

Jerry Colonna: Hey Chris and Brendan, it's great to see you and thank you for coming on the show. Before we get started um, can you just take a moment and introduce, introduce yourselves? Chris, why don't you go first and then Brendan.

Chris: Sure. Um, so I'm the co-founder and CEO of Wistia. Started Wistia 12 years ago
[00:04:30] with Brendan in a uh, 10 person house about a mile from here in Cambridge.

Jerry Colonna: Mm-hmm

Brendan: (laughs) uh, and I'm Brendan. I am the co-founder and CTO here.

Jerry Colonna: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Brendan: Chris and I met in college uh, we're in the same freshman year home. So we've known each other for a long time. Uh, we were best friends when we started this business and we are still best friends.

Jerry Colonna: Which is a remarkable feat unto itself. We-

Brendan: (laughs)

[00:05:00]
Jerry Colonna: No, we were, we were joking before we officially started recording and I said, "You know, I'm probably not gonna get you guys to cry but maybe if I get you talking about the deep friendship both," no I'm just kidding.

Chris: (laughs)

Jerry Colonna: (laughs) um, what college was that?

Brendan: Uh, Brown in Providence.

Jerry Colonna: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, um ... Let's, let's dive in. You know um, when I first heard the Wistia story, I was really fascinated by it. And, and of course we've got a number of different folks who sort of pointed us to each other and as we were noting before, um, uh, uh, Chris, you, you are friends or I guess you both are friends with Duncan Morris, who's been on the show and so there's like, it's this very very small little world. But, enough about my take. W- w- why doesn't ... Can, can one of you tell us a story about where you are right now and the decision that you made I guess a couple months ago ... um, with regard to your investors.

[00:06:00]

Chris: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: Um-

Chris: Yeah, yeah.

Jerry Colonna: Yeah.

Chris: Yeah, so, so we have a little bit of a different story um and I will say as we go into this, like, we didn't really, we didn't know what we were doing when we started which is-
[00:06:30]

Jerry Colonna: Nope. Okay, here's the thing.

Chris: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: Just a secret. No one knows what they're doing when they get started.

Chris: Yeah, yeah, I agree.

Jerry Colonna: Right, so go ahead.

Chris: Now that's clear.

Jerry Colonna: (laughs)

Brendan: (laughs)

Chris: It wasn't clear back then.

Jerry Colonna: (laughs)

Chris: (laughs)

Brendan: (laughs)

Chris: Um, but yeah, we, we started in, we started the company in 2006 and it took us a couple years to find traction and figure out what angel investing was. And we wanted to um ... We knew that we needed to do some hiring and so we raised a little bit of angel money in, in 2008.
[00:07:00]

Jerry Colonna: And from whom?

Chris: Um, all individuals.

Jerry Colonna: Right. So, friends, family ...

Chris: Friends and families were like 25 percent of it.

Jerry Colonna: Uh huh (affirmative)

Chris: Everything else was like professional angels.

Jerry Colonna: Gotcha.

Chris: Yeah, there's um, people who that's just what they do. And then we went another couple years and kind of um, found traction, figured out uh, what our prog should be, how we should price it, um, how we thought we should market it and we needed more money because we were (laughs) running out of money...and since that happens...
[00:07:30]

Jerry Colonna: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Chris: Um, we raised another 800 in ... 800,000 then. So there is a total of 1.4 million. Never raised anymore investment. And then, um ... You know, you grow, and, and, and it, and we also weren't really ... For a long time I don't think Wistia looked like a success through our investors. For us, it was. It was incredibly fulfilling. It was really fun. We learned a lot. We're still like, small ... and then at some point, probably when we hit about 10 million in revenue, they started saying, "What's gonna happen? What's gonna happen now? What's gonna happen? Like, are you gonna sell the business? What's, w- where is this going?" And um, once those questions started, they continued. And uh, it basically created a pressure on us. It was a different pressure than we had been used to of like, we need to run this company so that it could be sold someday. It's kinda-
[00:08:00]

Jerry Colonna: Right, so, so-

Chris: One of the options.

Jerry Colonna: Right, so, so, so, so, so let's give, give some context to that. Um, let me reflect back. So, so the investors, the, or the angel investors were saying to, that, they, they were, they were comfortable and then there was this point where it felt like, hey, there might actually be a return on investment here.
[00:08:30]

Chris: Yes.

Jerry Colonna: And, and I wanted to introduce that term because I think that that's one of the key issues, right?

Chris: Yes.

Jerry Colonna: I'm gonna give you a dollar and my expectations I'm gonna get a 1.50 to 2 dollars, maybe even more back.
[00:09:00]

Chris: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: And I'm, that's my profit. And, and so they started to sit up and take notice when you hit about 10 million in revenue and they said, in effect, what's going to happen but also, hey, is there a ... Am I gonna get, make some money on this investment? So that was the pressure.

