



Starkey Sound Bites Podcast Transcript

Episode: Bill Austin

Dave Fabry: Welcome to Starkey Sound Bites. I'm your host, Dave Fabry, Starkey's chief innovation officer. Our guest today needs no introduction to the hearing industry. He's none other than Bill Austin owner of Starkey, the founder and a trailblazer in the hearing healthcare space. Bill started his career in the hearing industry 61 years ago this month. I'm honored to call him boss, mentor, friend and colleague. And Bill, just thank you for joining us with the podcast today.

Bill Austin: Dave, I'm always glad to speak with you. I'm so happy that you can call me a friend and a mentor and a colleague because if I've contributed at all to anything in your life that makes me have more value, I'm worth something. You're adding value to my life.

Dave Fabry: Well, one of my favorite sayings is, in your humility you'll say, "Well, I'm not a big deal but I've got news for you, you're not either." And I think that that reminder that we all play important parts in each other's lives but also not to underestimate and overestimate that. And I do want to thank you for your leadership and your vision for Starkey and the opportunities you provided me] to have a significant part of my career here. And I enjoy what I do every single day and I've had the benefit of traveling around the world with you and really seeing you in action on missions as well as the day to day, as well as over in the Center for Excellence here on campus. And it's amazing the energy that you have. And I want to say, you're celebrating a milestone birthday this month, 80 years young and I know you still run circles around people 30 years younger than you. But first and foremost, I want to say happy birthday.

Bill Austin: Well, you're welcome, Dave. And I don't think I'm running those circles as fast as I used to but I'm running them as fast as I can, how's that? And I'm still enjoying being part of tomorrow by contributing to today. That's what I like to do.

Dave Fabry: Yep. I know you do. And I know you're not a big one for celebrating on your own but what do you plan to do for your birthday? What are you planning to do to celebrate it?

Bill Austin: Actually, I don't think I've ever really celebrated a birthday. Some people have had little birthday parties for me, but for me, a celebration really comes when I've been part of progress to help people better than we've ever helped before. And that's my eureka moment and that's when I go around really celebrating. I'm always looking to the past, trying to learn from that experience and apply it to today. But it's not a direct application. We're living in a changing world and we have to adapt to new. We can't be stuck in the way it always was.



Dave Fabry:

No question. I think you can reflect on the past to look and provide some guidance for the future. But as you say, we've certainly in the last few years, we've seen unprecedented times in terms of the impact of that change but nonetheless, staying true to the vision that you established when you really began Starkey in '67. And then also really you're also celebrating an anniversary of 61 years in the industry this month.

Bill Austin:

That's right, Dave. I started in February, 1961 and I actually came to Minnesota with no interest or intention of having anything at all to do with the hearing aid industry. I had decided that I would find the value in my life by being a missionary doctor like Albert Schweitzer in Africa, having a clinic and helping people and being pleased every night when I went to bed because I did the best I could for every one of those patients. And I thought that was important work and that the hearing industry didn't seem to me at that moment in time to be important work. I just didn't think it was as critical as medicine.

And I changed my mind after having some experience. I took a job making earpieces for hearing aids. I became pretty good at that pretty quick and I read about the work and what we were doing. And I got a little experience and one day an old man came in and I was called upstairs because he couldn't solve his feedback problem. He had a profound loss and I got him squared away and when I saw in his face what it meant for him to hear, it just struck me and it struck me so much that it was the end of the day and I was virtually speechless. I just went down, changed out of my smock and what I was wearing into my street clothes and caught a city bus home. And in the cantilever of the bus there was a little quote, "The true path to humility is not to stoop till you're lower than yourself but rather to stand at your true height against some greater nature that will show the real smallness of your greatest greatness."

And I always remember that quote, that quote, just it was timely. It was there at the right moment. It hit me as being important. I got home, went upstairs and sat on the little single bed I got to sleep on and started talking out loud to myself. And the first thing I said is, "Bill, the reason you want to be a doctor is so you can help people. If you do this work, you'll be able to help people and you won't will kill anyone. As a doctor, you're sure to kill many." And I was kidding myself because I was inundated with thought that I couldn't verbalize that quickly. It was like I saw the real opportunity that we would have. And so I said, "How many people can you see a day as a doctor, Bill? 20, 25? Night will fall, you'll go to bed, you'll get up the next day, you'll see 20, 25. You'll live your life."

