**Jason Ballard 00:00:05**  This is coach Jason Ballard, and I'm a business wingman. Over the years, I've learned a lot from working in our family construction business, serving as a senior officer in the United States Air Force, and running 12 different organizations around the world. Many, many people helped me get to where I am today, and it's my mission in life to serve as a personal wingman to others. That's what this podcast is all about providing knowledge, tools, resources, and mentorship to help people soar to their highest altitude. Welcome back to the Soar Higher podcast. This is your host, coach Jason Ballard. It's a real privilege to be with you today. Got a really great show in store for you today. Today we're going to be talking about, one of my favorite topics, leadership and some different aspects of leadership today we're talking about how as a leader, to continuously revitalize, grow and remain on top of the market you're in, regardless of industry, regardless of the size business, regardless of anything.

**Jason Ballard 00:01:14**  How do you, as a leader, navigate your team, your organization, your people through the dynamics of today and the fast-paced nature of how things work today and the adversity and the challenges we face. How do you keep your team focused, revitalized, fresh, relevant, and current and competitive? And so today, we have the privilege of having an expert on the show that's going to kind of talk us through that, share his valuable experiences that we can all really learn from. So today, I have the privilege of having, Mike Murphy on the show. Mike is the Managing Partner of a business consulting firm based out of Washington, D.C. called Sunstone Management Advisors. He has over 30 years of executive leadership experience running numerous insurance and healthcare type organizations, and is widely known for his ability to transform and scale businesses and reach unheard of results on a continuous basis, which is really remarkable. So without further ado, Mike, my friend, welcome to the show.

**Jason Ballard 00:02:35**  Yeah, we're excited to have you. Mike, tell us a little bit about you. You've got a phenomenal background, man. You've done a lot of different things and that's really hard to do it repeatedly. So give us a little bit about your background and kind of how you got to where you are today.

**Mike Murphy 00:02:54**  Yeah. It's it has been quite a journey. You know there are a series of, you know, left hand turns on my resume. And I euphemistically say this because I couldn't hold a job. But the reality is, that I got some great advice early on from one of my career Sherpas who said to me, and this advice holds forever is don't go the road off and travel constantly. Do, especially in the early part of your career, you know, constantly do very different things to build out your skill set. And so that's been my journey. So very few jobs that I go into from the time I started even to today, did I know what I was doing when I got in the door? I had enough skills to be effective, but then I was also learning something.

**Mike Murphy 00:03:38**  And that's also a message for hiring. If you hire somebody from the school of been there, done that, as opposed to somebody who's ready to take on a challenge and is going to grow and learn in the job, you're going to end up with a superstar at the end of that cycle. So that was a lesson I got early, and so I just did a lot of different things. And so my journey started inside the big company. I was a history major, so I'll constantly make absurd references to history to make sure my major's being put to work here. I got a book on my back shelf, Accounting for Dummies because I had to learn a lot about finance and accounting. So at any rate, I started, inside the big company and worked for a large, venerable health care managed care company for 15 years and 13.5 of which I didn't even have a resume together. Going up the corporate ladder and following my Sherpas advice and doing lots of different things, anything from sales to finance to health care operations, I was doing it all.

**Mike Murphy 00:04:36**  But then, you know, I woke up one day and I realized that having a bigger job inside the big company wasn't having a better job for me personally, and that euphemistically, I don't breed in captivity. So I was really looking for some things to stretch me and have more bias towards action then the bigger company. And while it was a great experience and I have considered it my alma mater it helped shape me. You know, I want to go on and do something else. And I went to do a very entrepreneurial thing. I was going to a company that was smaller than accounts. I had at the big company. And so big learning experience, when you can feel the weight of the world on your shoulders and you're not dealing with 50,000 employees, but 50, and people are dependent on you. So different sort of pressure. And then I did a series of what I would call “intrepreneurial” things, where some hard lessons were learned and they weren't as much fun.

**Mike Murphy 00:05:26**  And those were companies saying, oh, I want to change. I want to do something different. Hey, we got this new cool thing we're doing, and you're kind of an innovator and come on in. And a lot of those companies, it's the ultimate definition of madness, right? Because they want something different in the result, but they don't really want to do anything different in terms of what they're doing. And so as my Irish grandmother says, it only ends in tears, you know?

**Mike Murphy 00:05:49**  You know, it wasn’t a lot of fun, but, you know, it was a good learning experience and I met some great people. Then really the back part of my career has been where I feel like I've really hit my stride working with smaller, midsize businesses, transformational things, turnarounds in many cases, you know, really very small companies that weren't quite going concerns to others that were. And I've had some great success there. And, I think the last thing I would say is, if you ever hear me tout a property, that's going to be the next great thing.

