

Rock Thomas: Today's guest is a very likable, beautiful soul. He's recently become a father. He's a serial entrepreneur, speaker, a training and an army veteran. He's the author of five books.

Rock Thomas: One of them is a best seller. He has built and sold four companies.

Rock Thomas: And as a marketing leader he specializes in helping small businesses scale throughout his career. He's helped over 400 mid sized businesses, and he's a track record of driving company growth and brand awareness.

Rock Thomas: He's like I said authored five books and he's appeared in over 100 media outlets. He's got a dual bachelor's and master's degree.

Rock Thomas: And after spending eight years in the Army as a nuclear biological and chemical operations sergeant, he was awarded

Rock Thomas: The Army commendation medal while serving overseas interact and the Enduring Freedom. He actually joined the military. Three days after 911 and a kind of a rash decision.

Rock Thomas: And seal. You'll hear a little bit about how decisions do affect us as he goes through his story. He's also the leader and instructor of freelance masterclass please help me welcome to today's podcast, my dear friend Mike Volkin

Mike Volkin: Thanks so much pleasure to be here.

Rock Thomas: So we're excited to learn from thought leaders like yourself, people that are out there making the world a better place. So why don't we give our listeners, a little bit of a background as to where you grew up, and how you ended up where you are today.

Mike Volkin: Okay, so I grew up in New England, Massachusetts, to be exact, went to school in Texas. And after I graduated in Texas. I went to Stephen F. Austin State University.

Mike Volkin: And graduated there went over to California to do work from what I was trained to do as a scientist and somehow managed to transition my life into being an entrepreneur. And that's where I've been ever since.

Rock Thomas: So, today you help people improve their lives. Tell us a little bit about your military experience.

Mike Volkin: Yep, I joined the army. Three days after 911 and just dropped my corporate job and went down there to basic training.

Mike Volkin: As a chemical warfare specialist and then I got deployed to Iraq right after that I spent eight years in the army.

Mike Volkin: Reserves but three of those eight almost three of those eight in on active duty.

Mike Volkin: So yeah, when I got back from Iraq, I became an entrepreneur, because of a book I published just kind of a roundabout way of being an entrepreneur.

Mike Volkin: To really decide that I like to sell books and and learn how to market and then ever since then I've been a consultant and marketing consultants for over 400 companies and built and sold four companies along the way.

Rock Thomas: Anything interesting happening while you were in Iraq.

Mike Volkin: Oh, lots of good stuff every day was. It was an adventure. But, you know, a lot of times it's not like the movies where it's like, you know, go, go, go. And, you know, shooting and running. It's a lot of downtime, but

Mike Volkin: The action packed times are just like the movies. But yeah, we had it, I don't want to say it was a good time. But it was definitely a time full with a lot of stories.

Rock Thomas: Are you still in touch with anybody that you went through that with

Mike Volkin: Actually, one person, and I actually went skydiving with him last year. A buddy of mine and

Mike Volkin: He's been so busy because he's a firefighter now and he's been battling all the blazes around the world. I hardly ever get a chance to talk to him anymore, but I do touch base with them, you know, a couple times a year.

Rock Thomas: Because they say when you go through something intense like that you tend to create these deep relationships. Yeah.

Mike Volkin: Unfortunately, when, when I was deployed. I got deployed with a different unit. I was stationed in Sacramento and they told me I got a letter.

Mike Volkin: Said, hey, there's a platoon in South Dakota that needs you. And I've never even heard of anyone in South Dakota. I don't know what they needed me for but I flew down there and deployed with them. So I was pretty much a stranger to 200 people. But I thought you

Rock Thomas: Guys, have a good 200

Mike Volkin: It was actually the whole company but I spent almost all my time with one particular platoon. Okay.

Rock Thomas: Did you take any of that experience to what you do today. I

Mike Volkin: Well, especially the leadership. I mean, as a consultant. I'm a marketing leader for a lot of companies. I'm what's called a fractional CMOS. So I'll go into a small business and provide marketing leadership.

Mike Volkin: So small businesses don't have to hire a full time CMO, which a lot of times they can't. So I learned a lot of my leadership skills from the Army both formally and classroom training and then also in the field.

Rock Thomas: And what are some of the companies that you go into and what exactly do you do for them.

Mike Volkin: Many of them are internet based company so they don't always have to drive all their revenue through the internet but

Mike Volkin: They are interested in and have the capability to do so. So I'll go in there. I'll diagnose a lot of issues that the company might have, maybe it's the lack of a good leader. Maybe it's the lack of

Mike Volkin: The right hire in the right spot. And a lot of times it's the website or or the systems that produced the sales.