And then it was like I was in a trance. I had this vision in full color and I was at the bottom of a grave and people were standing around the grave and one man looking down said, "He was a nice old doc and he impacted our community." And I was like, I was out of there like that. I knew I could do more with my life but I had to change. I'd always thought it was all about me, all about my hands, all about my skills, what I could do. And I realized all of a sudden that no one can



impact the world alone. No one could have that big of an impact but with leverage, you could. The leverage being the hearts and the minds and the hands of many who agree with the philosophy and are willing to work with you as a team. And I wanted that leverage.

At the moment, I just got the first glimpse of it. I wanted to be part of that. I didn't have to own it. I didn't have to run it. I didn't have to make a lot of money from it but I wanted to be part of the leverage that would impact people around the world and would contribute significantly to life because I believe the more lives you contribute to, the more expanded your life is. And I believe we live on into the future through those contributions that we make today. And that's my idea of immortality.

Dave Fabry:

Wow.

Bill Austin:

I was ready to go. I couldn't go fast enough. And so I started thinking that I could dispense hearing aids efficiently and manufacture them. I started design. I had already been thinking about building them in the ear and I had the concept in mind that I could make an in-the-ear product that people would really want and would accept better than an appliance outside the ear. And so I'd started on that path and I started with retail shops and I found I couldn't control the quality of the care of the way the people would talk to the patients and deliver the hearing aids. And I was fighting with that, trying to have a delivery system for hearing aids, where we could control the quality.

And then one day I decided I wasn't going to get there on this path. And I decided the true way to get the leverage was on the manufacturing side. And that rather we would try to offer services that would help uplift the industry. And I couldn't get good service on repairs then. Really the policies were poor. The workmanship it wasn't good. And it was erratic. You never knew what you were going to have to pay when you sent an aid in for service, it could be all over the place because it was always a parts and labor thing and no one knew what went in and there was a lot of cheating going on.

I said, "I'm going to make it simple. There's going to be one price. It's unconditional, we'll take care of anything. If it's an eyeglass hearing aid, the person tries to shape it to the head." And I told him too, "If you break it, we'll replace it at no charge. The patient is your foremost responsibility, take care of them right and we'll be behind you." We had that repair service. The people just loved us. We grew within a couple of years, it was the world's largest repair service. We were doing business with lots of the dealers in this country that the manufacturers didn't realize because they were only selling new hearing aids. But I knew I was going to do more. I said, "Our reputation is our most valuable asset. We're going to guard that by doing our very best every time because we're going to do more with these people." I knew we were going to provide in the ear hearing aids to them.



Dave Fabry: And that was so 1967 you founded Starkey. And then within that, you already were thinking about improving the processes, not only for ear molds but then thinking about in the ear hearing aids at that point in time.

Bill Austin: Oh absolutely. And we started making then hearing aids for a select few customers and just to make sure and I wasn't satisfied that our range of fitting was adequate. I'm thinking, well we're going to have an order come in and we won't have enough power. We won't be able to address it right. The other end of the scale is we could never get adequate venting to avoid the occlusion. And so we solved those problems. We got the, it was called then an old Westinghouse push pull amp and we were able to build very strong aids stably. And I developed the BAV vent, that was the first humongous venting contoured in, cast in. I made it for a man named Austin Reynolds from Rochester, Minnesota. And he came up and I couldn't get rid of the occlusion. I couldn't and I remade it. And I finally designed this vent and had it cast in. and it was perfect for him.

Then I felt like I was ready. I could cover the milder loss. I could cover the more common losses. And in January of 1973, I sent a simple letter out to all of our customers. And it said, "We do something more than just service hearing aids and make ear molds. We also make an in-the-ear hearing aid worthy of your consideration." And that was, from then on, it was all we could do to keep up with the growth of the company because our policies were 90-day trial.

Dave Fabry: No one else in the industry was doing that at that time. No one.

