capability model. And I want to dig into that, and that's precisely what you're talking about. Let's talk about what you need and then how technology then can get help enable or solve a challenge. But you know, before we can kind of get into that? You know, I really want to talk

about Royal Canin. And I remember having breakfast many years ago, and this was before you were the CIO with John Seville. And you and John worked together. And I he was describing to me the process and kind of some of the differentiators, Rick of Royal Canin versus like another pet food company. And he was telling me about how the, the plant, the reduction, plant in Rolla he was describing this to me, I was so impressed. And do you know that day, I went home and started ordering for our dogs, and we have four dogs, and I, you know, at any one time we get eight flats, you know, of food. But tell our listeners if they're not familiar what, what are the differentiators? Tell us more about the company as a whole and what you guys do and what differentiates you?

Rick Hall 11:01

Yeah, I think the start off we're, we're very much science and health based. So, we are, we are looking at in about 75 to 80% of our portfolio is for pets that are sick or ill or have an ailment. So, you won't find our product in the, in the Sam's and the Costco is a big, big box stores purposely because we, we focus on those pet owners that have a pet that needs the food to get healthy or to stay healthy. And that's an important differentiator there. The founder of Royal Canin was a veterinarian that figured that really came to the conclusion if you feed a pet something that is healthy and proven from a science standpoint to really help them to stay healthy, then you won't have to treat an ailment. And so, our diets are very much science based we have a major facility in France, we have one here in Lewisburg, Ohio, that, that is specifically what they do is they test our diets to make sure that it's really doing what it should. And we look at the nutrient based so it's very much you know, how the nutrients absorbed in the intestines and, and you know, we talk about analyzing the poo, the stuff that comes out in the end. And everything that comes out of a pet is stuff that they don't need. So, if you can figure out what's coming out and what doesn't need to be there, and what is absorbed within the pet to make them healthier. That's what we focus on. And so, it's very much a science health-based company for pets.

Lisa Nichols 12:39

Yeah, I think that's a major differentiator, you know, is and I remember even John saying in Labradors sometimes have hip dysplasia, and the food for them is designed to help them with those issues. I'm so glad that you brought up the, the Genesis, I think it's how do you say his name, Jean Cathary?

Rick Hall 13:05

Yeah, Cathary.

Lisa Nichols 13:06

The veterinarian. I'm so glad that you brought that up. You know, and I think you guys I read I kind of dug into this, but you guys were one of the first research facilities that research bone related disorders and diseases among dogs. Yeah, so that, I love that. Another thing that I did not realize, Rick, is that you guys produce encyclopedias?

Rick Hall 13:35

Oh, yeah. We have a cat and a dog encyclopedia.

Lisa Nichols 13:39

Yes, I love it. And then, you have a quarterly magazine called The Veterinarian Focus, which is circulated to about 70,000 vets worldwide live in different languages. I mean, I love that you're sharing this research, and you're sharing these things with the veterinarians out there.

Rick Hall 13:57

Yep. And there's a continued education. I mean, we are very focused on educating the veterinarians on, on nutrition, and why we do what we do, and why the food is helpful to pets. And we have some guiding principles that really, you know, we're focused on the pet first. And so, you know, even, even to the point where, and that's one of the things I love about this company, is the passion that the people have for pets and the passion that they have for the product. And even when we aren't able to, you know, we've been in situations where we weren't able to meet a demand from a diet that a certain type of pet might not have in the past. And we've recommended our competitors because we absolutely want to make sure the pet is first.

Lisa Nichols 14:45

Pet centric organization.

Rick Hall 14:50

The thing is, pets first people always.

Lisa Nichols 14:54

Oh, I love it. I love it. Well, I also read that you guys have a foundation. And I did not realize that either. But you have a foundation that's helping with cancer detection? And is that cancer detection? Are you training the dogs to detect cancer in humans?

Rick Hall 15:14

Yes, yes. And I don't really have the specifics or the details behind it. But yes, I did see that when I was out in California. And we are, and there is an effort to train certain dogs to be able to detect that in patients. So, yes.

