



## Episode 222: Why ButcherBox Is Bringing Back Grass-Fed Meat With Mike Salguero

Child: Welcome to my Mommy's podcast.

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Katie: Hello and welcome to, "The Wellness Mama Podcast." I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com and I'm here today with Mike Salguero who is the CEO and Founder of ButcherBox. You've probably heard me talk about it, but if you haven't it's the first delivery service dedicated to providing completely natural grass-fed beef, organic chicken, and Heritage pork to consumers. It's something our family has used for a really long time. And

we'll talk about it today but the idea came when Mike's wife was pregnant with their first child and they wanted to eat the healthiest meat possible but had trouble finding completely grass-fed beef.

And so, of course, they solved their own problem and fixed their own need and I love that there's even an echo of my own story and my own journey began also when I was pregnant with my first child. So I cannot wait to introduce you guys to Mike. So Mike, welcome and thanks for being here.

Mike: Thanks so much for having me.

Katie: So I'd love to hear, to start off that story a little bit more in detail of how you, when your wife was pregnant, realized this was something that you guys needed to focus on and then how you went from that to starting a company, to solve the problem.

Mike: Yeah, sure. So a little bit of the background, so I was actually running a different company at the time, it was called custommade.com, which was a marketplace that connected makers, so people that make jewelry and furniture with consumers. And my wife was pregnant and we started...she started like, she has Hashimoto's so she has a thyroid condition which is a...and so she has to limit inflammation. And she really started like reading up on limiting inflammation and how to do that best, etc. And so we were both working hard to clean up our diet and to make sure that she's only eating the best stuff possible, you know, once you are pregnant or have children kind of those decisions are a lot easier because there's like something else that you're nourishing and feeding.

And every book that we read...there was kind of the paleo diet or...that was really the one that we focused on. It was eat grass-fed beef. And we couldn't find it, so we went to our local grocery store, I live in Boston, so, you know, we have city grocery stores and there might be a brick of grass-fed ground beef but that was pretty much it. And I also didn't really know all the terminology and I noticed like one label said grass-fed and then it said grain-finished. I was like I didn't understand any of that. So I just started getting really geeky about like, "Huh, how do we get really great grass-fed beef." And that led me to a farmer in New York who I was purchasing what they call a cow share farm. So I'd get like a trash bag or two trash bags full of meat and it's, you know, they would slaughter one cow and basically spread it out amongst a bunch of people.

And the first time that I did that I didn't have enough room for it in my freezer, I lived in a small apartment in Boston, and so I gave out some out to my friends. And then six months later we bought more and six months later we bought a lot, and all of a sudden we just really got into this grass-fed thing. And then the last time that I had given out grass-fed beef to my friends, one of them was, like, "This would be so much better if it is delivered to my house." I was like, "Oh, yeah. That'd be great." So I started trying to dig into that and figure that out and ended up meeting a former executive from Omaha Steaks who, you know, Omaha Steaks is like a huge direct to consumer meat company, beef company, and he was able to open his doors and solve some pieces which got us going.

We started with a Kickstarter campaign, this was started as like a very modest like, you know, we're just gonna get something up and maybe a few hundred people would be interested in this. We didn't raise any money because I wanted to make sure that we could make the decisions we wanted to in terms of the farms and the people we work with. And we just got going. And so it's so crazy like the day, so it was September, we launched like September 8th, 2015. The week of our launch, "Consumer Reports" came out with a cover story that was, "The case for grass-fed." And, you know, it was just kind of like this awakening, this larger awakening, people in this country saying, "I should be eating grass-fed."

And so our timing was right in terms of the product but also we were solving this need which is like a lot of people awakened to wanting grass-fed but then they go to their local grocery store and can't find it. Or they want to eat more humanely raised animals, or they want to eat antibiotic and hormone free animals and they don't know how to read labels, and it's actually hard to find this product. And what we see now, so we're nationwide, you know, fast-forward three years we're nationwide. We continue to just work on getting you a box of meat as quickly and as efficiently and as cost-effectively as possible. And we...you know, what we've learned, we've learned a ton about the meat industry which I can go into as much as you want to. We've also learned just how important great quality meat is. And, you know, I'm now a father of three.

