This Financial Plan Led to a $170 Million Exit

Steve Sanduski: Hi, everybody. Welcome back to On Your Mark, Get Set, Grow! This is the podcast of CEO Coaching International where we talk to the world's leading entrepreneurs, CEOs, and coaches who are looking to make big happen. I'm your host, Steve Sanduski.

Our guest today is Don Schiavone. Don is a coach here at CEO Coaching International, and he's an expert is SaaS business models, and he brings to this conversation a really deep expertise in technology with a test-everything philosophy. Now, previously, Don was the COO of the high-growth company Grasshopper, which was sold for more than $170 million.

In today's show, we talk about a subset of the annual planning process. Specifically, we talk about this idea of creating a baseline forecast and then coming up with a few experiments each quarter and firing them as bullets to see what works. Now, what's fascinating about how Don described this is the leverage and the compounding effect that you get when you do this on a quarter-by-quarter basis. When you follow the process that Don describes, you could end up with significantly faster growth than you ever thought possible doing a more traditional top-down planning process. Be sure to listen to the end too as Don shares a great story about how to treat your best employees so they feel appreciated.

Don, welcome to the show.

Don Schiavone: Hey. Thank you, Steve. Glad to be here.

Steve Sanduski: Well, it's great to have you back. What we are going to talk about today I think is a really timely topic because it's that time of year when entrepreneurs and CEOs and executives should be thinking about their business plan, their execution plan for the upcoming year, and so why don't you set the frame for us here in what we're going to talk about? I think we're going to be talking about, actually, a subset of the annual planning process.

Don Schiavone: Yeah, that's right, Steve. I think one of the biggest challenges executives face when they come into a new year is, "What should I set as the goals for my team to achieve over the coming year?" It takes a lot of thought, but there's a simple process. A lot of times, I see clients and business leaders that strive to put a lot of hope and expectations into the next year, but there's not a lot of basis or fact to get the team excited.

In fact, if you put too much hope and exaggeration into a budget without backing it up, it actually demotivates your team, so what we like to do is a process called baselining. That starts with truly understanding the previous year, retrospectively looking back month by month at our P&L and what drove that P&L, and then what is consistent and repeatable versus the experiments or things that we tried that we failed or that didn't actually work out?

By the end of the year, hopefully, you have a good run rate that understands our sales metrics, our marketing metrics, our operations, our customer service. All of those KPIs that we're tracking, what's just steady state? If the team showed up January 1st, got out of bed and didn't do anything different, didn't have any new goals or plans, what would we achieve throughout 2019? That's what we call baseline, and it's very important to understand where you're starting from based on all the achievements and successes you had in the previous year and then build upon that with credible goals that'll motivate the team. We'll talk further about the process of how do we come up with those goals?

Steve Sanduski: This baselining process, so we come up with what that baseline number is for the upcoming year. Obviously, that's not something that's going to get anybody excited, is it?

Don Schiavone: Yeah, in most cases, unless your team is in a high-growth mode and just a natural steady state 10, 20, 30, 40% growth, which is rare but can happen, then your baseline probably isn't going to get the team very excited. The point is the baseline is not the goal. That's the starting point. That's where we play a game we can win with the team by measuring where we start and going from X to Y. X is baseline. The Y is how we create credible quarterly goals to move the specific and measurable leading indicators of our baseline plan forward.

Steve Sanduski: What's wrong with a company that says, "Gosh, we've been growing 20% per year, on average, for the past five years, so we're just going to target 22% growth in the upcoming year"? What's wrong with people doing that? That's probably a pretty common strategy for folks.

Don Schiavone: It absolutely is. I typically look at that and say, "Well, that's hope, and hope isn't a strategy." You can hope you can hit that, but you go back to Innovator's

Dilemma, a classic book, right? The larger you are, the harder it is to hit that same growth rate. $1 million in overall revenue, 20% growth, 200,000. $10 million, much bigger number. $100 million or a billion-dollar company, even more challenging to hit. Eventually, you're going to run out of momentum. Marketing, sales, techniques that are working today will start to saturate.

We saw that at Grasshopper. I led that company, and we had outstanding growth rate month over month, year over year, but eventually, we saw the writing on the wall, and it was going to start to slow down. We knew that because we had a baselining process that understood the core drivers and when certain drivers were starting to saturate, and we had to do other techniques to help keep that momentum going.

