

The Future of Work podcast is a weekly show where Jacob has in-depth conversations with senior level executives, business leaders, and bestselling authors around the world on the future of work and the future in general. Topics cover everything from AI and automation to the gig economy to big data to the future of learning and everything in between. Each episode explores a new topic and features a special guest.

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**Jacob** 00:00

Hello, everyone. Welcome to another episode of the future of work with Jacob Morgan. My guest today is Chris McCann, the CEO of 1-800-Flowers. Chris, thank you for joining me.

**Chris** 00:10

Great to be here, Jacob.

**Jacob** 00:11

Well, before we jump into all the fun business stuff, how are you doing?

**Chris** 00:16

Doing just fine. You know, sort of struggling through here. Being in New York in the epicenter of this pandemic has been challenging for sure. From a family perspective, we've been hunkered down for a while. My my children are all grown so some of with the still some have gone. But all through the midst of all this challenging time, we had a little brightness and a bit of joy in our family. And my oldest daughter gave birth to her first child, our first grandchild, right around this past Mother's Day. So that was pretty special and giving us all something to be cheerful about.

**Jacob** 00:53

So what was the birthday because we just had a son that was born also right around the same time.

**Chris** 01:00

Oh, is that right? May 6th, if I remember correctly.

**Jacob** 01:05

Oh okay, we were a couple of weeks after you.

**Chris** 01:07

Okay, great. So that's a challenging time for you then, huh?

**Jacob** 01:10

Yeah, yes, we have our four year old we got a little baby floating around the house. So it's it's not super easy but you know, we're, we're getting by. But you know, as you mentioned having a new baby is always nice.

**Chris** 01:24

Yeah, congratulations

**Jacob** 01:25

Thank you

**Chris** 01:26

Having a baby in this time is different.

**Jacob** 01:28

Yeah, I mean, it was certainly interesting to go to the hospital. Everybody has the masks on all the security precautions. I mean, it was it was definitely a surreal experience. And it's certainly one that we will never forget. But yeah, it was it was certainly different.

**Chris** 01:42

Yeah, and even as things are starting to open up, so to say different parts of the country, you know, because the baby so young, I'm sure you're taking the same level of precautions. You know, we're still face mask on when interacting with new and new the baby gloves on all the all the The anticipation that you need to do and the challenges of this environment.

**Jacob** 02:07

Yeah, yeah, for sure. Well, I guess when you look around at what's going on in the world, what's just kind of your general perception, feeling observations just around what you're seeing in totality now.

**Chris** 02:20

So I think it's a number of different things. I think fear is still part of what we're seeing around the world. And even as we're seeing things start to open up as this still, while there's that emergence, really from from the cave that we've been in, and people yearning for that social connectedness, which is another thing I really see developing here. But there's also a yearning for change. And I think as we've gone, you know, to the, from the COVID issues that we've been dealing with, into the Black Lives Matter and the social unrest that we've been dealing with, people are looking for yearning for change, and like I mentioned earlier part of that change, as we've all been forced into this form of isolation that we've seen, is this yearning for social connectedness. And that that is a sentiment that I believe will be a long term long term impact coming out of this pandemic, when people realize the need to express themselves to people who are important in their lives to connect with them to celebrate, as you and I were just talking, celebrate a moment of a birth for example. So we see that really, and as a company, we think we're well positioned. I mean that that is what we do as a company. So from that aspect, we're well positioned to help consumers with that yearning for social connectedness.

**Jacob** 03:44

Yeah, no, it makes sense. And I realized I never actually asked you can you share a little bit about one 800 flowers for people who are not familiar with the company? What do you guys do? How many employees do you guys have?

**Chris** 03:56

Sure, so 1-800-Flowers is the parent company and also One of our lead brands. When I say a parent company, we have a portfolio of brands that we've developed over developed or acquired over the years to really help our customers Express connect and celebrate. So 1-800-Flowers is the primary brand and the floral side of our business. And then we've grown into the gourmet food category where we have brands like Harry and David, Cheryl's Cookies, The Popcorn Factory, Shari's Berries, 1-800-Baskets, Fruit Bouquets, a couple of other brands. So we really become a total gifting resource for our customers, but more and more resource that really inspires expression connection and celebration. So as a company, we know we probably run about 3000 employees non holiday ramps up to about 12,000 employees at a holiday period, especially the Christmas holiday season that quarter, which is our busiest. We just reported today, where we changed our guidance for our year end, which is June 28, so that we should be coming in, there's a revenue number of around, just under 1.5 billion in revenue for the year.

**Jacob** 05:13

Wow, that's exciting. Congratulations.

**Chris** 05:15

Thank you.

**Jacob** 05:16

So actually want to talk a little bit just about you kind of going way back. So before we talk about your approach to leadership and some of the things that you guys are doing, can you give listeners a sense of just how, how you grew up where you came from? How did you get to be involved with 1-800-Flowers and becoming the CEO?

