Rick Scalzou2019s Herbal Origin Story

And this was when I was a student, my mom had, um, amyloid disease. And so it was terminal. My family wouldn't let me give her herbs until the very 11th hour.

and I brought her herbs and she took up. She took that bottle, Heather, and. Held it up with two hands and looked up and said, please God, And I hope I'm not getting emotional, but she said please, God let these work.

And it was right there I realized that, did I do it right? It all came back to me. I questioned myself. Did I did it with the very best integrity that I could do with?

And I think that's what we all should be bringing into making herbal medicine. Some days just don't feel like work, and today is one of them. I have the distinct privilege of welcoming you back to the Think Well, Age Well podcast, but also to introduce you to Rick Scalzo.

Today, he is joining us and I am just So excited to dive into his career, his journey with you, he's really shaped the herbal medicine landscape and way more than I realized before I was doing some research to prepare for this.

Rick began studying herbal and naturopathic traditions back in the 80s, immersing himself in everything from eclectic herbal medicines to Ayurveda to traditional Chinese medicine.

And then he went on to get a master's in herbal medical. And he has an honorary doctorate in naturopathic medicine for his just incredible contributions to the field.

So after years of clinical practice, he founded Gaia Herbs in 1987. And this is a company that I am very familiar with, with my natriopathic career. I think of Gaio as one of the gold standards in herbal integrity, in potency, and transparency.

herbs that work to people. And after selling Gaia, the company, he didn't even consider retirement, as I understand it. He realized that the herbs worked and he had more in him to give.

So instead he launched the Institute of Botanical Research in Arizona and Costa Rica Medicinal Farms in Costa Rican, a fully regenerative organic farm that feels like the Garden of Eden but has a little better soil science.

So today, Rick is building on his newest adventure, Kokora, an herbal product company rooted in regenerative organic cultivation with a mission to create the finest herbal remedies that promote health and vitality for all.

So for more than four decades, Rick has been a pioneer and a protector of herbal wisdom. And now he's an innovator at the intersection of regenerative agriculture, medicine, and planetary health.

You can see why I'm so excited to welcome Rick today. Rick, I am so glad you're here. I was thinking, wow, that was great. Thank you so much, Heather.

Appreciate it. When I just started the beginning, your origin story, how did the herbs find you? It was a spiritual journey. I was actually not in studying, interested in wellness or in any wellness aspect.

In college, I looked to understand philosophy and I asked myself a lot of questions about who is God, which is quite interesting for somebody in their early 20s.

And so when I wasn't satisfied with what I was learning in college, and one day I decided one night I would go out and ask the question, meditate and spend the night under the stars.

And I did. The only thing that came was that if I want to know God and get closer to God, I need to study plants and to get close to nature. So that was my impetus and I'm glad I didn't.

That was a long time ago, though. Well, when you think back to those early days in the early 80s, right? Was there context? You know, was there things happening culturally or personally, I think you explained a little bit of that, that sort of opened this door to this lifelong path?

Were you part of like a counterculture movement or was this very well accepted by your family and people who cared about you? Or was it different? You know, at the time, I don't recall that my family really embraced what I wanted to do.

I was sort of a self-starter and I kind of moved through life at that time and self supporting and it was a journey that I knew I had to. So, you know I'm really glad I did it.

I don't regard myself as being counterculture, but I was just fitting into a stream of consciousness that I have for myself and following it.

From Student Practice to Gaia Herbs

And with that, you know, I guess this experience under the stars that night, this realization that to get closer to God you needed to take it closer the plants.

Did you have a vision? Was there a concrete vision of what you would create at that point or has a lot of the journey been unexpected? No, it was basically, I need to go study plants.

I needed to back to the roots. And I left what I was doing at the time. Doing part-time work in school, after school and in a bank, doing some banking type of work.

And I left that work and I went to work in a natural food store. And that was kind of my impetus to join my colleague there to go off to Utah to study herbs and spend the time in Utah studying herbs.

Then I spent the with one of our colleagues, Dr. Bill Mitchell and Ed Madison studying plant medicine, naturopathic botanical medicine with them up in Montana and over in Seattle.

So it was quite a. journey for me to get started with that tutelage. And then where did Gaia herbs come from? You know, Gaia was, I was after I went through all my school, i was in practice.