Chris: [00:09:30] Yeah. Exactly and it's interesting because it went from very little pressure of just kind of like, kiss the money goodbye to pressure like, are they gonna be able to run this company? Like, is it, how fast are they gonna grow? Are they gonna take advantage of the thing you found? Like, all these questions that are like, where are the season managers? All that kinda stuff. And um, we were able to, like, manage that pressure and manage that um ... through like communicating well with them and the company continued to grow pretty strongly. Um, and then, actually in 2000- in 2017, we actually finally had the moment where um, we had 3 different acquirers who were interested in buying the business at the same time ... and we were not very happy.

Jerry Colonna: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Chris: At work. Um, neither of us were. That, we didn't know that really. We, we didn't really say that but it was, looking back it's clear that that was the case.

Jerry Colonna: So does-

Chris: And so-

Jerry Colonna: So, so that somewhat mythical story of the frog being boiled in water.

Brendan: Yes.

Chris: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: Yeah, yeah, Brendan just popped in, "Yeah!".

Chris: (laughs)

[00:10:30]

Jerry Colonna: It was like, all of a sudden you wake up one day and you say, "Man, this water is hot."

Brendan: Yeah, I would say so. And, and I think it was also not wanting ... either not recognizing it at first and also not maybe admitting to each other that also, right, cuz you know, we were supporting each other in that. So, if one person's like, I'm having [inaudible 00:10:48].

Jerry Colonna: Ho- how did the not being-

Brendan: I mean, we will talk about that but um, yeah. How did it manifest itself?

Jerry Colonna: Yeah, how did it manifest itself?

[00:11:00]

Brendan: I think that a lot of the things that over the years, we were really proud um of things we were able to do with the company, which mostly revolved around really creative um, things that we had built or launched or decisions we were able to make that were different than the way other companies had operated. We kinda started seeing ourselves doing the same thing as other people and being more short term focused.

Jerry Colonna: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Brendan: Um, and having where the 2 of us are having to like argue against a lot of people here for things that we wanted which we were like, what? This is like the backwards of the way this company was s- suppose to work, like-

[00:11:30]

Jerry Colonna: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Brendan: It seems like these, we, we should be building something that where those things flow very effortlessly. And, and there was a time of long time where that had happened and then that was kind of the frog being boiled where it kinda felt like it slowly ...

Jerry Colonna: Yeah.

Brendan: [inaudible 00:11:51] you feel like you're the only one arguing for something that used to be the defining feature of the company.

[00:12:00]

Jerry Colonna: I, I wanna hang out in this moment just for, for a second because I think this is a really important moment and, and many people will write in around the podcast and they'll write in and they'll talk about like the topics that we talk about that often don't get talked about. And, and, we're, we're in that area which is, and, and I know you guys have written really eloquently about the decisions that you made. But um, and one of those is, was this notion that, that um, you wanted to get back to the company that you had use- that you had used to be. But, um ... I'm really emotionally relating to this moment um, in the sense that, and these are my words, it's as if I'm imagining you came in one day and discovered that the company was no longer the company that you had built ... that something else had sort of taken over. And, and Chris, I see you nodding as, as you say that. Does that resonate with you guys?

[00:12:30]

[00:13:00]

Chris: Yeah. I mean, it, it's, it, it's as simple as we kind of ... We thought that there was like normal things to do to grow a company and there's a lot of advice, a

[00:13:30] lot of nor- quote normal advice that's like, this is how you scale your team, this is what your ltd to cap ratio should be, this is how, this, like, all these like metrics and numbers and stuff. And um, it, one of them was like, if you're in growth mode, you can't be profitable.

Jerry Colonna: Right, right. So, so, this, there's, there's even a meme right now. It's a really good book but the High Growth Handbook. This, this meme, there's this notion that there's a playbook.

Chris: Yes.

Jerry Colonna: And I've used, I've seen these terms out there. The handbook, the playbook, the way to do it, here's the way to do it.

Chris: Yes.

[00:14:00]
Jerry Colonna: And I have no problem with that except with one piece of it, the article used in that phrase, The playbook, The handbook. When the truth is, it's A handbook, or An handbook, A handbook, and A playbook, a way to do it. Um, and, and, and this is really relevant. Yesterday, I was talking to a client and uh, the company is going really dramatically and you know, he got on the phone and he said, "You know, I just wanna kill my whole executive team. I won't name names." But it was a really-

[00:14:30]

Chris: (laughs)

Brendan: (laughs)

Jerry Colonna: You're you're both laughing because-

Brendan: (laughs)

Jerry Colonna: Because, because there was this powerful moment when is a, there was a realization, an effect at again, that the company that had gotten built was not the company that had produced the joy.

