



SoundBites Podcast Transcript

Episode: 2024 and Beyond: The Future of Hearing Care

Dave Fabry: Welcome to Starkey SoundBites. I'm your host, Dave Fabry, Starkey's chief hearing health officer. As we close out 2023 and begin to look into the future of 2024, I can think of no one better than Brandon Sawalich, our president and CEO, to reflect on where Starkey's been in this year and really looking at your role also with Hearing Industries Association, in the leadership position, reflecting a little bit on some of the things that you've done on our behalf in Washington, D.C. Where are we going? Where have we been? So, Brandon, thanks for being back on the podcast.

Brandon Sawalich: Well, thank you Dave, and it's always fun because I know that you and I could talk hours on this topic. And it's not just myself, it's I mean you and others here at Starkey and the great people in the industry that have been around long enough that understand the industry. And if you remember, it wasn't long ago that the industry was changing so fast, right? Well, I think those were really, if you think about it, good headlines for good articles, good thought-provoking articles, but not reality. The industry hasn't changed because it still all goes through the hearing professional, and you talk about the OTC and different channels, and so I think if we really look back on this year it's about the technology, what's been available and the advancements there. And then as you look into 2024, it's still about the patient. Yes, there's going to be advancements in technology and probably what others are doing. I know what we're doing. But it's really going to be about it patient-driven care and the industry will continue to evolve, but that's going to make us better, whatever that means.

Dave Fabry: Yeah, I mean, I think that important distinction between patient-focused and patient-driven, expand on that a little bit because the language has changed. We used to talk about patient-focused. What's the difference between patient-focused and patient-driven?

Brandon Sawalich: You taught me a lot about this over the last 10 years or so with the Mayo Clinic's mission, right?

Dave Fabry: The needs of the patient come first, they're the only interests that matter.

Brandon Sawalich: Patient-centric, right, everything matters with the patient. For us, our mission statement, serve our customers better than anyone else, Bill started that when he started really the company in '67, it was about the patient then it became about the customer or the professional as the industry evolved, so that serves both purposes. And I think as you see the needs of the digital patient more and more, people with their iPads and iPhones and everything, it's about convenience and control. And then we still have the, I say traditional patient, I think, because what is used and people can relate with, that are going to be in the office. My grandmother who, God bless her, 93 years old, isn't going to be



on her iPad all the time for tele-hear. She's going to want to go into the office. She's used to going the office. So we're in a hybrid. We're coming into an era of, I think, of three, four year hybrid era where you're going to see a little bit of that digital patient becoming more and more relevant from terms of how they want to be taken care of and then the traditional patient.

Dave Fabry: Yeah, I think you raise a good point. I mean, when we were going into 2020 at that time we thought the worst thing that we could anticipate was OTC hearing aids, COVID changed all of that, and a couple of things that I saw as somebody that still sees patients was patients that I didn't think were going to be capable of using telehealth suddenly were able to do so. Grandparents, great-grandparents all had to.

Brandon Sawalich: Exactly.

Dave Fabry: And they still like the face-to-face and I do want to talk a little bit about that in a little bit, but necessity was the mother of invention in that case and we had to very quickly mobilize to come up with tele-hear options. We had an asynchronous, not real-time approach, we had in a matter of weeks when the full brunt of the COVID pandemic was hitting us, we were able to mobilize a synchronous real time, which was mind-blowing in terms of the capacity. We had to be agile.

Brandon Sawalich: If you remember, I think our expo was the end of January 2020. I remember walking off the stage thinking, "Okay, this is it." Our education and everything was around the patient in the office and excellence and it was what, three weeks later-

Dave Fabry: Everything shut down.

Brandon Sawalich: ... went upside down and your priorities change and your priorities come into focus real quick. And it's amazing what you can do when in meetings before are told it can't be done, because it's survival, and you've got to adapt, and everybody had to adapt quickly. And people that might not have been in the, I'll say the tele-hear and the telehealth world, learned how to do it. They needed to because of the information on TVs, the isolation and such, and now that really gave us a glimpse of what was needed. We learned from it, from the patient, but if I look over the next several years, the app is a product.

Dave Fabry: Yeah, you've said that for some time and you're right.

