Mike Merrill:
Today we had an incredible guest on such a fun conversation with Mr. Matt Dibara. Matt is the leader of Dibara Masonry, and they are a company that has been around for many generations, actually since the early 1900s, if you can believe that. So over 120 year old company at this point, just an amazing wealth of information and knowledge. I love how Matt talks about the innovation and the journey that has happened within their business these last few years in technology and the adoption of system and process improvement. I think there's a lot of great nuggets here that you can take and implement into your business or that will actually back up some of the successes that you've had as well and maybe sparks and new ideas for you. So give this one a listen and give it a rating and a review and share this out with your peers and colleagues. I think you'll find a lot of value in it and hope you enjoy it.

Well, welcome, Matt. It's great to have you on the show today. Excited to talk with you. That's awesome. So I know in the intro I shared a little bit about your history, but I think it would be interesting just to hear from you for just a minute before we get into the conversation, just to help out a little relevancy and wait to your words.

Matt DiBara:
Excited to be here, Mike.

Mike Merrill:
You're from a family-owned business that was started in the early 1900s. That's pretty crazy. How does that feel?

Matt DiBara:
60 seconds, here we go. No, I'm only kidding. Yeah, my family's been in the industry now over 104 years. What happened was when my great grandparents fell in love, both of their fathers were contractors. And so they ended up working together and then it was my grandfather, my father, uncle, and then it passed down to me. But it's just that, it's that blue collar kind of American dream. My great grandfathers came here from Italy, built homes from the ground up and... worked for their neighbors. We were never like contractors, so to speak. We were just people who love what they did and neighbors ask questions and it grew from there. We don't know the exact time, but we joked that we became contractors when we worked for people who spoke English because originally it was an Italian section outside of Boston and that's the humble beginnings.

Mike Merrill:
That's amazing. So where do you live in proximity to where everything started for your family?

Matt DiBara:
So I relocated the business, at least my portion of it, to Los Angeles because I didn't like the cold. So I visited when I was late teens and I said, boy, there's something here. No snow, sunshine all the time, no winter. I was building chimneys in the cold. I was like, there's gotta be a place. The birds leave during the winter. I remember looking up. Yeah, I saw the birds leave and I thought, man, maybe there's something to this.

Mike Merrill:
Yeah, yeah, they're smart. Sure, that's funny. Well, that's awesome. And I've got to imagine. The legacy and the pressure that you feel with your family name and the importance of maintaining that and keeping it not only good, but maybe even elevating it and wearing that mantle, no matter what you do, you're representing that. So I think it's just important to talk about that before we talk about maybe the subject we wanna discuss today.

Matt DiBara:

Yeah, I mean that was always tough. I mean, there was a time in the early days of me getting ready to take over the business in my late teens. I went to a vocational high school to learn bricklaying and yeah, my dad and I, we got in a little tiff and he's like, you screw this up, you're gonna waste three generations. And that hurt me so much as a kid, thinking about all the things that they did to get us to that point. So I always took it serious, but I was fortunate and this might help anyone listening. There were two things that my grandfather did. To me when I was young. I was nine when I started working and the ritual was I went out and my dad took me to buy a pair of work boots. It was like a thing. I was like, all right son, you're ready to go. And then my grandfather pulled me aside and he's like, there's two things you need to remember. Number one, he said, honest days work for an honest day's pay. You'll never retire off any one customer. Don't even try. And he said, the second thing is treat each customer like they're your neighbor. And he pointed to the neighbor next door and he said, if it was Susan's house, he said, anything you would do for Susan is always going to be the right answer. And so, I had a lot of pressure, but I had these two kind of guiding principles that really set me up for success in my career that I didn't really know how much wisdom I was getting at nine years old.

Mike Merrill:

Wow, that's beautiful. And what amazing advice. I mean, I think that applies to all of us, no matter what location or any walk of life, right? Treat people like they're your neighbor.

Matt DiBara:

Yeah, it's something we do. I mean, we don't have it on a bumper sticker or a billboard at my company now, but it's just something where if things get tough, that question will come up. And I mean, it's self-fulfilling, right? I mean, we'll have team members, what would you do if you live next door? You know, and then they go, oh, and that, all right, I know what to do. And I'll hang up the phone. So it's nice.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah, what a great way to lead the staff and your teams no matter what so they can be empowered to make their own decisions based on their own conscience. So that's awesome, man.

So to start into some of the topic we wanted to talk about today, I know there are so many facets of the business that have probably changed because of technology, because of just the innovations that have happened not only within the industry but within the world. And so we were going to talk a little bit about a virtual estimate. What does that mean to you and how does that work and how does that apply to the way you're running your business today?