Bill Austin: No one did that. They thought it was wrong, heresy. I was going to ruin the industry by offering those policies. And I said, "To the contrary, we're going to make the industry better because it's going to make the reputation of hearing aids better by assuring that people get better hearing when they buy it, instead of just being out the money." We did that. We not only made them available on trial, but I said, "We'll treat the hearing loss, not the pocketbook." If your patient can't afford a hearing aid, just write Starkey Fund on the order and we'll make the same hearing aid.

Dave Fabry: Unheard of in the industry as well.

Bill Austin: That was unheard of. No one ever thought of anything like that or did anything like that. And that was our policy from the beginning, from day one, it was because I thought everyone deserved a chance. Everyone deserved equal respect. And maybe if we lift someone up, they'll be able to be a better part of society and our community and we should do that when we can. And I thought we would make enough money on the people who could pay. And I didn't think we'd be overwhelmed because our customers can't stay in business giving anything away here so they only want to do it when they really needed to. And



it's exactly the way it worked out. And so we were able to serve a broad spectrum of the marketplace.

Dave Fabry:

Well, and then you continued through the 70s to continue to perfect your craft with this custom craftsmanship and focusing on, as you mentioned, during those days it was probably 80 to 90% of the products dispensed, at least in the US were behind-the-ear devices, but you were focused on making small custom devices to help address not only that own-voice occlusion and the cosmetics to address the stigma but then really perfecting that notion of custom craftsmanship to the individual's ear and thinking about that led to tremendous growth as you say, leading up to the early 80s when there was another sort of pivotal moment in the industry and for Starkey.

Bill Austin:

Well, during this time, our issue was, Dave, not to just make something cosmetic, not to just make something different, but to help people better than they'd ever been helped before. It wasn't about replacing a behind-the-ear with an in-ear because it more cosmetic, it was actually about helping them hear better. And there's certain efficiencies to coupling a hearing aid to the ear. You have the advantage of pinna focus and we didn't have then what we have today with all of this digital processing and directional features that are somewhat helpful but the pinna focus helped quite a bit. Getting rid of the plumbing gave us, we didn't have those resonant peaks from the tubing and the response and we were able by designing a circuit that was carefully beta matched to have more dynamic range. And so we actually were able to replace those 80 to 90% behind-the-ears without any problem. And have people say, "Wow, I really like this new hearing aid."

That was the goal and that they worked. It was very quickly that percentage was changing from in-the-ear to from behind-the-ear. Not to mention Dave, that I go back to the idea that some people come in for a hearing loss and they're really not quite ready yet. They haven't accepted as well as they need to. They weren't sure they had that much hearing loss. Their hearing was just beginning its progression, it's down a little and they'd gotten used to hearing that way. And so all of a sudden they're hit with a behind the ear or eyeglass hearing aids at those times. And they would say, "Well, I better go home and think it over." And you wouldn't see them again. But when I offered them an in-the-ear hearing aid that moved with their body, when they did exercises, when they played tennis, when they did anything, it was part of them, that was acceptable. That became more acceptable as a point of getting started.

Another advantage, farmers who worked outside would sweat out the behind the ear hearing aids. No problem with the in the ears. They can wear them, work all day and they weren't failing from perspiration. There are different people like car mechanics rolling under cars and things are hitting their head and hearing aids are falling off. And today we have masks that are getting tangled up in them. There's all kinds of reasons why they're better for some



people. If I'm going to fit hearing aids well, I have to have all of that available to me. I can't be a good hearing aid fitter if I'm not a good fitter of in-the-ear products. They're a little more challenging to deal with but they're worth it for the patient. It's not that everyone should have one or needs one but there are some people that are really better off with them.

Dave Fabry: No question.

Bill Austin: And there are some people that really wouldn't be getting a hearing aid at all if they didn't exist. I think today, you can't say that one solution will take care of everyone. You have to have that full battery, that full armamentarium of choices to deal with a hearing loss the way you should deal with it. And that's always the fun part is not just selling a hearing aid but helping someone the way they want to be helped, they need to be helped with a product that's transparent to them, they don't notice it and they hear better. And so that's part of what we need to do that job. I have motorcycle riders and different people that really, they can't deal with behind-the ears but they can deal with in-the-ear. There's reasons for it.

