

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 01:03**

Hello, everyone. Thanks for joining me for another episode of the future of work with Jacob Morgan. My guest today is Mark Lashier, the CEO of CPChem. Mark, thanks for joining me.

**Mark 01:13**

Thanks, Jacob. Glad to be here.

**Jacob 01:15**

Well, before we start talking about all the all the leadership and work stuff, can you give a little background about your story? And we can even go way back to where you grew up? How you were raised? How did you eventually get to become the CEO of CPChem?

**Mark 01:30**

Sure, yeah, we can go way back to the Stone Age. I grew up in a small town in western Iowa, a big family. My father was a D day veteran and, and he came back and worked in several different occupations over time. But while he was doing that, he also managed to have seven children. So I'm the sixth of seven kids, and grew up in a in a kind of a classic, small Midwestern town in Iowa. Of those seven kids, I have one sister, she's the oldest and I have five brothers. So not really quite like being raised by wolves. but pretty close.

**Mark 02:12**

I tell people, I learned to run fast and eat fast. I was the I was the number six child out of seven. So and had a great life growing up with a great family. And as I was winding my way through through school, I really had no idea what I wanted to do. I was always good at math and science and enjoyed school. But I had absolutely no idea what engineers did, or even that chemical engineers existed. Engineers, were the guys that drove the trains through town, quite literally. And I went off to Iowa State University, I was like most bright kids in small towns in the Midwest the advice is, go go be a doctor.

**Mark 03:02**

So I was a pre med, Biology major. And I was fortunate I went to Iowa state that has a great engineering program. And I was helping all these engineering students that lived in my dormitory with their chemistry and physics homework. And I started talking to them about what they would do with these strange engineering degrees and decided I'd take a intro to engineering course I loved it. I was good at chemistry. And wow there's actually a chemical engineering that you can, you can join, and I

was also paying my own way through school. And they had all these great scholarships and chemical engineering.

**Mark 03:43**

So I thought I'd died and gone to heaven, I could I could do something I loved. And some would would pay my way. So I did that. I liked it so well that I found someone that was interested in paying me to go to graduate school as well. So I ended up getting a PhD in chemical engineering, wrapped that up in 1989. And went off to work for Phillips Petroleum Company in a laboratory in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, helping produce figuring out how to produce new chemicals using catalysts. And that's that's how I got started in the petrochemical industry.

**Jacob 04:20**

Very cool, and how did you go from that to becoming CEO?

**Mark 04:25**

That's an interesting story. Jacob, I, when I started with Philips, I thought I'd be doing all kinds of fun things, inventing things in a lab my entire career. And as I in the first few years of my career, I was working on some great projects and also supporting some of the the plants that Philips had at the time. So I got to go out and get exposed to what happens in plants. I got to spend time with commercial people finding out what commercial people did.

**Mark 04:55**

And about four years into my career, they asked me to go work as an engineer in one of our facilities just as a developmental assignment, and I've been on that developmental assignment ever since I never made it back to, to R&D in the meantime. But it really, I had opportunities, great opportunities and great mentors that that helped me along the way that coached me. And probably saw things in me that I didn't see in myself. And I listened to their advice and embraced the opportunities as they came along, I had an opportunity to go into business development after my tour through the plant, and then I had an opportunity to travel internationally.

**Mark 05:37**

And I've been on the road ever since. And got to run businesses. And then just before CPChem was formed, I was asked to go run Phillips Petroleum, chemicals interests in Asia, in Singapore. So my family, and I moved to Singapore, where we enjoyed five and a half years of those businesses in Singapore, my kids basically grew up in Singapore and have a really cool global perspective because of that.

**Jacob 06:11**

That's awesome. And to give people a little bit of context, say I had the opportunity to present to Mark and his team on leadership a little while ago, and that's how we got connected ultimately, and Mark agreed to be a guest on the podcast here. So Mark, for people who are not familiar with CPChem, can you give a little background about the company? How many employees do you have? How big is the company?

**Mark 06:33**

Yeah, CPCChem was formed in tooth the year 2000, July 1 2000. So we're just a little over 20 years old, we're owned 50% by Phillips Petroleum Company 50% by by Chevron Corporation, hence the chevron Phillips chemical name. And we produce petrochemicals and plastics, primarily polyethylene from ethylene. That's our primary value chain. We have other other products as well. We have about 5000 employees globally.

**Mark 07:00**

We have facilities that produce these materials all along the US Gulf Coast, as well as some smaller facilities scattered across North America, a very large presence in the Middle East, and both Saudi Arabia and Qatar, we've got assets in Europe, and Asia as well. So we've got a global platform. We've got people around the world in various countries, there's about 5000 employees. And they are all dedicated to making great materials for our customer base globally and doing it safe every day.

**Jacob 07:33**

What does a typical day look like for you?

**Mark 07:37**

A typical day, for me is a typical, I don't think in the last 11 months, I've had a typical day. That compares to the to the prior 30 years. But a typical day for me involves getting up early in the morning and getting some kind of exercise in I just don't feel the same if I haven't, haven't done that walking running or gym something. And then I get into the office and really have have a broad array of things that can happen in any given day.

**Mark 08:11**

But it typically involves interfacing with our other leaders interfacing with our owner companies, we spend a lot of time advancing our agenda with our owners, just like any company would with their investors, making sure that they're on board with the things that we want to do that we've got the right strategies and the right growth opportunities lined up, as we spent a lot of time advancing that agenda with our owners and making sure that we've got the right people working on the right things to advance that agenda.