Matt DiBara:

Well, I think for me, it takes place a few steps back. The goal with an older family business and a legacy business like this, my big pressure was always how can we innovate? And I started really taking over the business right around 2008 and I was petrified by what I saw with companies go out of business. And a lot of them at that time were relying on relationships and word of mouth that they had. And so I became obsessed with how do I modernize this business because

I saw companies my dad knew that were doing eight and nine figures and three or six months later were showing up and picking through their equipment, you know, buying trucks and you know, it was horrifying. So I've always had this big thing around innovation and technology because I saw the end of the yellow pages, right? I caught the tail end of that into websites and then SEO. And so there was, I saw the benefits of companies that jumped on things early and what that did and I saw the pains that companies face when they didn't. So I've always had this kind of fear, it was two parts. One was the need to innovate. The other was the fear I'm gonna screw up a hundred plus year business. And so the virtual side of the technology and in and of itself really came from me just, I'm not a tech guy, right? I grew up laying brick, but, and maybe you listening can also relate to that, right? It's like, I don't identify as a technology person, but I identify as somebody who wants to be successful in this business. And I knew that technology, was something that we needed. I mean, I think of it like, if I asked you right now, 97 times 46, you're probably not gonna pull out a pen and paper to do that math. You'll pull out a calculator, right? Technology, and so I remember

thinking to myself, where can I insert a calculator into my business? And so, technology was something where even though I didn't love it, I was always looking for where I could insert that tech. And virtual estimating became something important when we were really growing the sales side of our business and we wanted to make it more appealing to the clients, right? I really put myself in their shoes, you know, we show up and we're twice their budget or, you know, we don't do the type of work they wanted. I mean, people just want to know what things cost and that's, that was where it came from. I think that might help kind of color where we're going with it.

Mike Merrill:

Okay, so I love, excuse me, I love the way that you painted that. It's almost like this internal tug of war that you're having. How do I advance the company and the business in a technological way or so I can keep up with the pace and this new environment of tech that we're all in, but also maintain that same integrity and those guiding principles that this business was founded on, which are more a handshake, right?

I mean, really the opposite of the way that we have to operate today, just to cover our liability and just to stay in business so we're not the guy that's having to sell his tools because they got tied up in some big lawsuit, or maybe they didn't even do anything wrong, right?

Matt DiBara:

Yeah, and it's one of those things where I think a lot of us, when we implemented the virtual estimating side of the business, what I did, I did this exercise where basically, I call it the two hat exercise. And so what I did is I put on my, I knew that we needed to embrace technology in the side of quotes, right? But because we do residential work, we do commercial, we have a government prevailing wage industrial side of the business too. So three verticals.

I knew that at the end of the day, customers didn't like when we would show up, like I said, and we're either twice there, they miscategorize the type of work, they thought it was brick, but it was block, we don't do that kind of work, or whatever the case may be. And so I put on this hat of like, if I'm a customer, what are all the things that I want? I wrote out all of these different

kind of selfish needs, I call them. And then around the quote process, right? And then I did the same thing as a contractor. I put on my selfish contractor.

Matt DiBara:

I don't want to pay people to drive around and waste time. And then what I did is I found the middle where they overlapped. And it was like, what are the things that I want from this process? And what are the things that they want? And that's how we implemented it in the company. We literally rode out and tried to find the middle ground of the consumer and the business. And I tried to wear both hats. That was kind of where we were. That was the root principles of where this all came from.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah, I love that you're putting yourself in the customer shoes and trying to understand the way they're going to receive the information you're getting ready to share and making sure that message is on point on par with what they're expecting to hear. Is that right?

Matt DiBara:

Yes, exactly.

Mike Merrill:

Awesome. Yeah, so, and you probably don't know this about me. My background is I'm a blue collar guy too. I started a construction company. I worked in construction in my teen years. I didn't have any family background, but my father-in-law, he ended up being my father-in-law, was my first contractor boss. And so I learned construction through his family and his legacy and the challenges, the bruises, the scars that I took on as a contractor, technology because again that business wasn't based on technology at all. I mean QuickBooks was barely used. I mean it wasn't even spreadsheets in a lot of cases back then in the in the early 90s when I got involved and so me not having technology is part of what attracted me and a friend of mine whose initial idea was of Workmax to come up with a mobile time clock that could be used out on a remote job site. And so we started with Palm Pilots and writing a program that could run on a Palm. And really at the time we invented what we had, it didn't

exist. We didn't have anyone to copy and we were true pioneers in the innovation and the idea is what has led me to be where I'm known in the industry as a voice for technology for construction. So similar background where we both come from the blue collar, swinging a hammer side of things and really have leaned heavily into the tech and the efficiency side of things and try to marry those two together.

So on your, in your journey so far, what are some of the things that you have come to realize that maybe your forefathers didn't and how do you think you've best been able to reconcile the two and kind of put your best foot forward?

