

# Celebrity Chef Robert Irvine on How To Do the Impossible & Conquer any

**Jacob Morgan** 00:00

Hey, it's Jacob. Have you ever wondered is vulnerability for leaders the same as it is for everybody else? In 1991, the CEO of Continental Airlines, Hollis Harris, went in front of his entire company, which was currently struggling. And he told all of his employees, the company is struggling, it's going down, please pray for the future of the company. The next day, Hollis was fired. Now when I interviewed the CEO of American Airlines, Doug Parker, he told me that what Hollis did was vulnerable, but there was no leadership. And so the question became, is vulnerability for leaders the same as it is for everybody else? And the answer to that question is no. I'm very excited to share with all of you that my brand new book leading with vulnerability is coming out October 3, you can now pre order a copy of the book by going to lead with vulnerability.com. I interviewed 100 CEOs and surveyed 14,000 employees to figure out how can leaders approach vulnerability in the right way. That is the key the right way, leaders should not be vulnerable at work, they should lead with vulnerability, there is a key distinction and a difference. And if you want to find out what that difference is, and how to approach it in the right way, so that you can unlock the potential of those around you create trust, lead through change and drive business performance, then go to lead with vulnerability.com. If you preorder a copy of the book, you're gonna get access to some really cool bonuses, including some exclusive CEO, interviews, again, lead with vulnerability.com. Learn what the world's top CEOs are doing. And now let's get right into the show. Empathetic leadership.

**Robert Irvine** 01:49

Know the team and know their strengths or weaknesses know what makes them tick. Some people need money. Some people need time off with a family, some people need vacation, some people need a pat on the back every three weeks, you have to understand the each individual person that works for you. And if you don't shame on you,

**Jacob Morgan** 02:05

my guest today is Robert Irvine, who I'm sure a lot of people you know, he's a celebrity chef, entrepreneur, author, and host of Food Network's mega hit show restaurant impossible. A lot of people wish that they could do that as well. Is that something that's just inherent in who you are? Or is that something that anybody can learn,

**Robert Irvine** 02:22

you have to believe in yourself. Empathetic leadership has to cross over to those people because you have to understand what makes them tick. And if you don't understand that you'll never be successful. You have to believe in who you are and the strength of guiding people to get what you do for a job, whether it's cooking, whether it's driving, whether it's pumping gas, you have to be strong in the belief that you are the best you can be the more you help other people, the more you'll be successful.

**Jacob Morgan 02:53**

Hey, everyone, welcome to another episode of great leadership. My guest today is Robert Irvine, who I'm sure a lot of people you know, he's a celebrity chef, entrepreneur, author, and host of Food Network's mega hit show restaurant impossible. Robert, thank you for joining me.

**Robert Irvine 03:09**

Well, thanks for having me. I don't know if I'm a mega mega mega. I don't know what mega means. But I'm a good cook. Yeah, I'd

**Jacob Morgan 03:18**

say you're actually a second chef I've had on the show. The first one was Rene Redzepi. I don't know if you know, Rene the chef of what does it No, not in Denmark. So he won the award for world's best restaurant. And Chef, I think several years ago. And I always love to talk to you about Well, I always love talking to people in other industries and spaces and getting their lessons that we can apply in in the business and leadership world. Why don't we start off with just your background because you spend a lot of time in the military, which I understand influenced you who you are as a person and who you are as a leader. Can you share a little bit about what you did there and what you learned while spending time in the military?

**Robert Irvine 04:01**

Yeah. Yeah, of course, I started in the military. goes a little bit further back than that. As an 11 year old kid, I was in a Sea Cadets. Not I was not a good kid at school. So I joined the Sea Cadets, my dad was in the army. My brother was in the army, he joined the Sea Cadets to teach me. I don't know, maybe team sports discipline, or those kinds of things that we'll talk about in a second, but sort of 15 and a half years old, I hated school. I would wave my mother on the bus as I was going to school and then double back and drink my dad's beer. She called me one day by calling her house and saying, you know, all right, let's see. There was the demise of Roberta Romain miles down the recruitment office. Hence I joined the Navy at a very early age. And from there, I think the military which I was already in added in being in the Sea Cadets going around warships and marine bases and doing all those kinds of things. I really excited me, it was a good match for me. Challenge wise, discipline wise, fitness wise, all those kinds of things. And I think that was stuck what what started my journey of leadership at a young age. Simply because I became, I was not the leader at my training camp. But I was an individual and an individual that may kit was incredible. My boots were the highest shine you could ever get. Because I was trained in the secret as my boss came to me one day and said, Well, we're going to, we're going to fail you you're going to not pass out, you know, or graduate. Because you're not a team player. And I said, Well, why should I be doing? You know, that's their job, not mine? You know, why should I be helping these guys out? Anyway, I got really upset. One day, two o'clock in the morning, I tipped 12 guys out of bed, and 12 very upset guys. Were then taught how to clean their shoes and their boots, make the beds properly and clean the uniform and do the uniform press a uniform. And from that point forward, you know that if you Hey, say this, if you put somebody in a crowd, there's always one leader emerges. And I'm that leader in everything I do. And that started in early age in the Sea Cadets went into the Navy, when it came out the Navy, into hotels, and so on and so on. So here we are. I run a large organization 5000 plus employees. Wow. And yeah, it's how it's loaded.