**Mike Murphy 00:06:19**  I'm not exactly Warren Buffett, because I've had four scenarios that I went into that were like, almost done inside of 90 to 120 days. And I'm not talking about you take the job and hey, the executive washroom isn't what I thought it was going to be, you know? No, like literally like we're out of funds. Last one back on Friday doesn't get paid, you know, like, oh my gosh. I had to do a lot of firefighting and some of the best work I did was overcoming some of that adversity. So I'm going now, you know, 35 plus years and, recently about a year and a half ago, reformatted and reformed my advisory business called Sunstone Management Advisors with some great partners. And the idea was, you know, I had a track record for building and fixing things, as did my partners, and we said, well, instead of trying to do that in one place and find the right scenario, let's help as many companies we can as possible get better wide range of things from strategy growth to fractional leadership to improving their margins.

**Mike Murphy 00:07:17**  It's bringing to bear all the different things that I've learned with my partners, have learned to help companies get better and make that our mission. In fact, we do a fair amount of what I just call “brain pickage”. Somebody calls having an idea. What are you thinking about it? It's just we're excited about the mission. And so and you know, we get in the right scenario, we can get paid for it too. So, it's taking all this learning and developing on the success that we've had, and helping others, with their journey. So that's, that's what Sunstone Management Advisors is. And the last little piece, a little sunstone in my history major, to get to throw this in. A sunstone is actually a, Norse navigation device. It was thought to be mythological, and it's a crystal that the Vikings used prior to compasses to find the sun in the sky when it wasn't there either was behind the clouds or below the horizon. That's cool. We're going to help our clients, you know, find their sun on the sky.

**Mike Murphy 00:08:08**  So that's that's my quick background and that's the Sunstone story.

**Jason Ballard 00:08:12**  That's awesome. I love that, you know, Mike, you know, think about leadership. I'm a simple-minded guy. There's a lot of books, training courses. There's a lot of stuff out there under the heading of leadership. Right. But I've always just been a firm believer in very simple things. And I've just personally boiled leadership down to three simple things. Right. Leaders motivate and influence people to do things, do things they may or may not even like or understand or be comfortable with, to the point where they kind of take ownership of it. Number two, leaders grow new leaders. And number three, leaders set people up for success. So a real true example there of your story of you learning under people, people mentoring and teaching you, you rising through the ranks and then turning around and paying it forward with, you know, the people that you can help and build that next generation leaders help them prevent, you know them making mistakes that have been made in the past and help them with their decision making.

**Jason Ballard 00:09:17**  So, you know, thank you for what you do. Not everybody out there in the world that has served in a leadership or management role has that mindset or willingness to go back out in, in lead and coach and mentor and consult and care enough to get, you know, stay dirty in the trenches to help people figure things out in the in the benefit of, you know, everyone around them that you know that that work will create the next generation of success for years to come. And so thank you for making those sacrifices to do that.

**Mike Murphy 00:09:53**  Yes, it's my pleasure. And I literally mean it. It's my pleasure. I mean, a long time ago, I decided that I liked coaching better than sort of like necessarily getting the results myself. It was always more fulfilling for me to see the team I was with, you know, improve dramatically or the player I was as an employee or youth sports, whatever, get demonstrably better. And some of it isn't always necessarily, you know, that that whether it was in sports or whatever, that they became more skilled.

**Mike Murphy 00:10:22**  Some of it was a life experience. I mean, I would remember a young kid, he was diabetic and overweight and he could, you know, barely get up and down the basketball court. So he competed in an environment where he figured out how to contribute. And his mother came up and said it was transformational, that the kid developed a sense of confidence. And that's, you know, that's being aware of the kid and the player and putting them in a position to succeed. So. Well, first of all, there's a I think there's a cultural, reference or litmus test that has to be passed, for any leader to be successful if they're creating it themselves, even better. But if they're inside of it and you're in a team inside of something else, a little more involved and, it's I know when I started to work, my father, didn't go to college, got out of the military, was going to trade school, and then took a job loading reels in the old data rooms, and then ultimately became a computer programmer himself, and then retired after 35 years.

**Mike Murphy 00:11:15**  And he pulled me aside and, and he said, hey, you're going to go work in the corporate world. He said, this was how I survived 35 years and thrived and said, the first thing he said is outearn your pay. So no matter what you do, equal partnership, you give 51%, he said. That's your edge and it's your pride and should never, ever, ever let that down. No matter what is happening, you always, always outearn your pay. That's, you know, that's part of your pride. And I hear the great Bill Russell say his variation on which his father said, you know, I don't care if you want to be a ditch digger or not. You'd be the world's greatest ditch digger. And they'll come from miles around and watch you dig ditches. You'll be more important to the job than the job is to you. That way you can tell your boss to go to hell. So a little bit of an angle there. I mean, my my father's a little calmer about it than Bill Russell's dad, but.