Matt DiBara:

Thank you. Well, we started with tech on the side of tracking metrics. Right, so we basically, our journey was pretty simple. It's we got control of the, I would say simple, not easy. We got control of the lead flow first. So that was our, you know, building our websites, getting an ability to turn on or off our lead gen. And then when we did that, we said, okay, we're comfortable to hire people now. We know that if we hire somebody that part of the family, we won't lose them in three months or six months. That was a very big thing with my dad. He didn't want to bring anybody in and then three months from now have to hang his head in his hat and say, hey look, I can't keep you. You know, that was his big fear. So we started with lead gen and sales, making sure we had that. Then we hired people and we didn't have tech. So it became this nightmare of like, how many appointments did you go on today? What happened? And it was like constant calls and following up and I mean, I remember my dad used to have to call in payroll. We didn't even have any tech, you know, I mean, I would be with him driving and he'd be like, okay, employee number, you know, we had codes. It would be like I-7, 46 hours, six overtime. Like, I mean, that was my, you know, we're laughing at these funny things. But so the tech became an integral to like track metrics and understand patterns and trends, but in a simple sense. And then it became as we grew and hired more people, a need for efficiency. It was like, if we're gonna go to the next level, we need to now optimize before we maximize.

So I remember telling my dad I want to grow the business, I want to bring more people on. And we were just, even with the tracking, we didn't have enough to where we were necessarily using it to make the business better yet. And so it became, all right, now we need to install SOPs, right, standard operating procedures, and really make the business more efficient before we add more people. Because we had people and we could see what they were doing, but it wasn't enough to just see what they were doing. We had to take the data use tech, analyze it, and then make the business more streamlined. The virtual estimating side of the business was the quote sales process if you will was a huge breakthrough for us. That came much later, some more recent development.

Mike Merrill:

OK, yeah, no, I love that, your idea of let's build the backlog and then hire and scale appropriately to make sure we can actually complete the work. Use that lag time to ramp up your staff and then also have confidence that you're not hiring people that you're going to have to let go in three months, right?

Matt DiBara:

Yeah.

Mike Merrill:

That's great. So do you feel like you have a pretty solid handle on that process now? And is it running? Have you worked through the bugs? And is it running efficiently the way you're rolling it out today?

Matt DiBara:

Yeah, I mean now we've gotten to a point where I'm a complete tech, I mean I love technology. I think you get over the hill at some point, you get to a point where you, one of the biggest things that I think is underrated about technology in construction is two things. Number one is the data, like there's a quote and it says, it's not what you know, it's what you know that just ain't so. And I think that's a, I forget, is that a Mark Twain quote? I think it is. Yeah. And.

Mike Merrill:

Sweet. Yeah. I think it is too. Yeah, that's a great quote.

Matt DiBara:
When we really started getting, I mean, you talk time tracking, right? Like when we started doing that, I remember I brought, I had a, when we built out the C-suite level of the business, so we brought in a COO, a chief revenue officer. I remember he was showing me, he was like, Hey, you realize you're running, gosh, it was, I think it was 13 or 15 hours a day of overtime, excuse me, a week of overtime average. He's like, why are we doing that? I'm like, and I was like, I don't really know. I'm like, I didn't, I didn't even know we were doing that. So it gave us the data and the optics. Like I thought everything was running great. You know, I had the certain areas of the business I was tracking, but we saw optics that clearly made us think we needed to look at certain parts of the business and figure out what was happening and why. And the other thing that I think it helps you do is it forces you to make decisions in the business. So like before we integrated technology, a lot of the stuff in the business was like, well, sometimes you do it this way, but then if this happens, you can do it that way. And then, I don't know, depending on how you feel, maybe do it this way. Yeah, exactly, you're winging it. And with tech, as we were building out, when we integrated a CRM in the business, and we had to, I remember, we had this big whiteboard, and we're going through this brainstorming session, and we're trying to figure out the customer follow-up journey, right, the client follow-up journey. You know, do we text every lead two days later? Do you then send an email?

Mike Merrill:
Yeah. Wing it! Wing it! Yeah.

Matt DiBara:
And before that, it was kind of like, well, this person answered yesterday. I'll call them again today. Like, and it forced us to make all these decisions about processes. Um, and it's kind of this really cool feedback loop of like, you're forced to make decisions and then you now have a way to track it. And then when you analyze the data, you're then forced to make better decisions. And so if you get over the hill, it creates this really good feedback loop where. I don't know how I ever did it without it, to be honest, nowadays.

Mike Merrill:
Yeah, gut feel.

Mike Merrill:
Yeah, iteratively better all the time, right? Yeah, you said something. And I really want to call it out because I have heard this, I would say literally hundreds of times from companies before they implement a solution like ours, where they say,

Matt DiBara:
Always, constantly, and you don't go backwards.

