

## GMSB 244

[00:00:00] **Antony Whitaker:** Welcome to the Grow My Salon Business podcast, where we focus on the business side of hairdressing. I'm your host, Antony Whitaker, and I'll be talking to thought leaders in the hairdressing industry, discussing insightful, provocative, and inspiring ideas that matter. So get ready to learn, get ready to be challenged, get ready to be inspired, and most importantly, get ready to grow your salon business.

[00:00:28] **Antony Whitaker:** Hello and welcome to today's episode of the Grow My Salon Business Podcast. I'm your host, Antony Whitaker. And as I always say, it's great to have you here with us today. Whether you're watching on YouTube or listening as you walk the dog, driving the car, running on the treadmill or whatever it is you're doing, I just want to start by saying thank you for being a listener to the show.

[00:00:52] **Antony Whitaker:** Our podcast is growing and we do need your help to continue growing because well, we want to help as many people as we possibly can. So if you're on YouTube, then give us a thumbs up, subscribe to our channel and share with your friends. And if you're listening on your favorite podcast app, then give us a five-star review and a follow.

[00:01:09] **Antony Whitaker:** And that would be both very kind of you and much appreciated. So with that said on with today's episode. Today, I'm talking with Eric Fisher from Wichita, Kansas, where he has four world class salons and a school and a business education company. Now, I've admired Eric's business from afar for a number of years, and although we've never met, we do have two very good friends in common.

[00:01:36] **Antony Whitaker:** They both described Eric as being extremely talented, one of the nicest guys on the planet, a very astute businessman and a super all round nice guy. So I am really looking forward to our conversation today. Now, in today's podcast, we're going to discuss what the key is to building a bigger business.

[00:01:55] **Antony Whitaker:** What makes building a big salon business? Both harder and easier today than it was 30 years ago. And why where you are located shouldn't be something that holds you back. And so much more.

[00:02:09] **Antony Whitaker:** So, without further ado, welcome to the show, Eric Fisher. Yeah.

[00:02:13] **Eric Fisher:** Good to be here, Antony, thanks for having me.

[00:02:16] **Antony Whitaker:** Well, Eric, I'm really looking forward to this. We've spent the last I think probably about 30 40 minutes just having a chat. So it's definitely time we push the record button because there's been a lot of great nuggets of wisdom shared already. So look, I want to jump straight in the deep end here.

[00:02:31] **Antony Whitaker:** I want to ask you a question. It's a bit deep. Uh, so, you know, but I know you'll be able to handle anything I'm going to throw at you. So what I want to ask you is this. You've been in business a long time. Um, you started in, I think, I think about the eighties, uh, with the opening of your first salon and, you know, building a business is never easy. If you had to give yourself, you know, the 25-year-old version of you, three or four principles to follow, what would they be?

[00:02:59] **Eric Fisher:** Well, that's a, that's a great question. When I was, when I was 25, I wasn't an owner as of yet, I was freelancing and just working all over the place, just having the best time of my life. I would say don't do anything I did in those days. I'm lucky to have survived that. But, uh, as a young salon owner and I probably opened, uh, 1989.

[00:03:22] **Eric Fisher:** Uh, it was, you know, it's, it's hard work, but if you're passion driven, you enjoy what you're doing. You look forward to going to work every day. Uh, you can be a success. And I think it's inch by inch, day by day. You can't be defined by the challenges that you have. You can't, uh, you're going to fall on your ass.

[00:03:41] **Eric Fisher:** You've got to pick yourself up, keep going. So you have to have a good attitude about what you're doing. You have to be. Very standard driven. For instance, we hire all our people out of beauty school. They imprint to the standards of our company. We teach them how to cut hair. We have classes all the time.

[00:03:57] **Eric Fisher:** I would say being a learning organization is very important and the culture of a company. You know, I think that's, probably to me, it's more important than a PNL just knowing that people have a place

**to go that they like that, that everybody's likeminded, you know, they have the same standards. Like everybody wants to be good hairdressers.**

[00:04:16] **Eric Fisher:** You know, back in those days, you know, we trained everybody and, uh, you know, uh, Today, it's a little horror and the kids don't have that intrinsic motivation. I have a beauty school, but they, they, they, you know, they all don't want to come to class. You might get two or 3 percent that really wants to do more, be more and have more.

[00:04:32] **Eric Fisher:** But, you know, basically back then everybody, you know, we were bringing precision haircutting to Wichita, Kansas, and I had a job in New York. I came from New York and my wife brought me back home and, uh, And I wondered what the hell I was doing. You know, uh, I didn't go to college, uh, barely made it through high school, you know, I'm a hairdresser, right?

[00:04:52] **Eric Fisher:** So I want to go have fun and, and, and do this. So owning a business is a different ball game and you have to be very entrepreneurial. You also have to be a good manager. You have to understand policies and procedures and how to hire, uh, you know, properly, you have to have some idea of cashflow, long term debt, all those things.

[00:05:13] **Eric Fisher:** Uh, it's, it's essential or otherwise you won't have a business. And then most of us make the lion's share of what we make by being producers. And I would say, you know, quality was everything to me. It still is. It's a little harder, you know, **the bigger you get, the harder it is to keep small.** So some things drop by the wayside.

[00:05:32] **Eric Fisher:** You know, you, you, you lose a few of your values. I think Antony to, to accomplish a few of your other goals.

[00:05:40] **Antony Whitaker:** So much gold in there. I was gonna start scribbling stuff down, I was more interested in listening to what you were saying. So, you know, you talked about learning environment. You talked about the importance of culture. you talked about making mistakes, learning from them.