Brandon Sawalich: I made that statement I think in 2018. Where we have to, for intuitive... because I have a Tesla and my other cars that have the apps, they're very intuitive... you have to be just simple and our apps need to be simple because of the population. And also so what's next for how do they use that for remote fittings, telehealth, go down the list. And so we're investing in what's next within software, within the apps, and then hearing aids for that digital patient, they



want the, as I say, the control and the convenience. Control of the app, convenience of the product, make it as simple as possible but still high quality performance.

Dave Fabry: Indeed, and I think you're absolutely right. The app increasingly is the interface for the patient for controlling their devices, interfacing with their professional when necessary to provide benefits. And then when you start looking at features like translation and the self-check and some of the other Starkey only features in this, fall detection, we've really led in that area.

Brandon Sawalich: Yeah, we've expanded the definition of what a hearing aid can do. I mean, I look at it as that in our industry we've kind of boxed ourselves in in basic entry, how we label things and then channels and bands. That was the thing 20 years ago and maybe 10 years ago where how many channels and bands is that? Well, we don't talk about that anymore.

Dave Fabry: No.

Brandon Sawalich: What we're doing with AI, we started with Livio, and then now where we're going, it's really about... I see it as two areas. It's premium, premier technology, and then premier plus, premium plus. And that's really where Genesis AI, there isn't anything like it. I talk to people and they say, "Well, so-and-so has this premier level product, this is where Genesis is." It's not even the same level because we're focused on a race to the top when many are focused on a race to the bottom for various reasons. And what I mean by that is we don't sacrifice quality for cost or performance. We want to focus on what's best for the patient and providing them really the best patient care, the best sound experience. And I get asked a lot of questions about what we're doing compared to our competition. And our competition's great, and you want them to be good because that makes you better. You want to be pushed. I mean little league, all through life, whatever it might be, you have to be pushed to compete and better yourself and the same goes with business.

And what we're doing, I'm not looking to try and be like anybody else. And the people of Starkey's, we want to think and dream and hope, however you want to define it on what is possible and then also talk about what's not possible and make it the possibility. And that's what Genesis AI is. I mean, Genesis AI was number one, the sound experience, and then the stepping stone, then you look ahead about the industry and where the technology can go, it truly is limitless. I mean, you know the things we're talking about and other partners we're working with, and it's an exciting time. You and I talked about one of the last things I said at the Expo in 2020 was we're coming into the greatest decade in our industry, and I believe that. I believe that now.

But I'm really excited about it because of what technology is allowing us to do. And the relationships we built and putting hearing healthcare on the radar where it was a hearing aid before and the commodity and its amplifier, and



Starkey's work and our work in Washington D.C and in other state governments and agencies and really educating on hearing healthcare that hearing is essential, and technology. It's not just a commodity, it's not just some type of pill you pay a high price for and it's going to make you better. It's the human touch. And you mentioned that earlier, you have the human touch.

Dave Fabry: Right, and that patient-driven technology is as well the area where really we have the opportunity to shine with this product. And so, one of the things that we wanted to do at the end of the year was sort of get our customer's mindset and so we asked them to send some questions to talk with you today.

Brandon Sawalich: And disclosure, I haven't read these questions.

Dave Fabry: I know you haven't.

Brandon Sawalich: So you're going to hit me with them.

Dave Fabry: So with liberty I'm going to go ahead and begin with a couple of the questions that we've got here.

Brandon Sawalich: Go for it.

Dave Fabry: So we've touched on this a little bit already, OTC, but Spencer asked the question why do you think that there wasn't the massive hit to traditional or prescriptive hearing aid distribution when OTCs hit the market in full force this year?

Brandon Sawalich: I've been in the industry close to 30 years, and I think that I'm, I would say, a voice of authority on this, and I think it was over-hyped and marketed where people know when they're ready for hearing aids. There's a lot of advertising out there that misrepresents, and that was our biggest concern with OTC. There's been what, PSAPs, personal sound amplifiers for what?

Dave Fabry: The mid-teens, yeah.