Mike Volkin: Maybe after the fact, or even the marketing communications before the sale is made. So I'll go in there and I'll just, I'll get everything. I'll just analyze everything and determine what needs to be fixed.

Rock Thomas: And how much of it is usually the leadership versus the actual systems.

Mike Volkin: That's a good question because a lot of times the leadership is the one that hires me. I can't go in there and say that you suck in your toxic to your

Mike Volkin: To your company, but honestly, it's about half the time. It's not that they're toxic, but

Mike Volkin: Most of the time they're not. They're just they've never been a leader like

Mike Volkin: A lot of times, entrepreneurs are kind of thrust into being the CEO and they don't really know how to be a CEO. Maybe they're the ones that came up with a concept or an idea for business and they're kind of put in a leadership position. So they're learning on the fly.

Rock Thomas: So a lot of small businesses. I come across it typically is somebody who was maybe really good at selling something

Rock Thomas: Really good at providing that service and then all of a sudden they had more demand than they could handle so they started to hire an assistant and then they start to expand a little bit

Rock Thomas: And then kind of got to that place where, like you said they weren't really good at leading people write that kind of situation that you you come across

Mike Volkin: Yeah, unfortunately, companies usually hire backwards so they'll have the CEO and the like way I've got a little bit of money, a little bit of cash flow. Let me hire a social media system. LET ME, HIRE

Mike Volkin: You know, an email marketing person, which is fine, but it lacks vision and strategy in marketing. So I'm the person that comes in and says, you really need a strategy or you're wasting money here. You're not doing this right.

Mike Volkin: You've got some, some people who are doing marketing, but they don't really

Mike Volkin: Know what they're doing in terms of strategy. So that's where I come in. But, um, yeah. Unfortunately, a lot of small businesses can't just come in and higher up two or \$300,000 years CMO so they hire what they can give them the cash flow situation.

Rock Thomas: How do you get good at that. Because that seems to be a bit of an ordinance that yeah people, you gotta deal with systems, you got to be able to come in and add value right away. So how do you get good at that?

Mike Volkin: You know guys like you to be honest with you, I mean, you look up to the mentors, you read the books a lot of leadership is experienced based. There's a lot of different styles of leadership and mentorship. But then, you know, I'm a big advocate of

Mike Volkin: I wish I had people like you, when I was becoming an entrepreneur, it would have fast tracked me so much more and much faster, you know,

Mike Volkin: So I really didn't have those resources, but as an entrepreneur coach myself. I try to take every one of my entrepreneurs and give them leadership lessons along the way. In addition to helping them with their business because those two go hand in hand, you know,

Rock Thomas: What are some of the books or teachers, you've used in order to get better at what you do.

Mike Volkin: Oh boy. It really depends on what my passion is, you know, right now I'm really into neuroscience. So because there's a lot of really cool things happening in

Mike Volkin: Neuroscience and neuromarketing we're learning a lot in the last 10 years and what the brain.

Mike Volkin: Can tell us, we're actually able to verify this with proof and studies now that we're just concepts and theories in the past. So in terms of actual books. I like

Mike Volkin: The power of neuroplasticity with shad homesteader he's excellent and neuroscience deep work with Cal Newport really shows you how to do good focus

Mike Volkin: And productivity along those lines atomic habits. The Power of Now I mean anything that has to do with focus and productivity and really optimizing the brain because you can turn one entrepreneur into three

Mike Volkin: Just by being super focused, because honestly, you've heard of Parkinson's law, the work kind of fills itself. It fills its own day

Mike Volkin: And a lot of people just go to work like zombies, not really knowing that they're just clicking away into nothingness. And ever since I really focused on productivity and efficiency. My work has just skyrocketed.

Rock Thomas: So how many companies or clients would you typically have at a time, work with 400 you say

Mike Volkin: Yeah, as a fractional CMO I can usually do about four companies with about six entrepreneur coaching clients, which are really just weekly calls in that pretty much Max's me out for my week

Rock Thomas: Do you spend much time speaking on the circuit.

Mike Volkin: I would like to spend more time filling rooms like you do. That's actually my goal for the New Years. I make goals as silly as that sounds, but honestly, if you don't

Mike Volkin: Make goals and track. A lot of people. The goals are, they go away by February. Right. But actually, I make them and I write them down.

Mike Volkin: And I track them every week. And the goal is to do more public speaking. I've done speaking with 4060 8080 people but not like you are. There's hundreds of people in the room, you know,

Rock Thomas: So I have an assessment that I created called the seven traits of success. I'm going to go through them and I'm gonna ask you to rate on a scale of one to 10 how important you think those traits are

Rock Thomas: As the characteristics of somebody that's that successful. Maybe you came across them or you recognize them.