Brendan: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: And I don't mean the happiness. I mean the joy. The joy of creativity, the joy of coming to work everyday and just loving what you do. And um, I related to it uh, I was, I told a quick story about when I was in my early 30s and Fred Wilson and I had built Flat Iron Partners and I remember walking into the office one day and we had something like 25 employees, some of whom I didn't really spend any time with, which was so antithetical to the way I am as a leader, right? And I was uh, reviewing an email in which we were uh reviewing the language of our new dress code ... and I'm just gonna let that land.

[00:15:00]

Brendan: (laughs)

[00:15:30]

Jerry Colonna: I was in my 30s and I was the managing partner at a company that had a fucking dress code.

Brendan: (laughs)

Chris: (laughs)

Jerry Colonna: Right? (laughs) and Brendan, you're laughing, right? You know what I'm talking about. It's like-

Chris: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: What? When did this happen? Does this ... Am, am I ca- catching the feeling here?

Chris: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: Yeah, yeah.

Chris: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: Yeah, yeah. Okay.

[00:16:00]

Chris: Yeah, I mean, it's, it's uh, it happens to a lot of good companies. It's, I almost feel like it's like ... We, Brendan and I talk about in the early days, we had nothing but time.

Jerry Colonna: Mm (affirmative).

Chris: Right? No one's paying attention to us so we're just trying to do things that are uh genuinely useful, actually stand out, and for us to end up finding creative solutions to like every problem and then we start to grow and hire and at first it was totally fine. But at some point, we got big enough that people were like, "No, there's a way to do hire. There's a way to test pricing. There's a way to do this thing or that thing." And you start thinking, uh, there probably should be like cuz I don't have the time to do this creatively. No one really does and you start yessing these things and and um ... At least in our case, some of those things were totally like uh the way that we like to work and on brand it felt right. And some of those things were not but we still went with them anyway because they were like oh, best practices.

Jerry Colonna: Mm (affirmative).

Chris: And uh, it's, I think we learned that lesson that um, if you don't follow your instincts, and you're, and you're wrong, then you're okay. But if you don't follow your inst- or eh, and if uh, but if you, sorry, if you follow your instincts and you're wrong, then it's fine.

Jerry Colonna: Mm (affirmative).

Chris: Uh, but if you don't follow your instincts and you follow and and it's wrong, then it's brutal. That, that's the stuff that keeps you up at night.

Jerry Colonna: Mm (affirmative).

Chris: And uh, we try to resolve to, hey, the way we wanna run this company ... is where we are following our instincts and it's okay. Like, it's okay if it doesn't work because at least like the way that we went about it um is the way we feel good when we're working.

Jerry Colonna: Yeah.

Brendan: It's, it's funny too because you mention this joy um and I feel like we were fortunate early on when we were building the company to recognize that that was a really motivating force for both of us and that that was actually what enabled the work to be so good. And you know, saying that out loud and talking about that with the company which made it like extra (laughs) embarrassing when we were the frogs being boiled even though we had said that out loud and made that part of our value only to like wake up one day and kind of have that not be true. Right, like, it it seems like it wouldn't be so bad if you didn't ever reali- you know, you had some realization uh you know, later in life that like, oh, that was the thing that's you know suppose to be important than it felt like we found that early and that was really nice but ...

Jerry Colonna: Mm (affirmative)

Brendan: Away it went. (laughs).

[00:18:30]

Jerry Colonna: I- I, I like ... how we're framing this discussion because often times, uh, when people, you know, th- th- the- there's a, there's a, there's a profound intellectual question that we're actually implicitly working with right here which is, should one raise outside capital? Right? And, and-

Brendan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry Colonna: To be clear, your decision was to raise debt to pay back those investors to in effect, buy them out-

Brendan: Mm (affirmative).

[00:19:00]

Jerry Colonna: And create a mechanism for return on investment for them.

Brendan: Mm (affirmative).

Jerry Colonna: So, and, and we'll talk a little bit about the, the, the details with regard to that. But, implicit in this whole discussion is ... So here you have a successful

[00:19:30]

company ... and successful by a particular set of metrics and, and, and, and one of the implicit questions is, is should I even bother raising capital ... if I could build a company without that? And I think that one of the ... unintended consequences of taking people's money, taking investor's money is this sort of um ... uh ... a question that arises, what's going to happen now? Right, meaning the growth question-

Brendan: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Jerry Colonna: Meaning the exit question. Cuz that's really what that is, right? It's the, it's like how mu- how is my dollar gonna become 2?
[00:20:00]

Brendan: Yeah, it's a different set of expectations that you're, you were kinda signing up for.

Chris: I, I think people, I mean we definitely were in this gap. People don't understand that there's like a middle quote, middle zone that your company can end up in.