[00:05:54] **Antony Whitaker:** So many, you know, good principles. They come with experience, don't they? It's like you jump in the deep end and you start swimming. And you know, if you're prepared to, if you're prepared to learn

and make mistakes, learn from them, bounce back, get up and go again, you're heading in the right direction. So, um, let me just back up then a little bit.

[00:06:15] **Antony Whitaker:** Most of our American audience would have heard of Eric Fisher. Um, you've been around a a long time and you're very known. You've been very successful outside of America. Um, uh, Australian European UK based audience. Maybe a lot of people don't know who you are. So just for context, how many salons and how many staff do you currently have?

[00:06:35] **Antony Whitaker:** And if you don't mind sharing as a, as a sort of a ballpark figure, what sort of revenue? You know, would a business your size be generating just so that people have some context around who you are and what you do?

[00:06:48] **Eric Fisher:** Well, absolutely. So currently we have four salons. We opened one during the pandemic, which was three years ago, downtown. So we have East, West, North, South covered. And then, uh, about two years into the business that, and because we hire people from beauty schools, Antony, we realized that the, uh, the, uh, The kids that were getting out of school just were not trained properly.

[00:07:12] **Eric Fisher:** And so I went to the schools. I said, Hey, why don't you let me put together a training program for you? I won't charge you. I just want a better at that time I wanted to open like, like you did. I want to have a lot of salons. Right. And, and my model was too slow. And so they, they said, Eric, you're a great guy.

[00:07:29] **Eric Fisher:** We love you, but I don't want to do that. You know? So I said, I'm going to be, you know, formative, uh, competition for you. So I hired the smartest girl I could find. She was a consultant and we went around and looked at the very best beauty schools in America. And, uh, and everybody, you know, in this business, they're so nice.

[00:07:46] **Eric Fisher:** They gave me their financials, their build outs, everything you can imagine. Uh, Gary Manuel up in, uh, in, uh, Seattle, they were just the two, two of my. Best friends at the time until Kohler. There's so many people that helped me. So we opened a school, 20,000 square feet. We just, we had put a stage right in the middle of it.

[00:08:03] **Eric Fisher:** It's a very unusual school. We made it really modern and, uh, I borrowed a couple of million dollars to kick it off and we were successful the first year. And I spent a lot more money than I need to. Because I wanted to have such a good school. So our school is great. We have about 180 students that come from New York, L.

[00:08:22] **Eric Fisher:** A. They come from all over the country. We had a bikini model from Hawaii come. I had two PhDs come last year. Two, two professors. So we have all sorts and I love it. So we, we just, you know, we, we picked the people from the school to work in the salons now. And, and I could tell the school was good, but something was missing.

[00:08:41] **Eric Fisher:** As to your point about that, uh, the, uh, I can't think of the name of the book, but the book that you shared with me online, uh, I think one of the things it says in there is that they don't teach business. So we came up with a business program in financial literacy and we realized that etiquette training, things of that nature just weren't being taught.

[00:09:00] **Eric Fisher:** So we, we started off with this program and it's, it's been exceedingly successful. And uh, so we opened two more salons after that and we filled them full of students. And, uh, once we train them, we feel like they, you know, you train them with haircutting, you train them with, uh, you know, color, long hairdressing, and then conversational guidelines and how to build that average ticket, how to, how to make more money, how to take more money home.

[00:09:26] **Eric Fisher:** Cause we all know, you know, the two things that run the show are client count and average ticket. So if, if you can. You know, focus in on those things, then you've got the, the, uh, you know, the, uh, I guess the guts to have a great business, but you got to think about it. You can't just sit in the back room and wait for, you know, clients to come to you.

[00:09:45] **Eric Fisher:** We tell our students, you got to be the architect of your destination. So, you know, so that's kind of how we started. I still freelanced a lot. I love being a hairdresser. I'm in the chair behind the chair two days a week. Still, I went from five to two. Actually, I went from seven because we double shift all our locations.

[00:10:03] **Eric Fisher:** We, uh, open from 7 AM probably to about 10 PM, seven days a week. So our business has been really good. We, uh, we were

seeing about 14, 000 services are performing 14, 000 services a month. Now we're probably down to. 10, 000 after the pandemic, we lost probably 15, 20 stylists in our companies. As a whole, we have about 150 team members altogether.

[00:10:28] **Eric Fisher:** And, uh, I'm actually not sure of the gross revenues. It's double-digit millions. I can tell you that, but to be honest with you, when I look at the amalgamation of the three businesses, I can't tell you exactly, you know, probably 12, 15 million, I just can't tell you.

[00:10:44] **Antony Whitaker:** That's a good problem to have.

[00:10:46] **Eric Fisher:** Yeah, well, you know, I got to tell you going over the financials as a hairdresser, I'd rather take a pencil and stick it in my eye.

[00:10:54] **Eric Fisher:** It's not my favorite, favorite thing to do, but it needs to be done. And after you, I've been in the trenches so long, Antony, after a while, you just, you can read those P and L's just like that. You read the financials, you understand your business so well that any little, you know, um, Uh, something that's out of the ordinary of your normal patterns, then draws a red flag.

[00:11:16] **Eric Fisher:** And obviously inflation and, you know, supply chain challenges, everything is so challenging right now. It's, it is difficult to make money in the salon business.

[00:11:25] **Antony Whitaker:** yeah, yeah. Okay. You may not like doing it, you know, going through those, the financials and a lot of hairdressers don't, but you obviously forced yourself to do it and have become very good at it because you have a great reputation, not just as a creative hairdresser, but as a business person and, uh, and, you know, there's a lot of work that has to go into that to make it happen and to build the business, you know, that you have.