Steve Sanduski: Okay, so let's assume now that we've done this baselining process. We've analyzed our revenue month by month for the previous year, so we know, hey, if we just show up, if we just do our normal job, this is what the upcoming year's going to look like. We got the baseline. Now what's the next step in the process?

Don Schiavone: The next step in the process is to resist the temptation to throw all of these items into the forecast to make up a number for the end of the year. I urge my clients to start with the first quarter. We'll go back to Jim Collins, Good to Great and Great by Choice. It starts with that 13-week march of your upcoming quarter where you fire bullets. These are tests against the leading indicators that will move that baseline forward.

For example, let's say we have a opportunity to increase sales. Well, how? Is it new customers or is it existing customers? If we pick it's new customers, what part of driving new customer growth can it be? Is it the top of the funnel where now that's more marketing-centric tests and bullets? Is it conversion rate where we now have to do training, role-playing, or other skills upgrades for our sales team? Is it not enough people? Maybe, to grow, we need more bodies.

That's another important part of the baselining process. When we think about human capital, often, we'll add to the forecast for next year a hiring plan. The problem with putting the hiring plan in baseline is that, often, it's not just up to us about finding great talent, the when, and do they work out, and can we get them up to speed, so I often urge people to say, "One of your tests is to, in that quarterly march, put that hiring plan into action and make that a goal so that we have focus on it. It's not already in baseline so that, if it gets delayed, then we don't have a miss, and if it comes in early, then we have an unexpected surprise in baseline." There are all kinds of tests depending on the focus you give your team to achieve one or two things, not everything and the kitchen sink that you can think of and throw that into an annual plan.

Steve Sanduski: All right, so I got a question here. We've got the baseline, and let's say the baseline says we're going to grow 10% in the upcoming year if we just keep business as usual. Now, when we go through this planning process like you just described here in the first quarter, we've got this 13-week march, and we're going to be testing different things, do we have a plan? On January 1st, do we have a plan that says, "Okay, the baseline is 10% but we're going to put a stretch goal, and we're going to make it 20%, and now we're going to do these quarterly marches with these test bullets and, over the course of the year, we're going to see if these test bullets are going to lead to that incremental 10 percentage points growth?"

I'm wondering what is the timing of when we get to what the ultimate target is for the year? Does that happen at the beginning of the year or does it just occur over the course of the year based on all these bullets you're firing?

Don Schiavone: A great question. I think you kind of got at the approach in your summary. It definitely starts up front with the quarter. My caution is to don't try and predict the entire year because you don't know what bullets are going to work or which aren't. If you start with a healthy planning process that thinks about all the initiatives you could get done throughout the year, you'll have backlog of ideas. These initiatives will go at one or more leading indicators for your baseline plan.

In the beginning of the quarter, you then drill down on the initiatives. Which ones can you do in a year? There might be seasonality, there might be hiring, all kinds of reasons why timing is important and we can't do all of the initiatives we thought of. We pick the key ones that we think will move the needle and then we set up what is the realistic expectation in an above-baseline goal to set for that quarter?

Take, for example, sales. If one of your plans is to hire a new type of role that we've never hired before, so we have to define the role, find a person, and get them on board, you have to be realistic about what real impact that would happen in Q1 if you end up not even hiring that person til two weeks left in the quarter versus saying that's just setting us up for Q2 or future growth. It's really important, like you had mentioned, well, do we just add another 10%? Well, not really. You've got to add something beyond baseline but, hopefully, you're relying on your team to have the experience in their departments to provide some level of predictability by which you're going to judge did the bullet work or not? If I have a target of three or four marketing things that I could do, well, what's the expected return on marketing goal A, B, and C?

What we used to do at Grasshopper ... My chief marketing officer was great at this. He would have three or four bullets that he'd want to fire, have a best-case and worst-case return on each of those marketing bullets, and then we would pick a goal assuming one or two of them worked. If you pick a goal that says all of them have to work and they all have to hit their top, best case, then you're going to set the team up for failure or they're not really bullets. You're just assuming they're working. A true bullet, you have to have a range and you have to have some expectation that some of them will not work, so the goal then becomes something higher than baseline but with some credibility that the team believes they can hit by pushing these initiatives forward.

Steve Sanduski: Let's assume it's January 1st and, again, we got the baseline and we've identified three or four bullets that we're going to try and fire here in the first quarter, and we've identified what we think the expected result is of a couple of them working, a couple of them not working, and so the expected result is it's going to be 13% growth over the quarter from a year earlier. Is that what you're saying is we ultimately ... on January 1st, we're going to make a growth projection for the first quarter, but we still haven't done an overall growth projection for the whole year because we're just doing it quarter by quarter? Did I understand that correctly?