**Chris** 05:38

Well, I'm 59 years old. So that's a long story. But I grew up in a very middle class neighborhood in Queens, New York neighborhood called South Ozone Park. Most people in that neighborhood were either you know, we had civil jobs in the police, fire department, etc. My father had a painting contracting business. So I grew up working in that business for him. And I'm the youngest of five and I work with my brother Jim, who's our chairman and founder of our company, and He's the oldest of five and was a 10 year age difference between us. So grew up in the painting business really. And then my brother bought a flower shop in 1976. And I was 15, I guess at the time, and I started working in the flower business as well and starting to learn the business we had he bought one shop in Manhattan, I used to take the subway in all the time to go to work on on weekends and things like that. Then I went off to college and with the plans to become a plans to become a lawyer. So as a political science major, and on you know, when I could get back from college I did get home and work in the painting, business or on holidays work in the flower business where the help was needed as this is a family business and everybody chips into do that. And then when I got out of college, I made the decision while I still intended to be a lawyer, I didn't want to go right to law school, I wanted to get a job first and figure go to law school and another year or two. And at some point, then I was, you know, working in the painting business for the summer period. And come the fall, I started looking around for something else to do.

And my brother Jim, by this point, had 12 flower shops, and he asked me to join him. And I said, Jim, I, you know, I was planning on being going to law school. I don't I can certainly join for a short term. I don't know if this is what I want to do for the long term. He explained that he looked at the opportunity is this is a business that did not have a McDonald's did not have a Holiday Inn. There was a lot of all small businesses, and maybe we could become that unifying business across the across the network of florist all around the country. So he sold me on the opportunity, showed me that there could be a future and asked me to then we said, well, let's try it. Now. We also, as we grew up in a family business, as it often happens, sometimes business gets in the way of family. And that certainly happened with my father and one of his brothers, and it was a family split. So we were very conscious of that not happening. So we agreed to do a six month contract, and we would sit down and decide if it was working. And we renew that contract every six months. And well, I guess we could say I'm on about my 72nd six month contract right now.

**Jacob** 08:39

Wow, that's, I love that story. I didn't know about any of that. So this actually started you said, technically the first flower shop 1976

**Chris** 08:47

correct. Actually, a very apropos on April 1, April Fool's Day was when Jim took over that business.

**Jacob** 08:55

So literally started from your brother having a small Flower Shop, maybe him and one other person and growing to 3000 employees.

**Chris** 09:05

Correct.

**Jacob** 09:07

That's a that's an awesome. I mean, that's like the the, the entrepreneurial story that a lot of people keep hearing about.

**Chris** 09:12

It's been a fun ride. And, you know, it's one. You know, one of the things that people often ask us is, you know, what we do for funding and it was a completely bootstrapped operation. You know, we didn't take in any outside money to do it. We just figured out how to do it ourselves and made many, you know, many challenges, many mistakes along the way, many times where you thought you might not make it. And we still have that fear today. So that still motivates us every single day.

**Jacob** 09:42

Yeah, I think any, any entrepreneurs still has that feeling today. So how did you learn everything along the way? Because it sounds like you know, you never went to a leadership development program. Because it was a flower shop. I mean, you just have had to figure this stuff out. So how did you grow to learn all these things to learn to lead into did you start off as CEO?

**Chris** 10:06

No, I started off as a delivery person probably. But it was shortly after. After that I was working for Jim when I came in and join him full time, I guess it was January of 84. And not too long after that he did put me in charge of the 12 retail stores that we had. Jim was only in the business part time. He had a full time job as a social worker for troubled boys in Rockaway Beach, Queens called St. John's Home for Boys. So this flower gig was just a side thing for him. And once he put me in charge of the 12 stores, the way he likes to tell the story is that, you know, he put me in charge of 12. And the next thing he knew we had three, which was true, but leaves out usually the fact that we were doing more revenue and more profit out of those three stores than we were out of the 12 and it was really Jacob, because the consumers started to change. You know, we had, we had adopted there was new technology at the time called 800 telephone service, we adopted a couple of 800 numbers, customers started calling on the phone and just having their flowers delivered as opposed to coming into the store. So we just did some analysis on the data and found out we can be much more profitable with less of those doors out there and become more of a telephonic commerce company. And that's really what began the whole process of the transformation into 1-800-Flowers.

**Jacob** 11:32

Wow. So it literally came from the 1-800 number that you had almost 30 you know, 35, 36 years ago.

**Chris** 11:40

Exactly. And, you know, when you talk about, you know, how did we learn things along the way we learned by doing we learned by being involved, and it goes beyond that later on. I often think of a couple of specific stories. You know, when we were first getting going and first, you know, 800 flowers first off was actually a failed business from Dallas, Texas that started up in 1984. And it was a, you know, we saw them Come on, they spent a ton of money advertising the business, it was a bunch of venture capitalists and business people that invested and went through about \$30 million of money within two years, and then reached out to us to help save the company. And over the course of about a year and a half is how we took control of that failed entity, which meant we acquired a phone number and \$7 million dollars of debt, which then we'd continue to work off. But in those early days, I remember one time and we took over one of our flower shops in Bayside, Queens and took all of the giftware and the floral out of it and put telemarketing stations right in the middle of the store. And as the phone company was bringing in the lines, my brother and I would watch what they were doing, and we'd watch and say now how do you connect the outside wire to the inside wire and they would show us and we just ask lots of questions. Well, the same thing I remember when we installed our first computer system. And we would be side by side with the people installing just asking questions. We're not technologists, ourselves. But we needed to learn what this technology was and how to manage it and how to do it. And that's the way really the beginnings of my understanding of technology. And I've led the technology side of our business ever since.