Dave Fabry: Well and it was really only after about, you mentioned around '67, already thinking about custom and then perfecting that through the 70s. Then in the early 80s when you worked with then President Reagan, I think fitting him with custom devices when BTEs were still the dominant form factor, led to tremendous growth for Starkey. And I think one other thing that you did that I don't know, gets recognized enough is that in the early 80s, monaural fitting, fitting for one ear was still pretty common and you fitted both ears with custom devices and now that's commonplace but at that time it certainly wasn't.

Bill Austin: Well, it was a lot more common to fit one hearing aid. If you need to do something, you should do it the right way and that's the right way to take care of hearing aids. Reagan was a big boost in the industry but we were already doing very, very well. And so it almost gave us prosperity disease by having too many orders.

You should not have more than you could handle well and you see that today with the logistics of transportation and this and that, getting products to people. We were buried in mail and everyone thought that was wonderful. I didn't because it was a time where we really had to work so hard, seven days a week for months to try to keep up the best we could. And it was difficult for our workers to ask that much of them, the team, but we did, we asked it because it's what we needed to do and we got through it.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. Well, one of the things that you mentioned early on, that ability to work directly with patients and then also leverage that by providing products that you knew if properly fitted by the professional, would change people's lives and they continue to do that every day. The thing that I think is most impressive to me is



even after 61 years in this industry, when you're on campus, you're in the Center for Excellence and you're working directly with individuals even now. And I think as somebody who also enjoys not only the new technology but the watching people's faces and seeing how that technology impacts their lives is the best feeling in the world and I don't think it ever gets old, does it?

Bill Austin:

Not at all, Dave. I was born in Missouri and they say that's the Show Me State and I don't believe in talking about it. I believe in doing it. I think anybody can talk a good story and say nice thing things about what should be done but if you really care and you really mean it, you'll do it. And I learned so much from the patients, from experience. That's how we developed. Someone would come in with a unique need, like atresia and I designed a headband bone conduction aid back in the 70s. And then the doctor would come in and he couldn't hear with his stethoscope so we designed a power stethoscope and people with tinnitus and we made maskers and masker aids before anyone else. We were the first people to do that. And there were a lot of firsts and that's because of the patients. The patient driven, what do we do to help this a person?

Now we had other people in manufacturing that had industrialized the process, like frankly, some of our competitors. And they would say, "Well, there's not enough of those kind of people. It's like an orphan drug to do this." But I took a different attitude. And my attitude was it wasn't about money as much as it was that everyone was important. And for us to show that respect, we had to use our talent to try to help them. And it was a fun time of growth. Now in those days I could work on the design of the products. Today, they're so complex that I can just stand on the side and admire the work that's being done by Achin and the team.

Dave Fabry:

No question, no question. Fundamentally though, I know that first and foremost job one is ensuring that sound quality and speech intelligibility for every patient is ensuring that we're making the best possible devices for each and every person in terms of intelligibility and sound quality but sound quality is such a difficult term to identify and define. How would you define sound quality when you say we want to have the best sound quality possible?

Bill Austin:

Well, you've got to have a good dynamic range without distorting the signal. And back in the 60s, when I was fitting some behind-the-ear aids, I would order from the manufacturer a dozen at a time and grade them, send them ones back that didn't sound as well. Now remember, they're all built to the same spec. They're all supposed to be the same but those hearing aids sounded different. And I quickly found out that the ones that I thought sounded very sweet were the ones that the patients really liked. And so I sent back and they simply reshipped those to other people who tried to fit them and didn't know any better but I knew there was a difference. For all of these years, since we've been making hearing aids, I've been pursuing that sound. I identified it early, I knew it made a difference and I've been pursuing that and you cannot see it in the



typical B and K analysis or the measurements of hearing aids that are done by machine but I could hear it with my ears and particularly my left ear now.

Dave Fabry: Well, and there's an overused term but people will talk about a golden ear but I can honestly say after seeing and watching you listen and test every hearing aid that was fitted on a mission or that is fitted in the Center or that comes in for adjustment and you're right. It doesn't show up on an ANSI chart of some standardized battery of tests but the human ear can still, if it's trained like yours is, and how many hundreds of thousands of hearing aids you've listened to over the years, you can tell the difference and you know quality when you hear it.