Lisa Nichols 15:31

Is that is just incredible. You're training dogs to assist children that are on the autistic spectrum, challenge. Assistant dogs to help with natural catastrophes like earthquakes, I mean, you guys are really, you're doing a lot more than just meets the eye. And I absolutely my, my respect for the company has just gone out the roof, Rick, in the research that I've done. But I know that you guys are in the middle of talking. Let's get back to being a CIO. You're in the middle of this ERP upgrade. Can you share some insights are challenges opportunities that you've encountered in this process? And my second question would be, what impact do you think this is going to make on the overall company?

Rick Hall 16:22

Well, I can't share too much of a detail. But I can say that we're on a journey to look at what that should look like in the future. So, you know, we've always had an operating plan that's a year out. And we've always had an ambition that's more like five years out. And so, as we look at where we're at today, with the platforms and the tech stacks that we have, we're looking at purposely at the three to five year to say, you know, because we're very high-growth company, especially here in North America. And we've, we've, we've been very successful. And so, we need to be thinking about what does that three-to-five-year horizon look like. Not just for North America, but for the entire world. And we're in 52, markets were the biggest pet food producers in the world. We're a very small percentage of the market here. But we're a 40%, 40% market share in Europe. And so, as we look forward to what we need to do for the future, we need to look at the tech stacks and the things that we have today.

And so, we're on a journey to figure out what that next step is. Still in the initial phase initial process of identifying what we should be doing, and who's going to help us do that. So, and a big component in what we've learned over the last couple of years, is we have to make sure that we include the people in this whole process. And so business readiness, change management, how we approach it from how this is going to impact the front line is already a part of the discussion. So, typically, when you've got a big ERP, or you've got a big technology project, you're going through, and then you're looking at service induction, and then you're looking at training. We're purposely having the discussion on the people impact of what this is going to do today. And so, that's very important. The business readiness, the change management, having the right change agents in place that's super critical for the success of the project.

Lisa Nichols 18:25

Agreed. And many times, when it's not successful, that's the component that was missing. You can implement the best technologies out there. But if you don't have adoption, right?

Rick Hall 18:37

Right. And the hard part, I mean, I don't want to oversimplify it. But the easy part is turning it on. The hard part is getting the people to actually go over and actually do something with it. And so, to make sure that they're part of the journey that they are, they're part of the decision-making and part of the journey in adopting an early adopting what it is we're doing. And we've found success over the last couple years and some major projects that we've done when we take that approach.

Lisa Nichols 19:03

Yeah, that's really wise advice. Wise advice, Rick. So, I'm gonna ask you a couple more questions. And then we do need to take a quick break, but you're involved in various organizations focused on data. So, you're, you're doing a lot of things around data. How has Royal Canin leveraged data science and analytics to enhance your operations and decision-making?

Rick Hall 19:25

Well, I think we're approaching it much like other CPG companies to where you know, we're not bleeding edge as far as DNA is concerned. So, we know how to make a bag. We know how to get it at the right place, someone at the right time. And so, we're utilizing data and analytics to really help us to enhance that to really how do we how do we get the how do we get better? How do we do what we're doing today better? How do we validate some of our assumptions? And I purposely stepped into this space number one because numbers and math, and I like that kind of stuff. But I was

having discussions with some other leaders here in St. Louis. And we really weren't seeing a huge focus for a DNA perspective in this region, and purposely on talent. And so, we were seeing a lot of talent that were, were coming out of St. Louis, going to the east and west coast, because that's where all the money was. So, we purposely started having conversations, connected with a couple of different people here in St. Louis, to really how do we retain that talent? How do we first get that talent? And then how do we retain that talent here in the region? And so that's, that was initially why I stepped into it. And then I sit on a couple boards and wash you want to Missouri, and all of them are purposely my, my intent, my focus is really to retain that talent, how do we keep it in the region.

Lisa Nichols 20:51

Thank you for doing that. That's the thing. You know, students get trained here. But if there are no companies that are doing innovative things around that, they are gonna go somewhere else. So, thank you so much for doing that. And being intentional about it, Rick. So, one more question, then we're going to take a quick break. So, how have you use because you are a CPG company, we ordered I order eight flats, like I said, all the you know, online? What how have you used technology to improve the customer experience, especially in the context of E-commerce?

