

205 LEADERSHIP | How to adopt an Ironman Mindset to increase the value of your business. w/Robert Clinkenbeard

And now taking care of business, your hosts Craig Moen and Shye Gilad.

[00:08] Craig: Welcome to Business Owners Radio episode 205. Our guest today is Robert Clinkenbeard, author of the book, the *Ironman Mindset for Entrepreneurs*. Robert has competed in four Ironman triathlons, is a serial entrepreneur, and now the CEO of the Radix Group. Let's go meet him. Good morning, Robert. Welcome to Business Owners Radio.

[00:31] Robert Clinkenbeard: Thank you. I appreciate you inviting me on.

[00:33] Craig: It's a pleasure to have you here. Amazing background you have and some key insights. And before we jump into that, let me ask, what drove you to write this book?

[00:43] Robert: I think my business was fairly well-established, I thought, well, what's on my bucket list next? My dad has written four or five books over the years and I thought, well, maybe I'll write about my Ironman experience and tie that into running a successful business at the same time. So, it had been on my list for a while, and I just suddenly found somebody that helped me drive writing that book. So rather than me think it was going to take six months to a year, we managed to just work together and get that done over a period of two or three months, which was nice.

[01:16] Craig: And you have amazing background not only business but also in the triathlon area and rugby and five kids. Where do you find the time?

[01:27] Robert: Yeah. **I definitely work a lot, but I try and figure out how to be super-efficient and just really be disciplined about my day, block off times. Yeah, I just try and make it happen. But yeah, I've got very supportive wife, which helps a lot, so that helps.**

[01:44] Craig: In your book, you go into a number of elements that really drive the changes that you created to allow you to scale up a major company. Tell me a little bit more about that.

[01:56] Robert: Yeah. I think there's probably two key elements there. **I think the first was, everything was so reliant on me. And I just knew that there's no way that I could scale the company up, it'd be too much pressure on me. So, probably 10 years into getting a business, I thought, I need to find some real key people to help me grow this business.** So, went out, did a big search and found three key individuals there, brought them into the company as a middle manager type level, and really worked closely with them and coached them. They eventually became the senior leaders within the company. But by going through developing those employees allowed me to work on the business rather in

the business, and eventually got to the point it allowed me to go off and do things like write books or do Ironman training, and all that fun stuff. But people was definitely one part. **And then the second part, obviously, is building in some processes and systems into the business.** Initially, we used a program called *US Attraction* that then developed into scaling up. So I created a system in which we were all aligned. We all had the KPIs. We had that vision. We all knew our goals, where we were going in the future. So, it came completely aligned within the company using that system. So, I would say probably those are the two main things that really took our company to the next level.

[03:22] Craig: And when you were doing the Ironmans, what were your takeaways from Ironman that really helped you going forward?

[03:29] Robert: Good question. **I think, you know, I talked about this a little bit in my book, where first thing is surrounding yourself with the right people. So that could apply not only in doing the Ironman training and research, but also in business, where we're not necessarily good at everything. But if you're surrounded by the right people either inspiring you, or they have their own different skill sets, or maybe they're in triathlons, or maybe they're good runners or cyclists, then that's typically one that was going to push you to another level.** So, I would train with other groups early in the morning or early afternoon. And I knew that I was probably getting 30-40% more in my output during my training by working with others compared to just going out by myself. So that's definitely a key part.

And then the second part is you have to be super disciplined. I mean, I would start the night before, I would look at what my training plan was. I knew what I had to achieve the next day in terms of either going out and running or biking for an hour and a half, doing some swimming later in the day. So preparing for that the night before, getting all my training gear out, making sure my agenda was set the next day to balance between going out and doing my training but then going into the office and doing meetings with my key team leaders, but then also spending time with my family. So, I had to be super disciplined about my schedule, blocking off time, making sure I had enough time. I was fully prepared for either meetings or my training going into it. I would say those are the two key learning things that came out of the book and doing my Ironman training.