**Jacob Morgan** 06:48

Is that something you can teach? See, you mentioned something interesting, right? Regardless of where you put you, you kind of emerged as a leader, regardless of what you know, a crowd, a business or restaurant. And I think a lot of people wish that they could do that as well. Is that something that's just inherent in who you are? Or is that something that anybody can learn?

**Robert Irvine** 07:09

I think it can be learned to a point. But you have to believe in yourself, right? And I say this in the book. And I say this in my speaking engagements. I just spoke to, you know, Special Operations Command A week ago about leadership and fitness and health and how do we how do we lead subordinate subordinates, meaning people to walk work for us. But in a very different way, when I say subordinates, I use that word lightly, because empathetic leadership has to cross over to those people, right? Because you have to understand what makes them tick. And if you don't understand that, you'll never be successful. But yeah, do I think you're gonna be taught that? Yes, but you have to believe in who you are, and the strength of guiding people to get what you do for a job, whether it's cooking, whether it's driving, whether it's pumping gas, you have to be strong in the in the belief that you are the best you can be.

**Jacob Morgan** 08:15

Yeah, and I love that mentality. Because a lot of people always assume that leadership comes with title. But as we see, in a lot of cases, oftentimes leadership has nothing to do with your title or your rank. Because and we also know a lot of people who have the title who are not good leaders, and people who don't have the title and who are great leaders. So it goes to show that it's more of a, I guess you would call it character and mindset than it is something that somebody has to assign to you.

**Robert Irvine** 08:42

I think you're I think you're very right there. I mean, look, I the one thing that the the American military and the British military, and I can only attest to them to I really good at is creating leaders from NCOs noncommissioned officers or middle management right now. That's one advantage we have over any adversary. Any adversary around the world is because our sergeants are master sergeants, gunnery sergeants, etc. Master Chief's they are they are trained to control and utilize people to the best of their ability. And that's not the case in any any other business that I know. Any other business. There's a fortune 500 company that doesn't allow those middle management's to make decisions. Because the boss has to make the decision. You don't see a general on a battlefield ever. You may see him in the back of the battlefield, but you'll never see him up front. And I think that's the biggest problem that most fortune 500 company and mom and pop businesses make.

**Jacob Morgan** 09:52

Well, we're going to talk a little bit about empathetic leadership and some of your restaurant stories in a few minutes, but I'm curious how you got into cooking. Like what was your path from the military to getting involved with food to I mean, you've worked and obviously cook for some very, very famous people and celebrities. How was the path to cooking

**Robert Irvine** 10:14

is interesting because I hated school. As I told you. 11 years old, I joined a home economics class. Because not because I wanted to learn how to make food because it was 30 Girls and me. And that's how I got into the home economics class. And I thought it could be a good, it could be a good way to get a girlfriend kind of thing. I made my first kiss Lorraine. And it's amazing something dropped something clicked the eggs and p3 bacon, cheese onions could create a meal that was sustained somebody. And it was really interesting to me because the girls went out the window when I realized the science of what makes eggs in cream set and all these kinds of silly things that I talked about now, but and understand now, but I didn't then. So that's what got me into cooking. My mother was a terrible cook. I wrote a book that talks about her terrible cooking. And she said, that's just the way that your dad liked it. I might well I don't think so. But okay. So that's what really got me into cooking was a home economics class, then I started to really thrive, I was good at it. I was very good at taking something and making something great from it. I did it Navy. And when I came out, after working with the Special Forces Group and many other things whilst I was in the military, it is something that relaxes me. And I think, you know, when you see somebody's face, whether it be a president, a head of state, a general, a janitor, a bus driver, it's really irrelevant who they are. When you see the face. When you've given them something to eat, and they finish it. It's like, you've just they just want a million bucks, but sort of you at the same time. Yeah. Because the face debates and and mannerisms that I see every day are amazing, just to food is the conduit of hope. It really is. Because it's the only thing that you can have a conversation with your children about race, religion, financials. Anything can be I can put a cup of coffee and a sandwich and we can talk about literally anything. So food has this amazing ability to bring people together. Even if they don't want to sit in the room together. You put food in front of them is very important. It drops the gods.

