



2026

Ed McGrath

Executive Leadership Profile

The Operator Behind the Growth

How Ed McGrath built a career on trust, discipline, and the unglamorous work of sustainable growth.

At the start of any meaningful growth story, there is usually a moment when the outcome is not yet obvious. What exists instead is a set of conditions: a product that can work, a market that can respond, a team that needs direction, and a leader willing to stay with the problem long enough to find its shape.

When Ed McGrath first walked through the doors at Emulso, that is what he saw. Not a finished story. Not a clean operating model. Not a company already organized around the growth it wanted. He saw strong products inside a business that needed structure, focus, pricing discipline, and a steadier commercial engine.

He also saw a canvas.

"I looked at it as a new canvas that needed to be painted," McGrath says, reflecting on the early Emulso chapter. "I just needed to kind of erase a few things, and then I could start painting it the way we wanted to. And now look where we are today."



McGrath inside Emulso's warehouse, where product focus and operational discipline shape the company's growth.

That sentence captures the practical optimism that runs through McGrath's career. He is not an executive who speaks about growth as theory. He speaks about it as work: product by product, account by account, relationship by relationship, process by process. The work is rarely glamorous. It is often invisible. But over time, it compounds.

At Emulso, that compounding has become difficult to ignore. In roughly four years, the business has nearly doubled, with annualized growth that McGrath describes as well beyond the double-digit threshold most companies would consider exceptional. Yet the story behind that growth is not simply a sales story. It is the story of an operator: someone who understands that sustainable growth requires the discipline to protect margin, train people, build trust, remove friction, and prepare the organization for the next stage before the next stage arrives.

A Career Built in the Field

McGrath's operating instincts were shaped long before he joined Emulso. His first business came early, after he and his future wife, Lynn, traveled to Boulder, Colorado, intending to stay for three weeks, but instead putting down roots and staying for three years. There, at nineteen, he and his brother-in-law bought a Duraclean carpet and upholstery cleaning franchise and began servicing homes, hotels, and restaurants.

EARLY CAREER

Colorado / Duraclean

First business; service work in homes, hotels, and restaurants.

1984

Diversey

Territory management, district leadership, and corporate accounts.

1999-2011

Superior Products & Systems

Founder/operator phase; customer migration and strategic partnerships.

2011-2015

Swisher / Ecolab Transition

Acquisition experience, corporate scale, and a return to entrepreneurial business.

SANTEC

Director of Distribution

Expanded the distribution footprint from regional to multi-state.

EMULSO

Operational Reset

Pricing discipline, product consolidation, channel training, and culture repair.

THE THROUGHLINE

The experience gave him his first lessons in ownership, service, and the physical reality of work. It also began a career pattern that would repeat: enter an unfamiliar space, learn the mechanics, understand the customer, and build from there.

After returning to Western New York to raise a family, McGrath took a job selling cars in East Aurora. He picked it up quickly enough that a manager introduced him to his son, a regional manager in the institutional cleaning chemicals business. That connection led McGrath to Diversey, where he began as a territory manager in Buffalo in 1984 and spent the next sixteen years moving through roles of increasing responsibility, from territory management to district management to corporate accounts across New England.

It was there that McGrath built the foundation of his leadership philosophy: products matter, but service earns loyalty.

One story remains a standout. A local major cheesecake

plant had thousands of aluminum pans coated with baked-on residue. The dish machine was not solving the problem, production was suffering, and finished cakes were being discarded. McGrath did not treat the issue as a product complaint to be defended. Instead, he treated it as a customer problem to be solved.

Over a holiday weekend, he arrived with his wife, his brother, and his daughters. Together, they soaked and hand-scrubbed roughly 3,000 pans so the customer could return to production. Then McGrath kept investigating and discovered the real cause: a clogged greasing nozzle on the production line. The cleaning chemistry had not failed - the production process had.

For McGrath, that distinction mattered. Customers remembered not just that he provided product, but that he stayed until the real problem was understood. "Soap is soap," he says of that period. The difference was the willingness to do the work around the product: training, troubleshooting, accountability, and follow-through.

“You don't take sales to the bank, you take the bottom line to the bank.”

- Ed McGrath

In 1999, McGrath left the corporate track for a different kind of challenge. A startup chemical business tied to his brother-in-law's family was struggling. The original vision had been built around products for the portable sanitation industry, but the company had invested heavily in equipment before the sales base was in place. When the investors reached what McGrath remembers as the "twelve-month and million-dollar day," they decided not to sink in more money.