[05:07] Shye: And Robert, how does this inspire your work with your company, the Radix Group? Because, you know, it's interesting that you use some of these very proven programs through EOS, right, and scaling up gazelles. Tell me, how are you employing those in your practice now, or have you built some custom programs, maybe based on some gaps that you've seen in those programs?

[05:29] Robert: Yeah. **I think it's somewhat of a mistake to stick rigidly with one program and then so many tremendous thought leaders out there. So what I typically do is I'll look at creating almost like a bespoke type program based on the needs of the client. So I'll pick some of the best ideas from scaling up or pick some of the best**

ideas from EOs traction or pick some things from the great game of business. And I'll custom make them around the client's needs because every company is slightly different. But as long as they're working to some type of program, that you have the client's needs first and foremost of your mind, and I think that's really worked really well, managed to retain all my clients, and most of them have grown tremendously over the last couple of years during COVID. So I think that's been one of the key things to my success with the Radix Group.

[06:22] Shye: Can you give us an example of maybe a firm that you've worked with that had to make some big changes, especially in this COVID environment?

[06:30] Robert: Yeah. There was a firm out of Phoenix that, you know, they were doing most of their selling through going and meeting in-person, client events, everything was focused around that face-to-face type meeting. So, we went in and looked out, completely changing their sales program, a lot of it is done more virtually, there was a lot more [inaudible 00:06:48] proposals easy for them, a lot of the signatures on proposals were done through things like DocuSign. So, it completely changed how we sold to the customers.

We looked at, for example, who the core customers were. We looked at who were most profitable customers, who should we be targeting. And then creating some sales and marketing programs specifically for those clients. **So rather than just that shotgun approach, where you're trying to get all the customers out there, let's focus on the ones that are really true raving fans of the business. And then once we bring them into that sales funnel, then again, dialing in our sales and marketing program, and that company hasn't lost a beat.** I mean, there is now probably up 20% over what they were doing before. And what's more important is that actually more profitable than an around about 35% net profit. And that's just through getting a little bit more dialed in, getting more focused, maybe getting a little bit more lean, as well. So I find that to my success there.

[07:49] Shye: That's incredible. I know that you have a show, The Commercial Landscaper Podcast.

[07:55] Robert: Correct. So yeah, it's mainly focused towards the green industry. **But because I'm pretty well-networked with other business groups like EO, Entrepreneurs Organization, I bring on successful business owners from all walks of life, different industries, because I just feel as though it's inspiring to my listeners on what other business owners have gone through either during COVID, or maybe they've had labor challenges, maybe there's been some different exit strategies.** So, my list has been able to hear real business owners experience coming on the show and sharing those ideas. And my goal is that hopefully, they'll make a few less mistakes than I did to me. We all make mistakes. You know, if they can make a few less mistakes than I did, then I feel as though I'm giving back to the business community.

[08:43] Shye: I think it's fantastic. And one of the things I was interested in the show itself is just thinking about how your experience in that industry enable to scale in that industry, how that informs the work that you do right now. Because I know the landscaping industry is getting disrupted a little bit by technology right now, isn't it? So, I'm just kind of curious how what you've learned from that inform some of that work now even outside and in different industries?

[09:09] Robert: Yeah. I mean, I think what I found, you know, particularly green industry, for example, is that they've been somewhat guilty of not looking outside their industry and typically not bringing in some good speakers. So, I think what I found is that when I got joined EO, I was exposed to all these different industries and all these great inspiring speakers, and I've learned from that. And I think the green industry is now experiencing that where now they're beginning to hear other speakers coming in. They realize they're not necessarily a landscape company. You know, I hate saying this. But yeah, it's all very well going in and cutting grass and trimming shrubs, and I think that's a given, but really, they're more of a people company. **60-70% of the costs are all labor. What are they doing to manage their labor? Do they have a recruiting strategy? Did they have an engagement strategy, a retention strategy? How did they really bring people in?** And I think a lot of them are really having to carefully rethink that, because they've definitely haven't spent a lot of time in that in the past. **And a lot of people do complain about there's no labor out there, we can't find them. But in actual fact, I encourage them to look internally first, what's the culture looking like? Are they getting internal referrals? And if they're not, maybe there's an issue with the culture, maybe relook at what they're paying people, what their benefits are? Are they having company events? How they keep your employees engaged.**