**Jacob Morgan** 12:54

Yeah, now I couldn't agree more. But you know, coming up through the ranks, you must have had a lot of failures, a lot of mistakes. You know, when I talked to Rene Redzepi, who I mentioned the chef, he told me that he used to be like a very crazy command and control screaming at people yelling at people kind of Chef. And you know, over the years, he went through a little bit of a transformation. He started doing meditation and practicing, you know, empathetic leadership and kindness and he he evolved and completely transformed. I'm curious early on in your career. When you were coming up the ranks and cooking you probably have a lot of pretty interesting stories of how you were treated what the restaurant environment was, like probably working ridiculous hours.

**Robert Irvine** 13:39

The restaurant business I was never looked I was abused. Unbelievably, yes. Cups and knives and pens and thrown at me. People do night liquid and by the way. Oh my god. The old days. It's not like now I grew up with with classical French trained chefs who had no patience who you know. I mean, I tell you a story. I made 3000 Boiled eggs once. And I calculated you know, as young calculated 3000 times 11 By the time they come back, there was no eggs left and a big black hole. You know kind of thing. I can tell you I still have bruises from that.

**Jacob Morgan** 14:26

3000 So

**Robert Irvine 14:29**

yeah. Do you make a mistake? You have made 1000 mistakes. Would I ever make the same egg mistake again? No. But I think I think I've worked with chefs like you, Chef you're talking about. I have never been a screamer. I'm being very intense, but I'm not a screamer in the shower. And that's not who I am. I just have to look at you and you know that I'm pissed off. You know, it's kind of i The difference between me and somebody else I'd say affectations that hold you accountable. And I think that's the biggest problem with this other chef or many chefs have the old days, right? Especially the French, kind of chefs or European chefs that had no patience because their reputation is based on that last meal, unfortunately, or fortunately, not whichever way you look at it. We're not judged to that to that level anymore. Unless you're a three star Michelin chef, and then us obvious difference. That's something that's never impressed me at all. Three peas on a plate and you know, 22 people in the kitchen, it's not my thing. I take any one of those chefs and challenge them to jump into the middle of Afghanistan with no food, no heat, no water and 330 3000 people, they can't do it. And that's the truth. But I can do it, I can do it three P on a piece on a plate are two totally different spectrums of food. That's not leadership. And most young chefs would go to those kind of chefs to get experience and put on their resume and be abused. You can't do that. You know, you couldn't ever get away with that these days. What should they I mean, like, it was great at the time for me, because I wanted to learn I you know, and I took the abuse for four years and and said, No, I'm not doing that anymore. I went away to a cruise ship. And then all of a sudden, people that to me, came back. Yeah. And they became the cruise ship. So

**Jacob Morgan 16:37**

it's kind of similar in the business world, too, right. I mean, if you were to look back, like 20 3040 years ago, it almost felt like there was a little bit more of that. If you want to call that abuse to use a harsh word, but working longer hours putting in the extra time, you know, there was it almost felt like more work ethic, more grit, more hunger, more,

**Robert Irvine 16:59**

I don't think classify that as abuse. Things like life, headed in life is, is working long hours is working. When nobody else is working. It's putting in the grind. I understand that. Abuse to me is when somebody throws a clock. Yeah, everyday. That so so it's two different things. You know, I think my

**Jacob Morgan 17:23**

stories of all these, like, Jack Walsh, for example, you hear stories about those types of CEOs who would like throw chairs and computers and just toss things at their employees. But

**Robert Irvine 17:34**

good luck, you know, a world has changed dramatically. Yeah. And I'm so happy and has because luck for the longest time, and we're both males for the longest time, but it's a male dominated world world in every aspect of the way you look at it. You know, females weren't allowed to to do firefighting on the ships, they weren't allowed to do you know, a lot of jobs. And yet I and I'm telling you, from my standpoint, I have two females in depending on restaurant that are better than any male counterpart chef could ever be. So I'm a big believer in equal opportunities and all that kind of amazing things. But you couldn't let years ago right, there was an old boys network and an old boys club and uh, you know,

so So yeah, I worked every hour godsend because I wanted to be the best me. I could be not. I couldn't be Charlie Trotter I couldn't be Michelle Rashard. I couldn't be, you know, name any famous chef. I could only because I was not that well trained. I mean, I was trained, but it wasn't at that level. So for me, it was it was twice as hard. I joined the Navy with the lowest Maths and English test there is. So I wasn't the smartest guy. But I was good at taking people and getting a group of people to achieve a common goal and a short period of time and doing it well.

