Mitch Russo provides marketing guidance, sales strategies, corporate reorganizations, growth plans and more, and specializes in helping companies go virtual. Mitch started at the software company Timeslips, and then became the CEO and President of Chet Holmes International, and the CEO and President of Business Breakthroughs in his partnership with Chet Holmes and Tony Robbins.

Mitch
I started writing down all of the things that I knew about what we did to grow from a relatively small number of people to close to 300 people to generating nearly 30 million in revenue and doubling 3 years in a row all virtually.

DANNY
Mitch Russo is on a mission to bring together the best talent from around the world to build what he calls invisible organizations, which is the term he uses to describe the distributed companies that he learned to build over the course of his career first as a venture capitalist and then as CEO of Chet Holmes and Tony Robbins Business Breakthroughs International coaching and consulting company. He first began pioneering these ideas before there was an internet with his very first company Timeslips Corporation, which was later sold to Sage. It was back at Timeslips that he first connected with Chet Holmes who was working in advertising at the
time. Chet had one goal, to sell Mitch advertising.

MITCH I thought he was annoying and I thought he was pushy but eventually I got to really know him and I found his persistence to be one of his best qualities. I admired him and that became the beginning of a lasting, multi-decade friendship.

DANNY The friendship developed over the years with frequent phone calls to check in and catch up. On one of those calls Mitch sensed that Chet was frustrated with something and after some prodding learned that it was one of Chet’s employees. Mitch, out of the blue, offered to help.

MITCH I said, "Chet, let me talk to him," and he said, "Well, what are you going to say? He doesn't know you." I said, "I don't care. If he's upsetting you my friend, then I've got to find out what the heck's going on here." He says, "Well, if you want to go ahead." I called the guy on the phone and nicest guy in the world and just talking with him and finding out, I said, "What is upsetting you so much? Why are you so, what are you doing? Why is Chet so mad at you?" He goes, "Well because Chet is trying to get me to do everything and I just don't have the time and he's getting mad at me when I don't." I then said something that was going to change my future. I said to him, "Tell me the one thing that if I were able to take off your plate you would stop harassing my buddy Chet." He said, "The only thing I really need is I need help recruiting." I said, "Okay, I will recruit for you," and I said that in a bold, definitive way, and then I followed it up with the statement, "So how do you do that?"

DANNY Not having done it before wasn't going to stop Mitch. He turned to Chet's book, The Ultimate Sales Machine, and plowed through the corresponding training DVD’s. It was just a matter of weeks before Mitch had done the seemingly impossible.

MITCH At that point about 8 weeks later, I said to Chet, "Hey buddy, I'm done. Your sales force is complete so, you know, and I have a guy I
think can run it so hey, have a nice day." He goes, "Wait a second. Where are you going?" I said, "What do you mean where am I going?" He says, "Well, I have this $18,000 check on my desk with your name on it. What do you want me to do with it?" I said, "Well, I didn't ask for any money. Why do you have a check on your desk?" He said, "Well, Mitch, I mean you get a percentage of everything your sales guys are selling," and then all of a sudden I realized, "Wow!" He said, "Now you realize you're not going anywhere right?" I said, "Well, you know, are you saying you want me to work with you regularly?" He goes, "Yeah, absolutely!"

**DANNY** During their first year Mitch and Chet turned the recruiting division into a million dollar project and soon after Chet approached Mitch about negotiating with Tony Robbins to form a new company called Business Breakthroughs. The success was incredible for several years but then tragedy struck.

**MITCH** Unfortunately then Chet passed away and at that point in time it was, by this point it was the end of 2012 and I felt like I had 5 incredible years with Chet, and we had built something amazing but it was coming to an end for me, and I left. Something interesting happened when I left. I had a conversation with a friend of mine, Jay Abraham, and Jay said something pivotal to me at that moment. Jay has this influence on me. I've been learning at his feet, in his seminars with his materials, and partnering with Jay over the years over decades, really, and Jay said to me, "Mitch, you can't let what you know go to waste. It's too valuable." With that I said, "Okay, Jay, I guess I'll write it down."

