

# ASK A CEO

## An Interview with Joseph N. Campolo, Managing Partner of Campolo, Middleton, & McCormick, LLP

**Greg Demetriou:** Hi, everybody, I'm Greg Demetriou and welcome to Ask a CEO. Today, we have the pleasure of having Joe Campolo, the managing partner of Campolo, Middleton and McCormick here with us to give us a little bit of a what's in the whys of the outstanding growth of his firm known all over Long Island. They're a bit different, but he'll be able to explain all of that to us today. Welcome, Joe.

**Joe Campolo:** Thanks, Greg. Thanks for having me.

**Greg:** I'm glad you're here. Tell us a bit about you because I don't want to go through the whole biography thing. Give me the salient points of how you got to where you are today.

**Joe:** So I'm a Long Island guy. I've lived on Long Island. I was born in Brooklyn. But we moved out here when I was young. I've lived on Long Island my whole life. And I love Long Island. You know, other than the 4 years I was deployed in the Marine Corps overseas, I've been here. My whole career is here, my home network is here. I served honorably in the Marine Corps, which is a very big part of who and what I am. And, I'm a father, I'm a husband, I'm a business owner. And I'm just trying to make a living here on Long Island.

**Greg:** So, Joe, you hit on something that I've heard you talk about a lot. Once a Marine, always a Marine. Can you tell me how that affected not only your business experience and growing the practice, but in your life? I know you're passionate about it, and I think everybody would like to hear a little bit more about that.

**Joe:** Sure. So when I was when I was in high school, I was probably 16 years old. In 1983, the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut were bombed by terrorists and about 250 plus Marines were killed. It was the first time the largest attack of terrorism on U.S. occupied territory. I knew at that moment, even though I was just a teenager, that evil was in the world, evil that we just hadn't seen before. I knew that I needed to do something about it. I had a calling. So I went into the Marine Corps. And it was really a life altering experience for me. You know, you don't realize it as a teenager but those are kind of your college years. You don't really realize it. But as I matured past that, what I understood about the Marine Corps is, here's an organization that's able to take 30,000 spots a year open and they get about 400,000 people applying to be Marines. And it's bad pay, it's

bad living conditions. You have no control over your destiny while you're in there. You can be deployed and you may possibly have to give you a life. So I said, "Wow, how can an organization with all of those terrible value propositions to join them, recruit so many talented, amazing people in it?" And as I began to really think about it and study it, it really just made a lot of sense about how to grow a business. Because we're not asking anybody in our day to day to give their lives, we're not asking anybody to do anything that they ask you to do in the military. So the deeper I studied it and the deeper I understood the roots of it, the more I think it helped me grow as a leader and help me grow my organization.

**Greg:** It's really impressive the fact that 400,000 people apply and only 30,000 spots are available. It's almost like one of those disclaimers that at a drug commercial it might kill you, but you should go and ask for it. It's very similar to that. So you survived?

**Joe:** I survived.

**Greg:** So how did that translate into building such a premier practice in such a short period of time? You've only had it for ten years. It's really monumental what you've done. Could you talk about that? Sure.

**Joe:** Sure. So I spent the younger part of my legal career at respected legal firms. But I knew that I was more entrepreneurial than to be in sort of a big system. What I did was and this is something they teach you in the Marine Corps; always be observing. And you as a former NYPD detective, you know, always be observing, always be trying to figure out how they're doing things, why they're doing things, what's good, what's bad. And so the early part of my career was really a mental checklist. I have notebooks full of details of what I thought was really good about the legal profession and what I thought could be improved upon. I left that setting and was lucky enough to go work for a technology company in the late 90s, early 2000s, when technology was booming. I got to see a whole different side. I got to see sales. I got to see promotion. We grew tremendously into an internationally based company and with that growth, you think you're the king of the world when you're when you're growing. But as soon as things start to slip, you realize how vulnerable you are in business. And so the technology changes in that company started to slip a bit. And that's like an avalanche. You feel like you're just free falling. But again, I took principles that I learned in the Marines; hold the line. Keep moving forward. Don't stand still and you have to keep moving. And I think that's really the most important lesson that I learned was, if you're in a firefight, the worst thing you can do is stand still. You gotta keep moving. And so I formulated all this and said, you know what? There has to be a better way to advise businesses from a legal perspective. So, many business owners will thump the table and want to win on a legal issue, when my job is to say keep moving, you know, you're in a firefight. The best thing you can do right now is keep moving

**Greg:** Complete disclosure, Joe happens to be my attorney as well. And he just described me with every business I work with. And you actually answered my next question. Was there a guiding principle? And in your answer you said very clearly it was to keep moving, keep growing, keep observing. So you've got the practice and it's ten years old. What is the size and the scope of the practice? Does it have a particular focus?