**Mark 08:43**

And I'm also involved in a lot of industry associations like the American chemistry Council, and American fuels and petrochemical Manufacturers Association. And we helped found a year ago, an organization actually two years ago now called the Alliance to End plastic waste. And I'm on the executive committee of the board of that organization as well. It's a it's a non for profit organization that's dedicated to changing how the world manages plastic waste to keep it out of the oceans to make to make an economy around plastic wastes, so it gets reused and gets kept out of the environment are focused on setting up infrastructure and providing innovation to help some very distressed locations. In a world where, frankly, the plastic waste and the waste management challenges in general, the control.

**Mark 08:43**

And so it involves a lot of meetings, a lot of phone calls, and typically, a lot of travel, we've got great assets in the Middle East I sit on the boards have joint ventures that we have in the Middle East. So in a typical year, I'll travel to the Middle East four or five, six times to the Far East, to Europe. And so I do spend a lot of time on the road. So many of those days that I wake up that the gym that I go to is in a hotel. And it's and I do a lot of a lot of travel.

**Jacob 10:08**

Do you have any regular practices or ritual or habits that you do on a daily basis that you can help make you a more effective leader,

**Mark 10:17**

I think I'd make sure that I connect individually with people every day, it's easy to get wrapped up, particularly in this environment to get wrapped up and to get isolated. And to get internally focused on what you do. And it's more difficult to engage in walking or managing by walking around in this environment, because it's your everyone's trying to stay safe and isolated from a COVID perspective.

**Mark 10:43**

But I really like to reach out and connect directly with people we've, you know, for instance, I send out mass emails to our employees. And I will get maybe dozens of responses, I want to make sure that I respond to every one of those because I think that it's important to make sure everybody, every employee feels respected, feels like they're an important part of what we do. And they've got access access to me, because I'm at the end of the day, another employee, just just like them, and so I want to make sure that, that that personal connection is there.

**Mark 11:20**

And that I have an open door policy, which is is doesn't mean the same thing during COVID. So I've got kind of an open email policy, as well. And, and it seems to afford me the opportunity to hear what's on people's minds, they're comfortable responding, and letting me know what's going on. So I think that is is critically important in a job like mine.

**Jacob 11:46**

You mentioned that when you were earlier on in your career, you follow the advice of a lot of people who saw things in you that you didn't even see in yourself, can you share some of the advice that these people gave you that ultimately helped you become the CEO of a company?

**Mark 12:01**

I think there's key advice and key examples that they said that you always, you always have to act of high integrity, you always have to do what you say you're going to do. And you have to do it with with humility. And some people confuse, get confused about that term humility, but but you have to have a drive, you have to stand up for what is right. But you can do it in a way that puts others interests ahead of yours.

**Mark 12:25**

And so when I talk about humility, when I talk about what drives me, that's really what that means is that you're willing to have enough or you have enough confidence in yourself that you don't have to put yourself ahead of others that you do know that you have the wherewithal to put others ahead of yourself without losing your own self respect.

**Mark 12:48**

And I think that's probably the most important lesson that I've learned from others over the years that you don't, you know, the more you advance in your career, the less it's about what you do. And it's more about what other people do, what you can help them do and the barriers you can remove to help them be successful and engaged

**Jacob 13:09**

Now, of course, you throughout your career, you were always surrounded by a lot of very smart, very capable people yet, for some reason, you were the one who became the CEO, you were the one who was able to grow and develop and you know, move into roles that other people weren't. So what do you think set you apart from everybody else we're surrounded by because, again, plenty of smart people, plenty of people around you, only one CEO spot about you allowed you to get that role where other people can.

**Mark 13:41**

Or if there's one thing that I think that I that I been able to do over the years, it's to be able to translate complex issues into something that people can relate to and understand. And that goes both ways. Whether it's explaining to a board member, something complex that's going on technically in a plant or to explain a plant operator, how the business really works, I've been able to take those concepts and boil it down to the essence that makes sense to the audience that I'm talking to the individual and talking to and I think that's I've always enjoyed doing that. I've always you know, I think it's that's been a key part of who I am.

**Mark 14:25**

And that's the feedback I get is that people enjoy that in conversation. I'm not sure my kids growing up enjoyed going to the grocery store with me when I point out all the things made out of our materials and show them the little marks on the bottom of it but those that don't have to live with me every day have enjoyed my ability to boil things down to the essence and put it in a relatable context.

**Jacob 14:50**

It's interesting because it really sounds like it's about the human stuff. Being able to connect with people with other humans. It's not about I always made the most amount of money. We brought in the biggest deals is really just about connecting with other human beings.

**Mark 15:05**

I think that's, that's a key differentiator you still have to perform, you still have to deliver results for the company. But what I've learned is how you do that really matters. Things like integrity matters, things like character matter. You can get, you can get great results the wrong way. And I think that that is not sustainable. I think people won't want to play with you if you don't play nicely with them. And so I think how you do things is incredibly important.