Mike Merrill:
I thought, I think everything's running great. I think it's awesome. I think it's amazing. Yet there's so much more good to get and they just don't know it because their perspective is stalled in this. Again, no feedback loop. They're just, their feedback loop is, hey, things are running well. I'm earning plenty of cash. My house is paid for. I've got investments. I got rental properties. You know, they're growing and they're enjoying the fruits of their labors,

I mean, they could get so much more. And as we learn in construction, this thing goes in cycles. It's not always going to be amazing. There are lean times. There is a pruning and even a slash and burn in the market that happens sometimes where, like you mentioned, the guys that are selling their tools, I mean, that stuff happens. So I love that you're talking about iteratively improving and getting a feedback loop. I think that's a key that any business could learn from and try to work on implementing in order to improve.

Matt DiBara:
It's the best ROI on time that I've ever found in it. Like there is no better hack because I think what I didn't understand even as somebody who was trying to implement this was at the end of the day when the data is staring you in the face like you can easily make decisions. Like when I got my OT report and I was like oh my gosh you know I have 15 crews and we're doing the math on this overtime and I'm like I'm losing you know it's more than 10 grand a week right and it was simple I needed to bring more people in the company.

Mike Merrill:
Yep. Yeah, hire 10 more guys. Yeah.

Matt DiBara:
Exactly, I need to bring a few more, like, it was so simple. It was like when we brought this down and we had a meeting about it, it was like, okay, we have the data, now what do we need to do? Well, gosh, do we need this overtime? Okay, a few hours a week because we're not, you know, certain projects allow for it and there's a process now in terms of how they get that approved, but it was so easy. It was like, hire a few more people, track things a little bit better, and I think we underestimate sometimes, and I'll speak for myself, but we underestimate how easy these decisions are when they stare you in the face.

It's taking the time like when we first implemented the time tracking for us and just some of the different things that we brought into the business. It's that upfront hurdle. I look back to my dad. He was not somebody who loved this stuff and it was something that he put off. I remember him telling me, he's like, we don't need that. Because it's not going to necessarily put you out of business tomorrow or next week, it's so easy to put it off.

Matt DiBara:
I mean, we wouldn't have the stability. Like I wouldn't be able to do this meeting right now if I hadn't built the business out with the right people and the right technology.

Mike Merrill:
Yeah, so speaking to that, because again, a common phrase I've heard that usually follows up, I think things are going great. People will say, honestly, things are going so well right now, I don't dare rock the boat. I don't want to mess with anything. So no changes, just cruise control. What would you tell a contractor that feels or thinks that way right now?

Matt DiBara:
I remember that you're going back to the yellow pages. I remember sitting with my dad. We'd go every six months This was like early days that or the blue

book right when we were doing commercial work And then when it was actually a blue printed book and I remember a lot of contractors saying, you know I have so much from word of mouth I'm working for two builders and I'm getting all my work and these are people doing you know, eight figures nine figures and my dad's friends and I remember them saying that there and then in 2008, you know, here I am and my dad's like, what do you think about this truck? You know, hop under there, see if you can, and I can't wrap my head around it. I'm like, they're selling their big mansion house, like it was emotional. And those are the people that didn't want to change. And so I can tell you this, that if you're not finding ways to innovate, it will catch up and it'll catch up quick. I mean, in all areas of the business, I mean, if you're not growing, you're dying. And I mean, we see it, right? I mean, people thought pagers, right? I started when you had those little beepers, you know, it's like, that's how we used to call or the early flip phones before they were colored,

At that time, it was like, that's the best thing ever, but to think that nothing else is gonna come out after that, to make that obsolete, I mean, all you have to do is look at, for me, it's 2008, or I look at Polaroid as a company, right, like there's so many examples of companies that were the top of the food chain that they didn't innovate, they didn't grow, and they fell by the wayside.

Mike Merrill:
Yeah, yeah, Blockbuster Video is a common example you use with Netflix. And even Netflix has to continue to innovate in order to stay up with all the other streaming apps that are out there today.

So leading into your adoption, your embracing of technology, and then the realization that you've had on time tracking and controlling overtime and having that visibility, what I do want to peel the layer of the onion back just a little bit on culturally.

What changes did you see happen? I mean, I know that overtime sometimes is viewed as an awesome thing for some guys. Some people really want it and love it and like the extra money. Other guys are complaining the whole time. They really don't wanna be doing it. They know it's required. They don't wanna lose their job. Whatever the case, maybe their pride. They wanna get things done. They're willing to sacrifice for the

company. I mean, what other changes did you see in the business culturally when you made these other things more efficient and hopefully they're the lives

Matt DiBara:
Well, I think one thing we did was we went through and we built out a timeline. So we looked at it and said, okay, we're not gonna try and do everything right away. Because what happened for me was I went from very little technology to being like, I see the benefits. And then I tried to do everything. I was like, I'm gonna do a CRM and time tracking and we're gonna do project management software. And it was like, oh gosh, okay, this is gonna be an issue. So.

Mike Merrill:
Yeah, too much.