[00:11:46] **Antony Whitaker:** Um, can I just ask you about the business model that you have? Are they, you know, Employees, are they rental or is it a hybrid? What's the model you've got

[00:11:55] **Eric Fisher:** We uh, Uh, we use a commission base, uh, we start off at 40 percent and go to 45%, but it's a, it's an incentive base too. So what we want our, our team members to do is to keep constantly moving up the ladder.

So we have 12 pricing levels. Every time they reach a new level based on a certain amount of criteria, then they can, uh, make more money.

[00:12:20] **Eric Fisher:** So if we broke it down and it's, it's all a personal development. Development plan for each individual. So if I sat down with somebody out of school and I said, all right, how much money do you want to make? And they said, well, what do you pay? And I'd say, Hey, that's, that's not the question. What would you like to make?

[00:12:36] **Eric Fisher:** They go, wow. Okay. How about 50, 000? Let's say they're on the floor already. 50, 000. All right. Then we'd break it down. This is how many clients you need. This is what your average ticket needs to look like. This is how often you should bring your clients back. This is how much retail you'd say. This is the commission you're going to make on retail.

[00:12:51] **Eric Fisher:** This is how much tips at 15 to 20%. This is what you pay in taxes, this is what we pay for you in taxes. So in other words, if they're working five days a week, we know exactly how many clients are going to need and what their average ticket needs to look like. So once they understand that, and I think the most important thing about that is that you're not doing it for them.

[00:13:11] **Eric Fisher:** They have to take Uh, they have to take ownership of that, that information. They have to be responsible for building their business. So if I sat down and did a one on one with somebody and I said, okay, last quarter, this is what you did, you know, and this quarter you want to increase that by 10%, so let's look at your numbers, your average ticket or your client count or retail sales or whatever it happens to be, and they set goals up for themselves, they keep tallies.

[00:13:39] **Eric Fisher:** And then they can move the needle, but they have to take that responsibility and management can't do it. And managers and owners were like agents. You know, this is the talent you've selected that person for a certain reason. You got to let them fly. You got to let them do their own thing. You got to train them.

[00:13:57] **Eric Fisher:** Skills and knowledge are very important and they're transferable, but the actual talent themselves, it's all about them. And so we are very, um, You know, participative, we have quarterly awards and talking about compensation. So we've paid 40 to 45 and then every quarter they can

earn between one and 3 percent more based on, you know, their performance based on retail sales, based on their absenteeism and just basic compliance issues.

[00:14:28] **Eric Fisher:** And then we have, um. Well, my corporate headquarters, we have up to five weeks paid vacation. We have six paid holidays. We paid 50 percent of health insurance for children and for one adult. And we do have a 401k, which is a retirement fund, which we, we, uh, we put about, uh, 4 percent or 8, 000 per person for the retirement.

[00:14:51] **Eric Fisher:** In fact, we just won salon today out of the top 200 salons in America. We won best, uh, best, uh, best. Benefits of any salon. So, and I'm proud of that. Does it cost a lot of money? Absolutely. At the end of the day, there was administration costs, health insurance went up 33%, you know, it's millions of dollars, right?

[00:15:08] **Eric Fisher:** So it, it kicks your ass sometimes. So it is, it's harder and harder to make money, but I, I just felt like the benefits are something, uh, that I'm so proud of that I can offer my team that, uh, they can retire with a good amount of money. Yeah. And, uh, they can take time off when they need to, you know, have those mental, mental days, mental weeks, and, and just chill and get paid for it.

[00:15:30] **Eric Fisher:** So I am happy about that. It does cost a lot of money, but, uh, it's, it's well worth it.

[00:15:35] **Antony Whitaker:** yeah, exactly. Well, that's why you built the business up that you have, um, all over the world. There's a move towards, uh, being self-employed, um, independent contractors, freelancers. I mean, it all comes under many different names, but essentially it means a business unit of one salon suites, rented chair, booth, rental, whatever it is.

[00:15:57] **Antony Whitaker:** Um, what I want to ask you about is, You've had a, you know, you've been in business. I think you said 1989. So, know, a lot of water has gone under the bridge since then. 1989, it would have been a very strong commission salon environment to be in. Uh, these days, a lot of people that have had a strong commission salon have, have caved and, and gone to booth rental.



[00:16:20] **Antony Whitaker:** Uh, uh, and you'll hear staff or start or salon owners everywhere talking about my staff have left to open up suites on their own, et cetera. So. You've managed to weather all that, have a very strong employee, employer-based business model, um, has the salon suite thing impacted on you? I get the feeling that what you've just talked about with all the benefits and all that sort of stuff has made people realize, do you know what?

[00:16:47] **Antony Whitaker:** The grass isn't always greener here, so just talk to me. What sort of impact has that independent movement had on your business, if any, and, and how maybe counteracted it?

[00:16:58] **Eric Fisher:** I think, uh, it, it's had a very inimical effect on business as a whole. I know lots of salon owners that have lost their businesses due to it. I've lost. Tons of good stylists and largely in part, and, you know, I speak to schools a lot and I have a school with about 180 students, I'd say 95 percent of them want to go out and rent their own station and have a salon suite.

[00:17:23] **Eric Fisher:** And, and I think they're looking for, it's not just economics. So we know that. Uh, and I can say this pretty patently that people underreport their income. So that's just a fact, everybody does it. And, and I've had lots of people that have had IRS after them. My former employees, in fact, a friend of mine in, Kansas City had, a model and that she got hit with 150, 000 tip fine just off the tips because people weren't reporting the tips and ultimately, she was responsible.

[00:17:50] **Eric Fisher:** But I would say it's, you know, it's tough and, and with this young generation and, and I know I'm speaking to you, so you understand this so well because you went through the program, but people want work life balance, you know, that's a big thing. They want freedom, they want flexibility, but you don't get that when you graduate from Any business, you've got to work your ass off.