**Joe:** So we seek to be a resource for small to mid-sized businesses. You know, what we realize is

large businesses, large public companies, they have mammoth law firms in New York City and major cities that are going to be able to help them. And that's great, but at 1100 bucks an hour, which is what the partners in those firms are building, small and mid-sized businesses here on Long Island are not going to be able to sustain that. So what we saw was a void in the marketplace 10 years ago, where there are the experiences I have, the experiences my partners and counsel have, many of whom have been in-house and worked directly for customers and clients. So they've been consumers of legal services. They have the experience and the expertise to really give small to midsize businesses value because it's all about value. As a business owner, you don't mind spending a million dollars if you get two million dollars of value out of it. It's all about value. It's a value based practice and it's how are we helping you keep moving.

**Greg:** So you identified a niche in terms of what the market could bear. And you've actually stepped in and given them that. So that seems to me one of the reasons why there's such tremendous growth in your firm, not only your reputation, but also your affordability. So that's a big differentiator. That's one of the reasons why I see Campolo, Middleton & McCormick as being different. Do you see it any other way than that?

**Joe:** No, I mean, it was very strategic and deliberate. It wasn't just accidental. I had a very strategic and deliberate plan to go into it. It's an economic philosophy that I agree with. It's with regard to taxes. It's an economic philosophy I've agreed with and have shown that the model works. That is, if you're spending less on legal services, which in essence is profit, it's dollars out of your pocket as a business owner, if you're spending less and getting enough value to help you continue to grow. We both win. You're going to have more legal needs over time. So I'm going to continue to have a good client that that's growing in size and scope. You're going to be more profitable. And being investing in sales and marketing, research and development, all the things that you need to do to grow. I'm going to grow along with my clients. And that's the way that it's worked. If it was the philosophy of some of the larger firms out there, which is, "I'm going to charge you as much as I can on a transaction, because I don't know what tomorrow brings." It's not sustainable.

**Greg:** So you've put yourself in a position where if you succeed, the business owner succeeds. And I think you've been handsomely rewarded in the growth of the firm. So it's kind of unique, those components of Campolo, Middleton & McCormick is a bit unique in the way you present yourself to the marketplace, the way you've been branding the firm. I know you're very, very involved in the business community. You actually conduct seminars, three of which that just pack the room every time. And I'm going to read them if they want. I don't want to mess up the titles, one is called Incorporating the Leadership Lessons of Jack Welch into Your Business, Leading your Business the Marine Corps Way and Learning the Art of Business Negotiation. Now, all of these are always well attended. Why did you create them and why do you present them?

**Joe:** So, to me, the two biggest tools that any business owner or business leader needs to possess is the ability to influence and the ability to negotiate. If I can help influence and I can be a good negotiator, then my team is going to have a stable platform and is going to keep moving forward. So it's all about helping to keep people moving forward. And I've always viewed Long Island as the goose that lays the golden egg for us all. Remember the old fable where the goose is laying the golden egg and someone gets some patients? So they cut the goose open and they realized no more golden eggs? Well, Long Island is one of those one of those areas, we live in the shadow of New

York City. And so people, I think, over estimate their abilities because we're lucky we have a very prosperous area. But I don't think business leaders really understand how to lead. And I think what we can do on Long Island and what we have been doing on Long Island is making that group much healthier. So my feeling was, you know, it's like insurance companies. If you have a health and wellness program and if you do certain things and get a physical every year, your rates are going to stay lower. So if I'm able to take business leaders and I'm able to say, "Look, if you can run your business better and have fewer legal needs, that's healthier for us all."

**Greg:** It's very unique for a legal practice to delve into the business leadership platforms. That's what caught my attention when that came to be. It was just so interesting to me that it was a magnet because now here we have a law firm, one of the most prominent law firms on Long Island is offering business ideas, content information to help business owners grow their own businesses. I thought that was very unique. So obviously it was deliberate.

**Joe:** I'm a business owner. I sell time. You know, what I sell is time. And so I think the shift in the past, people viewed lawyers as lawyers. And, you know, they'd have musty books in the back and they'd have secret answers. It's changed so much. I view myself as a business owner. And the firm's time has to be as valuable as it possibly can be to the business community in order for them to consume it.

**Greg:** So the partners, when you approached them with this idea, that they would completely buy into it was there any pushback?

**Joe:** Well, it's a good question.

**Greg:** I only ask because it occupies seemingly a lot of your time. You're the face of Campolo, Middleton & McCormick. Your other partners are out there, but not nearly in the grand way that you are. So I was wondering if there was any tension or pushback.

**Joe:** Well, in the beginning, I think there was a lot of hesitance because I was a contrarian. I was going to swim against the tide of what lawyers and law firms were doing and in the beginning, certainly with Middleton and McCormick, who were my first two partners, they were nervous, I'm sure. But because it's worked now there's buying. If it didn't work, well, we'd be having a different conversation if it didn't work. But I think because it's worked so well, I mean, we're 65 professionals now. We just opened our third office, which you've helped us with in Westbury and did a great job. We're looking at a fourth location. We're probably in the next three to five years going to double our size simply because the business community gets it, not just the business community, but the talent. The talented lawyers out there that are really looking to be part of something exciting get it. So we get resume after resume right now.