**Mike Murphy 00:12:01**  But it's still true. It's a first and foremost, you know, you got you're going to give 51%. You're going to you know, that's got to be your mindset. The second thing is you don't spend other people's money and you get caught up in that kind of culture where, you know, it's posturing and preening. The water cooler talk I've heard you talk about before, which is the cancer that destroys organizations. And the third thing is, you know, don't get caught up in what other people are doing. And, the green eyed goddess of envy and, you know, Starhawk, I'm not this and I'm not that and measured yourself against others. And then the third thing he said is make sure your boss knows who you are, what you're doing, and if you're doing something that matters and you're doing something well and you're with the right organization, everything works itself out. So again, very simple, trite, you know, almost banal. All kinds of descriptions, but so powerful in their words and, and also and I've been in those organizations where they're not there and, you know, it's a heartbreak.

**Mike Murphy 00:12:57**  So I start with that kind of culture and environment in my assessment. I'm with the right company or not. And then I try to create that myself. The other thing I started to do early on, when I first got into supervisory management roles, as I used to call it, “Mikey meets”, I would sit down with everybody and just get to know them. And then I over time I said, you know, the organizations got more complex. I couldn't get to everybody. So I started to put it in writing like, here's who I am, you know, this is what you can expect out of me. And it became kind of a promissory note. And I had more and more folks tell me that as I left, they pulled that memo out and said, you were true to every word. And you know, what were those words? Well, again, back to my history, major. I don't believe in the divine right of kings. Right. So, but it's not to say it's not a democracy.

**Mike Murphy 00:13:41**  You know, we're not going to count the house. We're not necessarily going to be voting, you know? I'm not, you know, it's not that I'm not the king, you know, and I tell everybody that they have a right to my trust. Right out of the gate. I don't have a right to theirs. I have to earn that. and so I said about that marker I put for myself with every individual I work with saying, I want you to walk away from our interaction whenever our time is over. And you say, he's the best leade I've ever had. Now, you're not successful all the time with that, but that's my own little marker. And that's what I think about, and that's not indulging them. It's not giving him candies and cookies. It's being a proper leader and watching them grow. The second thing I, you know, I talk about is ownership and accountability and, 100% ownership, hundred percent accountability, empowering people.

**Mike Murphy 00:14:30**  You know, there's a, stress management model that says you figure out what you can control and you worry about that and don't worry about anything else. Well, I had a boss. If there was a big task and it didn't get done, he doesn't care if a hurricane ripped through Or, you know, or, you know, your house blew down. Good people find a way to make things happen and becomes a little scary, but empowering when you think seeing beyond, well, I can't control that now, but can I control it later? And if I take all consuming responsibility for this, you know, goal, I'm going to be likely to be more creative in my problem solving. And then the other thing is we talk about is communication open covenants open arrived at from the, Treaty of Paris. And I tell everybody, don't rehearse your speech. You have a prodigal right to complain about the boss. You know, I just don't shoot at me from high and rocks. Let me have it first.

**Mike Murphy 00:15:22**  Come in. Because there's the chances are I could be doing something wrong. And I want to hear from you. Or I want to communicate something, and we don't. We have kind of good task pressure. We just understand what the objectives are. And, so we have a good dialogue there. But I, you know, I said don't I'm not going to worry about how you're saying it. I'm going to get at the nugget of what it is that you're saying. So don't worry about making me upset or insulting me. You can't. I got thick skin. I know I'm flawed. You know, I'm wonderfully imperfect, you know? So it's okay if you point something out. In fact, if we create that kind of environment and you point something out, that's magic, right? Because now you've got the kind of dynamic that can go forward. And the last thing is, you know, damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead. Gotta have a bias towards action. We're accountable for results.

**Mike Murphy 00:16:07**  That's what makes us go, you know, it's an institutional relationship in that regard. I mean, we can have fun and, you know, do all kinds of social things together, but it's built on our responsibilities to one another, the organization. So, you know, I put all those things in writing and just say, you always get honesty for me. I will be transparent. You can say whatever you want to me. I'm not caught up. You know, I'm not going to be the Alpha wolf by baring my teeth. It's a Lord of the Flies thing. I think with my skills, I will get the juice to lead from inspiring you everywhere I've gone, I start with that kind of modus operandi.

**Jason Ballard 00:16:44**  I love it, humility and transparency. If you're out there listening, you know, leadership is simple. You know, if you're humble and you're transparent and what you're doing every day of the week and you're open to listening to people and not being sensitive and critical and, you know, thinking you're above somebody, boy, you can really make a powerful impact as a leader.

