

Doug Smith ([00:07](#)):

Hey, leader, and welcome to another episode of the L3 Leadership Podcast where we are obsessed with helping you grow to your maximum potential and to maximize the impact of your leadership. My name is Doug Smith and I am your host, and today's episode is brought to you by my friends at Beratung Advisors. We're also recording live from the new reiturn.com studio. If you're new to the podcast, welcome. I'm so glad that you're here and I hope that you'll enjoy our content and become a subscriber. Know that you can also watch all of our episodes over on our YouTube channel, so make sure you're subscribed there as well. And if you've been listening to the podcast for a while and it's made an impact on your life, it would mean the world to me if you would leave us a rating and review on Apple Podcast or Spotify, or whatever app you listen to podcast through that really does help us to grow our audience and reach more leaders.

Doug Smith ([00:47](#)):

So thank you in advance for that. Well Leader today. You are in for a treat, no pun intended. You're gonna hear my conversation with Marc Serrao, who is the owner of the Oakmont Bakery in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. If you're unfamiliar with Marc, let me just tell you a little bit about him. Marc and his wife Susan, started the Oakmont Bakery in 1988, establishing themselves as the town's only full service retail bakery. They began with 1200 square feet, two children in a big dream. Since then, their space is dramatically expanded to over 12,500 square feet, making Oakmont Bakery, one of the largest retail bakeries in America. Their family is more than doubled, adding three more children, and their dream of owning a successful business that will serve Pittsburgh and its surrounding communities for generations to come has been realized. The bakery was established on firm Christian beliefs and an absolute dedication to excellence and integrity in all areas.

Doug Smith ([01:37](#)):

In 2010, Oakmont Bakery was honored to receive the retail bakery of the year by Modern Baking Magazine, which is the most prestigious award in the retail baking industry given to only one bakery in the country. Each year, Marc and Susan attribute their success first to the strong faith in God, and then to their superior product, hardworking staff, and loyal customers for all of whom they are deeply grateful. Marc and Susan are so blessed by the to work side, by side with many family members to provide a positive working environment where lasting relationships are formed. They considered an honor to serve Pittsburgh with the outstanding products that their talent, hard work, and dedication have created. And finally, it is their pleasure to create delicious memories for you. And I've gotten to know Marc A. Little bit, and he's a phenomenal leader. And in our conversation, you're gonna hear Marc share the lessons that he learned along the journey of creating one of the world's greatest bakeries.

Doug Smith ([02:28](#)):

We talk a lot about the role of generosity and faith in his life. And at the end, he actually gives advice to church leaders. And I just think you're gonna love this interview. But before we dive in, just a few announcements. This episode of the L three Leadership Podcast is sponsored by Beratung Advisors. The financial advisors at Beratung Advisors help educate and empower clients to make informed financial decisions. You can find out how Beratung Advisors can help you develop a customized financial plan for your financial future by visiting their website [BeratungAdvisors.com](#). That's B E R A T U N G advisors.com. Securities and investment products and services offered through L P L Financial member of FINRA and S I P C, Beratung Advisors, LPL Financial and L three Leadership are separate entities. I also wanna thank our sponsor, Henne jewelers. They're a jeweler by my friend and mentor John Henne and

my wife Laura and I got our engagement and wedding rings through Henne Jewelers and had an incredible experience.

Doug Smith ([03:21](#)):

And not only do they have a great jewelry, but they also invest in people. In fact, for every couple that comes in engaged, they give them a book to help them prepare for marriage. And we just love that. So if you're in need of a good jeweler, check out [hennejewelers.com](#). And I also wanna thank our new sponsor [reiturn.com](#) and leader, let me just ask you this. Have you ever had an interest in investing in real estate? Well, now for as little as \$500, you can become a commercial real estate investor. Just visit [return.com](#) to learn more. That's R E I T U R N.com. Investing involves risk. Please consult at [return](#) offering circular if you're interested in investing. And with all that being said, here's my conversation with MarcSerrao. Marc, welcome to the L3 Leadership podcast. I've been looking forward to doing this for a long time. I've had the chance to interview you a few times for an organization that we're both a part of called the Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation with our friend Lee Kricher. And, uh, you've added so much value to the young leaders that we've influenced there that I thought I have to have you on the podcast. I think you'll add massive value to our audience. So thank you so much for your time and for joining us today. Hey,

Marc Serrao ([04:22](#)):

Thanks for inviting me.

Doug Smith ([04:24](#)):

My pleasure. So you're the owner of Oakmont Bakery and uh, I just wanna give people perspective of what Oakmont Bakery is now, uh, people from all over the world visit your bakery cuz it's famous. But for those who may not have context, can you just give us an idea of the scale and what Oakmont looks like today?

Marc Serrao ([04:39](#)):

Yeah, so, um, you know, we started out in a, a very small shop, about a thousand square feet. And we moved, um, into the Lower Boulevard of Oakmont, which is still the business district. And we, um, we're about 3000 square feet there. And now we're in our newest location, which is right off of the Hilton Bridge, which is the corridor into Oakmont. Um, and we're in an 18,000 square foot building with two warehouses with an additional 5,000 square feet.

Doug Smith ([05:10](#)):

Wow. And how many employees do you have Currently?

Marc Serrao ([05:13](#)):

We have around 220

Doug Smith ([05:17](#)):

<laugh>. That's incredible. And I don't know if you know any fun stats off the top of your head, but, um, I, I think you mentioned like how many thousands of Christmas cookies you make every day. Like do you have any fun stats like that for the,

Marc Serrao ([05:28](#)):

For the interview? I did some, I got some reports this morning. So, um, this past December, 2022, um, we sold 11,044 cookie trays in 10 days <laugh>. Um, we, we sold 49,720 dozen cookies. Wow. Um, besides the cookie trace, um, punchy season, which is January 6th to Easter Saturday, we sold 278,000 punch keys. Wow. Um, and like these numbers, I mean, they are gigantic, but to me they're unbelievably gigantic because it takes so much to make all this stuff. Like it takes a lot of people and a lot of hard work. So, so they're really big. Um, so, but some of the numbers that I think are really impressive that, you know, when I was, you know, my early days at the bakery, I wouldn't even believe this. Um, cause like we used to wait on 25 to 40 people an hour, and that's how we decide how to schedule and what to make, you know, things like that. Um, Easter Saturday we waited on 4,190 people an average hour. We waited on 400 people an hour, and our highest hour was 488 people. So that, you know, moving 488 people in one hour in Oakmont is really impressive to me. <laugh>.

Doug Smith ([06:48](#)):

I think that would be impressive, uh, to anyone listening. That's incredible. And, and we're listening to these stats and you know, you mentioned you certainly didn't start here and I think it's easy for a lot of leaders, uh, to see what you're doing with Okon Bakery and see the success of it and see the scale of it now. Um, but take us back to the beginning. You know, how did you actually get into the business? How did you start the bakery? What did it look like then?

