



Sound Bites Podcast Transcript

Episode: Brandon Sawalich 30-year Anniversary

Dave Fabry

Welcome to Starkey Soundbites. I'm your host, Dave Fabry. Starkey's, Chief Hearing Health Officer. Now today, we're really excited to bring back a five-time guest on the podcast.

Brandon Sawalich

Five times. Like Saturday Night Live

Dave Fabry

Your first five timers, so we need to work on the jacket or however we're going to commemorate that. But Starkey president and CEO Brandon Sawalich this month celebrates 30 years with Starkey and in the hearing aid industry. So I know you started when you were 12, we always have to say that.

Brandon Sawalich

And when did you start? How old were you?

Dave Fabry

In the industry? 17 years ago. But I don't wear it quite as well as you do. 42 years in the business now, but this month we thought we'd have a little bit of fun by doing our own take on the ESPN series 30 for 30. We're going to do one question for each of your 30 years with Starkey, and we're going to try to do it 30 for 30 in 30. So this is going to be a lightning round of questions and really commemorating that significant milestone in terms of you were named the president of Starkey in 2017 and CEO in 2020, and you've really shepherded us, led us through an era of great transformation in the organization. You were the first in the industry to embed sensors and use artificial intelligence, which has now become ubiquitous, but also meaningless. But we were way out in front of this under your leadership, and we'll come back to that a little bit later in some of the questions. But June 20th is your 30th anniversary with Starkey. Congratulations on that, Brandon, and welcome back to Sound Bites.

Brandon Sawalich

Thank you and I appreciate being here. And you're right, it's kind of like the fifth time. Time flies when you're having fun. And this is my favorite topic, talking about myself. It's what most people would think, but it's my least favorite topic.

Dave Fabry:

I know that.

Brandon Sawalich:

But sure. Let's have some fun here and see what you can find out. Be spontaneous.

Dave Fabry

Alright, we'll start out with some softballs because we want to try to get that pace to see how closely we can come to the 30 for 30 in 30, and we'll start out: Cats versus dogs.

Brandon Sawalich



Dogs

Dave Fabry

Figured as much. And favorite dog?

Brandon Sawalich

Bulldog, English bulldog.

Dave Fabry

Okay, so May was Better Hearing Month. We talk about hear better, live better, and that's really the focus of Starkey and under your leadership, we really live and breathe that every day with May being Better Hearing Month, one of the things when we talk about hearing better and living better is music. What's your favorite song?

Brandon Sawalich

Oh, what A Wonderful World by Louis Armstrong.

Dave Fabry

Wow. That surprised me. I was expecting Summer of 69 or...

Brandon Sawalich

I like Brian Adams. I could do, yeah. Blues Brothers Soul Man, go down the list. But that song always, yeah, resonates. Calms. I'm an old Soul Dave, so I

Dave Fabry

Did not have that on my Bingo card, so that was good. You are known for your commitment to innovation. Talked about AI and how did you come up with initiative and the goal, the objective to be our industry's first company to embed AI into hearing aids?

Brandon Sawalich

Well, it wasn't myself as you know, I don't use the word I because that takes a team and a lot of what you said, and where Starkey's at, it's because of a team. And it really evolved. But in a short and fast paced way, Bill had a vision for where the hearing aid was going. We've talked to that about it for 20 years. And then we had an opportunity of bringing new talent outside the industry, Achin Bhowmik and as our new CTO from Intel, who was their expert in AI. And then start talking about the possibilities. And then you find out around the campus of Starkey and R&D, what it can do for the patient, for technology. And you have to start somewhere. And if you're going to fail in some areas, you fail, fail fast, you do it in some features you're doing in some ideas, whatever it might be. But when it comes with AI, I knew it was time for Starkey. I've been in it long enough, the industry even in 2017, that let's take a swing at the fence, let's be different. No more incremental improvements and changes. Let's be bold.

Dave Fabry

Yeah, I love it. And we're not doing AI just for technology's sake, but to benefit the patient.

Brandon Sawalich

Patient, yes. Has to benefit the patient.



Dave Fabry

It's been central. So you're also a huge baseball fan?

Brandon Sawalich

Yes. Yeah.

