

What Quiet Leadership Looks Like in a Loud World – and How It Took This Company to \$3B in Revenue



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When I sat down with Scott Clawson, CEO of Culligan, there was no pomp, no buzzwords and certainly no ego. He's not trying to sell you on anything. Culligan is a nearly 90-year-old water company based in suburban Chicago, and under Scott's leadership, it's grown from \$400 million to over \$3.3 billion in revenue, now serving more than 14 million households and two million businesses across 90 countries – and I had never heard of him! But Scott doesn't come across like a typical "big company" CEO. He was grounded, thoughtful and deeply mission-driven.

We met at the United Center, where Culligan is the official hydration partner. It was fitting. Sports have played a big role in Scott's life, and he credits much of his leadership style to lessons from his high school basketball team in small-town Indiana. There's no star player mentality – just a group of people working together with clear roles and shared goals. That philosophy seems to underpin his entire approach to business: Build a strong team, stay focused on purpose, and lead with consistency over flash.

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Culligan's purpose is straightforward: to provide healthy, safe, sustainable water to people around the world. It's a mission that matters more than most people realize. More than two billion people lack access to safe drinking water. In the U.S., issues around outdated infrastructure and chemical contamination in regions like Michigan, Texas and parts of the Midwest are far more prevalent than many think. Scott and his team are trying to fix that – not just through better filtration, but by reducing reliance on single-use plastics and expanding access in underserved regions like Latin America and Southeast Asia.

What stood out most to me wasn't just the mission, though. It was Scott's clarity of thought and genuine sense of responsibility. He's not trying to be a social media personality. He's not chasing headlines. When you lead a company for 10+ years with that type of performance, he easily could be. But he's building something with long-term impact, and that tone seems to permeate Culligan's culture. It's rare to hear a CEO say he wakes up every day and loves going to work – not because it's easy, but because it's meaningful.

Scott also made it clear that leadership doesn't have to be short-sighted. He advocates for more business leaders to prioritize sustainability, long-term value and the human

element of enterprise. In a time when CEO turnover is at an all-time high and employee disengagement continues to rise, leaders like Scott serve as a reminder that humility, consistency and purpose still win over the long haul.

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This is why I do *The CEO Series*. Not to promote companies or CEOs. Not to grill executives on quarterly performance. But to better understand the people behind the titles – and to highlight leadership that isn’t driven by ego or profit alone. Scott Clawson is one of those leaders, and I’m glad we got to tell a little bit of his story. Hope you enjoyed the video.

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