My wife got pregnant again. We found out at 22 weeks that we were having twins, which is crazy, and we...you know, the meal is so important to me and my family and cooking and, you know, sharing in this great meat. And it's just so cool to be able to bring that to so many other people across this country. It's just been an amazing ride and, you know, I think it's rare to find businesses that are great for you, great for the environment, you know, kind of we're hitting a lot of different touch points. It feels very mission-focused and that's a really great reason to get out of bed. And try to make this a really, you know, impactful company and a really impactful thing in the world.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. And I go with your wife's sentiment, I also have Hashimoto so I know very well about keeping inflammation low and the health differences between grass-fed and conventional beef. But I'm glad you brought up the meat industry because I feel like there's still so much confusion even among really educated consumers about these terms within the meat industry because you hear natural and organic and grass-fed and, of course, we all are a little bit familiar with feedlots and how awful those are. But can you walk us through just some of the terms associated with the meat industry?

Mike: Sure. Yeah, so labels are very confusing and I think one of the things for your listeners, or what I tell my friends is, just keep in mind that labels are designed to confuse you in some ways. So they're gonna market the things that are like a little bit better and kind of...you know, so it's just like shopping at the grocery store for anything. You need to read your ingredients and understand and be informed. So all natural doesn't mean anything, so all natural. Generally, when you see all natural you'll see an asterisk and it says, "Minimally processed." You can get all natural on your product with no...like you don't actually need to prove anything.

What you're really looking for in terms of antibiotics and hormones is antibiotic and hormone free, and never ever is even better, so never antibiotics or never ever antibiotics and hormones. So in beef antibiotics and hormones can be put in pork, antibiotics can be put in chicken, antibiotics can be put in as well. Antibiotics started in the '50s and it actually was a way of getting them to put on weight to gain a lot of weight. So there are these professors in the '50s and '60s who were trying to figure out ways to get chickens to grow bigger, faster, and they found by administering an antibiotic they put on weight incredibly fast. And not only did they put on weight but they actually converted feed better.

And so what happened in the industry was two things, one, everyone was obsessed with cheap meat, right. So the consumer wasn't really worried about where it came from, it was worried about the price of meat. And two, because all these animals were having antibiotics they were able to be put closer and closer together. So what ended up happening was the feedlot or the confined feeding operations started popping up because people were able to put a lot of animals on the same amount of space whereas before that wasn't really what they did because of sicknesses and whatnot.

So that's kind of the antibiotics and hormones. As far as grass-fed goes, so what you're looking for is 100% grass-fed. What's really interesting and I think, you know, a travesty is what's happening in this country right now is people are innovating around feedlotting cow's grass. So I also say to look for pasture-raised. I believe pasture raised is going to be if you ask me three years from now I think all the labels that are true pasture-raised will say pasture-raised instead of 100% grass-fed because I think the customers...there's gonna be a backlash. But, yeah, did you know, you really want not only 100% grass-fed but pasture-raised or raised on pastures.

Generally, in terms of humane standards, if you care about humane standards, so there's GAP which is Global Animal Partnership. You can find that at Whole Foods and also in a lot of other places, it's a five-step thing they have a lot of information online, but, you know, step three, step four, and step five are I would say where most people want to be if they care about humane standards. There's also an organization called "Certified Humane" which will go in and certify humane.

Third party, what happens there is there's a third-party audit, so they go into the farm and they make sure conditions are good, they show up possibly unannounced to make sure conditions are good and they're kind of like the eyes and the ears for the animal to make sure that it's being treated well. So I personally, all of our stuff is humane certified and that's really important to me and the meat I eat but, so if people are interested in that, that's where that is. And then, so there's like the grass-fed grain-finished. I see less and less of that now, but sometimes it'll say grass-fed and grain-finished, which at best like just a traditional cow. That's, you know, how they're raised normally.

So just a little bit of information and I'll try to be quick. The way that grass-fed beef works is...so every cow starts out the exact same way, which is cow-calf, meaning the cow is born and then it feeds from its mother for the first six months. And then the next year it's basically every cow is exactly the same as well, it just eats grass out on the field. Now, some that are given antibiotics were given antibiotics really early in their life. The

ones that are never ever didn't get an antibiotic but otherwise, they're essentially the same living conditions. At the last six months, that's where things change.

So the cow is 18 months old and then 98% of them are sold to a feedlot or feeder operations where they are fed, they basically wean them off the grass and feed them a diet that's very high in carbohydrate and grains. So it's grain, corn, soy, and the cow just eats it and eats it and eats it and just keeps eating and gets bigger and bigger and bigger. Whereas the grass-fed cow just stays on the field, and generally, it's like instead of six months it's about nine months before the cow has grown to the full size. So grass-fed cows are leaner because they didn't spend six months just eating grain, and basically, they lived as nature-intended. So in many ways, they've been healthier rather than eating of substances not really designed for a cow.

