



**Mark Whitacre:** Thank you for having me. I'm excited about being on the show. I remember that prayer breakfast very well in 2014.

**Lisa:** Yes. I didn't remember exactly when it was. I just remember you made an impression on me, so I know that you will make an impression on our listeners too. Let's just take it back to just when you grew up. Tell us a little bit about that story, and then we've got a lot of things I want to talk about. [chuckles]

**Mark:** I grew up just north of Cincinnati, near Kings Island Amusement Park, about 30 minutes north of Cincinnati. Wonderful parents, my mom's still living, 87. My dad passed three years ago at 90. Just wonderful parents, two brothers and a sister, so three other siblings. Only one out of four that went to college and I went to Ohio State University got a Bachelor's and Master's and a PhD in biochemistry from Cornell, and my mom used to say I went and got a degree for all of them.

**Lisa:** [laughs] I have to ask you though, biotech, biochemistry, was there a precipice for that? Did you have a teacher that inspired you? That was a different kind of degree to get. It's a great degree as we're going to talk about, but what inspired you to do that?

**Mark:** We had a guest speaker when I was in eighth grade, that was from the biotech industry and talked about how the biotech industry was booming. It did boom because I graduated in '83 from Cornell, and that's right when Genentech was coming about and the whole biotech boom, but that platform was being prepared shortly before that. I can remember as far back as eighth grade, I remember telling my parents that I'm looking to possibly get a PhD in Biochemistry, and they said, "What?" I'm maybe 13 years old at the point. [laughs]

**Lisa:** I think you picked right, and I'm so glad you were listening that day. You did go to Cornell, and I remember reading, Mark, you were the youngest PhD in biotech, when you graduated with a PhD?

**Mark:** Yes, I was. That's long ago in '83, but I was at the time. I was 22 years old when I was a PhD student already. The average was closer to 32 during that time when I was there, so yes, 22 is fairly young for that. I graduated 25, and most of them would be about mid-30s, with a PhD in Biochemistry.

**Lisa:** Just amazing. I love that though, that you were in eighth grade, and you said that's what I'm going to do, and by George you did. There had to be some other things going on with you Mark, like determination and grit, [laughs] that I'm sure that we can talk about.

**Mark:** Yes, I was pretty ambitious, and I think that ambition was good, but I think it was also part of my challenges too and part of some downfalls that I've had in life. Sometimes you can be over-ambitious, and I think I've been through a few spells of that, not in college, but there were seasons that over-ambition was a downfall for me.

**Lisa:** Not to dive too deeply into this, but I was just reading something this morning and it said that it used to be that people would be like they wanted to work hard because they wanted to make a lot of money. In fact, young people often say, "Yes, I want to make a lot of money." We can talk about that. I think the tide is turning a little bit because I think people realize that money is not everything and money really cannot buy happiness. Going on into your career, you started your career here in St. Louis, and that's what a lot of people may not know about you.

**Mark:** Yes, I did. I remember Ralston Purina, it was its own independent company then. It wasn't a part of Nestle's and I remember them recruiting me. I talked to several different companies in Cornell campus, and I recall Ralston Purina coming to recruit me and I'd started with them right when I graduated in 1983. I came there to Ralston Purina on Checkerboard Square, downtown St. Louis, and my wife was working for a South African plant researcher at the Botanical Gardens.



**Mark:** Yes. Divisional president and corporate vice president of the company and divisional president of the biotech division.

**Lisa:** 30,000 employees, huge company, right?

**Mark:** Definitely bathed in revenue. Number 56, on The Fortune 500.

**Lisa:** Number 56 and at 32 you were the divisional president and then the VP over the company. I know Mark, you were pulling down a lot of money. [laughs] \$3 million a year, I think is what you were pulling down.

**Mark:** With the stock options, bonuses, the base salary was much less than that, but the total compensation was in that two to three million a year, every year for the eight years that I was there.

**Lisa:** 32 years old.

**Mark:** That would have been 1989. Think about that, 30 years ago that salary level.

**Lisa:** Anybody that's put in that position would be maybe a little bit shaken.

**Mark:** I thought I was Bon Jovi. I really did.

**Lisa:** Let's talk about what happened, and I'm not going to take this out of your mouth. You tell me the story, and what happened with the price-fixing and then your precious wife, Ginger, [laughs] who I just love, because I'm just like, "Wow, what an awesome wife." [laughs] In a way, it's kind of a hard thing I know.

**Mark:** Basically, when I was at Degussa, for the six years at Degussa, I was over joint ventures and acquisitions and mergers, and I was doing some joint ventures with ADM, but I was with a different company.