Danny, I have never written a book before and I didn't know anything about writing a book nor did I have a desire to write a book but I started writing it down and I started writing down all of the things that I knew about what we did to grow from a relatively small number of people to close to 300 people to generating nearly 30 million in revenue and doubling 3 years in a row all virtually, all running from a room in my house, and not a single bit of infrastructure along the way. I realized that other people could really
use this. Other people who run brick and mortar companies can take the information in this book and go invisible, and that was the birth of my book, The Invisible Organization. The reason I called it that is because while you are invisible you get to do incredibly cool stuff. Remember when you were a kid? Did you ever want to be invisible when you were a kid?

DANNY  You know I heard once there's this personality test type question you ask everyone, if you could choose a super power would you want to be invisible or do you want to be able to fly.

MITCH  Right.

DANNY  I always wanted to fly.

MITCH  Okay, me too, by the way. I always wanted to fly too but what was cool was that when I was a kid I wanted to be invisible and probably for the wrong reasons but there was a fun part about being invisible is that you could get to do stuff that nobody else needed to see you were doing. I don't mean that in a bad way. Here's an example. When I ran BBI I ran it from literally from hotel rooms all over the world. I was in Tuscany enjoying the beautiful scenery in the middle of the summer and from my laptop I was running my company. I was in Peru. I was at Machu Picchu. I would go back to my hotel room and there I was on my laptop inspecting sales reports and changing the flow of how our sales funnel worked back then. I found that being invisible, in this case, was probably the most incredible way ever to create and run a company.

Here's something else I discovered. Everybody else loved it. There was no commute, there was no expenses regarding a car, or clothing, or transportation, or gasoline. We all were able to wake up in the morning and arrange our life the way we wanted by actually working from home. Now clearly Danny, I have to tell you there are some people, they're just not cut out for it. There are some people that can't get focused. There are some people that just aren't suited for
working from home. They need more structure. Well, we found out a way to screen those people, and again I talk a lot about that in the book itself, but the most important thing here is that once you have that right group of people, then the way you judge people changes too.

Think about it. When you have an office and you have a lot of people coming in you judge people on many, many subconscious levels. You judge how much you like them. You judge, sometimes, whether even their appearance is a part of it unfortunately, but it's just human nature, but when you run an invisible organization you really only judge people on 2 things, their trustworthiness and their production, and that is it. Whether they're white, or black, or male, or female, whether they live in Afghanistan or Brooklyn, it doesn't matter. If you can trust them and they produce then they deserve the incredible money that they can make doing exactly what they do.

This one fact alone can change the entire business structure of this country because once people realize that you could merge companies without literally leaving your house that, take an interesting example that I used in the book is that Southwest Airlines, I don't know if you know this, JetBlue and Southwest Airlines have their entire call centers running from people's homes. Their entire call center is virtual and next time you're on the phone with somebody with JetBlue, if you ever use JetBlue, say to the lady and I did this. My interview of this woman is in my book. I say to this woman, "So, what's it like working from home," and there was a pause for a second. She didn't realize I knew that. She says, "Well, I love it. I get to eat the food I need to eat. I get to walk my dog when I want to walk my dog and frankly it's changed my life. I've never enjoyed working more than I do now. That's what's in store for people if they can take some part or even all of their company and go invisible. That's why I wrote this book.

DANNY I want to get a sense of kind of the scope and almost mechanics of what you're describing.
MITCH    Sure.

DANNY    I mean it's a whole book. You wrote a book called The Invisible Organization so to say, explain your system in 60 seconds or whatever, that's absurd. If people want to know this then they should get the book but that being said just to give people, and frankly me, a sense of what is the scope of what you're systems included and of where your system includes and how does it work because it sounds very vague to me right now. I don’t have a clear picture in my head.

MITCH    Okay, well, I’ll try and explain to you how the book takes you through the process and I hope that’ll help. The first thing we need to do is we need to change the mindset of the CEO because it's the mindset of the CEO is what prevents most companies from really embracing the incredible benefits of going invisible. If people or CEO’s who are listening to this interview were to read my book the first part of the book, maybe even the first 25% of the book is all about dealing with mindset and management style. That becomes the most important thing before anyone should attempt trying to convert their company into an invisible organization. I explain some of that before about the mindset.