Matt DiBara:
We built a slow and steady rollout plan. I think that's important. It's not always about doing everything and doing it all at once, but it's about committing to being a technology based company and embracing that. And so that was the first thing. And then in terms of culture, I mean, it's tough. I mean, some people don't love the change. And so I always tried to build a company culture of change, right? Like I always wanted to build a team that was excited about the innovations and the change. And so... We did that and not everybody adopted it. You certainly had people that were like, they didn't like the fact that they had to like punch in and out on their phone or that we could see where they are when they clock in and they had to be geotagged in a certain location or whatever it was. CRM, my client services team, they didn't like that they had to write notes for every client. But we always explain the benefits holistically for the company. So we explained like, for example, a client services answering the phone, we showed them examples of the sales team not having the notes and the stress it causes for the clients and voicemails or emails where things might have got missed, you know, and we showed them the benefit. So I always start with showing the benefit is important, building a company of change, right, so that it's expected, not unexpected, and then rewarding people who did great. So like we always, when we roll

out a new tech, we have some, we always have a fun thing where it's like, we did one for pictures and how to capture pictures and videos with our teams on the job and that was a more recent one. And we did this rollout competition where we're like, hey, you know, the person who does it, you know, the best each day gets this and, you know, we're going to pick a winner. So I think putting yourself in the shoes of your team members is really important because then you make it fun, we gamify it, we give rewards. It lowers that resistance and you reward the behaviors that you want to see.

Mike Merrill:
Yeah, that's beautiful. I love that. So it sounds like these changes have really transformed the business and probably in most of the areas, not just one or another. What do you think spend the overall most impactful change to tech and innovation that's really blessed your business?

Matt DiBara:
I think it creates freedom. I think it creates freedom for every role in every department because it helps to create a clear divide. Because I remember without technology, it was hard to, it was like, well this person did it. No, it was that person's fault. And that happened, right? And what embracing technology did for us was it allowed us to create clear lines and it was like, you're responsible for this, you're responsible for this. And I found that people love that.

You know, the right team members love that. They know how to get an A, you know, if you have a report card example, and they can self judge. You know, they didn't like the fact that some of the stuff they didn't directly control. So I thought that was a really interesting benefit of doing this. The other one was around the tracking and the data, and then having our team members, like the overtime, I was amazed at what my production department did with that. You know, like they first of all they noticed it and they actually brought it up to my COL when we were tracking it right they ran a report and they're like wait a minute so it creates a level of empowerment and an opportunity for growth because now team members get to see the problem just like I did as the owner and

they get to identify problem and present a solution which if you want to grow in a company and you're invested in a mission it's such a fun exciting thing to do.

Mike Merrill:

That's interesting. Yeah, there's a I think this transfers over to all industries, but I know in the software side I've read and seen and heard a lot about studies where programmers that work more than even seven hours in a day of actual coding like 90% of the bugs are created in those 8th and 9th and 10th and 11th hours of coding in a day and so then 90% of the rest of their effort has gone back to fixing those issues that they created when they were working too much or too long, right? And so actually the efficiency of a programmer goes up significantly when they're working shorter hours, but more focused and intentional. And I think in construction, it's the same thing. After a 10, 11, 12 hour day, you're really not thinking as clearly, productive, but you're actually paying as a company over time, time and a half. Maybe there's hazard pay per DM, other, especially in the state of California, right? All of the rules, seven consecutive day. I mean, you're, you might be paying double sign plus, then, then gross payroll is tied to, or I'm sorry, your taxes and your work comp is based on gross payroll. So everything is more for lower production and more mistakes, right? Would you agree with that?

Matt DiBara:

Oh, 100%. I think when you have the tech to track it, I mean, we did an audit, we did a poll on some data where we found like what projects we were making mistakes on and what things that, and not things that like ruined projects, but just things that weren't, you know, it was the efficiency wasn't there. And again, it was so easy. I mean, we literally pulled a report, went over it, my COO went over it with the management team was like, Hey, you know, what do we need to do here?

And it was so cool. I mean, it was neat. I was like a fly on the wall in this meeting and I was like, gosh, the ability to track and pull data and do this. I mean, we'll see in a week what they come back with. But it's so interesting how it just empowers everybody in the company. Like the information really empowers people.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah, that's beautiful. And really to tie it back to the estimate where we were talking about earlier, so when you're tracking the time with a system to watch that time and that labor and that productivity and those ratios with accuracy, like pinpoint calculator accuracy like you were talking about earlier, what does that do for your estimates on the next job?