Jerry Colonna: Mm (affirmative)

Chris: Like, we thought it was gonna be like when we raised that money, there was definitely ... I'm, I've not, the, the B word, the billion word may have been said at some point.
[00:20:30]

Jerry Colonna: Mm-hmm (affirmative) Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Chris: You know, like, and so (laughs) it's like, you say the B word and everybody's like, "Oh! You're saying the B word! Then, that's easy to invest in. If it doesn't work, it's fine. If it works, it's a billion dollar thing." What if it's actually like a 50 million dollar thing or a 100 million dollar thing um ...

Jerry Colonna: Mm-hmm (affirmative) that produces joy.

Chris: That produces joy for everyone it touches. It produces-

Jerry Colonna: For a-

Brendan: (laughs)

Jerry Colonna: (laughs)

Chris: For the customers, [cross talking 00:20:53], for the community.

Jerry Colonna: Right.

Chris: And it, it's, it uh, joying machine um, what about, what about that?

Jerry Colonna: Right.

[00:21:00]

Chris: And, you look at it, most companies will probably end up in the middle. Um, but they're structured in a way where they need to be the billion. And I think that is like ... We didn't even go that far down this path. Like, we only raised 1.4 million. That's like nothing in today's dollars, right? Like-

Jerry Colonna: Right.

Chris: When people raise capital today, that's like half a, half a pre super pre seed or whatever the hell they call it. It's like-

Jerry Colonna: Right.

Chris: (laughs) What's a [inaudible 00:21:23] for a million? Um, so we would actually get off that train but the I- I think that people don't understand what they're sign- they're just so excited to get money that they take it and then later they're like, "Wait, I actually like being an entrepreneur." I was like, "Well, you can't be an entrepreneur anymore. You need to sell your company cuz we need a return." And it's not a great one but we need it cuz we gotta close our fund and ... People don't understand how it works. Um and it's also ... We're not saying it's not for every- everyone. Uh, I mean, there's tons of people who absolutely should raise money. We have friends for companies that are starting that was like, "Probably should raise money with that thing." I was like, "I agree." It's just different. It's just, I don't think people ask themselves those questions.

[00:22:00]

Jerry Colonna: Yeah. I think, I think you're you're you're right. There's, there's, they're, in addition to the sort of implicit conventional wisdom that there is a, there is the way to build a company, that there is the way to build a high growth company. There's an implicit conventional wisdom which says to be an entrepreneur means to raise money.

Chris: Yeah.

[00:22:30]

Jerry Colonna: And uh and that's a dangerous im- uh implied wisdom because it actually disconnects one of the most important uh principles I think of most successful entrepreneurs, which is to be focused on profits.

Chris: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: Uh, you, you just smiled Chris. Cuz it's like you know, I often tell the story of my grandfather, Dominic Guido, who is an iceman in Brooklyn. And one of the lessons he always taught me was that being an entrepreneur, he never used that word. He always used the word business man. Being a business man meant that you had more money at the end of the day than you had at the beginning of the day. (laughs)

[00:23:00]

Chris: Simple concept.

Brendan: Yeah.

Chris: Simple concept.

Brendan: Well, that's crazy (laughs).

Chris: Right? Crazy, right?

Brendan: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: And, and yet, there's a liberation. There's a freedom and flexibility. There's certainly less growth ... but to use the term that we were using around before and uh, uh, there's a joy ... that if you get that machine working right, and all of a sudden 30, 40 people are doing great work, getting well compensated, coming to work and enjoying their lives and not feeling like frogs being boiled to death ... but going home we, we talked about our mutual friend Duncan. And going home and being able to coach their son's sports team ... and still be an entrepreneur, what?

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[00:24:00]

Brendan: (laughs)

Jerry Colonna: That's crazy. All because he sort of gave up the notion of the B word, right? The, like, I'm gonna go for it. The, there's a great um anti-notion floating around right now that the guys at base camp are talking about which is you know, fighting aga- and, and, and what's the name, Alexis Ohanian fighting against this notion of hustle porn. Fighting against this notion that we're all suppose to kill ourselves to get to the, to this finish line. You know, and, and poor Brendan, you're nodding away. You- you- you're like, am, am I speaking your language here?

[00:24:30]

Brendan: Well, I think it was a funny thing because like Chris mentioned, when we started to have that pressure and throughout the business, we also never

[00:25:00] knew what we wanted in the end. So people would say, "Oh what are you gonna do?" You know? Or the, I don't know, maybe we'll sell it one day. Maybe we'll go public. Maybe we'll just keep doing this forever. Um, and we had, we had interest in acquisition and and being bought along the way from other places. We never really seriously considered it ... um and it kinda wasn't until when Chris mentioned that we had 3 offers come in at the same time and we were ... really not enjoying what we were doing then that started to take it seriously. And that was a weird moment because it was what we had thought of as a fini- you know, uh, a normal like entrepreneurial finish line.