**Jacob** 13:30

And what about the leadership side of stuff? How did you figure out the people aspect of the business?

**Chris** 13:36

Well, me personally, I learned a lot from my brother on that. You know, Jim brought a mantra to our business from what he learned as a social worker. And he tells a story that, you know, again, these were really tough teenage kids from the streets of New York that he was dealing with, and if you wanted to connect with them, and get to help them realize he needed to build a relationship with them first. So he created this mantra that rolls into our company, you build a relationship first, you do business second. So that was really the beginning, whether it's with a customer, whether it's with an employee, you need to understand and learn about these people, and how to connect with them and do so in a very honest, transparent manner. I will I've also been fortunate, I did take a leadership course and later on an executive leadership course at Cornell University, which I found very helpful, but also along the way, out of this process of building relationships. Jim and I were both very fortunate to build relationships with some of the most enigmatic business leaders of our time. One in particular was Jamie Dimon, who heads up JP Morgan. Jamie also grew up in Queens and we got to know Jamie throughout our life and we would spend time with him from time to time and just absorb little into the way he thinks about things and take it and soak everything in. Remember, one of the most important things that Jamie said to us at one point was he said, you know, you guys spend way too much time trying to get everybody in the company to understand how the whole business works. He says, You can't not everybody's going to understand that he said, but what they need to understand is how what they do, connects to the company success. He said, because people want to go home from their job every day, knowing whether or not they contributed to success. They're not just in there to punch the clock. And that was a transforming thing for us is to really make sure that we do this now. And I really think it helps with leadership is to make sure everybody understands they don't need to understand the whole picture. You just need your senior management team to understand that. Everybody else needs to really understand how the piece contributes.

**Jacob 15:57**

There are two I think important things here. Maybe even more that I just want to make sure people realize. So first when it comes to the technology piece, because I think a lot of leaders who are not technology leaders tend to shy away from technology. So I loved your approach of asking questions, just being around it, understanding that you're not necessarily a technologist, but you need to be aware of technology. So I think that's a really, really crucial point for people to understand. And the second I think, is part of what shaped your leadership. It's not necessarily just taking courses, but it's shaped by the people around you. And so I think that's a very important thing for leaders to remember is who you surround yourself by, both inside of work outside of work, also has a dramatic impact on your leadership, not just going to get an MBA at some fancy school.

**Chris 16:46**

Yeah, very much so and my brother and I often said that, you know, we got our MBA by meeting these different people that we got the opportunity to learn from, as we as we did business with them throughout. Another great leader that I learned a lot from a gentleman Ed Miller, who was CEO of AXA Financial. And prior to that he led manufacturers hand over the integration with Chemical Bank and into Chase Bank, just a great leader. And as we were growing our company, we had people that were with us for a long time. And sometimes you run into a situation where the job outgrows the person, but yet the person was very loyal to you and very important in growing the business early on. And letting that person go would be very, very difficult to do. And I remember having conversations with Ed about this.

He said, You're not being loyal to that person. I said, Well, I sure am, I'm keeping them in a job. He said no loyalty is making sure that every person on your team is in a position to succeed, whether inside your company or outside your company. So if the job has outgrown someone and you don't have a position in your company. It's your responsibility to do everything you can to get them the right job outside of your company. And that really transformed the way I the way I thought about people.

**Jacob** 18:06

I love that because so many, so many people associate tenure with loyalty. Just because you're there for a long time means you're loyal. But I think you make a great point. I mean, what if you have people at your company who were there for a long time, but they're unhappy, they're not engaged. They, they, they really don't want to be there. And you're doing everything you can to keep them there. That's not really helping anybody.

**Chris** 18:29

It's exactly right. And helping them... We've done this over time, when we've gotten so many communications back from people basically thanking us for letting them go. And forcing them into a new career, advising them into a new career, but supporting them along the way.

**Jacob** 18:47

And that's an important distinction to make is that you support them and guide them along the way. You don't just kind of cut them off and say see you later.

**Chris** 18:53

Exactly.

**Jacob** 18:54

So I'm also quite curious transitioning a little bit to you know, today We live and work in pretty turbulent times. But before we talk about how do you lead in today's world, I'm curious, have you during the course of your career, have you had other experiences where you've had to lead during tough or difficult or uncertain times? And if so, maybe you can share what those times were in what you did.

**Chris** 19:22

Yeah, there's been a number of times and as I think about, I think, certainly about the crisis that we're in now. But I'll go back to a very small moment in time. critically important, but small compared to whether it be the financial crisis, which was a difficult time that we led through, whether it be the terrorist attacks of 9/11 that we had to lead our company through or certainly these times. But in the very beginning of our business as we took over the responsibility of the 800 Flowers business, and we merged it into the retail store in Queens with these telemarketing stations in it that I told you we built and we bought in a new computer system. I wasn't really involved in that part of the business, we had this other lady that was running that part of the business for us. And I was still running the retail store operations. However, we we knew that we were hearing lots of customer complaints in those early days that they placed an order but it never got delivered. And again, we were installing this new computer system at the time. And I remember talking to my brother, when we were at a Special Olympics event in upstate New York, our middle brother Kevin is a special Olympian. And we were gathered around as a family at this event.