So, yeah, there are, you know, like I said, it's 98% of the industry goes one way and 2% goes the other way. The whole structure has been built around kind of that feeder operation and we're here to change that structure and we're here to basically create a different way for the farmers and a different way for the customer and kind of help bridge that gap in between. So chicken is...yeah, you said organic too. So basically organic in order to be organic it's kind of like a third-party certification. So it is a third-party certification. So there are certain requirements of being organic and in the meat worlds, you can read those requirements and then understand like what you want to support.

So in a lot of cases you don't find organic pasture-raised grass-fed beef because it's too hard for the farmers to certify their fields and these cows roam, and so if you have a huge field it's very hard to certify the entire thing as organic because things like a tractor that goes from one side of a non-organic field into an organic field ruins the organic certification. So it's very hard and very expensive, and in this country, land is hard to come by and certainly hard to court off as organic. So sometimes when you see organic meat or beef it's what it's fed is organic grains in a grain-fed environment. And brought up in a couple of fields where they have organic.

On the chicken and pork side, that's different. So organic chicken it's fed organic grains and it is...there are like density requirements and, you know, health and wellness requirements, etc. So certainly, if you're worried about antibiotics and hormones I think looking for it specifically saying antibiotic or hormone free or organic is the way to go. And just to put a cap on this piece, what I tell people, so oftentimes people are like I can't afford grass-fed beef. You know, which I recognize as a real challenge for people like putting food on the plate is hard and it's expensive, and what I tell people is if you're not gonna eat...I mean the first thing I would say is eat meat, just eat less meat. Eat high-quality meat but eat less of it.

The second thing I would say is if that's not working for you what you want to do...so animal store toxins in their fat, so do humans. And what you'd want to do is get the leanest cuts possible. Like, so if you feel like you...and this is the only meat I have access to, great, try the leanest cut as possible. And then if you want to have that you know thing of bacon or you want to have that rib eye or you want to have something with a lot of fat try to get the cleanest meat you can.

Katie: I definitely echo that and that's what our family's done a lot over the years is just to eat less meat and make sure it's really high quality. And I always tell people that from a budget perspective, it's easy to add in and inexpensive to add in even things like frozen vegetables if you're on a budget or just whatever vegetables are in season when cabbage is in season, it's very inexpensive and stretched the meat buy.

Mike: Yeah.

Katie: I think more vegetables which most people universally agree are vegetables are pretty good for us so that's a great place to start. I'm glad you talked about the environmental impact as well because one thing that frustrates me in the health world, I'm sure you see it as well, is the polarized people arguing over tiny details in diet even amongst the like vegan versus paleo, there's actually so much we all agree on. There's like 90% we all agree on none of us in this health world want feedlots to happen. Nobody wants animals to be treated poorly. So it's like there's so much we can do together if we learn from that common ground. But I know a question that comes up so often is about the environmental impact of meat in general.

Mike: Yeah.

Katie: And I often hear people say, you know, like cows, or it's bad for the planet for any of us to eat meat. So I'd love if you could speak to that from the industry side. Is there actually a role for animals in the environment.

Mike: Yeah. And it's actually super interesting. So basically all the facts about the environment and the environmental impacts, I'll take cows because I mean there are whole movies about the beef industry. So, all the facts about the environment and the environmental impacts are generally for the feedlot cow not for a grass-fed pasture-raised cow. So that's just like one piece, so a lot of like, it's really bad for the environment, all the farting, all the stuff, it's like that was the measurement. Actually, the UN Climate report which I think was done in 2015, the last report that they did, says that grass-fed cows emit more carbon than grain-fed cows because the only thing they looked at was life span. So because they live longer they "emit" more carbon into the air.

So that's kind of like the backdrop of what people say on the negative side. There's a whole bunch of research happening right now which is really interesting and exciting about soil and what they call carbon sequestration, and about what happens when you put animals on the soil. So if you've ever been to a farm where you're looking at a pasture anywhere that the animal has been is generally a way more lush grass fields. And in the middle of this country there are lots of fields that have been overfarmed for years with crops. And essentially the soil is pretty depleted and is completely...has just been tilled and tilled and tilled and tilled. And what people are seeing is if you put animals on the land, they're pooping, they're using their hoofs to mash that poop in and it's growing these incredibly fertile grasslands.

