

# THE EVOLVING MAN

LIFE VIRTUES MEN  
DON'T TALK ABOUT

**MARKHAM F. ROLLINS III**

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# FOREWORD: ABOUT THE BOOK AND WHO IT IS FOR

*The Evolving Man* is for you if you are looking to grow and evolve to become a better father, son, brother, spouse or partner, friend, and human. This book will not give you any quick fix, but rather will help you start a journey of self-reflection and imagining what a better life could be for you and those around you.

We all get one shot at this life. Why just wander through checking the boxes and calling it in? If you're okay with floating through life, then this book is not for you. But if there is a little voice inside of you asking questions like these, then this book is for you:

- ☐ Why do I have such a difficult time listening to people?
- ☐ Why do I have a difficult time opening up to share my struggles and look for help?
- ☐ Why do I have such a hard time forgiving people?
- ☐ How do I let go of all the regrets I carry around?
- ☐ Why is the relationship with my spouse becoming flat and boring?
- ☐ What would it feel like if I had more gratitude for what I have, instead of desire for what I don't have?
- ☐ I'm feeling lonely and I want to find a way to have a community of friends.
- ☐ I have a strong ego and am very opinionated, and I think that is hurting my relationships. How do I fix that?
- ☐ I have a low capacity for empathy and compassion and I don't know how to fix that.
- ☐ What will my legacy be after I am gone?

All of these questions and more are the reasons I wrote *The Evolving Man*. And I commit to you that if you read this and do the work, your life will improve. You will notice the change, and those around you will notice the change as well.

How can I make this commitment to you? Let me give you a little background on *The Evolving Man*. On April 15, 1957, I came into this world and began my journey. I do not know how much longer I will be here, but my vision is to reach 90, then reaccess. My first 66 years have been incredible, and I tell people that I have lived a full life, and if, by chance, my time ends before 90, I'm okay. I am at peace. I am fortunate

to have done more than many. I have not lived a perfect life, but I have no regrets. I am quick to forgive, and I do my best to practice unconditional love. I have a wonderful wife and six glorious children, their partners, two grandchildren, and a close circle of family and friends who provide genuine nourishment to my soul. I have suffered just as everyone does. I have made my share of mistakes, and I have learned multiple lessons the hard way. But those lessons have also allowed me to heal and grow into who I am today and to write *The Evolving Man* as a guide for others to do the same.

For example, I was always the person who shied away from controversy, and that trait has not treated me well. It hurt my growth as a leader, a person, a husband, a father, and a friend. It became clear to me that this was a problem early into my second marriage. My wife, Jody, is about as direct as anyone can be. She believes that by not being direct to others, you hinder yourself and others in trying to live a full life. Whenever she was direct with me, I would withdraw, get quiet, and tell her everything was fine, but she knew full-well I did not have the courage to be truthful and tell her how I really felt. I realized I struggled to be vulnerable for fear of shame, judgment, and rejection. Since identifying this, I have worked very hard on not pulling away and retreating. I have come a long way with vulnerability, and still work on it every day. (I have included a whole segment on vulnerability in Section Two where I explain this work further.)

Coming from that place of vulnerability, I wrote *The Evolving Man* entirely from the heart, and it incorporates a number of thoughts that reveal some of my personal philosophies. It is a collection of my own stories, as well as stories of more than 50 other men, just like you and me, who became part of a group I emailed weekly with the same journaling questions you will encounter here. Many of their answers are woven into the fabric of this book, giving you a variety of stories to show you that you are not alone.

This book is for men of all ages. I write it from the perspective of having learned from the mistakes I made along the way as a younger man, and grown from them to where I am now. The purpose of the book is to give you hope, inspiration, guidance, and finally some community that men just seem to get too little of.

In **Section One**, I share with you some major life events that helped shape who I am today. To be clear, my journey still continues and I work on myself every day.

**Section Two** takes you through 12 life virtues that I feel are critical to spend time on so that you can evolve as a man. Each chapter begins with

an overview of the virtue, then a story from my life that was a learning experience for me. As you read this book I will be sharing my stories with you in the hope that you will find the lessons that I have learned too.