Rick Hall 21:27

Well, I think all of us CPG companies learned a great deal when we went through the pandemic a couple of years back. One of the things that, you know, I come from the retail sector. So, I understand the demand curves, the peaks, the valleys, you know, Easter and Christmas, and you know, it goes up and down. But if you think about it, a pet eats the same bowl of food every day. So, our demand curve is really dependent on acquiring new pets or losing pet owners. And so, when this happened to us through the pandemic and people were pantry loading, and we didn't anticipate that we were going to be the paper towels of pet food, that people were taking everything off the shelf. We didn't have the infrastructure to really support that. And so, along with the paper industry, and along with some of the other industries that went through that we've all learned. We've all exercised the muscle that we didn't have before. And so, that's something that we've learned, and it's taken some time to get through it. And I think everybody can attest to that. But that's where some of the data and analytics work that we're doing really goes into, how do we make how can we make it even better? And so, we're constantly looking at, again, capabilities, not just technology, but what capabilities do we need to enable? And what do we need to enhance? And so, we've got product teams that really evolve these capabilities on a monthly basis instead of waiting for a major upgrade. And so, we're trying to stay close to the customer. We're trying to stay close to our internal customers and really determine what we need from a capability standpoint, so we can enable it.

Lisa Nichols 22:57

I really, honestly had not thought about that. But I bet people were stockpiling food. Like did toilet paper. But the other thing, Rick, and I just now that you're saying this, I think people went out and got pets, a lot more, I think, I think the number of pets really even went up during the pandemic because I think people were like, well, we're home. So, it's a great time to train to train a pet, right?

Rick Hall 23:26

That was that was part of the demand increase. But we also saw when things got back to normal, we saw a decrease in that. So, we saw an increase in the number of pets that are in shelters. So, we're partnering with a number of shelters to find homes for pets. We feed a ton of shelters in the region and across the globe. So, that fluctuation of pet ownership goes up and down as pets are gonna go somewhere. And so, they're going into the shelters, and we're helping with that. And we're helping breeders as well.

Lisa Nichols 23:53

Yeah, thank you so much for that. Well, Rick, we need to take a very quick break and we'll be right back on this Something Extra Podcasts with Rick Hall.

AD 24:01

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Lisa Nichols 24:31

So, welcome back, everyone, to the Something Extra Podcast with my friend Rick Hall, who's the CIO of Royal Canin. So, Rick, we've talked about a lot of things. But when you look ahead, how do you see technology really continuing to shape the future of the pet care industry? And, I guess, what role does Royal Canin aspire to play in that?

Rick Hall 24:55

Yeah, I think one of the things that we're looking at is we want to be something more than just selling a bag of food or a can. And so, because we are so health in science based on the pet, we're looking at different ways that we can provide services to our, to not only our pet owners, but also the partners that we work with, the breeders, the veterinarians, and clinicians that work into the in the clinic. So how can we offer you know, more education to educate them on the science behind what we do? But how do we create services that can help not only within the clinic, but within the pet owner. So, we're looking at things like how to, you know, body score is one of the things that you look at? If you look at the healthy weight of a pet? How do we create an easy way for a pet owner to be able to evaluate the body score of their pet, or feeding recommendation from a portion standpoint. Again, feeds into the healthy weight of a pet? How do we educate the pet owner? How do we educate the nutrition expert that's sitting in the clinic? And how do we make sure that we're all talking about the same thing. So, we're looking at more efficient ways to, to have the right bag at the right place at the right time. But also, to offer services that would be beneficial to enabling healthy pets for the pet owner and the vet clinics.

Lisa Nichols 26:20

We have one dog, Bear who is a chocolate lab and I, I I'm not sure what his body score would be. His BMI is probably a little bit off right now. But he loves his food. He loves food. So, let me ask you, Rick, what do you think is your leadership style? And have you seen your leadership style evolve? Over the years?