If you think about this company like...or there is some country back in the days of the buffalo it was the Great Plains. So it's this wide, open plains of grass, and that grass was, you know, basically, buffaloes eating the grass, they're pooping out the seeds, they're mashing it in and it's creating more and more grasslands. And what people are measuring now is what they call carbon sequestration which is the ability for those grasslands just like a tree to essentially suck carbon out of the atmosphere and store it in the ground where it's a nutrient for the ground and the ground can continue to, you know, get better and better and more fertile.

So there's actually some really...there's the Savory Institute which has done a lot of research on this. He actually, he's from I think Zimbabwe and they've seen this with like elephants and large animals as well where they go to areas where it's arid or where grass is not grown and they're able to like regenerate Savannah in really interesting and exciting ways. So we're very excited for this notion of emission-free or carbon-neutral meat, and we are working with people on measurement, better measurement making sure that...so there is a methane, you know, cows fart and it produces methane. There is that. But in terms of like first of all after eating a diet that's made for them it's less and if there...but nobody has like really measured this stuff before. So there's some really interesting work being done on this space.

And I mean there is a lot of different arguments for and against, so, you know, the vegan argument of not eating animals is interesting because generally, you know, the tofu that people are eating or the beans that they're eating come from those same overcropped areas. And I mean it's...there are a lot of insects, a lot of animals, a lot of bees, a lot of, you know, things in the ground. There's a lot of living life that exists in open grass fields and doesn't exist in a, you know, in a planted soy field. Well, that just says it's interesting because that never really comes up. It's really just about the cow.

The average American eats 220 pounds of meat a month...oh, sorry, a year, so, and a grass-fed cow is probably about 500 pounds of edible meat. So you're talking about if you and your family had one cow and ate from that cow it's gonna last you about a year. And, you know, there's interesting arguments on all sides, environmental, as well as humane arguments. And I, agree with you. So we agree that the industry needs to be reformed, that's what we're trying to do. We have a lot of people who, you know, tried being a vegetarian and can't because they're not healthy or it's just not working for them, and a lot of those people really appreciate being able to work with us because we care a lot about how the animals were raised.

I mean I could tell you, you know, we're touring the farms, we're touring the slaughterhouses, we're just making sure that that experience is as good as possible. You know, given that we know that it's meat, right? So it was a living animal which is sad, but we try to make sure that that's as dignified of an experience as possible, and a lot of that has to do with this fundamental belief we have which is why it's all over our website and all over our box which is, "Back to nature." This notion of nature had a really good plan and we've been trying to control nature, and all we need to do is just go back to the way it used to be and things seemed to be way more in harmony and way better, and the health outcomes for humans and the health outcomes for the animal just appear to be way better.

Katie: Yeah, I absolutely agree and I think just to go back to that point for a second, I think that's...we could actually create so much change and we are throughout the health industry certainly, but if all of us would start with the things we agree on. And I think that's a common thing that would actually help across the society right now if we can start with the things we agree on.

And I want to switch gears a little bit because I think you also have some wisdom in a different area that could really be helpful to a lot of the listeners and that's on the entrepreneurial side and life balance. And the reason I say that is because most of the people listening are moms, not all of them but most of them, and I firmly believe that moms are the hardest workers on the planet and we're constantly juggling pretty much, you know, nine plates in the air at all times. And I think the only thing that comes pretty close is entrepreneurial life. So I would love if you could that for a minute of how you have managed to find balance. Because certainly, I'm sure growing a company while having three toddlers in the house has not been an easy ride all the time.

Mike: No. No, definitely not. So, I'll give a little bit of a back-story but... I just read this article about mental strain, I don't know, if you've seen this, I think it's in Slate or something. And it's about how the mom whether it's a part-time mom, or a part-time working mom, full-time working mom, or a stay at home mom, there's this notion of mental strain, which is essentially like the strain of keeping the house going and coordinating all the different things and the calendars and the events and like this, that, the other, the bills. You know, running a household is incredibly hard and a lot of that for whatever reason is just given to the mom which is essentially like entrepreneurship, you're right. It's like all these different things. You have no idea what's gonna happen today and it's like you just got to react in the best way possible and hope for the best.