Marc Serrao ([07:10](#)):

So I started, you know, when I was 13 or 14 years old, I started as a, a housekeeping member and a donut shop in Pen Hill is called a Donut shack. So I was, we called 'em the Cleaning Boys then, and I washed pans and mopped the floors. And, um, when I was about 15, he made me the supervisor of that department, which I, I thought was so exciting. So I, I had two people under me. Um, and then, um, and then I, you know, I married my high school sweetheart. We got married and I was working for Giant Eagle in Foodland, two supermarket chains. Um, one is a merchandiser, the other one is a manager. And, um, I did that for a few years and we started having children. Uh, and then while, while I was working at one of the grocery stores, um, a produce manager came in and told me about Oakmont Bakery that, you know, somebody opened this little bakery in Oakmont.

Marc Serrao ([08:01](#)):

Um, and he had it open for seven days or nine days, something like that. And he was 40 years old, he had a heart attack and died, and it was for sale. So I went and looked at it and it was, he did a really, really nice job. He wasn't a baker, he actually owned Hallmark shops. Um, so, but he did a really good job. He had quite all new equipment, which at my age then I was 25. I wouldn't have been able to afford to buy new equipment. I would've bought used equipment. Um, it wouldn't have probably been in Oakmont, it would've been in a town with cheaper rent. Um, so his family, you know, I met his brother who was in charge of his estate and he made it possible. He, they held the mortgage and he sold me, um, the business for \$75,000, which to me was like 5 million now <laugh>.

Marc Serrao ([08:44](#)):

Um, and, uh, but they made, you know, they made it possible, you know, God made it possible. So I ended up buying the bakery. Um, it was funny because, um, I was married and I went home and I said to my wife, who, my wife isn't as much of a risk taker as I am. And I went home and I said, um, Hey, I have something to tell you. And she said, I do, I have something to tell you. And I said, um, well, you go first.

Oh, you go first. So I said, okay. I found this bakery in Oakmont, which was 15 minutes from our house. Um, so then I went buy, you know, and she started crying and she said, I'm pregnant and we have health insurance. You know, my God, we have to keep our health insurance, you know. And um, so we, we worked at all auto, obviously. We had our, we had our, that was my son who now is in succession for the bakery. Um, so we had him and we bought the bakery. And, um, but I still to this day, like every once in a while when something really good happens or we look at stats like this, and my wife was very impressed with it too. And I'll say to her, yeah, we still have health insurance. <laugh> <laugh>.

Doug Smith ([09:45](#)):

Uh oh, that's awesome. Oh, thanks for your wife for, for jumping in with you. Absolutely. Just quick question, when, when the guy from Giant Eagle, I think he said it was Giant Eagle told you about the bakery, is that something from an entrepreneurial standpoint, I think some people ask, you know, or some people just be born entrepreneurs, is owning your own business in bakery something you always wanted to do? Or was that the first time, you know, the kind of, the light bulb went off of, I can do this at my own time? Um,

Marc Serrao ([10:08](#)):

No, I've always had that entrepreneurial spirit. Like I've always, you know, since I was a little boy, I would get up five o'clock in the morning and go outside and, and build a lemonade stand and, and sell lemonade, you know. Um, I was always, always doing stuff like that. I was always finding a way to, to build things, you know, to make things, um, like business, things like that. And, um, so at that, when I was growing up, there was a series on called, um, oh, with Alex Keaton, I forget the name of it. But anyways, Alex Keaton was young and he was kind of like that. He was a young guy. He had this entrepreneurial spirit and his name was Alex Keaton. So my dad always called me Alex <laugh>. So I always had that.

Doug Smith ([10:50](#)):

Yeah. And, and just outta curiosity, cuz we live in a, in a world now where, you know, everyone probably when you started entrepreneurship wasn't the cool thing. Now I feel like everyone who's breathing wants to be an entrepreneur and start their own business. Do you think, uh, that it's something that you just either have or you don't have? Or do you truly believe that, you know, anyone could go out and start their own thing and make it?

Marc Serrao ([11:10](#)):

Um, I just think it depends on what it is, you know, what kind of business it is and what your goals are. Um, to me, um, I think I was born with that kind of a gift or or talent for it, for, for building a business. Um, and I think you have to be a visionary for sure, to be able to see, like, I always, I always said, I, when I first started the bakery and it was so small, I always said that I was gonna have the biggest bakery in Pittsburgh, you know, and that was just one of my goals. And so I think you have to be able to look ahead and say, I'm gonna work, work really hard to get to that, but that's what I'm going for. So whatever. It's, it's always something different.

Doug Smith ([11:49](#)):

Yeah. You talked about, you know, you've always been a risk taker. I'm also curious here, you know, uh, is that, are those calculated risks or is it, you know, going along with that visionary, Hey, I'm gonna risk whatever it takes to, to be the biggest bakery. Yeah. How, how do you assess risk?

Marc Serrao ([12:04](#)):

So I think for me, like I'm a big risk taker, so, you know, I'm not a gambler, so like, cause I don't, I don't like going to casinos and gambling. Cause I feel like that's, that's a, a different type of risk. The, I like taking risks where I know what I'm capable of and I can, you know, climb to that. And like, I remember at one point, um, you know, the ba when I first started the bakery, it wasn't going that well. I was working like 16 or 18 hours a day. Um, you know, I mean the bakery started off doing pretty well right from the beginning, but it was so hard. And, you know, there were times when I had to decide, am I gonna pay for flour this week, or sugar, you know, like instead of when I, when it was due, it was, what could I afford to pay for? And, um, so, you know, that, that was kind of a scary time. But I always, my goal then was I will do whatever it takes to make this business succeed. And I always said that to, to myself, you know, when I get up in the morning, I was tired, you know, or I deal with, you know, a problem with a customer, an employee, but I always said, I'm gonna do whatever it takes to make this business succeed. That was my thing.

Doug Smith ([13:07](#)):

Wow. Well, let's go back to, to actually, you know, you started the bakery, or you bought the bakery, uh, and actually growing it, you know, it seems like early on you made some really unique decisions in the industry specifically. Um, I know that you made the decision to focus a hundred percent on retail, uh, to have fully stocked shelves. Can you talk about those decisions early on and how big of a difference they made? And, and even just going back to risk, you know, what was the risk factor like with those decisions?

Marc Serrao ([13:31](#)):

Yeah, so, um, when I, when I first, you know, I was raised in the bakery business really. So I had some really great mentors, you know, from, from pretty much a young boy through, you know, my twenties. Um, and the, the one thing that everyone kind of agreed with, uh, business owners, the supermarket, uh, managers, was the way to make money in a bakery is to sell out a product by the end of the day. So that was my goal. So I would be really happy if at the end of the day now I didn't like empty shelves ever. So at the end of the day when our shelves were empty, it didn't feel right to me, but I, but I believed it was the right thing to do, a logical thing to do. So that's what I did. And I noticed when we were open until seven o'clock and there was nobody coming in the store after six, so we started closing at six, and then there was nobody coming in after, you know, at, at six.