**Jason Ballard 00:17:13**  People will respect you, look at you differently, and even hope to open up to you. Right. You know, to make really great decisions as a leader, you need the best possible information. Where does the information lie? If it lies in the brains of the people that you've hired, you know, because they do the job every day. And so the better you know them, the better that, you know, relationship is, the more willing they are to share and the more they're willing to share the better informed you're going to be. And hopefully at the end of the day, you can make the best decisions possible for situation at hand. Right. And so it's a team effort, man. And I thank you for outlining that. You know, if you are a leader, whether you're just starting out in a new leadership role or you've been in a leadership role for a while, doesn't matter. Do you have a leadership kind of philosophy, a leadership mantra that you've developed that you can write down and you can hand to people or email to people and say, this is how I roll.

**Jason Ballard 00:18:18**  This is how I think this is, you know, what's important to me. These are the things that I think are critical to success. Here's kind of my pet peeves of what will get you in trouble. And here are the things that will help you know, you know, make you successful. I remember sitting in a meeting with one of my bosses a number of years ago. The room's full of like 30 executive people, and he's sitting at the head of the table. And I was, kind of his understudy. I was his executive assistant, if you will, and, and, pretty much carrying his bags and doing all the crap, you know, for them that he needed done right, earning my stripes, so to speak. And, we're going through some challenges in the organization. And, you know, he made it a point to talk about folks. It's not about you.

**Jason Ballard 00:19:17**  It's not about your career. It's not about your title. It's not about your next promotion.

**Jason Ballard 00:19:22**  It's not about your bonus. It's not about your annual appraisal and saying you're the next, you know, genius of the world or whatever that may be. This is about the greater good of the organization where are you in it? These are the things that will make you successful. The first thing and they only had three. The first and most important thing he talked about the most was, if you want to impress me, make somebody else in this room look good. Everybody's sitting there. Like what?

**Jason Ballard 00:20:07**  He's like, you're all in this room because you're proven leaders. If you're not a proven leader, then we're going to have a conversation and we're going to talk more about that and how you can improve. But you're here because you're a proven, solid entity that should be able to do the job. So you don't need to impress anybody. You don't need to one up anybody. You don't need to do any of those things. You just need to make other people in this room look good.

**Jason Ballard 00:20:35**  By having one on one meetings out of our meetings, figuring out how to team up and work together to help each other because everybody in the room is going to need something from somebody at some point. And so how do we solve problems today as a team? I remember a guy named Bob Mulally. He was the president and CEO of Ford Motor Company from I think it was like 2006, 2007 to around 2012. If I'm not, if I'm not mistaken. But he took over during the time of the recession. He came from Boeing. First time ever anybody in Ford, you know, took over the helm of Ford without being in the automotive industry, right? He came from the aviation industry. And, I remember in some, you know, a speech he did and later in, in a conversation I had with him, he talked about the power of the team. He sat in the executive meetings for the first couple of weeks in how the culture was show the boss everything that's green.

**Jason Ballard 00:21:52**  Nobody showed the boss anything red. He said, man, I go out to these different factories, these different distribution centers and these different dealerships and assembly plants. And, you know, I've got notebooks. I'm filling up full of things. I'm seeing things people are telling me that I can help them with and He's like, no, we're a team. We have to work really, really well together. There's no problem we can't solve as a team. And so I just think those things are really important and you certainly are, you know, embodying those things. But, you know, Mike, I'm just curious, whatever got you into leadership in the first place? Was it? Was there a day you woke up and you're like, oh boy, what a great day to be a leader. I think I'm going to be a leader today. I'm going to go ask my boss if I can be a leader.

**Jason Ballard 00:22:47**  Like what happened? Let's you know, you could be a potentially good leader. And just how did that happen? How did you figure all that out?

**Mike Murphy 00:22:59**  Yeah. I mean, like anything else, it's experience is a great teacher. And, there's the old adage where, a door closes and a window opens and that sort of thing. And again, back to my Sherpa who said constantly do different things. And I was in a stage of my career where there was a path in front of me that was a little bit more of, you know, go into sales, right? And that you can no, you can make untold riches. And you're largely looking for your work for yourself in a large organization. You have a small little team, but you're really kind of on your own. Just grab your box of samples and off you go And, my Sherpa said, you know, I think for you.

**Mike Murphy 00:23:41**  And it was relatively young. I was probably 24 or 25. And he said, I want you to get some management experience. So I'm going to ship you over here and you're going to manage 37 billing clerks, you know, and they're all back in the day. They’re smoking cigarettes. And, you know, it's like they're like, I what? It was the back office of tthe company. Yeah. They were doing billing. You know I'm a kid. I don’t want to go to this. And he said to me, he goes, well, you need to learn. No matter where you go in life, any of these are the, you know, checkbox skills. You need to learn how to be a leader and supervise. Even if you decide ultimately, do you want to make riches and sell and be your, you know, be your own boss kind of thing, but this is a skill set you need. And then he said, the other thing is, that you're going to be challenged in ways you can't imagine right now, and it's going to teach you things about organization and about yourself, about managing stress because I was very linear, you know, you know a equals b, b equals c equals c.