Mike Volkin: Okay, but I'll tell you, I'm the hardest critic of myself. I'll give myself a lot of low scores, because I believe that there's always room for improvement. So

Rock Thomas: Yeah, of course. So you give yourself a score, then maybe let's say you choose Richard Branson. Okay. Okay. So as a learner.

Mike Volkin: This is one to 10 right 10 Jenga highest learner eight

And Richard

Rock Thomas: Going to get of course

Mike Volkin: I would say nine or 10 hitting him. Obviously the pinnacle right

Right.

Rock Thomas: As a leader.

Mike Volkin: Eight Richard Branson. I've never studied under him, but I would say he's, he's a 10 he's built tons of companies.

Rock Thomas: Right, right. Self care.

Mike Volkin: Seven Richard Branson. These he's up there nine

Rock Thomas: self aware

Mike Volkin: Five. I could use improvement there. I don't know. Richard Branson, I would assume

Mike Volkin: Eight since he's found his niche and, you know,

Rock Thomas: How about somebody that is willing to the. We call it the trade as asked her, but there's two sides to that because there's asking for help. And then there's asking for the order and one requires courage, but they're two different sides of the same coin.

Mike Volkin: That is one of my leadership skills. So I would give myself a nine on that I do both of those. Nice. Nice. Very good.

Rock Thomas: And then a tracker importance of tracking your numbers and being aware of what's going on having a dashboard. It's I'm

Mike Volkin: A tracker junkie. I give myself a nine my Excel spreadsheets can always be a little bit more refined, so I'll get myself a nine out of 10 I have no idea where Richard Branson, but

Rock Thomas: Um, and then the last one is

Rock Thomas: level of commitment to get the job done. In other words, what happens like when you decide you're going to do something. Is it like people are like care probably be done or they're like, Oh, no. Just consider it. I mean, he's he's always

Mike Volkin: I'd give myself an age because I've had a couple companies that I've taken it to a certain point and I decided to drop it for various reasons.

Rock Thomas: Yeah, I think it's more like new information can come up and we can make a new decision if it's not about that. It's like, for instance, right now I'm doing 75 days straight of yoga.

Rock Thomas: And I'm on my fourth day and my accountability partner. And he goes, Okay, so what are the things that might take you off track. And I go, death.

Mike Volkin: Yeah, that's a 10

Rock Thomas: Like, you know, other things like you don't have time, or you're going to be on a plane. I go, that's irrelevant to me, I'll do it on the plane, I will find the time doesn't even occur to me. Right. Yeah. Once I commit. I am all forgiving. So how would you rate yourself there.

Mike Volkin: I would give myself a 10 I'd probably the only counter

Mike Volkin: I can't think of anything in my life, I've just left hanging on the table, even if it's just going to the gym, making a commitment every day. I've been doing that every single day since I was 19 years old. I'm 43. Now, I don't think I've

Mike Volkin: missed a day that I plan on going to the gym. As an example, so I always attend

Rock Thomas: So if we think about all those traits and somebody was to lean into them. What, what we believe is that you can develop that

Rock Thomas: You can increase your commitment by me in the right environment, the right set of circumstances and by being coached and mentored etc.

Rock Thomas: You can increase your tracking ability, even though you might say, I'm not good with numbers, but you could increase them, you could increase your courage and ask for help. And you can ask for the order more by

Rock Thomas: Developing the ability to handle rejection and changing the meaning of that, etc. That makes sense.

Mike Volkin: Absolutely. That's a great system. Yeah, so

Rock Thomas: So you scored pretty damn high for a guy who's tough on yourself.

Mike Volkin: Every point counts. You know the difference between seven and eight is like. I like the Richter scale like an earthquake. Right. It's a big

Difference.

Rock Thomas: Is very true. Well said. So when people come to you. Do you spend a week, a month, six months there? How does it generally play out for you to move the needle.

Mike Volkin: Yeah, well that varies a lot with companies, but generally with entrepreneur coaching. It's almost immediately, I can

Mike Volkin: diagnose what the main issue is what that person's kind of niches themselves into what their weaknesses are.

Mike Volkin: With a company. It's all over the map. I've helped companies immediately. Most companies that can help right away what I do laser focus on, I find out where the biggest need is so that I can turn around for improvement.

Mike Volkin: That's also, you know, to help the company, but it's also for me to show my value and to get bigger contracts and longer clients. So I would say on average between one and three months. Usually there's an increase in revenue or a decrease in wasted expenses.