**Greg:** So you've created the CMM Academy-

**Joe:** Yes.

**Greg:** It's in your office in Ronkonkoma. It's a wonderful facility. I've been there. It's perfectly accessorized. Was that exclusively to run the presentations that you're building now?

**Joe:** So what we had was a unique opportunity. There was that square footage available in our office space and the rent was pretty reasonable. And our director of marketing was saying, you know, “We’re using outside hotels, even our own leadership training, our internal leadership training. We’re using we’re going to restaurants. We’re spending a lot of money outside before we need office space. Maybe we should use that as an internal training center.” And I thought about it and I said, “You know what? All right, let’s try it. Let’s figure out and see how to try it.” The original scope was we could have internal trainings, which we do a ton of every week. There’s two or three training sessions that go on just for CMM employees. We rolled out a new technology, saw an I.T. manager who has to be training everybody on that. We have a leadership team, they may have to be training people on that. We have staff members that have to be trained. So it became a very good thing. It also became a very good thing for our culture committee. So every month we have a team lunch. We now do it in that room and its themed and we do a team lunch and we use it for culture.

**Greg:** So it does double duty.

**Joe:** Triple duty because the business seminars that we do for business leaders. The focus on that is, leadership and negotiation. The two tools where as a business leader, if you have those you’re going to find yourself in a lot less legal trouble. And then what that does is strengthen our relationship. Why? Because I don’t want to represent somebody in a matter that I can’t bring any value to it. It hurts the relationship.

**Greg:** We’ve actually had that conversation over certain things that we were dealing with. What’s the value going to be? So far, so good.

**Joe:** Business owners think in terms of value. And so if we are, like an insurance company, if you’re making your workforce healthier. Insurance companies are going to have to pay less. If I’m helping business leaders negotiate through a lot of problems, then the matters that I’m working on with them now are matters I can actually bring value on.

**Greg:** So you’ve become an avid blogger with your off the record newsletters, which are very interesting. You take lots of chances sometimes venting your spleen on different topics. I was surprised what the topic of the next new newsletter is gonna be. You’re on to Jay Oliver radio show on Saturday mornings. You were a perpetual emcee, moderator, panelist and interviewer at major events for major organizations. How did that all come about?

**Joe:** Well, so with off the record, my internal marketing team strongly advised me against it. They weren’t that much in favor of it. But when I thought about me and who are the people that I’m trying to build a relationship with and what are they really looking for? What I realized was they were looking to be able to trust me.

If people are going to come to me with their most delicate, sensitive legal matters, they’re having a problem from a criminal perspective, a high level S.E.C. perspective. They’re looking to sell their business and it’s their whole life’s work. Who are they going to want? I want somebody they know, one they can trust. And I can shovel and pick and I do every day, all day build relationships by having lunch with people and everything else. But when I thought about how do I sort of mass produce that.

**Greg:** Isn't that one of your first pieces of it? Don't eat lunch alone.

**Joe:** Right. So I thought about how do I mass produce people to get to know me and trust me. It was, I could write a blog. But so many people are out there talking, but nobody's saying anything. You're not learning anything about them. And I wasn't going to blog about, you know, here's read 253 and what to do about it, because you just blow your brains out when you read those things. So when I really thought about it, I said "How is it a way that somebody I may not know yet. Somebody knows me can read it and really get to know who I am?" Now look, there's good and bad. Some people say "You're a moron, Campolo. I don't agree with anything you say and don't want to do anything with you." Okay, I accept that because what I found is more people will say, you know what? "You've demonstrated a lot of courage. I appreciate your candor. And that's the kind of guy that I want to have in my corner."

**Greg:** I recall that very well. That was one of the reasons that you and I really started to have a relationship because you wrote something and I was slightly objected to it. And we started a dialogue back and forth. And then we had lunch and then we became friends. So you're absolutely a thousand percent correct.

**Joe:** Right. If I was saying it, if I was blogging it, and not saying anything it just wouldn't matter. And so if I was going to do it, I wanted to say something. So it's always interesting. It's called a science. No one knows what the topic is until it goes. And it's a lot of fun.

**Greg:** So now that you've almost created yourself as an icon on Long Island, what's the feedback from the populace?

**Joe:** Well, just remember them. The higher a monkey climbs up a pole, the more of us, as you can see. So you're not learning that lesson. If you're going to take positions on things or at least say what your opinion is, I try not to take positions because what do I know? I'm just one man and I like to just give my opinion. You're certainly going to get people that don't agree with you, which I'm fine with. I respond to everybody who gives me feedback and I try and explain what my thought process is. And it's worked out well. There hasn't been hostility. I think we need more of that in this world.

**Greg:** I agree with that 100 percent, because you can rant and rave all day long if you try to make an intelligent point, which you do. That's the conversation piece because you can rant and rave and say go out, go screw yourself, jump off the rope, bridge, whatever. But that avoids a real conversation. And everything that I've read and heard from you is always either, even if it's provocative; it's making a point. And I think that's where we fall down in the world today. It's all about pointing fingers, being antagonistic. And when you make points, I think you have much more broader chance of penetrating somebodies mind and let them see a different angle. So I really appreciate that in what you've been doing. So CMM has grown. It's expanding. You've just elevated two people to partners. You've opened a third office in Westbury. You now span Long Island from Bridgehampton to Ronkonkoma to Westbury now. Was this actually a well thought out plan or is it driven by demand?