Dave Fabry

Favorite Cubs player of all time?

Brandon Sawalich

Oh, Ryne Sandberg, number 23.

Dave Fabry

Why?

Brandon Sawalich

I grew up in southern Illinois, so my grandpa was a Cubs fan, so in southern Illinois you're either a Cardinal fan or Cub fan, and 85/90% are Cardinal fans. So I guess I was going against the grain a little bit, even back then, and I think it was a 1984 Cubs team, so I would've been eight, nine years old. And Ryne Sandberg was MVP and went from there, followed him his whole career.

Dave Fabry

And you met him?

Brandon Sawalich

A couple times? Yes. Yeah, I have.

Dave Fabry

What is your favorite job that you've had at Starkey, aside from the two you have now as president and CEO?

Brandon Sawalich

When I started, I did a lot of different jobs. I used to joke that Chief Executive Gopher. I had a lot of, it was a variety, but that also was the foundation of learning the business or Starkey or business. And then meeting people that I still have strong relationships, say they are customers. So there's that. I did the reception, answering the phones, which I think is one of the hardest jobs at Starkey. We have eight operators. They answer with a live voice. You don't understand until you do it. Trying to get that person to the right person that they want within the company while more calls are coming in. But always, so I kind of go two phases of my career and then later, sales and marketing back to the market and the patient and the customers. And marketing is fun. You get to create all the different personalities and bring out the personalities and give the new products and the technologies, talk about market, what they're doing and give them, like I said, their own character.

Dave Fabry

So summarizing: all of them.



Brandon Sawalich

Yeah, that's a hard one, but I would, it's the customer side. The events probably.

Dave Fabry

We'll put a pin in that for a little bit, but you've had the opportunity, as you mentioned, to meet a lot of people in your career. What's one person that you haven't met that you would go back in time to meet if you had the opportunity to time travel.

Brandon Sawalich

Oh, Billy Graham.

Dave Fabry

So you never met Billy Graham?

Brandon Sawalich

I didn't. That's the one I had an opportunity to go with Bill, and I can't recall why I didn't. And it was one of those, oh, well, I get to meet him again. And I think there's people throughout history that are known around the world and that influence, and you say their name and you think about who all they have met. And I think, I don't know who would be left. I think the passing of Queen Elizabeth as one of those figures of history that you think of all that, all the people she met in her lifetime. How many US presidents just start there. And Billy Graham was another one. I think one of my favorite was that I did meet was Walter Cronkite and I got to spend, I think it was '96, '97, picked him up at the airport. He came up, we took care of his hearing until he passed and I got to spend the day with him. I got to pick his brain all day. He was the nicest man. Just very nice. And we just talked all day. I'm a history buff as you know, so I got to learn some things.

Dave Fabry

So let's play Brandon and Dave's excellent adventure and say independent of if we fit them. Is there an individual in history that you would love to meet? If we could time travel.

Brandon Sawalich

Yeah, Lincoln. I would say Lincoln because of the adversity and just, I mean, I could go down the list. I've read enough books and biographies studied. Yeah.

Dave Fabry

The southern Illinois connection. I also know you're a space nut. Yes. Who is your favorite astronaut?

Brandon Sawalich

I didn't see that one coming. I would say Alan Shepherd. Because he was the first to get on top of a rocket that was built by the least expensive parts that anybody could, that the contract called for. And it had never been done before. So think about it, I mean, to what's been done yesterday.

Dave Fabry

Yeah, that quote has been widely attributed to a number of different...



Brandon Sawalich

Yeah, it was, yes, it was Shepherd and Glenn, but no, I've studied, yeah, Mercury program, Apollo, Gemini, all of it. It just fascinates me.

Dave Fabry

Recently we had the opportunity to watch one of the SpaceX.

Brandon Sawalich

We've had a lot of the Mercury seven astronauts up here earlier in my career, and I got to become good friends with Scott Carpenter. So I went to NASA, Kennedy Space Center with Carpenter once and got toured around and being able to ask him what it was like and going through all of that again, just I learned from by people that have been there, done that in various points of history in their careers.