**Jacob Morgan** 19:04

Yeah. That's actually a very important distinction, I think for leaders, right, because a lot of people what tends to happen, at least in the corporate world is if you're really good at your job, you get promoted, and now all of a sudden, you're responsible for leading others, even though you might not necessarily be a good leader. And so to your point, ultimately, what makes a great leader is not somebody who's necessarily good at the task, but who's good at motivating and inspiring and getting other people to be amazing at the task. And in the business world. It's how leaders

**Robert Irvine** 19:33

if you're leading you don't Yeah, you don't do the task leader or boss, whichever way you want to put it because there's two differentials there. But a leader shows somebody how to do something and allows them to do it. Great. Here's, here's the expectation. Here's how to do it. Here's when and what I want and go ahead and do it and hope really a double check you and it's great. And if not, I stop you before you get too far off through that. And I do that on the shows. When we're rolling silverware, I make them roll the silverware ones, so I can see it. And once I'm comfortable with it or not, if I'm not there and do it until I am comfortable, then log on to row silverware. You know, it's all about accountability and verifying your expectations. If you don't set expectations and hold them accountable, then you fail.

**Jacob Morgan** 20:29

Yeah. Well, how do you do that in your your business? I mean, you have restaurants you have, like you said, 5000 employees. And sometimes I'm sure you're in a position where you know how to do something. But you have to let somebody else do it, even though you know that they are not going to do it as well as you. But you have to restrain yourself from coming in and taking over and doing the job for them. So how do you balance that? I mean, how can leaders balance that? Because sometimes you need to let other people fail? You got to let them do things on their own, even though you know that you could do it?

**Robert Irvine** 21:03

Well, I think there's two things there as to there's two parts to that question. And there's two parts the answer. Number one, never ask anybody else to do something that you can't do, right? Number one. And then if you have an expectation of whatever that task is, you share that upfront with them and what you want it to look like or tastes like or be like, and then you show them how to do it. If they don't know that I've hired people that are smarter than me, a lot of people will hire m&a. Somebody like me, that's not me would I ever be I want double A's. I want people better than me and my company to help guide me, right. So I don't care. I've had a chef for me, Shane for 27 years, I taught him everything he knows, I don't cook anymore. I do on TV I do for the military and just come back from Poland for five days visiting eight base cooking eight bases cooking, but but they know exactly what I expect and exactly

how I want it done. And you have to understand these people have been with me for 515 years, not 515 years. So I'm very specific and things that I want and how I want it done. From the recipe, the way the recipe is laid out the way the recipe development is done on protein bars or liquor because I do that myself. Because I want I want people to see how I work. And if you're new in the company, I don't let you touch anything until you know I don't I mean, I don't even talk to you for the first four weeks. I mean, I'd say hello, and good morning and whatever. But I want you to watch and learn and write things down. And then ask questions. And that's the biggest fear of employees is asking questions of people because they're afraid that they get their heads ripped off. Yeah, the vulnerability instead of just saying what sorry, I didn't. I didn't understand that. My okay, I can steal your once I show you twice, I let you do it. I show you a third time if it's wrong, after the third time, you should be able to get it.

**Jacob Morgan** 23:20

Now, you know, vulnerability

**Robert Irvine** 23:22

like is a big? Well, you boy.

**Jacob Morgan** 23:25

It's a big struggle inside of organism. In fact, my si boil is coming out in October. That's called leading with vulnerability specifically for that reason, because a lot of employees and leaders are the vulnerability piece saying I don't know I need help. I can't like that's a big struggle especially as you know for a lot of guys so it's definitely something to get over abilities

**Robert Irvine** 23:48

easy. Yeah. You know, that goes back to those four pillars of success for me and we're not talking about the book but it's in the book. Number one, empathetic leadership know the team and know their strengths. A wiener says, know what makes them tick. Some people need money, some cheap, people need time off with a family, some people need vacation, some people need a pat on the back every three weeks, you have to understand the each individual person that works for you, then you have to understand their family. Is there a disabled child? Is there a sickness is there, you know, is there a divorce all these things? That's part of your job as a leader to know that and if you don't shame on you, because that's how you get the best out of people. Number two is egos yours and theirs. Losing egos. Number three, great one trust. Number four is is what I consider one of the biggest next to you know, authenticity Be who you really are. And when you're authentic people either like your resume.