**Joe:** Well, it's a couple of things. So it's driven by demand and not necessarily just client demand but talent demand. New York City is so close and because the larger firms in the city pay much higher than what Long Island firms traditionally and historically do, the natural gravitation for young folks is to try to go into the city. What we've had to do is give them alternatives. A Nassau County office was very, very important to that. It now gives us a broader base to reach out to talent that's thinking about maybe going into city, but doesn't want to come out to Ronkonkoma.

**Greg:** Can you tell me an anecdote of somebody called you from Brooklyn and said, "I'm not going away to Ronkonkoma, but I'll go to Westbury."

**Joe:** Absolutely. The other piece of it was, we have existing attorneys and talent, one of them being my new partner, Arthur, who lives in Brooklyn already. And you know what? He never complained to day about driving to Ronkonkoma. But I know that he's got two young kids. I know that, that's not a lifestyle that anybody should have to really do in today's day and age. And so opening that was an accommodation for him and others as well, folks that live in Forest Hills. So we could keep the existing talent that we respect very much, happier. And it's the market that it's opened up. Look, it's the Nassau county firms who are our direct competitors their value proposition is going against the city firms. They can be a third to 40 percent cheaper than the city firms. And that's their value proposition. So that opens up as they're looking west towards the city, that opens up a huge void for us to be able to move into Nassau County and fill the low hanging fruit that's left in that void.

**Greg:** So tell me about Bridgehampton. I mean, if you're all the way in Westbury, did you start in Bridgehampton?

**Joe:** Yeah, so it was another one of my sort of contrarian views that worked out for us. Everybody said "You got to be in the city, you have to be the city guy in the city." I said, "Well, look, nowadays city folks all have a place in the Hamptons and they're expanding their stay." So they're not just they're from Memorial Day to Labor Day. They're there from Memorial Day to Columbus Day. So if I open an office in Bridgehampton, I now have a captive audience of all these folks in the city. But I have them in a much more relaxed setting. And now I can build a relationship with them. So we do things like have a chalet at the Hampton Classic, we do high-end cocktail parties out there. And we work with a lot of high-end developers. It's been a lot of fun. I'm able to get these people in a much more relaxed setting, build a relationship with them, and then have them say, "So why am I paying all this money for my New York City lawyer to handle these matters?" It's worked out great.

**Greg:** Very interesting. Very interesting. You've proven that business doesn't stop in the summertime.

**Joe:** Absolutely right. You've got to do it differently. You've got to have a velvet glove and ease into it. But it's worked out terrific.

**Greg:** Wonderful. So one of your other endeavors is chairman of the Hauppauge Industrial Association. Big job, big organization. Can you tell us what drew you to the position? First of all, you're obviously invested personally in the growth of the organization and the success of the

organization. Tell us a little bit about what drew you to it and why is it so important to you?

**Joe:** So when I was looking at starting this firm in Suffolk, because Suffolk had no real full service business law firm in it, Nassau had plenty and there were plenty of solo practitioners out here in Suffolk. But when I was looking at really building this firm, I said, "If you're going to fish, you've got to go where the fish are." So I need businesses and in businesses that are going to be attracted to it. When I looked around, I said, "There's a lot of business organizations. But the Hauppauge Industrial Association had 1,400 businesses in an 11 square foot mile park. Well, that seems to be a good school of fish there." So I engaged with Terri Alessi-Miceli, the president and I fell in love with her. She's a very dynamic, visionary woman. Terri knows how to throw an elbow, and I respect that greatly.

**Greg:** I think I received the couple of elbows over time

**Joe:** Oh yes, I've received elbows and feet in my backside and everything else. But I love that because those are the type of people that I happen to get along really well with. And I saw what she was doing with the organization. And I said, "You know what? This is something we'd really like to be involved in." Then my partner McCormick joined us right as we received the Business Achievement Award as Rookie of the Year. And that sort of blew up our profile there. Then Terri invited me to interview to join the board, which I did. The board members there are amazing. They're amazing because they work. I don't want to be a part of anything where people just sit around and talk. I want people that are going to make progress. So first of all, look at what Terri does on limited staff and limited budget. I mean, it's amazing. You would think it's 10 times that. The board rolls up their sleeves, they take initiatives and they go out and they execute on it. That's what I'm all about. You won't talk about the Marine Corps. Take this hill and they go do it. You know, they don't sit around and talk about it for hours.