Rock Thomas: So, this I am movement podcast is about when we grow up. We were given labels, we received information to help form who we are, get feedback from our parents and the people around us, priests and teachers, etc. What's a label that you were given that you overcame if you can pick one.

Mike Volkin: Scientist. I mean, my father was an engineer slash scientist, I went to school. I got three degrees in science and I got one. I'm like, Yeah, I'm going to be just like my dad, I'm going to be a scientist and

Mike Volkin: didn't like it at all. I got out there in the field and didn't like being in a lab. I didn't like that I was a water chemist and didn't like doing water samples.

Mike Volkin: Didn't like my job at all. But I did it because I was told that I go and get an eight to five job and I work Monday through Friday. And that's what everybody in my family did and that's the way I was going to do it and

Mike Volkin: I just had this calling in the back of my mind that says this is not the way it needs to be done for you, go ahead and go out and do something on your own.

Rock Thomas: Were you encouraged by your folks to follow in their footsteps or your dad.

Mike Volkin: My father. Yes. He wanted me to be a scientist. He didn't push me and say, you're going to be a scientist but

Mike Volkin: He certainly didn't encourage me to be an entrepreneur. I don't think he didn't hold back. But he didn't say hey you should be an entrepreneur.

Mike Volkin: And same with the military. I mean, no such a rash decision I made a decision. Three days after 911 and I was at basic training, less than a month later, so he didn't. He didn't hold me back, but he also

Mike Volkin: didn't encourage me to join the military didn't want to see me go off to war, obviously.

Rock Thomas: How do you plan on communicating with your children what they should do?

Mike Volkin: Oh well as a new Dad, I am super open and accommodating. My daughter is only six months old. So she can't understand me, but I spend as much time as possible with her.

Mike Volkin: And I want her my father was really big on said, You know, I'm not your friend. I'm your father. He said that to me a lot growing up.

Mike Volkin: I don't want to say that hurt me, but he definitely put his place.

Mike Volkin: Where, where I was growing up, you know, I'm not going to be butting around with him. I did a few things and went to the movies. Every now and then, but ultimately he was my dad and I didn't want to be around them. Right.

Mike Volkin: With my daughter. I'm going to be hopefully her best friend and her father. I'm going to find find that that fine line, you know,

Rock Thomas: So you say you didn't want a buddy around with him. Is it, you didn't, or he didn't want

Mike Volkin: I think we both didn't only I didn't. I would love to have gotten more attention. My father because I was, I think, a very needy child but

Mike Volkin: My father made it quite clear that, you know, go out and make your own friends and I'm your dad. I'll be here for support, whenever you need me. I'm not going to be mean to you.

Mike Volkin: But I'm not going to go hang out with you on a Saturday afternoon. If I don't need to, if you have friends, you know,

Rock Thomas: Interesting. How much of you, how much of that you think is shaped

Rock Thomas: Your drive or who you are today.

Mike Volkin: tons, tons. Just like your way, your father. I would imagine a date as well. Right. So when I look at my daughter, some things that I do some mannerisms that I take I make sure that I'm online with what I don't want

Mike Volkin: To be at in terms of a parent, you know, be extra patient, all that kind of stuff. So I'm trying to break away from the typical you know 50s, 60s and 70s. Dad, where it's like

Mike Volkin: Wait till your father gets home, you know, that kind of thing. So I want to be like the new cool dad that it's a friend and add as well. But you know, I want to find my fine line there.

Rock Thomas: So as you do that, you're going to obviously introduce her to concepts and things like that. Do you have any rules already pre planned around consumption of Internet video I've had because I see kids today. You know, one year old or

Rock Thomas: Terrell half or something with an iPad with the parents kind of snoozing off. What are your thoughts around that? I know it's it's

Mike Volkin: very timely conversation. My dad just left for the airport and he spent the last few days here and he was okay, having my six month old daughter watch the news with him. And I was like, no.

Mike Volkin: My daughter does not look at the screen if you want to spend time with her, you know,

Mike Volkin: Have her touch your hand or or play with, you know, I want her touching feeling squeezing things and you know the mat. They play mats and squeezing the ball and listen to the sounds of this and that.

Mike Volkin: So, I mean, I want her to be very developed very early without the screen time. I think that's super important.

Rock Thomas: Very nice, very nice. Love that. What's your thoughts around nutrition and children?