Brandon Sawalich: And they've been out there. This wasn't anything but a government push and bill from Senator Warren, as we know, and we all know the story, and to address healthcare costs. Well, we knew the industry. It was creating more confusion. A lot of good articles and concerns. There was a lot of hype about it that it just wasn't going to deliver because it's a product and a journey that people have to be ready for. And I think there's a lot of debate right now on, I see it online, so-and-so are reporting numbers, we really think OTC is more than it is, and our people are doing it and they're not. I think they're frustrated. Matter of fact I know they are because we all know whether it's our customers throughout the U.S., people might buy the \$99 hearing aid or they might buy the \$200. They're coming into retail offices as hearing professionals and they're



mad. And I could say they're mad and dissatisfied, and that's not what's being reported, because they're going to hearing professional offices thinking, "You did this. This is a hearing aid. You're supposed to be able to fix this."

And they don't understand and are somewhat confused of why they can't be helped, but it's a product made somewhere outside the United States that can't be fixed by a hearing healthcare professional. And that's why hearing healthcare professionals, whether it's OTC, even some type of direct to consumer channel down the road, is still going to have a role. The jobs just change. Just like my role changes, your role changes, we all change and adapt and we have to. I mean, if we stay the same complacency, we will be extinct. So I think OTC, it doesn't surprise me that the volume is what it is. I mean, we truly don't know, and it's just like we did with PSAP. But I don't think it's helped that access and what people were saying it would. I think there was a lot of other agendas. Well, I know there was a lot of agendas behind it because I could say that, but for us, I took it as an opportunity and a platform to educate and raise awareness of all the options that are out there and what's best in several channels.

Dave Fabry: Yeah, I mean, I think no one argues accessibility and affordability are important as it relates to hearing care. We want to support that, but at the same time you've been very consistent on the prescriptive model, our technology in the professional's hands delivering optimal results. And you've doubled down on that. And it seems right now I work with a lot of patients who are technically capable of pushing the buttons and adjusting their devices, engineers, et cetera, tech field workers, and they still say they're more comfortable having me make the adjustments even though they're capable of doing it.

Brandon Sawalich: I think over the over-the-counter hearing aids are great, because to me it's what's wrong with somebody saying, "I need help"? And you know what, if an over-the-counter hearing aid helps somebody, great. I don't think it does the masses, but I think it eventually, like in many cases, that person's going to find their way to a professional for help. So it's great. I've been in favor of it, but done the right way. And Starkey and HIA and the work we've done there, I mean, we helped frame that up and educate where it was done in a safe way that I think will continue to evolve. But we did it right.

Dave Fabry: Do you see a role or a need for OTC as providing a first step for some patients and then really serving as a hybrid model? Or do you see it as distinctly apart and different from the prescriptive model?

Brandon Sawalich: The biggest confusion, I'll say one of the main, I shouldn't say biggest, one of the main confusions on OTC hearing aids is it's a hearing aid and not a channel. It's not a channel. And what I would say by channel is how does somebody go and get hearing healthcare and hearing help for their hearing loss? Well, there's private practice, you have your clinics, and there's various ways. And an over-the-counter hearing aid, yes, some of the restrictions are less, but it's a hearing aid. And it was frustrating, but somewhat... I dare to use the word... it was



puzzling because they were saying, "Well, you're just worried about it because it's going to hurt your business." And I look at it and I'm like, "We make the products you're trying to deregulate, and open more where we could sell more, we're doing it because we know what's best for the patient. That's why I'm here talking to you, not because I'm afraid of competition." So over-the-counter hearing aid is a hearing aid. It is not a channel.

Dave Fabry: Right. Well stated. It was funny, Spencer came in with this comment and he did have one more thing that he wanted to add.

Brandon Sawalich: Spencer's getting some air time.

Dave Fabry: He said one more thing for Brandon, I was never able to formally apologize. Years ago I was in the first group in the Starkey Entrepreneurial program. When we did that program, we were in the conference room by your office and I drank a bunch of soft drinks from the fridge and I was told that that was your private stash. So, sorry about that.

Brandon Sawalich: Spencer, it's okay. I don't have a real private stash. Anything at Starkey you have access to, so not a problem.

Dave Fabry: I do want to expand on, I think that comment about the hearing aid, OTC is a hearing aid not a channel, but we're also seeing threats from increased number of channels. And you've been very consistent about we believe in the prescriptive approach, but also we see these other distribution channels. Use your crystal ball and say what's Starkey's and your leadership and vision really in terms of emerging channels, established channels, what do we see in 2024?