**Jacob 15:40**

I know that obviously 2020 was a very, very difficult and tough year for everybody. If we were having this conversation in 2019. And then we had this conversation again, you know, 2021, can you talk about the, the change the 2020 is cause to your business to you as a leader. I mean, how significant was 2020 in terms of COVID, black lives matter? I mean, all the stuff that happened that year,

**Mark 16:08**

I think, on a personal level, my wife and I realized that we can we can really tolerate being around each other, we like being around each other. So that's a good thing. I think on a professional level, we've had to learn to be a lot more agile, we've had to learn to respond more directly to individual circumstances, to be flexible, to keep everyone focused on what's important to keep everybody focused on staying safe and doing the right thing.

**Mark 16:42**

We've got incredible communication staff that helped us get videos and messaging out to people in a timely fashion to help calm their nerves. So you think back early on, in 2020, we didn't know if this thing was going to come through our towns, our cities, our companies, and you know, and kill 10% of the people that in fact, we had no idea. And so we really had to go back to our fundamental beliefs about how you perform safely and to back away from the situation until you had better information. And that's the way we approached it.

**Mark 17:21**

And we ramped up quickly our ability for remote work. And now that's a key part of our toolkit. We like people to be in the office because we believe that fosters our culture and our ability to collaborate and to be creative. But we also have these great technical tools that allow us to communicate remotely and to make sure that we continue to move the ball forward on our corporate agenda to deliver to produce and deliver great products for our customers and stay connected with our customers.

**Mark 17:53**

But we also are in a business where at the end of the day, people do have to go into our facilities to operate them. And so we had to really hyper focus on how to keep them safe. So they were safe at work. And I'm really proud of the way the company responded and protocols that we put in place. And the way everyone complied with those protocols to keep everyone safe at work. While there were more challenging things going on out in the communities around them.

**Jacob 18:22**

Have you changed as a leader, you know, your your approach to leadership, your beliefs about leadership, your style of leadership, has any event changed as a result of the events that happened in 2020,

**Mark 18:35**

I think it's really reinforced some of the basic principles that I've that I've always believed in. And and the thing, when I first became CEO in 2017, the thing I really focused on was trust, transparency, and simplicity and trust means that you've got, you've got the character to do the right thing, and you've got the competence competencies to do it.

**Mark 18:59**

And that's really embodied in our, in our tagline performance by design, caring by choice, and, if and then so if you've got the trust based relationships, that you've got the transfer, you're transparent with people about what needs to happen and how it needs to happen. And you keep people focused on what's really important by keeping it simple. I think those things were just even more intensely reinforced through COVID. And through remote work and through managing through a crisis. We had to we had to trust each other we had to. And it's great that we had those trust based relationships in place around the globe, because it'd be so hard to get things done.

**Mark 19:42**

We've done incredible things with some of our joint venture partners in Qatar and in Saudi Arabia that I don't think we would have been able to do if we didn't have trust based relationships and if we weren't transparent with our employees about what could happen and what and what we're trying to do to keep them safe, we wouldn't, we wouldn't have been able to accomplish what we accomplished. And we really had to focus on what mattered, we had to eliminate a lot of noise, we had to eliminate a lot of distraction and really boil it down. So everyone could focus on what really mattered to a keep them safe and healthy and b continued to be an operating company and produce the things that we need to produce. Many of the things we produced, helped fight COVID helped deliver things around the world to help people stay healthy, and to stay sane, and to still be able to play in their backyard with toys, you know, the full spectrum.

**Mark 20:38**

And it really, it really highlighted to our employees, the fundamental importance of what we do it, we're not just making pellets, we're making things that make people's lives better, that make them safer, that help them go about their daily business in a very efficient and sustainable way.

**Jacob 20:57**

I know your mantra is you touched on is trust, transparency, and simplicity. I wanted to touch on how those things come to life. So trust, transparency and simplicity. If somebody says, Well, Mark, how do you? How does trust come to life and transparency, simplicity? What is it that you do or the company does that allows the employees to feel that that's, you know, really happening?

**Mark 21:21**



We it's critically important that all of our leaders demonstrate those behaviors every day, we talk a lot about that, as leaders, you talked to our you spoke to our leadership conference, our top 7580 leaders in the company, and that they really have to embody those, those characteristics to get it because people are incredibly perceptive. If they smell something that's inconsistent, they see something that's inconsistent, they're not going to buy it, and they're going to say, okay, you say you want trust, but you're not exhibiting trust.

**Mark 21:54**

And I see it, in the conversations in our in our facilities, when I go there, for plant reviews, when I walk around and talk to people, they are bringing that language back to us in a positive way they have embraced it. They are holding us accountable for it. And I think that's a beautiful thing, when you've got employees that maybe in the past, were afraid to speak up for whatever reason. Now, they're not afraid to hold top leadership accountable for the things that we're saying. And I think that's an incredibly beautiful thing. And that is just self reinforcing. It makes us so much more effective in getting out messaging, we're trying to, to move continue to move our culture to a better and better place.

**Mark 22:36**

And since we've got that trust in place, and they know that we're going to be transparent about why we're doing this, why do you want us to change what we're doing? everything's working pretty well? Well, this is why because we can go to a higher level of performance and you're going to have a better place to work and more enjoyable place to work. If we accomplish these things. They said, Okay, let's do this.

**Mark 22:55**

And, and under the under the name of simplicity, we really have simplified the work people do it. You know, it's quite easy in a corporate center to to push out lots of initiatives to put push out lots of things to the folks that are out actually making things happen on the front line. We realized at one point in time that maybe we were burying those folks with things that we just assumed that they could handle and they could do, but when you stack in the amount of paperwork, that the administrative burden that were stacking on top of them, and you actually went out and talked to them about what their lives were like, they said, oh, we're really boss. We're really trying to do this. But we're just getting snowed under by all this.