Matt DiBara:

100%. And I think, you know, one of the things that helped me was when I shifted my identity from a contractor to a business person. So, you know, I looked at a lot of, I had a lot of like business mentors. I don't have a business background. I mean, I could lay one hell of a break, right? I could finish concrete like nobody's business, right? Real good. But the business side was tough for me. And I think when I really looked at like restaurants or I had a mentor who owned car washes and he was getting P and L reports. And I mean, he had the tech that he had in the car wash business where it was like he knew how many times somebody had come and he could show up and they would scan their license plate and he knew the name of the person and he'd be like, hey Mr. Jones how you doing? Like it blew my mind and I was like gosh you know all the successful business people I know do two things. They have tons of tech and they embrace all the data and they're always measuring and improving and I thought to my end it was in every industry and the best people I knew in construction that were much bigger than us you know multi nine figures were really tech based. I mean they had everything. I mean you could measure. I mean they knew how much paper they were using in the office. Like it was they could tell you like they had a way to track like office ink and office paper and they could know with a week in advance what they needed to order. I mean it was it was mind-blowing. I was still trying to wrap my head around you know how we can plan for materials two weeks from now on a job. So yeah it's they say success leaves clues and you know I would urge anybody to look at a company that is maybe three steps down the line that they want to emulate and not find that they're extremely efficient with some form of technology.

Mike Merrill:

That's beautiful. So let's talk about that. So what do you tell the little guy or the contractor? Maybe they're not little. Maybe they're big, but they haven't embraced technology to the level they probably know they should or they feel they should or they've even heard they should at a conference or a trade show or their buddy that seems to always win the big jobs and always seems to make a killing. What would you tell them to really motivate and help make them take those first steps into the tech world that they've been maybe resistant to this point.

Matt DiBara:

Well, I think for the smaller company, because I've been in both shoes and around both sides of it, for the smaller company, the big one, I think, is around freedom. It's really hard to have freedom or growth in the company, especially if you're a smaller business. My dad used to get phone calls all the time. Or he'd get problem calls, or he'd have to chase down information always. You're always chasing down info and being reactive. Hey, did you finish this? Hey, where's that? Did we call this? Did we do like?

My dad had, he was in seven places at once, right? If we had six or seven or eight big jobs, it was always like, did you remember to do this? Did this happen? You know, did we call him that? So I think when you're smaller, it's really about if you want things to be more leveled out, if you want things to be more relaxing, if you wanna be able to go on a vacation and not worry, think having the right people and the right technology are crucial. And then for the bigger side, I think if you're a bigger company, there's, you know, I have a friend of mine, he does, probably about 150 million a year at this point, maybe 180, he's got four companies. And I was having a conversation with him about technology and he's got the benefit of having people that have worked with him 20 or 30 years. Things work well, he makes good money. But I told him, I said, you know, how much are you leaving on the table that maybe you don't need the money, right? Maybe you're, because financially, I mean, he's doing very well, right? Like he doesn't have to show up for work, he's in a good spot. But I said, wouldn't it be nice if you found ways to make the business more efficient and then you reinvested that in your team?" And he stopped and he was like, what do you mean? And I said, well, yeah, I was like, you know,

you're doing $150 million a year. I'm like, if you found 1% in efficiency, right, through technology, I'm like, you're a smart guy. I know that as soon as you have the data, you're going to be able to leverage it. I mean, you have a – it was interesting because he had an IT department and he had to do it because he had so many companies and so many people. And I said, you know, you've got this IT department that you needed because things kept crashing and people didn't know how to use it. So you embrace technology when it's like a bleeding need. Yeah, a bleeding problem. But I'm like, there are so many areas where you could be more efficient. And I remember it was the framework for him of like, cause he was like, well, I don't need it. I'm like, I said to him, I said, you know, can I tell you something respectfully? And he said, what? I said, there was a lot of eyes in that response.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah, problem. Yeah.

Matt DiBara:

I said, what about your team? You know, you have 800 team members at this point across your companies. I was like, I didn't hear you mention them. And we have a good relationship where I could be a little bit more direct. And he's like, you know what, you guys, you're right. And I said, maybe that's a goal. Cause he's very altruistic, right? If he could frame it around other people, he'll move mountains. I mean, he does great stuff with his team and whatnot, but I just don't think he saw it as like, I'm gonna make the business more efficient and then I'm gonna give back to my team members. Better 401k, better bonuses, better place to work, more vacation time.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah.

Matt DiBara:

And I can see the light bulb go off and he went, huh, interesting. And it's like, sometimes I think you need to relight that fire. And when the business gets bigger, you know, if management is doing really well, your C-suite team, it's like, what are you fighting for? Right. And it's like, when you're at the top of the mountain,

sometimes that fight is about getting everybody else to elevate. And that was interesting.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah, in construction, I find most of the contractors that I know, whether they're wildly successful or still struggling, we all have this need to solve problems and we're usually pretty good at it. I mean, and it's, you mentioned your grandfather or your dad even taking all the phone calls. And it's like, you know, yeah, one at a time, you could be really good and a superhero at fixing things and coming up with solutions quickly. But as soon as your business grows past that, where now you're on the other line fixing one problem the other one is boiling over, right? Like you can't replicate yourself fast enough. And so you have to have systems and processes in place to manage those things. And I think that's what you're talking about is, you know, your buddy who, whether he's a mentor or just a peer, obviously, like I was mentioning before, that's the don't rock the boat mentality. Everything's going great. I don't really need to change anything because I'm doing great, but I love that you flipped that and flipped the script and said, you know, what about the team, right? Could you use those things to bless them? I think that's a beautiful sentiment and again something we can all learn from as business owners, leaders, directors, or even employees looking to maybe start on our own venture down the road, right?