Bill Austin: Absolutely. Dave, it's something I think that a lot of people can't relate to anything other than the measurements. It's what you've learned in college. Well, there's a lot you haven't learned. And a lot that we think is right today that we'll find out isn't quite that way tomorrow. And one of the things is everybody is very comfortable with going back to an exact number and they do that with those machines but there's more to sound than that and there's more to hearing than that. And to pair those two together is an art and I like it that way because if it was simple they wouldn't need me.

Dave Fabry: Everyone would do it. And it's not.

Bill Austin: Everyone could do it and I could do something else. I wouldn't have to do this job but I like this job.

Dave Fabry: Yeah, that comes through well.

Bill Austin: And it's always changing because it's people and people, they're all different. Their requirements are different. And even if you measure their hearing loss with what the measurement you think is accurate and you do a threshold test and a discrim test and you say, "This person is this." You could take another person with the exact same measurements that would want their hearing aid different, sounding different.

Dave Fabry: Yeah, sound is very personal. You can't just predict from the audiogram how a person's going to want it.

Bill Austin: Not only does it need to sound sweet and good but it needs to sound the way that person is best recognizing speech and hearing. It's an interesting job. And I think if you accept that as a challenge, it makes every day fun.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. Well, no question. And you famously have said, speaking about sound as personal and the impact of hearing, March 3rd is World Hearing Day. You coined a phrase that I've known for many years of, So the World May Hear. What would you want to share with our listeners on World Hearing Day, knowing that your life's passion has been devoted to helping people communicate better and



yet we know with 465 million people around the world with what the World Health Organization considers to be a disabling amount of hearing loss, only a small fraction wear hearing aids today. Talk a little bit about that part of your life's purpose.

Bill Austin: Well, we've been trying to do that with our outreach programs. We have programs in 70 countries. We've been impacted severely by the COVID, but we still have our people out there servicing hearing aids and delivering new hearing aids, but at a lesser scale because we're not able to travel and build it up. And we're training people to fit and we have a simple fitting system that's effective that can be taught. And it's practical for this kind of hearing level approach. I believe with our training facilities and with the intersection of some help from different governments or organizations that want to be part of it, that we will reach more of the world population. It was So the World May Hear was in the fanciful dreams, it's the double entendre is two things.

To hear is to understand. To understand, you need to know someone's intent. You hear that through their voice, the inflection, their eyes. And so I wanted the world to understand that we were seven billion brothers and sisters and we were better when we helped each other. And since I'm from Missouri, we had to do that by going out, reaching out and doing it. That's so the world may understand. So the World May Hear was well, giving everyone a chance at hearing, so they could at least understand better their family, their friends and be connected to life. I had a kind of a spiritual side to this mission and a physical side to it. And both of those have been, we've been working on and I knew all the time, when you say, "So the world," the world is big and that's highly unlikely in anyone's lifetime that you're going to accomplish that. But I remember the true paths of humility is not to stoop till you're lower than yourself but to stand at your true height to give some greater nature. And this is showing me the real smallness of my greatest greatness, this challenge.

Dave Fabry: Have you lost track of how many countries that you visited in your quest to help the world hear?

Bill Austin: Tani tells me we have programs in 70 countries or so that we've had.

Dave Fabry: Remarkable.

Bill Austin: And I think I visited all of those and some more. Well I've certainly visited more countries.

Dave Fabry: Good for you. You've had programs that you've established.

Bill Austin: Oh yeah, have programs.

Dave Fabry: Remarkable.



Bill Austin: Certainly must be well over a 100 countries because of course, we go to all of the developed countries too and we don't count those because they have their own hearing program.

Dave Fabry: They have their own. Well and speaking of developed countries and in the US for the last five years or so, we've been intently focused on accessibility and affordability and lo and behold, we're going to have an over-the-counter hearing aid channel created in the US. And what are your thoughts on that? Good news, we've got inexpensive hearing aids and how does that address the problem? And is it going to put professionals out of business?

Bill Austin: Well no, it won't put professionals out of business because hearing is not that easily dealt with. First of all, over-the-counter hearing aids were available when I started in the business, mail order business were available from Rhodes and some of them.

Dave Fabry: Lloyds, I remember was one.