[00:25:30]

Jerry Colonna: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Brendan: So we went through all these exercises of ... well, what would we do ... you know, like ...

Jerry Colonna: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Brendan: Well, we were at the finish line and you could have like a pile of money uh ... but that isn't, I- I mean, that's great you know, to have that financial freedom but ... w- what then, it's like a weird to end up at the finish line and be like, I don't wanna be here. This is not where um, we wanna be. So, I just, just the nodding was around ... (laughs) this like, that like this uh, you know, it's about getting to the end. I mean, it's like the most cliché to thi- thing to say but right, people say like it's about the journey, not the destination. I think (laughs) that was ... is very true for us and w- the thing that we enjoy doing is running and operating this business.

[00:26:00]

Jerry Colonna: Yeah, you know, look, I- I think one of the reasons why clichés like that last is cuz because they contain truth ... and you know what makes some quote cliché is that, the need to constantly re- reinforce that truth. And what I'm experiencing, you know, I'm gonna, I'm gonna sort of take the posture of, of being the elder here in this conversation. What I'm experiencing is um ... young men who have become older during this 12 years in which you've launched, launched and run this business and become more of yourselves and realizing the visceral nature of the truth with that statement.

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[00:27:30] And you know, I made a note when you were talking, Brendan, because we never knew where we wanted to end up in the end. We never knew where we wanted to go and I realize that one of the organizing questions I often will ask when starting work with a, with a new client is, well, what do you wanna have happen with this business? And often times, we launch our businesses unaware of where we want to end up. And the result is we end up in that joyless place with dress codes and vacation policies-

Brendan: (laughs)

Jerry Colonna: Right? And not running the company that we wanted to work at. Right?
[00:28:00] Another question I often will ask is, what kind of company do you want to work for? Because, you're building that every single day. And I'm gonna insert ... based on all the things I've seen you write and speak about ... I think you realize that you had built a company that you didn't wanna work for. Does that make sense?

Brendan: Yeah. And I think the other piece of that first question that you asked I think is the question that you know, if you start a business you get from even before you start, if you say that you're thinking about it, where do you wanna end up?
[00:28:30] Um ... and I think ... honestly we ... would always feel a little bit funny because we didn't really have an answer. And you always assume that these other big successes or other businesses that are really good, they ha- always have an answer, right? You know, to colonize Mars or to do, you know, cure cancer or to do something like that, um-

Jerry Colonna: To colonize Mars by curing cancer.

Brendan: (laughs) That that could be as well.

Jerry Colonna: (laughs)

[00:29:00] Brendan: But um ... I la- I think the, the sec- at least for us, the second question um, was the one we should've always been asking, um, and I, and I feel like you said like ... uh ... It's not like shame is probably not the right word for it but like when we didn't have an answer for that first one, I feel like now we do have an answer for that, or we, we have, like through going through that whole kind of trial, feel much more comfortable saying, no, it's, it's the thing ... It- it's the running of this business. It's how it, how it operates. That is the thing that we really wanna be focused on and keep doing that at bigger and bigger scale. Not that there is some ...
[00:29:30]

Jerry Colonna: Mm (affirmative)

Brendan: ... you know, destination in sight that we're all working towards.

Jerry Colonna: Mm (affirmative)

Chris: There's a, just to add onto what Brendan just said, I think, the other piece of it is this realization that um, if you can stay focused on something you enjoy but is a hard problem and a big opportunity for a long time, you actually can build something significant cuz none of this is about us not wanting to grow the business. Like, we're working very hard to grow the business. We have just figured out that for us, if we're profitable ... then, it actually helps us prioritize and run the business better and be more creative.
[00:30:00]

Jerry Colonna: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Chris: Um, and if we give ourselves time. Like if we, if we don't think really, it basically let's us be much more long term focused.

Jerry Colonna: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Chris: And um, when you're long term focused, you don't sacrifice on the hires. You don't sacrifice, you don't do the quick things. Like, there's always quick things you can do to increase revenue. Like, we have a subscription business we could raise prices or do something. We could change something and definitely make our, our revenue go higher but that's not ... That would've come at a very long term cost and we weigh those long term costs because we don't wanna be at the company in 3 years having paying for a- a stupid mistake we made to try to increase revenue now. Um, cuz that's just not, we actually believe that we'll build something very significant.

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[00:31:00] It's just, we're willing to have a much longer time horizon and uh, I think that that's one of the things that is now, we're free of, right? Like, we're free of this exit date. And so, we can have the very, very long term horizon um ... and it lets just lets us do different things. It lets us even with our products, try to win on different, in different ways because we aren't just like searching out for the next feature that we think is like the feature that's gonna change everything. It's like ... You can ... It's, it's, it's, we need to have systems and people and structure and plan that allows us that in 5 years with either we'll be doing really amazing and probably a lot bigger than we are now. But I don't know how big and it doesn't really matter. Like, eh, eh, but it eh, I think by giving ourselves that time, it lets us, lets us build something significant.