And so a couple of things, one, I grew up without a father. My parents got divorced when I was three months old. I'm the youngest of four, so I never had a dad. And always, I was the kid that always believed my dad was coming home and never did. And I take my job as a father, as the most important of all the roles, the most important. And, you know, what's happened is that's actually worked better for the business. My last company, so the CustomMade company I was the first guy and I was the last guy to leave. I was there on the weekends. I was working and working and working, and grinding and grinding and grinding. I didn't have any kids at that point, but, you know, definitely, like left my wife, you know, home alone a lot just to like work and work and work. And it didn't work like I didn't perform any better.

The company didn't perform any better, in many ways we did worse because I was around so much. And one of the big lessons that I had when my daughter Marley was born and I started ButcherBox was, a lot of times I believe that I needed to be there to keep all the plates spinning and like keep everything going. And what I didn't do or what I like...I didn't really want to do that anymore. I wanted to keep plates spinning in my family. I wanted to be there so I, you know, I've tried to not work Fridays and I've tried to...I'm home for dinner pretty much every night. I say no to a lot of stuff because I believe that my job is to be a father and be home, and also to take some of that mental strain away.

So I also believe like some of that work is super easy for me to do because I'm in front of the computer and I'm just like in execution mode. So, you know, I do a lot of the appointment setting and a lot of the vacation planning and a lot of the stuff that like it...whatever I can take off my wife, Karlene's plate so that she can focus on, you know, being the mom she wants to be and doing the things she wants to do and also her business. She's a pelvic floor physical therapist which by the way is amazing. You should have her on because she is...I mean what's happening...and that's a total aside, but what's happening in pelvic floor health and the way in which she can help women rebuild their pelvic floors after having children is incredible. And it can happen really fast. So my wife runs a company, it's called Women's Journey Physical Therapy, it's a Boston based thing thing, so. But her patients are people who had children and generally have issues with incontinence. So leak urine whether that's when you pick something up, sneeze, jump rope, etc. And it's fixable and a lot of people deal with shame over years and years and years of like, "Oh, geez, something is wrong with me." And she basically in six visits, some people take longer, some people take shorter, helps people get better, which is amazing thing in terms of empowering women and empowering moms, and whatnot. And also she birthed twins so she's no stranger to, you know, having your body get really, really hurt by having kids.

So anyway, that's an aside. I believe that the more that I as an entrepreneur can have that bleed into my home life and help as much as I can is really important. It's also been really important to me especially if you're in a startup or if you're starting a company, you get to choose the life that you want to live. You know, a lot of people are like, "I really wish I could do that but I can't because I have to like do my startup work." And that's like, well, that's missing the whole point. The whole point of being an entrepreneur is lifestyle design. You get to design the lifestyle you want. If you want to work super hard, okay, work super hard. But just know that you're making that choice.

Now, obviously, like every once in a while there's something you have to do and, you know, that's different. But I think for the most part people, especially people in like, "Startups" believe that grinding it out is the way to go, that working 100 hours a week is like, you know, something to be proud of. And I've just made a huge shift in that in terms of realizing that, you know, it stems from work but the less I'm like in everyone's hair and working and the more I'm delegating and empowering others to do my work the better things are.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. And I loved a couple things you just said. First, being the importance of family dinner. I love that you go home for dinner every night and I think like that's one thing we do as well in our family. And that one small change alone it affects your family culture so much and in such an important way. And I think that's something I would encourage all families to do.

**This podcast is brought to you by Fabletics.** This is my go-to brand for athletic wear that is long lasting, super comfy and functional but also cute enough to wear anywhere. I discovered this brand, co founded by Kate Hudson, when looking for cute workout clothes and now I'm a regular customer! Their pieces are all super cute but also comfortable and flattering. I've always had a love hate relationship with workout wear until now... because while I love the idea of yoga pants and comfy bras I never loved the prices on the premium brands like Lululemon and hadn't found other options that were affordable but still comfy, flattering and high quality. Fabletics is my solution. They are a fashion focused activewear brand and its mission is to empower

women by making a healthy, active lifestyle choices because of its exceptional price point. They carry gym wear suitable for any type of workout... and cute enough for the normal every workout of being a mom! Fabletics **IS** your one-stop shop for affordable gym wear and because they create all of their designs in-house, you won't find them anywhere else. If you've never tried Fabletics, I highly recommend starting at their collections page so you can see all the trending pieces. They also release brand new styles, collections and prints every month! Before I forget, Fabletics is offering you an incredible deal you don't want to miss: Get 2 leggings for only \$24 (\$99 value) when you sign up for a VIP. Just go to [fabletics.com/wellnessmama](https://fabletics.com/wellnessmama) to take advantage of this deal now. Also free shipping on orders over \$49. International shipping is available and there is absolutely no commitment when you purchase your first order.