Bill Austin: You'd see those little ads. And people could write in and they'd try to send them a hearing aid. And then in some cases, they'd try to send them an impression kit and have them try to take an impression of their own ear and send it back. And this went on but it never was a very effective solution.

At the same time in Japan, in Asia, the way hearing aids were sold were over the counter. There were cabinets and you'd look and there would be hearing aids in it with little price tags and you'd point the one you wanted to buy and they'd take it out and give it to you with some standard ear tips and off you would go hoping or you'd buy one for grandma or grandpa or whoever, which was the age that people are respected there. And that was the hearing aid business. But because of that, hearing aids had a very bad reputation. Most of those didn't work. They ended up in the dresser drawers because they weren't interfaced properly.

Today we have somebody once again, coming into the industry and we've had many of those major large corporations who've said, "Well, these boys are dumb. We're going to get into this business and show them how it should be." And they all lost millions of dollars and they've gone away. This is a highly competitive business, even though there are fewer competitors.

Here we are with an over-the-counter hearing aid again. Today, there may be some advantages. People with milder losses are accepting them. It may be somewhat easier to interface a RIC that's open to an ear with a mild loss and they may get a boost out of it. I never thought we could and then what about the cable links? The ears are all different size.

Dave Fabry: Sizing it.



Bill Austin: Is it really going to be fitting very nice or is it going to be loose and flopping around? And is it going to be adjusted very well for that person?

Dave Fabry: Yeah. And it's really that customizing and personalizing both the acoustics and the form factor. And really the individuals that are worried about being made obsolete, I think you can't commoditize caring and you can't commoditize that art and science. And I still think our technology in the hands of the professional will deliver the best results.

Bill Austin: Absolutely. And you're not going to get a decent custom fit, in-the-ear fit over the counter. There's no reason today for a large, obtrusive behind-the-ear hearing aid, none. Zero, zero, zero. People think, well, a big hearing aid will have more power. I can get just as much power out of my little tiny RIC as you can any hearing aid that's made in the world behind the ear. No problem. And the reason is, is the power is dictated by the output transducer. We're putting that transducer right into the mold. I can put the same transducer in the ear that they put in the power behind-the-ears and the circuits are the same. People that don't seem to understand that, they think that it's different but it's not different. The driver is the same, the same circuit, and the power is dictated by the output transducer. We can only go as far as it will go. And we are able to make a really nice looking RIC fitting on the most profound corner audiograms we have.

Dave Fabry: And great sounding. And so I do want to transition. I know we're already more than 40 minutes into this conversation but I want to also talk about your vision and you and Brandon in bringing Achin Bhowmik in as CTO around five years ago now, as you anticipated this transition, really raising awareness, we've seen in the last decade and really accelerating in the last few years, the link between hearing and overall health and wellness. And talk a little bit about your vision and how are we doing with that transition of thinking about hearing aids from single purpose into multipurpose, multifunction devices?

Bill Austin: Well, it started a long time ago when someone asked me to pause and think about the future, I think about 1980, I was asked to write an article for the Hearing Aid Magazine. And I said, "If you're asking about the future of hearing aids, there is none because in the future, we will be making devices that cross barriers to communication of more than just hearing loss — of language, of various distance noise and we will cross those barriers." And I said, "That's the future." Then in 1998, with the advent of science moving along a little further, in fact, people don't know, Starkey made the first digital hearing aids with Dan Grabeeks and some others that we worked together and with and I was thinking about what we could do with that but it was impractical. Size, to produce it and so we were out of that.

But now with the advent of it coming back in and becoming more practical, I knew that we could realize many of the things that I had talked about. And so



we had a meeting in Germany and I don't know if you were attendance, I think you were. But there we brought our people in from the heads of some of the other countries and our engineers. And I said, at that meeting, I said, "We own this territory. We will be the future of hearing aids will translate language. They will do all of these different things." And I said, "Work on that. We own the future. We got to be part of this future by doing it." And I would keep asking, "How are we doing?" Well and again, it's not ready yet. Well, it's not ready yet. And this goes on and on into 2015 or something.