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Jerry Colonna: Uh, uh, I'm, let me reflect back some of the wisdom I'm hearing. One is that, um, focusing on profitability creates optionality and freedom.

Chris: Yes.

Jerry Colonna: Focusing on profitability creates a kinda structural discipline ...

Chris: Yeah.

[00:32:00]

Jerry Colonna: That allows you to then build the company that you'd like to work for.

Chris: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: Um, letting go of the need for um, demonstrable return on investment ... on the part of investors. Um ... and staying focused on the long term cr- ena- is enabling you to create more creative and more joyful work experiences and I would even argue, product and services. Does this ... am I-

[00:32:30]

Chris: [inaudible 00:32:34]

Jerry Colonna: Yeah.

Chris: You're right on the, you're right on the money. I mean, we for example, we made a uh an original series this year that's a 4 part d- docu-series that's 142 minutes, uh, it's an hour and 42 minutes long.

Jerry Colonna: Mm (affirmative)

Chris: It's on Amazon Prime. It's called One, Ten, One Hundred and um, we, we paid this really talented production company to make 3 ads for us at different budgets and then documented their production process and the creative process and this whole thing. So, you give them 111,000 dollars, one ad is 1,000 dollars, one ad is 10,000, one ad was 100,000. When we were doing this, we decided to do this last year and we were just getting profitable again and it's terrifying to do. And then, throughout this whole year, you know, it's like, oh we thought this was gonna be 2 blog posts. No, it's a way bigger thing.

Jerry Colonna: Mm (affirmative)

Chris: It's like turned into effectively a movie that would premiere to the theater and it's now on Amazon Prime. Um ... What is the return of this? What is the return of that time? What is the return on the, the uh the ads? I don't know. Uh, I can't I can't tell you. Like, there's there's a lot of views. It's a, but it's like a brand thing that we believe in and we're excited about. We think it's really creative and really different and really um, we're just really proud of it. And I think that, I actually think it's been fantastic for us but in uh a million ways, we can't measure super well ...

Jerry Colonna: Mm (affirmative)

[00:34:00]

Chris: And are we gonna keep doing more stuff like this? Yes. Is it gonna be bigger and different? Yes. But like, when we were short term focused, we never could have done this. Like it was just not on the table as an option.

Jerry Colonna: Mm (affirmative)

Chris: Um, and now, it's it's freed us up to have like 5 different ways that this project could be successful. And the, it was like successful day 1 and then we're like whoa. What if the other 4 work?

Jerry Colonna: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Chris: It's like, the 2nd one worked, the 3rd one worked, it's like, this is pretty cool (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

[00:34:30]

Chris: And uh ... I think we probably got lucky too in the, in this project but um ... It's just I think an example of something that's like very creative, very different, very long term. We believe in it. It's inspiring to us, um, and I don't think we could do it if we said, "You launched this, and like show me the results in Q3." Like, I, I don't know how you'll do it.

Jerry Colonna: Brendan, you were gonna say something?

Brendan: I think that's, we- we've had success like that before in that um, you know we first, we were profitable after we had raised that 2nd amount of angel money. We worked really hard to get profitable. And then once that happened, there was you know, the, the time clock of you know, we need to raise another round, that was all off, and it felt like we had a lot more freedom in what we could do. And we started to think longer term. And I remember then, we started making uh, investing in video content marketing and doing things like um, we made a lot of DIY video content. Hey, here's the best uh, here's 100 dollar lighting set up that you could build. Here's, I'm teaching companies how to do this.

[00:35:00]

Jerry Colonna: Mm (affirmative)

[00:35:30]

Brendan: There wasn't ... I remember at that time too, we also got you know, from other people, we were at some, you know, how will you make money doing this? You know, you're giving it away for free. This doesn't directly connect to your product. You are teaching some things that you, you as a business are really good at and are a differentiator in your own you know, marketing cuz we were good at making videos and now we're giving that away for free. We knew it was valuable. We knew it was helpful, um, and we thought over the long term, this is something that you know, people will get to know Wistia for and they will, you know, if they trust us, they, they may buy from us or tell other people about it.

[00:36:00]

And that's a pretty, you know, that's, that's content marketing, right? It's very normal strategy. But, it's really hard to measure. The direct, well, it's easy to measure the direct effect of it and it doesn't usually work in the short term. And when we launched some of those videos, there's like you know, 100 views on something like that. Um, and now, uh, it's really cool to see some of those ones that we made 7 years ago you know, are still huge drivers of of um, of growth for us today in that a lot of people still watch them. And it's like this funny thing of building this way is that it's this compounding effect and uh, we

[00:36:30]

still, again, back to the cliches and things that you have to constantly remind yourself of.