Don Schiavone: Correct, yes.

Steve Sanduski: Okay.

Don Schiavone: The most disciplined teams have the guts to do a quarter-by-quarter march. While we may say, "Boy, based on previous years, year over year, we could have some personal goals that we'd like to see for the end of the year," trying to hold a team accountable without having any idea of how you're going to get there, what the difference between baseline is just makes us play a game we're not going to win. Again, it's back to hope. We could have those hopes. We might have all kinds of ways to try to motivate at the end of the year, but having that discipline to you a quarter-by-quarter march and realizing that that will open you up to get to a higher level goal than you might have predicted, you might be able to beat what you'd hoped because, each quarter, we're firing actual tests on the things that matter.

We're not doing activity for activity's sake. Those things that matter really move the needle so, at the end of Q1 ... I've seen this, we've done this for 21 quarters in a row at Grasshopper. At the end of Q1, we had a goal that was 5% above baseline, and we beat that goal by 1%, so we're 6% over baseline. We then, at the end of Q1, re-project the forecast going forward with those tests that worked. They're no longer tests. They're now part of our whirlwind. That means, for Qs 2, 3, and 4, we now have a 6% increase over each other, so there's a cumulative effect of that to the end of the year just starting off without any new experiments.

Then we rinse and repeat for Q2 and we come up with a couple of new experiments. One or two of those work. Now, at the end of Q2, we have the original 6% from Q1 plus another percent point which is cumulative on top of that. You can see quickly how, if you do that quarter over quarter, you'll get to 20, 30, 40% growth that you never would have able to be predicted at the beginning of the year. By putting some arbitrary number, it could be high or it could be low, we just don't know, so why do it?

Steve Sanduski: Well, how do you then balance having to think long term, to plan long term, because some of the investments that you're going to make are not investments that are going to pay off this quarter? How do you balance this idea that I need to have some kind of, I think, correct me if I'm wrong, some kind of long-term forecast so that I can do long-term planning along with these quarterly marches that you're talking about? Is there some kind of balance in there?

Don Schiavone: There absolutely is. There's levels of analysis and then knowing what do you use the analysis for? The analysis I just talked about is how we're motivating our executive-level team to move the needle forward and really go beyond what we could analyze at the beginning of the year. A lot of times, then, you're tying in compensation bonuses and real hard numbers to these plans, so they're executable, they're in the quarterly march. Now, of course, you might need a three-year plan if you're going to try and do an exit.

We, at Grasshopper, we had all kinds of scenarios, but those become scenarios, best-case scenario, worst-case scenario. We look back year over year at our growth. You had mentioned at the beginning, hey, a company that's growing at 25% year over year. Well, you might have a scenario that says we'll be able to maintain that 20% growth because we believe in our team and they'll find bullets that will maintain that, or we may have insight that says our market's falling apart and, in three years, we're worried that we're going to miss that.

Of course, we want you to do all those planning. You want to have all of those scenarios. I'm not saying don't have them. It's just a matter of do I commit to my team? Do I stand up at the beginning of the year and say, "This is our goal. We have confidence we can hit it because we know our business that well." For some, maybe you do, but the businesses I've been involved with, I can tell you, it's a struggle to understand what's truly moving the needle and what isn't. This process helps us focus a team to do activities that truly drive growth versus activities just get in the way and wasting time, and it provides that clarity.

Steve Sanduski: As we started out in the conversation here, you mentioned that this is a subset of the annual plan. We've done previous podcast episodes on the overall annual planning process. We also have some information on that in the book Make Big Happen written by Mark Moses, so those are a couple areas that folks can go back and look for the overall plan.

I think this is really interesting here what you're talking about, Don, because this is a different way of looking at the annual planning process, to really break it down to these quarterly 13-week marches, as you describe here, and really getting focused and then experimenting with firing these bullets, figuring out what works, what doesn't work, and then incorporate what is working going forward. Now you've raised your baseline, as you described, from maybe 6% to 7%, so then it becomes cumulative, and we'll get this compounding effect, so a great strategy there.

I'd love to hear some examples of some bullets. Now, you were the senior exec there at Grasshopper during its great growth years, so maybe an example there or even from some of the clients that you work with.