[00:18:10] **Eric Fisher:** It's not, Hey, I, uh, I'm going to work. Uh, could you imagine Beyonce saying, Hey guys, I need work life balance. No rehearsal tonight. You don't do that when you want to be good, you know, or, or my home saying, Hey, we got to quit practice with the Kansas city chiefs because I got to go watch TV with the kids, you know, I sacrifice a great deal to build my businesses and when you love something, it's not really a sacrifice.

[00:18:33] **Eric Fisher:** I mean, work life balance. I, I still. Antony, I probably put 60, 70 hours and I'm a photographer as well. So I work all the time, but it's a passion driven work that I love. So I can't complain if you love something, you find passion for it then. But, but the passion comes when you hit that sweet spot. And when you go lease a station, you know, forget it, forget about getting better.

[00:18:56] **Eric Fisher:** It just doesn't happen. You know, people say, well, I'm going to get better, but they don't. You know, they stop, learn learning stops. I don't care if you're a doctor, an accountant, I don't care what you do unless you have somebody prompting you. If I wanted to drive a car a little faster and uh, stop a little quicker, I might take a Mario Andretti race car course.

[00:19:14] **Eric Fisher:** And in that one week, I guarantee you I would learn so much. And I know a lot of people say, well, I'm gonna keep learning, I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna do that. But very seldom, 'cause we keep track of that, very seldom do they ever do it. And uh, and I like. You know, the idea of a team, people coalescing in a wonderful way, producing great results with each other, you know, uh, I love that better.

[00:19:34] **Eric Fisher:** That experience for me, you know, all of us are better than any of us. Right. So I don't get why people can work independently and we know that it's a, it's a flawed model. People don't last in that industry that don't get any better. They never hit the sweet spot and then they go, you know, I just don't think I like hair as much as I thought.

[00:19:54] **Eric Fisher:** Or skin or whatever they happen to be doing. And the reason is, is because they never, never put the energy into hitting that sweet spot. They didn't pay their dues. I know at Vidal Sassoon's, the dues that you paid, and I know the dues that I paid and, uh, you know, it's in learning is what, is what passion is made out of, you know, and they say, if you don't have passion for your job, you got the wrong job.

[00:20:16] **Eric Fisher:** I think passion is everything and it's hard to have that momentum, you know, when you've been in the industry as long as I have, you know, so, but you just find it. You keep going.

[00:20:27] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah. Yeah. So many good things you touch on there. Um, one thing I just want to, want to sort of go back to is you're talking on sort of reflecting on, you know, my business when I started my salons was

about the same time you started yours. And there's a lot of stuff that people have got today. In terms of technology, et cetera, that we didn't have.

[00:20:47] **Antony Whitaker:** So what I want, the question I want to ask you is this, is that if you were starting out today, a young hairdresser starting out today with dreams of building a big business like yours. What would make it harder to do today than what it was 30 years ago? And the flip side of that question, what would make it easier to do today?

[00:21:08] **Eric Fisher:** That's a that's a great question. I'm not sure. You know, technology has definitely played an amazing role with people being able to book online. I mean, I think. 50 percent of our clients book after 10 o'clock at night. They just book their appointments online. But I think that the thing that's made business harder is that the lack of commitment for basic population, you know, I think this is, this is ubiquitous amongst Americans.

[00:21:32] **Eric Fisher:** I don't know how it is in Great Britain or Australia or any other country, but people change their jobs a lot. They call this the resignation generation. So when you train somebody. And you put all your energy into making them great and they leave you. It's not only is it heartbreaking, but it's financially devastating.

[00:21:49] **Eric Fisher:** So everybody wants social mobility and they want, uh, economic opportunities and you can have all that, but you have to be steadfast. You can't jump around, you know, you gotta, you gotta get good and you gotta stay where you are. So I think if I were to do it, I think I was very naive when I, uh, I had that job in New York city with Roger Thompson.

[00:22:09] **Eric Fisher:** It was easy in those days because we'd have class. I'd have 20 people that wanted to learn what I know, you know, people really wanted to be great in those days.

[00:22:20] **Eric Fisher:** And I'm not saying I don't want to marginalize this generation saying that they don't want to be great. I think they do want to be great. They just want to be smarter about being great than we were. They want to use technology and all this. I remember, you know, I did a lot of fashion shows. I worked, you know, London, Paris, Greece, I worked all over.

[00:22:38] **Eric Fisher:** And I remember, uh, doing this show in Chicago. I then took it to Athens, but I was using these hair pieces to make these beautiful

young models look with classic updos. And I had no idea what to do. So I. I got the best teacher I could find. And I said, you know, I'll cash, whip you. I'll do anything you got to teach me.

[00:22:57] **Eric Fisher:** And I was already a pretty damn good hairdresser with a good reputation, but I never let my ego get in the way. I just wanted to learn. I was passionate and I'd, I'd have that mannequin and I'd practice and practice and practice.

[00:23:10] **Eric Fisher:** I think you'd have to revisit the slum business. The prices would have to be higher. Uh, it's hard to make money. I think you take your P and L today, you turn it upside down. You say, okay, I'm going to pay myself this much. I want 7 percent out of the business. And here are my variable costs here. Here are the things I can control here at strategic costs.

[00:23:31] **Eric Fisher:** This is where I need to put my money. I think you'd be a lot smarter about it. Plus, there's so much more information. Like I listened to your podcast. I've learned so much from just listening to the people you interview. So I think information is probably. It's better and it's, it's easier to obtain than it's ever been before.

[00:23:50] **Eric Fisher:** So I would definitely, you know, what did, uh, Abraham Lincoln say, said, if you had to chop down a tree, I'd spend three hours sharpening the saw and one hour chopping down the tree. I'd spend a lot of time sharpening the saw before I'd open up another business. And I think it's doable, but, uh, you gotta, you know, you know, one thing that I've learned over the years is you have to be obsessed with the right fit.