**Mark 23:35**

And I said, Okay, let's step back and find out what's really important, what we really need to get you to do and to free you up to have the time to focus on what's what's right. It, it cleared the decks. And it helped us unleash a lot of potential out there that was getting burdened by unnecessary work. And now that we've got the system in place called performance by design, where we're letting we're allowing, we're encouraging everyone to challenge the status quo, and to have that kind of conversation with their leadership.

**Mark 24:09**

And I have to tell you that we've had record breaking safety and environmental performance in the last couple of years, we've had record setting operations and our plants producing more than they've ever



produced. And we've had record setting sales. And so by unleashing the potential of every employee, there is an incredible payout as well. And you can see it in the morale, their employees are happier, more energized, they've got a hunger for this and we as leaders have to figure out how to perpetuate that and how to encourage that.

**Jacob 24:43**

Do any of your team members or any employees ever call you out on something? Are they comfortable disagreeing with you or challenging something that you say?

**Mark 24:52**

Sure, no, no, absolutely. It's and I encourage it, I sent a letter out to Just this past week addressing the things that were happening in Washington DC recently, and, and some challenged me for the vast majority applauded what we said some challenged me for not being aggressive enough in what we were saying about that event. And some said, You know, I was afraid to respond to other things that you've put out, because I was just afraid to respond to the CEO. But I've gotten comfortable. And now here, here's, here's what I want to say. And really, all they wanted to say was, thank you, thank you for acknowledging these things.

**Mark 25:36**

Thank you for giving me the courage to talk to my family, my kids about this. And it really is about making the world a better place for our kids. And so if you had employees that at one point in time were, were concerned or afraid to speak up to the CEO about making the world a better place for their kids, I think that's a huge wind. And now they're comfortable acknowledging that, hey, it's okay to speak up and talk about these things at work.

**Jacob 26:01**

It's interesting how this trend has occurred. Because I'm sure you know, earlier on in your career, a lot of people or for most people, a lot of people wouldn't be able to walk up to the CEO. I mean, I've literally spoken at conferences and events where, you know, when the CEO would walk out of their office, people would take pictures of him or her, you know, they'd be like a celebrity, you know, you would never see the CEO, right, want to respond to one of their emails or challenge them on something. And now we're getting to a point where it's, you know, we want that to become the norm, we want that to become more accepted. Why do you think this change is happening from like, the CEO and ivory tower, who nobody questions to the CEO of like, open, transparent company with anything.

**Mark 26:45**

I think it all is around technology and communication, frankly, I think there is so much ability to be visible. And so to put it bluntly, so few places to hide, and now that you have to be prepared to engage or you will fail, you think about early in my career, people were still typing letters with carbon copies on typewriters back in the late 80s. And till the ability to send out a communication was incredibly difficult, and they would end to produce maybe a monthly video that would show up on some old ancient television, it just was, it was just so much more difficult.

**Mark 27:24**

And there just was a lot more bureaucracy around and leadership in those days. And so you could, it could behave more like a cult of personality than, than anything else. And it just, it just created a an atmosphere where I think CEOs were more revered than respected. And they just didn't have the ability to reach out through all of that all those layers of protection to connect with people. And I, I don't think I would have thrived as a CEO, or perhaps even had the opportunity to be a CEO in that environment. But I certainly enjoy this environment much more.

**Jacob 28:03**

I know that you guys are going through a bit of a transformation internally, you're working on your culture, you're working on so many different things, your digital journey. Can you share a little bit about some of the transformation that you as a company are going through and why you're actually going through this.

**Mark 28:19**

Yeah, I think it really started back with what we're talking about earlier about simplifying things for people freeing up their ability to innovate. And so we formalize that into this thing we call performance by design. And it's, it's energized 1000s of people across the company working on 1000s of initiatives that they've identified as opportunities to enhance the value of what they do, or to simplify what they do. And we, we rigorously track this, we've got some great technology in place to track when people bring these things to the front. And we have, we have blown away our targets as far as producing value and, and creating efficiencies for the company.

**Mark 29:04**

You know, we had a certain target for 2020. And we doubled that target when the economy got difficult thinking that we'd have to scrape every penny we could out of the system, and they blew away that target. And so and we've been celebrating that and that, and through that we realized that there were opportunities that combined with it with a survey we did in 2019, that there were opportunities to reinforce our culture around innovation we were a very compliant organization. If you gave us a target, we would hit that target and be very happy with hitting that target.

**Mark 29:41**

Now people aren't satisfied with hitting targets they are they are driven to unleash their own potential to find out how to blow away that target. Find out what the true maximum contribution they can make. And if people are having fun doing it, they're energized. You can you can hear it in their voice. You can see it in their face. So, and along the way, we're trying to push our culture to one of greater accountability, if you've, if you are just focused on hitting a target and complying with with the rules. You know, I think that there's, that's important, but it takes away a certain dimension of accountability. And we want to have, we want to have a greater level of accountability.

**Mark 30:20**

And like you said, We want people to feel comfortable holding leaders accountable too and create a two way constructive dialogue to get everybody to perform better. It's not just us putting our thumbs on the people on the front lines, saying you have to perform better, we want them to hold us accountable for what we're doing. We want them to understand what we're doing around growth and creating opportunity with this company, we want everyone in the company to understand what our products do out in the communities around the world, what kind of opportunities they're providing, what the impact on the environment is, we want to be very transparent about all of that.