Part of that was even when I was the four years in Europe, in Frankfurt, Germany. We were looking to build a plant together either in Europe or in Asia with ADM. I got to know the leadership, the CEO, the COO, the vice-chairman, very well, for a couple of years working with them. I remember one day they asked me, they said, "Why don't you join us at ADM?" He said, "You got all this bureaucracy in a German company, and boy, we do things on the back of a napkin and we do things quick."

I told him, I said, "Look, I'm six years with Degussa, I'm never going to leave. I'm vice president already, soon to be executive vice president. Even have a chance to be the president of Degussa USA, which is a few thousand employees, plants in Mobile, Alabama." I said, "There's no way I'm going to be leaving." Then they made an offer and the salary, with the bonus, was about nine times with the stock option, the bonus, and the contract they were offering me. I can remember telling them for an hour that there's no way I'm leaving, and I said, "Where can I sign?"

**Lisa:** Quickly changed your tune.

**Mark:** Yes, I did. Moved from Frankfurt, Germany to Decatur, Illinois. ADM has 30,000 employees in Decatur, in an 80,000-people town.

**Lisa:** Wow. A little monopoly going on there. I bet there's a little nepotism going on too.

**Mark:** Huge company, a great company. 30,000 people going to work on the right thing every day but there were four bad apples at the top that were focused on selfish leadership, not servant leadership. All about themselves. I was one of those four. We had a 75-year-old CEO, 69-year-old COO, who I reported to, and then me at 32. I thought, "Boy, I've got three people above me I'm number four ranked in 30,000 executives. I got three above me and they're all double to triple my age." All I have to do is be patient I'm either the next COO or the next CEO of ADM. Absolutely where my mind was.



A lot of my income was on performance, but a lot of the divisional president's income was on performance, profitability, increased growth, and so on, increased revenues, but there was not anything performance-related when he gave me that, I thought, "That's an odd time to get \$1 million." He came back an hour later and I knew what it was for. That's when he said, "Look, Mark, we're going to start bringing you into the family. We're going to start showing you how ADM has been. We're going to have a mentor mentor you to show you how to get involved with the price-fixing of our food additives that are utilized around the world.

It'd be hard to find a processed food or beverage that doesn't have something from ADM in it, one of the largest in the world. At that point, I asked him, I said, "Well, that's illegal. You can't do that." He said, "Look, Mark, it's been going on for 12 years, the price-fixing scheme." He said, "Everybody's doing it. You can't be in the commodity business without doing this." He said, "Everybody does it." He said, "Mark it's just that the politicians that put these antitrust laws on the books, they just don't know anything about business and these laws shouldn't even exist."

I'm listening to people 30 years, my senior, and I'm thinking, "Well, that's how business is done." I started rationalizing and said, "Well, they know a lot more than me at that point." I'm nine years out of college, at that point, age 34, I was 25 when I graduated and here they're 40 years a CEO, I thought, "Well this is the way business is." I rationalized.

**Lisa:** You had a conscience [laughs] and your conscience name was Ginger. [laughs]

**Mark:** Yes, [unintelligible 00:14:10].

**Lisa:** You're telling Ginger about this and what did Ginger say?

**Mark:** I'm sharing with Ginger, about seven months later when she said, "Something's happened these last seven months that you're not telling me."











That really became front page of the media newspapers at the time *USA Today*, *Forbes*, *Wall Street Journal*, and so on.

Ian House read that in the paper and reached out to me from CBMC, from a group called Christian Businessmen Connection and he started, he introduced me to God, it is that time, after eight years of college and biochemistry, all I learned in science was big bang theory, Darwinism. I remember a professor saying, if you believe in God, you can't be a scientist. That was a block for me and so he started pouring into me. Then my second week in prison, another man reached out named Chuck Colson, who was the white house counsel under President Nixon in his 30's, had an office next to the oval office, went to prison for the Watergate scandal.

President Nixon would have had, but also President Ford pardoned him. President Nixon didn't go to prison for that reason, but Chuck Colson went to prison and he became a Christian in the '70s during that journey. He read about me in the paper and he saw a lot of himself in my story. He reached out my second week so between Ian House and Chuck Colson disciple me and mentoring me, for the first time in my life, I'm seeing real servant leaders, rendered my life to Jesus, literally, my third month in prison in June of '98 at age 40.

**Lisa:** Oh, and we didn't talk about this piece, but I know that you ended up going on to lead several other people to Christ during your time. God took that situation and there was purpose and good that came out of it. Do you remember what was it about Chuck because reconciling science with faith is sometimes really hard for people?

**Mark:** He was like a father to me and poured 15 years into me, not only even in prison, but even when I got out 15 years ago in '06, he didn't pass till 2012. He actually passed on out on stage giving his testimony. He was working right up to the point when he passed away. I remember telling him about Ian House, I told him about how I'm being discipled and I'm learning about Jesus, but the block is the science and he said, "Mark, you don't think there's a PhD scientist that believes in God?" I said, "No, I don't."



