

LEADERS in Action

Jason Womack interviews MIKE BRADY



Mike Brady, President and CEO of Greyston Bakery, is building on the organization's nearly 40 year heritage as a leading social enterprise. Mike is responsible for Greyston's Workforce Development, Community Gardens, Housing, Health Services and Early Learning Center. Mike's passionate about the integration of business and social good, particularly through the scaling of Open Hiring™ which provides employment opportunities regardless of background or work history while offering support and services needed to succeed in the workplace and thrive in the community. Mike is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School.

Q&A

Jason Womack: *Do you have a simple way to think about how leaders get better?*

Mike Brady: Surround yourself with excellent people. Collectively, we'll all get better as we focus on and solve increasingly challenging problems. I've got a lot of hustle in me. Paul Polman said, "Don't think about what career you want, think about what kinds of problems you want to solve."

JW: *What was your Defining Moment as a leader?*

MB: I've always been fascinated by finding the purpose in what I do. I spent a good part of my career not loving what I was doing. When my father passed away I made a commitment, I wasn't going to continue doing what I didn't want to do.

I wanted more control, and for me, that one step led me down a path of running a great organization.

JW: *What will leaders increasingly need to include that up until now they may not have had to study in great detail?*

MB: At Greyston, we are committed to coaching and building "Compassionate Leaders in a Compassionate Business."

We need compassionate, mindful leaders — this means understanding the needs of both my team members and my stakeholders and improving our operating systems. I don't remember us focusing on this approach in business school.

Q&A with Mike Brady

Mike Brady shares what he considers to be the most important focus for contemporary leaders today — how to be more mindful and compassionate toward employees, suppliers and customers.

This interview encourages leaders to ask themselves, "What is it you really want to do?"

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JW: *What do you think are the most important questions effective leaders need to ask of themselves?*

MB: I often ask myself, “How can I be more mindful and compassionate toward my employees, suppliers and customers?

One answer is to be mindful of the very diverse needs of those groups. The needs of my hiring manager, for example, are very different from those of my CFO. And, asking myself to reflect on that is something I do regularly.

JW: *What are some of your own habits or routines as an effective leader?*

MB: We set annual goals. Being effective means that we've established the path to be successful, and we continue to realign by meeting regularly to assess how we're doing and how we're working together.

My own daily habits include meditation, exercise and taking time to be with my family — all reenergizing activities for me. I also don't spend a lot of time doing things I don't like. We know that we're not as effective — and it's not as fun — if we have to do work we don't like.

JW: *How do you listen - and what do you listen for - so you hear more than what is just being said by those you lead?*

MB: I'm always asking, “How do we get better?” I'm listening for someone's passion. As long as the mentality exists to keep trying, to consider, “this is not yet good enough, but it's still not all that I want” you're going to end up where you want.

If a colleague is not leading with a passion, I'll ask, “What is it you really want to do?” I want to help people become more entrepreneurial in their thinking, thus more energized at work.

Once I know what they want to do, I can motivate them to work on our collective goals.

JW: *How would you define your self in just one sentence?*

MB: Be not afraid of failing, be most afraid of standing still. Or, as I would say to my young children, “Keep trying.”

JW: *How has being an organization founded on the principles of inclusion and diversity helped you flourish?*

MB: At Greyston, inclusion is at the core of our business and is the basis of our Open Hiring Model. Open Hiring creates opportunities for everyone: women, men, people of color, people of all faiths and sexual orientations, immigrants and refugees, the economically disadvantaged, the formerly incarcerated and all others who may have been excluded — blocked from contributing to the health and strength of our society. Without our commitment to the principles of inclusion and diversity, Greyston would have never achieved the levels of success we recognize today.

JW: *Greyston began the moniker “we don't hire people to bake brownies, we bake brownies to hire people,” what incited this philosophy?*

MB: Roshi Bernie Glassman was well ahead of his time with his belief that a successful business could do more than create financial gain. He believed capitalism could be used to generate social justice alongside products and profits. Bernie created Greyston as an enterprise that would treat people, regardless of their past, as equal.

To this day, we believe creating thriving members of the community is as important as delivering increasing financial returns. Rather than judge people on their past, Greyston today remains steadfast in the belief and the proven practice that everyone has the potential to succeed and to contribute.