The other thing I do is I include a training guide so that you can not only change your own mindset but you can help your management team do the same and so part of the book is something that you can share with your management team as to the 10 leadership principles that I explain in the book, and take those leadership principles and you could workshop them with your staff. The whole first part of the book is all about changing one's mindset. Then the next part of the book is explaining the way systems can change the way we do business and then what happens is that as I explain this process of understanding how systems, interconnected systems, can change the way we do business, we then literally go into a nuts and bolts session inside the book where I take people through laying out and designing the lead flow and client flow inside their company so they can match
it to systems and products.

DANNY You mentioned that a big part of what you talk about is how to use the word convert, you know how do you transition a brick and mortar type organization into an invisible organization. It would seem to me that that’s a challenging transition. If that’s the organization you have, if you’ve got a big brick and mortar business and you see the value of making that switch it makes sense to do that.

MITCH Right.

DANNY Can you build an invisible organization from scratch? Do you have to build a brick and mortar organization and then do the conversion?

MITCH God no! In fact it's better to build it from scratch. The reason I wrote the book is to help people who are stuck in a brick and mortar situation to convert to be invisible organizations, but it's better, and the book is very clear about this. If you could build it from scratch, my goodness, you save so much money and time by getting this started up front and not having to convert, you're in for a much faster pass to success and profits.

DANNY What point does the invisible organization idea become relevant in the growth of a business? If you go, if you've got an entrepreneur who's working on their own, getting their business of the ground, and at some point they're going to get some help, probably an assistant, then maybe another assistant, maybe they hire a subject matter specialist, someone with specific skills and expertise, and that may be local, it might be remote, it might be contractor before someone is kind of brought on full time. At what point does it stop being some dude with a few people helping out and start becoming an organization where the principles that you teach are actually relevant?
MITCH  It could start with as little as 5 or 10 people if the CEO was smart enough to build structure and systems into his thinking. Let me explain that. In a company, let's say you have an education company like a training company let's say.

DANNY  Hypothetically.

MITCH  Hypothetically, and let's say that you're in the process of doing maybe 3 things, marketing, and I'm being very broad, I know there's many more than 3 things, marketing and selling, creation of product, and then deployment of those products. Well, each of those should be completely self-contained systems. What I mean by a system is that every aspect of what you would need a person to do in any of those 3 pieces should be taught by an automated training system or a learning environment. What I've discovered and what I've deployed now over, and over again are learning management systems inside of companies so that they could take their trapped knowledge, embed it into a learning management system, and then bring a new person in, sit them down in front of a computer, and have them go through the material, and become competent at the end of this process, which is, it's unusual because this thing wasn't even really possible until just a few years ago, maybe 10 years ago when something like this was finally created. Before it was video tapes and you'd sit in the library and watch video tapes all day, and you'd yawn, and check your email at that time if you did.

What learning systems do is they become interactive and in the best of all learning systems these lessons are very short. They're 6, 7, 8 minutes at a time. They are interrupted with a series of questions and assessments, and the learning management software becomes a monitoring system to see if people are going through it at the right pace, to see if they're answering the questions correctly. These learning management systems have revolutionized the way companies can work and are starting to catch on. In my book and in my [00:16:00] model, we deploy learning management systems very early on in the process. In fact, we deploy them as soon as we have enough skill to accomplish our task competently. Once we
have a competent individual and who is really, really excellent at what they do, then we take that person and we embed their knowledge into a learning management system so no matter what we can train the next, and the next, and the next person.

Then, what I said before, systems, then we create a structure, a workflow, of what that person does and embed that into the equivalent of maybe a product creation or project management system. Again, this goes across every single boundary. For example, when at BBI we trained people, the way we did it is we had a bunch of videos we had them watch. We had them listen to a bunch of sample phone calls. We then would ask them to take a test. We would then get on the phone and test them live. All of that could have and should have and eventually, once I left BBI and started helping other organizations, that's where I used my learning management training skills to get all of that inside of a learning management system.