Rick Hall 26:47

Oh, absolutely. I would say early in my career, I think we're constantly learning how to be a leader. I don't think that ever stops. And I think there's, and I think, too, it depends on the environment you're in the company you're with and the culture that you're trying to foster, and drive. I've learned so much within be here seven years, this June. I've learned so much about leadership within this company. I would say more so than I've learned in my career. More so about how to be a servant leader, because this is a very people focused organization. And so, one of the things I've learned and one of the keys to my success here has been really finding out what gives my people energy, what really engages them, what keeps them engaged. Because, I found that if you can find something that they, they, they can get energy from they get engagement from, they're going to be, they're going to do a better job, and they're going to be fulfilled. And so, really what I've tried to do here is find out what fulfills you, what gives you that energy and some for some people. It's creating the platform for recognition, it's gives giving them the opportunity to tell a great story that they did. And so, you know, I tell my team, I position you guys to run, and I create the platform to show how well you're running. And so, I would say my leadership style is around empowerment, really letting them do what they want to do what they need to do. And then create, I create the space. My job is to create the space for recognition for the storytelling, and to get them to that next best move. So, I would say more so than any other time in my career. I'm really trying to help my people get to where they need to be.

Lisa Nichols 28:44

I love it. I love it. And when you help them get to where you are, that's to me, because I was going to ask you what your definition of success is. Because there's all sorts of definitions out there. But don't want to put words in your mouth. But what would you say that is for you?

Rick Hall 29:01

Success? I think the biggest thing is, is when I see somebody from my team, my leadership team on my team, getting a promotion or getting another job or getting, you know, in the past early in my career, I probably was resistant on people leaving my organization to go somewhere else. But now I'm How can I build that resume? How can I build that experience, experience to get you to where you need to be for your next best move? I think to me, my success as a leader is getting my people to where they want to be, where they need to be, where they can be. And it's different for every single person. And sure, I have skip levels with every single person in my organization. I, in fact, I just came from one to this. Just to find out how they're doing what they're what, what they need, how I can help. And I learned early in my career, I had to a servant leader here, when I first started, that she really taught me how to be that servant leader.

Lisa Nichols 30:08

That's, that's beautiful. I love that. I had another thought, and it just went on my head. But I'm gonna keep going here. I'll probably think of it here in a minute. But tell our listeners, why aren't you already kind of at the beginning, you touched on it a minute, but when you came in and how you approach things in this position, but tell our listeners about the business capability model? And what benefits have you seen? It's a different approach, right? It's, it's not teaching the leaders about technology, but rather, it's a different approach.

Rick Hall 30:47

It is. And I think I learned it early in my career. I had too many people, even on leadership teams coming. Hey, I found this application, we need to install our Hey, I think we should go and do this because a friend of mine is doing this over the other company. And so, I've really purposely created the space, and I taught my leadership to have the conversation around, like I said, the capabilities. What are you trying to enable? What are you trying to do? And one of the things that we're purposely getting into now is, as we talk strategy, we talk about what do you want to enable? So, a lot of companies have these ambitions to increase sales by 20%, or get this market share or do this and do that. We really focus on asking the question, How do you want to do that? How do you want to do that? You can increase your sales. But how do you want to do that? And so, then we purposely don't talk about technology. And so, we get the enablement and the capability in what it is you want to do defined, because nine times out of 10, what I found since I've been here is that there's another division in Mars that is actually doing that, and they already have a solution. And so, I'm trying to force that conversation.

Rick Hall 32:00

And over three years, it's to a point where I'm not having technology discussions, I'm talking how teams want to do it, how marketing wants to do this, how Customer Service wants to do this, how the sales team wants to do this. And then my team can step back and build a roadmap and go see if there's something out there, and then come back and say, hey, we found something that could work. But it's really focused on, on that because then you can have the open conversations with those people. And they're not fearful that you're going to be talking technology jargon. And you're going to be your, your I'm not going to understand, in fact that we just had a leadership summit last week, where I talked about tech stack. And I didn't talk about tech stack, I talked about all of us using the same tools. And so that just kind of an interpretation and talking and being able to convert that into an understanding for the audience is just something that I think has been successful with my team. We created a business partnership within my team now that's new to the company, that actually a member of my team sits on their leadership teams, so they can actually hear what's going on, and they can bring it back and they can be a liaison, and they can be an advocate for that part of the business.

