

~~~Please note that the following transcript may be inaccurate and has not been edited for content~~~

**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Welcome, listeners. I'm Ken Segel. I'm the Chief Relationship Officer of Value Capture, and we're so glad you're with us on this episode of Habitual Excellence. I'm really excited to have Justin McElhattan as our guest.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

I have pursued Justin to convince him to come on this podcast for a number of years, and...

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Justin has been both busy as a leader and is an extremely humble leader in my experience, but has agreed to come on. So, Justin, welcome to the show.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Again, thanks so much. Really, really value the partnership we've had with you, and Value Capture over the years. We've done a lot of benchmarking together, and learnings, and the work you all are doing is so important. It's great to be able to talk to you today, so...

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Well, it means a lot for you to say that coming from you. Justin, until recently, was the CEO of Industrial Scientific, and then oversaw the company as part of a portfolio for Fortiv, and now runs something very interesting that he's gonna tell us about.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Through his company, Nicely Road, but I consider you, Justin, one of the really outstanding leaders who has applied a powerful framework of habitual excellence and been part of a multi-generational display of what's possible and creating the conditions where it's highly likely to continue into the future, so...

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

We look forward to learning from you, just as we have, as you said, for a number of years now together, in multiple different ways.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Justin, can you share a little bit about yourself as we get going here, and sort of your tier leadership roles?

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Sure. Yeah, I've had the wonderful blessing in my life of having kind of a great combination of people and circumstances that I've been able to learn from.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

As you said, I'm running Nicely Road right now. We had a business I started a couple of years ago. We were really focused on helping agriculture reach its full potential to nourish, connect, and heal people.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

We do investments and acquisitions of companies in that space, and along with my wife, Shirley, who's an internal medicine doctor, having a blast on this new journey. But most of my career, really, if you rewind, has been spent in the environmental health and safety space. My dad and grandfather started Industrial Scientific back in 1985.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And I had a little bit of a taste of that coming out of high school, working there in the summer, and I just fell in love with it. The company was maybe 40 people at the time, and I saw this wonderful camaraderie of people working towards a critical mission. Industrial Scientific makes products that people literally bet their lives on, and at any given moment, there are millions of people on the planet, in the International Space Station, or below the Earth in mines that are betting their life on the work that the company does.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And I just fell in love with that. I graduated from college, wanted to go work there. My dad wouldn't hire me. He said, you're not qualified to work here. Go get a job. And so I did. I went to

work in sales. I sold for a distributor of Industrial Scientific. I sold products and services and training.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And really, I think an important point for me, those early years of my career, the first four years of my career, I was on the road every day at customer sites and wastewater treatment plants, steel mills, refineries, and seeing the people who were dependent on my company and me to come through for them. It was such a powerful foundation of what a company generally has—one purpose to serve that customer—and it was a great experience.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

I came to Industrial Scientific in 98, worked in product management, and took on a number of roles.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Before becoming CEO in 2010, and led the business for a number of years. We had a transition in 2017. We had gotten to a point where we basically realized that we were not the best owners of the company anymore. Until that point, I think we really had been the best owners.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

But seeing the opportunities that were ahead for us to transform an industry, making sure people get home alive from work at the end of the day, and eliminating death on the job by 2050, which was our vision.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

We made the decision to look at other options, and we became part of—we sold the business in 2017 to Fortiv.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Which was a spin-out. Danaher split in 2016.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

The industrial technology businesses went into Fortiv, along with Fluke and Tektronix and other great technology companies.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And we became part of Fortiv, and I continued in my role leading Industrial Scientific, eventually took a group executive role, running a number of companies in the environmental health and safety space.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And I just loved it. I had six great years of learning, seeing the cockpit of a big public company that was extraordinarily well run.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

But I turned 50, and had a good friend pass away, realized that life's short, and it was a wonderful feeling that my job was done. We had integrated the company well, I had great leaders in place on my team.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And it afforded me the opportunity to step away and build something new. And so in 2023, at the beginning of the year, I stepped away and started Nicely Road.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

With the intent of building great businesses with, really, the three ingredients that I have seen so effective in my career. First is an employee's-first mindset—employees first, customers second, shareholders third.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

The second is, we talk a lot about a robust commitment to continuous improvement in Kaizen.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And then the third being an unlimited investment horizon. I think so many times we put these

artificial deadlines on an investment, or the ownership model of a company, and I think that really can hinder that. And so I think when you can combine these three things, it's so powerful.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

To help create extraordinary businesses that build people, and serve customers really well.