**Mike Murphy 00:24:39**  Yeah. Go. You know, and when you get in these large corporations it doesn't work that way. There's lots of external pressures and things you don't understand. And it's not logical. And there's politics. And if you're very linear like I was, you know, you could lose your mind and you have to learn how to navigate all of that. And I got into the role. I did it for about two years, and it was everything he said it was going to be. But I came out of that and I accomplished some things and, you know, and got the high of feeling making an impact on these 37 people. Don't get me wrong, we didn't go find a cure for cancer. It was just, you know, just dealing with overtime and cutting back on their number of hours and all that other stuff. And so, it just gave me a sense of accomplishment that I said, that's what I want to do. I like getting results for others. And while that sales job might be all that great, So I actually went into sales management after that.

**Mike Murphy 00:25:36**  So I'll skip past the sales thing and go right into sales management, because I was so excited and buoyed by the experience, all the difficulties of leading people. I just felt it was such a high for me.

**Jason Ballard 00:25:49**  So you've had a phenomenal career. You've had many, many leadership roles. You've climbed the corporate ladder, you figured out these things and, you know, one of the things that you mentioned that you're one of your bosses did for you that I think was critical for success is move you around, give you a lot of experience in different departments, different functional areas. And so you've, learned probably a little bit about a lot that's, you know, allowed to propel you forward. And so now you're, you know, in the position of senior leadership, right? You're at the CEO level of your career. And you start going to these different companies and you start taking things from, you know, one thing to something bigger.

**Jason Ballard 00:26:38**  There's one, instance where I see you started something, a new division of a company and took it to $435 million in revenue in a relatively short amount of time. So how did you figure that out? What did it take from you to be able to go in kind of cold and figure things out and drive the ship in that direction and get that kind of success? $435 million is more than a lot of businesses make ever, I know.

**Mike Murphy 00:27:12**  I’ve been very blessed - I look at as kind of my Super Bowl wins. Right. Like that was, and like anything else, there's a combination of things that, I mean, was I any better an executive when I did that, as opposed to the couple of things I didn't that didn't come out so well. No. And so there's a little bit of luck. Right. Example. And really the right leadership. So the person I was working for was an entrepreneur, self self-made billionaire.

**Mike Murphy 00:27:49**  Didn't know anything about insurance but you know knew success and saw opportunity and then basically turned me loose. So he had the capital and I had the brainpower. And then the other thing is we remember is that, you know, it's there's an old adage that nothing kills a bad product faster than good marketing. So you gotta have something. It works. You know, there are companies that come up and suddenly they've got market valuations more than established enterprises and they're not making any money. I'm old fashioned in that regard. You know, it's like, do you know, I guess Warren Buffett like, you know, just you got to have a reasonable product as big or fast or better, cheaper than the competition And, a total addressable market that's going to allow you to grow and then you sustain it. And so what did I do? I mean, I you know, it started as there was only a handful of us.

**Mike Murphy 00:28:42**  It was an established company. It had its own line of business. It was doing fine, but we were building a whole new division that was foreign to them. And I was very much dirt on the fingernails. I mean, \we're going to be very cautious. And how we spend our money, we didn't we didn't bring on a lot of staff until we could match revenue to expenses. And that meant as an executive, I had to be dirt under the fingernails, you know, build anything up. But, you know, it's, flash forward to today that business is well over $1 billion. When I look back and go, wow, we have something.

**Mike Murphy 00:29:19**  Oh, yeah. Yeah, you feel great about it. And again, it was, you know, it wasn't easy. Every day was an interview - I used to joke, you know. And we had to kind of get through a lot and because we were building something that was brand new.

**Mike Murphy 00:29:30**  It was an insurance company that didn't exist in the space. And so we had to do some creative things and we did some acquisitions and integrated those. And so it was no shortage of business challenges. But you know, I would say that, you know, going back to the fundamentals, it starts with, again, even if you're a CEO, you've got a board, you've got investors. So you've got to have that right environment for, you know, for you to be of like mind in terms of what it is that you want to accomplish. And secondly, you have a business plan. It's logical and makes sense and is not and is real. And because your troops will understand what the business model works or not. Right. And so if you've got a good strong vision and then the last thing which I was blessed to have is, you know, built an unbelievable team. Right. And so you suddenly invite all these co-authors into this masterpiece you're building.