Lisa Nichols 33:11

I love it. I love it. I love it. Well, it's really kind of getting to the root. It's really getting clarity, about defining the challenge, right, Rick, that's what you're really doing. The goodness gracious. I can't remember now who it was. But I was talking to somebody recently. And they said it's the five why's. Well, why do you want to do that? Why do you want to do that?

Rick Hall 33:37

It goes back to the question, you asked me earlier. What does success look like? In your eyes, what does success look like? Not to technology, not to an open rate or something like what does success look like for your, for your aspiration for you what you want to do? We built a story around that.

Lisa Nichols 33:55

Yeah. Love it. Love it. Love it. Well, what advice, Rick, if there is a technology professional out there that thinks I want to aspire to be a CIO one day, what advice would you give them?

Rick Hall 34:08

Oh, gosh, I would say, purposely look at what you need to be successful in this type of role. Find the gaps, and go and find opportunities to learn from real-world experience. I did that early my career with that left turn going into an operations role. I did that with my MBA. I've done that with projects that I volunteer for that I probably shouldn't have. But I have identified leadership competencies that are required for this role that I didn't have. Because what I didn't want to do is step into this role and not be ready and not be prepared. So, I learned operations. I learned how to work with people. I knew how to do marketing, I learned sales, I learned finance. I think in this type of a role, you have to understand all of those. And so, I would say purposely look at the gaps from a leadership competency standpoint where their strategy or influence, or whatever it is, get with somebody that does it absolutely well and learn from them from a mentorship standpoint. And then go and try and find a training or a project or an experience or a ride along or something that really gets you exposed to it. Because that has been my hard knocks, learning through my career on how to do that stuff.

Lisa Nichols 35:26

The thing that just comes to my mind is, I hear your talk, you need to be intentional, you need to be intentional about it, right? And have a little self-awareness, a little introspection, it goes a long way I thank to you. Well, let me ask you this. And I know you're so passionate about this, but you're an adjunct professor at Lindenwood. You've taught classes Management, Leadership, Organizational Behavior, Supply Chain Management, Employment Law. How does

your teaching experience Rick, influence your role as a CIO? And I bet there's a reverse thing that happens, because you're learning too, right?

Rick Hall 36:04

Well, one of the great things about the, the classes that I teach are a lot of they're a night, so obviously, I can't do it during the day. And we have a lot of professionals that come into those classes. So, you know, as I'm teaching right now, organizational behavior, I get a lot of exposure to the culture of some of the companies here in St. Louis. So, I get students from Boeing, or I'll get students from Bayer, Monsanto, or Express Crips or some of the other companies here. And we start openly talking about culture. And so, I learned about the different types of culture. And one of the other aspects that I get from the classes as well is the multi-generational aspect that I have in the class. I'll have anything from a 22-year-old, to an upper 50-year-old, it's really going back to learn. So, I get, I get that exposure on what these things mean to different generations. And if you're going to be a successful leader, you have to learn and know how to lead multi generationally. Because what engages one set of generation does not engage the other. And so, you've got to be able to learn that, and this classroom is really getting me that experience. And then it's helped me to also apply what I've learned into my role because my, my team is multigenerational. And so, and they're from St. Louis, so I'm pulling a lot of this stuff into, into my work into my classroom. So, it's going back and forth.

Lisa Nichols 37:27

I love it. And I know that they are getting a lot from you, Rick, because I believe Oh, I know they are. Because I believe having a practitioner, a person out in the marketplace. It's not just theory, it's not what they're reading from the book. This is real world. And, I think that that is huge. Well, Rick, not to embarrass you, but you've won many awards here. You were a 2021 St. Louis ORBIE, Large Corporate Finalist. In 2022, you were an enterprise winner. And then in 2023, which I had the pleasure of being at the nationals when you were there, you were a national ORBIE Large Corporate Finalist. So, I know that that you don't do what you do for the awards. But how have these notable achievements are very notable? what did these awards mean to you personally?