Dave Fabry

And you've said from time to time that when you were little you wanted to be an astronaut growing up,

Brandon Sawalich

Yes. I would be an astronaut, but I gave up on that I think somewhere in high school because of you had to be really good in math I was told. I didn't apply myself as I should have.

Dave Fabry

You're better than you give yourself credit for it. I've seen you with numbers. What is, in your opinion, the most underrated hearing aid feature?

Brandon Sawalich

Oh, I would say, well, waterproof just popped into my... the coating. And I think what goes into what we're doing with our HydroShield and what I see and know the process and the automation that hearing aids, to avoid the daily things that we take for granted. And so candidly, that's the first thing that popped to my head because the second thing I could go into would be Edge Mode

Dave Fabry

And I think it...

Brandon Sawalich

But it gets a lot of play. So it's not underrated.

Dave Fabry

It's not underrated anymore. It's our third most used feature after volume control.

Brandon Sawalich

Edge mode Plus is, I use it pretty much every time.

Dave Fabry

But I agree, the waterproof element, the ear is a hostile work environment. And so it's underrated.

Brandon Sawalich



It's underrated. And if you don't have it. I also know what happens on the other end. So that's where, take it for granted, but never take it for granted.

Dave Fabry

Can you describe or remember the first time you saw a hearing smile from a patient fitted for the first time or in a long time with hearing aids?

Brandon Sawalich

When I first started at Starkey, I think this is 97, and I went on the very first, I would say what we now call the missions that the Austins and the Foundation now does. I went on the first one in 1997 to El Salvador, so that would be my third year at Starkey and had no idea what to expect. And my assignment was just bringing in the people, standing with Bill, helping him out, doing whatever was needed. And that was the first one when I saw this kid. I have a picture and I don't know her name, but where again, you've seen it more than I have, probably, out on missions and couldn't hear her mother. And then boom, that was it. 1997. Yeah, it was three days and we were down there or Bill and the team was just down there to help. There was a request and then from that, people that were with us from Starkey, it was only a handful. And then somebody went back, created a video that night, and it was just Niagara Falls with everybody. And I think from that moment on, it's just kind of, that was the genesis of what came to become, I'll say the staple at the Starkey Hearing Foundation and then the galas and such.

Dave Fabry

And three years in. So three years into...

Brandon Sawalich

Three years, yes.

Dave Fabry

I'm paraphrasing the quote where the most important day is when you're born. Second most important day is when you figure out why you're born. That probably was the hook, right? Who is the person you most admire or is your role model and why?

Brandon Sawalich

Boy, you're going to put me on the spot. There's going to be a lot of people, several people named.

Dave Fabry

Say, wait a minute, what about me?

Brandon Sawalich

Yeah, no, my mother. I mean without a doubt. I mean I look back now and seeing what she did with her career, but also making it seamless to being a stay-at-home mother. But she wasn't a stay at home mother. She was out working and in the industry. Locally she had her own hearing dispensing practice then, but she made it seem like she didn't, she was always there for sports or whatever it might be. But then also going through when I started Starkey and then the last 30 years, seeing what she has done then and through in this industry. Yeah, I mean it's no doubt. I mean it sounds might sound, oh, mama's boy. Well, I guess so. I'll take it.



Dave Fabry
I don't know. Up to that one. Tani is...

Brandon Sawalich
Admiring. Admiring,

Dave Fabry
She'd be that person for a lot of people.

Brandon Sawalich
I am blessed because I have her and then Bill who's been the mentor for me, and you know the things that he would talk to me about in the nineties and the aughts and all these classes and travel and things you can't get out of a textbook. And you saw, he is like, yeah, I've heard that story before. Here we go again. Walk to school. Uphill both ways. But he's right. I mean, I appreciate it more and more. I'll still take the time to go up and talk to him at night and just pick his brain.

Dave Fabry
Like you said, you've been fortunate to have a number of great mentors.

Brandon Sawalich
Yes, I have.

Dave Fabry
What's your favorite food? This one's an easy...

Brandon Sawalich
Pizza. I think most of the people probably that know me know that one.

Dave Fabry
Yeah. What is the best advice you've received during your 30 years here at Starkey?