Matt DiBara:

Yeah, and there's also, I mean, I have a friend, I consult with a few VC venture capital firms, and I'll tell you, I mean, they're looking at ways, I mean, they like companies that have tech, that have data, that have optics, and a light bulb moment for me when I realized that the same thing that makes a business much more profitable and makes it much more seamless is also the same thing that makes your business a big acquisition target, and that's.

Integration of tech and great people. I mean, they literally want to understand the data, the optics, and they want to see your orchard. I mean, those are the two huge, it's not the only things, but those are the two big ones. It's who do you have on your team, and what's the tech and the optics that you have to make

things efficient? And have you developed anything that gives you an edge in the marketplace? I mean, that's kind of the intake. So if your team isn't enough of a benefit, if making more money isn't enough of a benefit, how about that long-term goal of making a business more money or even potentially being an acquisition target.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah, that's awesome. I know another big thing is head count and then dollar per person, right, per employee generated from revenue and then profitability per person. And when VCs or private equity, when these companies that are looking for acquisitions are looking, they want to see if those numbers are in line or they're very efficient, they know you're doing something special. And it's usually technologically driven. It's usually you've got great systems of process in place. And like you said, they eat that stuff up because that's something that they can invest in, not just the top line revenue or the bottom line that's left in the bank account, but what are you doing in the middle so that they could potentially scale this, right? And do more with it than maybe what you've been able to do with more limited revenue.

So from where you're at today in the future, I mean, what kind of goals and aspirations do you have and where do you see your adoption of technology and systems taking you into the future?

Matt DiBara:

I think with us, we're looking at how can we integrate a little bit of AI is one thing we're looking at in the business, right? Where does that sit and how do we maintain our kind of core family business field that we've managed to grow with? That's one thing. We're also looking at, I think for us, there's a big push towards, we're being pulled towards more commercial and more government work. We're looking at how can we track things more efficiently? My goal now is to get data and optics on everything and really build out individual scorecards. So that way we can make sure that every person on the team has some form of performance incentive. And before we can do that, we really have to be able to track everything and draw clear lines in the sand and say, your performance is

solely based on the things that you directly control and not the things that are indirect. So that's a big motivation for us.

Mike Merrill:

I love that. So what about, I'm sure you've got some stories. I know it's off the cuff here, but what about an example of maybe an employee or some employees that you have been able to empower and really help to grow and expand their own potential through adoption of these systems?

Matt DiBara:

Yeah, I mean, we had, gosh, there's so many. I mean, we had somebody that I, years ago, I mean, this was probably six years ago, seven years ago, that I really worked with and mentored alongside a few managers that we had. And younger person came in the field early, their family was in the business too, but same thing, no tech. And I think one of the things that really allowed him to grow so quickly in our company was the fact that he became an ambassador of these programs.

And so, you know, really good in the field, but we kind of made him, we actually built a role around his skillset, which was anytime we introduced something in the field, he was the first person to get it. He was what I called our proof of concept. Like we rolled something out, he would get it right away. And then he kind of turned to be like, look, you know, guys and gals, you know, we can do this. And so I think, you know, finding somebody who, you know, if you're listening, finding somebody who's like your tech ambassador or somebody who's your, uh, you know, proof of concept if you will. Because when you can remove doubt, that's a big one. I mean, we had an issue where we rolled out an upgraded inventory management system. And I think at the time I probably had, I don't know, 12 or 13 crews, you know, so there's 13 trucks. We got 50, 60 people in the field at that point. And, you know, when you're rolling this out, you got iPads, they're scanning stuff, there's forklifts everywhere, you know, we're loading trucks up and it was a lot of resistance. But because I had this one person, he kind of became the proof of concept where he did it right away. And it, and it between management and team, which she was high level with, it reduced the friction of like, well, I can't

do this and this is impossible. You know, somebody said that and he's like, impossible. I've been doing it for three days. Come here. I'll help you. Right. And so having somebody that can do that. And I have that in every area of the business. Now I have the one person where we roll something out. I'm like, they will be the proof of concept that this works and they will help other people jump on board. And that's honestly, I've never thought about it consciously, but that's one of our secret things that allows us to do this so easily.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah, that's awesome. I know when we roll a new system out with a new company, it goes so much smoother when we've got some, we call them power users, right? And like you mentioned, and this is a critical piece, because they're a peer, it's not the top down, it's not the boss pointing their finger down at anybody. This is somebody on their level, out there on the project that's at least semi equal to them in many regards.