I don't know if that was part of my, my bio there, but I wasn't practice for about eight years. i saw about 10,000 patients and it was. In a medical clinic with a, medical doctor and, and lots of acupuncturists and a chiropractor.

And I, was the herbalist. And so I was responsible for seeing the patients with their herbal protocols. And I needed to go out and gather the medicine, make their medicine and dispense their medicines.

So I handled the whole thing. After so long, it became so much. I decided I would reduce my practice by raising my prices. When I almost doubled my price, my practices almost double.

So, you know, who can explain that? But it is very true. And I decided I would phase out of practice and begin a product line. I had no aspirations for building the GAIA that became GAia, but I just wanted to start a small company, just to support myself.

But, it became a very big company as you Yeah. You know, Bill Mitchell, you mentioned, and he is the person who sort of introduced me to the concept of Gaia, where I feel really privileged.

He had passed away by the time I got to Bastyr, but part of our curriculum was watching videos of Dr. Mitchell teaching. And one of them was on this, this deep exploration of, of gaia.

So could, would you just explain what that is from your perspective and why you named the company Gaie? Well, it was, you know, my journey with Gaia was really based on the writings of James Lovelock.

And at the time, the idea is that we don't live on Earth, we live within it. We live amongst all of the forces and life forms on this planet. So we're a partnership.

That implies a very holistic process of relationship and connection and coevolution. And it all made sense to me. And I thought, what a perfect term for the company, you know, to use that term.

Thinking of Gaia herbs, it was, I think of like purity and potency and transparency. And this was kind of before those were buzzwords on social media and people talking about their pure, you know, latest supplement that they've got for sale on Amazon.

Can you talk about, like, how were you guided to do that before it Well, for me, you know, I just think that if I was going to do it right, A herbal product is only as good as the herb from which it came.

And I needed to control the supply chain. So that's why we moved the company shortly after I founded it. We moved it to North Carolina to establish what is now a 250 acre farm.

When I was running, it was 200 acres. And so that was the foundation for purity. Let me grow all these herbs organically. I did, I grew probably 40 to 45 crops at the time, which was a big chunk of our materia medica.

So it, was, the, foundation of. what we would do. And, you know, I just wanted to carry that purity, that concept of purity into the whole upscaling, the herbs into finished extracts.

So that means we needed to extract for purity. We needed avoid excipients and harmful exipients. we need to avoid harmful solvents, which many herbal products at the time, maybe even today are made from.

we needed to concentrate honoring nature. We needed the total potential of nature in our products, the wisdom of Nature. So that means we represent all that's in the plant.

we don't isolate, we do not purify out, We don' structurally elucidate anything. And that was my, what do you call, my mode of operanda. You know, creating this MO, there's more to running a company than just growing the herbs and putting them in a bottle, right?

There's the leadership and the business acumen. There are all these pieces. And how did you come to have that, to build a large, successful company? What did use for guidance?

I use my heart, my spirit. I was meditating for quite a long time by that point, so I used my ability to integrate spirituality into my thinking, into leadership.

Today, it's a little bit different with my new company, Kokora. We actually formed an ethos for leadership called regenerative leadership, and what does regenerate leadership mean?

He'll be happy to know that it's founded on the six principles of naturopathic medicine. And I've elaborated on them and what they mean in leadership and how they're used in nature and nature is the ultimate CEO.

Would you mind running through those principles real quick? I will try to remember them. The first one is the Vis Medicatrix Naturae, the healing power of nature and the acknowledgement and embracing of the reality, of truth, that nature heals.

And as long as we don't interfere, if we do not step in the way of healing processes, then we have a good opportunity to align with the power healing of Nature.

So, what is this second one? Doctor as teacher, Desiree. Yeah, docere actosere and the doctor as a teacher. You

know, the leader should not be somebody who tells you what to do in an organization, but it should be someone who inspires, who teaches, and who guides you with the greatest wisdom that can be offered in business.

And that is the wisdom of how nature guides evolution. So we need to align ourselves with a higher purpose and a high intention. Primum non nocere, first in Ohan.

And the attitude that when you are a leader, you're not there to create problems, but you there are to set up practices and operations that are formative and fundamental in guiding truth and guiding wholeness and guided evolution of your company and providing support to your people.

Gaia, Purity, and Herbal Manufacturing

And in so many ways, CEOs get in the way of people's creativity and people processes for contribution to a successful company. So, you know, those are a few.