**Jacob Morgan** 24:55

Yeah, now those are those are great ones and we'll dive into those in a little bit as well. I'm really curious, before we jump into the the next question that I had for you, when you look back during your time cooking, is there a particular moment or situation, or something that comes up whether it was an interaction with a chef, somebody throwing a knife at you, that really kind of stood out for you, kind of like an aha moment where you said, Okay, this is what I need to do or not do. Like something that really was a pivotal, turning point for you.

**Robert Irvine** 25:32

I think everything I've ever done has been a turning point, simply because I was the youngest. At every job I've ever taken. I was young as the executive chef in a hotel, then I came to a casino from that particular hotel. The casino was doing \$784 million a year. Wow. And I was told, not told and told us the real world. I need to make more money in food and beverage, it was doing 15 million at the time, I had 11 132 employees. And I said, Well, I've got to look at the operation. I was told to fire 1100 people, while I said well, they can't all be bad, right? It's got to be the leadership piece. So how about you do this? Just you give me the names. Let me watch. Let me do and I took four months to go undercover. Literally, I came in at six at night, I work till six in the morning. I sat in bathrooms, I sat in places that you wouldn't believe and just listen to what was going on. At the four months, put a uniform on and then fired 300 People of the 1100. I then went on to take in the first year from 15 million to 84 million. Understanding the purchasing the waste, the inability of the people cooking, because they weren't trained or given an idea or given a direction or follow up on or checked up on on all the things I just mentioned. So I think the whole career builds you to each step of that career. No matter what business you're in, if you really want to be the best. You then you have to be watching everything I say this to people that say Oh, I'm going to I'm going to have a restaurant because I think it's a great job. But it is a great job. If you want to work 90 hours a week, make 1.2 million a month if you're lucky. And take home \$82,000 A year. You're right out of that 1.2 million. But how many people sustain that? Because when your mom says oh, you make a good source and good gravy and make good meatballs, then you get in the restaurant business is not as simple as that. But people think it is. That's why the show is so successful is because you know people don't understand you may be a great chef. But you've also got to understand bookwork and financials and recipes. And now all those great things. It's kind of like even college in school don't get it.

**Jacob Morgan 28:15**

Yeah, it's kind of like when somebody says, Oh, you're funny, you should be a comedian. And then it's like, well, there's a difference between, you know, being funny with somebody at the dinner table versus getting on a stage in front of 1000s of people and getting timing and jokes and being able to read the audience and knowing what works and what doesn't. So yeah, to your point, just because you can make something in the kitchen doesn't mean you're all of a sudden you're gonna be a great chef. So I love that.

**Robert Irvine 28:43**

And I don't consider myself a great chef. I mean, I'm good. But the full guys I have my corporate chefs are way better than me. Yeah. I've trained them a system that I like, they do the system, but they can also cook like I can have the president united states call me which he does on my team, and say I'm doing a dinner in ABCDE tomorrow, and I'm feeding 1000 people, and I send somebody or two guys or three, whatever. And literally six, seven hours later from cross country, they're doing that job. B and they know what to do. You know, if I if I took a chef and then you restaurant and said go and do this and his wife expects I'd be scared stiff because he couldn't do it. Well, one thing, one thing, we were a very unique company in a lot of different facets but, you know, whether it's an aeroplane, whether it's, you know, a desert, whether it's a warzone, whether it's a jungle, you know, we've got it wired, we know what to do, is very hard for somebody else to to get into that space.

**Jacob Morgan 29:54**



Remember to grab your copy of leading with vulnerability. Here's what Seth Godin had to say about The book, this is a well researched compelling book about something we spend far too little time thinking about being human, it works. So preorder your copy at lead with vulnerability.com. If you get a hardcover copy, you're gonna get access to some really cool bonuses. Again, all the details and instructions are at lead with vulnerability.com

30:19

Vulnerability is beautiful thing, you will see that the human being in front of you will welcome you as a human being,

30:26

we can be vulnerable with each other and learn from each other. So I do believe that you need confidence to be vulnerable and to be authentic. I think vulnerability is pretty innate, I think it's natural, it's almost like sense of humor, it's kind of an important element of human psychology,

**Tiger** 30:39

the more vulnerable you will reveal yourself, the more the person you're dealing with, reveals their vulnerability and becomes vulnerable themselves.

**Jacob Morgan** 30:49

I'm curious if you would agree with this, because I mean, looking at some of the stories that you've been sharing in, and I talked to Frank Blake, who's the former CEO of the Home Depot. And when we were talking about leadership, he told me that one of the things that a lot of people don't understand about leaders is that they are supposed to do more than everybody else and care more than everybody else. I mean, in your case, it sounded like you were working from 6pm to 6am. You know, you you have to work harder than a lot of people around you, you have to care more than a lot of people around you. Would you agree that that's a kind of a good way to think about it? And it seems like a lot of business leaders don't I understand that.