As individuals, we all have a personal story that is meaningful and reveals a connection with our own personal growth. Think about it. You wouldn't have remembered your story clearly if it wasn't important. *That means you learned something.* It was a genuine "a-haaa!" moment. And sometimes those stories become suitable tales to share with others because you thought your "lesson" would help them too. I have many stories from throughout my life that have taught me my deepest lessons.

Following that, comes the journaling questions that I asked the 50+ men that were part of the research I did while writing the book. I had more than 2,000 responses to my questions overall. These answers will give you additional perspectives on the topic at hand. Having these different perspectives will let you know that you are not alone with your struggles.

After reading the comments from the men, I give you an opportunity to take these other reflections, stories, and experiences, and then develop your own set of answers to the same questions. This will give you a starting point or an accurate idea of where you stand right now.

Finally, each chapter ends with a challenge for you to grow in that specific area. The challenge may be the most important part and I want to push you to do the work. This book is intended to put you on a path of change.

**Section Three** covers six more important areas: self-care, sex and intimacy, marriage, grief, spirituality, and then your legacy, using the same format as above. They are not necessarily "virtues," but are important parts of our lives.

In **Section Four**, I spend time with you and explain what to do next; how you can take all that you learned and put it into practice.

Think of this book as a men's discussion group. Pay attention to my opening remarks in each chapter, read what the other men in the room have to say about the topic, then spend time journaling on what your responses would be. Take your time with the journaling. Write it out long-hand, using a paper notebook, not a computer. I recommend you jump online, or take a trip to your local bookstore, and get a quality-made, special journal dedicated to this journey. You'll be glad you did.

I am grateful that you purchased this book. If you like it, please buy one for a friend and share what you have learned about yourself with other men. And please feel free to drop me a note; my email is [mrollins@markhamrollins.com](mailto:mrollins@markhamrollins.com). I would sincerely love to hear from you.

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## SECTION 1

# INTRODUCTION

This section is a little about me and my journey so far. I want you to better understand me so that you can see where I am coming from when I write about each life virtue. We are all individual men with our own skills, emotions, and good and bad habits that make us who we are.

And we all have the capacity to change. I certainly have changed a lot over my first 66 years here, and expect to keep changing and evolving.

As you read the next six chapters and learn more about me, I challenge you to think and write about yourself in this same way:

- ☐ What are some pivotal moments in your life that helped influence who you are today?
- ☐ Who are some of the people that impacted your life?
- ☐ What are some areas of your life that you know that need change?

Think back on your childhood, your education, your time in college if you went, and your career. Think of loved ones who have passed away and your most important relationships.

If you are not used to journaling or writing, this might be challenging. I want to encourage you to get comfortable writing in your journal about your past, about your feelings, and about your dreams. Over the course of time, I have found that men are hesitant to show their true emotions. This is not news to most people because for centuries, men have been expected to be strong, to be tough, to not “let their guard down,” and if they need to cry about something, they will usually do it privately. But why does this expectation exist?

Personally, I believe men should do the complete opposite, and be at peace in their emotions. There are plenty of emotional men who are just as solid in character as the “tough guys.” I cry during OnStar commercials and sad movies, and I’m okay with that.

It takes a strong man to be able to show vulnerability and emotions in a way that society would want to be critical of, and that’s a shame. Women don’t have a monopoly on expression, and men need to be comfortable in their own skin too. As I contemplated this idea more, it soon became one of the first premises for this book.

Before we move onto the next chapter, spend a few minutes to start thinking and writing about your journey up until now. Think of it as a history of your life or a highlight reel. Make it fun and, as you write, sink into your feeling of joy and happiness for all that you have accomplished so far and who you are as a man, a father, a brother, a son, or a husband.

## CHAPTER 7

# THE DAY MY HEART OPENED

I had been crouching for about an hour, moving down the wall, cleaning up the concrete between the rows of cinder blocks that were placed there by one of the high school students. As I looked across the worksite, I noticed Maria, one of the local women who we recently built a home for on my last trip. My Spanish was limited but we always found a way to communicate. She was about 22 years old and had three children ages 6 months, 2 years, and 4 years old. Her husband worked as a day laborer cutting sugarcane and was paid about \$3 USD a day. In Nicaragua men and women marry as young as 14 and begin families right away.