I remember talking to Jim saying that you know, we this needs to get fixed, it's it can really cause a problem if this is starting to get bigger and bigger issue. So that day driving home from upstate New York, I basically drew out on a yellow pad, a whole audit system of how we would track an order from the beginning to the end and his new computer. Where we would put these traps in place. And I got into new office at like six in the morning the next day into the flower shop. And as the computer team started coming in again, they were in the middle of installing this, I grabbed them all together, we sat down, we put these yellow sheets up on the wall at different places. And I said I want these trap points are all different, these traps and all these different points, so that we can track this down and understand it. And we did and we able to identify where the error was. And for me, that was me showing one of the first times where I had the ability to really show show true leadership, not just to others, but to myself, where I took an area that I didn't know about, in this case, computer technology. But I was able to work with the team to help them figure it out and emphasize that it had to be figured out there was no choice. So it was a small area and then as I mentioned, the big areas of leading through challenging times and certainly the 9/11 terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center, the financial crisis and then the current pandemic that we're in.

**Jacob** 22:08

So how do you lead through those major changes? Those major tragedies 9/11, the recession now, I'm sure there are some common elements between all of them, but also they're they're pretty different events. So how what do you do as a leader when something like that happens?

**Chris** 22:26

Well, I think one of the most important things is communication and visibility. In even in today's time, so let me just stay on communication for a minute. In each of these events, the need to step up communication so that the people in your company know that you're on top of things know that you're there know that you're looking out for their best interest is critical. And then as we look at as we look at the communication, visibility is important.

**Chris** 22:54

Now, in the case of 9/11, in a company was smaller at the time, we were able to stand up and basically be in front of everyone in the company. As the financial crisis hit, we're a bigger company, we needed to use teleconferencing really to make sure everyone was there on a regular basis. In this pandemic, being visible, is even more difficult. I'm on, you know, we're using Microsoft Teams, and I'm on teams or Skype calls, zoom calls, constantly all day long, a lot with my direct report team. But I need to be visible into each of the other teams as well. So I'm jumping in and out of that department meetings as much as I possibly can, just so that people see they're visible. But also, I think a key component here is re-emphasizing the vision of your company, your values, your mission. Because in this world of turmoil of any of these events, it's it's people are fearful of change, you know, that their lives have just been disrupted. They've been changed dramatically and there's a level of fear there. By focusing and constantly reminding people the job that we do and our vision to inspire human expression, connection and celebration. And tying everything we do back to that gives them a sense of normalcy gives them a sense of a bedrock that amidst all this change nothing is changing in our business, and especially in our business, as I mentioned earlier, Jacob, it's also a reminder to every employee of our company, very special role that we get to play in helping people express connect and celebrate the trust our

customers, putting our hands to deliver an expression for them, to deliver a smile is a very meaningful moment. And one of the ways we reinforce that is to constantly share information from our customers about the you know, why they present this order how much it meant to them, we often get these notes back and we share that information with our team as much as we possibly can.

**Jacob** 25:01

When 9/11 or the financial crisis or the you know, the current pandemic, or the Black Lives Matter, or any of the things that we're seeing happening now, when those things happen, do you remember in each instance, the first business action that you took as a leader to respond?

**Chris** 25:20

I think in every case, the first action was communication and different forms of communication. The you know, even if I think of this pandemic, I remember when it, you know, started early on for us back in the January timeframe, and so there was something going on in China and we needed to monitor the supply chain and make sure we had people looking at that right and talking to them about what they're seeing. So communication from that aspect. By the time we hit the mid March period, when it really struck the US You know, there was communication with my senior management team. And we went to two a day meetings, virtually, of course, two a day meetings right away for a number of weeks, we now do one a day, moving our town halls with people with our employees from once a month to once a week, sending out regular communications. So the first step is, okay, focus on communications, get the communications plan in place, it will evolve. But let's get started. So in each of those cases, it was the first, as I think about in all of these situations, the thing I'm most proud of, is always the way that people react and respond. Someone asked me to question earlier today that what's one of the outcomes of moving the company into this virtual world and everybody working like this and the challenges that it presents, like yourself with two children at home and things like that. And you know, I hadn't thought about it, but when I stepped back and thought It really has brought the team closer together, I think and its brought the team into a bit of a rallying cry that we can do this. And we did you know, we managed Mother's Day, which is one of our biggest holidays, very complex, lots of moving pieces, and to manage do that extremely successfully where we had our best Mother's Day Ever. And doing it remotely is just a tremendous job by the team. I saw that rally cry element happened back during the 2011, sorry the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the Trade Center here in New York, where the mayor's office Mayor Giuliani at the time reached out to us for help. And we were providing flowers for many different funerals, sympathies, it's a you know, condolences events taking place. And they asked us to provide the flowers for the prayer for America that was having Yankee Stadium and we put the call out to our suppliers And they help donate flowers. Our florist who we work with around the country, many of them drove in from other states. And people worked in one of our facilities around the clock. I remember being there working with them at three in the morning. And then the team went and decorated the Yankee Stadium covered the mound and an American flag of flowers. That's the thing that has always made me most proud is the way this team and our industry as a team comes together for moments like that,

**Jacob** 28:28

which is always very, very inspiring, especially as a leader to see those around you coming together. So you mentioned communication, which is a very important aspect during leading times of crisis. What

are some of the other crucial aspects that you think leaders who are listening to this podcast need to be aware of besides communication?