**Greg:** You guys have just undertaken a major, major project. Tell us about that.

**Joe:** What I try and really emphasize with business owners and leaders is, take all your past experiences and figure out how you can use them to take the point. You are right now and grow from it. In a past role, I was president of the Stony Brook Alumni Association. And Dr. Shirley Kenny was the president of the university. And prior to her becoming president of the university and I becoming the president of the Stony Brook Alumni, had no relationship whatsoever with the university. They were actually hostile and adverse to it. And it's a crazy, crazy situation. So when I got involved, me and a lot of other board members said, "This is crazy. We have one hundred and five thousand alums." We didn't even have a homecoming at that point. So Dr. Kenny and I built a bridge and then 9/11 hit. We made a major gift to the university, the alumni association for a 9/11 memorial. And that sort of sparked our relationship. And so we then embarked on a project to see what was the economic impact of Stony Brook University on the region, because she wanted to go to Albany for dollars. And she knew that the only way you're going to get money is to show that you're generating revenue. So when the HIA was looking at growth initiatives, I said, "Terri, why don't we look at what the economic impact of the park is on the region? Because I have to assume it's phenomenal." So we partnered with Stony Brook University, they gave us three MBA students for three semesters to use. And the Miller Business Resource Center, which is a tremendous, tremendous resource for Long Island, did an economic impact study and found out that almost 20



billion dollars a year that comes out of sales volume out of the companies in the park. 20 billion dollars net, net payroll in pocket, household income is like two and a half billion dollars to spend locally here on Long Island based on employees that are in the park. One in 20 jobs on Long Island is employed in the park. So we blew our mind. So we went out again, influence in negotiation rights and said "We can sell this." We went out banging the table, second largest industrial park, second only to Silicon Valley. Nobody knew any of this until we did it. We started banging the tables, banging the tables, banging the tables. What happened? A remarkable thing. Our elected officials are all talking about the second largest industrial park. Second only to Silicon Valley, it was great. So then we caught the attention of the Suffolk IDA. And the IDA has been great partners with the HIA because they have so many people that are buying buildings in the park. The IDA funded the feasibility study that we just had completed that was released on April 24th. They brought in a professional planning company, James Lima Planning. He's great. He's worked with Google, he's worked with Facebook. He's worked with the Buffalo Billions. So he knows what's going on. And it was a nail biter for Terri and I because we said, uh-oh, real people are going to be looking at this now and let's hope there's something there. And he unleashed his report April 24th. And it was amazing, Greg. What it said was, and some in substance, so tradable industries are the most important thing to the U.S. economy right now, tradable industry means what's attracting new dollars and new jobs. If you don't have tradable industries, all you're doing is circulating dollars, which means you've got to increase your tax base. So Long Island, what came out was a good, healthy industrial cluster in a municipality. Usually about 36 percent of it are tradable industries. And it's these nine industries; aerospace, food service, I.T., technology, business services, where dollars from outside your region are going to come in. That helps electors because it's new dollars. They don't have to raise the tax base. So, 36 percent was a national average. Long Island was below, Long Island as a whole is only 23 percent. Why? Because, you get paid, you go to Costco. The people at Costco get paid. They go to 7-Eleven. And all we're doing is circulating, circulating no new money. But these nine tradable industries are bringing new dollars from other states, other regions into it. The 1,350 companies in the park, their cluster is 58 percent tradable industries. So that means inside the park, just inside the park. That means every dollar that's coming in there is actually worth a dollar and a half to the elected officials. Now to the taxpayers.

**Greg:** So you've got their attention?

**Joe:** For sure. We have everyone's attention because what we've shown is that's a national model now, national model to increase the tradable industry cluster.

**Greg:** So because of that, Long Island operates in silos. So how is the Hauppauge Industrial Association going to elevate its brand, if you will, to compete with the recognition that some of the Silicon Valley gets? I mean, we're in we're blip according to that, but we're not. So how is that good message going to get out?

**Joe:** That's a great question. It's sort of been the challenge. And now that we're armed with this information because numbers matter. Numbers really matter. Now that we're on with this information, we are going to take it on the road everywhere we possibly can. And you're giving me this platform is a tremendous opportunity. You mentioned Jay Oliver. Jay is a very big supporter of the Hauppauge Industrial Park. And he lets me get on there and rant, you know about it as well. Silicon Valley became Silicon Valley because of the stories, became Silicon Valley because of the

marketing that occurred, because of the branding, because they highlight it. You know, before it was Silicon Valley, it was the Stanford Industrial Park. That's what it was called. Just like we're the Hauppauge Industrial Park, right. It was the Stanford Industrial Park. And then a little chip was discovered there that was made out of silicon. And then all of a sudden, because of the stories of the great companies and the great entrepreneurs that were there, all of which we have here on Long Island. But the marketing and the branding was critical. And that's what I mean about influences. If all of our board members of all of our business leaders tell the story, then it's going to grow. We have a remarkable opportunity here, Greg. For all the discord that's going on in American politics, Long Island once again has shown tremendous leadership because we have Democrats and Republicans now completely focused on this project. Completely committed to making sure that the park remains healthy and completely trying to help get the story out. So it's a hard job, but I'm passionate about it. There are so many out there that are passionate about it, you being one of them. We need everybody out there, though, to stop apologizing and complaining about Long Island and start really promoting the amazing economics.