[00:24:17] **Eric Fisher:** You can't just hire somebody because they're a good hairdresser. You can't just hire somebody because you like them. You have to look at the skills and knowledge. But most importantly is what. In a talent, do they have when I'm telling talking about talent, I'm talking about not if they can run faster, jump higher.

[00:24:34] **Eric Fisher:** I'm talking about having the ability to be empathetic or caring, or how did they do under pressure or, or is there, are they going to freak out if somebody doesn't like their hair and quit their business? You know, how resilient are they? How tough are they? How brave are they? These are the things and we test for these things at my corporate headquarters.

[00:24:51] **Eric Fisher:** We have two HR people and anybody that works in my school. As you know, probably the two main core values they have empathetic and caring. That's what we want. That's why our turnover rate is minimal. Our, uh, we never have drops. Our, our loan default rate in the school is 3%. I think it's the lowest in the country.

[00:25:11] **Eric Fisher:** And, and I think largely in part because of the right fit, we have great teachers in there. We try not to burn them out. We look for their strengths and we forget about their weaknesses. The weaknesses don't matter. If somebody's great on the floor and they're learning later, we We put them on the floor.

[00:25:25] **Eric Fisher:** If they're not so good in the classroom, we don't want to make them better for the classroom. We just keep them on the floor and vice versa. If somebody is good in the classroom, but they're not good on a one on one on the floor, we keep them in the classroom. So really working to those strengths. So if I were to do it all again, Uh, you know, I never had more fun than when I was freelancing.

[00:25:44] **Eric Fisher:** I loved it. I'm not sure. Of course, you know, I got married, had kids, have businesses, but you know, there's just so many, this is such an amazing industry with so many avenues that you can take and things you can do. There's just no limit to, to, you know, what people can achieve in this industry. So I don't know if I answered that question.

[00:26:04] **Antony Whitaker:** no, no. I, I, I'm very happy to sit here and listen to you talk. you know, you're a sort of a. You know, push the button and it'll just come out and great. stuff. you know what I mean? So I'm very happy.

[00:26:14] **Eric Fisher:** I'm old. I've been around a long time.

[00:26:17] **Antony Whitaker:** Well, the other thing I want to ask you about is You mentioned a couple of times that you were in New York and you're no longer in New York. You moved back to where you are, which is Wichita in Kansas. Now, a lot of people, I'm sure in America as well, will go, where the hell is Wichita? the, the only thing I'd ever heard about Wichita was the Glen Campbell song, right?

[00:26:41] **Antony Whitaker:** So before we got on the, on the call, I thought, I better check because I've never been to Wichita. I've never been to Kansas. So

I thought I better find out where it is. And so I Googled it and Wichita is a city with about half a million people, according to Google, and you're bang in the middle of America.

[00:26:57] **Antony Whitaker:** So, you know, you don't get to the beach very often. Um, and so the question I want to ask you about is this, you must've thought this as well. And a lot of young people will think this, and what they will think is, do you know what? If you really want to be successful, 'cause I've got big ambitions, you can't do it in a smaller city or smaller town.

[00:27:18] **Antony Whitaker:** You gotta move to New York or LA or Chicago or Houston, or you gotta be in a big city to succeed. So what I'm asking you is what would you say to that person, because you've been. Extraordinarily successful. Um, in a, in a smaller city, that's not a small city, half a million people, still a reasonable sized city, but it's about the same size as the city I grew up in.

[00:27:40] **Antony Whitaker:** Um, it's, it's not that big and yet you've built a great phenomenal business here, uh, that has national and even international reach. So what would you say to that young person that's thinking I'm going to go to New York or LA or London or Paris or somewhere to be successful?

[00:27:58] **Eric Fisher:** You know, that's a very salient point. I would say, uh, it's going to be a lot harder in a big city and I did it. I did it in New York. I was in LA for eight years as a creative director. I love that, but I have students that go to small town USA and they're inordinately successful. And, and he, you know, you have to measure what success is.

[00:28:20] **Eric Fisher:** I mean, a lot of people think that means a lot of money. Well, for me, it doesn't what success means to me is going to work because you want to, not because you have to, you love what you do. You're a day maker. You love the difference you make in people's lives and, and you make some money, I mean, obviously profits are like breathing, you got to have them.

[00:28:36] **Eric Fisher:** They're indispensable, but the money is just a by product of your hard work. So I think you can go to small towns. Easily. I love small towns.

[00:28:44] **Eric Fisher:** I love the big model. But everybody's view of the world is different. If you if you were raised in a Compton, California, uh, you know, outside of LA, uh, your view of the world is going to be totally different than if you were raised in, in, uh, Connecticut and, and, you know, a Darien or someplace like that, you know, you, you, you could be just as intelligent in both places, just as gifted in both places, just as intrinsically motivated, but your view of the world is just different.

[00:29:14] **Eric Fisher:** And I think that you have to find what's comfortable for you as a business person. Uh, and I know a lot of people that, you know, change careers and they, they're so fortunate they did. They moved locations and they love the fact they did it. I think you have to have the fortitude to, to, to do that.

[00:29:32] **Eric Fisher:** And you've got to trust your gut to say, I'm going to do this. I'm going to do this here. I'm going to be a big success. I mean, I have this lovely student, lovely student, and she lives in a really small town and she's just, I just can't tell you how much I like her. She shows up, she drives an hour to get to school.

[00:29:49] **Eric Fisher:** She's an amazing person and she wants to open up a, she's an aesthetician. A, you know, small little salon and she bought the building in her hometown. I can't even tell you what it is. I don't think I'm in Kansas. I don't think I've ever heard of it, but she's so excited. And for her, it doesn't take much.