And there's three more, two or three, more that are relevant. Treat the cause, treat the whole, and prevent. totally cause them and totally totem, right?

Totally cause him is treat the cause and you know, in problem solving, you can spin your wheels all day long trying to fix a problem on the level of the problem.

But if you step outside, and I have done this so often in business, step out side and say, is this aligned to our mission, vision, values? And if it isn't, then step away from it.

Because your mission should define the most holistic approach to your business. And tole totem, treat the whole person. You know, I, uh, think you have to have respect in business for every employee that, that is there to grow your company.

So, you know when you put all of these things together, You realize that nature is the perfect manager. Nature does this as a way of existence. And why can't we adopt these principles?

I've expounded upon them a lot in our company, and call them the regenerative principles of leadership. And I think they've worked for us. Is there an herb that stands out to you?

Is their one that is a favorite or has been a particularly good teacher? Wow, that's a great question. I don't know. There's so many. If I were to ask you the same question, do you have that one single herb?

Well, glycerides are right now, but I think it's been different over the, over years. Like at some stages, like oregano has been my favorite, there have at the moment, I that's part of why I asked because I just, have some like licorice tea that I'm having right.

And it, it just feels like the right fit for the moments. But I was just curious, in your journey, is there one that stuck out? Well, it used to be when I was studying herbs, I used love marshmallow root.

And then I really loved Hawthorn when we grew, you know, 200 Hawhtorn trees on the farm here in North Carolina. Now I'm growing hectares, acres and acres of turmeric in Costa Rica, and I am in love with turmeric.

And all of this now is, we never had the vision to grow regeneratively at Gaia when I was there. But we're growing very regenerative in costa Rica and to see a regenerative tumor growing there.

It's just, you know, it's profound and it is an amazing teacher. Ginger comes up for me now, like thinking about tropical herbs, right? I want to get into the regenerate piece, but first I kind of want make this transition from more temperate North Carolina.

You're outside of Asheville, is where Gaia is? That's where Guy is now. Yeah. And so very different climate than

Costa Rica, which is much more tropical.

So was there a shift in the herbs that you were drawn to or, of course, that your cultivating with that shift and climate? Oh yeah, we can't grow what we grew in here in North Carolina.

It's too temperate and these crops would not do well. We have a very distinct rainy season, a distinct dry season and during rainy seasons we'll get 150 inches of rain.

during that season, during a six month period. So, you know, we have to focus on the more tropical crops that we can grow down in Costa Rica. And I would say we're growing about 11 or 12 crops there now that do very, very well and that are appropriate for growing in costa Rica Okay, so the regenerative farming movement You're a part of that.

This is the ethos from which Kokora was born. Talk us through that, what does it mean to be a regenerative farm and what drew you to that in particular?

Many, many things really are part of a regenerative farming practice. We're certified regenerated organic by the regenerate organic Alliance agencies.

You know, they granted our farm in Costa Rica, what they call gold status. So the first qualifier is bronze. And to be bronze certified, you do need to have organic practice to.

To be silver certified. and you need to be fair trade certified. To be gold status, you have to have organic practice, fair-trade certification, and apply all of the elements that protect and grow the soil food web.

Being involved in a regenerative certified organic farm that's gold standard, we go well beyond organic We are fair trade certified, but we include practices like we make our own bio-ferments and we made our biochar, our bamboo vinegar, we produce our compost, grow our worms, make worm compost tea.

We're doing everything that speaks to the soil food web. No till practice on our farm. That means no plowing. So we've taken it to highest level. It's amazing when you see the quality of the soil aggregates that we have formed on our farm, when in just three years the population of earthworms growing from 25 worms per square meter to 450. When you see in the spring, when the first rains come, the whole farm, you know, 100 acres, looks as though it's covered with a blanket of snow.

But what it really is covered is all these blooming mushrooms, all this fungi that's coming out of the soil as an expression of all the hyphae and mycelia that is already in now coming in and breeding new life.

I just rejoice in that because I know we are feeding the soil. You know, you have focused so much in disorders of cognitive dysfunction. And I like to say, in a way, our gut is connected to the Soil, which is Connected to The Brain.

So the whole gut-brain axis is got the interface of our soil and the microbiome in the soil that kind of supports both the gut and brain health. So I focus a lot on soil food web, which is the micro biome.