Don Schiavone: Absolutely. I think, across the board, there's always opportunity to find ways to drive growth and revenue through customer acquisition. Depending on the type of business you have ... We had a SaaS model, so our growth was mainly done by marketing, and so we did channel analysis, and we fired bullets at every kind of online marketing channel you could imagine from pay-per-click, search engine marketing. Then we finally looked at direct marketing channels. We did billboards. We fires bullets at tray tables in airlines that flip down and did advertising there. One of the most successful bullets we fired and went with was national radio advertising through satellite radio first and then through actual direct radio advertising, but very expensive, took many years to build up the confidence that that would work, and so there's just one example of firing some bullets that can grow into some things by looking at different channels.

Certainly, looking at some client examples in terms of whole new areas of business, changing your business model, you don't want to wake up overnight and just completely flip the business model, so we take steps to try new product or service offerings without all the ceremony and the process that we have built in our current business. Today, I have examples of businesses where they are amazing at delivering their current offering.

If we use that same level of customer service, product development, engineering, and marketing to try something brand-new, we'd have to commit so many resources for something we don't even know works. It's no longer an experiment, so the skill here is how do we break out with a subset of teams that can try some things, be a little nimble, that may not be up the same level of quality or same level of standards, but it's a test? If the test indicates that that's a good direction, then we'll reinvest and bring that into the whirlwind of the way we can do it with our engineering, our QA, our customer service, and all the other ceremony that we've built that makes us the company we are today.

Steve Sanduski: Then, from a leadership standpoint, how do you get the organization to change its mindset in what you were just describing there where we're going to fire these bullets? We're maybe going to carve out a small team to try this stuff. We know we're going to lose money. We may lose our whole investment in a particular bullet that we fire if it just fails miserably. How do you change the mindset of the organization to say, "Hey, this okay. We're going to be innovative here. We're going to try new things, and this is how we're going to accelerate our growth"?

Don Schiavone: I think, first and foremost, acknowledging just the fact that it is an experiment. It's a bullet, which means, by definition, it can fail, and not having it in baseline is a big step in that direction. Imagine executive team that has one of your typical hope strategies of 5% growth for Q1 no matter what. Your bonuses are counting on it. Maybe even your job's dependent on it. There is no such thing as an experiment in that environment because everything has to work because we have no idea how to get to that 5%, whereas try this within some guidelines, and those guidelines tend to be quick-and-dirty budgets that are very risk-averse at spending a lot of money. We don't want to go for the end game assuming it works. Just like we don't want to assume it's going to fail, we don't assume it works either and spend all of this money and time as if it's going to be the 20% growth engine. We assume it could fail, and so we do things very on the cheap and on the quick to make sure that we get the right market indication.

Here's a perfect example, and it works great in digital advertising. We had a concept for new product offering at Grasshopper, and so we threw up a web page and advertised it, but we couldn't deliver it. We were just seeing what the market intent was. Would they purchase it? What was the pricing? Then, on the flip side, if they selected that offer, we put them into a queue for potential customers, said, "We're doing market research to see the viability of this product, and we'll contact you when it's released."

We didn't have to build anything. You just had an idea, but you're seeing if you could sell it. Would the marketing message resonate, and do we have potential customer base that would justify the numbers in our plan that would make it work? If we knew we needed a certain conversion rate to make it work, well, let's go test that conversion rate. Then we'll test the next thing, and then we'll test the next thing incrementally rather than let's build it, and they will come.

Steve Sanduski: Right. I love that idea you just shared there where you said that, "We put up a web page. We came up with a product idea, did some digital advertising, tested it and, if someone said, 'Yeah, I'm interested,'" ten you said, "Oh, well, we're doing this for research. We'll let you know if we launch it." Did you get any blow-back from that from people saying, "Hey, this was a little misleading?"

Don Schiavone: Well, you have to be very careful on how you message it.

Steve Sanduski: Okay.

Don Schiavone: It really comes back to controlling the sample size. We weren't a brand-new product. This was just an augmentation to an existing, so while there is that risk ... We talked about that. That was the very first thing, "Oh, we're going to have customer service problems. People are going to be pissed off." No. People have a need. You just said, "Wow, there's a need." If you respond with, "Well, thank you. We're investigating if there's a need. Oh, by the way, would you like to participate in beta and have a say in how this might shape up?" You have to help them see where it's a win for them. Now they can participate in shaping that idea.