[10:39] Shye: Yeah, that's so important, right? And it sounds like you really help them focus on what part of our business model is most critical to our success, right? And then so what are we doing, not just to manage that risk, but to really strengthen it and turn it into a real advantage?

[10:54] Robert: Yeah, for sure. Because I think you know that most of the other companies are not doing that, so what can we do a little bit differently? What's our differentiator? And then just really focus on that and strengthen that and put some investment in. **A lot of companies are now talking about having recruitment managers or engagement supervisors. So, really rethinking about how they look at their org chart and focusing on what their strengths are.**

[11:19] Shye: And Robert, when business owners come to see you, I am sure they are feeling some pain, right? This is why they're reaching out, because something's not working for them and they need help. So they come into your world, and how do you help these folks? They're struggling. They're not happy. Some of them might be frustrated, and in our experience, sometimes ready to give up. And I'm just curious how you use this Ironman mindset to help turn them around and inspire them to move forward.

[11:47] Robert: You're right. I mean, a lot of them are either coming to me, because they finally realize that. But yeah, **I would say a lot of business owners are out there that have some struggles, but just a lot of them are a little bit guilty of not necessarily being honest with themselves.** So yeah, they'll come into Radix Group, I'll do some assessments just to really identify what those core challenges are. And then, you know, I want to make sure that they're willing to put the work in to get some of those things fixed, sort of win-win situation. But yeah, we'll come up with a plan over the next 6, 12, 18 months, and figure out how we're going to work on those challenges. And that's where I bring in our mind mindset tools, where we'll look at some of the meeting rhythms like, what's your discipline around your schedule? Where do you see yourself in 3, 5, 10 years? And what are some of the chess moves you need to make between now and that ultimate point, you know, whether it's some type of an exit.

I'll give you a good example. There's a local company in South Carolina I work with, and very similar challenge where the owner was ready to give up. And even though he probably had a \$30 million company, I mean, he was ready just to chuck it in, because he said his family were unhappy with him, because he was never a home. He was getting beat up every day from his employees, and just under so much stress, and it was wearing on his health. So, we came in and started helping this owner out. And through a series of exercises and processes, I mean, he's now probably do 40 million at the end of this year. He's now got a COO in place. He's working three days a week, and probably spending four to six weeks a year on vacations with his family, and it just totally transformed his company. He's now motivated again. I feel as though every single month he's getting some company approaching him about potentially buying it, but he's in a good place right now. So, exits can look different for different companies. I think it's figuring out what truly are those pain points.

[13:49] Shye: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And it's great that you can help people understand how to first really change that mindset, right? And you're talking about kind of helping them get their personal leadership in order before they can really get to the other side. And tell me if you've ever had to deal with maybe a business owner that when you ask them those questions about the future, when you ask them about that 3 and 5 and 10-year where they want to be, and sometimes that's a hard question for people to answer, right? It seems incredible, because we're all working so hard. It's like, well, what are you really working towards? What do you want that life to look like? What are some ways you help people explore that idea, if they're finding a hard time visualizing that?

[14:27] Robert: It happens more frequently than not. When I say 2 out of 10 people have a pretty clear direction of where they want to go. So yeah, I've got two of these specific exercises. I'll get the owners to come through and it's, you know, looking at things like what are they passionate about. That could be family, it could be hobbies, it could be traveling, or some of the things on their bucket list. So we'll go through these exercises, and as we go through that, we'll get closer and closer to really defining what it looks like in 10 or 15 years.