**Mike Murphy 00:30:24**  And it's not just yours. I mean, yeah, you take some quiet pride in what you accomplish, but you know damn well that if you didn't have some of those key players, you wouldn't have been successful. And so that's that humility that enters into it. So, I mean, I have all the confidence in the world of myself. And believe me, you know, I can bend the rubber tree plant, but I also know if I'm not surrounded with a great team, I'm not I'm not going anywhere. And I can't, you know, I can't make a business out of nothing. Right. There's those fundamentals got to be there. So it's got to be real.

**Jason Ballard 00:30:52**  So let's talk about where you went from there. Right. So you've built many businesses. You've created something from nothing. You’ve taken it to, you know, just immense levels of success. And then you figured out some things and then you went into consulting and then helping other people figure out these things and get unstuck, or figure out a new path or what was going wrong, etc..

**Jason Ballard 00:31:18**  And you've come up with like a proven strategy. You've got some things you've kind of, you know, benchmarks, as you know, from your experiences, talk to us about your proven strategies, and how do you go into a business that wants to hire you? How did what are the first things you do? And kind of kind of walk us through that a little bit and give us an idea of kind of your methodology behind the method, behind the madness, so to speak.

**Mike Murphy 00:31:47**  So the the first thing is our target client, is may not be somebody that's out necessarily looking for us, right? Then it's oh, I need to hire a management consultant. I mean, you know, that's that's the kind of a dreary existence that we all occupy, right? A management consultant, right? They're the first thing to go when the cuts are there. And, you know, so we start with a kind of a dose of humility around our value. And we first focus on trying to build some sense of trust.

**Mike Murphy 00:32:19**  Not, “hey, I'm the I'm the Shell Answer Man. I've got all the answers.” “I've got it all it sorted out.” Because that's insulting, right? If you've got somebody that's trying to get to understand the human basal behavior, especially if you've got founders or, you know, folks that were small and mid-sized businesses that have had some success, and now it's maybe not going the way they want. And for them to kind of come to the conclusion that they might need some outside help. I mean, that's a pretty big personal journey. And so, you know, we try to be sensitive to that. And so often we just start with we don't try to sell anybody anything. I'm not sticking my tin cup out. I'm not espousing our virtues. I'm just building a relationship and saying, if you need anything, just call me. You know, I'm happy to spend an hour on the phone with you. The second thing is, once we're into a scenario where there's some expressed interest, we put question marks in our sentences.

**Mike Murphy 00:33:11**  We don't go in exclamation point boiled. “Here's a product, we got this turnkey” “It's guaranteed” Thereare others that market themselves that way. There's like the shrink wrap thing. We're not shrink wrap. We're first going to spend a lot of time in discovery. And so we break down our projects with the first part of a discovery effort where it's, you know, we try to make the cost as, as minimal as possible, where we go in and get underneath and with our eyes and with our ears and obviously with data, we can say we've got a pretty good picture of what's going on here, and here's the places that we can help. So the second phase is where we've kind of done the initial kind of fact finding. And then the second phase is, all right, here's what we're going to do. And as much as possible we try to, put a return on investment.

**Mike Murphy 00:34:05**  We try to make our fundamental goal to improve the enterprise value of the company. If we're burning expenses, we're not improving the enterprise value. So it's all about the return. And so sometimes, you know, a client will say, gee, I really can use your help, but I really can't afford this. So we said, okay, let's instead of saying “no because”, let's do “yes if “and let's talk about how we might be able to leverage your resources versus ours and maybe we can take some cost and put it as a success fee because we're confident in ourselves. Then obviously then we execute. And if we can't help somebody, we step away. And we've done that before, too. It's like, I can't help you, you know, if somebody wants a pretty binder that's authored by Sunstone Management Advisors, they're not getting that from us. We're not excited by that, if that's what you want, not on us. But if you really want to get better and you really want to collaborate, then we're all game.

**Mike Murphy 00:35:00**  But if you're not, we're not going to. Don't waste our time. We won't waste yours.

**Jason Ballard 00:35:04**  It makes a lot of sense, you know, Mike. So for folks that may be struggling, folks that may be, you know, trying to figure out some answers, that's a great strategy. But what if you're doing well, you know, I got a company, I'm doing well, I'm making money, I'm profitable. I'm, you know I'm reaching my goals and things are going pretty darn smooth. What is your advice on people to continuously stay relevant, to revitalize, to continuously reinvest and grow and continuously, add value to what they're doing, but their clients in the market and how do you what does it take? What are some of the best ways you've discovered to do well and to continuously do well, so you minimize the risk of ever doing bad?

**Mike Murphy 00:35:56**  Great question. And, you know, success, you know, success can be the enemy of long standing innovation because you get the drug right and then you get a and entrepreneurs.