Rick Hall 38:22

I think it's, it's well, and its recognition for my peers, because the, the nomination, the awards are actually done by CIOs. And so, they're done by award-by-award winners. And so, because I've actually been in some awards, selection meetings, so it's, it feels good to have that recognition from your peers. But what it's done more so than the recognition than the awards, it's created. It's created a community, especially here in this region, because I'm connected to probably 60 different CIOs here in the St. Louis region. And we meet on a regular basis. And so, what it's done, and the motto of the organization is the answers in the room. And so what we do is we learn from each other, and we, and you know, some of the things that, hey, if you go down this road, don't do this, or do this, which typically, if you don't have that connection with an organization like this, or with a group or community, you're going to, you're not going to have that knowledge. And so, I get extreme value out of that connecting with my, my peers, especially here in the region. But it was wonderful to be able to go to Boston and be able to see that we're not on an island. Everybody's experiencing the same things that we are and to be able to connect in a non-pressured environment was just wonderful.

Lisa Nichols 39:49

Well, okay, so Rick, you've set me up perfectly. We'll go on and talk about this organization, Technology Partners. We were very, very blessed to be one of the founding underwriters for this organization, but it's inspires CIO is a national organization. And what you're talking about is the St. Louis chapter. So, I don't know how many chapters they have now. But if you are a CIO or a top Technology Leader, you heard it from Rick. Today is a wonderful organization to become a part of and reach out to Rick, reach out to me, and we'll tell you, we'll be glad to tell you more, and get you connected.

Rick Hall 40:29

Absolutely.

Lisa Nichols 40:30

Yes. So, Rick, I know that you're married to Kath, you have two daughters, Sam and Maddie. Maddie is a teacher. We've talked about Maddie offline, you've got a lot of what I would call spinning plates in your life, you've got a big job at Royal Canin and you've got a beautiful family that you're trying to be there for. You are teaching at Lindenwood you are involved in the community? How do you take care of yourself? How do you take in you'd, you'd mentioned to me earlier about your team and finding out what brings them energy because everything that we do, right? we're taking

out of our energy bucket, or we're putting it into our energy bucket. So, for you personally, how do you take care of you so you can be the best version of you for all these people?

Rick Hall 41:20

Well, I think, and then, you know, I'm, I'm one of those that grew up generationally that you know, the end of Wall Street days, where you work, you work, you drive, you achieve, you aspire, you get the big check, you get the big car, you know, that was that, that generation that I'm in, really, that was the early part of my career, and I've learned that's not going to bring you happiness. And so, what I've, what I've learned over the last probably 10-15 years is the ability to separate. And so, and one of the things that I've done with this company in the last seven years, but it's been more of the last 10 to 15 years, is when you walk out of here, you separate you, you, you, you, you put your focus on the stakeholders that you're with, and you purposely find time to spend that energy and to get that energy from the ones that are important. And so obviously, my family is the most important as the ones that I've, I think first when I get that award, but then it goes down to my team and the company and all of that stuff. And the organizations that I'm volunteering in, I really have a passion because I want to give back. But what I've done is a find the time to really focus on that area at that time. And then a disconnect. I'm not thinking about work when I'm at home, I'm not thinking about home when I do think about home when I'm at work. But really, it's that art of separation is really putting the phone down, closing the laptop. And our global president said it best when I first came on board and one of the reasons why I loved this company. He said, You know what? I don't open my laptop on the weekends. I don't look at my phone after five o'clock. I said I spend time with my stakeholders. And that's my family. And that's what I've tried to practice over the last 10 or 15 years. And I look forward to that time that I can spend spent time last weekend with my oldest daughter in Kansas City. I didn't look at my laptop. I didn't look at my phone. If I did, it wasn't because of work. But I think it's that art of separation, and being able to do it, and setting up an organization that you don't have to be on call all the time. And I know that's hard and technology, but you can do it.

Lisa Nichols 43:27

Such sage advice. I heard it said one time, Rick, and I've never forgotten it. The person said, I want to be present where my feet are.

Rick Hall 43:27

Yeah, absolutely.

Lisa Nichols 43:32

Wherever your feet are, you want to be present. And that's precisely what you're doing. And I just love it. Well, I've got a little lightning round for you here a couple of questions, and then we're going to talk about something extra. So, what is the best piece of advice you've ever received, business advice?