**Robert Irvine** 31:29

I would say slightly different. But yeah, I would agree with the concept. You have to work harder, for sure. But harder doesn't mean you know, if I'm filling in ditches on the road, that I have to go and dig ditches and erode and fill them right or fill shelves like Home Depot, or, or whatever. I had to be smarter in the way I work. So I look at different problems. And my problem was literally work. So to this day, and I'm 57 years old. I work from six in the morning till 910 at night. Wow. But then I'm not physically cooking. I may be on the phone to Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Poland, Spain, I may be profiling a new a new liquor, I may be it may be a new protein bar. So I'm working in very different ways, but also in ways that benefit the company to make sure that those senior leaders belief beneath me know what what I'm looking for. So So for example, the new bars every new bar that comes out, I create the bar, the recipe, the everything, the same with liquor, the same with the vodka, the gin a create those, those recipes from my own palette. I don't have somebody going in and doing that. Why, why do I do that? Because at the end of the day, when I put on the label, you know, Chef curated, I know what's in it, where it came from the cinnamon that I went to salon to get or SriLanka to get now, as it's called now. I know every story about every ingredient that's in there, then I say, Okay, this is the taste profile I want. Great.

Off you go. Let's run a small batch. Let's try it. Yeah, it's works, then every person knows the story behind that. So same with the restaurant, when we opened the restaurant in Vegas, or in the Pentagon, had five months of training, I had my kids, my wife, my team there, so that the employees understood my likes, my dislikes, the service training I want, because I'm on TV telling people Oh, your food sucks, or this is bad. Or I want somebody to go into my restaurant, have an experience and say, Oh, can I go and look in your refrigerator? Because Robert does it all on time on the show? I let them I let them cook meals I let them go into refrigerator. I want them to see what it's supposed to be like. So yes, work work longer. And harder. But smarter. Yeah. So I would agree with longer and harder to show up. And then in a smarter environment smarter way, the CEO of Home Depot is not thinking about how to stock you know, drywall or marble or taps and lightning. You know, he's thinking about how do I grow the business to a better sector for our for our shareholders for the you know, he's thinking in a very different light now than a lot of other people. So,

34:38

of course, you've also cooked and you've had a lot of interesting bosses during the course of your career. I know one of the things that you've been talking about fairly recently is what it was like to have Trump as a boss. When you think of somebody like a like a Trump or or any other celebrity that you work with. What are some of the important lessons that you have learned from some of the bosses or some of the people that you have worked with like Trump?

**Robert Irvine** 35:00

Well, you have to listen for number one, I think the biggest lesson I've learned with everybody I've worked with is to listen to what they're asking you to do. Right? And there's a reason I, I listened very carefully. This is what I want, then I repeat it back to them, then I'll say, was third, you know, and I'll give you an example. Prime example. I was told by Mr. Trump, or asked by Mr. Trump to change the meat that we had at Trump Taj Mahal, I'll never forget it. I want the meat to be all prime beef. And I said, Well, sir, prime beefs versus choice, or select is going to be X amount of million dollars more. Right? How about I do this? How about I cook them all blind taste them season and the same? And you try them and you pick? And if you pick the one, that's the one we'll use, rather than just going to spend another 15 20 million a year on beef? Is that okay? Robin? That's a good idea. So we did. And he picked a select beef better than the prime. So by listening and then offering a solution, which is like me saying to you, and I'm using you as an example, if I give you 16 Different red wines, pick me the, you know, the best red wine out of it, you would not be able to I'm sorry, you wouldn't? Yeah, I guess after the third or fourth one, you'll know the one you like. But, you know, President Bush used to drink a \$13 bottle of wine that was made in United States, it was his favorite wine, yet he could have any wine he wanted. So I feel it's, it's Listen, listen to the problem, or the the the request, let it permeate. Because I think what we tend to do is wash instead of thinking and that particular case, it took me two days to go back to him. It's okay to it's okay to just take notes and listen, and question at the right time. And I was talking to to senior enlisted in the Pentagon yesterday. I'm okay with people questioning what I'm saying, at the right time, in the right tone at the right place. Yeah. But if I'm in front of 1.2 million soldiers, and you question me on, you know, why do we have this rifle? I'm going to say, well, you know what, give me a minute to get back to you. I'm not going to talk in front of 1.2 million people. Ya know, and I think that's the biggest, you can get the question and answer the question. But give me time to

figure out what the answer is. Don't expect it immediately. Because sometimes you could give me the lead. Sometimes you can.

**Jacob Morgan 38:05**

Yeah, no, I love that. Kind of a timing.