**Mark 30:55**

So we're pushing that dimension and we want people to have a great careers here as well. And then there's digital opportunities across the board, the petrochemical industry, industry has not been on the leading edge of introducing digital technologies. And, frankly, we haven't either, but we've seen the potential that we can have with various digital devices, digital means to make work more efficient to allow our employees to be safer to push our facilities harder, without incurring any safety risks to be better protector of the environment.

**Mark 31:35**

There's a there is a number of dimensions that we can address through digital technologies that are available today. We don't have to invent any new digital technologies, we just have to figure out what's out there, and what the business case is for us to bring it in house and to use it.

**Jacob 31:50**

Yeah, no, that makes sense. You touched on something, which I think is interesting. And it's the I think the importance of thinking beyond and you didn't say it specifically like this, but it kind of was woven in there. And that's the idea of thinking beyond dollars and cents. So I feel like there used to be very much a mentality of like, the purpose of business is to make as much money the purpose of a CEO or all the leaders is to generate as much profit as possible for the company. But you're talking a lot about safety, about taking care of employees about the community. Can you touch on the importance of why leaders need to think just beyond dollars and cents for their business,

**Mark 32:25**

Right, we like to think about ourselves as being sustainably profitable and sustainably growing. And there's a lot of dimensions to that you can't you can't be sustainably profitable, or sustainably grow if you're in a community and you're abusing that community, either environmentally or through bad employment practices. Or if you're not taking care of employees providing a good, a great work environment or career opportunities, they're going to go elsewhere, which will impair your ability to be sustainably profitable over time.

**Mark 32:56**

And if you're not continuing to push the technical envelope of what you can do, you're not going to be around very long, so you're not going to be sustainably profitable. So yeah, we're in business where we have to be profitable. But we need to be sustainably profitable over time we can there's dozens of stories of companies out there that have risen mightily and then crashed miserably because they weren't taking care of all those dimensions to be able to make sure that they had the the virtual license

to operate in communities that they were in, or that they didn't, they didn't manage their employee base properly and lost the talent they needed to be to be sustainable, or they didn't continue to evolve their technologies to deliver products that their customers didn't even know they needed yet.

**Mark 33:43**

And then there's the environmental sustainability dimensions that we're very focused on, we produce materials that provide great properties that provide great value to our customers around the globe, as you imagine hundreds of millions of people every year trying to work their way out of poverty into the middle class. They need access to clean, efficient, energy, clean, efficient water and materials that make their lives simpler and more efficient every day. And that's what we want to focus on. That's where our growth is focused on is providing those materials we we produce pipe that can deliver clean water to communities we we produce materials that keep food fresher, longer. So food doesn't have to go to waste across the spectrum. If we're not providing solutions for humanity? We're not going to be sustainably profitable, or grow sustainably over the long time a long period.

**Jacob 34:37**

Yeah, no, I love that messaging. I wanted to shift gears a little bit and ask you about the first job you've ever had. Do you remember what that first job was? And how have things changed since that first job for example, you mentioned having to do notes on carbon paper. My dad told me about Back when when he started working, they had like these PA systems. And if somebody wanted to get in touch with you, they would announce across the entire company, you know, can David please report? Things have changed quite a bit. What was your first job?

**Mark 35:15**

Yeah, my first job out of out of graduate school, my first post postgraduate job, I could take your way back to some really ugly jobs, but those were irrelevant. But my first job out of graduate school was with Phillips Petroleum Company in a lab in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, and I was working on innovating new catalysts, and working in a lab with technicians, and innovating and if I think about what's changed the most, you know, we thought we were cutting edge at the time, but I look at now that the technology that would have made that job so much more productive, so much more efficient, around acquiring data in a lab and managing that data and understanding that data and redirecting our efforts more quickly to more productive directions is, is just phenomenal.

**Mark 35:48**

I go visit our labs now. And I see that and it's just, I'm just in awe of what they can do. But on a more general basis, we didn't, we didn't have laptops we didn't have we didn't have cell phones, flip phones didn't even exist. let alone a smartphone, we had big mainframe computers that you logged in from a terminal, our email system was this thing called props, you didn't have a computer to take home at night, when you traveled, you didn't have a cell phone, you didn't have a laptop, you know, you maybe call home from the hotel phone at night, if you were lucky.

**Mark 36:44**

And so the ability to communicate was and to be productive with downtime was just yeah, just wasn't there. And those things slowly evolved from big heavy phones to flip phones that these things were so

expensive, maybe you get a check one out to take it with you on a trip if your trip was important enough. And if you're high enough in the organization, you got to do that. Or you get to the airport, when we finally did have laptops, you'd have to plug your laptop into the phone system and dial in and all these strange noises would come out of the phone and then you'd have to sync up and maybe before you had to board your plane, you'd get five, the five emails that you want to read. And and then you unplug it and dash off to the dash off to the plane.

**Mark 37:29**

So it's just, you know, and a lot of those things have only occurred in maybe the last 20 years. 25 years, but it's just the rate of change. And the rate of technology deployment has been phenomenal. And I have to tell you, I just have got a three year old grandson and an 18 month old grandson and my daughter texted us today said well, Jack, our grandson asked what the temperature was a cold outside. And so my daughter got her got her iPhone out to look up her weather app. And she said, Oh, it's gonna be 45 degrees. And the three year old said, Why didn't you just ask Alexa, what the temperature was, you know? So phones are obsolete now. You know, you've got you've got smart speakers that can give you all the information you need. And you'll have to every three year old knows that now you don't need to mess with that app.