Rick Hall 43:59

Oh, I think it was earlier in my career when somebody said, don't listen to respond. Be an active listener, try to understand whether you agree with it or not. Try and understand what that other person is coming from and own the clarity. And so, you know, if I don't understand, don't agree, ask questions, the five why's like you said, but really is the act of the act of listening.

Lisa Nichols 44:28

Yeah, that's a good one. What are you currently reading? Are you reading anything right now? And what are you learning from it?

Rick Hall 44:39

I can't tell you I don't know the name of the author. But one of the things that we're talking about, you know, coming out of the pandemic, we've, we've stepped into this, this virtual real world to where we're just inundated by meetings. We get back-to-back to back-to-back virtual meetings, back-to-back to back physical meetings when we're in the office, and I'm reading a book about having effective meetings, and it's called *Meeting Suck*.

Lisa Nichols 45:04

Meetings Suck.

Rick Hall 45:06

I can't tell you the name of the author of that book. But it's pretty effective. And you know, it talks about, you don't always have to have a meeting, you don't always have to schedule something, you don't always say do this. And when you do, make sure it's effective. And so, I, again, this is part of me hearing my team, it's like, oh, my gosh, we

have too many meetings, we're pulled into conversations, it's like, I'm gonna go find out if I can get this better. So, I'm reading this little book called *Meetings Suck*.

Lisa Nichols 45:37

I love it. I love it. Well, and when you think about those meetings, sometimes, depending on the stakeholders that are in there, it can be a really expensive meeting.

Rick Hall 45:47

It can be, it can be. And then and you own the clarity on that. What is this meeting for? What am I going to do? Especially when you just get an open a meeting that doesn't explain anything?

Lisa Nichols 45:56

Sure, sure. Well, thank you for accepting my meeting invite today.

Lisa Nichols 45:59

Well, I knew what yours was.

Lisa Nichols 46:04

Yes okay. How about a notable mentor or mentors? And what do you believe makes up a good mentor, and I probably could put words in your mouth right now, but I'm not gonna do it based on something you just said.

Rick Hall 46:20

I had a, I think probably the most influential one that I had was early in my career. I had just stepped into technology. And, and I was working with the CIO at the retail company I was working with and, and I wanted to learn about this part of the industry, part of the world that I didn't know about, you know. I'd run sales, operations and marketing and all this kind of stuff. But they wanted me in technology, because I get it. And so, I'm talking to the CIO at the time. And I was telling him that I had an opportunity to go work for a law firm. And my second career move was with Husch & Eppenger at the time, which is Husch, Blackwell, Sanders now, it was really leading their technology. And so, one of the things I'm having coffee with him one morning, and he was, you know, he is this is probably a great opportunity for you. He says, there's two things that I've learned as a CIO, and he was an older gentleman. He goes, if you can do well, in these two industries, you can do pretty good for yourself. And he said, what is legal? And what is medical? So, if you can lead technology in those two industries, you can do anything. When he I think he was absolutely right, because that was not the easiest part of my career.

Lisa Nichols 47:29

Right, right. Oh, my goodness. Well, Rick, what do you believe this is the Something Extra Podcast, what do you believe is something extra that every leader needs?

Rick Hall 47:43

I think is really stopping. And it goes back to what I measure success, success, is really stopping to make sure you're taking the time to understand individually what your team needs. From an energy standpoint, from an, from an engagement standpoint, from an aspiration standpoint, and your success is going to be based on their success. And it's not about the numbers you do and the number of projects that you do. It's all about who represents you in the future. And that's in your legacy. And that's your team. And that's your people. And so that, to me, has been something in the latter half of my career has been more important than meeting the budget or making the budget or doing the projects. It's like, how well is my team doing? Because if they are, they're going to do that for me.

Lisa Nichols 48:33

Absolutely. Well, Rick, this has been so much fun. Thank you so much for making the time I cannot wait for our listeners to learn from you. And yeah, it's good to see you, my friend.

Rick Hall 48:44

It's good to see you as well. And thank you for asking me to do this. This was a pleasure.

Announcer 48:49

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