Brandon Sawalich
Take the initiative. This is still true today: don't wait around for somebody to tell you what to do or it's okay to be proactive. Take initiative. There was really, nobody said, well, that's not my job description. I don't do that. If something needed to be done, didn't matter if it was helping with the classes, dishes, trash, customer service, receptionist, you did it. I mean, that's the best, because that's how you learn too. If people want to be helped, they're not going to tell you no. It's just your attitude and how you're going to approach it

Dave Fabry
Right around here. I mean to people just starting, we always say don't point. If someone asks a question, don't point. Lead them to there.

Brandon Sawalich
It goes along with our say mission statement. Just help service and help people.



Dave Fabry

So now that you are 30 years in, you're president and CEO of the organization, what advice do you have for other leaders or emerging leaders?

Brandon Sawalich

It's about the people don't get caught up in the title. I mean, you have a responsibility that comes with your job and your role, but you're only going to be as good as the people you put around you and have on the team because at the end of the day, you win or lose as a team, not as an individual. Being a leader, that's the responsibility and the responsibility that comes with that is, and it's hard at times. I will be a candid, it gets hard where you, I'm a fixer, so you want to do everything or kind of go around and help people out or move things along or try and take care of it if you can. But you also have to have a team that you help develop, grow, trust. And I'm fortunate to have that team that has matured in their job every year just like I have. And they know what to do, they know who Starkey is and they work together as that team. So hire a caring people with the great attitudes and then develop the talent. That's the advice.

Dave Fabry

Yep. I've heard you speak to that authentically over the years. What is one word you would want all Starkey employees to use when describing where it is that they work?

Brandon Sawalich

Purpose. Because we're a company with purpose because we help people. I mean, we change people's lives through connecting them back to their family, their job, whatever it might be. Bringing the best out of them as we can through better hearing and our caring technology. So people stay at Starkey, people come to Starkey for that one word. That's what I would say.

Dave Fabry

Do you have a favorite quote?

Brandon Sawalich

The one that popped into my mind when you asked that honestly was Mike Tyson's quote.

Dave Fabry

Oh, yeah, no...

Brandon Sawalich

"Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the face." Lived there, done that. Churchill's quote "If you're going through, hell keep going." Is there going to be bad days? Right. And you just got to keep moving forward. But I've always used, and I have it on my desk at home, a Lincoln's quote, "Whatever you do, be a good one."

Dave Fabry

Yeah, I love that one. Alright. If you could help the average person, not someone working in the organization or one of the hearing care providers we work with, but the average person understand one thing about hearing aids, what would it be?



Brandon Sawalich

Oh, the stigmas is so far 30 years ago. I mean it is cool technology. What hearing does, and to sum it up, what I would say to them is the five senses, hearing is feeding and exercising the brain that's driving and doing everything that you need for the day. And we're developing and providing technology that nobody else is doing in our industry and we have to make complex, simple. Right? And I mean you look at AI and some of our features, what AI can do and help as through our processor and get people back in the game on what they're missing. I always think of the movie "Up" from Disney, whether it's movies or TV or articles, how they portray the technology that can help people now and what we're doing. No way does it do it justice and hearing aids are cool. That's what I say. I always try to think of what does that word date me? My son likes to say lit. It's lit, Dad, lit. That took me a while to figure that one out. But yeah, so it is, we're working on really cool stuff.

Dave Fabry

And we're seeing that the age of first time hearing aid users is coming down. So I think we're innovating in that area and helping driving that. You are fond of saying we really need to have fun at work too. And when we do launch events, I think we achieve that. There've been a lot of great launch events over the years. Is there a single one that is your favorite?

Brandon Sawalich

Oh, one A one B. Yeah. You have to enjoy where you're coming to work at. Are you going to enjoy it every day? No, I mean we're human, but I think part of Starkey's culture is that fun and getting back to let's celebrate as a team. The launch events are frankly designed, starting for the team to celebrate their success. And then it was like, oh, well let's put this out virtually or let's share it with the rest of the, I mean, so that kind of evolved. The first one was Livio. I mean the Livio launch. I think we did it out here in the parking lot. And it was hot. It was hot. Whoever decided to do that one in August, I tell you. But that was a fun one because that was a transition for Starkey. That was the start in that transition. The second one would be what we just did last year, of course. So I know you asked for only one, but I'd be remiss if I didn't say it. The Genesis launch, we arrived, we're at the level and we're now on our path for our vision and where we're going to be. And it started with Genesis, five years in the making and a new Starkey had just been introduced.