Brandon Sawalich: I don't see threats per se. I see opportunities. And because why I say opportunities is at the end of the day, the patient decides. It's not going to be Starkey. The patient's going to decide how they want to, again going back to control and convenience, the traditional patient, how they want hearing healthcare. And the biggest evolution, and change is good, you have to change, and I think private practice has changed. Clinics have changed, hospitals, and they've adapted yes to technology, but a shorter attention span. We all have shorter attention spans and memories because of social media and how we're marketed to. And marketing is not a bad word in this industry because you're educating. People have to know. So over the coming years, I think there's areas that, existing channels that Starkey has not traditionally been involved in. They're growing. I think our great loyal customers, we continue to invest in programs and ways for, yes, patient counseling, patient tools, different types of programs that help them do a better job within their office and provide more and more hearing help in their community.

I think there's emerging channels that will be coming and we'll be watching, because for Starkey, Genesis AI, I firmly believe, it's the flagship product of the industry. It is the best sounding hearing aid in the industry and patients deserve



that opportunity to be able to experience it. That's why I call it a sound experience. And as channels grow we have to continue to invest. I mean, I know what it costs, years and hundreds of millions of dollars of investing into Genesis AI to get it where we need. I know what we need to do next. And as a company, just like businesses, you've got to continue to grow. Lead, adapt or die. I've been talking to our customers about that for 13 years now in the Blockbuster example.

My biggest fear, and I get asked this all the time, I shouldn't say fear, it's self-aware, for Starkey, I get asked what keeps me up at night? Well, it's ourselves, it's complacency. So I have to pay attention. We all have to pay attention to the current channels that we haven't been involved in that we need to look at. I mean, for the technology we have, because our technology deserves to be out there for others. And we have to continue to push those boundaries and we to sit back and watch and see how other channels emerge because it has to be through and with a hearing healthcare professional. That's the best solution. I don't care what channel it is right now, that's the best option because that's where you're going to get that personal human touch and that care and service.

And we're looking into the next year, how do we get more? Yes, of course our product's out, because the more we provide and we sell, I mean, this is business, the more we invest into our company, not stockholders, but we invest into our company and our customers. And it would be irresponsible of me not to be looking at current channels and then exploring new and emerging channels, but maintaining our great service and the exclusivity of our programs and services that we provide to our valued customers.

Dave Fabry:

That's well said. Turning and pivoting a little bit to the technology, in 2018, you mentioned Achin Bhowmik, and when we launched Livio AI, it was the industry's first product that had embedded sensors in the device capable of monitoring physical activity, social engagement. That was prescient because now you look five years later, the ACHIEVE study results, the initial findings from the multi-year ACHIEVE study came out that really made that association between untreated hearing loss and cognitive decline in particular for those with cardiovascular risk factors. So that ability to have a patient only wear their hearing aids, track physical activity, encourage them to be more physically active to prevent that progression of cardiovascular risk factors and the social engagement, loneliness, cognition, that arguably, I think, we were five years ahead of that trend that is now coming out. Similarly I think right now AI has become so ubiquitous as to be a buzzword that is meaningless, but we're leading in that space as well with Genesis.

Brandon Sawalich:

For the last three years or so. I mean, that's the thing with AI is, I'm reading articles in our industry and hearing and talking to people and it's like, "Oh yeah, this is going to have AI and the future of AI," and we've been talking about it for three years and we've been leading in it. And that's okay. That's not a bragging point. To be first you got to be running up that hill and sometimes it's lonely.



We knew with Livio AI and the team we were putting together and what we did, I remember the look on people's faces, they were fearful of AI. That's the one thing we learned. We had so many great features it was almost like a Swiss army knife where you couldn't keep up with everything the hearing aid was doing. So now that was our learning period and we knew it.

We're five years ahead and we've dialed it into, all right, here's what the patient needs for features. We talk about the fall detection and activity and that engagement, exercising the brain, mental health and wellbeing, and then continuing because of what we did with Livio AI, dialing in our algorithm and our secret sauce to make Genesis the best sounding sound experience on the market. We're ahead. I mean, what people are talking about now within our industry and what could be, we started that five years ago. And I'm not, again, being arrogant or naive that new things can happen, but we've learned a lot and I love where we're going.