**Chris** 28:48

In general, or during a crisis?

**Jacob** 28:51

Specifically, I'd say during a crisis, times of uncertainty, kind of like what we're facing now.

**Chris** 28:58

So I think, you know, we will But I touched on a little bit about giving people the ability to have that bedrock and to know that all of this change going on around the world. There are some things that will not change. And that's our commitment to our vision, any company's commitment to their vision and their values is very important to be communicated to people. I think that at the same time, you have to be flexible, because you have to as a company respond to the changes being thrown at you. You don't have to change as a company, but you have to change the challenges being thrown out. You know, I think we've seen that, you know, we talked as this first unfolded, you know, we said, we The reason we were having two a day meetings was because things were changing by the hour and gathering information. And then also, I think, the most important thing that we've done in this situation, which is different relate in the financial crisis, so it's certainly different than the 911 attacks. The fact that people needed to know that every decision we made would be made with the safety and health of our associates, our customers, our vendors, first and foremost. And I mean that that clearly is specific to this pandemic. And was was and is so important. So they need to hear that from me on a constant basis in every town hall. We have our general counsel who heads up our Preparedness and Response Team for this event. gives an update constantly on what we're learning how we're changing, what we're adapting how we're providing equipment to people, whether it be masks, gloves, etc. to keep them safe, is extremely important.

**Jacob** 30:44

Okay, perfect. So next I'm also quite curious you what percentage of your workforce would you say is traditional, you know, retail in stores versus kind of in back office.

**Chris** 31:00

Very few of us in retail stores, we really don't have we have a handful of retail stores that are Cheryl's brand. We now have one retail store Harry and David but we have a lot of warehouse manufacturing or food, bakery candy kitchen distribution work. And that's the vast majority of our employee base action.

**Jacob** 31:18

So how do you make that transition to virtual because you have a lot of people that need to be like you said in a in a factory making something creating something shipping something, how did you make that transition to virtual?

**Chris** 31:33

Well as a company we've stayed operating and we've deemed as an essential business because certainly of the food supply that we provide to people as well as on the floral side. You know, many, many, many just about all municipalities recognized the mental benefits of for flowers themselves. So those parts of our operations did not move virtual, they stayed we you know, they stayed operational right throughout in a traditional fashion, now we've had to make adjustments to that where we've had to run, instead of this time of year where we might be running one shift, we'd have to run two shifts on a certain production line because of the social distancing requirements that had to put in. So therefore, you couldn't have as many people working at the same time. But these are all the things that our team was out on the forefront with looking at what's the best way from a safety and health point of view, to make sure that those operations could continue to be operational. And they've been very successful at doing that and something we're very proud of.

**Jacob** 32:35

Okay. Next question. And I'm sure this is something you've also had to deal with is making a lot of tough choices during your career. It How do you make tough choices? Do you have a framework that you use a process that you go through? Or how do you how do you decide on something?

**Chris** 32:52

Well, I think the first thing you do is you do you make that choice very diligently. It's not something you do reactively tough choices sometimes need to be made quickly. That doesn't mean it's just a reaction. You I think you often need to step back. And first and foremost, look at what data you do have. Sometimes you'll have more data than others. But you have to look at what data you can analyze to make that decision. And I think the most important thing is understanding, well, what what are the impacts of that decision, because in most times, there's going to be positive impacts. But also there can be negative impacts of the decision that you make. And then you need to understand that the negative impacts so that you can manage them appropriately. For example, if you close a facility, it may be the right decision for the business, it may be the right decision for a for the profitability of a company, but there's negative impacts on the people that are in that facility. What do you do for them? How do you help manage that process? It goes back to our earlier conversation about loyalty. So I think as we look at this, you need to really understand the information, assess the possible outcomes. And then most importantly, I think, take responsibility. Once you make that decision, you don't you can't pass that responsibility on to someone else. It's your responsibility to make sure it's successful.

**Jacob** 34:14

So it does require a bit of I guess you could say courage or boldness to make sure that you follow through and not just decide something and pass it off to other people.

**Chris** 34:23

Very important. You may need other people involved in in executing that decision, etc. But you're right, you can't pass that off. The responsibility remains with you.

**Jacob** 34:34

When you look at the course of your career, you know, the flower shop started in 76. I think you were more involved. I think you said in 84. How has leadership, do you think changed over the last 30, 40 years?

**Chris** 34:54

Well, it's different, I think and different really because of the, the access to information that we have over the last 30, 40 years is tremendously different. So whereas I think in the past, there was probably probably a bit more reliance on your dynamic leader. Whereas nowadays you see more leaders that are not necessarily as dynamic but a steeped in data and a really good, good analyst as well. I'm guessing, I don't know, I'm guessing that that was far a few between 30 years ago. I think that you really, the scope of leadership today has broadened. If we're thinking if we're talking about business leadership, the scope of business leadership today has broadened more so than it was 30,40 years ago, where I think businesses need to be much more involved in the communities in which they operate than maybe they had been in the past.