Now training sales people, we're saying, "Okay, when you're done let us know." Of course we were monitoring them on the spot every day, watching their progress through the system, and in fact the system is so automatic it can even send out a reminder that says, "Hey Bob, you didn't watch any videos or lessons today. Is anything wrong? Do you need to speak to anybody at the office or can you restart your training right away?" That was a revolution in understanding that now you can duplicate knowledge 100% and perfectly.

The next step is the system itself that the products or the processes are used to create. Now, those products can also [00:18:00] now be embedded into systems so that when it comes, for example, when it comes to creating a product, like you create Danny, there is a system that you take people through and whether you've mechanized it yet or not, you will because the way that product creation works once you learn how to do it is duplicate it over, and over, and over again. Well, now if you have a management learning system that teaches people how to do it, and now if we have our framework that gets people to create products, then for heaven's sake you don't have to be there any more.
You could hold a training call once a week and you could make sure that your people are hearing from the CEO, and by the way, remember I told you before it was the lesson of communication that I learned at BBI, and the lesson I learned was that we need to constantly communicate our true self with the people we work with. There is no way to hide behind being a virtual CEO. It's the opposite. You need to become much more visible as a virtual CEO than you ever were if you were a standard or a physical CEO. Does that make sense?

**DANNY**  It perfectly makes sense. Mitch, as I hear this I have 2 big questions.

**MITCH**  Right.

**DANNY**  The first thing that I'm wondering so I'm asking for you to either, I guess confirm my thinking or push back and say I'm wrong but the first thing is it occurs for me that for you to build these systems it has to be a fairly easily systematizable piece of knowledge or expertise, which I think would be challenging for a lot of entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial companies where there's a lot that's changing or evolving. I would hesitate, as much as we have our training that is systematized to a certain extent and that came at the tail end of a lot of experimentation figuring things out but it also continues to evolve, and we continue to make it better. I would be concerned about spending a lot time or money to build a system that would then be quite rigid and not be able to adapt as we learn and grow. It would not give people the room to make judgment calls and then kind of propagate those judgment calls through the organization. What's your take on that?

**MITCH**  Well, see when you build your systems they're built to be disassembled and reassembled very quickly. For example, you start where you are. You always start where you are. You take what you know and you put it into the system. Then as you improve it, you remove the sections that are no longer correct or as advanced as what you now do and you replace them with these newer sections inside
your learning system. The whole process of building a learning management system is evolution. The evolution of your learning management system is basically slightly behind the cutting edge of the evolution of your processes but you never, ever discount the brilliance of the entrepreneur who created the process. You see, those folks are always creating. We're always creating. That never stops but what has to happen is you need to find a way to smooth out parts of your world so that they can be taught to others. Otherwise you'll never grow beyond yourself. Once you do that, that's the part that you then mechanize and teach.

Let's say I need to teach 30 or 40% of the process in a learning management system and then from there I take it myself. I bring people into my world. I work with them individually. I understand what their blocks to learning what I know are and I overcome those blocks, and now they know what I know. Then I go back to my learning management system and say, "What did I just learn in this process? How do I improve my ability to teach others what I now know? You see what [00:22:00] I'm saying? It evolves. Everything evolves and your learning management system evolves. Your product creation process evolves. It's just a matter of knowing that ultimately you're able to show another. If you're able to teach another then you have a need for a learning management system.

**DANNY**

Is this something that could become mainstream because I, I'm trying to think of how to phrase this question. I look at a think about my own company, Firepole Marketing. We are a distributed company. A big part of why that works is that there's a lot of, like you said, communication. People attract, people communicate, people are in touch with each other and maybe I'm just misreading what I'm hearing from you but it sounds to me like what you're describing is a process that will create an organization where people are very, I mean independent is the wrong word. The feeling I'm getting is almost isolated to go do their own work and there are people who can do that. There are people that can do that and function very well, and like you said you have a process that screens for it but most people, we need the social contact of the people that we work with. I have a new daughter. I'd like for her to grow up and work with people that
she likes working with. I don't want her to sit in her spare bedroom at home and not talk to people all day. How does that work?