Mike Volkin: Well, it's tough as well because my father and I just had this discussion. He's a meat eater. I'm a vegetarian trying to be a plant based

Mike Volkin: But you know, I had the unfortunate pleasure when I was in grad school, going to a chicken poem quiet place and CHICKEN NEVER WANTED TO EAT MEAT again. So now I'm a vegetarian and I love it and I would hope that my daughter would be the same. However, I'm

Mike Volkin: Not going to push her in any one direction. I'm going to get her on the way I feel about meat and

Mike Volkin: Know what certain vegetables. I like to tell her the reasons why I don't like them. It doesn't mean she's not going to like them but I'm just going to be really open, you know, it might be easier said than done. I just don't know. She's six months old.

Mike Volkin: So,

Mike Volkin: I'm saying I'll be fantasy playing Pokemon Go workout. So, yeah.

Rock Thomas: Very cool. What is some of the things that you're working on yourself right now, personally, personally, well,

Mike Volkin: Actually, we talked about me being a speaker. So from a personal level. I'm trying to be a better speaker, you know, and it's really hard because I'm a fast talker. As you can imagine, no need to play this podcast on one and a half speed.

Mike Volkin: So also personally, I mean, it's such a big endeavor to try to be the best dad, you can be, that's my main focus. It's really hard because it slows me down all my goals as an entrepreneur.

Mike Volkin: I used to be all my goals, used to be about creating businesses selling businesses as fast as possible. And now it's just like

Mike Volkin: What is my daughter mean when she cries like that, or why is she, why is she, laughing when I do that like trying to understand and get inside of her head is my personal goal right now, just so I can understand to make the best life for

Rock Thomas: Kind of interesting how you can be just going along in your world thinking this is the path. I want to be super important.

Rock Thomas: And then something happens like for some people it might be losing a job or going through a divorce or having a child and then

Rock Thomas: A whole array of other things become super important. And let me give you a context because so many people will tell you, I just don't have time to do this. I don't have time to do that then they get a child.

Rock Thomas: And now they allocate 510 1520 hours a week to this whole new endeavor. When before they have this belief. I don't have time to do anything else, but everything I'm doing. So what are your thoughts around that concept?

Mike Volkin: Well, I'll tell you when the baby was almost being born between seven and nine months.

Mike Volkin: In the womb. I was telling my wife, you know, we don't need a nanny. I'll just, I'll do my work and I'll hold her in one hand, I'll type the other in all seriousness about that. I was like, I could do both.

Mike Volkin: And then like two days after she was born was like, there's no way to be able to do this like I had to change everything and make concessions. So now we have a full time nanny, two of them actually

Mike Volkin: And it's still slow because I hear her right now as I'm talking laughing in the other room at the nanny. I just want to go out there and play with her while she's laughing

Mike Volkin: Yeah, so it's tough, but it's. That's what makes life interesting right as the constantly changing goals and priorities. That's why you gotta

Mike Volkin: You gotta crack all this and it would have long and short term goals, I talked to a lot of my entrepreneur coaching clients. I say yeah yearly goals are great but quarterly goals are.

Rock Thomas: Yeah yeah and monthly and weekly and daily to right track.

Mike Volkin: Them. Yeah, every Friday I have in my calendar spend an hour, looking at your goals reviewing why you didn't make the goal if you did what was so great about it. How can you make it happen again? That kind of thing.

Rock Thomas: So how can people get in touch with you if they want to tap into your wisdom.

Mike Volkin: Well MikeVolkin.com, V O L K I N .com. If you want some entrepreneur coaching. If you want to become a full time or even a side Hustler Freelancer. What am my startup, which is a freelance masterclass nine step course on how to make some good extra, extra money.

Mike Volkin: Break free of that corporate rat race.

Rock Thomas: I love your energy. I love the fact that you're able to engage so quickly and pitching catch and talk and really nice sound bites. So thanks for joining us on the podcast. What's your parting words or recommendation of a book or a quote or something that you want to leave with our audience.

Mike Volkin: Yeah, my parting word word hey if you're not a reader become a writer. I mean, I just started doing this in the last year, and I've learned so much as an entrepreneur.

Mike Volkin: That's just amazing. Books are so underutilized now as popular as they are, I think, entrepreneurs need to take

Mike Volkin: More advantage of them because they're so busy all the time, take some time out and read for 10 minutes a day. Make it a goal to do one book a month. Leaders are readers. That's what I say. Because we're books are fantastic sources of information.

Rock Thomas: I appreciate that Mike Volkin shared some time and wisdom with us. Let me remind our listeners of the words that follow. I am following us. So remember, describe yourself in a way that empowers you.

Rock Thomas: To live the life that you deserve the life that you want the best version of yourself. And we'll see you on the next podcast.