**Mike Murphy 00:36:**08  And we see this a lot especially the innovators. Definition. Success can mean a bunch of different things. I mean it should be sustainable year over year, EBITA growth and that sort of thing. But sometimes success is defined as I have investors pouring over themselves to get to me or, you know, or they're or they're looking out and they think they're seeing all this great result coming at them, and they're misreading the dials on the plane. Right. They just thinking this, we're doing great. It's all wonderful. and so they get a false sense of security. And I've seen that firsthand with the entrepreneur. And then you're in that position of pointing out that, it's not going as good as you think it is. Right? And maybe you need to think differently about what it is you're doing. Boy, that's a really hard conversation, and especially since a lot of these folks are wired by pushing through that flak. Right, because they hear that, no, you can't do that. And they're used to the naysayers.

**Mike Murphy 00:37:06**  And I go, well, I'm going to go right through it. And there's certainly a time and a place for that, but there's another time and a place is that wait a minute, am I am I being introspective? Am I asking myself the tough questions? And so there are certainly tools that go with it. First of all, if you're if you've moved past kind of the development stage as a leader and as a CEO, and your team is full on engaged and you've pushed tasks down, then you, as the CEO, stare out the window and go, what are we going to do three years from now? Right. Because there's the ultimate role of the CEO is not just to be a logistics kind of CEO heavy. And if you're the innovator and you've got that in your revenue, marketing person is killing and your operations person getting a finance person getting it and the teams killing it, then you as the CEO need to be thinking about what's next.

**Mike Murphy 00:37:58**  And there are tools in place to help with that. Obviously a good strategic plan really look hard at your total addressable market, you know, and if you're an early innovator and you're killing it to think that you're going to sustain that and nobody's going to try to impersonate you or do anything. I mean, you're just, you know, you're not thinking about your long term success and you have to think it's not, you know, it's not just, what are we doing in the next 2 to 3 years? Is that three, 4 or 5 years out? Where's my total addressable market going? What are the disruptors? Where else is going? What's next for me? You know, and that sort of thinking and make that a viable, vibrant part of your planning process where you're engaging your team as well. Obviously, you know your day in and day out, you're doing your thing. You're killing your balance sheet and your income statement. You're doing all that. But you need to be thinking about what's going to hit three plus years off from now and start that conversation today.

**Mike Murphy 00:38:50**  So there, you know, a lot of this is a simple business plan and metrics around total addressable market and places to expand and places to go. And just you can't ever be satisfied. Right. And so I go back, one of my favorite quotes is Vince Lombardi. And he said perfection is a goal that can never be attained. but if we pursue it all, our might in capability along the way we will find excellence. And so if you're a CEO and you've got success, keep that restlessness right in. And I got your organization and start thinking about where you're going to go as an organization in the 3 to 5 year plus horizons, and stay hungry. And then the other thing, which is, which is a floor is, is make sure you're reading your tea leaves. Right. Make sure you're reading your dials. Right. It's shocking to me, how many organizations don't have a really sound instrumentation panel? I will tell you a story, and, you know, your pilot would understand it.

**Mike Murphy 00:39:52**  And it was a publicly traded company. And the CEO, ran into problems. And so, of course, we got to save our way to prosperity, cut expenses. This is a company that could not answer basic price mix volume questions. Revenue. Revenue up, revenue down. I don't know why. No, “nobody knows” is the price as it mixes I'm don't know. So we were getting ready to try and build a data store and to try and get better control of our revenue. And it was had a big price tag. And he goes, well, that's the first thing that comes off. Cut that. And I and I said to him, go, why? Why are we cutting that? He goes, well, Wal-Mart knows everything about its customers and it misses its number. So what makes us think we're going to be any better? And I said, well, you're a pilot, right? Yep. So those jets got that fancy avionics in it.

**Mike Murphy 00:40:39**  Yep. Those things crash. Yep. Well take all the avionics out then. What's the point. You know, and he went oh. So yeah. So having a good balanced scorecard metrics not take the grease pen to make full, you know, empty look like full. Ask yourself the tough questions. and then have it built into your management structure that you are looking for the next thing. Because, you know, the market is such that even if you're on to something and you hit a strain and the, you know, black oil's pouring out, you got to figure out a ways that you're going to drill again. And it's got to be a fundamental part of your management process, fundamental part of your DNA. and it's got to be built in. Across the board of your culture.

**Jason Ballard 00:41:21**  Wonderful words. Great advice to business leaders out there that take things for granted. Get too busy. And I guess ultimately the message is never be complacent.