[00:37:00] I feel like we're, one thing we're constantly saying even today is, you know the growth that we'll get this year is the product of the hard work that we've done the past 5 years. Not what we're going to do you know, this year to to get that lift. Like, it it's something that takes a really long time to do. Um, and I think requires managing the business in a different way and that's why the profitability stuff has been so key like you were saying. In that it gives us that freedom and we can focus on the longer term without needing an immediate return on investment.

Jerry:
[00:37:30] You know, um, uh, I'm I'm sitting here and again, I'm I, I, for whatever reason maybe it's because my birthday is coming up, I'm feeling my elderhood. Right, and so I'm as as as, my birthday is coming up in a few weeks.

Chris: [Crosstalking 00:37:36] happy birthday

Jerry: Thanks

Brendan: Happy Birthday.

Jerry Colonna:
[00:38:00] Thank you, thank you. Um, but as I, as I hear you speaking what I'm relating to is, actually even some of the decisions that we've gone through with reboot ... When we decided to start a podcast 4 years ago, um, it it was really prompted in large part by my co-founder and partner Dan who was a big podcast fan and and he said, "Oh, you know there there's something in there." And and initially we thought of it as, well maybe we should sell advertising, maybe we should have a partnership there and but what evolved over time was that there was a joy ... in creating a platform for conversations that were slightly different.

[00:38:30] And one of the things that's happened is even if we can't provide services and support to somebody because they can't afford a coach or they can't even afford to be in a pure support group that we have ... We are now convinced ... because we get letters, it notes emails at least once a week from someone who says, "I'm alone, I'm sitting here by myself. I've been listening to your podcast and it's helped me." And there is zero quote and quote financial return on investment ... but there's an incredible joy return on investment ... in all the efforts that we're making here. And one of the most profound uh, returns on investment that come to me from the podcast is it gives me the capacity to wake up every day and to say, "I was kind. I made a difference in somebody's life. I am the luckiest human alive because I have a company that allows me to be kind and make a difference in people's lives everyday." And for me, that purpose is a hell of a lot better than the B billion word.

Brendan: (laughs)

[00:40:00]

Jerry: So, forgive me for being the old man looking back, but, but I see from the smiles on your faces that there feels to be a connection with what I just said. Is that right?

Brendan: Yes, absolutely.

Chris: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Jerry Colonna: I have to remind people that nobody's watching your videos so if you nod-

Chris: (laughs)

Brendan: (laughs) We're nodding vigorously.

Jerry Colonna: (laughs) you know, and I just wanna say, welcome to the club of people who
[00:40:30] organize ... their businesses around the joy of the work ... rather than necessarily the outcome, you know? I- I'm thinking now of a conversation I had a few months ago with one of my dearest friends and mentors, Parker Palmer. And we were talking about his new book, *On The Brink of Everything* which is about aging and it's a, it's really a it's really a beautiful book about life itself.

[00:41:00] And in that conversation, we're sort of batting around this, this phenomenon that people are so driven by purpose. They're driven by this seeking of purpose that they, they, they, they they conflate it with a kind of outcome produce thing. And I think back to that well, you know, w- what is the outcome of this

[00:41:30] company that you want, that you started? And he and I joked and we said ... that the really interesting organizing question similar to you know, what kind of company are you building? Is this the kind of company you wanna work for? The, the organizing question was, have I been kind? Have I lived a life where I don't feel like I'm a frog in a pot being boiled? Have I been able to create time and space for the people that I love? Have I been able to pay the bills ...

Brendan: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: And take care of the people that took care of me when I was a boy, when I was
[00:42:00] girl, when I was a child? Those feel really, really powerful and liberating. I don't know, I hope I didn't cut you off, Chris.

Chris: No, no. I think um, I think you're right on it. I, I think it's interesting knowing people who ... know a fair fit a couple people who uh, have a lot of money and they're not happy, at all. And it's, I think it's really easy to conflate money with happiness. I think the thing that we're fortunate to figure out is like, at least
[00:42:30] for us, that's not the driving thing. It's an enabler to a degree but ... that's not what makes us happy. It's like, working with the right people, it's like spending time with our families. It's like feeling proud of what we're building and who

our customers are and all of those. All of those things um and like that is what, that's what happiness is. And actually more like the realization of ... How do

[00:43:00] we keep doing this? Like, that's, that's what we wanna do. We wanna keep doing this. We don't wanna like ... do this bigger and do this different and do this but do it with the same values and hopefully, we can, that's like our governor on, on what we'll take on.