Dave Fabry: And with the industry's first circuit that has an onboard DNN accelerator, and we're employing that already in Edge mode and in other ways in the future to really personalize to the unique environment and the combination of the hearing loss and the environment that patients encounter.

Brandon Sawalich: You mentioned DNN, because we did our European launch event, and we were talking about DNN and what it does and we had the interviews we did. Well, there's been DNN in the industry, it's been talked about. That's right, it has. But there was also, to use a simplistic, there was a PS3 and now there's PS5. Ours is the most advanced up-to-date DNN AI that you can get. There's not a processor inside a hearing aid that is as good as what's in Genesis AI because it's all new everything. And we mean that. And you could be running on an older version of Windows or you can be up-to-date on the most current Windows software. And we are the most current in the industry.

Dave Fabry: Yeah, no question. And thanks to Eduardo for that question on looking forward on industry trends. So when you look at embedded sensors for the purpose of cardiovascular and cognition, then AI and DNN, quite a few questions came in. Alan articulated what others mentioned too, what's Starkey's future with Bluetooth low energy audio and specifically Auracast? The big deal about Auracast?

Brandon Sawalich: Well, I think it comes down to intuitive, being intuitive and easy and what's best for the patient and the strength and quality of the connection. For us, you know that you and I can get into this for a bit, but I like where we're at. I like where we're going and more to come very soon. You were in Germany with the Auracast demos and such, and there's a lot of great things because if you look at a hearing aid, it's a communication device. I mean, we're in the communication business. Now it's connectivity for all, right? It's that connection where the phone, and I mean that's where we're going, and hearing is always job one. So we talk about when we are designing a new... in our first, as we say, our gate



one vision for a new program, a new product... question number one is how do we improve the sound experience? Period.

And then question number two is what do we need to improve the features for real patient benefits for today and what's next, kind of looking up and out? So connectivity is always the one. You want the hearing aid where you take it out and it instantly pops up whether it's Android or whatever, iPhone, just hit the button and it instantly connects. But the other thing is with newer technology and radios and Bluetooth, you're going to have to have the newer phones, newer devices, and that's going to take some time, especially in our industry. There's going to be a lag, again I'll reference my grandmother and others, they still have an iPhone 14, maybe there's some iPhone 8's out there, I don't know. But they're not going out and buying the next version like you and I do on the next day, we're early adopters.

Dave Fabry: So it will depend on-

Brandon Sawalich: Well, what is yours? I mean, what's your opinion?

Dave Fabry: I can give you a couple examples for me. First of all, well, I agree completely. I'm tethered to my phone all of the time, and it's the connectivity and really the handshaking between different technology. I'm an Apple person like you are, and I have the latest Mac, so with our devices, the Genesis devices with Bluetooth low energy already-

Brandon Sawalich: Nice blue by the way. I like that.

Dave Fabry: I know a guy. So in this case, when I'm using my latest Mac it will enable streaming directly from the Mac computer to my devices. That's forecasting a little bit of where Auracast, that next generation, is going to go, where you can walk into a movie theater, you can walk into a classroom, a place of worship, and instantly be hit with a pairing request. And now you can talk about one to many connections, and there's a lot of possibilities for the future.

Brandon Sawalich: Amazon Fire, and the companies that we're working with, that we're exclusively-

Dave Fabry: All of the companies that are developing that technology and pushing it out, for all we know Bluetooth low energy is the future, but we also know that that agnostic behavior to Android or iPhones makes the pairing experience a little different than when you're doing Bluetooth classic, but you can't get 51 hours of battery life out of these RICs using Bluetooth classic. We know it's the future. Auracast will provide that seamless interplay throughout the day, whether you're going from your phone to your computer to your TV. And really, I think, again it's blasphemy for a hearing aid company to start talking about we may not need some of the accessories we have now that we can monetize, but it's about the patient focus, the patient experience. That if they can get a television



set, we're going to be dependent on the technology coming out, but with compatibility with these Auracast emerging devices, that next generation, it's going to make their experience better and patient-driven technology enables that.

Brandon Sawalich: Starkey is a hearing technology company and we manufacture and we do a lot of different things, but we're first and foremost now a technology company and what we're doing and where we're going, it's going to be all about connectivity and a communication device. Hearing's going to be using it as a hearing aid and better hearing for those with hearing loss, that's going to be one dimension of multiple dimensions. This is going to be a personal assistant.