**Jacob 38:27**

I have a four year old daughter and she very much knows about Alexa and asks to play music and good things. So yeah, I'm right there with you. You mentioned something interesting, which was around downtime. So it kind of feels like nowadays nobody gets downtime, because you're always connected. Yep. What, you know, decades ago, if you were on a plane, I mean, you had downtime, you were literally forced to do nothing. If you got to the hotel, you were forced to do nothing. It's really interesting. I mean, what was that? Like? And do you think that our constant reliance on technology now is? I mean, is it a bit of a problem? Or what do you do for downtime these days?

**Mark 39:11**

I think every technology that man develops has a downside a dark side and I think that we get all these technologies that make us so much more efficient, but actually can steal a lot of our time away if we don't manage them carefully. It puts a great burden on us to to manage it to train ourselves to to manage that more effectively. And I used to carry large books with me to read on airplanes and occasionally still do but it's so it's so tempting because you know you're going to have all these emails waiting for you after this long flight you need to you know, you need to get through them but really it's something you have to manage and be intentional. be disciplined about

**Mark 39:59**

I you know, I said I have to start every day with some kind of exercise. Because I feel better. Okay. It's there's a reward there but it's really about being intentional and making that commitment to yourself to be more balanced because I think I think we're better, better human beings, better employees, better spouses, better friends, if we, if we can create a little space to have a little balance in our lives.

**Jacob 40:25**

Yeah, I couldn't agree more. Um, what do you personally look for in a leader? So inside of your company, when you're thinking of who to promote to an executive or to a leadership position? What are some of the things that you look for?

**Mark 40:38**

I think number one is character and integrity? Are they do they have the character and integrity to to do what they say they're gonna do and to inspire others? Are they are they willing to put others needs ahead of their own? Are they are they so driven, that it's, it's it's all about them, if it's, that's the fatal flaw, if it's, if it's all about them, if they haven't made the transition to being a servant leader, that's going to be a problem.

**Mark 41:11**

And I've seen it over the years where we've had young, high potential incredibly talented people that needed needed coaching around that and needed to spend some time in situations that allowed them to realize how important that was before they could go on. And it was worth that time and investment, I think the worst thing we can do for someone like that is to say, Well, okay, we can ignore this dimension of their personality, because they are just so brilliant and so good, we have to just keep moving them along. And then you watch them just absolutely implode when they get to a certain level or in a certain situation.

**Jacob 41:48**

Have you seen that happen.

**Mark 41:50**

I've seen that happen. I've absolutely seen that happen. And I think that's the worst thing that we can do to people is to not coach them along the way particularly people that are incredibly talented but need to learn some behaviors and it's it can be servant leadership can be an acquired talent. And it's, it's important to us to train people to that.

**Mark 42:17**

You can go through all of your educational career, being absolutely rewarded for just being being a genius and being a jerk along the way. And, but to be the leader, to be a leader in a corporation like ours, where you have to be able to connect with people and lead people inspire people, you're going to have to have another dimension. And so we focus a lot of time on, on that with our leaders as we develop them.

**Jacob 42:43**

So I suspect it would be kind of similar to this next question, but it's, you tell me if it's the same response? And that's what's the biggest thing that you think leaders oftentimes overlook when it comes to being more effective? In other words, is there is there something small that a lot of leaders could be doing that makes them more effective, that a lot of them are not doing or overlooking?

**Mark 43:03**

I think I think taking the time to connect well with people is easy to overlook, it's, it's again, if you just are focused on the results, if you're comfortable, more comfortable with with data than with with people, that's going to be a blind spot, I think that you know, spending the time to build relationships is incredibly important. And as we go around the world, I spend a lot of time in Asia, I spend a lot of time in the Middle East, you really do learn a lot about cultures that that's a deep part of their cultures, spending time to build relationships.

**Mark 43:41**

And once I have a relationship that I trust you it's a golden thing. But if you don't have that relationship, it's you're not going to get anything done. Or at least you're not going to get it done in a timeframe that you'd be interested in doing it. So really take that time to to have a meal, have a you know, have a cup of coffee, have a glass of tea, develop relationship, get to know people understand, you know, their family understand what makes them tick, what what energizes them, that's, that's what's often overlooked.

**Jacob 44:17**

You touched on a couple times the fact that you've had the opportunity to travel you've surrounded yourself by people from different cultures and backgrounds. How important has that been for you, as a leader to just understand these different perspectives and backgrounds of individuals.

**Mark 44:33**

It's been incredibly important. I think it's helped me to develop better, better empathy. Again, if, from a cold heart business perspective, if you want to accomplish anything in, in other cultures, you need to understand what's important to them. And then you start to relate to that on a human basis. And you start to understand why their cultures are the way they are and you can use I think incorporate some of that, those things that into your own way of being and way of behaving.

**Mark 45:08**

And I think that that I, I would say that, you know, as I said, I grew up in a small town in Iowa, which is a great culture, great place to grow up, I never dreamed I would have the opportunity to live in a place like Singapore that is so multicultural. And you really did come to respect how you've got, you know, maybe half a dozen different identifiable cultures living on a small island all together, and everyone gets along, and everyone respects other people's cultures that are very different from each other. But that's, that's how they get along.