Could you get someone that gets mad that, wow, they really wished? Well, what are they going to be mad at? They're going to be mad at, "I wish there was something." We never charged them. We never took their money. It's, "Hey, here's a concept. Would you be interested in using this?" Now we have violent agreement that that's valuable. I actually love to hear that.

Steve Sanduski: Right. Now, is the fact that you're just firing bullets, you're controlling sample sizes, you're controlling your digital advertising and who's going to see it, is it because of that that you're limiting any potential damage to your brand in that, if you're testing some crazy things with these different bullets that, because you've got such small sample sizes, is that limiting any potential negative impact to the brand if one of your bullets just fails miserably?

Don Schiavone: Oh, absolutely. I mean that's the big key, right? You don't want to assume that it's successful and just go mass ... do this to your mass customer base. We would start very small, customer sizes of 10, 20, get a first indication, realize, oh, there was an unintended consequence that none of us thought of. Okay, well, we've limited the damage. Then get a bigger sample size. Make sure it's a diverse group of people, existing customers, potential new customers, different geographics or demographics. You have to think through all of that. That's why the testing process, it takes some time if you do it properly but, like you had mentioned, you limit risk, maximize the potential for your success because you're focused on what were the activities that really matter?

Steve Sanduski: Well, and are there any other either best practices when it comes to this type of strategy, or things to avoid, or mistakes that you've seen people make in this process?

Don Schiavone: Oh, absolutely, a great question. I think one of them is thinking that we have all the answers in the planning session, right, in the executive team, we're smart enough to have all the answers. We'll come up with a plan, and then we'll just hand it to our minions to implement. I think that's a disservice to your team. I love the quote from Steve Jobs, "I hire people smarter than me, not to tell them what to do, but so that they can tell me what to do."

Part of the process is you have potential bullets to fire, but you have to then come out of the planning session and gauge the team to put meat on the bones into those plans. What is the messaging? What are the actual sample sizes? Get them involved to act and help provide feedback. Also, ask them for that input prior to the planning session. What could we be doing differently? What should we be looking at? If you have a spirit of testing, that gets contagious across the whole organization. It's not just an executive-level function. The entire team starts getting involved in, "How do we test at our level, provide tests, and push this down throughout the organization?"

Steve Sanduski: When you create one of these tests, do you go into it and say, "Okay. This is our test. This is our hypothesis that we're going to get ..." Let's say it's a digital ad.

"We're going to get an X percent click-through rate and, from that click-through rate, we're going to get X percent of people are going to purchase, and so that's our expectation, and then we've got a best case, worst case, and then you can determine, hey, this is successful because it exceeded our expectation or this failed because it was below our expectation." Is it as simple as thinking of it in those terms to determine whether this is good or bad?

Don Schiavone: That is absolutely correct. That's the simplest way to think about it, and I'll just add to it. You're also going to be open to unintended consequences. Part of these are things might happen in other departments that you didn't realize. We launched this, wildy successful on the customer acquisition side, but causes a customer service nightmare. Now, can we solve that customer service nightmare with another test on a product enhancement, or a messaging, or something else, or does the benefits up front get outweighed by the cost of serving the customer or something else? Just keeping your mind open to the unintended consequences in other areas of the business is a best practice I'd add to that list.

Steve Sanduski: Then what about some type of review process? How do we track all these bullets? How does management know what's going on, what's working, what's not working? Is there some kind of meeting rhythm process to review all of this?

Don Schiavone: Absolutely. Healthy companies will create one or two focused initiatives to go after a quarter. Take, for example, our marketing. Let's say we know we can go get some mileage out of increasing new customer acquisitions through some marketing bullets. That'll be one hot, one area of focus for the team. Now we're going to ask the team, "What are those three or four tests?" and we'll manage them through a weekly rhythm of you have the entire cross-functional team in the weekly meeting saying, "What did we say we were going to do last week? Did we get it done? What did we learn? What can we do for the upcoming week in the spirit of moving that needle, which is new customer acquisition, forward?" We're always looking at the ultimate outcome, which is a lagging indicator. In the weekly meetings, we're looking at leading activities that the cross-functional team can act on on the test to either prove or disprove that hypothesis.

Steve Sanduski: This sounds like a very well-thought-out, methodical process, and so if people follow through with this kind of structure, it sounds like it's almost like you can't fail at this if you just follow the process and you've got good people on board that are testing things and are serious about this.

Don Schiavone: Absolutely. A lot of the most successful and high-growth companies follow this religiously, and it's about that commitment to test, learn, implement back into your plan, and repeat.