You've been at this for four decades. I'm curious about your understanding of people and the relationship between people in plants and how that's evolved.

And I feel like you're kind of getting into that here, but do you have sort of a framework in how you think about the relationships between plants? Well, you've got to honor the wisdom of nature.

As any one of us at any point in our life, we're experiencing the tilth of the earth in one shape or form or another. know, we're interfacing with the tilth of the earth and why not do it with respect and reverence and dignity?

You know there's this wisdom, this knowledge, there is an orchestration of intelligence at play at every moment and we interface with plants all the time whether we know it or not through our diet, through our medicines and so forth,

but we don't know how deeply we interface with the soil where these plants come from.

And, you know, that's the responsibility that I've taken on is really try to bridge that connection between people and plants, which is building a robust microbiome in the Is there something that you wish more patients, more, you know, basically people who are engaging with medicine, people, who have health conditions, something they understood about herbal medicine and what kind of gets missed in some of these clinical settings?

Can you answer that in a little different way? Yeah, I guess I'm imagining a patient walking into a clinic with an ailment. And from my perspective as a naturopath in a conventional clinic, right?

Regenerative Leadership and Kokora

They're coming in with whatever it is and we'll just take my space, they're aging. So they got aches and pains and they are worried about their memory and don't have as much energy as they used to.

Is there, what do you wish that they knew walking in to there about the potential for herbs? Is that helpful? Yeah, I think the wish I would have is that they knew that herbs represent the healing power of nature and that They have the ability to reshape, reset, redesign, reorganize our physiology back to a state of wholeness.

And if we step out of the way, as I said, the Vis Medicatrix Naturae implies nature heals when given the opportunity. So we have to be a co-creator in this journey in our wellness.

What does stepping out the of way mean? As a doctor to your patients, it may mean a lot of things. As somebody who's working on creating the highest quality plant remedies, it may mean another different set of things.

I'll give you an example. For me, what it means, Heather, is I'm going to grow regeneratively now and I am going do it. If I choose to do, I will do to the very highest degree.

And then after I take these herbs and harvest them, I'm going to treat them with reverence. I am not going extract them in toxic solvents like many companies do.

Im going use water and organic alcohol to extract it. im not gonna dry those extracts using a myriad of different excipients. that include things like maltodextrin and things that.

So I'm not going to put impurities into the product artificially. I am going concentrate those products to a degree where I know they can be therapeutic for the patient.

I'm going to do everything I can to understand the delivery system so that I could make this with the highest opportunity for success when the patient takes it.

So I think of it that way. You probably, I would love to know how you think about it because I am sure it's very different. Even in my clinical practice, part of the reason I was so excited to talk to you today is every time I learn about herbal medicine, I'm more inspired to use it, both personally and professionally.

And I think I am almost admitting to right now, like I don't use enough. I do not use a lot of herbs. I think to get over that, I'd like to start using them.

I feel like there's a lot of potential that's missed. Now, lion's mane, we use quite a bit of. The mushrooms, they feel are pretty accessible. Tinctures, less so.

So things that can be put into capsules feel a little easier for a lotta people rather than the alcohol extracts. And dealing with the tincture just can sometimes be a lots for people.

But yeah, I think I'm just looking to you for the wisdom so that I can then translate that into more benefit for my patients. Kokoro is a really beautiful name.

We talked about the origins of Gaia. I'm curious what Kokora means to you and how it sort of represents what you're building in this regenerative movement.

Yeah, well, to take in, you know, the root for that name is Kokor?, which literally translates out of the Japanese culture to mean the connection of spirit or soul, heart and mind in the creation of all of those.

And for me, since we're working so much on the soil to soul kind of concept, it made sense that we use a name that was addressing in its meaning. I happen to feel that Kokoro as a game was too masculine.

So I changed it to Kokora. So the name would flow a little bit more and be softer and more approachable to women. And it felt right. You know, when I say Kokora, it just feels like it's just got more of a softer quality to it.

But yeah, It implies this very holistic relationship between soul and heart and mind. That's beautiful. And then there's this regenerative practice that, yeah, it almost feels Asian or kind of Confucius, right?

This like cyclic, like this regenerative picture in my mind is like that oh, that use sometimes that very simple drawing that you see in Zen temples or in a spa setting.

But the regenerative practices, they also change the quality and the energetics of the medicine, of herbs themselves. Can you talk about that? Absolutely.