Yet, McGrath saw something worth carrying forward. He borrowed \$25,000 from his father, took the pieces that remained, and built what became Superior Products and Systems.

His father made him pay back every penny. McGrath does not describe that as a slight. He describes it as a lesson. "When you've got some skin in the game, you're more apt to be successful," he says.

Superior became a defining accomplishment. McGrath grew the company tenfold, built strategic distributor relationships, and created a model that allowed him to scale without carrying unnecessary overhead. One pivotal partnership with Chudy Paper gave him access to a trained sales network and helped the Chudy chemical program grow from zero to approximately \$1 million in annualized sales over the next five years.

In 2011, McGrath sold Superior to Swisher, a Wayne Huizenga-owned business that was acquiring regional companies to build a national platform. The sale mattered not only because of the buyer, but because of what the numbers said about the business he had built. McGrath recalls being told his company had the highest EBITDA among the 66 companies Swisher acquired at the time.

That experience sharpened one of his clearest business principles: growth is only meaningful if it reaches the bottom line.



After Swisher was later sold to Ecolab, McGrath chose not to return to a large corporate environment. He joined Santec in New Jersey, a family-owned chemical manufacturer that wanted to expand beyond metro New York and New Jersey. As director of distribution, he helped build a distributor network that expanded the company's reach from two states to 27 in seven years.

By the time he arrived at Emulso, McGrath had lived nearly every version of the business: startup owner, territory salesman, corporate account executive, distributor builder, operator, and mentor. He knew how to sell. More importantly, he knew how to build the conditions that make selling repeatable.

Walking Into Emulso

When McGrath arrived, he saw strong products inside a business that needed structure, pricing discipline, operational focus, and a steadier commercial engine.

The early Emulso work was not one sweeping move. It was a sequence of disciplined corrections.

Pricing was one of the first and most important. McGrath inherited a business that had not fully caught up to post-COVID cost increases, even as raw materials and operating expenses had changed. In some cases, the gap between current pricing and required gross profit was too large to correct all at once. A 40 or 50 percent increase might have been mathematically justified, but commercially dangerous.

So, the team took a measured approach: review the customer, review the product mix, identify where pricing needed to move, and phase increases in a way the market could absorb. "We literally nipped it off one customer at a time," he says.

That discipline helped protect the customer base while restoring the economic health of the business. It was not only a pricing exercise. It was a trust exercise. Emulso had to correct the model without breaking the relationships that would fuel future growth.

At the same time, McGrath focused the product line. Too many products were doing similar jobs, which made the sales process harder and diluted focus. Product consolidation gave the team a cleaner story, a clearer catalog, and a stronger basis for training.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Disorganized Systems
- Internal Friction
- Communication Breakdowns

PRICING

- Pre-COVID Pricing Gaps
- Raw Material Escalation
- Margin Pressure

CAPACITY

- Outgrown Space - Finished Goods In Aisles
- Plant Flow Under Pressure

BEFORE

- Disorganized Systems
- Internal Friction
- Pricing Gaps
- Capacity Constraints
- Unclear Selling Focus

AFTER

- Right-Sized Pricing
- Product Consolidation
- Trained Distributor Partners
- Stronger Gross Profit Discipline
- Room for Continued Growth

The Growth Model

Training became central to the strategy. McGrath understood that chemical sales are technical. Distributor salespeople may know food, paper goods, and disposables intimately, but a cleaner, degreaser, sanitizer, or warewash product requires different knowledge. When a salesperson does not feel prepared, they avoid the category.

McGrath calls it the "fear gate." His strategy was to lower it. Distributor reps did not need to become chemical experts overnight. They needed to know enough to ask the right questions, identify an opportunity, and

bring in a specialist. Once that clicked, lead generation changed. What had once been perhaps one lead a month from a major distributor became a steady flow of warmed-up opportunities. With roughly 60 distributor reps in the field, Emulso effectively gained an extended sales force far beyond its own internal team.

That is McGrath's growth style: practical, relational, and scalable. He does not separate sales from education. He does not separate growth from operations. He does not separate customer trust from internal readiness.

RIGHT-SIZE PRICING

Margin discipline without shocking customers.

SIMPLIFY THE LINE

Product consolidation and clearer selling paths.

TRAIN THE CHANNEL

Distributor reps become lead generators, not chemical experts overnight.

BUILD RELATIONSHIP EQUITY

Warm doors, trust transfer, field support, follow-through.