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Katie: I also love that you talked about the mental strain side or I've also heard it called like the emotional responsibility for the family. Like, there's so many...I've read multiple articles about this and I think you're absolutely right, that all these things do get put on women which is wonderful, like I know women are perfectly capable of balancing these things but I also know that it can be super overwhelming.

And so I'm gonna share more about it myself in the next year or so, but I went to this phase where I was doing great on the business side. I had systems, I had a checklist, the business was running, and I felt like I was always stressed at home and I kept thinking, "Why can I just kill it in business but I can't manage my own personal life like this." And I finally realized, well, maybe it's because I actually have a mission and goals and systems in my business, and at home, I'm kind of just flying by the seat in my pants trying to get everything done.

Mike: Yeah.

Katie: And so I really like took the business mindset and adapted that to my home life and the byproduct was when everything had a time and a place and a system there was no longer that emotional strain or mental strain of having to think about everything all the time. And so that's one thing I...it sounds like you guys have figured out as well. But I really encourage women to consider is just when you put systems in place you've actually got a tremendous amount of freedom, and just like with entrepreneur life I feel like our families it's our lifestyle design. We have families because we want to enjoy our families and spend time with those we love. But so often we get stuck in the weeds of just managing the day to day. So I love that you made that connection and I know from talking to mutual friends that you have also worked very hard to build an incredible company culture at ButcherBox.

And I think this is another lesson that's really applicable to families because families like businesses have a culture and it's something maybe not all of us think consciously about creating. But I think it's super important. So I would love if you could share a little bit about things you do to create a company culture and especially how those things could translate into family life.

Mike: Yeah. So that's a great question. So company culture is really fun, very fun, kind of topic to work on and to think about. It's also incredibly important because if you don't establish the culture that you want it runs away from you. So then the culture becomes the culture it is. And especially if you're in a growing organization where, you know, we are at a size now where it used to be everyone who was here I knew personally. I probably knew them for a few years because I was calling them friends or people that worked for me before. And now, we're at a place where sometimes people hire people and I haven't even met them.

So if we don't have a culture that everyone understands you run a risk of hiring people and immediately like kind of losing that culture which is a really...you know, it means it's even more important. My last company, we never actually established a culture. We never actually wrote down, "Here are our cultural values" until it was way too late. Until the culture really got tested and then we were like, "Oh, okay. I guess we should write something down because this isn't the way we wanted things to go."

So, yeah, I mean the culture that we have here is...so we have culture values. Humble is one of them, so humility is incredibly important to me. Member obsessed, meaning we're always thinking about our members, how to drive a better experience for them, how to make their experience even better. And we've been working super hard this year. It was a really hard summer. We changed our box and went to a more eco-friendly liner, and that caused a lot of thoughts to happen and like, you know, we're just...all we care about is delivering an amazing experience to the customer. And, you know, so that number obsession is a really big one. Accountability is really important as well. So if you say you're gonna do something that you actually do it. Authenticity.

And what I find is like those are the things that people would say about me, I would hope people would say about me. So really the culture in a lot of ways comes from the founder or the founding team of like, "This is

what's important to us. This is how we want to show up." And it's a great reminder of, you know, like then you start hiring people and start screening people on those questions like are they humble. When they come in do they talk with a lot of like I language, like, "I did this and then I did this and then I did this." Or like, you know, "I was on a team and we were able to accomplish this and then we did this." You can see it. I have, you know, things in terms of interviewing people things as easy as, like, did they pick up the coffee mug that was on the table and ask me, where can they put it?

You know, how did they come in? Were they able to roll with the fact that I wasn't around for a few minutes and did they talk to the team or not? Were they, you know...like there's just things that you start to look for to make sure that people fit in. And obviously, like we want diversity too. So you want diverse thoughts, you want diverse background, you want diverse...you know, just like that's good for a company, that's good for any organization. But also you want people to have some of these core fundamental values or else it's just not gonna work. So if you come in here and you say you know everything that's not a good start. It's not gonna work.

Katie: Can talk a little bit about the talent factory as well. This is something else I've heard that you mentioned.