When you grow regeneratively, I'm going to share with something with you that still I won't share it all because we're developing IP around it, but something we observed on our farm is when you grew regenerative, you put your crops the way we do it.

We're putting in bio-ferments. which by the way are made, I mean I'll explain it very quickly. We go out and harvest some of the forest floor, some the soil, leaves, twigs, branches, bring it back and we mix it with rice semolina, a little bit of powdered milk, a little bit of coffee hulls from the coffee processing.

We put in a bit molasses as the feed for the organisms. we add some cinnamon and some cloves. sticky pasty material, put it in a 50 gallon sack, tie it, and put that sack into a 200 gallon tank.

Let it ferment for two weeks and the whole tank is then filled with bio-ferments. and which are filled with bacteria and fungal organisms which can feed the soil biome.

And so we take this as a foundation for making our own fertilizers, our regenerative fertilizes, are regenerate pathogen controls. So it's always going into our soil, onto our plants, either fully or fed or injected right into the The biome that exists, you've heard in plants, we have to test for the total plate count.

When we're testing for purity of our crops, do they contain any microbes, any E. coli, E coliforms, things like that? Well, these bio-ferments are anti-pathogenic to all of those.

And they also enable a beneficial organism called bacillus subtilis, which is a spore-forming organism to predominate as almost a protective layer around the roots and around in the plants.

So when we're harvesting our regenerative crops, we are not only getting the value of the crop phytochemically and nutritionally, but we're getting a very vast biome or probiotic quality that is a new feature that you haven't gotten before in crops that are grown organically or conventionally.

It's pretty amazing to see when we test and to when do speciation on our test to all of the microbes that exist in the plant sample. It's all bacillus subtilis now.

And so do you think this translates into a improved microbiome for a human who's taking the herbs that you guys are creating, or does it translate into more balanced immune system or better immune function?

What does this mean from sort of a practical health? Well, a bacillus subtilis is a very beneficial organism and it at least gives us a boost to our gut microbiology.

And that is, as you and I know, that it is foundation for healthy immunity, for health cognitive function, and so forth. Fascinating. How exciting. I want to shift from sort of the professional to the personal.

You have been at this for 40 years, so you've had a lifetime to accumulate wisdom and experience. And I'm wondering, what are the top things that are helping you to think well and age well?

Regenerative Farming in Costa Rica

Well, I do have a routine and aside from eating really healthy and a holistic diet. What does that mean? What is that means to eat healthy for you? It means eat the foods, choose the vegetables, chose the food that are supportive to my constitution.

Now I am very deeply involved in TCM medicine. And so when I look at my constitution, I'm usually looking at it these days from a TCN diagnostic medicine, traditional diagnostic approach.

I happen to have a bit of dampness in my constitution and I happened to, you know, have stomach chi deficiency, as we call it, or spleen deficiency. And I need to nurture that.

So I'm choosing foods that help to check damp, that helped to improve my stomach. you know, energetics and, you now, I'm choosing more vegetables that are green and you, know I am choosing herbs that tend to promote, dry up some of the dampness and cool down at the same time since my dampeness is more heat related.

So, you know, which is more of a challenge, but I, I kind of know how to deal with it. So that's for me. I'm able to really bring together a more customized approach to my diet, to And then I'm able to, because of where I live in Costa Rica, I have a beautiful yoga shala.

So my morning practice is, you know, after I clean up, go up to the yoga Shala and I do a series of yoga postures that are supported from my back. And then I do, I sit up in a lotus position and I, well, before I did that, do a forward bend that stretches my, from my low back all the way, touching my forehead to my toes to stretch my entire spine.

And, then, doing some core exercises. Then I set in full lotus and do tapping. You know what tapping is? I'm using a tapping tool to tap all over my body, like this, to help clear stagnation.

And all overhead to toe. Then I do some breathing, Uddiyana Bandha breathing exercises to build core strength. I then do a series of, I guess you can call them, restorative meridian massage.

about a 15-minute practice to massage along all the meridians and key longevity points in the body to activate the energy flow. And then after that, I do a series of qigong exercises.

That's all my morning routine. Then that's followed by sauna and infrared sauna, and cold plunge. How long does this all take? Almost two hours. And then in the afternoon, I'll get in a pool and do a series of 50 laps, which are more aerobic type of what I call like aqua jogging laps.