Marc Serrao ([14:21](#)):

So I, so I decided to close a five. And, you know, I prayed about it, talked to my wife about it, I said, this isn't right, because if we keep going like this, we're not gonna be open at all <laugh>, you know. Um, so I, I decided that, and this was very unconventional for bakeries. I decided that we always, you know, my wife and I are givers, so we, I loved it at the end of the day, giving leftovers to area food banks, veterans, senior citizens, shelter, all kinds of shelters. Um, so I didn't mind having a few large boxes of stuff left to give away. We had a couple organizations that would come in and get stuff, but I decided that we were going to, um, bake, bake all the way through the day, like till in the middle of the morning, uh, or or middle of the afternoon, which was unusual for a bakery.

Marc Serrao ([15:06](#)):

We usually, you bake all night and then you're done. You saw everything you have. Um, so we decided to keep baking and that we were gonna have stuff on our shelves until the end of the day. Um, and

whatever was left, we would donate a lot more stuff to these, um, organizations and hopefully it wouldn't, um, as hopefully we would still make enough money to keep the business going. So even immediately, um, you know, we started doing that baking stuff and our lines were lasting throughout the day until like, now, you know, we actually will close the bakery at seven o'clock and we'll lock sometimes 80 or a hundred people inside the bakery cuz they're, wow. They know that they're coming in, they're gonna find full shelves. And, um, so our business is, we, we, we, we actually serve more people our last hour than we serve our first hour.

Marc Serrao ([15:53](#)):

And, um, so that worked really well. And we, and actually that year, you know, I used to read, uh, um, a bakery magazine, um, called Modern Baking. It was, I read every month I waited for it to come and it would have stories about bakeries. There was no internet then it would've stories about bakeries, big bakeries and how they ran their businesses and stuff. And every year in the summer, there was a, um, a, uh, kind of like a competition for best bakery in, in, in the country in America. And I wouldn't read them. I mean, I, I, I used to read and I used to think that's gonna be me someday, even though it seemed impossible, you know? So, but the first part of that is you had to, um, write an essay about some special skill or some new thing you brought to the, um, to, to that business. And so I used that and I called it our merchandising, um, our merchandising department, which, because we were, we started getting so busy. Um, I would, we would hire people that weren't cashiers, that weren't housekeeping or bakers, but they were merchandisers and all they did all day was fill our trays up, you know, um, rotate our product, clean our trays, keep our cases looking pristine. So we won, we won that award that year for merchandising. And we, so it was like, there, there were 10 different topics and we won the merchandising that year.

Doug Smith ([17:17](#)):

Wow. That's incredible. Um, I know in your business you've also had obstacles throughout the way, and I actually didn't know this, you know, in the times that we've spent together, but I heard you on another interview with Carrie New H, which was a great interview. Um, you, you mentioned that very early on, I forget how old you were, but you actually got sued and I think you were 20 something. Can you tell us that story? Cause I, I listened to it and I'm like, if that happened to me, oh, I don't know what I'd do. So yeah. Can you share that story and what you learned? Yes.

Marc Serrao ([17:42](#)):

So, so I learned a lot through that. Um, so, so when I bought the bakery from the family of the, the guy that passed away, um, they, he signed a five year lease and the landlord was kind of holding the estate to that lease and he had to okay, another person to come in and take over the lease. And, um, so, you know, I went and I was interviewed by them, by, by him. And they accepted me as taking over this lease. And there was a, um, there was something, there was a part of the lease that said, um, now, at that time, that was 35 years ago, the average rent in Oakmont was I think like \$5 a square foot, which my rent should have been about \$500 a month, but his rent was a thousand dollars a month. Um, which was a lot for that, for the small space I was in.

Marc Serrao ([18:29](#)):

But I, you know, I saw the, the potential, it was all put together already and all that. So I did that. And while I was, and I didn't have an attorney then, but I noticed in the lease this one little section that said, you can choose the, the, uh, tenant can choose a high rent, which he did a thousand dollars a month,

\$10 a square foot, or, um, can choose a low rent and, and give 10% of the gross, um, revenue of the business to the landlord, which meant that he'd come in and audit the books and all that. So I mean, I saw that, you know, knowing what I know now, of course I would've taken this to an attorney and they would've taken it completely out. But we just scratched it out and initialed it. So, um, five years later when my lease was up, you know, I was gonna, I was going to stay in this, in this location, um, because I, and even though it was probably way too small for us by now, but I, my mind couldn't really, I couldn't wrap my mind around moving in Oakmont having a bigger place and all that.

Marc Serrao ([19:28](#)):

So we were good with that. And, um, went and talked to the landlord and he said, um, you know, I said, I said I wanted to remodel it a little bit and he was gonna raise the rent 50%. And I was like, 50%, that's insane for that, you know, size. And, um, he's, and pretty much what he said is, here's the deal. If you move, you, you pay the rent and you stay there for five more years, or if you move, I'm gonna sue you for the, um, the section of the lease which asks for the 10% that you never paid. And I said, you know, well, first of all, I never paid it because I wasn't, it wasn't part of our agreement. And, and that's obvious that you never audited the business. Like the first year they would've audited the business and all that.

Marc Serrao ([20:10](#)):

But anyways, I, at the, in the end I said, I'm moving. So I found a new location. Um, I hired an attorney, um, and it was a, it was a few years and my wife and I were very nervous, you know, really, we were afraid cuz he was suing us for a lot of money. And, um, so in the end, it kind of worked out in our favor that, um, instead of having, they were, we were supposed to have a trial, and when my attorney went down for the trial, they, they, um, normally have this part of it where they say, um, there's always a possibility that your trial, your hearing would be called that day and you have to be ready for it. Well, we weren't ready for it. And they, they called very unusually, they called my trial that day. So on the way to the, um, on the way downtown pit to downtown Pittsburgh to the courthouse that day, I called our past, our past our pastor.

Marc Serrao ([21:00](#)):

And I was telling him, I said, I'm so nervous, you know, I'm on my way down to this. We're not prepared, my lawyer's not prepared. And, um, he said, just remember, you're gonna be judged by a judge, just like you're gonna be judged by, you know, there's gonna be a lot of things you're judged for in your lifetime. And when you are, when you're sitting in front of this judge, tell him the absolute truth. Don't blow anything up. Don't, you know, diminish anything. Just tell the truth about what happened. And I did. I said, you know, I looked at him a whole different way. He, he said to me, kind of look at the judge, like he has a fishing hat on. You're just having a talk with, you know, a regular guy. A regular guy. So I did that and, um, it went so well.

Marc Serrao ([21:40](#)):

The judge at the end of the, at the very end of the thing, he said to the landlord, um, normally it, I, you know, I tell you guys I'm gonna go back on my chambers and then I come out and say, we're gonna give, I'm gonna give you my verdict in two weeks or whatever. And he said, but I don't have to do that. Um, you should be, you should be mentoring this young businessman instead you're trying to hurt him. And he said, I rule in favor of, you know, of, of the defendant. And, um, this is over today. Which was such an unbelievable blessing.