Maria was standing at the edge of the road about 30 feet from where we were all working. There were several other villagers watching, but Maria was looking more interested in what we were all doing. Jim Gordon—one of the founders of Bridges to Community, which was an NGO from New York—ran trips to Nicaragua. It was primarily a community-development and house-building organization, and we were building a church in the village of Las Conchitas. Jim and his wife Bonnie served as our hosts and

liaisons with everyone in the village. Jim noticed Maria and headed over to talk to her. She held a special place in Jim's and Bonnie's hearts. After a brief discussion, some smiles, and a hug, Maria got to work. She really wanted to help, and Jim said it would be okay.

Maria kept walking back and forth, one cinder block in each hand, carrying them from the street to the middle of the worksite. She had no gloves and wore flip flops on her feet as she trudged over the dry earth and around the pourings of wet cement. It was late morning, so the sun was not quite yet at its peak level in the sky. And although we did have some shade, it was already a hot day. We all had clothing that, by now, was sticking to our skin. There was a strong breeze that day, and the dry earth made for recurring dust bowls sending dirt into every crevice on our bodies.

At the time, I was 42 years old with three sons, two of whom were there on this trip. This was my second visit in two years, and I had committed the previous year to come back every year and bring more people with me to live this experience.

But *this* trip was special. We had a fresh crew of students, and it allowed me to relive my first trip through their eyes. Ten of the students were from the Bedford Presbyterian Church in Bedford Village, New York, and the other 10 were from Temple Shaaray Tefila located in the same village. There were several adult leaders as well.

It was at that moment, as Maria was bringing back two more blocks, that I began to well up inside. It was a feeling I had never had before, and I was not sure what was happening. As I continued to watch Maria, I looked to my left and saw that Jim Gordon was there at my side.

With tears in my eyes, I shared with Jim what was going on and how I was feeling. I described in detail the feeling of sadness, happiness, humility, gratitude, and joy, all at the same time. The feeling of love and respect for Maria and the rest of her family, and for the people in this small village, was overwhelming. He stared back at me and said, "What you are feeling is the way God intended for all humans to feel. And imagine what the world would be like, if all humans felt the way you are feeling right now."

It was then that I began my journey towards living a life filled with unconditional love. As I think back, not only on that specific trip, but the next 20 trips to Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic to build homes for families living on the edge of survival, I realize now that there is a different way to weave ourselves through life. A way led by love and the belief in a higher power. I talk more about this in the chapter on spirituality.

## SECTION 2

# INTRODUCTION

We all tend to know what our values are, and to live our lives according to how they align with who we are and who we want to be. We learn the basics at a young age which include principles like knowing right from wrong, being kind to others, treating others as you would like to be treated, etcetera. Many of these were taught to us by our parents, our families, our school systems, our religious establishments, or our spiritual leaders. I learned from all those sources, and am grateful for all the people who provided mentorship along the way.

As I moved through my career, and was raising a family, it became my turn to mentor others on their personal journeys. As the expression goes, "the best way to learn something is to teach it." This section is part learning for myself, part teaching you so that you can learn. It takes shared experience and shared learning to truly make progress when we need to make a change in our lives.

Towards the beginning of this book, I briefly mentioned the Boy Scout

Law, which is comprised of 12 virtues that a Scout must strive to live up to (trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent). It's a way of living that was taught to me over and over for eight years. Those principles are truly ingrained into my everyday life. But that was not enough for me, nor would it be for you. In this section, we are going to look at some of what is in the Scout Law, but also some other core values that, if practiced on a regular basis, will uplift your life. They will put you on a path of self-alignment, they will bring you peace of mind, they will help you heal if that is needed, and they will become part of your very fabric as a human being.

Let's talk about change. Some people are set in their ways and will continue through the rest of their lives as they are today. Some may have purchased this book and never even got to this section. And that's fine, we can't help everyone, especially those that don't want or think they need change. But if you are reading this now, then you are one of the men who can see a brighter future. A man who can see that, with a little effort and small incremental changes in beliefs and behaviors, you can improve your life and the lives of those around you. Congratulations on being one of those men!