Mike: Yeah. That's cool, yeah, the talent factory. So what I have talked about for years is, so I guess a little backdrop, my first company, we were up to about 60 people, we took a bunch of venture capital, and then it didn't work out the way we wanted to and we went down to a team of five. My co-founder still runs it. He was rebuilding it. It's working great, custommade.com for jewelry. But it wasn't the like massive outcome it could have been. And a whole bunch of reasons for that, but one of the things that I realized was, you know, so I had to like let go of a lot of people which is awful. And what I realized was everyone wants to be in a company, the elbow, like the viral growth curve where just like you're growing like crazy, your revenue is growing like crazy. Everyone is looking for that in terms of the startup world.

And what very few people honor or think about is your ability if you go into a company like that is if you can grow at the same growth rate as the company you can literally in a couple years completely change your career in terms of where you started and where you end up. So somebody who comes in as an intern can be running an entire division in an incredibly short amount of time just by saying yes and by just knowing, "Hey, well, I'm on this growth curve I got to stay ahead of the growth curve," which is incredibly hard to do, but if they do it, it's amazing.

So going back to when we were letting people go at CustomMade what I realized was when I felt really good and proud even though I'm saying like, "Hey, you know, we can't do it anymore. We have to say goodbye." I would feel incredibly proud if I had done the work or if I felt like the company had done the work to take them from a spot, you know, from one spot to another spot way above. Because then I felt like, okay, if you were there for six months, if you were there for a week, if you were there for three years, at least we had this huge impact on your life and on, you know, your future career, and where you can go, and what you believe in yourself that you can do. And so in this company, I decided to really embrace that, right, to like really focus on the talent factory.

So how do we get people better, you know, how do we empower people to do bigger things? How do we basically frankly give people a lot of trust, you know, a lot of rope and a lot of like, okay, you know, like we'll build some guard rails but, you know, you're gonna have way more responsibility than you imagine very quickly. And let people rise to that occasion. And what I find is if you have the right people especially with that trait of humility and accountability, and think they have authenticity, if they're willing to say, "Oh, I messed this up. Like, what do I do now?" You can have a really, really interesting company culture. So, yeah, we have people who I believe are riding that curve really well or staying ahead of that curve. And that's really exciting. And it's so cool to see, you know, you take a risk on somebody and you see where they end up and it's amazing. It's really, really fun.

Katie: I love that. And I think that's actually a perfect corollary to human life as well. I think of this in relation to my kids and yours may still be a little young for this, but people asked me a lot, how do you get it all done, how do you do this with business and kids? And my answer is that I don't. I have a team in both places, and at home, part of that team is our family, our children. And that our focus with them is creating lifelong skills so that they can enter adulthood as a functional human being who can do all of the things required. And part of that means that they are contributing to the household and that we give them a large degree of independence early but also with that comes responsibility. And so they have things they're responsible for in the house. And the degree to which they can be independent and perform those tasks, of course, makes my life easier but it also gives them that autonomy and the ability to be self-sufficient in that skill and to take ownership for it. And it's truly amazing, I feel like what children can accomplish when they're given that freedom to do so.

So we have a motto in our family with our kids that we don't do anything for them once they're capable of doing it themselves. And that's not to say that I will never, you know, brush my daughter's hair or braid it because she is old enough to brush it. We still do things in a bonding way, of course, but once they can tie their own shoes, they tie their own shoes. And once they can do their own laundry they do their own laundry because our goal is to create independent functioning adults, and it sounds like you do the same thing in your company. You want to create people who have skills, who can change the world and they get better and not who are just stuck in a very defined role. I love that.

Mike: Yeah. No, that's super. I'm taking that to my family because, you know, like even this morning, so I have a 4-year-old and two 2-year-olds, all girls. And my 4-year-old who can very easily get herself dressed and oftentimes dresses her sisters today was like, "I need help getting dressed." And first of all, I got frustrated because I didn't sleep well and I was worried about leaving the house and whatnot. I helped her but I was frustrated about it and, you know, I'm sure what she was really asking for was, one, either a bonding moment where, you know, I could just see her and just be with her. Or two, she really wanted help getting dressed, but I think that's ridiculous because she knows how to get dressed. So using the kind of like once you know how to do it yourself like you do it. I think that's a great way to build in the lifelong learning.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely.

Mike: Do you have any chore recommendations for a 2-year-old and a 4-year-old?