Dave Fabry: Yeah, it's going to personal assistant.

Brandon Sawalich: It's going to be your personal assistant that's going to help you get through your day, that's going to give you that little extra oomph, that edge that you need, and it's going to be your superpower. It's going to be your superpower whether you're still in the prime of your career or active aging and doing what you want later in life. It's going to be your superpower and your personal assistant that's going to be there and know you better than you know yourself.

Dave Fabry: And that's the excitement for the patient, the end user, from the technology. Michael asks the question, what opportunities will arise for hearing care professionals in 2024? What do you see on the near horizon?

Brandon Sawalich: I think that in 2024 I see the one opportunity, and this is always for us it's what we've been able to do, we're the best at, and I think some patients want this and it's kind of a lost art as what we could do with our CICs and IICs, kind of telegraph some things a little bit, because I think the role of the professional, continue to invest in yourself. Nothing huge is going to change next year except if you allow yourself to become complacent and waiting for something. We need to take the initiative. And we offer that, just like I have to take initiative, my job and what you do, is be the best at what you do with the technology that's in front of you. You don't have to know everything and be overwhelmed by it.

You have to know the app. You have to know, yes, of course the patient and what the software can do where they're trusting you with their hearing. There isn't a more sacred trust than that. And what are professionals doing to continue to invest in the, I'll say the real world of the patient, not what we might read in articles and what-ifs, I think the custom products, small, to some size matters. I mean, they want the CIC and they want that IIC. And for some reason in our industry, we've become, it's that lost art, but fearful of impressions, where-

Dave Fabry: An entire generation has forgotten how to make impressions, and even existing practitioners have gotten complacent to your argument.



Brandon Sawalich: Correct. You've got other industries, dental, they have to do it every day. And it's an artwork, it can come back, and it also, depending who, there's a niche for the patients that want it and want to pay for it, for that higher, I'll say premium, of personalized fit down in the ear, and we know the benefits of the acoustics and everything of custom and CICs and IICs. Invest in yourself and offer new products that will benefit your patients.

Dave Fabry: That really touches on the next question, which comes from Scott. And really you talk about how to differentiate yourself. Many of our customers are small business owners, independent practitioners in a private practice environment. What does the future of private practice look like? Those that are specializing in diagnostics and dispensing, everyone fears that we'll see what's happened in optometry or even in dentistry now where there's vertical integration and there's no role for private practice anymore-

Brandon Sawalich: It doesn't change.

Dave Fabry: You touched on some things.

Brandon Sawalich: There's a role, and you can get update on equipment. We could talk about ear scanning and all this, the endless future that always comes of things of differentiating yourself that we've discussed for, what, decades. It comes down to service. It comes down to how that person feels when they walk in your office. You want to differentiate yourself in private practice, a clinic, a big box-

Dave Fabry: It's the value of that service.

Brandon Sawalich: ... it doesn't matter. Yes, it's the value of the service that's underestimated. Where a person that walks in they don't feel like an employee number, they feel like you are there to help them, and they're trusting you with their hearing health. I don't get mad. I don't like to get mad a lot and I don't have a temper but the one thing that irritates me is when you go into, whether it's an electronic store, I won't name any, but the things that just irritate me instantly is when you're the customer and you're treated like you're the problem. So you want to differentiate yourself, focus on the little things from when the person gets out of their car at your practice, your clinic, what's their experience?

What's your front office look like? What's your sidewalk look like? Is it easy access? Are you thinking about them or are you thinking about you? So you want to differentiate yourself, and it's not... Yes, you have to have the equipment and the talent but it's also having the right experience that that patient needs because they feel like they're at home, just like the Mayo Clinic as we talked about.

Dave Fabry: And the issue is people say, "Well, I have great success with receiver-in-the-canal devices. I love them. I love custom," for people that take the time and have established a practice with IICs and CICs, but even if you're fitting



predominantly RICs, notice I have customized solutions here. We used to talk about these as AP being absolute power. Now we talk about it as all-purpose because it fits more comfortably. It's a skillset that you can differentiate.

Brandon Sawalich: The service part, that's where you differentiate, where get out of the easy button mode, get out of the easy... and I've seen that-

Dave Fabry: That's the thing that cannot be commoditized, caring.