From the outside, successful growth can look clean. The sales numbers rise. The company expands. New customers arrive. New products launch. But McGrath is quick to point out that the visible results are only part of the story. The invisible work happens off hours, in the quiet space where leaders carry the business home with them. McGrath describes waking up at two in the morning with his mind moving through problems: how to make the sales team more successful, how to make office processes easier, how to remove pressure from someone overloaded in the field.

"If you genuinely care about not just the company, but the people that make up the company, that's what happens," he says.

That care is not sentimental. It is operational. It shows up in who gets trained, which process gets fixed, which customer issue gets escalated, which employee needs backup, and which uncomfortable conversation must happen before a problem damages the culture.

McGrath believes culture is not peripheral to performance. It is the center of it.

Growth came from making the business easier to sell, easier to operate, and easier to trust.

How He Leads

His own leadership values are direct: honesty, fairness, selflessness. Fairness matters because people may not always like the answer, but they can respect the process. Honesty matters because leaders who avoid the truth create bigger problems later. Selflessness matters because the job is not only to win personally, but to help others grow.

McGrath is especially clear that leadership does not have to be cold to be effective. He rejects the idea that a leader must stand apart from people to lead them. It is possible, he says, to be a boss, a leader, and a friend at the same time, provided everyone understands the line and respects it.

WHAT PEOPLE DON'T SEE

McGrath describes waking up at two in the morning with his mind moving through problems: how to make the sales team more successful, how to make office processes easier, how to remove pressure from someone overloaded in the field.

**HONESTY
FAIRNESS**

**SELFLESSNESS
MENTORSHIP**

**ACCOUNTABILITY
INTEGRITY**

That balance is part of why people work hard for him. He wants employees to earn more, build better lives, and grow professionally and personally. He also wants them to know he has their back. Whether the conversation is with a customer, a distributor, or ownership, McGrath believes support matters most when it costs something.

When asked what he hopes people remember about his leadership, he does not reach for grand language. He says he hopes they remember that he was fair, honest, and did what he said he would do. That they could count on him. That he had their back.

For all that has changed at Emulso, McGrath does not sound like someone looking backward. He sees the company as still early in its potential.

The growth itself has created new operational questions. At one point, the company had so outgrown its space that finished product was being moved into the parking lot each morning so the plant could operate, then moved back inside at the end of the day. That bottleneck could have capped growth. Instead, Emulso expanded into additional space and has since continued looking ahead to the next facility need.

“If you genuinely care about not just the company, but the people that make up the company, that’s what happens.”

"I think we're just scratching the surface."

The Next Chapter

The next chapter begins inside the operation itself. Process discipline remains unfinished work, and one example is the master price list, a project McGrath describes as both necessary and constantly moving. Products change. Pack sizes change. Customers have different agreements. Without one consistent system, pricing integrity becomes too dependent on memory, history, and manual lookup. With one, the company gains speed, consistency, and fairness.

Beyond the internal work, McGrath sees major opportunity in private label and white label manufacturing. E-commerce has changed the way brands come to market. Entrepreneurs no longer need their own plant to build a cleaning-products brand. They need a manufacturer that can formulate, package, and support the product behind the label.

That creates a natural opening for Emulso. McGrath points to growing inquiry volume from companies looking for environmentally conscious cleaners, laundry additives, powdered detergents, and specialty formulations. Some are already building national consumer visibility. Others are just beginning to understand what is possible.

"I think we're just scratching the surface," he says.

That phrase could apply to Emulso. It could also apply to McGrath. Despite a career that includes corporate leadership, entrepreneurship, a successful acquisition, national distributor expansion, and a major growth chapter at Emulso, he still talks like someone with

another act in him. Through those chapters, one constant has been his wife, Lynn, whose support across 44 years of marriage has been more than a small part of the success behind them.

He still keeps the Superior Products LLC open, filing the paperwork each year even though the operating assets were sold long ago. He laughs about it, but the instinct is revealing. Entrepreneurs rarely think in full stops. They think in possibilities.

Asked what keeps him motivated after all these years, McGrath does not mention status. He mentions challenge. Helping customers solve problems. Helping employees advance. Building something that works. Winning business the right way.

"I happen to like winning better than losing," he says with a smile. "Winning's fun."

At Emulso, the wins have not come from flash. They have come from the steady accumulation of better decisions: clearer pricing, stronger partnerships, cleaner product focus, deeper training, better processes, and a culture built around trust.

That is the operator's work. It is rarely the loudest part of a company's story. But when it is done well, everyone can feel it. The business runs cleaner. The team stands taller. The customer relationships deepen. The numbers start to follow.

And the canvas keeps expanding.

FROM THE PROFILE SHOOT



Scenes from the 2026 executive profile shoot at Emulso.