**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Justin, so no one listening to this now has any questions about why you're a guest, and you just laid down so much foundational stuff, and I think we owe it to our listeners to dig in a little bit on some of that, so...

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

You know, I loved you referring to your early experiences of just being customer-connected and feeling the intensity of the importance of the work in that relationship.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

And then you took that into the company and built on it. You've also just sort of almost in passing mentioned your vision at Industrial Scientific of eliminating death in the workplace by 2050, which I think is extraordinary and an animating aspirational vision.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Anyone who was around the company, which we were several times teaching Shingo workshops and other things, and just spending time with you with frontline employees, says it was really real. And in many ways, you've made gains toward that across the United States. So, just amazing things you're dropping there, as we go.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Well, these are very real things. I think one of the things we talked about is bringing the outside world in at Industrial Scientific, and making sure that we took every opportunity to have our customers interface with our people.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

When cell phones started proliferating, and it was possible for a salesperson or a service

technician to be at a customer site, we would have them ask the question: how are we using our products, and what would you like everybody in the company to know?

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And the magic of having people be able to tell our entire internal team how they were using and how they were betting their life on it — those kinds of connections are just beyond value, immeasurable value.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And so I think that's... we would say go to GEMBA, right? Where is it happening? And that's what mattered.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Yeah, awesome. Just awesome, and again, radiating through the company when everybody can hear that and have that mindset, which you created quite deliberately.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

So, you also threw out this really powerful framework of, you know, people first, customers second, and third, shareholders.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

And so let's unpack a little bit. You had this extraordinary experience to develop outside the company and then inside the company, and you talked about those 40 people, and sort of absorbing that people and culture were the heart of the company. So, can you talk about how that sort of got into your bones and became people first?

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Yeah. Sure. So the founding of Industrial Scientific — you know, my dad and my grandfather were very different people.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

My grandfather was an engineer who had worked in business, taken a company public, and he

was very focused on governance and excellence at that level. My dad was an English major, a creative type, who fell in love with business and seeing the potential for business to do great things.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

On day one of Industrial Scientific, my dad wrote a couple of statements, and this is in January of 1985. And he wrote that we believe good financial performance — right? Because it is about businesses making money. That's the report card we all have in business: our financial statements.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

We believe good financial performance is the result of doing the right thing for employees first, customers second, and shareholders third.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And so the entire journey, and the thinking behind that, is: get the best people in the world, support the heck out of them, give them the best tools, systems, and working conditions they need, to then, in turn, serve the customers best. And if those two things happen, shareholders are generally going to be okay, if we are good stewards of what we have. They'll generally be okay.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Justin, can you give some examples of how you really tried to live that value of employees first?

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Yeah, there's so many. I think one of the most important ingredients in this is clarity. Being clear about what is expected — what the people in the company should expect, and what is expected of them.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Because there's a corresponding agreement here. We called it the compact. And it was: here's what putting people in the company first means. It was five statements around that: giving you opportunities in your career, providing you with the best tools and marketing systems, paying you well, treating you with dignity, honesty, and respect, and putting your needs and serving customers ahead of the needs of shareholders. Being super explicit about that.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And then being clear about what the expectations are on the other side of that. This needs to be a high priority in your life. It can't be number five on your list of importance in your life. It needs to be probably around three — maybe your family, your faith — but it can't be number seven.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

So clarity around the expectations was really important.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

I also think that a commitment from the top leadership in the business is critical. My dad had a statement that he had been using for decades called “Humble, Hungry, Smart.” That we need people across the business that are humble, hungry, and smart. And that it starts with humility and understanding that you're serving people in the business.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And then so much of it, I think, was... I would see this when new people would come in. There's a reflexive nature that when you're faced with a problem, the habit becomes: what do our people need to solve this problem, or to achieve this created goal, or whatever it is?