Having the right mindset will make the difference in whether you improve your life, or you don't. Go at your pace and set aside time to do the work at the end of each chapter. Even if you think you may have that core value dialed in, go deeper. We have one shot at this life. We can be as grateful as we can for what we have today, but there is always more. Dream big, and live hard.

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## CHAPTER 9

# VULNERABILITY

Vulnerability is, in my opinion, the second most important virtue to develop healthy long-lasting relationships that stand the test of time and go way beyond casual friendship. And for so many people, especially men, they spend their life avoiding it when in fact their life would be better if they did it more.

First, you must learn to understand what being vulnerable is and what it can do for you and your close friends. As you will see from the journal comments in this chapter, many men think of it as a weakness. I myself was brought up that way. But it is one of the greatest strengths that you can build for yourself.

When you put on your armor each morning and prepare for your day, you are preventing others from knowing what you need, what you want, how you feel, and how they can help you in certain situations. When you wear this armor, you can seem aloof, not interested, shallow, and without a soul. People who care, people that you want in your life, reach you easier

and quicker when you are vulnerable.

I'm not suggesting you run around and just tell people what you need. Listen first to their needs. Build rapport, then open up and share your innermost feelings. It will backfire at times, and you may feel judgment and criticism from others. In those moments, it's time to question if these are the people you want in your life.

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## **My story**

As I sat at the kitchen table looking him straight in the eye, I tried as hard as I could to summon the compassion, the courage, and the words to let my father know how much he was hurting me, my wife, and my children with his behavior.

As the words flowed from my mouth, I could see the anger, the disappointment in me, and the defense mechanisms kick in. He lashed out for what seemed like five minutes. How ungrateful I am, how I am dishonoring him, how outrageous I was being in my accusations. When he finally finished, I let silence fill the room. I just stared at him.

"Dad, I love you more than anyone on this planet. You have done so much for me, and I am overwhelmed with gratitude for everything you have done for me over my entire life. Working with you in the family business has been the best work experience ever. All that you taught me as a young man and now as a partner in the business has helped guide me and mentor me like no other."

His red face and scowl seemed to melt away. He was always searching for accolades, handwritten notes of thanks, reassurance that I knew he was always there for me.

I began speaking again in the kindest loving way I could. But I needed to be brutally honest without fear of losing my position in the firm, without fear of being judged again by his ranting voice, and with the full knowledge I was taking a huge risk.

His drinking had become so prevalent, he was talking to my young sons in an inappropriate way. They were easily influenced by my father as they loved him. They did not know that his inappropriate and offensive language was wrong and I needed to protect them from my father's

behavior.

He listened and did not interrupt as I spoke softly, in a kind tone that seemed to resonate a little as tears filled his eyes. I suggested again that he get help. He softly said that maybe this was the message he needed to hear to stop drinking, and that he would stop that day. This was a good sign that he knew he needed help, and he knew that damage he was doing to our family.

But he was so independent, and he wanted to continue feeling that he could do anything on his own. *"I am a Marine and I have the strength to do this, I do not need any help."* This was not the first time we had this conversation and not the first time he promised to quit, so I knew it would not work. He needed an intervention, as well as formal rehab, and that was going to be a big push for both our family and for him.

We talked a bit more and I thanked him for listening to me. But then I needed to give him the message I came to deliver; that I was going to prevent him from seeing my boys until he got professional help and worked on his behavior with all of us. I told him Mom could still see them, but we would not be coming here until he has worked on himself. The anger in him showed up again, and the guilt I felt for the pain I was causing him and my mom really hit me. I told him again I loved both of them unconditionally, but this was going to happen. I will still see him at work, and I would also stop by once in a while to grab early coffee with him and my mom. That was always a special thing we had with each other.

Thus began a seven-month time in my life that was sad, stressful, and, in a way, shameful for what my dad was going through. I felt at least somewhat responsible for his grief. We had additional chats during that time and even came close to a family intervention, but he continued to drink in excess for the rest of his life. And unfortunately, that's what killed him in the end.