So I'm lifting my legs up, my knees up to my chest as I am doing this. What's happening there is I actually creating more flexibility in my low spine and so forth.

You know, as many of us age, you know we start to feel it in our posture, in your spine, and low spine particularly. And, then we don't get around very much, we stay in motion the way we should.

So, I think one of the foundations for aging is movement. We have to keep active and keeping the low-spine as supple as possible is very important. Is there anything else that stands out to you?

You talked about movement and meditation and diet. You also mentioned to me before we started recording that you've had the opportunity to visit many of the blue zones around the world and you live in Costa Rica where there is one.

Are there people who have taught you, who've been particular mentors or teachers who taught about not just the diet and the exercise and things we all know, but about what it means to age truly well?

Absolutely. You know, because I had been going back to Italy, primarily to the Blue Zones there, and this past summer, it was interesting because I learned something which I knew, but I heard one of the centenarians say to me that I didn't associate with healthy aging.

And that is not to entertain weary or mental anxiety. I just thought about that and I said, wow, is that really something that's really bogging us down?

Do we spend a lot of our times worrying in a field of anxiety about, you know, events and circumstances and results of things and how much of our life do we let go and we embrace.

The other thing, Heather, is, and you can comment on that if you want, but I'll just say one other things is we need to experience more moments of awe.

Everybody knows what a moment of is for them. How many moments do you invite in your life every day? Right. How do you cultivate that? Well, you create an environment that's suitable for evolution, suitable life, instead of create environment, that is toxic for yourself and be able to change it.

And this implies one of the tenets of regenerative living for these long centenarians is connections. you know, I speak about and you speak as a naturopathic physician about how important the fascia is for health and well-being.

Well, the fascia is, in a way, what connects our cells and organs and tissues. And when we extrapolate that into society, we have to have a similar web that connects us to society in healthy way so we remain active and present and purposeful in our life, right?

Yeah, I was hoping that you would touch on that. Community and relationships are such an important part of aging well. But what does that look like for you?

Well, and unfortunately I live on a mountain top alone in Costa Rica. So I am making it this starting at Thanksgiving. I made it a resolution to once a month, spend at least four or five days in community with friends, even if I have to go somewhere and be together.

And so I think I to do that because I really feel that's when I feel the best. When I love, when experience partnership, When experience purposefulness beyond my work.

When I can teach to others and inspire others, you know, that's, in Japanese culture, they say you have to live your Ikigai.

Herbs, Microbiome, and Cognitive Health

And throughout the course, Ikiga means your life purpose. I know what my life purposes and as I'm aging, it definitely includes teaching and inspiration, inspiring the younger population.

If you could pass on just a single message to the next generation of herbalists and healers, what would it be? It would be, you know, think for a moment of how well we're all connected to nature and, let's not forget source, in our work with herbs.

Let's embrace source. Lets embrace the wisdom of nature that guides us and bring it to the conscious forefront and remain in partnership with it. Beautiful, beautiful.

So I just want to get your feedback. In the mornings, I drink matcha that comes from Japan. And I put Lion's mane and theanine and taurine. It's in a little combo thing and some MCT oil and creatine in there.

What else do I. Oh, and, some collagen powder. Is there anything I'm missing? What else should I, is there something else I should be adding to my matcha blend?

Are there herbs, especially for brain health, that I might be missing out on personally and for my patients? Well, you know, we did this, I will say bacopa, and we do this interesting study, Heather, at our institute in Arizona at the Sonoran University.

We do RNA gene sequencing there, and so we're looking at the effects in vitro, but still the affects of herbs on genes, whether or not they are upregulating or downregulating genes.

And we found, with memory, we've found some fascinating results. with Lion's Mane and Lion' Mene mixed with Bacopa and then Bocopa separately from Lion Maine.

And then surprisingly with our seven mushroom mocha product with seven unique mushrooms as a drink and the amount of genes for healthy cognitive function, for memory.

The amount of genes that were turned on by lion's mane with Bacopa, Bocopa separately, and to seven mushroom mocha beverage was probably 20 or 30 genes, that supported healthy, cognitive, function.

And the number of jeans that we're turned off, interfere with healthy cognitive function that contribute to, you know, different brain disorders, probably 15 or 20 genes were turned off by the same herbs.

And this is a product that you can buy? Well, we tested the Kokora products. Got it. Our Lions main product has Bacopa extract that we grow on our farm added to it, and then we also tested our separate Bocopa and we test it our seven mushroom mocha.