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Having that reflex of thinking about people first. Those are some of the things that I think are really critical to making that real.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Well, that's awesome, and I'll just speak as a witness in a couple ways. When we would bring leaders from healthcare and other industries in for Shingo workshops you were kind to host, they would go to see, go to talk to Gemba and frontline employees, and they would come away with something that was classic in the best companies, which is say, wow, I was talking to a frontline engineer, or a frontline person that assembled product.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

And you would think you were talking to the CEO. You know, the level of ownership was just that high, and it was great to see. It was great to see.



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**Justin McElhattan:**

It was interesting... oh, go ahead, Tony.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

No, you.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

I was just gonna say, you know, I read something back when Jack Welch was still alive, and he had a column with his wife in the Wall Street Journal about how it's so important for senior leadership to understand the mission statement of the business.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And I was like, wait a minute, no, everybody does. Exactly. We would spend, and Parker Burke continued after me, we would spend an hour and a half with all new employees.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

There'd sometimes be 30 people in the group, but every month we would have a new employee session, and it was, we would walk through the fundamental statements of these things.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Yeah.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And I think that giving ownership, trusting people in the business with big decisions, and giving them ownership of that is a critical piece there.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Absolutely, and I think, you know, and I'll just be direct, and maybe it's impolitic, but I think you just summarized something that really separates the companies that talk a good game on these values but end up in a different place, and those that can endure with them.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Because it's really true all the way down to the frontline folks. And you said trusting them with really big decisions, and I'm going to act as a witness, again, for our listeners, and then I'm going to turn it back to you.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

One day, we were just meeting in your office, and it's an inspiring building, hundreds and hundreds of employees around, and we went to grab a sandwich in the cafeteria, and you made a beeline for a frontline engineer. I could oversee the conversation.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Essentially what had happened was he was on overnight, and he had made the decision, when your critical monitoring systems for mines and other things had gotten unstable, to shut it down and fix it for the few minutes it took, rather than risk it staying up and leading to a more serious outage.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

And you were completely reassuring him that he had done the right thing, and even if it had not been, you had his back. And to me, that was just the real deal in terms of psychological safety and standing behind your people. You probably don't even remember that, but...

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**Justin McElhattan:**

No, I don't. Well, the statement I said before that was in our compact was, we put your needs in serving customers ahead of the needs of shareholders. And I would always say, that's your get-out-of-jail-free card. Make a decision.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

You know how critical the work we're doing is. Make a decision, and make a good one.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Yeah, well, that's great, that's great. All right, so culture and people first, employees first.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Nope.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

And then, as you went on as a leader and grew the company — and boy, did you grow it from those 40 employees, you can describe the scale and the change — but then you guys became an absolute leader in deploying the principles and ideas of continuous improvement.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

You know, systems to do it, based in the values. Can you talk about that aha for you, and sort of how you became so committed and so organic about building in the principles so that your processes supported your people and your customers and eventually your shareholders in that way?

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**Justin McElhattan:**

I think we had a real nice tailwind on that journey, way before I was part of Industrial Scientific. But the criticality of what we did — the notion that we are preserving human life in the moment.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

And that we need an organization. You know, as I always say, there's a moment in every product we build.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

That somebody's life will be dependent on that thing functioning, and the entire world behind everything that happens before that needs to be perfect to enable that one outcome to occur properly.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And so I think, again, way before I was there, we were the first company in our industry to become ISO certified. We had a great team that knew what was needed and was able to bring these principles in.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And so we were lean, we had outstanding quality systems.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And it was really interesting. I'd always respected Danaher from afar, just such an iconic company, really bringing that mindset of continuous improvement in quality systems and business systems, not just to manufacturing but to growth and innovation.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Yeah.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And so it was interesting when we were going through the process of selling Industrial Scientific and looking at where we were going to be. I always said Fortive — and it was mostly Danaher folk — felt like our older sibling. Same genes, but much bigger, more experienced, and could teach us a thing or two. And they really did.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

That incredible growth. We more than doubled the size of the business over the six years after the acquisition.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And I think the rigor and discipline that I saw, similar to the commitment of employees first — you need that commitment from leadership to do that. And seeing Fortive Business System deployed, we had the core tools: problem solving, visual daily management, value stream mapping.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

All of those things were consistent across the board, but then going deep into exercises around innovation, voice of customer. I really saw the power of having a given set of tools that people were adept at using.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And so there was this whole thing around the tools. The tools helped us get better. But I also think there were two mindset things that were really important. One is this notion of working on the business intentionally, instead of just in the business.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And so the Kaizen events we would have — we would have the President's Kaizen, and it was a week, and we would basically tackle the two or three biggest problems we were facing as a company, swarm it, and knock it out of the park. It was unbelievable how impactful these Kaizen weeks were.