**Jacob** 35:56

How would you explain leadership in In other words, what does being a leader mean to you?

**Chris** 36:03

Responsibility, first and foremost, to be a leader means you have to be willing to take lots of responsibility. It's taken the responsibility of everyone on your team. To, which means that you're taking the responsibility to help them all be successful. You're taking the responsibility of, you know, win or lose. It's your responsibility. It's no one else's, and I think, really, that's what me is that I take the responsibility to help everyone in the company to be successful and to be aligned on the goals that we're shooting for.

**Jacob** 36:40

Is being a leader for everyone?

**Chris** 36:44

Yeah, I think that everyone has the potential within themselves to be a leader. And again, there are all sorts of different types of leaders. But it requires I think, embracing change, effective communication flexibility, adaptability. And I think a constant willingness to learn and evolve. And I think that one of the most important traits of a leader is that they instill confidence. Because if your team has confidence in you, then in your commitment to their success, and they will embrace your goals,

**Jacob** 37:22

did you ever get a bit of imposter syndrome during the course of your leadership career or think that maybe you're not a good leader or you don't have what it takes?

**Chris** 37:31

Many, many, many times

**Jacob** 37:33

Yeah. Are you Do you have any stories that you can share?

**Chris** 37:39

Um, you know, the first thing that pops in my head is I think about that Jacob was when I was, you know, earlier, this is the main part of the business I was running was our call centers. And I knew nothing about running a call center and you know, learned it on the job. And very often we, out of need, we determined there was a need somewhere and we would determine what the fix was for that. And we put a certain program in place. And we did lots of these things. And then I started going to some telemarketing conferences. And, you know, I'd be listening to some people talk and I'm like, boy, I'm clearly out of place here. I'm in over my head. I don't know what they're talking about. But then I've listened closely. And I realized, well, they're talking about the same thing that we're doing. I just didn't know the lingo. That would happen quite often. And you know, we again, I'd be around lots of people have developed MBAs and things like that, and I'd realized that, you know, okay, they're talking maybe a different language of time because I didn't learn the same way. But all of a sudden, I realize good maybe what we're doing as a business is the exact same thing. We're just calling it something different. So those are the couple of examples that I think of there. But that's that's happened often in leadership. I think. in my, in my tenure as a leader...

**Jacob** 39:03

how do you, oh, sorry, go ahead.

**Chris** 39:06

It's just that a different times when you each time you take it to the next level, it's the point where you have to get comfortable with yourself to say, Okay, I know what I'm doing. It doesn't matter what others are doing, as long as I'm measuring my success based on the inputs, and the success of the people around me.

**Jacob** 39:25

I was actually just gonna ask you, how do you get over that kind of imposter syndrome or self doubt or lack of confidence? Because I'm sure a lot of leaders especially now are struggling with that wondering, you know, do they have what it takes? Can they lead their teams?

**Chris** 39:40

Yeah, I think you have to get comfortable with the fact that you have the responsibility. You can't shirk it. And it's, you know, it's the old Nike theory of management. Just do it.

**Jacob** 39:53

I like it.

**Chris** 39:54

I remember as we we were growing our business early on, we said to Two management theories that we will following. One we call the Nike theory. And it was just do it because there's nobody else here to do it. So figure it out and get it done. And then the other was the Reebok management theory. And Reebok at the time is all about cross training. And we made sure we did that made sure we'd rotate

people throughout the company. And as you do that, and you get experience in each of these different areas, you really build builds your own self confidence.

**Jacob** 40:27

I like the two approaches Nike and Reebok. makes sense.

**Chris** 40:34

Good companies to follow,

**Jacob** 40:35

Yah no, for sure. And of course, I'm sure a lot of people know and recognize both those those names and brands. So next question for you. I wanted to talk a little bit about failure. And are you able to share a story or a couple stories if you have them of a time when you've failed in how do you deal with failure when it happens?

**Chris** 40:58

No, we've never failed next question.

**Jacob** 41:01

Everything is always perfect.

**Chris** 41:05

No, I think one of the things that we're very proud of is that we, as a company, we've fostered a culture of innovation. And that culture of innovation often begets a culture of reinvention. And we challenge our people constantly to do, what are we doing to reinvent our business? Because we can't stay the same and we can't change. So we have to be on the forefront of things that might change consumer behavior. So often technology that might change consumer behavior. We don't know if it will, we need to be on the forefront in case it does. We were fortunate to have been there as the world embraced 800 service way back when we were fortunate to be there when the world moved online into online services in 1991, and into the world wide web in 1995, in the world of e commerce and and then we'd be there early in the mid 2000s. In the, you know, 2005 to seven timeframe, as people began to embrace mobile technology, and how that's transformed our lives. But I remember when social media was really just first getting started. And my brother and I both at the same time, I think read an article about a company called Second Life. And I don't know if you remember,

**Jacob** 42:22

I remember Second Life Yeah, for sure.