And I'm saying, " Not yet." And I'm saying, "We just don't have the right leader for this team." We went out on that search and we found Achin who didn't want to work for Starkey and had no interest. And then he discovered that he did have an interest because he wanted to be part of our values. It wasn't a job. He didn't make more money, he made less and he didn't care. He was part of something he wanted to be part of. And so with the advent of him coming on board, and he brought on engineers in Israel and other play places that had worked for him at Intel, we developed our ability to move quickly forward. And that's changed the whole landscape for Starkey and it will prepare us for the future, the way we should be prepared.

And incidentally in defense of those past, I probably was a little bit too ahead of my time asking for that. It just wasn't ready. But in defense of myself, I told them that, that's the way I am. If I tell you something's ready right now, it probably means it'll be ready in three years. It takes longer to execute than it does to think about it and to dream about it.

Dave Fabry: Well, so 61 years in the industry and with your vision for where we are today, what predictions do you have looking at your crystal ball for the future now? Obviously central is that sound quality and speech intelligibility, what other things do you see on the horizon for hearing aids?

Bill Austin: I see that hearing aids will become an indispensable, personal assistant that rides with you and communicates to your brain, discretely and quietly information that will help you perform to task better, be healthier, and communicate across barriers, including hearing loss. But it's including hearing loss. It's not only because of hearing loss. I envision in the future, we will be fitting these devices to people with normal hearing as well as impaired hearing. And they will all have good reason, good value and good purpose to those individuals.

The human ear is different. It's so different that I don't see an easy way around having professional involvement so you can adapt the device to that individual. We still need the professionals. And we are going to support that and try to provide the education that's necessary to up train them on using the new features as they become available.



Dave Fabry: Excellent. Well, as we wrap up, we always like to ask our guests to share some of their key learnings and you've already dropped some great pearls of wisdom here, but life lessons for those with hearing loss or the professionals who work with those individuals, what comes to mind when you think of trying to summarize in a few words, a career that already spans 61 years and I know you're not done yet.

Bill Austin: Well, I would say if you're a professional, rather than rely on your degrees on the wall to prove how good you are, people don't care how smart you are, they want to be helped and they'll decide whether they can trust you by how much you care. If they can read in your voice and your actions that you really care about them as an individual, they'll release the hearing problem to you and then you can work with them and try to solve it the best way possible. It's about caring. You've got to care enough to do your best every time.

If it's late in the day, you stay longer. You don't just accept what you want to do. Fixed office hours, fixed programs, fixed whatever you want, it's you're there for one reason, to serve the patient. It's all about the patient. And if you make it all about the patient, you'll find your greatest reward. You'll not only be successful financially but you'll successful spiritually because you'll feel that you've contributed to life. And I am a testament to that. I started out with nothing and I never liked going to any bank meetings or talking about finance. All I wanted to talk about was how are we going to help someone better? And because of that, Starkey has been successful. It proves that you don't have to have a bunch of Wall Street wizards crunching numbers to build a company. You can have someone who just wants to serve well and that's what people will reward. People reward good, humble servants.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. You are the best definition that I can think of as a servant leader. And I can think of no one who leads by example that way and is never afraid to lead wherever you are, whether you're in front of a group of 4,000 people or more, whether you're in the middle of that group, or whether you're even watching from behind as a sheep herder, if you will. You are my definition of a servant leader and I'm grateful for you sharing with us the time today and also your leadership and continued leadership as the founder of Starkey.

Bill Austin: Well Dave, it's just because I know I don't amount to much but we, we are really significant. We've got to work together and make that future happen the way we can all be part of it and we can all find more significance in our lives. That's what Starkey is. It's a place to work together to contribute to humanity.

Dave Fabry: Well, thank you for your leadership, your wisdom, your vision and happy birthday again, 80 years young and look forward to continuing to work with you far into the future.



Bill Austin: Well, as long as I can do it, I'm going keep working. I have no retirement interest.

Dave Fabry: What would you do? What would you do? You'd be doing what you're doing now, I think.

Bill Austin: I couldn't stand it. I've got to be part of contributing to life or my life is over. That's what gives me life.

Dave Fabry: Well said. And thank you for being with us today. And to our listeners, thanks for listening to this episode of Starkey Sound Bites. If you enjoyed this kind conversation with Mr. Austin, please rate and review Starkey Sound Bites on your preferred podcast platform. You can also hit subscribe to be sure you don't miss a single episode. We'll see you next time and thanks for listening to us.