**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Wow.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

So it's the notion that you can fix things quickly, and that you need to be working on the business. The second mindset piece, I think, is that we can always be better.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Hmm.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

If, if, you know, there's a delicate balance of recognition.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Yeah.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And pushing.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And I think that, you know, we all have different needs around that, but I think when you have a culture that can be thinking about ways to improve, consistently, that is, like, that's an amazing benefit on that.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Wow, that's great. Can you give an example, either working on the business, or that tension around improvement, where you sort of saw the magic take hold?

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**Justin McElhattan:**

I, I, I saw, yeah, a couple of things,

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**Justin McElhattan:**

So, one of the things, on the second point, an example, we had an operating leader come in from Fortiv.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

To basically go through a business review.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And everybody was sitting around the table and talking about how wonderful things were, and he got up and left. And it was like, well, you don't need me, everything's okay, so why am I here? I'm gonna go work on a problem. And it was such a moment of kind of like, wow, this isn't a dog and pony show. We're here to work on

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**Justin McElhattan:**

You know, on the biggest problems in the business.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

We, we had our, our first

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**Justin McElhattan:**

our first president's Kaizen. We had grown, and our systems had, had, had, weren't able to absorb the growth that we had had over this one period of time. And so we had some work to do on fixtures.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And, just on systems that would calibrate the instruments that were being shipped to our customers.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Yeah.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And we tore down, we called it the Colossus, because it was this massive, massive thing that we used, and then, you know, we rebuilt it in a couple of days, and our general counsel

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Was, was down there screwing things on, and it just was, it was such a powerful, you know, and seeing folks working, you know, working till midnight for, for most of the week, and

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**Justin McElhattan:**

just realizing that, this is how we, you know, we, you can put this in a bucket, work on it, focus on it, and knock it out of the park.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Wow. Amazing. Amazing.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

You know, and for those that are not familiar with Danaher and Fortev, and a lot of our TPS steep listeners will be,

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

go check it out. They're a humble company, and they like to keep their system based on TPS

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

A little bit quiet, out of humility, and they know the advantage it gives them, but you will wish you invested in the various stocks a long time

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

to see the outcome of shareholders third and the systems that are in place. Justin, you also, in our conversations, have emphasized the long-term horizon, and you've said to me a lot of

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Sort of current public company and corporate culture and private equity are sort of missing out.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

What are they missing out on?

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

And why? And what if... yeah.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Yeah, that, I have, you know, kind of as my, the third thing we look at with Nicely Road is we take an unlimited investment horizon, that I'm not making investments, we don't have these companies with the intent of selling them down the road.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

I hope that these businesses outlive me, and, you know, and they go on in perpetuity. That doesn't always happen, but I think having that horizon is important, and I think that there's really two

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**Justin McElhattan:**

kind of two things I think of.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

that I think can be improved by taking that view. One is, I think, financial performance. I think that when you have a longer view, you know, there's always tensions to maybe prioritize a margin expansion initiative over growth.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And I think that the shorter term that is, the harder that is to navigate. I think also that when you look at some of the private equity models where you have liquidity needs, you know, you have outside shareholders coming in and giving you money and saying you're gonna, you know, we'll make X on that.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

over, whatever, 5, 7 years, I think that you miss out on opportunities for, for real compounding that can happen further down the road. And as you, as you, you, you see, you, you know, you see these wonderful situations where companies are able to build

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**Justin McElhattan:**

great bases and take a 20-year view and, you know, really get to kind of 100x

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**Justin McElhattan:**

you know, 100x in 20 or 30 years, rather than a 3X or a 2X in.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

For the flywheel.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And so that's, I think that that oftentimes is missing. So there's a financial dimension. I also think that there is a