So yeah, you can buy all three of those products, but… And can I add them to my matcha in the morning? The seven Mushroom Mocha, You can. It's a beverage.

The Bacopa and lion's mane with Bocopa you'd have to take as capsules. But yeah, but the seven mushroom mocha drink powder is delicious and it goes great in most beverages.

That's great. Well, you know, You brought up the Institute of Botanical Research and I'm curious, what is, What's the goal there? What are you hoping to, the answers that you're trying to…

What other questions? Maybe we'll start there. What the questions you are trying answer? Well, let's step back. Why did I do it? When I left Gaia, I wanted to make a contribution to the herbal industry.

And I thought I would like to see herbal medicine under the roof of a naturopathic umbrella, and that would make me happy. So I went to Dr. Paul Mittman, whom you know, who was the president at the time.

of what was at the time Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine, now Sonoran University of Health Sciences. And we decided that we would contribute to the building out of this institute after I sold Gaia.

So we did that and it became a foundation for doing research beyond just the purity and bioactivity testing. We wanted to see the mechanisms in which these herbs work.

So we did brought in a virologist who did human cell line bioassay cell-line testing on human cells lines and this RNA sequencing type of gene expression work.

In order to give guidance to, yes, it's in vitro, so maybe we can't predict fully how these herbs are going to work, based on the in vitro results, but at least it will give us direction on what they may do in the body if we were to

experience them clinically or in vivo.

And sure enough, you know, the research is exciting and that's what Cocor does. It uses the Institute for all of its RNA sequencing and bioessay cell line testing.

for every product. So we have at least a direction, a supportive mechanism on how these herbs are going to work in the body and to help us guide our structure function claims.

Great. Wow. And that integration with a naturopathic school makes a lot of sense because as natriopaths this is we're going deploy these medicines and practice.

I am curious what role you see herbalists and natropath's playing in sort of restoring ecological health as well as human health, like bringing it all together.

There's this regenerative farming practice and adding herbs to medicine. And there's a bigger vision, I think, this global ecological perspective that you have.

I'm curious how you see the practitioners, the professionals in that space contributing to it. Well, you know, in the nature of athletic medicine, we say that, it's important to take foods that are highly nutrient dense, right?

And yet we rely on other people to provide those foods for us. So, the interface between regenerative farming, which we have proven, undeniably we are proven how regenerate farming increases nutrient and phytochemical density of our crops.

And we know through Rodale Institute, who's done so much research on nutrient density of food crops, how this is changing. And, we're talking about really activating nutrients and phytochemicals like ergothionine in our foods, particularly in legumes.

Ergothione that helps to really create a foundation for longevity. So, when I think about this interface between the environment, the people who are practicing the, people are seeking out practice.

I still have to come back to where plants, the role that plants play because they represent our food, our medicine. They come from soil that we're all dependent upon.

And more specifically, they come form a soil food web, which has been ignored. and maybe that ignorance of our soul food web is part of what's contributed to the proliferation of disease.

Without a doubt, I'm sure it's a big part. I certainly come to conclusion In my, just when I think big picture, like what would make the world a better place?

It starts with regenerative agriculture. You have less disease if you have higher quality food. It just always comes back to that in my opinion. And it sounds like we've drawn the same conclusion.

Aging Well, Purpose, and Legacy

you've been immersed in this for decades. I'm curious, what surprised you the most looking back? What surprised me the most? You know, I am such a purist when it comes to making herbal products.

What surprises me most is why are there not more people embracing a similar attitude to manufacturing of herbal product? Is it not just simply the bottom line?

I don't know if I should answer that. For me, that would be a cop-out that you're doing it just because you want to make more money. I think we have to look at our ethical responsibility.

And I'll share with you something very personal, and this was when I was a student. My mom had amyloid disease,

so it was terminal. So my family wouldn't let me give her herbs until the very eleventh hour.

She took that bottle, Heather, and she held it up with two hands and looked up and said, please God. And I hope I'm not getting emotional, but she said please, God, let these work.

It was right there I realized that did I do it right? It all came back to me. I questioned myself. Did I did it with the very best integrity that I could do with?

And I think that's what we all should be bringing into making herbal medicine. We don't see 99.9% of the people that take our herbs, but we have a responsibility to their wellness if we're gonna choose to make herbal products for them.