Before he passed, over time I brought my kids back into his life, but it was never the same. As they grew, they realized why my dad was the way he was, and they found ways to continue loving him despite his controlling and alcoholic behaviors.

Being vulnerable is probably one of the hardest things for a human to do. It does not come naturally, so it takes contemplated effort. Our flight-or-fight instincts usually take over immediately, and we put up our guard when our vulnerability becomes known. The fear we sense is real, and

we automatically try to protect ourselves. There is a misconception that being vulnerable is a sign of weakness. Men, especially, have a hard time being vulnerable because we do not want to look weak, especially in front of other men. But in fact, it takes courage and strength to be vulnerable. And by being vulnerable, you let people know more of the “real you,” which can open and deepen relationships better than trying to hold up facades. Vulnerability is not so much a sign of being weak, rather it’s a sign *that you know your weakness*. And that’s actually a strength, because now you can work on it.

I have worked very hard on this in my life. Especially in more recent years, but probably because I’m so much more aware of it. I believe that the inability to be vulnerable is part of the reason why my first marriage failed. With Jody, I work through the resistance every day and now can safely say I am much better at it. It’s hard, but I am so glad that I pursue this challenge.

We all have our own personal collection of fears, flaws, insecurities, and weaknesses. That doesn’t make us “men.” That makes us “humans.” But if left unchecked, those things can also hold us back in the relationships we want to continue nurturing in our lives.

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## **What do others have to say?**

*Here are some important questions with actual responses from other men like you:*

**What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of the word "vulnerable"?**

*"The first thing that comes to mind when I think of the word 'vulnerable' is the word 'naive.' To me, vulnerability represents being unaware, weak, somebody easily taken for granted."*

Charles W.

*"Vulnerability makes me think about how I grew up hearing from my dad, 'Stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about.'"*

Seth S.

*"As someone who likes to be in control, vulnerability is hard for me. I believe it means setting up a situation where you agree to give someone else some degree of power over you. To me, that is the ultimate affirmation of trust and love. I am not talking about crying when watching a movie. It's too much work to try to hide emotions like that."*

Anonymous

*"Being vulnerable is the practiced art of letting people know how human you are, how fragile you are, while you're working on building inner strength."*

Roger L.

*"The first thing that comes to mind when I think of vulnerability is drawing people in."*

Vincent B.

### **How has a time when you experienced being vulnerable helped you change in some way?**

*"The first time I opened up to casual friends about needing pharmacological and talk therapy was pretty liberating. It really made the need for such therapy more acceptable to me by simply voicing it and by seeing how little anyone gave a shit. And, of course, you learn how many fellow travelers there are out there. The risk I perceived in coming out that way has been more than rewarded. And it gave me a ton more empathy for those who suffer their own different types of mental health challenges."*

Ken F.

*"Exposing and asking for help with my alcoholism 32 years ago required me to be vulnerable, and being vulnerable allowed others to step in and provide the help I needed."*

Tim H.

**Is it difficult for you to open up and ask for what you need, to talk about how you are feeling, or to have the hard conversations? If so, why do you think those things are hard for you?**

*"Actually, over the years this has become easier. As I am in my 60s now, I believe all of my life experiences have given me the perspective to open up and be willing to be more vulnerable."*

Anonymous

*"Yes, it is very difficult for me to open up and express my feelings fully with anyone. I think the reason is I don't want people to think I'm a weak and vulnerable person."*

Anonymous

*"It's not hard to think about what I need, but when I feel that saying it out loud would change nothing, then it's too easy to bury it."*

Roger L.

*"This has always been difficult as I am afraid people will see me as needy and weak. I have never loved myself enough to imagine that anyone else could possibly love me too."*

Tim H.

### **Any other thoughts on being vulnerable?**

*"This is a difficult topic. I think that open and honest conversations help us move forward and make improvements."*

Brent K.

*"It makes me uncomfortable to think about being vulnerable!"*

Anonymous

*"Being vulnerable is not a bad thing. It enables you to adapt to situations and be better for it. Life is a long journey, and it requires significant ability to change to live a healthy life."*

Keith D.