I had a great conversation with somebody a couple days ago, when I was driving up here to Louisville, where, again, very successful business owner, but he just felt as though every single day he was complaining to others, he just felt he was always whiny. And then he suddenly had that light bulb moment, I think after listening to one of my presentations where he said, "I think it's me. I think I really don't know what my life looks like. I see all these other people, and they're successful and they're traveling and nice vacations, but I'm just unhappy. So, send them some exercises and we're going to meet up in a couple of weeks. And, yeah, we'll walk through that whole process." And I think this gentleman will probably take a few months to get there, but I think at least having that light bulb moment that he's realizing that he has a problem was pretty eye-opening.

[15:42] Shye: Yeah. That's super powerful, right? And so when you can help someone through that process, it's really rewarding. And I can't help but wonder about your background, Robert. I know that you were raised in Edinburgh, Scotland, and then of course moved to Arizona. You've been out there since around 2000 or so?

[16:00] Robert: Yeah, that's correct.

[16:01] Shye: And so, what do you take from your upbringing in your culture? You know, you mentioned your dad was an author as well. What do you notice that's different about operating in America, and how does that influence the work that you do?

[16:12] Robert: I love where I grew up. The people there are tremendous people, just honest, hardworking people. And you know, I love going back there every couple of years. But I think when I came across the seas, I just felt as though there was more opportunities, more encouragement to be successful, be an entrepreneur. I feel in Scotland that once you tend to rise above the crop, that people have a tendency to try and chop you down over there. It's just not as encouraging to be successful.

So what actually inspired me to move to the States was I had a vacation that end of '98 and went out to Scottsdale, Arizona, and I saw the beautiful houses, beautiful cars. And I started asking a lot of questions, why did people live this way? I mean, it's just totally foreign to how I grew up. And I started to find out a lot of them were either entrepreneurs, business owners, or work for Fortune 500 companies. So how do I -- because it seems like a really nice lifestyle. And so yeah, I mean, did some more inspiring thoughts and especially when I was sitting back in my sitting room in Scotland, where the rain was bouncing off the window in the middle of winter. And yeah, I think within six months, I moved out to the States and I said, you know what, I want to try this whole American Dream concept. A lot of hard work at beginning because I had no social security number, two suitcases, no credit history, so it was pretty challenging the first few years, but I think that Scottish grit and determination just kicked in. And yeah, I haven't looked back.

[17:52] Shye: Yeah. I can imagine Arizona sun must have looked pretty good, you know, 300 and something days of sunshine after growing up in Edinburg is probably a big inspiration.

[18:00] Robert: Yes. So the north in Arizona you've got the snow and skiing, and into the south you have mountain biking, you've got skydiving and the golf. So it was a nice place to be.

[18:11] Shye: Well, Robert, it certainly is a beautiful part of the country. And I can say that we're very lucky to have you here. It sounds like you're doing a lot of great work. We want to thank you for being on the show. It's been great having you here today.

[18:23] Robert: Well, thank you. Again, I really appreciate the opportunity. So thank you for having me on your show.

[18:27] Shye: Is there anything else you'd like to leave with our listeners?

[18:30] Robert: Yeah. I mean, I'd love to. Listeners, if you want to contact me, I'm happy to send you some chapters of my book, and even do this free assessment just to establish what are some of the challenges you're facing with your business. So if they're happy to contact me through LinkedIn under my name or the Radix Group. And then my contact information is there. We got a copy of my book or the Radix Group on Amazon. But I'd love to hear from your listeners and see how we can help them.

[18:58] Craig: Our guest today has been Robert Clinkenbeard, CEO of the Radix Group, which has several offices around the world. He is a serial entrepreneur, having sold his \$20 million company, and now has several franchises and the largest peer group facilitation company in the US. You can learn more about Robert as well as find links to his content, free assessment and book all at our website at businessownersradio.com.

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