**Greg:** Yeah. I mean, we've always been a stepchild to our neighbor, the west, New York City. But we have the same dynamic abilities; we can do anything they do there, we can do here. We have the talent, we have the skill. We have the servers. We have the professionals. Alright. So now when are we going to be able to say, hey, we're the high tech island? We have to come up with the ability to reach out beyond our borders and plant the flag and say, hey, guess what? We're here. Come and get it.

**Joe:** And that's so that's my vision and that's what I'm spending my career doing.

**Greg:** Well, thank you very much for your driving force to move this island forward and break some of those silos down so we can all be a better place, a better community, a better business community. So in terms of that you and your firm are superior, just amazingly generous. You announced a couple of months ago, was it a 450 thousand dollar grant to Staller Center at Stony Brook University? Amazing. That's a pretty high bar. When other companies that have a philanthropic bent are looking at it. Tell me, what was the genesis of that and how can Campolo, Middleton, McCormick be that generous?

**Joe:** So it's another interesting scenario when you look at our focus and our commitment to growing Long Island as a region, as a whole, you have to look at what is it that's going to drive affluent business owners to want to be here. What are the selling points? Well, the selling points are going to be, golf clubs and communities. Arts. Arts are big are a big part of that. Restaurants, all the things that people are going to say, you know what? I enjoy living here. Why? Because on a Saturday night, I can go to a very good restaurant and I can go to a show. I'm not traipsing into the city. I'm not doing all this other stuff. In university level, what's going to get cut? Art programs are getting cut. Why? Because it's all invested in STEM and health care because that's what's going to generate the dollars. The Staller Center is one of the most amazing, amazing things that Long Island has to offer. The amount of talent they bring to that are things you going to go pay big bucks on Broadway for. So when it was really in jeopardy of not being able to continue to do that. I looked at it and I said, "I live in a three village area." It draws people from all over the Staller Center for a Saturday night show. They're usually sold out. And if we lose that, how is that going to hurt the community? It's going to hurt it drastically because now people are going

to say, you know what, I lost my Saturday night out for a reasonable price. And so we really were committed to supporting the university. Arts are necessary in any civilized, affluent society. They're just necessary. We've got to get people off their phones. We've got to get people off their computers. We've got to get people to sit in an audience and watch real live human beings perform and let the arts live. And so it became a natural thing for us to be able to do. The amount was overwhelming. When I was first approached by Alan Inkles and his team, the amount was overwhelming. But you know what? I have great partners and we all bound together and we all decided that it was worth doing. And so we committed to the pledge and we move forward.

**Greg:** Well, I congratulate you on that. That's very commendable, really. I mean, and it's another leadership role in the overall business community on Long Island, because sometimes I think that some of the businesses just sit on their hands. They identified need and they don't necessarily respond all the time. So I'm always a proponent of businesses being involved in every aspect of Long Island. So I commend you and I commend your partners for taking on such a serious role. Appreciate it. So besides Stony Brook. Campolo Middleton McCormick is philanthropic in lots of other ways. I know you support many, many organizations and different causes through what you call a CMM cares.

**Joe:** Yes.

**Greg:** So is that like a foundation? What is that?

**Joe:** It's a division of our firm. So Victoria Tringone, our director of marketing, heads that up. She directs that program and its children, veterans, and affairs in the arts, or three areas that we're very interested in supporting. And so what Victoria spends a fair amount of her time doing is going out and meeting with organizations that are in those areas and finding ones that we as a firm feel are making a very big impact here on Long Island. She does a terrific job with it. And we enjoy it. The arts are very important that we do that. Children's issues, Greg, I can't tell you. It's amazing to me that we overlook children in so many ways. There are our only future. One of the stats that's amazing is by 2025, 75 percent of our workforce are going to be millennial based workers. But what are we teaching them as children? What are we doing with our kids nowadays? And how much abuse and how much hunger and how many things are really affecting kids so that the next generation, where are they headed? I mean, it's unbelievable to me. So we're very passionate. I don't like bullies, I just don't like bullies in the way we treat kids in our society and we exploit them online. We really are not very good to children. So we're very vulnerable.

**Greg:** They're very vulnerable in so many different areas. So but as a firm, that's a big reach for you guys. The Stony Brook thing, now you're devoting so much time and volunteering, mentoring, you sued your lawyers, your attorneys sit on various different boards. How do you keep that focus? Is that the three focuses that you pretty much stick to or does it change?

**Joe:** Well, the three focuses in terms of where dollars are going to come from. Where the attorneys want to spend their time can be different. So one of the things that I'm involved in, which I'm pretty passionate about is the Tesla Science Center out in Wardencliffe, which is right out on the North Fork. It's the last existing laboratory of Nikola Tesla. And so I chair their fundraising committee out there. That's the last one we haven't right here on Long Island. We'll talk about a

gem. You want to talk about being able to attract STEM and technology. We're doing it worldwide. Europeans are investing in Long Island now because Nikola Tesla's final lab is here and it's an amazing place. But I think STEM is a critically important part of our infrastructure here on Long Island. So I'll commit time and dollars to that outside of what the firm sort of mission is, because I believe in that.