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**Justin McElhattan:**

I, I believe that the, the,

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**Justin McElhattan:**

perspective of managers, and this is why it's important to have alignment across everyone in the organization, changes. There's a, there's a, one of my favorite quotes is from G.K. Chesterton. It's super long, but it's a paragraph, it's in, it's in the book, Orthodoxy, and he talks about

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**Justin McElhattan:**

what makes things beautiful? And he uses Pimlico, when he was writing Pimlico, a neighborhood of London was in bad shape, and it said, how do, what would we do with this? And he said, it's not, we can't just encourage it, we can't just reject it. The only way to make something beautiful is to love it deeply and wildly.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And the things that we love deeply and wildly are the things that are ours, the things we take ownership of. We love our children so much, we, and he says, you don't put a bow on your child to make it beautiful. You put it on because it's yours, and it's beautiful to you. And so that,

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**Justin McElhattan:**

In order to,

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**Justin McElhattan:**

You know, you kind of do the reverse ma- or do the, whatever the math on that, and it's, well, in order to make things beautiful, you need to make them yours.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

And, this, you know, I wish there was a better way to concisely state, but I think that's really it.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And so I have always thought so much about business, and the way I've approached it is, how to, this is yours, right? This isn't, this isn't mine. You have ownership of this. You spend a lot of your life at work.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And, you, you know, you need to love it wildly. And when people do that, it's, it's magnificent. And I always, I have a great example of this. We,

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**Justin McElhattan:**

So the instruments in industrial scientific, that we made, you know, they're, like I keep saying, people are betting their life on it. One of the most dangerous things you can do

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**Justin McElhattan:**

If you're wearing a gas detector, and it goes into alarm.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

One of the most dangerous things you can do, it's trying to warn you to, is to turn it off.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And we would have situations where customers would be, oh, this thing's annoying, I'm going to turn it off. That's one of those dangerous behaviors. Our system, we built a system that we could do remote monitoring, et cetera, would tag when customers were turning instruments off an alarm.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

We had a technician on the production floor, and he was the guy who, before stuff was shipped off to customers,

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**Justin McElhattan:**

would kind of, we did a pre-commissioning before we did commissions on site, and so he would load the instruments in and everything, and he noticed

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**Justin McElhattan:**

That this one customer in particular had high occurrences of people shutting instruments off while they're in alarm.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And this bothered him, and it bothered him at a deep enough level that those little gears that are working in his head when he's in the shower, or working at home on the garden, or whatever it is, he called me, he called my cell phone one day, I was actually in the Middle East when he called me. He's like, hey, it's Chris, I have an idea.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And he developed this basic

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**Justin McElhattan:**

configuration in the instrument that would enable us to disable an instrument shut off while an alarm, and blah blah, you know, and it was, but I used that example that it was such an elegant fix. It wasn't a product manager that came up with that by listening to voice a customer. It was somebody who cared deeply and felt ownership of our customers' outcomes.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

deepened the organization, and came up with a great solution, that we actually deployed and had success with. So, that's what owning it looks like.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

It's taking, you know, that deep ownership and applying it to making things better at all levels.

**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Wow, what... I mean, there are no words to say after that kind of example, other than I found myself writing notes as you talked about that, like I think a lot of our listeners will be as they listen to you talk about that.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Love and passion, and the... just the fundamental truth of... human truth of what you just said, so... and I know I and many others are grateful that you've led that way.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

In that last answer, Justin, you talked about, you know, you own it, you know, or...

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Great things come from us, you know, the things that we love, and that, you know, and that means we have to own it.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

When you made the decision to leave Fordiv, and among your portfolio of companies, Industrial Scientific, I think, I know, a lot of your employees and a lot of people in the region, and a lot of people who had work for Industrial Scientific were surprised.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

But you helped him get through that with, some of this thinking. Can you describe some of that passage for... for you and for them? And then I'm excited to talk about Nicely Road and Agriculture.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Well, I, I don't... I think, first of all, I think the...

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**Justin McElhattan:**

The leadership that we had in place was...