So when there there's positive peer pressure from that peer to you know adopt what they're saying this is actually pretty easy this is actually better than what we were doing before look how this makes your life and your job easier if we put this in place uh you know and then to your point with your friend when they know that the business is going to reinvest and improve things for them after the successful adoption of these new things, as the business grows, they're going to get a little bit of that benefit also, they're gonna be 10 times more likely to lean into it and help you out versus oppose it and be one of those naysayers that's gonna try and, you know, peel away at the cracks and, you know, try and get rid of this new process that they feel like is now changing their life or moving their cheese, so to speak.

Matt DiBara:

Yeah, and it's a sense of accomplishment too. I think, you know, when we do embrace it, I find that even the people that were a little bit, they don't love it, like once they start doing it, there's a little bit of a sense of pride that comes along with it once they've mastered it.

Mike Merrill:

And they realize again, oh, wow, I actually can do this. And it's empowering. And then the next project that comes where they've got to put something else new in place, maybe there's a little bit of excitement or dopamine versus complete resistance and don't want to have anything to do with it.

Matt DiBara:

Yeah, and it creates, I think it creates the next generation of the workforce. Like I had somebody who, gosh, they were amazing. Their wife got a job at Amazon and they had to relocate. He said, look, she's making enough for the both of us. Like I can't say no. And he was very sad. We did an exit interview and we looked at his file when he came in. So we documented the skillsets he had. And he was almost in tears when we were going through it because of how much he had grown with the tech, specifically around tech, you know, he's like, man, when I started working here, I was two-fingered clucking the keyboard. He goes, now I'm doing inventory management, I'm running jobs, I'm doing job logs, and I'm managing field tracking time. And it was just a really cool moment to think that he felt confident moving across the country because he knew that his skillset was in demand and he had grown so much in the company. I mean, it was literally there. I mean, we had tracked every three months, we were doing our reviews and documenting skillsets. We have a growth plan at the company. And it was just really interesting to see that, if nothing else, I was also investing in their entire career.

Right? So, and he had a leg up on anybody he was going to compete against in the workforce because he had all these skills.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah, that's beautiful. And what a wonderful opportunity that you have as a business to empower individuals and help them to improve their own lives with tools that they already had and ability that they were already blessed with. They just never realized it because they didn't have to tap into it before, right? That's awesome. I love that.

So in wrapping up, I think one of the things that just keeps coming across my mind is you've been on this

journey. You're obviously reinventing an over 100 year old company in some ways. What do you think is the single most impactful thing that you've done or the change that you've seen that gets you really excited today about the future?

Matt DiBara:

Gosh, that's a good question.

I mean, at this point in my career, I'm obsessed with the integration between great people, finding and bringing in great people, and then providing the tools for them to do exceptionally well. I mean, that's the thing that excites me. I mean, because you, you know, there's leadership and there's all these elements that are success indicators of a company. But I think it's like when you can find somebody great, bring them into your team, and then it's just like... Like you think of a fire that's already there, right? And you drop a log on it. It's like, did you really do a ton? I don't know, you know, but it's like, that's what I see in our company that's so special is finding great people, creating really wide lanes for them to just grow, and then providing the tools as they need it. You know, we're big on that. You're really big on having people identify areas of the business that they think are inefficient, and then adding efficiencies, but it's really cool to watch.

Because we brought a lot of great people into the company, specifically from companies that are much bigger than us, and we do well, but there's a few really big companies where I am and it's interesting to see the same person that did maybe okay or good at a job. We come in, we give them the right tools, we create the right environment and they just do exceptional. And that's something that I've just been fascinated with because that concept of potential, it's not something you can always see. It's like an inkling, right? It's like... I think this person can do amazing stuff. If only they had the right leadership, the right tools, the right team, the right culture. And when you can foster that, I think you do that enough times, you're gonna have an exceptional company.

Mike Merrill:

That's beautiful, Matt. Well, I think your great grandfather and your grandfather and your father probably all very proud of what you've done with the

business and where you're taking it. And it's exciting to see and be a part of this story with you. And I can't wait to see what you're going to continue to do in the future. We need to keep in touch and have you back on and talk a little bit more about some of the things you're doing. I think a lot of businesses could learn from your positive example.

Matt DiBara:

I think your great grandfather and grandfather and father are probably all very proud of what you've done because of where you're taking that. And it's exciting to see and be a part of this story with you. And I can't wait to see what you're going to continue to do in the future. We need to keep in touch, have a talk, a little bit of core about what you're doing. I think a lot of this is just part of your positive example. I appreciate that and I appreciate your background as well. Now you've got a little bit of fun to do this again, but I'm going to thank you so much.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah, you bet. It's been a lot of fun. We'll have to do this again down the road. Thank you so much for joining us today.