**Chris** 42:25

So these online avatars, etc, and you could develop this whole community. And at the time, I remember reading all go with it, you get like a million unique visitors into second life. I said, if there's that many people going there, we need to figure out how to have our business in Second Life. So we took someone in the company that was, you know, who you know, someone who liked to force the change gave them the responsibility to launch a store in Second Life. And we did and we got great press out of

it. And from a pure business point of view is a colossal failure. You know, we probably did a couple of orders of people place actually placing an order and then sending flowers from our second life store, but that was in it didn't last very long. And failure is certainly not something that we celebrate. But it's something we tolerate. And we look and say, Well, what did we learn from that? And what we learned was that there's something going on here in the world of social media stick with it, we'll figure it out. And you know, next thing we knew the first company to have a store on Facebook, and certainly was successful there. But also, internally, what did it say down people that we were willing to take a risk like that? And then to take the person who was in charge of that, and put him as head of strategy in the company right after that. So shows that

**Jacob** 43:44

You didn't fire him?

**Chris** 43:46

No, not at all. Failure won't hold you back. It may I see because of your willingness to fail will help propel your career or in our company.

**Jacob** 43:55

You mentioned something interesting, which is that you don't celebrate failure you tolerate And I've heard so many other companies say, Oh, we celebrate failure. Do you think that's the wrong approach to have?

**Chris** 44:07

Well, it's the wrong approach for us. We're in a world where we're in the business of celebrations. And there are certain things I don't think warrants celebration, but I do think they warrant acceptance and toleration. And that's, you know, one of the ways that we push innovation in our company, when something fails, we're not going to throw a party for it. We're gonna sit down and we're gonna analyze it, we're gonna understand why.

**Jacob** 44:34

Well, you know, other Bay Area companies here whenever you fail something, you got parties DJs coming out free food. So everyone's

**Chris** 44:44

maybe I should move to the west coast.

**Jacob** 44:47

People are failing here on purpose to get all access to this stuff. But it's it's been interesting. I mean, I like that approach of like, tolerate it. You don't necessarily need to celebrate it and go crazy with it. And you also mentioned something about technology. And this has been a very, very interesting debate for a lot of leaders in organizations. How do you balance technology with humanity?

**Chris** 45:09

Well, we always take the approach that technology enhances humanity. And really always have, if I look at just really as I just ran through quickly, the different waves of change that we've gone through as a company, how technology like 800 service completely changed our retail store model, how embracing online services and e commerce changed our business. How embracing mobile and social have transformed our business. That's the way consumers change their behavior. By embracing these new technologies. They enhance our lives. Now, as I mentioned earlier, any any decision has its benefits and its negatives. So we see also today the negative impacts of social media that it could have on society, but in general, the ability to have social media as an example, educating everyone around the world outweighs the negatives that we see of loneliness, etc, that it can also Foster. So I think, you know, we look at, and one of the big areas that we're stepping into now for the past couple of years is conversational commerce, how we can interact with our customers, through chat, through through voice interaction, etc, making it easier for people to interact and engage with us and for us to engage with them. That's from the customer perspective. I think from the employee perspective. You know, I look at Can you imagine if we didn't have this conferencing technology that we have today, could you imagine how many companies would be going out of business right now because of this pandemic? But we're not we're, yeah, we're able to stay together, we're able to manage our business now. I don't look at this as a as a long solution. Our business needs to get back to people interacting with each other connecting with each other in a real manner. But technology has certainly helped us all do our jobs. Through this challenging time.

**Jacob** 47:02

So it sounds like you're optimistic about the role that technology has because there's also a lot of conversation on AI automation people losing jobs, but you're, you're more on the optimistic side of all these things.

**Chris** 47:13

No question I view technology is constantly enhancing the ability of, of humanity, the ability that we have, we talked about AI. AI is driving things that we couldn't, that the human mind could never could never drive, all of the automation that we have the things you know, how we're seeing new technologies, you know, like drones and things like that the shape the impact they're having on the farming industry. It's just just tremendous impact. Again, especially as you move into areas of AI, you also need to be managing the negative impacts as well and minimizing those.

**Jacob** 47:49

Before I ask you a couple of just fun, rapid fire questions, maybe we'll wrap up with this. One more serious question. And that is for those who are listening who are trying to figure out how to become better leaders? What advice do you have for people for how they can improve and become better leaders in their organizations and/or life?

**Chris** 48:11

Well, I think you really need to look look at-- assess yourself, understand, what are your strengths? What is your personality, like? And therefore How can you lead from that lens. If you try to copy somebody else's leadership style, you'll fail. Now you can borrow and you can learn from other people's leadership style, but you have to develop your own style. First and foremost, second, I think very

important thing and it goes back to the mantra in our business, you build a relationship first, you do business second, you need to connect with the people on your team. You need to connect with the people that you are expecting, hoping to lead and need to understand what motivates them. Therefore, it's not you it's not your ideas, but it has to become their idea, and what motivates them, what are they looking for? That that's the most important two steps, I think in becoming a good leader

**Jacob** 49:11

Well before we wrap up I have just have a few fun rapid fire questions. What is your greatest business failure?

**Chris** 49:21

I just told you second life.

**Jacob** 49:23

Okay. What about your most embarrassing moment at work?

**Chris** 49:30

Well, I don't know the answer to that, Jacob. Keep in mind, this has been a bit of a family business, my sister's involvement in the business over time as well. And I'm the youngest in the family. So they've embarrassed me quite often.

**Jacob** 49:45

In a family business, you probably get trolled a little bit by by your family members.