*"I like the 'at risk' concept because it immediately suggests there's a reward to be gained in vulnerability. Just as there is no free lunch in life, there is no reward without risk. The corollary is that taking risk—in this context, making yourself vulnerable to a potentially bad outcome—almost always has a reward."*

Ken F.

## Your Turn:

*If you want the best results possible from this book, answer the journaling questions before moving onto the next section.*

**What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of the word “vulnerable”?**

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**How has a time when you experienced being vulnerable helped you change in some way?**

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**Is it difficult for you to open up and ask what you need, to talk about how you are feeling, or to have the hard conversations? If so, why do you think those things are hard for you?**

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**Any other thoughts on being vulnerable?**

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## My challenge to you

*Now that you have given this topic some thought, here is my challenge to you:*

Being vulnerable is hard and, frankly, in my opinion, even harder for men. Perhaps that is evident in this chapter's journal responses. But you can also see that we all know we are better off learning ways to practice and embrace this most important trait.

I think it begins with a self-assessment of ourselves.

- ☐ Do we believe we are good humans?
- ☐ Are we loving, kind, thoughtful, and caring?
- ☐ Do we believe that we have parts of us that might need work?
- ☐ Do we have things we are hiding and not being open and honest about?

I do, and I'm sure you do too to some extent. All of this makes up our authentic self. All the good, the bad, and the ugly. People want to know the real and authentic you, so start thinking about how you can do that.

Find a person you trust, a person who cares about you as much as you care about them. Have them read this chapter and ask them if they would be willing to have an open, honest, and confidential chat to discuss this topic.

It won't be easy, and I can't guarantee the outcome will be positive. But what I do know is that you will begin the process of learning to be vulnerable. Once you chat with this person, move onto others. Magic will begin to happen. You will love those around you more and they will love you more as you both begin to be more vulnerable.

I always try to find friends that I can be vulnerable with. And I don't completely open up 100% on day one. It's a process of talking, listening, and building trust. Go slow but give it a try. You might be surprised how your life will change for the better.

Here are some other ways to work on your vulnerability muscle:

- ☐ Each day, check in with yourself and identify your emotional state (ex. Happy, sad, stressed, lonely, anxious).
- ☐ Honor that emotional state by telling someone else (ex. spouse, partner or friend).
- ☐ Discern what, if anything, needs to be learned.
- ☐ Each week, reflect on a difficult conversation that needs to happen. Challenge yourself to have that conversation with someone.

### Discover a Journey of Personal Evolution with *The Evolving Man*

If you're a father, son, brother, spouse, partner, or friend seeking to grow and evolve into a better version of yourself, *The Evolving Man: Life Virtues Men Don't Talk About* is your essential guide. This book isn't about quick fixes; it's about embarking on a transformative journey of self-reflection and envisioning a more fulfilling life for you and your loved ones.

Why should you buy this book? Because it speaks directly to men who are ready to step out of the shadows of complacency and into a life of active self-improvement. You'll learn to confront and overcome common challenges, like struggling to listen, sharing struggles, forgiving, and cultivating empathy and compassion.

By reading *The Evolving Man*, you'll gain insights into developing gratitude, deepening relationships, and building a supportive community. This book is a tool for positive change, offering hope, inspiration, and practical guidance to reshaping your life.

Your life will significantly improve as you engage with the 18 life virtues presented in this book, accompanied by personal stories and journaling questions for reflection. Embrace the challenges posed in each chapter and embark on a path to a more fulfilling, meaningful legacy. *The Evolving Man* is more than a book; it's a catalyst for lifelong transformation..



**Mark Rollins**, a retired insurance executive transformed his professional acumen into guiding others towards fulfilling retirements. With a life marked by entrepreneurial success and a profound commitment to philanthropy, Mark serves as a beacon of wisdom-sharing and community-building. His journey, enriched by overcoming personal challenges and embracing vulnerability, especially in his roles as a husband, father of six, and grandfather, forms the backbone of his book, 'The Evolving Man.'

Through this work, he extends his legacy, guiding men towards a deeper understanding of themselves and a richer, more engaged life. Mark, alongside his wife Jody, enjoys an active lifestyle in Marco Island, Florida, balancing boating, golf, and pickleball with their passion for health and wellness.