**Greg:** So I know you've also supported the United Veterans, Beacon House, American Vet dogs. I think that was like mostly last year, you did that. So is there mind meeting will around the firm when you say, OK, this year we're going to focus on X? Is that the way that happens?

**Joe:** So last year was veterans and the arts. So we did the Staller Center gift last year and we did the Beacon House and we did America's Vet Dogs in terms of dollars and volunteer time. This year, family service league and other children's organizations are a big focus of ours. So we're looking at this year being the year of the child and really trying to get some awareness on some of the issues. I mean, hunger and child hunger is amazing here. If you have you knew that a hundred thousand kids every day go hungry on Long Island. Shame on all of us. They don't have lunches to bring. The obesity problem isn't a problem of overeating for children. It's a problem that they don't have nutritional food to eat. So we're really focused on trying to help that, so we're pretty excited about that.

**Greg:** CMM cares. Let's talk a minute about the culture. Because obviously you have to have a support mechanism not just from the C-suite, but it has to permeate through the whole organization. Tell me a little bit about the culture at CMM.

**Joe:** Sure. So it was probably two years ago that I realized if we're going to grow, I personally, as the managing partner, have to let go a lot of the things that I was doing so that I could be freed up to be out in the community more and really start to recognize this. So a very difficult thing to do. Listen, when you grow it, it's your baby. You know, when I've been advising people for 25 years, but I was now realizing I need to eat my own dog food at this point and I gotta let go. So what I was able to do is take a group of eight of our top professionals, not mostly non lawyers who were heading up our business units. And for my leadership council, which is great. And I've empowered them to basically run the day to day business every extent. You know, we really looked at it. I empower them all. I have a meeting once a month with them. I have breakout meetings with them. But other than that, you know, they have to make the decisions. And you have to learn to live with that. And that's a hard thing for me to have learned to live with. But they're going to make mistakes. It's going to cost you money. But that's all part of the growing curve. They are amazing, though. Every single one of them is amazing, has embraced it, takes it very seriously, learns from their mistakes. It's not defensive, owns it. So leadership and ownership are two things that were very big. They own the problem. And we've been able to grow. So we've been able to grow the infrastructure that's enabled me and my other partners to get out into the community and really find needs to be able to serve.

**Greg:** So the general culture of the workaday people that work at Campolo and not just the lawyers, but the whole organization as a whole. I know you do many things. Could you tell us a little bit about how you nurture the culture that allows you to be so philanthropic and so out in the community?

**Joe:** So we're all in. Every year we have a full day offsite retreat for everyone, not just the lawyers, but for everyone. And from there, we're going to chart our course. Everybody buys into it. What are our priorities? What are our philanthropic goals? What are our volunteer goals? What is our growth? How are we going to do this? Everybody buys into it. I think that, that's very important. We have a culture committee who makes sure we have monthly and it's very important. So one of the reasons I use the training room, it's very important with three offices now that we have a central place once a month wherever it comes together and has a meal.

**Greg:** And is it big enough?

**Joe:** It's big enough. But we empower everybody. So everybody's role is critical and that comes from the top down. I make sure that everybody understands that everybody's role is critical. Whether it's somebody who's taking in the mail or the managing partner, it doesn't matter. Everybody is respected and critical. So you can't just say-

**Greg:** Walk the walk or talk the talk.

**Joe:** Right, and this is the same thing. We had to strike a check because you can't just say you want to be impactful and make a change and not do it. It's hard to do, but you got to do it. Or else you're exposing yourself to be a thinly sliced sandwich, which is what I'm totally opposed to. And so internally, it's been very hard to change the culture, but you have to do it. If that person owns that job, it doesn't matter. Someone who's "higher" than them tells them to do it a certain way. They're empowered to do it the way that they want to do it. And that's taken a lot of time to correct. But now that it's done and it's worked, you know, everybody embraces it. If it was done and it didn't work, it would be a different story.

**Greg:** I commend you on that because so many people think they can just talk the talk. But if you don't walk the walk, eventually somebody's going to tell you you're full of crap. Right?

**Joe:** Right.

**Greg:** So back to the lawyer part of your brain-

**Joe:** Which I love being a lawyer, by the way. I really do.

**Greg:** Well, what happens when you have to go back and do it? Now you've got a nice sizable firm, 10 years worth of experience. Can you tell us without divulging anything confidential. A couple of the last really successes that you're really proud of.