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**Justin McElhattan:**

The most important thing to do is make sure that that's good, right? And we... and that was... that was in place. And I think that so... so much of,

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**Justin McElhattan:**

The conversation... so many of the conversations I had, when I... when I announced that I was stepping away was around that this is your business, right? This is not the McMahan family, this is not just Ford, this is yours. And, what has made industrial scientific special over the decades is the people in the business

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Loving, loving it, supporting each other, serving, and... and, and that that carries on, regardless of, of, of, you know, who's, who's, who's leading it. And it's, and it's a responsibility of the folks in... in the business to, to keep that... to intensify that.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

One of the things I would always get really annoyed about was when people say, oh, we have to keep our culture, or whatever, and I would say, no, I don't want to keep it, I want to intensify it. I want it to evolve and to strengthen and deepen and, you know, be a model. So, this is their chance to do that, and, so, anyway.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

That's great. No, I love it. I love it. I love it. And,

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

This is... this is not mine or my family's, this is yours, and I... I just think that's so powerful.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Tell us what Nicely Road is doing. You're moving into a really important human system and making things better. Talk a little bit about that work, and...

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Yeah, you know, it's exciting for me to see your energy around it, so share a little bit with our listeners.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

You know, when I stepped away and started Nicely Road, I knew what I wanted to do, but I didn't know what form it was going to take, and so I just set about to understand where there's problems and where can I be helpful with my experience.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And so, have made a number of investments in, in, small and medium-stage, you know, mid-sized companies.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And serve, you know, advising CEOs in those companies. But one of the things that both my wife and I, my wife, as I said, is an internal medicine, she was a practicing internal medicine doctor. We had always had... always have had a deep love

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**Justin McElhattan:**

For agriculture, rural communities, we both grew up in my early years, and then her, you know, until college, very, very rural. And, and we had always said when we retire, we're gonna, we have a farm, Westmoreland County, we're gonna retire on their own farm.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And it just kind of sharpened into, well, why don't we do this now? And so, let's point nicely road fully towards... towards this concept of enabling agriculture to, you know, what's the full potential of it to nourish, connect, and heal. And,

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**Justin McElhattan:**

So my wife, with a health perspective on food systems.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

With me on a business perspective, and then we've had just the incredible blessing of being connected with, Steve and Mel Montgomery at Lamppost Farm in Columbiana, Ohio. We sent out to start, okay, how can we help, right? I said we went into a learning tunnel of just talking to as many farmers as we can.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

We've started a business called Fireberry, where we're focused on enabling small farms.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And have acquired a farm in Deerfield, Ohio, called Tierra Verde Farms. It's a livestock, grass-fed, pasture-raised, meat with a couple thousand customers, so a sizable livestock, farm.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Serving, serving that area.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And, we just... we see this gap where,

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**Justin McElhattan:**

You know, agriculture is such an interesting industry. It's very hard to scale, and bad things happen when you, you know, can really... bad things can happen to the environment, to the food systems, to quality, etc, when you try to scale some of these things. But as many people in the industry say, it's highly repeatable.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And so, how can we help create more resilient food systems? How can we help the food that we eat be healthier, more nutritious, and have an impact on, you know, in these local communities from an employment standpoint?

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And so that's what we're set out... set out to do. We... we see Fireberry being a, with... with Tierra Verde being the first part of Fireberry.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Being a model farm, and we want to help

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Small farmers be successful. We just led an investment round in a company called Good Agriculture, which,

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Basically automates a lot of the bookkeeping and tax, all the crap that you don't want to do. Most farmers are not, you know, excited about going in and closing their books each month and doing tax and enterprise planning. So, we can help, we can scale that with technology, we can do that and let people focus on

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Creating great farms, great soil, and great food. So, having an absolute blast, learning so much. But...

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Those, those kind of core foundations that, that, you know, the... and bring that employees first mind, what does that look like, in agriculture? What does continuous improvement look like? How do we bring those principles in? And then how do we take a very long view towards this, and just applying this in a new, in a new field and really enjoying it?

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Well, I'm excited, you know, to see I...

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

No, only great things are gonna happen from

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Applying that leadership framework that you've described so eloquently. And, you know, I love how, you know, it starts with, humility and the learning tunnel. You said the learning tunnel. Any funny experiences during that learning tunnel for you?