[00:30:07] **Eric Fisher:** You know, I mean, when you're in, in a small town, if you make X amount, you're fine, you know, and, and are you going to be doing, you know, work for the cover of Vogue magazine? Probably not. You know, are you going to have a publicist? Probably not. You're going to be doing major shows. You could be, but probably not.

[00:30:24] **Eric Fisher:** So there's a certain set of consequences in, in every destination that you choose, but you got to choose your choices are so important that you make, and you can't, you know, these people that want to, you know, they talk to me, I'm, I'm going to open a salon, I'm going to serve wine. I'm going to do all this.

[00:30:40] **Eric Fisher:** I go that. Is great. That's a very romantic idea, but if your average tickets, 30 in each glass of wine cost you, you know, 4 and you're

making a 10 percent profit, you just lost a dollar off that glass of wine. So you, you gotta be realistic. And you know, you gotta, you, you just need to weigh all those things in together.

[00:31:01] **Eric Fisher:** And choose what you want to do. I mean, the last thing I want to do was be a salon owner. My wife convinced me, I didn't think I was very smart. I barely made it through high school. I'm, I'm, I'm a rockstar in New York and I'm traveling around. I'm, I'm, I'm doing these big shows and shoots and, and, uh, but you know, changed my life for the better.

[00:31:18] **Eric Fisher:** She was right. And, and I was wrong. So, you know, sometimes it, it takes a. A bigger, you know, bigger force than you to help you make those kinds of decisions that if that makes sense

[00:31:29] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah. Yeah. No, definitely. Definitely. Um, with the, with the people on your team as a, as a stylist today, you know, you've, you've, you know, I had employees since the late eighties. Here we are 2024, whatever. Uh, you've seen lots of generations come through, um, changing work, life expectations, et cetera, et cetera.

[00:31:52] **Antony Whitaker:** So what I want to ask you is this. What does a successful stylist look like today in your business? Are they part time? Are they full time? How much retail do they do? How long do they typically stay with you? You know, that, that sort of thing.

[00:32:08] **Eric Fisher:** That's a that's a great question. I just took the ogs which means old girls out to dinner I think we had uh, almost a thousand dollars just worth of old fashions drinks We we that's not including the food. We just had a great time and these people I have different standards and different levels of commitment than my newer people.

[00:32:28] **Eric Fisher:** Now, do they want to come watch? Like we, we bring some famous hairdresser in every quarter. Plus we do a big summit where I bring eight people in every year. We do the same thing. Do I expect them to show up at these educational things? No. I don't, I don't, uh, some do, some don't because they've already paid their dues.

[00:32:46] **Eric Fisher:** They've been in the trenches. Most of them been to London. This assumes they're, they're, they're my old girls. They've been there and they're all great. And they're the big producers. The younger generation is



different. They care more about flexibility. They, they, they, you know, we had to change our hours and I can tell you.

[00:33:02] **Eric Fisher:** We turned down a lot of clients and people complain about not making enough money. And I say, that's because you're working three days a week. All right. In order to get full benefits, you can get health insurance at 32 hours, but to get the whole benefit, you need to work 37 hours. That's tough for these young individuals.

[00:33:18] **Eric Fisher:** They, they just don't want to do it. You know, they want to work less and get more. And, and there, there lies some of the problem. So that's why, again, you have to make sure you got people that, that want to do. Okay. You're that want to take ownership of your standards, your vision, your mission, your core values, your company, people that want to take that ownership, it's going to be really difficult to keep them period.

[00:33:41] **Eric Fisher:** And we have lost people. But I think, you know, when I look at the difference in the generations, these guys. Wanted to get good. They really tried. Uh, like I've got somebody coming in tonight. That's a great hairdresser. Uh, I will, I'll probably have 15 people there, uh, in my entire staff. I'm 15. That's it. Uh, they're going to be at the, they're at the school today teaching and it's compulsory that all the students go.

[00:34:08] **Eric Fisher:** So they'll watch them. But when I was a kid, You know, I, I remember sleeping in my car to go watch Horst in Houston. I remember watching Paul Mitchell and just being blown away as a, as a young student, I remember I used to, I now work nights, but you know, three nights a week, I would get models and work with really good hairdressers.

[00:34:27] **Eric Fisher:** I did that. I still practice. And if I do a big music video or something, they want a particular thing. I will make these hair pieces again and again. And again, I don't see that kind of dedication today. People want to be great. You know, like when my dad, he dropped me off at, at, uh, at the airport and Heathrow, I think it was Heathrow.

[00:34:48] **Eric Fisher:** And he looked at me and said, do you want to be good? Do you want to be great? Or do you want to be amongst the best? And I'm like 19, 20 years old. I said, shit, dad, I don't even know what that means. You know, I guess I want to be my best. I didn't know, but now I understand that,

you know, so much better. And, um, it's not that you want to be better than anybody else.

[00:35:09] **Eric Fisher:** You just want to reach your best. It's a sense of purpose when you're good at what you do, as you know, and it's something to be proud of. And, um, and I don't see that, that resilience for, in that. That, uh, hunger for, to get great anymore. You know, it's just, it just isn't quite there as much because when you're passionate about something, you just want to do it.

[00:35:35] **Eric Fisher:** You know, I tell young people, it's like a merry go round, you know, in the early days, the early stages, you push, you push, you push, you push, and then you can get on board and you can coast a little bit, but if you don't push first, then, you know, it's, it's just not going to be, It's not going to be as good for you.

