Michael L. Schaal

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Summary

Operator with 16 years running a business in Tokyo and 13 years leading international training events. I set up the systems, write the SOPs, automate the repeat work, and follow through. Comfortable in small teams, across time zones, and with AI tools. Based in Japan, US citizen, Japan permanent resident, MBA graduating December 2026.

Experience

Founder and President, Chikara Fitness K.K., Tokyo | 2010 to present

- Opened in 2010 as the 5th CrossFit affiliate in Asia, without speaking Japanese, after most local lawyers said it would be difficult.
- Built lead-to-sale pipelines on Zen Planner, Mindbody, Mailchimp, Infusionsoft/Keap, and now Momence. Grew a list of 10,000+ contacts and 900+ members since 2010.
- Run the member lifecycle on Momence, Stripe, Zapier, Notion, and Google Chat. New leads and members create records and alert staff with no manual entry.
- Wrote SOPs so non-technical staff can run each process without me. Learned that adoption is the hard part and now introduce one change at a time.
- Manage up to 4 full-time staff, pricing, training, and vendor negotiation. Took a landlord dispute to mediation and kept the lease on the same terms for another year.
- Mentored members and seminar participants on opening their own gyms. Former members have opened 6 gyms after relocating.

Flowmaster (Lead Trainer), CrossFit Seminar Staff, Asia and US | 2013 to present

- Joined in 2013 as 1 of 3 head trainers in Asia. Became the first Flowmaster in Asia.
- Built seminar teams from the ground up in China, Korea, and Taiwan, and helped develop teams in Singapore and India. The Asia staff grew from 3 to 15 trainers.
- Mentor interns through their first seminars and keep developing them after they are hired. Give written feedback every seminar weekend and report to CrossFit HQ in the US.
- Led about 200 two-day seminars in 15 countries across Asia, the Middle East, Europe, Africa, Australia, and the US, most taught through live translation.
- Write an After Action Report after each event with names, numbers, timings, and a recommendation.

Admiral's Aide, Submarine Group 7, U.S. Navy | 2006 to 2010

- Planned weekly international travel between Washington DC, Hawaii, and Bahrain, and regional trips to Singapore, Malaysia, Korea, and across Japan.
- Ran protocol, schedules, ceremonies, and official events for a Submarine Group Commander, and wrote the reports and briefings behind them.

Submarine Officer, U.S. Navy (Lieutenant, O3) | 2003 to 2006

- Nuclear-trained officer qualified as Officer of the Deck and Diving Officer. Battle Watch Captain. Navy scuba diver (honor graduate).

AI Systems

- Run Hermes, an always-on AI agent on my own VPS. It sends my daily plan, runs scheduled jobs, and commits its work to GitHub.
- Built a 5-agent team (coordinator, builder, researcher, reviewer, advisor), each on a different model provider, with tested handoffs between agents.
- Built a scheduled AI task that pulls Momence reports and combines them into one weekly dashboard for the gym.
- Upgraded Chikara's Drupal sites from Drupal 10 to 11 in one day with coding agents (Claude Code, Codex, OpenCode, Pi, T3 Code).
- Created Mikes I/O, a blog that teaches technology from the ground up. Built it in Astro.

Startup Experience

- Early Japan customer of Momence (YC S20, acquired 2025). Gave the founders product feedback on Japanese translation and 3D Secure card authentication.
- Lead beta tester and user of WodUp since its 2017 start, a workout platform for gyms founded by a former Chikara member. Quoted on their site. Now exploring AI features with them through their API.
- Taking notes on This Week in Startups since September 2021: about 140 episodes and 1,350 snips, including the Founder University and Japanese founder pitch episodes. Attended the All-In Fan Meetup in Tokyo on March 2, 2023.
- Volunteered at Takeoff Tokyo 2026 on media, capturing the event at every stage for live posts and later marketing.
- Keep a personal knowledge base of founder and investor notes, so I can recall who said what and when.

Education

- MBA, Information Technology Management, Western Governors University. Graduating December 2026.
- B.S. Systems Engineering, U.S. Naval Academy, 2002. Division I varsity lacrosse.
- Naval Nuclear Power School, 2004. Graduate courses in project management and operations research (Old Dominion University).

Skills and Tools

- **Systems:** Momence, Stripe, Zapier, Notion, Google Workspace, Slack, Confluence, Workflowy, TickTick, GitHub.
- **AI and code:** Hermes, Claude Code, Codex, OpenCode, OpenRouter, Python, Drupal, Astro.
- **Languages:** English (native). Japanese: passed JLPT N5, studying for N4.
- **Interests:** Avid skier, snowboarder, and hiker. I plan group trips and team offsites.