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Oh, we've... I think, The... the...

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Most around just how much I don't know. It's, it's... it's the, you know, I think one of the... one of the funniest things that's kind of a recurring joke is that

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**Justin McElhattan:**

I use email, right? I have a laptop, I'm on my laptop, and, you know, most farmers I work, they're... it's all mobile, and so, just being in this thing of, oh, well, Justin sent an email, like, somebody might read it in 2026, it's, like, that's not the form of communication, and so that's been, those are... but those are real, there's a lot of little things like that that,

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

That's funny.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

You know, and some days, you know, the one time we were...

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**Justin McElhattan:**

This shift of worlds, right? The,

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**Justin McElhattan:**

We had had this business, Good Agriculture, had their leadership team in Pittsburgh. We were doing some strategic planning here at Nising Road's offices, and my wife was gonna join for the dinner, but she was at the farm and got stuck. They had a pig escape, and so she was running through... like, it's quite a different, you know, these...

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Very different experiences than, you know, we're used to doing. We've had many of those as well.

**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

That's great. That's great. I love it. I love every second of it. Justin, before we wrap up, there's another thing that I really deeply appreciate as a...

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

...

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Safety-committed leader, and that is, again, and we're gonna touch on something where your humility will kick in very deeply, I'm sure, but your family are one of the leading, investors in and thought leaders contributing to the workplace safety movement around the country, in various different ways through your foundation. Can you talk a little bit about the mission of the foundation and its work? Sure.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Yep.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Yeah, that's, yeah. When we sold industrial scientific, so, we had the Industrial Scientific Foundation, which was part of Industrial Scientific before we sold it, when it spun out.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

After the acquisition, became the McLatin Foundation. And, we, the shareholders of Industrial Week, contributed a third of the proceeds of the sale of the company into the foundation.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And with the intent, one of the program area, our main program area in the McAwin Foundation is eliminating death on the job.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

And so, we're partnered with,

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Number of individual, you know, thought leaders in the industry, but also things like the National Safety Council, so we are a key partner for the Work to Zero movement, setting the expectation that everybody has the fundamental right to come home alive at the end of the day, and so...

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Looking at areas that we can eliminate hazardous tasks, raise awareness around this. You know, people don't realize there's 5,000 or 6,000 people killed every year on the job. And it's 2025, and it's just such a shame, right?

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Crazy.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

We've talked about this for years and years, and the numbers don't change. It's indexed to economic growth.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Is what, is what it tends to do. And so, we're looking to create inflection points in that.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

We spent years doing that as a for-profit organization, and now, with the McWhatten Foundation, as a non-profit, we're able to do things that, that, really for-profit businesses can't. So it's been, we continue that work. The commitment to eliminating death on the job.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

By 2050, and preserving human life, that, that continues. That didn't end.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

With the sale of Industrial Scientific, or me leaving, or my dad, or anything, it's, he's continuing to work on that. I'm involved as well, and we continue to work on that.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Well, again, there are no words, but, this is what mission-centered leadership looks like, generation to generation, no matter what you're doing, and, I think, I think listeners understand why I've been so, thought it was so important for others to hear your story and hear your framework and learn from you. So we're, I'm very grateful that you joined us today, Justin. Thank you.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

I appreciate the time, Ken. Thanks for all you do.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Yeah, absolutely, and for listeners that like this episode, and I'm sure a lot of people will do more than that, you know, please subscribe if you haven't already.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

If you need more information about Leading with Safety, you can always check out the Value Capture website. And Justin, is there a way people can find out more about, sort of, the investment portfolio companies that you're.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Sure.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Website is...

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

If you guys.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Road.com. [www.nicely](http://www.nicely.com), N-I-C-E-L-Y dot com. Nicely ad.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

NicelyRoad.com. NicelyRoad.com, great. So they can, tap into this, very, practical, unwinding, exciting, inspirational.

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**Ken Segel - Value Capture (he/him/his):**

Leadership story that continues to unwind. So, you've given us a lot of energy today, Justin. You've accomplished a lot over the years, and more to come, and done it with all the values fully in place, so we're very grateful for you. Thank you.

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**Justin McElhattan:**

Thanks, Ken.