Doug Smith ([22:12](#)):

Wow. Uh, that brings to mind. I'm just curious, you know, as the, the leader, as the owner of your company, for how, how many years have you owned Oakmont?

Marc Serrao ([22:22](#)):

35, 35

Doug Smith ([22:22](#)):

Years? You know, where we're living in a world right now post covid, where leaders are having tons of mental health issues. It's stressful. And I I'm always curious when I, when I talk to leaders who have a lot of pressure on them or a lot of weights, how they actually deal with that. You know, I think about you have a 24 7 operation, you know, 200 plus employees that you were mentioning all these cause you have to deliver, then you have all these other things going on. How have you learned when, when things like getting sued come up that make you nervous or you feel pressure, and maybe you don't, but how do you deal with like, the pain and stress of being an owner and a leader and, and not, you know, break down mentally, et cetera?

Marc Serrao ([22:59](#)):

Um, well, because I have children in the business, it's even more important to me now to teach them how to get through this stuff. So me going through that, that few years, my wife and I, you know, besides, we were both tormented. We, we just didn't know what the outcome was gonna be. Um, but we also, you know, our relationship with God got much stronger and our relationship together, you know, we were partners and we were like praying. We prayed about this every single day and it, it kind of overshadowed us. So what I do now is I always, you know, I tell my kids and I try to do this myself is, um, is just try to, um, you know, keep it, you know, keep everything in perspective. Um, keep it in a compartment in your mind where you can turn it off. Like I can, you know, I go home at night, um, and I still work 12 hours a day, seven days a week, pretty much.

Marc Serrao ([23:47](#)):

Um, but when I go to sleep, I'm instantly sleeping. I don't let my mind, you know, race. And I think the most important thing is to put your priorities in order and know that like, my business is really important. It's a blessing to me, my family and a lot of other people. Um, but it's not the most important thing in the world. You know, the most important thing in the world is my relationship with God and, and making sure that my kids see that, see that we live a life of faith, you know, and that we're helping other people. So I kind of try to put my focus on that stuff once you, one thing that my wife and I have found in those days is that when we would focus on scriptures, um, it would take our mind off of that nightmare, you know?

Doug Smith ([24:30](#)):

Wow, that's so good and so wise. Um, and you, and you mentioned your wife several times already. I am curious, you know, you talked about her saying okay to the bakery. You talked about walking through this. I mean, it sounds like she's been along for the whole journey. Uh, any advice out there for, for people who work with family members, maybe even especially a spouse, what have you learned about working with your spouse and, and keeping your marriage and, and even having a thriving marriage?

Marc Serrao ([24:52](#)):



Hmm. Um, so in the early days, you know, because we couldn't afford a lot of employees. We both worked, we, we, you know, I would go at one o'clock in the morning, start baking and my wife would come in, you know, we had two kids that, two kids then. So she would come in later like in the morning, like nine or 10 in the morning. But we were together all day long. And, you know, she is, she is as much ownership of the bakery as I do, so, and she's, she's not quite as aggressive as I am with like, being the boss. But with me, she is <laugh>. If she says she wants something done, she wants it done, you know, then she's not shy with me about that. So there were times when we would have disagreements, you know, huge disagreements and would get into arguments and stuff like that.

Marc Serrao ([25:34](#)):

So it really wasn't good for our marriage, you know, so that fir I think it was like the first year, um, we had a couple, you know, huge arguments. We actually talked about getting divorced. Um, and we, we decided that working together wasn't good for our marriage. So, um, we, the way we worked it out, which really benefited me also was when she would come in, I would leave. So, um, like on Saturday after, like, I would work Saturday night until, you know, into the afternoon. And then she would come in Saturday afternoon and I would go home, which gave me the time that I really did need either to relax or spend time with my kids or, you know, whatever. And we did that on Thursdays, Saturdays, and then other days of the week should come in in the afternoon and I'd go home and go to sleep for a couple hours cause I was up all night. So it benefited us in a few different ways.

Doug Smith ([26:24](#)):

Wow.

Marc Serrao ([26:24](#)):

I would just say, I mean, there are people that work together and, and do well, you know, um, I work with my children when we get along really well, we're all in like, kind of different departments, so it works out that we're not like together all the time.

Doug Smith ([26:38](#)):

Yeah. I think that's super wise. To actually just be self-aware I think is the, the key lesson there. Just know your wife, know yourself, and set boundaries and, and that's so good. Thank you for sharing that. Um, I wanna go back to, to just, I wanna talk about goal setting. You talked about being a visionary and, you know, and even just the vision of being that bakery magazine and being a winner. Um, I've heard you talk about, I think you set one big goal a year. Can you talk about that process and what that looks like?

Marc Serrao ([27:01](#)):

Yeah, I mean, sometimes, sometimes the goals are, sometimes, so every year, by the end of December, I always have a goal for the next year. And sometimes it's for my employees, sometimes it's for a certain product line. You know, one year it was building the new bakery. Um, so one year it was being, um, winning, you know, best retail bakery in America, which we did win that the next year after the merchandising award. That was, that was a really big goal. And um, but like, there was one year that I, for, for some reason, I decided that I wanted, um, the bakery not to just be a destination for people in our community in Oakmont, Verona, Penn Hills, but for the entire city of Pittsburgh. And, um, we did a lot of intentional things, the way we advertised things that we advertised, you know, creating Pittsburgh specific products, things like that. And that year, and I always believe this is God's confirmation that

we're doing the right thing sometimes. Um, that year, um, I, the Pittsburgh airport had a marketing company that were, um, they were targeting businesses in Pittsburgh that they considered Pittsburgh destination businesses. And we were one of those businesses that were on the, um, all the TV screens in the Pittsburgh airport.

Doug Smith ([28:17](#)):

And that made a big difference.

Marc Serrao ([28:19](#)):

Yeah, well to me it did <laugh>.

Doug Smith ([28:21](#)):

I mean that's huge. How many thousands of

Marc Serrao ([28:23](#)):

Thousands of people. I mean, obviously our business increased our, and that's another thing that the bakery has increased in revenue every year and it increased that year too. So it's always hard to say what it is, but I believe that made the people in the city and the people visiting our city much more aware of us.

Doug Smith ([28:40](#)):

Yeah. And can you talk, just give people an idea now, cuz you've certainly have, uh, hit that goal of being known in Pittsburgh and your go-to destination. Uh, but now, I mean, are there people coming from all over the US to visit the bakery, the world? Like what does that look like?

Marc Serrao ([28:54](#)):

Well, so, I mean, we have people every day. We have a lot of people that come in and have never even been into the bakery. And we know that because we see people, they come in sometimes and they wander around. So my team has done some pretty cool things. Like there's QR codes on every sign in the bakery. There's a big one when you walk in the front doors, um, on the sign that says take a number, there's a QR code there. And when you, um, when you scan the QR code, it tells you how to navigate through the bakery. Like, you know, if you wanna get, have food or if you wanna get in line or what you need to do and all that, where the bathrooms are. And um, so we see people doing that all the time. And obviously people that come in all the time don't need to do that.