Dave Fabry

How'd you come up with the idea for the Hearing Innovation Expo? It's legend in the industry.

Brandon Sawalich

Yeah, but I don't know if I've ever really told anybody to be honest with you. I told people, which is true, when I was used to jog, we had just come back, I can't remember, I think it was five or six weeks from somewhere, various customer groups and I never want to do that again. It was just so long and it was so long on the staff and away from families and everything and every time we did a customer group or product training, I kept thinking, how we've got to do this different? It can't be just by group, by group by group. And because some groups they think, well, you like me better. It's kind of like your kids, right? No, there's a better way. We're stronger and better together. And I wanted to show also that size of the customer group together that we have more in common than differences and start breaking down those barriers in that mindset. So I think that was that 2012?

Dave Fabry



Yeah, 2012. 2012 was the first Expo, so it was probably 2010.

Brandon Sawalich

And the word expo, all of that Starkey and I've never told anybody this. Okay, I should say it maybe one or two people, but it was Iron Man 2 because I think in there there was a Stark Expo and I was thinking Expo, and that was kind of the name and where we got it and then kind of went from there. There were so many other events in the industry. Let's showcase what we're doing. Let's showcase the people, the talent and the rest is history as they say.

Dave Fabry

And I want to feed right into that one then. What's been your favorite interview at the Expo? You've had the opportunity to have some tremendous guests.

Brandon Sawalich

Oh, we could go down this road. President Bush, by far.

Dave Fabry

President Bush noted.

Brandon Sawalich

We share that in common.

Dave Fabry

Yeah, no, I know. We both got to do it and people see it on TV and you watch Barbara Walters or whomever interview someone live for an hour looks pretty easy, but I guarantee you they probably had four hours of video to condense it to one hour to do a live hour for an interview because I was fully sweated through my shirt, underneath my sportcoat.

Brandon Sawalich

I think he and I have done, we've had those discussions, those interviews four or five times at various events and we're now, we just get up there and talk. You always have a guide kind of like, okay, where do I want to take a conversation and get out of it? But he's one of the individuals, former President sitting or sitting up. There's incredible, you're thinking and you're sitting here talking and then there's always stuff going on in the back of your mind. But he just naturally puts everybody at ease and you just have a conversation.

Dave Fabry

Yeah, it's like interviewing a river. It just flows.

Brandon Sawalich

And we all know there's been tough ones too, but it, it's been a remarkable experience.

Dave Fabry

If you weren't working in the hearing industry, what would you be doing?

Brandon Sawalich



Well I think that, as you said, the astronaut thing's probably out. I don't why this pops in my head. I think it's more of a hobby than what I would do, but weather fascinates me.

Brandon Sawalich

Friends. And I think my arm is kind of blown. So I think pitching's out anymore.

Dave Fabry

Pitching's out by this point. Yeah. What keeps you awake at night?

Brandon Sawalich

Oh, you know the answer. I don't want to say it. Complacency. I am wired and hardwired to always keep moving forward, keep what can we do better? What can we do better? And I think that's, for me, and as a leader, that's a motivator. But I've also had to learn how to adjust my throttle on that one because you want to go hard and fast and go at it, but then you also have to know that you could only push the organization so much. And there's been times someone will tell you that I might've pushed too hard, but we're still here. But it's complacency, it's the Blockbuster syndrome, lead, adapt, or die. And you cannot just think you've arrived and get comfortable. You have to be comfortable being uncomfortable.

Dave Fabry

You mentioned throttle, your son William is a budding NASCAR rockstar, but I also know you like to drive. On a scale of one to 10, how good of a driver are you?

Brandon Sawalich

I'll give myself an eight.

Dave Fabry

An excellent driver.

Brandon Sawalich

I'm an excellent driver. I'm an excellent.

Dave Fabry

Excellent driver.

Brandon Sawalich

Okay. No. Yeah, he has a talent that I won't claim it, it's his own talent, but for me, I've never went as fast as he does. But sure, I'll give myself an eight.