Steve Sanduski: Good. All right. Anything else on this topic before we wrap up with a few rapid-fire questions?

Don Schiavone: I think that about covers it, Steve. Thanks.

Steve Sanduski: All right, perfect. Okay, well, let's ask a few of these questions. The first one that we always love to know is are there any books that you're reading or any books that you would recommend?

Don Schiavone: Absolutely. One of them is The Customer Service Revolution by John Dijulius. He's a partner of the firm, and we've had him help many of our clients who struggle with customer service and trying to understand how to do better customer service throughout their organization.

Steve Sanduski: Great. Well, we've had John on the show before as a podcast guest, and we will link to his episode in the show notes as well as link to his book.

All right. Let's talk about leadership here for a second. Is there one leadership trait that you can think of that tends to be correlated with success?

Don Schiavone: Yeah, absolutely, and I think it starts early on. For young companies to be successful, they need leadership that has drive. That means get up every day to move the ball forward. So many people out there aren't successful because they show up and just do activities for activity's sake rather than driving towards a specific goal and making things happen.

Steve Sanduski: Now, do you just need to work with people who already have that drive or is it part of the founder or the CEO's role to help inspire the people around him in the organization?

Don Schiavone: If you look at Jim Collins, he'll say your job isn't to motivate people. A-players are motivated. You need to provide the right environment by which those A-players can thrive. I think having that organization, that culture that rewards and promotes getting things done and getting the right things done will attract those types of people that you want on your team. That starts with the leader setting that culture and making sure that you hire towards it, you reward for it, and you promote for it.

Steve Sanduski: All right. Then, on the reverse side, is there a leadership trait that you see tends to kill success?

Don Schiavone: Absolutely, and I think it's the flip side of that drive. It's where leaders let their ego get in the way in that, "Hey, I've been successful as an entrepreneur moving this forward, so I got to continue, and I got to be involved in everything," and they don't let their ego get out of the way and to let others take over things and hire people smarter than them that can do a better job in the roles. I think, really, you got to learn to delegate. While you want to be driven, you got to understand when do you bring others in and let them roll with it and give them the autonomy that they'll want if they're A-players?

Steve Sanduski: Right. Yeah, that old saying that, talking about delegation here, that the bottleneck is always at the top, and so if the leader's-

Don Schiavone: Absolutely.

Steve Sanduski: If the leader's not delegating, then that's going to put a damper on the whole organization in terms of its growth level.

All right, just one final question here. Let's talk about employees. What would be a good way to show employee how much you ... Let me state that again. Let's just finish here with one more question. What would be the best way to show employees how much you appreciate them?

Don Schiavone: Well, obviously, it's to thank them. I see a lot of leaders who just appreciate them in a coaching session. They'll tell me how much they appreciate them, but they've never even said thank you. Number one, you got to be learned how to say thank you and show that appreciation, but I think it goes even farther if you show that appreciation by doing something unexpected. Most people think, "Oh, great, so I'll give them a spiff or a bonus," and that's not it.

I'll give you an example here at Grasshopper. We had an engineer critical to our success, genius, helped us develop our infrastructure, very humble, no ego to ... just the right ... the amazing person you'd want on your team. He recently bought his first home. I remember him talking to his manager about how stressed he was about having to maintain a lawn. He was in apartment, never had a lawn. What did we do? We bought him a lawnmower, John Deere, top of the line, had him delivered, surprised the hell out of him. That what paid dividends compared to if we gave him a check to go buy a lawnmower.

Steve Sanduski: Yeah.

Don Schiavone: I think doing things like that, that means you have to know what's important to your people, really understand, as a manager, what drives them, what motivates them, what's important, and how could you give them that unexpected surprise thank you?

Steve Sanduski: Yeah, yeah. No, I think that's such a great insight there in terms of, sure, we can thank people, we can appreciate them, but do something like you just described, which is something totally surprising like buy them a lawnmower or pay for their lawn service for a year or something like that-

Don Schiavone: Yeah, exactly.

Steve Sanduski: ... which would really let them know that you're thinking about them as a person, and it's not just, "Oh, here's a gift card." Anybody can give a gift card, so it's nice, but it doesn't really show the degree to which you might actually appreciate them, so great.

All right, Don. Hey, great conversation here, some really tremendous insights and very timely as people are working on their business plans for the coming year, so appreciate it, and we'll look forward to getting you back on the show down the road again.

Don Schiavone: Hey, thanks, Steve. I really appreciate it. This was fun.

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