Marc Serrao ([29:31](#)):

So when we do see people that we feel are new, we, a lot of times, me, my son, my daughter will go talk to them, um, some of the managers and say, Hey, where are you from? And they, they're from all over the country for sure. And, um, and so I, we always think that's interesting. Now they're not, most of those people aren't coming to Pittsburgh to come to Oakmont Bakery, but because they're in Pittsburgh, they're coming to Oakmont Bakery, which I think is so cool. And, um, and we also have, we've had quite a few businesses, um, that come to the bakery bakeries from all over the country that come just to tour of the bakery. And we make ourselves very available. So when they bring their, they'll bring their production teams or their managers, um, sometimes just the owners and their kids that we take them on a full tour, share all of our information with them.

Marc Serrao ([30:19](#)):

Um, which I learned from, um, the bakery business in general is everyone that like to, all the people that I know that, that own bakeries for the most part are very friendly and open and kind of like a family. So, um, like, um, when I heard about Porto's Bakery, which is in California, it's a, um, it's a family bakery that's huge. They have seven locations at least as big as ours or bigger. Um, but I, when I was thinking about, I was actually gonna expand the bakery to, we were in three buildings in the center of Oakmont and I was gonna join two of the buildings together and become about 12,000 square feet plus a warehouse in the back. So that was my plan. Somebody said, before you do that, you have to go to Portos in California and see what he's done there. So my son and I got tickets, we flew to, um, we flew to Portos and it was funny because we're all Portos such a great guy.

Marc Serrao ([31:15](#)):

Everyone said, just so you know, um, Raul doesn't really talk to people very much, but he lets you tour his bakery, you know, so just so you know that. So we get there, um, we met his manager at the front. He introduced us to Raul. So we're talking to Raul and he, he takes us for a tour all through the bakery for two days. He drives us to other locations, to their commissary, all this stuff. And, um, and it was unbeliev it was, it was overload. It was over, it was like going to Disney World <laugh> if you, if you, if you worked at Kennywood. I think so. Um, we, so at the end of those two days, um, I said we were sitting in the office. Any other questions you have? He, he actually had a spreadsheet on his gigantic screen showing us their income and all this stuff.

Marc Serrao ([31:58](#)):

Wow. And, um, any other questions? And I said, I I, one thing I have to ask is, everybody said that you don't really talk to the bakery owners all that much when they come here, but you're very generous letting in for the bakery. And he said, most of the people that come here from bakeries, the first thing they say to me in their first paragraph is, I would never want a bakery, this thing <laugh>. And I'm like, why are you here? So I just ignore them, <laugh>. And he said, you and your son come in with eyes wide open and never stop, you know, so,

Doug Smith ([32:26](#)):

And, and leaders, if you're, that's one of my favorite stories that you share, mark, and, and leaders, if you're listening to this, I tell people this all the time, just, just ask. You'd be surprised who'll spend time with you. Yeah. You'll be surprised who will give you their time if you just ask. And I was interviewing a guy named Don Yeager the other week for the podcast. He wrote for Sports Illustrated, got personally mentored by John Wooden, um, he's one of the greatest basketball coaches of all time. And he's, he did the exact same thing you did. He started meeting with John and he said, John, you know, how many people do you do this with? He's like, not that many. And he said, well, how many people ask? He said, not as many as you would think. And I think so many times we think, oh, you know, you lose that opportunity. You've never spent time with me, but you'd be surprised. So leaders just ask, um, I wanna I want you to share another fun story and I wanna talk to you about competition. And so, uh, at one point in your journey you had some competition from a, a bagel shop come into town. Can you tell that story and just maybe tie in some lessons about how you view competition?

Marc Serrao ([33:18](#)):

So I'm very competitive. So when all my, most of my friends were really into sports, and I was always into working since I was really young. So I'm competitive in business <laugh>. So, um, I, so, you know,

when I, the bakery was open for probably around seven years, and the, the big bagel craze came, it was in the, in the nineties, you know, and every, there was bagels everywhere. Um, the only place you could get them originally was in Squirrel Hill at Bagel Land. But now there were bagel shops were popping up. Bagel land, um, was increasing, um, Bruegger's bagels were everywhere. Um, so I, so I decided to buy bagel equipment, which was probably, I think it was around \$35,000 for a bagel machine. Cause normal, and that's the other thing when, you know, originally when you made bagels, you just made a dough, which is a simple dough, and you, um, cut the pieces and three ounce pieces and then rolled them out and boiled them in water and all that.

Marc Serrao ([34:12](#)):

It's very simple procedure, but when you're making a lot of them with not a lot of employees, a bagel machine, you know, you make the dough, you stick it inside the machine, it, it rolls them out, cuts them in the exact right size, and then it rolls them into a bagel, drops 'em onto a tray, and all you do is pick 'em up and put them on, on trays. But it's, it, it's the, the processes, um, you know, it's the same process, the outcome's the same, but the process is very auto automated. So I decided to do that. So I bought the equipment, prayed about it, was really nervous about it, bought a bagel kettle. And, um, right around the time that we were, our bagel machine was coming, I heard that Brewer's Bagels was opening a location one block from the bakery. And anybody that knows Oakmont knows that Oakmont is not a franchise town.

Marc Serrao ([34:58](#)):

It's all small businesses, you know, it's just, you know, the, the, the all American, little, little, uh, city, little town. So, um, when I heard that, I was very nervous, of course, you know, and the one thing I should have learned earlier that took me a long time to learn, I teach my kids now, is if, when I look at all of these stories, the, the, the basic thing is trust God. If you trust God, you don't get nervous, you don't spend all your time worrying. And, but, but it is important that you do something about it. You can't just sit around. So I decided the, the bagels, um, Bruegger's claim to fame was kind of what they would do is when they were getting ready to open their locations, they would send a coupon to every address in that community, I think like a seven mile radius or something, and they would all get a half a dozen of free bagels.

Marc Serrao ([35:48](#)):

So they got to try their bagels. Um, when they baked all day, they baked their bagels all day. Um, so they got to try their bagels for free. And, um, I'm sure that helped kick off their opening. So I decided that we were going, so we ran ads in the PennySaver, which was the big paper at the time, and church, some church bulletins, things like that, and said, um, if you get a competitor's coupon, a bakery coupon, we'll double whatever they give you. So we were giving away a dozen bagels, but they had to bring their product into the bakery. So we had these people, so I, I bought these big white garbage cans and put them in the center of the bakery. And, um, we made the customers throw their bagels into the garbage cans, <laugh>, um, kind of like a, you know, make a statement. And then we gave them a free dozen donuts. And I mean, it got to the point where like, we, like this one lady, she danced into the bakery, got my bagels, there's like, you know, 50 people in there and she toss them into the garbage, you know? And, um, so, but we did donate all those bagels to our organizations. We didn't throw away. Um, yeah, that was, and it worked out our, our bagel um, our bagel, you know, um, line did really well right away

Doug Smith ([37:01](#)):

And and how did it turn out for, for boogers?