Dave Fabry

Okay. And I've ridden with you a couple times with we, we've filmed a couple times when you went into launch mode on one of your cars. Let me get to that. Then you like to drive and you're a car guy and not always fancy cars, but...

Brandon Sawalich

No, I got out of that.



Dave Fabry

What's your favorite car of all time that you've had?

Brandon Sawalich

1979 Black Ford Bronco, pure steel when cars were made of that and I know that, but it was just a fun car and I actually had that sophomore year, junior year in high school.

Dave Fabry

Love to have that now.

Brandon Sawalich

Well I'm always looking, well back then, I guess it might have been a little problem with the gas line and it literally blew up, but obviously I got out in time. But I had a big pool of Corvettes or Corvette and driven a Corvette. Now it's just how do I get to work? I don't even think about it to be honest with you, but my favorite car yeah, would be the Bronco.

Dave Fabry

Yeah. I had love to have one of those. Can you isolate and think about what has been the most impactful moment of your career? Is that even possible?

Brandon Sawalich

A lot of things come up. I would say the most impactful as people would think, you can go two ways on this. Impactful being something that obviously was known a big win or whatever. For me, impactful could also be the most, it was a motivating, the hardest and reality is probably April 4th, 2020 when the industry was shutting down, offices were shutting down and people looking at me, do this, do this, what do we need to do? And coming up with a plan to unfortunately cashflow and preserve what we could with the pandemic. But the day that, again, we had to furlough a lot of people and I think that was probably the most impactful day of my 30 years because we have fun like you said, and we've done a lot of great things over the years, but that was the most impactful because then everything got real as it did in the world, real fast. And then you just buckled down and it was like figure it out.

Dave Fabry

Well that reminds me of the Tyson quote. When we got punched... the world got punched in the mouth. We had just launched Edge Mode.

Brandon Sawalich

We just came off the Expo.

Dave Fabry

We had all the training plans and everything and it all had to go virtual. And initially people just had to worry about, we had to worry about how people could keep their doors open and...

Brandon Sawalich

And you made your plan each day, you couldn't plan out. So that's when you asked that. That's what came to my mind because that redefined the world as we know. But for me, pushed me way outside my not comfort zone...well, nobody had experience in this. And the people seeing people that were leaving



and they were thanking me and that was the hardest part. I mean that was because they knew what we've had to do and why everybody was sacrificing then.

Dave Fabry

Yeah, I can't imagine how difficult that was because it is a culture here. Take care of the company, company takes care of you and those had to have been just incredibly difficult decisions. What is the first thing you do when you come into the office in the morning?

Brandon Sawalich

Apologize and say, sorry I'm late.

Dave Fabry

Yeah, I would say that you're not necessarily the first in the office, but you're the last one to leave.

Brandon Sawalich

No. Yes. My routine changes depending on the week or if there's traveler or jet lag, whatever. But I try and do emails in the morning at home because emails just turn into full-time job and then you get, yes, I talk to people who start getting, get calls, customer calls and some things. And then, yeah, I'm aware of the time, but I always know that I'm kind of run a little bit behind.

Dave Fabry

Well and you've got to give the attention to the person that you're on the phone with or in the meeting with...

Brandon Sawalich

Or texts. I mean you get bombarded from all different. Everybody does nowadays.

Dave Fabry

Everyone wants a piece. Yes. What excites you the most about the future of the hearing industry?

Brandon Sawalich

Technology, because I think, I know we will expand where we're going with and who we're reaching and helping. I mean what the technology is going to be able to do and that we're not catching up. And I firmly believe this because I'm pretty real about where we're at. We're leading in the areas that this industry needs to go, not only for the professional and the tools and that role, how it evolves, but it's always about the patient and we have a great team and being privately held, we are making decisions for the patient and at the end of the day, the patient will decide. And we have yourself and so many others here that know the patient and know this industry. I am grateful that I get to come here every day and I do think back and, who would've thought? Because not me. This wasn't the role like many of us we're at now. I never thought this is where destiny would take you

Dave Fabry

Literally and figuratively. So 30 years in, what advice would you give to someone just starting out in the hearing aid industry? There's always fear around the corner, whether it's some disruptor, but what advice would you give to someone just starting out?