Brandon Sawalich: And you have to care. The number one thing in this industry is you have to care. And I've seen that more and more as we move ahead, where people, professionals, they want that easy button. And time's a commodity, I get that, but the patient isn't, and the products aren't.

Dave Fabry: Every patient deserves your entire attention and your focus. You don't know your patient until you know your patient and that takes time. But that's the differentiator.

Brandon Sawalich: So is there a big change in 2024? No, it is a slow evolution year by year what comes out because it still comes back to that human touch.

Dave Fabry: I knew that time would fly with this. We're already-

Brandon Sawalich: You and I could sit here for hours.

Dave Fabry: So let's do a little bit of lightning round kind of work on this case. So I know that you're, as you said, you're a user of the My Starkey app with the devices, the app often serves as the interface to the technology, but what's your favorite feature within the My Starkey app?

Brandon Sawalich: Edge Mode Plus.

Dave Fabry: Edge Mode Plus. Why?

Brandon Sawalich: Because whatever that environment is, every time it seems to nail it. I was in a very crowded environment last night at a retirement party and instantly it just took care of it. I didn't have to think, intuitive.

Dave Fabry: Just use it, it's a user interface that's effortless. What's one sound that you can think of that is your favorite sound that you would miss if you couldn't hear anymore?

Brandon Sawalich: It would be the wind and the leaves blowing around.

Dave Fabry: Okay, so that silence, because you're surrounded by energy that and-



Brandon Sawalich: That serene, yes.

Dave Fabry: ... that serene and calm. What's your least favorite sound? One that you could go the rest of your life and not worry about hearing ever again?

Brandon Sawalich: Oh, a Vikings game.

Dave Fabry: Just because it's a Vikings game? You and me both, we're aligned on that. But usually it's often when I go to the Vikings game you can hear a pin drop because it's so quiet.

Brandon Sawalich: The sounds are so loud in there, and it's really not Vikings it's just overall sports. But for me, the number one sound would be a blender.

Dave Fabry: A blender, least favorite sound. So it's a loud sound. Who's your favorite race car driver?

Brandon Sawalich: Number one fan, my son, William Sawalich, yes.

Dave Fabry: Indeed, he's had a hell of a year in the past year and looking forward to he just announced he's going to be in the Xfinity series next year.

Brandon Sawalich: Yes, yes, he's doing great on his own. He's his own young professional and he's got the talent, he's investing in that talent. And the other thing that surprised me, but bringing hearing healthcare awareness to protecting hearing and what it's done a lot in that community and it's expanded. I just had a couple other meetings in other industries and they're wanting to protect the healthy hearing because it's a growing problem.

Dave Fabry: Indeed. I mean, it's an important derail from the lightning round kind of approach because it seems crazy that a hearing aid company would be interested in selling fewer products, but in fact, if we can prevent hearing loss from occurring in these young individuals. I've had the opportunity to test the hearing in a lot of young musicians, young people who are exposed to loud noises, including race car drivers, and when you start to tell them that they're hearing, which they depend on more than they realize for listening to when to shift, and the car, it gets their attention.

Brandon Sawalich: It's loud, but I tell you what, you go to a race, it's powerful. And a lot of people ask me if it's nerve wracking. No, it's everybody else I'm worried about. He's done a great job and I couldn't be more proud.

Dave Fabry: Well, I think we'll end on that as proud dad in addition to leading Starkey and in the industry with CEO and president. And I thank you for sharing your views and then also looking at [inaudible].



Brandon Sawalich: You're a leader in this industry too and your opinion matters. And a lot of people are at Starkey, it's not just me, but I work with a great team and enjoy everybody. And next year's going to be great, and I'm excited about the next three years. I mean, we've only just begun.

Dave Fabry: I can't wait. So thank you for the past year. For our viewers and listeners of Starkey SoundBites if you have any ideas for future topics or questions that you want answered, send us an email at soundbites@starkey.com. Thank you for listening. Thanks for this last year. We've got great things planned for 2024. I'm sure we'll have Brandon back a time or two.

Brandon Sawalich: Anytime, love it.

Dave Fabry: Thanks Brandon.

Brandon Sawalich: Thanks Dave.