**Mike Murphy 00:41:39**  It's gotta be joy, right? It's. And I do the same thing in my own business. We're still, you know, we're trying to figure things out. We're always kind of trying to figure things out. And we said, is it messaging and and and that, that that restless leg syndrome. Right. It's there's a comedian Stephen Wright had a great line. He goes. he said, when you ever lean back in your chair and you feel like you're going to fall, because I feel that way all the time. And, you know, as it's true and the CEO and, you know, in the in the modern entrepreneur, I mean, there's a little bit of that. But that's got to be it's got to be invigorating. It's you're alive, right. You know, you're not like I felt like because I was trying to breed captivity. The fact that you're scared and that you're moving, I mean, it's the stuff of life. And it should be exciting and it's scary. Don't get me wrong, I've had those moments too, where you want to just burst into tears and go, how am I going to do this? But I don't know.

**Mike Murphy 00:42:32**  I would trade for everything. And if you got that mindset in, you know, you're unlikely to get caught off guard by something, you might make a mistake, I made them, I made the very mistake I just described you five minutes ago. I made it myself. It happens to the best of us.

**Jason Ballard 00:42:47**  It does? Well, Mike, thank you so much for being on the show, man. You've got you've given us just a ton, a treasure trove of different things to think about and just different life experiences, leadership lessons. I think people are really going to, you know, connect with and and yeah, yeah, that's me or. Yeah, I certainly don't want to be that. And so thank you for being on the show, man. You're an amazing guest. If folks want to learn more about you, if they want to connect with you, maybe even work with you, hire you to do consulting, or just have questions or whatever that may be. What's the easiest way for people to connect with you?

**Mike Murphy 00:43:28**  they can just go to, Sunstone Management advisors.com all one word forward slash. And, you can book time with me. You can ask a question. You know, Iwe obviously have a pretty, robust website with, lots of stuff on it for you to kind of download and look at. But, that's the easiest way to get in touch with me and. Yeah, like I said, I'm, I, I spend a fair amount of my time just talking to folks without a commercial relationship. And, because it keeps me invigorated because there's a lot of cool stuff going on out there in the space. If somebody's going to take the time to explain their business to me, it's an honor. And if I can, you know, offer some pearl or nugget that says, oh, I went to that. You can try this or, you know, I know a guy. You know, the famous I know a guy, I know a gal kind of thing.

**Mike Murphy 00:44:19**  The super connector role. You know, those things are invaluable as well. So I'm happy to do it all day long.

**Jason Ballard 00:44:23**  That's awesome. Mike, thank you so much for that. We're also going to put all of his contact information in the show notes so we can make it easy for you. So if you're driving down the road listening to this on your way home or to work or wherever you may be running on the trails or whatever you may be listening to the podcast, you don't have a chance to write things down or whatever we're going to put in the show notes. Just click on it. It'll take you right to Mike and his company, and you can connect with them in whatever way you'd like to. So great show, great episode. Hope you got a lot out of it. Right? Today we talked a lot about leadership. We talked about, the value of putting other great people, other great leaders around you, whether they're in your company or externally in your company, getting a mentor.

**Jason Ballard 00:45:12**  You know, Mike, talked a lot about that today. The value of Sherpas and mentors and coaches and people that may have different perspectives, different experiences than you. They can see things or have knowledge and skills and things or maybe have made mistakes or whatever that you may or may not have experienced yet. That can really be invaluable. So surround yourself with really good, trusted people, people that have been there and done that and are good quality, caring people that want to help you want to see you succeed. It takes everybody to work together. I certainly have had a lot of leaders in mentors and people, you know, guiding and directing me in my career. Mike certainly has from his story today. And so if you don't, then reach out to me, reach out to Mike, reach out to others that you know may be in your area that that you can surround yourself with and think right. You as a leader, you need to be able to think and be proactive and get ahead of things and stay relevant and competitive and always be looking to improve.

**Jason Ballard 00:46:19**  Obviously, you're going to have a lot of success and you're going to celebrate that success and high fives and beers and parties and all that's good and well and you should do that. But as a leader, you should always, you know, the next day when you wake up, be thinking about how do we continue to be relevant, how do I continue to empower my people? How do I continue to help them realize their dreams? How do I help my clients realize their dreams? And when you do those things, great things happen in the world. And when that happens, you know the world is potentially a better place. And I think if we can all, you know, go to our graves, knowing that we may have made a difference in making the world better, I think that's what it's all about. So that's it for today's show, everybody. Next week we've got another great expert guest on the show we're talking about a huge, huge needs in the market today and that is the workforce training and development, how to close the gaps that we're seeing out there in people that are struggling to find the right people, with the right skills and the right, you know, talents and abilities to work together as a team and stay together and and retain that culture and that, you know, those things on a sustainable level that helps you thrive.

**Jason Ballard 00:47:41**  Things are kind of just very fractured today in our world. And so next week we're going to be talking about how to close those gaps, bring people together, train and develop people for the long run and how amazing those results are. You won't want to miss that. Have a great week everybody.