Brandon Sawalich

It's a people business. If you start looking at P&Ls and all that stuff right out and you're not setting yourself up for success, you can't save your way to success and you have to care and you have to work with people.

Dave Fabry

Make sure you have passion for it and then everything else does have a way of working.

Brandon Sawalich

It starts with caring. You have to have caring and passion and then with that service mindset, if you have that, you'll be successful.

Dave Fabry

Personally, I know you're kind of a bucket list person, but what's at the top now? You've knocked off some bucket list items, but what's at the top of your bucket list now?

Brandon Sawalich

My bucket list seems to always be spontaneous.

Dave Fabry

Kilimanjaro wasn't spontaneous. I was there when you were working out.

Brandon Sawalich

Yeah, but it was spontaneous when I told Heinz and committed said, asked, sure, I'll do it. Thinking it was a day. I didn't know it was eight days and 19,341 feet. That's spontaneous. You and I talked about this, Antarctica, I think I want to touch the South Pole.

Dave Fabry

Me too.

Brandon Sawalich

Why? It's there. And then you can say you've been on all seven continents.

Dave Fabry

For me it's seven continents before incontinence. What is one thing that you have not accomplished yet, but you want to personally or professionally?

Brandon Sawalich

The first wisecrack was, I was going to say get in shape, but continue to train and develop yourself to enjoy life for, I know that's not the answer you're looking for. But what's great is that being a part of the team and you build a team on your professional side and you have a great supporting team on your personal side is you're not feeling the stress or anxiety or that you got to be doing this, this or this. Where normally if I go on a vacation, it takes three to four days for me to really start, just cut it off where you feel like you're on vacation. So I guess you go all the mental personal wellbeing and I guess it is exercise and just feeling good about where everything is. Turning my switch off. I don't have an off button right now.



Dave Fabry

I know that that is a struggle for you.

Brandon Sawalich

So I don't know if I answered your question, but several ways.

Dave Fabry

Here's a hard one. What would you like your legacy to be?

Brandon Sawalich

Oh, that's my kids, family. Because I think that's anybody's. Starkey should go on without me. I'm not the end all be all. None of us are. And I think anybody's legacy is, personal opinion, that your greatest legacy is going to be what you leave with your kids and how they're going to contribute. And family overall, not just some people have kids, some people don't, great, personal choice, but it's what are you going to do with helping others and paying that forward?

Dave Fabry

Love it.

Brandon Sawalich

I don't think it's business. It is all about paying it forward and just helping others. It goes back to the word purpose.

Dave Fabry

I love it. Alright. How about from the standpoint of if one thing, if you're willing to share one thing about you that most people wouldn't know?

Brandon Sawalich

Other habits, good habits, bad habits that I havem just like everybody else. I have a few vices. I haven't drank in nine years. I'm starting, because of my son, getting more of a NASCAR fan than probably even baseball. Baseball has changed so much, but I still love baseball. But we love the nostalgia, right? Yeah. I used to think I could ride horses like John Wayne, but my daughter proved me wrong on that. So I mean you think back and there's a lot here to me that I think is pretty boring, but I also naturally always deflect. And I don't mean that in a negative term, but just people ask about what you did, just I always kind of make it about them too.

Dave Fabry

I appreciate that honesty.

Brandon Sawalich

I've always been like that. It's just because I always make it about the team.

Dave Fabry

Last question. Went to your mom for this.



Brandon Sawalich

No.

Dave Fabry

What would your mother say, your best attribute?

Brandon Sawalich

What would my mother say my best attribute? Kindness. I think that's what she would say. I know because I could think first thing that popped to my head was, oh, those dimples. No, I get them after her. My heart is what she would say. I think in this role as a CEO or whatever, there's an image or thing you start thinking you got to portray or even if you're vice president, you're manager, you're a director, you've got to portray this and everybody reads the Jack Welch books and all that. Then there's two different people. I think what I've learned is that this goes back to what she said too, and Bill: lead with your heart. I think if you're genuine, I think the insecurity drives that facade, the robot mode. But once you get comfortable speaking about what you're doing, where you're going, the company, you got the people. And it's a maturity thing too. But for me, I like helping others. I mean you've done the same as somebody needs help with a hearing aid. I don't look at how much it costs. Like okay, I know we can afford it to help somebody out if it's going to help them X, Y, Z. We do it around Christmas. Or I just do random things because I think people ask me what my hobby is. And to me that gives me energy just helping others and I don't ask anything in return.