**Mark 45:40**

And I think that's what it really comes down to is you don't have to agree about everything. But respect is so important. And understanding where people are coming from helps you respect that, and accept that they've, you know, they they are, who they are, that's part of their culture. And that's, that's a good thing. And we can all learn from that.

**Jacob 46:02**



Where do you get motivation or inspiration from when you feel like quitting? Or when you feel like you're exhausted or burned out? Well, first, Do you ever feel like that? Or have you ever felt like that? And if so, what do you do to kind of get yourself back in the game, so to speak

**Mark 46:18**

I think everybody, Jacob, everybody feels that from time to time. And I think you just have to step back and think about whether it's whatever your faith is, whatever your values are, whatever your intent is, you have to remember why you're doing things and why, why you're driving things, and you know, maybe it's, it's important for your family, maybe you you think you really truly believe you can change the world make it a better place every day. And you can be an example for others, that is hard to be an example for you can help others do better.

**Mark 46:59**

And honestly, you know, servant leadership sounds like this altruistic thing. But you know, once you, I think the kind of the Nirvana there is you realize that it's, it is energizing, and it's fun, and it feels good to help people be successful. And so it really is a self reinforcing thing. Once you get to that point, and you really, you know, I can't make myself feel better every day that I don't, that I'm in a bad mood or whatever. But it's certainly really helps change and improve my mood when I feel like I've helped somebody else do something. And so I think that's that you get back to those fundamentals when when life gets tough.

**Jacob 47:43**

So one of the very common question that I get is, you know, things are changing so quickly, the world of work is changing, business is changing, leadership is changing. What do you do to to keep up to make sure that you stay relevant, that you're consistently being a good leader, that your organization is staying on top of things? How do you not get drowned in this rapidly changing world that we're all a part of?

**Mark 48:09**

That's why I get up and run fast every morning. But no, I think I think again, I bring it back to that human element, I tried to talk to people that know more about that stuff than I do. And that will help guide me. That's why we brought you in to talk to our leaders because you wrote this great book, and we wanted to hear more about it. And that's, that's it, there are people that exist to spend their time thinking about these things. So the rest of us can tap into them and benefit from their thinking, while we're doing what is important for us to do.

**Mark 48:42**

So that we gotta be unafraid to reach out for help. Not afraid to make those connections to understand, but you can, you can see things changing, and you can fight the change or you can understand the change and help and help other people deal with it. Help yourself deal with it. Help your family deal with it. And and generally things are going in a good direction. If people of goodwill are all trying to pull the same direction.

**Jacob 49:11**

If you can go back in time and give yourself some piece of career advice. What would you tell yourself?

**Mark 49:17**

Wow. Yeah, that's a great, that's a great thing I would have I think, earlier on, I would have, I think focused on a few more business skills, a few more, I think, communication skills. I think that that that was later coming to the game, I think communications skills, just the necessity to be a skilled communicator grows exponentially. And fortunately, I've had good people help me later in the game, but I think I would have I would have focused more intentionally on that early on.

**Jacob 49:58**

So we only have a couple minutes. So maybe just a few more questions for you. And another question that a lot of people are always interested in is how, how do leaders make decisions, especially tough choices? So can you talk about a time when you've had to make a tough choice? And I don't know if you can share any stories? But how do you? How do you think through decisions or tough choices? Do you have like a process that you go through?

**Mark 50:23**

Yeah, I think, in my decision making style, and people have various decision making styles as as I tried to be collaborative, I try to get the best possible information. But I try not to let it drag on too long, and depends on the magnitude of the decision, of course, and how much information is out there. But at the end of the day, I will listen to wise people, often wise people, they don't all agree and so you have to make a judgement based on on various inputs, and in your own background and intellect and make that decision.

**Mark 50:59**

Sometimes you have to just make the decision on your own, particularly if there is some urgency around it. And in there, and there's some controversy around I think one great thing, I think one one tough decision we made early in COVID, when there was all this information about people shouldn't wear masks, because it's not going to do any good. And we had an opportunity to procure masks, and it was it was very controversial, a great debate amongst our leaders whether or not we should do that, I said, No, here's the here's what we're going to do, we are going to procure those masks, and if a local hospital needs them more than we need them, we'll we'll hand them over to the hospital.

**Mark 51:43**

But we really need to purify those masks, because I believe we're gonna get to a point where everybody's gonna need wear masks. And that was the point in time where all of the CDC guidance all the government guidance was no don't wear masks, masks are gonna be a good in fact mask could be bad for you. And in just, you know, there was there was some wisdom, but some intuition in that. And it just, it was not a unanimous consensus decision. But we went ahead and did that. And we were glad that we did. And we needed them and, and others started doing doing the same.

**Mark 52:20**

So that's kind of a very small example there. There's a lot of examples along the way where, you know, you've got to make the decision, you've got to press on, not everybody's going to be happy with it. But you've got to do what's best for the organization from several dimensions, or you got to do what's best for your family, or you've got to do what's best for the organization you're serving at the time.

**Jacob 52:42**

So tangential to that is failure. So can you share a time that you've failed? And then how do you how do you respond when you fail at something?

