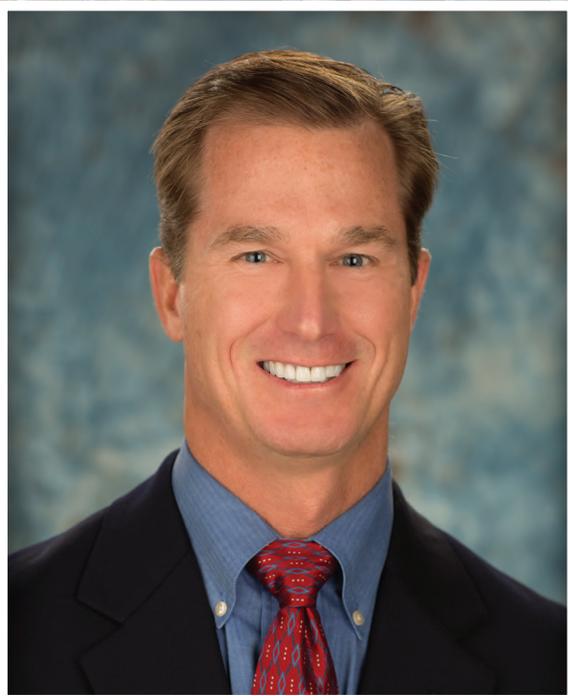


ERIC GRIPENTROG

A MAESTRO FOR STRATEGIC BUSINESS TRANSFORMATIONS



ERIC GRIPENTROG
CEO, Kirkman

In today's fast-changing business world, every transformation presents challenges that can impact profitability and the long-term sustainability of a business. From increased competition to changing market conditions, internal issues to inflammatory challenges, or supply chain problems, companies can find themselves struggling to keep up. This is especially true for legacy companies that need to adapt to the changing business landscape while maintaining a consistent quality of products and services and a loyal customer base. To succeed in such a scenario, companies require a transformation expert who can identify and tackle internal and external threats and set the business on a path to success.

In this chapter of "C-Suite Starlight: CEO of the Year- 2024," we will learn the captivating story of Eric Gripentrog, a transformation expert with over 25 years of experience in propelling branded consumer goods companies to phenomenal growth. As the current CEO of Kirkman, one of the leading brands of nutritional supplements for dietary sensitivities worldwide, Eric brings an entrepreneurial spirit and an optimistic leadership approach to take

the brand to new heights and solidify its global presence. His 'can-do' attitude allows him to take on complex challenges with the right focus and vision, ensuring the brand's continued success.

75 YEARS OF UNPARALLELED EXCELLENCE

Kirkman's remarkable story began in the early 20th century when the idea of a "Vitamin Pill" was first introduced. By the 1940s, these supplements had become more affordable, which paved the way for Kirkman's future success. In 1949, Lyle Wellman and Bill Graham founded Kirkman Labs in Seattle. Years later, it was acquired by entrepreneur Stan Bachman, who took it to Portland, where Kirkman truly began its journey.

The brand collaborated with doctors and researchers to develop clean and tested supplements that catered to people with dietary sensitivities. The collaboration resulted in Super Nu-Thera®, a revolutionary multivitamin designed to meet the unique needs of individuals on the Autism Spectrum. With this product, Kirkman quickly became a trailblazer and earned a well-deserved reputation for excellence within the community. From here, Kirkman built a legacy for manufacturing quality nutritional supplements that cater to dietary sensitivities.

With a commitment to quality and safety, Kirkman introduced its Ultra Tested® testing protocols in 2011. Now, its products undergo rigorous testing methods to detect and eliminate environmental contaminants and harmful chemicals, far exceeding FDA requirements and testing standards. Moreover, Kirkman's focus on sensitive communities has led them to avoid common allergens in their products. With a diverse product portfolio of over 175 nutritional supplements, (including expertly crafted probiotics, multivitamins, antioxidants, minerals,

KIRKMAN®

HELPING PEOPLE LIVE HEALTHY LIVES

and botanicals) Kirkman offers customized solutions to meet the unique needs of its customers. As a top-tier manufacturer, it has earned a reputation for excellence that draws in customers seeking high-quality supplements from a trustworthy and valued source. In 2023, Kirkman was identified as one of the Top 50 Most Admired Companies as well as a Top 10 Supplement Manufacturing companies.

USHERING KIRKMAN TO A NEW ERA

Globalization has revolutionized the dietary supplement and functional nutrition supplement industries. However, the pandemic has disrupted this industry, making the world feel much larger. With a legacy brand that has stood the test of time with globally sourced ingredients and an international sourcing network, Kirkman had to re-evaluate business operations. Fortunately, Eric joined Kirkman to turn around the tide for its growth. Upon his arrival, he realized that the brand was vastly underperforming. He identified several structural and financial issues, and made decisions that needed to be implemented to improve overall cash flow and allow further investments into the business.