Marc Serrao ([37:04](#)):

And so Bruger was, they were in the town I think for like, I don't know, maybe eight or 10 years, and then they went out of business. Yeah. So I'm sure that they had, you know,

Doug Smith ([37:14](#)):

Challenges. So Yeah. Well, thank you for sharing that. I love, I love how competitive you are. I love all, love that story. Uh, I wanna talk about staffing. You have a 200 employees, which is just crazy. Like you said, it was probably crazy for you to think that you'd have that one day. Um, my understanding of the times that we've spent together is you've also had people with you for years and years and years who have been really loyal. How do you, I guess I'll just leave this open-ended, what advice do you have for leaders in creating great cultures and really taking care of their staff to enable them to be so loyal to your organization?

Marc Serrao ([37:43](#)):

Um, well, I mean, the most important thing I think is, you know, and I learned this as a manager in the supermarket, is that we have to be com our, the wages have to be competitive. So that's another thing, like a mom and pop bakery, they would normally, you know, you would just pay your employees a little bit less because you're not a big corporation. Um, and then a lot, you know, people were very loyal, you know, so they'd stay for many years. But it, in my bakery, I decided that I was very competitive. So, you know, it, it, it, when we first started, I believe that like a baker was a giant eagle, for instance, was maybe at \$6 an hour. So we started them at \$7 an hour. That's what we started them at. And, um, and we also always believed in, um, promoting from within.

Marc Serrao ([38:28](#)):

So like the people that have been at the bakery for a while, like we have, um, one woman, um, who's been Courtney, who is our operations director now, she started when she was, I think 14 years old. And, um, so, and she was a great, great cashier. She was a merchandiser for some time. And, uh, then she was a order specialist, and now she's our operations director. She actually designed our p o s system, which was a, a year long job working with, um, a computer, um, programmer. And, uh, and our system's unbelievable, you know. Um, but she also, um, you know, right now she's designing a new, um, surveillance system for the bakery. Um, so she's, uh, she's just, you know, so valuable to us. Um, our, one of our head managers, um, Michael, um, was a high school kid, you know, went to Riverview High School across the street from the bakery.

Marc Serrao ([39:17](#)):

And, um, his goal was always to be a, an entertainer. He, he went, he was in all the school plays. He was about standing ovations, you know, but he was, you know, he started the bakery as a cleaning guy and moved through the ranks, became a baker, um, um, and, and now he's our head front manager. He's been, I think at the bakery for 20 years. And, um, but a, a really funny story about it, and I love when people, you know, I read a book one time called The Dream Maker, and it was about this company that, um, the owner of the company had this little office. And every, when a, when an employee was there for a certain amount of time, they got to go in his office and tell, tell 'em what their dream was. And like, there was all different ones.

Marc Serrao ([39:58](#)):

Everybody's dreams are different. One lady was, um, only spoke Spanish and had a, I think an eighth grade education, and she wanted to speak English. And he sent her for, he sent her to the local community college and she learned to speak English. Um, another, a couple people always wanted to own property, and he, um, helped them fi get loans, find houses, things like that. So I love that story. And, and I, I, I have that same feeling. I always want people to be as happy as I am, you know, able to attain their, their goals. Um, so Michael, who always wanted to be a star, um, and he's such a great actor, um, he, um, my, my daughter-in-law, who's our social media director, she started making these videos with Michael. And, um, he's actually, and this is unbelievable. It's so true. Everywhere we go, people say, I wanna meet Michael.

Marc Serrao ([40:48](#)):

Or people come in the bakery and they're like, is Michael here today? I wanted to get a picture with him. Um, even his wife, people say to him, people will say to him, you know, what's it like being married to him? You know? Um, so he's definitely, he, he's a star at Oakmont Bakery for sure, but they, the, you know, my daughter-in-law's, social media, um, you know, stuff that she does, which she didn't go to school for, she's very talented. We actually had a, um, we had a social media director that we hired that went to marketing school, and it just didn't really work out for us. So she filled in my daughter-in-law, Samantha filled in as the interim director and blew it outta the water. She has some posts that reach a million or million and a half likes. Um, so, but, but Michael actually is, he loves the whole idea of what he does on social media.

Doug Smith ([41:38](#)):

Yeah. So I'm, I'm hearing you say so many things when you, you talk about just empowering people. Um, one, it sounds like you, you really have a, a freedom internally to give people an opportunity to shine and go after their dreams. Like you, you have no insecurities about handing over no control issues. Is that, is that pretty accurate? That's

Marc Serrao ([41:56](#)):

Ac Yeah, that's accurate. And I learned that through the years. I was, you know, early in the earlier years, I was, you know, I was always concerned about, I always wanted to have my hand on everything, but now I've learned that most of these people are better at their jobs than I was when I was doing their jobs. You know, like they're, it's just their thing. They're good at it. They're better than me. So why jump in? Like, sometimes I think a leader will hold somebody back because they're constantly, um, questioning 'em. And, you know, you know, I, I think sometimes you kind of have to accept a little less than what you really want to let somebody else grow in that, in that, you know, position or field. We have, um, we have a guy that works for us who, who was in jail and, um, we hired him as soon as he got out of jail.

Marc Serrao ([42:40](#)):

Somebody I knew knew him. And, um, so we checked, checked his background and stuff, and he had no other offenses before that, but he was a alcoholic and drug addict. And, um, so he came to work at the bakery and he was, you know, he, no, he's been there now for about 18 years at the bakery. Wow. And clean and sober for 18 years. And he helps a lot of people. It's, it's, it's amazing, you know. Um, but one of his goals was that he wanted to have, he wanted to have a transition house where people got out of jail and, um, you know, he helped them. So it probably, after he was at the bakery for a few years, I, I

helped him find a house close by, um, and he purchased it. I helped him get a loan with the person that I got loans for, so I didn't really give him anything. Um, but I helped him through the whole process. And now he's had the house for I think, 10 or 12 years, and hundreds of people have lived in this house that, you know, it's a halfway house for people to get outta jail in their transition to, you know, their own life. So, uh, I think that's amazing.

Doug Smith ([43:37](#)):

I love that story and just how you put your employees first, and, and really as a, you know, as I've heard you share over and over again, it seems like generosity has been one of the major themes of, of your life and your wife and your entire family. And not just generosity with money, but obviously your time in investing in people. I love, uh, I do wanna talk about generosity though, uh, and I'll just leave this really open-ended. What does generosity look for, look like in your life, and why has that been important to you?