Katie: Yeah. So I'll say on that first note that's one thing of course kids also are human like all of us and if things don't work they don't necessarily do it. So I already did that age too with default to the "I can't do it" or "I need help." And we would have all these responses basically the long lines of, "Well, I won't do it because I know that you are capable and it will be an insult to your character if I did it for you," or something along those lines and kind of reframing for them. I love the 2 and 4 ages though because they still have that natural desire to help, which I feel like is a great time to hone it in.

So at that age, we would let them do things like help load the dishwasher. They could wipe things down. They could obviously keep their own rooms clean and learn how to fold clothes in their drawers. But honestly, our... She's now 5, but when she was 4, our second youngest started doing her own laundry because she was capable and I showed her how to do it and how to treat stains, and she would have to get a stool because she was so little, she'd able to get stuff out of the laundry, out of the washer, and put it in the dryer, but she was completely capable and she still does that. So pretty much everybody from number five on up does their own laundry because they're capable. So I would say baby step them into it but they are especially at 4 and above that they're incredibly capable of doing a lot more than we often give them credit for.

Mike: Yeah. No, that's a whole subject which we're just starting to get into which is, yeah, it's actually very good for me to hear kind of how you've taken things from your business and moved them into your family life. Because it is the male that's...you know, the idea of work-life balance is, I don't know, I think it's kind of a misnomer because it's really a blur between work and life and it's figuring out how to make that blur so that you could be present in every moment and be part of that blur. So this idea of taking the things that to me and my company are like, of course, you're accountable, do it. You know, and thinking about how to relate that back into my house is, yeah, that's a good thought exercise.

Katie: For sure. And I think it helps to also alleviate some of that parent guilt that happens at times of when you're with your kids you feel guilty you're not getting work done and when you're getting work done you feel guilty you're not spending time with your kids. And just reframing that to realize, of course, you want your kids to see you being a successful entrepreneur and changing the world and doing things to make the world better and, of course, you also want them to see you being an amazing parent. And so I think that's the key to it all. It's just being extremely present in the moment whenever that moment is because you can't be present everywhere all the time. So, that's another key principle in our families that we are present whenever we're in a place we're very careful to be present there.

But when it comes to advice another question I love to ask toward the end of interviews and I would love to hear your answer is, any book or books that have really had an impact on your life that you would recommend?

Mike: Definitely. So my most gifted book is an oldie but goodie, "Rich Dad, Poor Dad." Personal finance is a thing I just think it's crazy if they don't teach in schools, they don't teach people how to, you know, like what having money means or how to save, etc. So in terms of personal finance, "Rich Dad, Poor Dad," and, "The Richest Man in Babylon" which is this whole notion that all you need to do is take 10% of your money and save it and invest it, and you'll be fine.

In terms of like leadership books, let's see, I just got into this whole thing called, "Conscious Leadership," which is a fascinating subject. And a book called, "The Big Leap" is also an interesting one. And those are probably my big recommendations.

Katie: And any parting advice that you wish you could spread far and wide? There would at least be a couple hundred thousand people listening to this, you can get it that far.

Mike: Well, get some meat from ButcherBox. Parting advice, now, you know, I think what's really interesting right now in this world is there's a lot of division, there's a lot of divisiveness. And I agree with something you touched on at the very beginning which is if two sides could just try to find that common ground and work from there it's just a way better...I think a lot of stuff can happen, things can be done, and, you know, try to find common ground with the person you disagree with I think is obviously an ongoing challenge but something I recommend for everyone to try to do a little more of.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. I think that's something, unfortunately, we're seeing just more and more division, and the days roll and it's easy to focus on the things we disagree on or I even see people shut people out of each other's lives because they disagree on one thing and they still probably agree on so much more. But also I always think even if you don't agree on things we owe it to our kids, back to the family thing, to show them examples of being able to disagree with someone and still love and respect them.

Mike: Yeah.

Katie: And so I love that that's your parting advice because certainly, the world needs that right now.

Mike: Yeah, sure.

Katie: Awesome. Well, Mike, thank you so much for your time and being here. This has been fun. I love that we got to touch on family and business and some other aspects I don't usually get to talk about. And I know that you are a busy parent and business owner so I appreciate you prioritizing being with us today.

Mike: Yeah, absolutely. It was my pleasure.

Katie: And thanks to all of you for listening and I hope you'll join me again on the next episode of, "The Wellness Mama Podcast."

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