[00:35:51] **Antony Whitaker:** yeah. Good analogy. Um, well, okay. That's sort of one of my pet, one of my pet subjects at the moment to really dig into what you've just been talking about. Um, and it's interesting like you, I've got kids, I've got four kids as well. Uh, and two of them are Gen Z. And none of them are in the industry, right?

[00:36:10] **Antony Whitaker:** Um, and their work ethic is phenomenal. Like they work so hard, much harder than I ever did. They work incredibly long hours, but at the same time, I know of other kids. Of the same generation, the same age group, who are completely the opposite, who are the stereotype of I want more and I want to do less. So there's a part of me that sort of goes, it's not just young people today, because as soon as you say that, people start pigeonholing do you know what I mean?

[00:36:43] **Antony Whitaker:** Like, move on. you know what I mean? Because I don't think it is just young people today. I think it's people today, like especially people today don't want to do what we used to do 30, 40 years ago because we just loved it. They just, people don't want to do it as much anymore. So what I wanted to ask you, and you touched on some of it was how has your business had to, because you have to adapt.

[00:37:14] **Antony Whitaker:** So how has your business adapted To suit the expectations of today's workforce, but still enable you to be a strong, viable, profitable business. You've already alluded to the fact that people work two or three days a week if that's what they want to do. Great. You know what I

mean? So what other compromises have you had to make to, you know, attract and keep good people that are young, old in between?

[00:37:38] **Eric Fisher:** That's a, that's a very great question and to address the other thing you were saying, I would say you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink, but you can salt the hay. So we are hay salters. So we constantly. To do the, if then, if you do this, then you get that we do that with compensation.

[00:37:56] **Eric Fisher:** We do that with work. We do that with everything. So like we have an award tonight, tomorrow night, and we give away iPads, uh, uh, Apple watches, uh, thousands and thousands of dollars' worth of stuff because we want people to show up. it's not. Mandatory that they're there, but it's four times a year.

[00:38:13] **Eric Fisher:** We do the same thing. Every manager will speak as to how their salon's doing. Operation speaks, education speaks, HR speaks. So they get an update of where we are. So I think part of our magic has been, uh, Uh, definitely keeping everybody in the loop. Everybody's a partner there. It's very horizontal. I mean, they see me working as hard as anybody I sweep up the hair.

[00:38:36] **Eric Fisher:** I'll do whatever I'll shampoo for somebody. I don't care, you know, so no egos. And, and I think we're pretty ego free. And I'd say that our program, our intern program. Apprenticeship program used to be three years long when we started and it was tough and, and I was a very much of a dictator, very, very draconian and a lot of people didn't like me because my standards are so high and those standards have dropped because we had to, otherwise we wouldn't have anybody.

[00:39:04] **Eric Fisher:** So we went from, from three years. Um, now we are at nine months. And we have a lot of new clients coming in and it breaks my heart. Uh, you know, you get one day after three months if you pass a certain test. So we have a creative director. So we still Monday mornings, we do class Tuesday evenings. We do class Tuesday nights.

[00:39:27] **Eric Fisher:** We do class that we personally coach all the young people. And not only do we coach them on haircutting. And just being more efficacious as a hairdresser, we coach them on the numbers. So we look at

those key numbers and we go, okay, your average ticket is down. How are we going to build that average ticket up so you can make more money?

[00:39:48] **Eric Fisher:** And they get these numbers all the time and they go, well, there's three things we can do. It's either color, it's a waxing or conditioner. And, and those are really important that they are, are very ethical when they say these, but the people that make the most money have the highest average ticket. So when I'm coaching somebody, I'll say, you know, if you get your average ticket up there, oh my gosh, what a difference.

[00:40:09] **Eric Fisher:** Your, your numbers are great, your rebook is great, your retail's great, but your average ticket is amongst the lowest in the company. So you gotta get that up. And if they, you know where you put your focus, where you get your, get the results. So, if they focus in on those things, which we do more. You know, and, uh, you know, Antony, people don't exactly want to do one on once, you know, we can't make a mandatory, everybody's so busy, including me that it's hard and we don't like management is not a big part of our company.

[00:40:37] **Eric Fisher:** Managers implement policies and procedures. Like I said earlier, we want people to be self-starters. They have to know what's expected of them, but the numbers are the barometer of the business. So they've got to be keenly aware of what the benchmark numbers are, the key drivers for them. So they know how to improve them.

[00:40:51] **Eric Fisher:** And I look at all the numbers constantly for all my. All not, not for all my stylists, my top 20 percenters, they are home runs. They're booked up two years ahead. They're in demand and nothing says more about somebody's business than the demand. You can say, well, how's your retention? How's your average ticket?

[00:41:08] **Eric Fisher:** How's this? How's that? But. At the end of the day, if they're requested, if they're booked up two weeks ahead and they're working four to five days, then they are going to make it really, really, uh, uh, make a lot of money and be a good hairdresser. So those standards, and sometimes you have to sacrifice a few of your values of like excellence and all that to, to hit a few of your other goals.

[00:41:29] **Eric Fisher:** So we've, we've reduced the amount of time they go on the floor. Uh, precipitously and nobody really likes that by the way. The OGs

don't like it. I don't like it, but it's a fact of life. You have to do it. Otherwise you won't get people. Nobody, even my son's 23 is working in Dallas. I said, why is it that nobody out of beauty school wants to apprentice with any salons in America?

[00:41:49] **Eric Fisher:** Very few. And he says, well, why would they dad? He says, what do you get with Google? You get an answer right away. My generation wants an answer right away. We don't want to have to pay more dues. I went to your school, the best school in the country. Why should I have to expect to do an apprenticeship.

[00:42:03] **Eric Fisher:** And I said, well, that's a point well taken, but, but as you know, if you really want to get good, you need somebody else to teach you to get that good. You can't do it on your own. So there's always that difference between having a job or having a career where you're really good and you really, really love it.