Marc Serrao ([44:02](#)):

Um, so, so Susan and I both, you know, we, our favorite scripture is in Luke. Um, to whom much is given, much is required. And I think that says so much in it, you know, um, I think, you know, obviously it's so much is given by God. Like God gives us so much. He gives us, you know, talents, wisdom, um, financial success. Like everything good comes from God. So, um, I, and then, um, much is required, which is we have to pay it back. You know, it's, it's a requirement to pay it back. And so I always feel like, um, both of us feel like the minute we're challenged, um, to, to give, I mean, we pray about it. Like we don't just do it, we don't do really random stuff, but we pray about it, we talk about it, and then we help everybody we can. And we've found that over the years, even things that seemed like a gigantic hurdle, um, it always ended up, um, you know, in another scripture is, uh, at the end of it is by your, um, standard of measurement, it is measured back to you, which I love because it's like, that's kind of like the sky's the limit, you know?

Doug Smith ([45:07](#)):

Yeah. And I know as, as believers, and again, there's a lot of believers listening to this, A lot of people tie, they give 10%. And I love the story you shared where God really challenged you to actually double your giving. Can you share that story? Cuz I just think it's profound for leaders to hear.

Marc Serrao ([45:20](#)):

Yeah. So, um, you know, I, I was very involved in our, our, our local church, um, amplified church. And, um, there was, and, and, uh, I was on the board of directors, you know, for quite a while now, but, um, at one point we were, the church was struggling so much that we were actually thinking that we were gonna have to, um, to give the church to another church. You know, they couldn't afford the mortgage payments and stuff. And, um, so, um, we, our founding pastor came back and jumpstarted the church and, but we needed money to, because the church was in, in such a mess. It was, the roof was caving in, everything was old, we had no sound equipment, all that stuff. So, um, we just, so we always, we were always 10% givers no matter what, no matter how bad it was, you know, what we needed or whatever.

Marc Serrao ([46:09](#)):

Always had 10%. So that year, um, I said to my wife, you know, it's never a stretch for Harvard. I said, what do you think about giving 20% instead of 10% this year? Which is a lot, you know? Absolutely. You know, so, so we decided to give 20%, which we did. And about towards the middle, or like probably

three quarters of the way into the year, we were invited by a organization called the R P I A, which is a bakery buying group you have to be invited into. And there's certain criteria you have to meet, you have to, at that time, you had to be, um, have a revenue of over a million dollars a year. Um, you had to be in business for so long, you had to be in good standing with all your, um, vendors and stuff. So we were invited, we, and we, we got in and just one product that we bought through there. Um, uh, I believe it, I think it, I can't really remember. I, it's something, it was Gen A General Mills product that we were buying. We got such a good deal on through the R P I A that our income that year, um, went up so much that our 10% or our 20% became 10% of our income that year. Wow. So our income went up. So our personal income went up so much that, um, you know, it ended up really being 10%. Anyway.

Doug Smith ([47:23](#)):

<laugh>. I love that. I love the story. I love the generosity. Um, I wanna ta talk a little bit about church. You know, you mentioned you were on the board of, of a church. Uh, it's played a huge role in your life, but you've made a comment before that that always challenges me. You know, everyone listening to this clearly can understand how busy you are, you know, working 12 plus hours a day, building the bakery. Um, but you made a statement that if the church ever needed you, you would put the church over the bakery. Yeah. So, one, I wanna verify that that's true, but can you talk about why you've made that decision and, and has that, how has that impacted your life and your business?

Marc Serrao ([47:55](#)):

Um, so there were a lot of times, you know, when we were really working on revamping the church and stuff that, like, I would never, ever be away from the bakery on a weekend. Um, but we, a lot of, you know, we had a service on Saturday and Sunday. I went to every single service Saturday and Sunday, sometimes an hour and a half before and an hour after. So it was a gigantic amount of time in our peak times, you know, at the bakery. And, um, but I just, I committed myself to that. We were gonna, we were gonna build a church, we were gonna reach, you know, um, you know, Lee's goal was to reach as many people as possible, and that's what we did. But in order to do that, it takes so much, you know, so much work and so much money and so much time.

Marc Serrao ([48:37](#)):

And, um, so I, I committed myself to that. And I found, what I found is there's always, you know, whenever we do stuff, like whenever I do stuff like that, I always find that I learn something through it that I would never would've thought I learned. So I thought I'm just sacrificing this time, you know, um, away from my business. But actually what I learned is when I made my priority, what I believe would be God's higher priority, he takes care of all the other stuff. So the bakery, we didn't skip a beat, you know, it just kept on going, just the way it always had, even though I wasn't there a lot of times during our busiest times.

Doug Smith ([49:12](#)):

Yeah. And you've mentioned him several times throughout, but Lee Kreiter is your pastor, I believe he's one of your greatest friends. And, um, I'm just curious, you know, from a mutual friend perspective, what's the greatest thing that you've learned from Lee as your pastor?

Marc Serrao ([49:25](#)):

Um, well, I mean, he's, anybody that knows him knows that he's like the ultimate leadership guru. So, um, I learned everything I know about leadership, I learned from him. You know, he, you know, it's just



everything. It's like everything that I thought I knew I didn't <laugh>. So I, you know, I learned, so I learned how he led at the church and I used all the same techniques and, and ideas and stuff at the bakery. And it always works. <laugh>.

Doug Smith ([49:53](#)):

<laugh> Lee always works. I love that. Uh, and because you've been on a board of church for so long in the round church world, do you have any advice, we have a lot of, uh, pastors listening to this or people that work in the church from a business owner perspective, do you have any general advice for church leaders on how they can be better leaders in the church from a business perspective?

Marc Serrao ([50:11](#)):

Um, well, so one thing I, all through the years, so as long as I've been on the board, I've owned a business and, um, so many times people in the church world and even people in congregation have said, you can't run the church like a business. Um, the church isn't a business, actually, business is the church in my opinion. Like, all the things that we do in business really we should be using, really can come from church. Like Jesus. Like I read a book one time called Jesus for CEO, he was the ultimate CEO, he could handle everything. He was the best leader. He was, you know, he was a servant leader. Um, so I believe that, you know, we shouldn't look at it that way. All, all businesses should run like the church runs. And I think that is business. You know, I mean, as far as the way we treat our staff, the way we treat our congregation, people or customers, um, you know, um, I just think that it's very, I think business people have a lot to offer in the church world. You know, ideas, visions, you know, things like that.

Doug Smith ([51:14](#)):

Yeah. And any advice there for pastors? Cuz I, I think sometimes, you know, if, if you came into a church, a lot of times leaders wouldn't know how to capitalize in, in, in my perspective, a lot of churches would look at you and say, well, hey, can you help out? You know, can you greet on a Saturday night service and say hello to people? Which is great, but how can pastors really, I don't wanna say take advantage of, but really partner with the business owners in their church to maximize the gifts that God put in people like you?