**Robert Irvine 38:09**

All right. You asked me the question. And if I don't know the answer, and say, Look, I don't know. But let me get back to you. And I will get back to you. But let me get my facts straight.

**Jacob Morgan 38:23**

Yeah. No, I love that. And being aware of those things is also really important. So it's not just asking questions, or challenging or being vulnerable, but the timing is important. Who you're with is important. The intent, the professionalism, like all that stuff makes a big difference. And I loved your story about Trump because, and this, to me seems like a huge problem in the business world where oftentimes when people are told to do something, they just act as order takers. They don't actually go one level deeper and understand well, why like, Why is Trump asking me for that? Well, he not because he just wants to spend money, but he wants the best quality steak, he wants something that tastes good. Well, what's the solution for that, instead of just doing it and spending the money, it's going at one level deeper. And we see this in corporate America all the time, right? You're told to do something. And instead of going one level deeper, to understand what the intent is of the ask, you just go do it. And instead of coming up with those other solutions, and this, I think if more people did this, this would be a huge driver in their career success if they understood kind of the language of the business of intent with which their boss or their leader is coming to them with a certain request, and being able to come back to them with something besides just hey, I accomplished XYZ. And it would be huge.

**Robert Irvine 39:44**

But that's fear. But it's fear. And I'm doing that now in the military. I'm questioning everything we purchase, we buy foodways, right? And you get somebody that will say Oh, because of this because of this immediately, and it's fear. But it's fair because they don't understand. Right? They don't understand where where the big picture, the overall picture overarching picture comes from, you know, we spend x amount of billions a year on feeding. Do we buy the best food? No. Okay, why not? When we're buying cheaper food, that is that we can buy the best food for \$3 cheaper per pound and we can buy the crappiest food. Yeah. Right. But it's the and that's what you see on restaurant impossible when I walk in, and I asked numbers and asked for certain questions. It's the fear that steps in and, and makes them become defensive. And like that close up, and like, Oh, this guy is not very nice. And they're just common questions. If I asked the CEO of Walmart, or Home Depot or American Airlines, you know, tell me what you but it was last year, or tell me what your cost of goods are? And tell me what your you know, your fuel costs are or you know, they'll tell me straight away because they know that's their business. Yeah, well, you should know your business.

**Jacob Morgan 41:08**

Yeah, couldn't agree more. So let's talk a little bit about the show. And for people not familiar with it, basically, you you go into a restaurant, I think you have 48 hours, and you basically transform the entire

restaurant from the decor, the menu, the operations, the business, like everything, it's really fascinating for people who haven't seen it. And you've done what hundreds 1000s of these restaurants, probably by now, from all the restaurants that you've worked with. What do you think, is the key ingredient of the owners and of the leaders who are able to be successful? versus those who are not? Because I mean, you help everybody, but some people are able to carry it forward. And some people still fail, even after you help them. So what is it that makes the people who succeed? Successful?

**Robert Irvine** 41:59

Simple answer, and I've done 360 restaurants on TV, and 1000s 22,000 in total, oh, my God. And what makes those succeed? is lack of fear to change. You know? I used to be able to pick the ones I thought that were going to be successful. I can't do that now where the last three years at the COVID When 96% successful of restaurants that have stayed the course, based on changes. Yeah, I mean, we go in, we change the decor, and 90% of the people don't know the numbers, they don't have recipe books, they don't have plating cards, pictures. They don't hold this staff accountable. All the things that in any other business, you would fail, just like the restaurant business, I think the common denominator areas, the leadership skills, there are none. We hire people because and and don't forget, it's changed since COVID. Right? So pre COVID At least we could get people into the restaurant business post COVID. We don't we don't have the staff of the line level cook level service level, the hospitality industry, and the service industry in general, is changing dramatically. You know, because people would rather you know, stay at home and work people would rather get \$27 an hour from McDonald's for throwing, you know, a burger and button. And by the way, there's nothing wrong with that. But small mom and pop businesses can afford those those salaries. That's why you see, you know, one in four restaurants right now failing because they can't put the product out and they don't have the people

**Jacob Morgan** 43:54

it's interesting that you mentioned it

**Robert Irvine** 43:55

look at Walmart, Walmart's a prime example. They've got they've got a store in test right now. And Amazon of people are stores. Yeah, you know, computers are you know, you go shop and you check out yourself. You pay. You had those measures in there to stop you're walking out of course. But that's the future. McDonald's has now machines or robotics that are doing french fries seasoning Chipotle the same way. We have one called flippy that flips hamburgers, you know? So is our is Our Business and Hospitality going that way? Yes. Look at hotels. Now. I can use a smartphone to as my key. I can order my food from my smartphone. I can get my TV on the premise mop. I mean, we don't have those mundane job people anymore.