I can relate and certainly resonate with what you just described of the profound interaction between healer and patient and showing up to that every day and having this question of like, did I do it right?

Did I the best I could? Am I showing up in integrity with whatever your art is, right? Whether you're a healer or an herbalist or a painter or banker or whatever or care partner for someone.

This intention, it's living with intentionality. It's so beautiful you use that word, intention and also confidence and conviction. I found that that's a big part of what makes the herbs work.

Your confidence and your conviction and what you've put into this enlivens the healing potential of these herbs. Do you believe that? Do I believe it?

Absolutely. Yeah. I mean, I've experienced that. Yeah, it's true. I've actually seen it in practice with an M. D. I. practice who was prescribing Chinese medicines by just giving out a little prescription slip to fulfill at the front desk.

And his patients would then come to me and say, well, Dr. Doyle's herbs aren't working. and I said, Well, let me go through and let's talk about each herb and have a discussion about why these are recommended.

And then they would take the herb and then, they start getting results. And you know, just breeding conviction and confidence is a big part of healing.

Some people would say, oh, well, that's just placebo. My response to that is like, it's actually multifactorial, right? It's like you give the herbs and they can do what they do, but then when you actually infuse potency in them through the intentionality, That is the shift.

I think so. I love how you use the word intention. It's a beautiful word when you apply it to the giver and the receiver. Yeah, to both. You had this opportunity to retire.

You sold a large company, and you could have kind of just been like, all right, I'm going to kick my feet up and relax. But you seem to be accelerating.

And maybe that's just my perception, having read your bio. One, is that true? And two, what keeps you inspired to keep building, to put keep putting the effort in?

Well, it's just, you know, what I said when we talked about the centenarians, we all are born with our ikigai, our purpose. And for me, I'm really, yes, a herbalist and I receive these wonderful accolades for what i've done.

At the end of the day, I'm a visionary and I have a purpose. And I want to be sure I leave a legacy that can continue on. That was my next question is, what is your legacy?

I don't mean to morbid, but your eulogy. What does it sound like? What is you legacy. Right now I'm working with the government of El Salvador to transform the country into a regenerative agriculture country, which is big.

And we're working on building a very, very huge project that can set the foundation for a whole new stream of pharmaceuticals, of botanical type drugs that are made with integrity that we are talking about.

That would be my ultimate legacy is to is to get a transformation started with an example like we can do in El Salvador. President Bukele is very interested in what we're doing and we are having lots of conversations and it's really inspiring to see how a whole country is starting to embrace regenerative agriculture.

That is exciting. Wow. Rick, you know, this has been a really rich and generous conversation. I'm so grateful to you for coming. Well, that's very kind of you.

Well people can reach, look us up on our website at uw.kokoralife.com. And that is the way to connect to our web site. You can follow us on Instagram or on Facebook at Kokora Life.

You can also follow me on Instagram through Rick Scalzo. But I think the important thing is when we talked about those principles of naturopathic medicine, and I love, I so love.

I've done so many podcasts now and as a natropathic doctor, so I loved chatting with you because of that connection on these principles that we share, but to enliven them here on the show, and talk about how they can also be, you know, enliven in business.

They could be enliving in our personal life, in their family life. I think that to me is very exciting. You know? I would hope people would, if anything, really look up the six principles of naturopathic medicine and begin to expound upon their application into all aspects of life rather than just natiropathy medicine.

Beautiful. Rick, it is a true privilege to have you here. I just can't thank you enough. Your life's work is really a reminder that herbal medicine isn't just about the plants, right?

It's about relationships with the land, with soil, our bodies, the communities that we nourish and that they nourished, and then the whole planet, from Gaia to Kokora and from the forests of North America and Asheville to the forest of Costa Rica.

I think you've shown over and over again that it's possible to work with integrity, principles, and also be innovative, to respect the earth, respect humans and the life forms on the Earth.

I really think that you have elevated the herbal industry. You're a light that shines the way for people to age with vitality and purpose and a sense of this innovation and creativity and acceleration even as you're aging.

And so I really appreciate you for showing up here and for sharing your wisdom and some of your stories and this vision for a future where people and plants and the whole planet can really thrive.

It's really been an honor and privilege to have you here. Thank you. chat with you and I hope we can do it again. Thank you so much for listening to the Think Well, Age Well podcast.

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