Marc Serrao ([51:40](#)):

Well, I mean, most of the time, um, business owners are big givers most of the time. And they also, a lot of times I think, um, business owners realize that you have to, like, you have to put money into things for it to work. Um, one of the things I feel like I was a big asset to lead in the church was, um, so we gave regularly, you know, our 10%, but then like, when he wanted to do a project, like, um, we had a, we had a, um, a department in a church called Up Street, which is our kids' department, and we remodeled this whole wing, turned it into little, a little town, kind of like oak. So we had a bakery, a candy store, a live, you know, uh, a savings and loan, things like that. But I paid for a lot of that, um, you know, as, as an offering, not as part of my type. And, um, so, but I also liked doing it. Like, I liked being the person I met with the contractors, you know, I, and I kept it going. And I think a lot of times business owners know how to get things done. So if you really wanna get stuff done, a lot of times it's the business owners that will be committed to the end result of the goal, you know?

Doug Smith ([52:48](#)):

Yeah. And, and to tie things up, you know, as we start to talk about, you've already mentioned, you know, you're now thinking about succession and you have family members that you want to, to take the bakery and run with it. And we were just talking about Lee, for those who haven't listened, Lee's been on the podcast before, Lee Kreiter, um, and he wrote a book on seamless transitions. And if you haven't listened to that and you're in a season where you're thinking about succession, I can't think of a greater resource for you. Lee is phenomenal. Read his book, connect with him, he'll actually do consulting with you. Uh, and you know, be it the Mark said he does everything that Lee says, uh, Lee has transitioned the church. And I'm just curious, mark, how are you thinking and sending up Oakmont Bakery to, to hand off to the next generation?

Marc Serrao ([53:26](#)):

Um, so I believe, so my son, um, who's 35, he was born the year the bakery was started. Um, he's actually been coming to work with me since he was five years old. He just has a love for the, for the business, and he has the entrepreneurial spirit, no question. Um, so that, I don't believe that's something you can really teach somebody. I think it's just, but he also, but the difference between me and him is, you know, like there was a year every year, um, I would, on Christmas day, I would go to the bakery and take our Christmas decorations down. On Thanksgiving day, I would go to the bakery and put my Christmas decorations up. So, so Tony would always say to me, dad, I wanna open the bakery someday, just me and you, you know. So this one year on Thanksgiving, I took him with me to the bakery and we, and, and so we hurried up and took and put the Christmas decorations up, and then I fired up one of the ovens.

Marc Serrao ([54:15](#)):

Um, we made coffee, so we made some donuts, we made some products. And, um, he was in the front of the store and we opened the bakery at like nine o'clock in the morning. My wife didn't know she would've killed me, but, um, before you know it, we had a line of people out the bakery and down the sidewalk <laugh>. And, um, this was like, I think he was about seven or eight. Um, and he didn't flinch. He didn't skip a beat. He was not nervous, you know, and, um, I think, and we took him like \$500 that day and I gave it to him, you know, and, um, so, but right from that age, I could just see in him that he had that he has that spirit, you know, he loves people. Um, he has, you know, he has as, as much a relationship with our housekeeping staff as he does with our top bakers and decorators.

Marc Serrao ([55:01](#)):

And, and you know, I, I made him, you know, that was his first position at the bakery, just like me. He mopped the floors and empty garbage cans and, um, moved all the way through the rights. He learned everything on the way up. So now he is part, so our succession plant has already started. We, we actually started looking at it about four or five years ago. And, um, he's now 10% owner of the bakery. And eventually I'm 61 within the next few years, um, after my last, you know, couple children, graduate college, um, will, he'll become the owner of the bakery. And the way we work things now is, it's very clear to everybody that he is the boss, you know? So I kind of, I mean, I go in every, every day and I, I talk to people and I help wherever help needs to be and stuff, but at the end of the day, everybody knows that Tony calls the shot. So I never get in the way or say, you shouldn't have done this, or you shouldn't have done that. Cause I think he knows enough by now. I give him advice, and I think he, he, he's phenomenal at his job.

Doug Smith ([55:59](#)):

Oh, that's great. Well, mark, this has been a phenomenal interview. Uh, just as our time's wrapping up together, I'll just leave this really open-ended. Is there any, anything else that you just wanna share with leaders today to add value to them?

Marc Serrao ([56:10](#)):

Um, I don't, I, I just think, you know, my, one of the best pieces of advice I've ever got from somebody, which was a pastor at the church, um, I was going through some, a really rough time with my marriage and the bakery. Um, and I always remember, and I was probably 26 or 27 at the time, and he said, the best piece of advice I can give you is, um, whatever you want written on your tombstone is what you should go after, you know? And so I remember at that time, the most important thing to me was my wife and my children. And they were on the back, the back burner for sure. You know, I, I put the business, it was my first priority. And one of the things he said was, um, how's, the first thing he said to me is, how's the bakery do?

Marc Serrao ([56:50](#)):

I said, it's, it's doing great. You know, it really is. It's still really good. It's throwing and um, how's your marriage? I said, it's terrible. And, um, and that was the, that was the priority. That was the order of priority. You know, at that time the bakery was the most important thing and it was thriving and doing well. When I reversed that and put my family first, God, my family, my church, um, the bakery was still doing great. It always has, you know. And so I think it's really important to keep your priorities in order. And I guess my advice would be lead like your legacy depends on it. That's what I always tell my kids. Wow, you know, you, that that is your legacy.

Doug Smith ([57:29](#)):

I can't think of a better way, uh, to end the interview. That was Mike drop, for sure. Uh, Marc, thank you so much. If you're listening to this Leaders, again, we'll include links to everything that Marc, uh, shared in the show notes. If you're in Pittsburgh, make sure you check out Oakmont Bakery, go visit it. Um, buy some delicious food and pastries and, uh, again, you can order online and if you're listening out of town, come in, uh, make sure that you add that to your bucket list of Pittsburgh visits while you're here. So thank you so much, Marc, appreciate it. And, uh, thank

Marc Serrao ([57:54](#)):

You Doug Smith.

Doug Smith ([57:56](#)):

Yep. Well, hey, leader, thank you so much for listening to my conversation with Marc. I hope that you enjoyed it as much as I did. You can find ways to connect with him and links to everything that we discussed in the show notes, and I say it every episode, but I wanna challenge you leader that if you want to 10 x your growth this year, then you need to either launch or join an L3 leadership mastermind group. Mastermind groups are simply groups of six to 12 leaders that meet together on a consistent basis for at least one year in order to help each other grow, hold each other accountable and to do life together. For me personally, mastermind groups have been the greatest source of growth in my life over the last eight years. So if you're interested in learning more about launching or joining a group, go to [l3leadership.org/masterminds](http://l3leadership.org/masterminds) or email me at [dougsmith@l3leadership.org](mailto:dougsmith@l3leadership.org). And as always, I'd like to end every episode with a quote, and today I'll quote Henry Cloud who said this, unforgiveness destroys a good life. Forgiveness creates it so good. Well, leader, know that my wife, Laura, and I love you. We

believe in you. And I say it every episode, but don't quit. Keep leading. The world desperately needs your leadership.