They were reading about me in the newspaper and they started visiting me in prison and they brought pharmaceutical companies and biotech companies to visit me and I had four offers the day I got out of prison from the biotech and pharmaceutical industry.

**Lisa:** You know what? Your brains were always there Mark. You're incredibly smart, intelligent man. There's no doubt about that. You don't get a PhD at the age that you did, started your PhD when you're 22 years old, and not be incredibly intelligent. Now, you had a character maybe that matched that intelligence because of what Jesus had done in your life.

**Mark:** Yes, more maturity and more about others than myself and I chose this particular company because of a Christian CEO called Cyprus biotech. I started off someone like right out of college. I became the COO, the number two executive of that company over a decade, and still on the advisory board even today.

**Lisa:** Yes so you did that and then pivoting to what you're doing today you're under the umbrella of Coke Consolidated, which a lot of people may not know about Coke Consolidated, they know about Coca-Cola. [chuckles]

**Mark:** There's two parts of Coke, Coca-Cola is in Atlanta and kind of the pair company, but then Coke Consolidated is a separate company, different CEO, different board and we're the largest bottler in the United States, the distribution fulfillment, bottling side. 102 plants, five billion in revenues. We're a public company on the NASDAQ and our purpose statement, you see it on our invoices. When we hire people, they see it on their pay stubs. You see it on our entire wall of our headquarters, our purpose statement is, "Our only purpose to honor God in all we do". It's amazing, company chaplains in all of our plants. It's a very servant leadership ornated company.

**Lisa:** Yes, and we've talked a little bit about that. I can't wait to, at some point meet Frank.

**Mark:** He's an amazing guy.

**Lisa:** There's an initiative under this and now with t-Factor, you're teaching other companies how to do something similar, right?

**Mark:** I lead the t-Factor Initiative, I'm the executive director and it's where we equip other CEOs and senior leaders companies around the world. We have people from Europe, Mexico, Africa and we do these every couple of months and we equip them how to have a purpose-driven servant leadership culture. We share our Coke journey that we've been doing. We're a 118-year-old company, our CEO has taken us this direction 22 years ago, kind of a purpose-driven faith-based direction and we share that journey with other CEOs and senior leaders at t-Factor.

**Lisa:** Yes, I just love that. It's going to be so fun to see how companies, may just be turned upside down [laughs] by what you guys are doing there, but this is called "Something Extra". Mark, I'd love for you to tell me, what do you believe is this something extra that every leader needs and there's lots of something extras?

**Mark:** I tell you what I see and what I really learned in this 22-year journey when my own life was transformed at age 40. What I see in those is relationship versus transactional. When I was at ADM in my 30s. It was all about these 4,000 people in the biotech division, "How can they help me move up the corporate ladder?" Very transactional, "Hey, I'll give you a higher income, I'll give you a higher bonus if you do this, this and that." Very transactional. Now, I've learned through this 22-year journey of servant leadership of relational, relational trumps transactional. It is the longer-term way to serve. To me, what makes a servant leader is when they're relational instead of transactional.

**Lisa:** How does that flush out in a day in the life of Mark Whitacre? Having that servant leadership mindset, what does that mean to you? How does that look?





**Lisa:** I think that it's important, too, Mark because that certainly is not a fun time. God knows what we need.

**Mark:** Right. Absolutely.

**Lisa:** He knows what needs to happen in our life to make us who He intended for us to be, right? Sometimes it's those struggles and certainly, He did a transformation on you and now you and Ginger just celebrated your 41st wedding anniversary and that may not have happened because you would have been the same guy.

**Mark:** Yes. I think I would have lost my family if I became the COO of ADM, and this may have saved my family.

**Lisa:** That's right.

**Mark:** It also brought me to God with brokenness. Sometimes brokenness is not a bad thing. I had to be broken.

**Lisa:** Absolutely.

**Mark:** That's how I got to know God and would listen to people like Chuck Colson. Now being t-Factor is where we actually help equip ones to become servant leaders and they can go on our website [t-factor.com](http://t-factor.com). It's Coca-Cola Consolidated's initiative, how we equip leaders to integrate their faith in their work and transform their cultures to purpose-driven, servant leadership cultures. We're seeing cultures all around the world are adding some of the things that we're sharing, and we see their companies being transformed. We'd love to have them.

**Lisa:** Thank you so much for being on the show today. I know how busy you are and so I'm just completely humbled that you made the time. I know that your story is going to help our listeners. Thank you so much.

**Mark:** Thanks for having me. Thank you, Lisa.

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