He had a clear vision of what he needed to do and made strategic moves to achieve it. Starting with onboarding a new CFO, he did a meticulous market analysis, including calculating Cost of Goods Sold (COGS) for each product. This helped him increase the MSRP to reflect proper margins, which could significantly improve the overall gross margin of the respective products. Additionally, he designed and implemented a global cost-to-serve program based on extensive research of customers, including direct consumers, wholesalers, practitioners, and international accounts.

Having experience in devising strategic operations for leading brands, Eric knew that overcoming the period of stagnation would not be enough for Kirkman. The nutritional supplement industry is evolving rapidly, especially with e-commerce opening the market for new brands. Therefore, a brand needs to offer something unique to bring to market. His servant leadership approach has allowed the brand to meet the needs of both the business and customers, resulting in remarkable growth and profitability. His ability to establish a strategic framework supports its vision of "Helping people live healthy lives,"

“Conduct proper due diligence and research to understand trends, consumer needs, and potential ‘white space’ opportunities. This minimizes confusion and assists brand positioning, innovation, Go-To-Market, and Route-To-Market strategies.”



ensuring that the brand stays ahead of the curve in this dynamic industry.

CARVING A NICHE IN A FIERCELY COMPETITIVE MARKET

With hundreds of thousands of supplements in the market, finding a quality assured product can be challenging. Eric explains that environmental contaminants and heavy metals in supplements, can cause severe conditions in customers. Studies have even linked these contaminants in prenatal supplements to Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, ADHD, Leukemia, and more in developing fetuses. That is why Kirkman works closely with multiple OBGYNs and adheres to the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) guidelines. By doing so, Kirkman has established a quality benchmark for prenatal supplements and trust among its consumers.

By emphasizing diligent research and quality testing, Kirkman is the only supplement manufacturer offering a certified and tested prenatal product. Every raw ingredient undergoes repeated testing for insecticides, fungicides, herbicides, biocides, endocrine disruptors, and allergens such as casein, gluten, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, soy, and sesame. Such high standards indicate that it is a credible brand. Furthermore, Kirkman offers exceptional customer service to its consumers. Its devotion and care towards its customers are the key ingredients in its success recipe.



“Helping People Live Healthy Lives”

ERIC GRIPENTROG – STRETCHING THE LIMITS CONSTANTLY

Eric's dynamic leadership has helped Kirkman grow consistently over the past few years. One of his key strengths is his ability to think big and beyond the norms. He has successfully held different management roles in Europe, Latin America, and the United States. Despite being in different geographies, he has successfully integrated local culture into a work culture, driving its success. As an example, once he successfully turned around a non-performing business in a Latin market with a challenging culture. Eric launched an innovative initiative called the “Black Pearl,” inspired by the movie “Pirates of the Caribbean,” which aimed to shift the company culture for improved performance. By immersing themselves in the roles of pirates, the team held pirate-themed events to generate new ideas, build stronger teamwork, and strengthen the company culture. The result was astounding. Financial metrics, market share performance as well as culture survey results significantly improved with a short period of time.

This is just one example among many that demonstrates his exceptional ability as a turnaround specialist. He has a talent for breaking down barriers and driving innovative growth within a business. His leadership style and bold thinking are critical to the success of Kirkman. He takes care of his physical and emotional well-being, as well as that of his social and workplace environment, to maintain his innovative edge.

WORKING WITH A WILDLY MOTIVATED TEAM

As dynamic and innovative as Eric is, it is no secret Kirkman has a thriving team under his stewardship. The team has an unquenchable fire in their belly, fuelled by their passion, commitment, motivation, integrity, and competitiveness. Eric and others in the management team understand it's easier to put out a fire

than to create one, so they provide cross-departmental support to keep the flames burning. This “All hands-on deck” approach keeps them focused on their ultimate goal. With the management's unwavering support, the team members constantly push themselves to achieve their best.

This leadership model is a shining example of a harmonious and mutually beneficial relationship at the workplace. Every individual plays an indispensable role in propelling Kirkman's growth forward. This, in turn, enhances the brand's standing in the dietary supplement industry and reinforces its unwavering commitment to the vision of “Helping People Live Healthy Lives”.

LOOKING FORWARD TO A SHINING FUTURE.

Kirkman has set the standard for quality and delivered best-in-class customer service, earning numerous milestones. But they're not done yet! As the leading name for the only certified prenatal supplement with a minimum of 18 months of exclusivity, Kirkman is determined to capture as much market share as possible. But that's not all! They're planning to take Kirkman public and launch their IPO by the middle of this year. Eric shares that these investments will foster extensive R&D, incremental sales, and enhanced marketing for further growth and extend outreach to the health-conscious community. This will ultimately make a necessary difference in the world of healthcare.

A NOTE TO EVERY EMERGING ENTREPRENEUR

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