**Jacob Morgan** 44:54

But it's interesting that you mentioned like the leadership skills and fear because for me the analogy is it Instead of corporate America, it's like a leader who's coaching their employees and giving them all the tools and resources that they need to be successful. Get the employee still does not succeed because of whatever reason, oftentimes it's because of fear. Maybe it's because of discipline. Maybe it's because of work ethic. But yeah, sometimes it can be sort of macro economic factors that you can't control. But it seems like if you take out those macro economic factors, what separates the successful

owners from those who don't succeed? It seems like their commitment, their ability to embrace change, their ability to stay the course to kind of commit, versus other people who are like, well, you know, it was great. Robert came by and yeah, we'll kind of just go back to the old ways of doing things, because that's what we know, like staying in your comfort zone seems like a big killer.

**Robert Irvine 45:52**

Well, because because if I go into, like, I have 11, out of 11 companies, they're all different clothing, protein restaurants, wherever they go into your restaurant. And I say, Well, number one, who are you? What is your identity, right? And you can't tell me what you're supposed to be or what the original vision was. I create the vision, not only collectively in the restaurant, but also the menu that goes with it. And what tends to happen between my end when I leave after two days, and eight weeks later, when the show airs, and I opened with a menu. And I say, Well, you should keep you know, some of it and start adding whatever you like, based on what I've taught you to the menu. To customers will come in a split a plate and say, I don't like this. What happened to the perogies what happened to that, you know, whatever, and they go back, and eventually the menu becomes so big again, and they buy the food, then nobody comes into the restaurant. Instead of the ones that are successful, the largest being \$1.1 million in debt. Cerritos, California, off Street Cafe, in a in a strip mall, it does now 3.4 million a year, eight years later, because they did change. You know, all while in New Hampshire, which I go back to. And I talk to these guys every week. I'll be there next week that she was \$350,000 in debt, or husband, or ex husband of 10 years, they run the restaurant together. Although she had no idea she really wasn't involved in it. They couldn't work together, I came in day two. So one of us gotta go. And the other ones got assumed \$350,000 with a debt. She took it on. We got a lawyer to ratify he took the debt, he was debt free. Literally went to school for two weeks to a French restaurant to learn how to plate food, then went to a community college a couple of weeks out of the month. For basic food now does \$3.2 million dollars year after the first year of paying off her debt with a beautiful and then when COVID hit was like on the phone, it may seem really just here. We put a hole in the wall of a restaurant and she didn't take out. You can't keep this girl down. It's incredible to watch the success because she's not afraid to pick up the phone and say, Hey, I'm thinking about doing this. And we walked through it. And this was six years ago, I still talk to the people every two to three days. So you know, if you now have one that has an alter ego in Wisconsin, that went back the next day to the same thing he did and he was failing. And what happens before the show airs, they call them again see what the sales on whatever they put on the end, his sales were down. We put it on the end of the show. His wife called me crying. And I said I told him not to do that. I got on the phone, got him back on the right track. And now they're doing well, right, I had to change the end of the screen because it was killing his business. But you know, when you go back to doing something you're used to doing that's where you fail.

**Jacob Morgan 49:15**

Yeah. Couldn't agree more. So I want to switch gears a little bit and go to a segment of the show that I like to call the leaders toolkit. And it's around the last 15 minutes or so where we talked about specific tips and action items for leaders out there. But I have just one fun question that I wanted to ask you before we dive into that. And that was I think there was one episode on a Sunday interview that you did fairly recently about this, where you almost got in a fight with with one of the people you were trying to help right like he got he got in your face. He was very, very aggressive with you. And I'm asking the question not just because of the story behind it. But as a leader you know, a lot of leaders out there are

going to be faced with situations that are tense that are uncomfortable, that are stressful, that are filled with egos in the room and you need to know how to control your mental and even your physical state. So can you talk a little bit about that story? And did you learn anything from it as far as yourself and controlling yourself? All right, my conversation with Celebrity Chef Robert Irvine is going to continue but only for paid subscribers on [great leadership.substack.com](https://greatleadership.substack.com). If you head over there and subscribe, you will get access to this bonus episode that we're going to be releasing called the leaders toolkit. And in this bonus episode, Robert Irvine is going to share a story of how he almost got in a fight with a priest. We're also going to talk about empathetic leadership and the importance of caring about your people as human beings specifically why that is so crucial and what Robert actually does to do that, so head over to [great leadership.substack.com](https://greatleadership.substack.com) Right now, you're not going to want to miss this follow up conversation with Robert Irvine.