**Mark 52:52**

I yeah, we've failed on some, some projects, we've failed. They they didn't turn out as well as we would have hoped for. We fail on some initiatives. The important thing with failure is, what do you do with it? And what do you learn from it? And how do you build on that and make sure that you're better at it the next time. And we do have a strong learning culture here. And we do have an organization with lots of engineers and accounts that do document things very well. And we always have lessons learned and, and avoid, unless it's something egregious avoid shooting the messenger. And capture that knowledge and build on it for the future.

**Mark 53:48**

Otherwise, it's a it's really a total failure, total waste if you don't learn something from it and do better than next time.

**Jacob 53:56**

So you don't beat yourself up over it and think, all these terrible thoughts.

**Mark 54:01**

Oh, I always do, of course, of course. But then you've got to put that aside and say, you know, what, should we have done better? What could we have done better? What choices could we have made? How could it could, it could come down to very subtle things about how we elected to sell a concept to to our board, for instance, and failed to get their support. And, you know, and there's lots of soul searching about what, what contexts, could we put that in that would have convinced them to take the action because now it's really the tough ones are the ones where you know, history proves that if you did done that you would have been correct, but you didn't make the right sale, the right argument to get that particular opportunity to cross the goal line.

**Mark 54:51**

And those are the ones that haunt you later. It's like yeah, we really should have been the ones doing that. And if we had told if we thought of this at the most At the time, we would have been the ones but I think it's a bit like sports psychology, they tell these athletes after they after they mess up to, you know, to look up at a cloud and leave, leave whatever happened up there and then move on. Yeah, yeah, we've got to do a little more diligence around it. But at some point, you do have to, you know, leave it behind and move on. You can't live you can't dwell on those mistakes.

**Jacob 55:26**

Well, to wrap up, I just had a couple of fun rapid fire questions for you start. Oh, yeah, of course, I have to do these. What has been your most embarrassing moment?

**Mark** 55:38

Oh, yeah, my most embarrassing moment, I grew up with five brothers, there's 1000s of them.

**Jacob** 55:46

Well better yet work related,

**Mark** 55:48

Work related. work related. I think I dressed up as Dilbert for a company Halloween party. In those pictures just keeps showing up and showing up and showing up.

**Jacob** 56:03

And who's the best mentor you've ever had.

**Mark** 56:06

Best mentor I ever had, I would say it was it was it was a guy that actually worked for me, in Asia. Chinese taught me about Chinese culture. And I think I helped him understand Western culture. And we would we would have lunch or tea or something every week and just put business aside and learn about culture. He, he escaped from China. About the time the communists took over, he actually negotiated getting his future wife into Hong Kong from China. And so he has a great history, great story, but had a keen understanding of Chinese culture and how to how to succeed in business, how to build relationships. And it was it was really cool fact, we're still in contact. I just got it. I just got a card for him from him. He's over 80 years old now just yesterday. So yeah.

**Jacob** 57:12

Very cool. What one moment most impacted your approach to leadership.

**Mark** 57:22

I was in a business development job. My first business development job I'd always had technical positions up to that point. And I was had technology that we were that others were pursuing us to license this technology. And I was with a very seasoned businessman. And I saw how he handled very difficult challenging negotiations, very adversarial discussions and negotiations. And in that, that moment in time it crystallized for me that's, that's what I want to do. I saw how he was professional, but firm, brilliant, all wrapped up in one in one package. And I said, that's, that's what I want to be. That's what I want to do. And that's how I think I can lead and that that was probably 1997.

**Jacob** 58:18

What's your favorite business or non business book?

**Mark** 58:22

Ah, my favorite book is His Team of Rivals. By Doris Kearns Goodwin, it's about Abraham Lincoln. And when he ran for office and made it through the Civil War, but he actually he built a cabinet of people from different parties, different outlooks, the basically these people hated each other, but he was able to form an incredibly strong team get very, at that time, diverse viewpoints together to keep the country from falling apart. And it's also the thickest book I've ever read.

**Jacob** 59:01

And very last question for you. If you were doing a different career, what do you think you would have ended up doing?

**Mark** 59:09

Um, I could have been a history teacher, I think. I'll tell you what I wouldn't be doing I lasted six or one semester as a biology major and a doctor, I wouldn't be a doctor or a biology teacher. But, history fascinates me.

**Jacob** 59:30

Very cool. Well, Mark, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to speak with me. Where can people go to learn more about you the company I mean, anything you want to mention for people to check out?

**Mark** 59:41

We've got a website, CPChem.com. And you can you can go there, you can see BIOS, you can see all of our leaders you can learn about our company. If you're interested in our products, who to contact that's probably the best the best starting point right there, Jacob.

**Jacob** 59:59

Very cool, well Mark again, thank you so much for taking time out of your day. Really appreciate it.

**Mark** 1:00:03

Thank you, Jacob. It was a pleasure. It went by very quickly.

**Jacob** 1:00:07

Yeah. Well, everyone always says that, you know, 60 minutes seems like a lot. And then when we get through it, everyone's like, wow, that went by quickly. So I that's that's my job. I'm glad

**Mark** 1:00:16

You could you could give Jimmy Fallon a run for his money. You know.

**Jacob** 1:00:18

If somebody from network TV wants to give me a call, we'll make it happen. Thanks. Thanks, everyone for tuning in. My guest again has been Mark Lashier his last name is L-A-S-H-I-E-R in case you want to look him up, CEO of CPChem, and I will see all of you next time.