Dave Fabry

Want to know what she really said?

Brandon Sawalich

Probably a lot shorter than that.

Dave Fabry

Heart came up for sure, of course. Because you're always looking on social media to find stories of people who are in need and your heart, certainly you lead with that. But we talked quite a lot about this. We talked about your independence and your drive. She said that she had you in a walker, one of those rolling walkers at six months that you were walking independently at nine months. Then the part I liked was, here it comes. First day of kindergarten, she took you in and you wanted to be dropped off at kindergarten, first day, two blocks from school because you wanted to go in on your own, your independence. And she said she had to form a compromise with you on the spot that she could drop you off in front of the school. But you went in by yourself and she said that independence was evident in you when you were nine months old, certainly carried through in five. And then to see that blossom into where you are now. She knew that you were going to be destined to run a business, own a business, lead an organization because of that independence. But then she did also mention...

Brandon Sawalich

Well, I wouldn't see, I wouldn't have said it. Yes, she's right, but again, not talking about myself. It is like that's a character of mine that has always been there, but I wouldn't proactively. But yeah, I can see her saying that.

Dave Fabry



You're shifting a little bit. You don't want to hear about that.

Brandon Sawalich

No. Well, I could hear her telling that story, but it's points all through my life just like others have. I've always wanted, not to be in charge, but the responsibility, which goes with the independence.

Dave Fabry

And the other part that comes back to this heart is lots of people have had opportunities through circumstance or otherwise, but the opportunity is not a promise or a guarantee of success. And she said the other part, your heart, but also your drive and the energy that you're willing to put in to ensure that you don't waste an opportunity. It's beyond intuition. It's sort of recognizing that you have an opportunity, but you want to not waste that opportunity because you realize you have to put the hard work in.

Brandon Sawalich

No, I'm driven. And yes, that comes, but it comes with the passion you have for what you're doing. For sure. But you keep moving forward. I'm not a quitter by any means, and I've had a lot of good people around me and I've had a lot of great people I could name endlessly for another 45, 30, 45 minutes or an hour. That's helped me through my career. But I've had a great upbringing. I've been fortunate. We've all had ups and downs, but we're all at a good place and we're going to keep doing great things.

Dave Fabry

I hope so. I plan to be here for as long as you'll have me. So we've gotten through 30 for 30 and then a couple follow on questions with those. So I appreciate your willingness to sit through and let me throw some curve balls at you to continue with the baseball metaphor. And congratulations on your anniversary on June 20th of 30 years and stewarding the company and your role now as president and CEO.

Brandon Sawalich

It's my 30th skip year, I started, came up here, did a summer job, was going to go to my second year of college, said, oh, just skip year. I had another two more... I love Starkey so much. And 30 years later the skip year continues and I'm very fortunate to work with you and many other great people with Starkey.

Dave Fabry

Well, and thank you for your leadership. And it's cliché where people say, well, if you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life. You'll work your ass off a lot.

Brandon Sawalich

Yeah, you work.

Dave Fabry

But your passion for what you do comes through and everyone in the organization can see that. We tried to do this in 30 minutes. We didn't hit that. But like some years the 30 questions, some were a little longer, some were a little shorter and some flew by a little faster. But I thank you for going through them all with me.



Brandon Sawalich

No, my pleasure.

Dave Fabry

And for our listeners, thank you for your attention on this special episode celebrating 30 years with Brandon. And if you have other ideas of topics that we should consider in the future or bring Brandon back for a sixth time, I think that's a pretty sure bet. Send us an email at soundbites@starkey.com. Until then, thank you for listening. Thank you for watching if you're on the YouTube platform and we'll look forward to seeing and hearing you again really soon. Thanks Brandon.

Brandon Sawalich

Thanks Dave.