**Chris** 49:50

No question.

**Jacob** 49:51

I expect I know the answer to the next question, but what are you most proud of

**Chris** 49:57

I'm proud of a lot of things. Proud of the business that we've created. I'm proud of the opportunities we provide people. I'm proud of the role that we play in people's lives. Where they turn to us to really help them deliver a smile to express themselves connect and celebrate. It's a special place that we have as a company.

**Jacob** 50:18

What is your favorite business or non business book.

**Chris** 50:24

The one minute manager.

**Jacob** 50:27

It's very famous one. I'm sure a lot of people are familiar with that one.

**Chris** 50:29

It's one I read a long time ago. It's a very simple read. And when I come back to time and time again,

**Jacob** 50:35

what has been the toughest business decision you've ever had to make?

**Chris** 50:41

A decision it made it a couple of times a decision when you have to layoff people or close a facility and understanding the impact on the people. And that's when you that's when you really talk about taking responsibility.

**Jacob** 50:55

Who's the best mentor you've ever had?

**Chris** 50:59

Well, I mentioned two earlier, Jamie Dimon and Ed Miller, but I think the best business mentor I ever had was my brother Jim.

**Jacob** 51:08

Yeah, it sounds sounds like you learned a lot from from him. And he's still very much involved with the company today.

**Chris** 51:14

extremely active. Yeah, day to day. So a few years back now, four years ago, I became CEO and he became executive chairman. But what we've always talked about as we've always had the opportunity and the benefit of really having two at the top, and he could step into my role and I could step into his role, and it really provided us a great, great benefit to the company. I think.

**Jacob** 51:38

If you were doing a different career, what do you think you would have ended up doing?

**Chris** 51:46

Oh, that's a tough one. Well, I intended to be a lawyer. But now what I know now that I know what lawyers life is like, I'm glad I didn't become

**Jacob** 51:53

So sticking with what you got. And last question for you if there was one workplace practice that you could get rid of. What would it be?

**Chris** 52:07

A over reliance on email

**Jacob** 52:11

Yeah, that one comes up a lot.

**Chris** 52:13

Yeah. And people relying on email to, to get a point of view across. when they should stand up and do it in person.

**Jacob** 52:21

Yeah. Well, I get a sense that it's said you get some of the New Yorker, they're like, you know, just, you know, confront someone talk to them face to face, don't hide take responsibility. So I wonder if is do you think New York itself shaped some of your leadership style too?

**Chris** 52:38

It has to. It has to have shape it. You know, I grew up in Queens. I've lived here my whole life. So of course it shaped me.

**Jacob** 52:48

Yeah, New York. I mean, Queens has changed quite a bit. So I mean, it's I love the story, the family I mean, it's it's really amazing. So where can people go to learn more about you or 800flowers or anything that you want to mention for people to check out?

**Chris** 53:03

Well, I think, you know, certainly feel free to go to my LinkedIn account. And I think you know, what my brother and I have been doing one of the things that's we've been doing during this pandemic, is reaching out to customers and checking in on them, and writing these weekly letters to them that we send out now on every Saturday and Sunday to our customer base.

**Jacob** 53:22

Really, you personally do those?

**Chris** 53:25

My brother Jim and I, yeah.

**Jacob** 53:26

Wow.

**Chris** 53:27

And, and you know, just sharing advice about what to do sharing advice about how to combat loneliness and things like that. So and we get we get great response from people on LinkedIn to those to those elements.

**Jacob** 53:39

Oh, I would imagine. Yeah, I mean, getting those personalized letters from the leaders of the company, I'm sure can dramatically change someone's day. And where can people go to learn more about 1- 800 Flowers as a company.

**Chris** 53:52

Well, 1 800 flowers.com and you go to our Investor Relations section. You can learn a lot of material there. Look at the website, look at the things We're doing under our community tab, which really is a whole area that we haven't touched on about how we're trying to figure out ways to help people express themselves where it doesn't even cost them a dime, whether it's providing them free digital greeting cards, building a community, where people can share, like our connection communities that we launched with a company out of Israel called wisdom and is communities of people that have been there, done that. So one of the most popular communities right now of course, is is Coronavirus, anxiety,

**Chris** 54:32

and lots of us dealing with anxiety from this pandemic. And people can go on and join that community and share experiences and find that that helps or relationship advice or coping with loss, some of these different communities so it's a way for us to engage with our customer that's outside of the transaction. It's just how do we build a deeper relationship with our customer

**Jacob** 54:55

focusing on the humanity aspect, I love it not just dollars and cents all the time, which is I think leaders need a little bit of a reminder for that. So I'm glad you mentioned that. Well, Chris, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to share your insights with me.

**Chris** 55:09

Jacob, I really appreciate you giving me the opportunity to talk with you. It's been great.

**Jacob** 55:14

Yeah, of course, it was a lot of fun. I love the stories and everything that you shared. I'm sure the listeners did as well. So again, thank you very much. And thank you ever everyone for tuning in. My guest, again has been Chris McCann, CEO of 1- 800 flowers, make sure to check them out. You can also find Chris on LinkedIn. And if you enjoyed the show, make sure to rate or review it on Apple podcasts and follow it on Spotify and I will see all of you next week.