[00:42:19] **Eric Fisher:** It's a balance and we balance that every day. We, you know, with all our benefits and. The lack of people working a full 40, 50 hours, uh, which I, I get that too, Antony, I really do, but it's, it's administrative where we were not producing as many services, we still pay the same in benefits, but it costs us.

[00:42:41] **Eric Fisher:** My benefits used to cost me 8.9 percent uh, the payroll. Now they're like 14%. So my profits are minimal, you know, one month last December we lost 113,000 that month. You know, it's a three-pay period, you know, it, it happens, you know, we, we, we're in the millions, you make it up again, but the profits are not, uh, where they used to be.

[00:43:03] **Eric Fisher:** So again, you have to rethink profitability, how you want to pay yourself. Maybe you don't need to make a profit. Maybe if you just get a hundred percent of your income off of standing behind the chair, maybe that's what you want. So I think looking at the profit potential. And how are you going to make the profit in the very beginning of your career is really important.

[00:43:23] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah. Okay. Um, I, I weren't going to go there, but you've touched on it. So I just have to ask this question. Um, what profit margin do you think that a salon today Okay should achieve as a, as a realistic

figure, what would you say it should be? You hear a lot of numbers bandied about as someone who's been in the trenches a long time.

[00:43:45] **Antony Whitaker:** You've said salons aren't as profitable today as they used to be as a percentage of total sales. What would you suggest should be profit? And this is after. The owner has been paid.

[00:43:56] **Eric Fisher:** I think, uh, uh, again, it depends on the compensation for the owner and what kind of management structure you have and, and, uh, financial structure you have. We do a draw every month. So we get X amount. And, uh, my wife obviously, uh, controls that money and spends it on her shoe allowance. So, so in other words, I'm always broke, but, uh, I would say, you know, we look for between three and 7 percent and that might not seem like a lot, but it is, it's, it used to be maybe 11%.

[00:44:29] **Eric Fisher:** It's just harder and harder to make that money than it used to be. And there's a balance. And once productivity picks up and you're not turning down clients, if you can make a little bit, I mean, I figured I need to do a million and a half off my little salons to make profits a million and a half. And we did that, you know, and, and we do make a profit.

[00:44:50] **Eric Fisher:** So you can base your profit on a client count. You can base it on a stylist count. I know each one of my chair does 72 hours. I can break it down into the hourly chair for profit. But I would say. Three to 7%, and then you got to ask yourself, that's not much money. Is it really worth doing? Because when you open your own business, I mean, I took out the loans.

[00:45:13] **Eric Fisher:** Uh, I had to pay him to pay him back. I took the risk. I worked 40 hours, 50 hours, 60 hours, 70, 80 hours a week. In the beginning, I was the janitor. My wife answered the phone, uh, you know, with a little baby, then two little babies. She worked her ass off and you know, we started off hand training everybody.

[00:45:33] **Eric Fisher:** So it was a little salon. So we survived and then we got really busy. We double shifted open seven days a week. We're making, making tons of money. So just like Costco, 1 percent a profit doesn't seem like much, but if you do it a hundred million dollars, it's a lot of money, you know, I think, uh, Southwestern Airlines, they make 300 a flight, but they do, you know, 5, 000 flights a day.

[00:45:55] **Eric Fisher:** So it, it, it all depends on your, you know, your model,

[00:45:58] **Eric Fisher:** you

[00:45:59] **Antony Whitaker:** But that

[00:45:59] **Antony Whitaker:** three to seven percent,

[00:46:00] **Antony Whitaker:** that

[00:46:00] **Antony Whitaker:** seems like, that's, a pretty good number.

[00:46:02] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah. Okay. All right. Well, listen, on that note, uh, I've got lots of other things I can ask you. So I'm going to have to get you back for volume two later on in the year.

[00:46:10] **Antony Whitaker:** Uh,

[00:46:10] **Antony Whitaker:** so, so we'll definitely do that. Uh, whereabouts can people connect with you on Instagram or any other social media channels?

[00:46:18] **Eric Fisher:** I'm on Eric Fisher Hair is, is, uh, my Instagram. They can DM me and, uh, be more than happy to, uh, You know, to respond anyway, I post I'm a photographer too. So I post mainly work from my students and, uh, and my staff. I have three people in the North American hairdressing awards. Uh, this year we, uh, we, uh, won the Midwest, uh, awards with hair and, and, uh, artistic, uh, creativity this year.

[00:46:44] **Eric Fisher:** So yeah, I've got a great team and we post all the time.

[00:46:47] **Antony Whitaker:** Cool. Okay. Look, I will put those links on our website and in the show notes for today's podcast. So if you're listening to this episode with Eric Fisher and have enjoyed it as much as I have, then do me a favor and remember that sharing is caring. So please consider sharing it with a few friends who might also find it inspirational.

[00:47:07] **Antony Whitaker:** And don't forget to subscribe and leave us a rating and review on the Apple podcast app. So to rack up, to rack up. So. So, so to wrap up, uh, Eric, thank you very much for being on this week's episode of the Grow My Salon Business Podcast.

[00:47:25] **Eric Fisher:** Oh, my pleasure, Antony. Thanks for having me.

[00:47:27] **Antony Whitaker:** Thank you for listening to today's podcast. If you'd like to connect with us, you'll find us at [Grow My Salon business.com](https://www.growmysalonbusiness.com) or on Facebook and Instagram at [Grow My Salon business](https://www.facebook.com/growmysalonbusiness). And if you enjoy tuning into our podcast, make sure that you subscribe, like, and share it with your friends. Until next time, this is Antony Whitaker wishing you continued success.