MITCH  Well, you see it's exactly what you said. First of all, it's the opposite of being isolated. It is the antithesis of community. You see, working from your home or your spare bedroom, if you will, means that you're always communicating because this is, again if you're running the company, for heaven's sake you could record a video with your cell phone and 30 seconds later have everybody in the company listening to you, hearing you, feeling your enthusiasm and your good will, and everything about you. People get to know you better because of running and being an invisible organization. That's the first thing.

Second of all, the way that these systems evolve, and by the way, I've mentioned only one part of it, which is the learning management part. The thing that happens is that once you create structure you get freedom. Structure leads to freedom and the reason for that is, is because once I learn something to the point of competence or even beyond competence but actually mastery, it's then that the pianist can throw the music away and just feel, and feel the keys, and just create. Well, that's basically what I'm inspiring here. I hope I'm inspiring this as I'm trying to inspire a friction-less environment where a CEO can really create the systems that run the day-to-day while they create, while their teams create, while their teams become one faster and in a more involved way than ever before yet still retain that autonomy of being able to work the way they want. That's the beauty of what this whole program is about.

In fact, that's what we did at BBI and in some ways we were successful. In some ways we were unsuccessful but yet the basic element of the business was that people loved working for us, working from home. People made money. The company made money and the company grew very quickly because we did not have the constraints that so many other companies have when they try to grow. Now, true we were selling information products, if you will, but other companies, listen, I mean there's a story in the book about a
meat packing company that basically was about to merge with another meat packing company. They thought that they couldn't [until they discovered that they could send their entire sales and administrative and marketing people home to work, and consolidate just their meat packing area, and that allowed them to merge, as an example.

It doesn't mean that when you go invisible you have to make everything invisible. For heaven's sake you can't go to an invisible dentist if you need to get dental work done. There are certain companies that will never be able to be completely invisible but the elements of what I teach in the book can be applied to any company. The elements really clearly are developed systems to help people learn and develop processes that are easily repeated and that people can build upon and see developed sales and marketing that can be enabled by having invisible organizations that almost could never be enabled before.

DANNY That was Mitch Russo sharing his remarkable experience turning massive organizations invisible and building new ones completely from scratch. There's a lot to take away from this episode but the most important message for me is that becoming invisible isn't an all or nothing sort of thing. Regardless of whether you see yourself going completely invisible, you still have so much to benefit from following Mitch’s 3 course steps of developing systems to help people learn, developing processes that are easily repeatable and can be built on, and developing sales and marketing that can be enabled by the structures of an invisible organization. To learn more about Mitch’s ideas, find his book, The Invisible Organization, on Amazon and anywhere else that good books are sold.

Voiceover We love hearing from you. Your feedback makes this podcast even better so take a minute to rate us on iTunes and leave a review. Each week we'll share what one of our reviewers has to say.

DANNY Today's reviewer is Caboholic who says, "The folks at Firepole Marketing have nailed it with this podcast. Danny's sincere desire to provide value to the listener comes through in the way he presents
the interviews and how he asks just the right question. The one you're sitting there thinking as you listen. Business Reimagined delivers content that isn't fluffy, feel-good stuff that sounds nice but has no teeth. It is valuable, inspirational, and actionable information you can use today to get you moving in the right direction. Thanks guys."

Well, thank you Caboholic, and thank you especially for recognizing the whole team that is working so hard to create this podcast for you. You know, my voice is on the podcast. I'm the one sitting in the interviews and so I often get a lot of the credit but really most of the credit goes to the team of people and especially to Audra Casino, our podcast producer, who has done so much work to produce these podcasts and coach me on asking really good questions. I've gotten a lot better and I'm continuing to get better thanks to her, thanks to my team.

**Voiceover**  *This has been Business Reimagined with Danny Iny. Join us next time as we talk with Randy Gage.*

**RANDY GAGE**  It's fascinating to me. I'll see celebrities being interviewed on TV and they'll say something like, "We were poor but we just didn't know it," and I'm always like, seriously, because I was poor and I knew it. I hated that but that drove me. I said to myself, "I'm going to be a millionaire," and the funny thing was I always told myself, I used to affirm this that I would be a millionaire by the time I was 35 years old. When did I become a millionaire? At 35.

**Voiceover**  Learn more about us at Firepolemarketing.com

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