**Joe:** We do a lot in terms of helping business owners sell their business. So nothing is more gratifying to me than when it's a family owned business, watching this family that's worked for 30-40 years. Not taking a lot of money out of the business because they've invested everything back into the business. And not really understanding the value of the business that they have. And so when I meet them and there's been two, in particular over the last year or two when I've met with them and they've said, you know what, we're tired and we think it's time for us to retire. We're thinking about selling it, but we don't know what's worth. When I met with them and taken my



professionals and worked with them and telling them what we think they will be able to sell their business for and their eyes light up like two saucers at that point because they can't believe and they come to tears because they work so hard. And they couldn't imagine that they were ever going to be able to make that much money. We're talking about tens of millions of dollars and then get those transactions across the finish line. That's the American dream, my friend. American Dream is you're an entrepreneur and you have an idea. You work. You invest. And you build something. And then all of a sudden you're able to sell it. It's absolutely incredible.

**Greg:** It's really huge. And the reason I always remember, there's a number in the back of my head that only 33 percent of businesses that are for sale ever sell. So if you have a hand in bringing those over the finish line, that's a huge accomplishment.

**Joe:** And you're right. It's you know, the flip side of it is. So those are the success stories. The flip side of it is you get a lot of people out there who think their business is the best thing since sliced bread. The only ones doing it and it's worth a gazillion dollars. And that's where trust comes in. And so I think you can appreciate this and you can understand this; lawyer's probably correctly have a reputation of not really wanting to break their ass too much. They'll do a good enough job for clients, but clients, especially business owners and I try to explain this to people, because when you're defending insurance companies, it's not that person's money. But when you're defending business owners and this is something I'm very aware of and I have to train my lawyers about is every dollar is your dollar. Some insurance companies dollars, your dollar. And if you don't feel that your lawyers are pushing as hard as they possibly can, are doing everything they possibly can to get the most value for you. You're going to be disappointed by it. And that is the dilemma that lawyers find themselves in when they work with business people. That goes back to why I blog and everything else is I want people to know me and trust me, because you have to have a confidence. You have to have a confidence as the business owner. When you're talking to me or one of my attorneys that when we say, that's all we can get. You have to have a confidence that that's all that we can get. There has to be a trust. But if we don't have that trust, if we don't have that relationship, you're never going to believe that's the best deal that could've been had. You're always going to walk away from that and say they could have gotten more. They were lazy. They didn't want to be aggravated, they didn't push. So the trick is with those people, if they don't trust me and with me saying, look, this is a very difficult business to sell. You're probably not going to get as much as you want, if they don't know me. Trust me, they're going to walk away from that engagement. They're going to say, "Campolo doesn't know what he's talking about. He doesn't want to try." It's not the point. I try to all the time educate myself and my team and give them my best pragmatic answer.

**Greg:** That's the hard part of your job. I guess when you have the downside to that and you say "Mr. and Mrs. Jones, I appreciate what you think, but I don't think we can get you to the number way you're going to get." That's got to be a hard conversation.

**Joe:** It's very hard because everybody in their world thinks what they have is worth more. My job is to fold in the firm. One is I'm the chief strategy officer. So what I try to do is make sure before the team starts, you know, shovel and pick working and doing billable work that the right strategy is in place. And I'm the chief client advocate. So I'm always taking the client's perspective with my team. I'm always pushing them to say "If you were paying this bill, would you be willing to

pay for what you got a steady hand on the rudder?" I have a steady hand on it and I push back hard because that's the only way the relationships are going to build.

**Greg:** That's what's gotten you where you are today, quite frankly. And the future is very, very bright. So in terms of that, it's kind of a lame question sometimes. But I think it's more important this time five years from now. What do you think?

**Joe:** So five years to now, I'm very, very bullish on Long Island. I think Long Island is going to continue to do very well economically. I'm all in. Look, my entire life savings is all in on this firm. At this point, it's just my everything. I'm all in on it. So I don't really have a choice. But to go forward right now, you know, burn the boats. So as Magellan, when he when he conquer an island, he'd get off, he'd row his team to the island. Then he burned all the boats and he said, "You ain't leaving, you might as well conquer this island." So I'm all in on Long Island. I think with things going on like the Hauppauge Industrial Park, the way Stony Brook is, it is blowing up the region the way all these initiatives are. I think we're going to be in good shape over the next five years. My sense is you know, we'll probably double in size over the next five years, which will be a very good, healthy thing.

**Greg:** I think you're very good. So in closing, I know we've talked for quite a while now. Parting gift. You tell people something that most people don't know about you.

**Joe:** Well, that's an interesting thing because I'm pretty much an open book. I try to be an open book. I mean, I think at the end of the day, you know, nothing about me is driven by a dollar. Everything about me is value based, integrity based. You know, I'm not perfect. I make mistakes every day. You know, I kick myself probably harder than anybody I'll ever kick me. And I acknowledge that. I think business is hard. I think life is hard. I think society's hard right now. I'm challenged like everybody else, trying to find ways to unplug, trying to find ways to stay creative, trying to find ways to be a good husband and a good father, trying to find ways to be a good boss. And I let people down some of the time and I feel very bad about that. But what I do tell people all the time is at the end of the day, I'm always going to pick myself up, dust myself off and keep moving forward, because I think that's why we're on this planet. I think we're on this planet to be productive. And that's what I'm going to do.

**Greg:** Terrific. Thank you, Joe. Thank you very, very much. What a great, great conversation. Thank you.