Jerry Colonna: Mm (affirmative) You know I don't know him other than from a distance but um ... When I first started in my career, I, I started to watch Bill Gates closely. [00:43:30] Um, I think he's probably 5 to 10 years older than I am. And everything I'm about to say is a complete and utter fiction and projection cuz I don't know him

Chris: (laughs)

Jerry Colonna: But what occurs to me is that um, there were probably very many moments in his life, in his early years at Microsoft where someone could've bought that company. I can imagine IBM probably offered him a lot of money to buy that company.

Chris: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:44:00] Jerry Colonna: And the truth is, he chose to stay with that company until he chose to do something else with his life.

Chris: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: And, again, it's a complete and total projection but I look at the numbers that he has and I say, "Huh, not bad huh?"

Chris: (laughs) not bad (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: And, he is curing cancer by colonizing Mars.

Chris: Yeah.

[00:44:30] Jerry Colonna: Right? Or the, or the equivalent there of. The, the truth is he is. He and Melinda, they are making a difference. They are ... and again, this is all projection. They seem kind. And thi- this was, you know when I was a young man and I was a young technology reporter, Bill Gates and the word kind were not words that we associated.

Chris: (laughs)

Brendan: (laughs)

[00:45:00]

Jerry Colonna: But you sort of look at that phenomenon and you say, I, I imagined it that some point in his life where ... running Microsoft, building Microsoft was the only thing that really ... he wanted to do. And somehow, somewhere in the last 20 years we've lost sight of that as a goal. And we thought that the, that the goal was ... and then we sold it and we took our part of gold, pot of gold and we left the business. We stopped doing the thing that created joy in our lives.

[00:45:30]

Chris: Yeah, and I think it's also who are we selling our businesses to? It was like the same companies.

Jerry Colonna: Yeah, yeah.

Chris: There, there are a couple to this, small number of people still joyfully building but they're, they're they're buying everyone else's ...

Jerry Colonna: Yeah.

Chris: Companies.

Jerry Colonna: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:46:00]

Chris: Yeah. Yeah, I think its just, I mean, it's the quest for the growth hack... It's the, the this like mentality that you were talking about in terms of there being the playbook. And there isn't one. That's just life. Like, there isn't a playbook. If there was a playbook, we would all be exactly the same. And we're the exact opposite. Everyone's extremely different. Um, and I think it's the idea that, the the idea that it can be taught ... in a way where down to like ...this is how to price. This is the process you use to get a customer. Which, those are all helpful tools but for each, you know, if you're building a house, you don't just like ... take all the same tools as the guy next you and assume that you can build a house. Like you gotta figure it out. You gotta figure your way. You gotta figure your taste. Like, it it's about like imprinting your experience and values onto those tools and I think that people somehow miss that. It's like-

[00:46:30]

Jerry Colonna: Yeah, I, [crosstalking 00:46:55]. I, I think you're absolutely right, Chris. I mean, uh, uh, I have a book coming in June. It's available for pre order now.

[00:47:00]

Chris: (laughs)

Brendan: (laughs)

Jerry Colonna: It's called Reboot: Leadership And The Art of Growing Up. And, a central message of the book is that leadership presents an opportunity for us to fully actualize and grow as human beings. And, those folks who choose to do that process end up leading well ... and become the kinds of leaders we want to work for. A central premise of the book is that there is no one way to lead.

[00:47:30]

[00:48:00] Right, in a sense, what a, what I was working with was, pushing back against what I often see as the, the the the wise old generally white guy, straight white guy, who smiles down from the cover of the book and say, "These are the 5 steps you need to take in order to be a successful leader." And what's missing from that whole notion is, for me, this is what I did.

Chris: (laughs)

Jerry Colonna: And what I see in my new friends, Chris and Brendan ... are 2 people who have asked question, what does it mean for us to be leaders? What kind of company do we want to build? You know, another test question I often ask people is, d-
[00:48:30] are, do you either of you have children?

Chris: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Jerry Colonna: How old are your children?

Chris: 3 and um 11 months for me.

Jerry Colonna: Oh, Mazel tov. How about you Brendan?

Brendan: 2 months.

Jerry Colonna: 2 months, oh my god.

Chris: (laughs)

Jerry Colonna: Are you getting sleep?

Chris: (laughs)

[00:49:00] Brendan: I was just telling Chris before this started, uh, mostly yes. Last night was ... was a bit challenging, but ...

Jerry Colonna: Mm (affirmative)

Brendan: (laughs)

Jerry Colonna: You look remarkably good for the challenging sleep.

Chris: (laughs)

Jerry Colonna: So, my children are 28, 26 and 21. Okay, and so heres an operative question that I want you to hold onto ... as you continue to hold your seat as leaders of this company. 15, 18, 20 years from now, how would you feel if your children came to work for you at Wistia? Would you be proud? Would you feel happy?
[00:49:30]

Would you feel that they're working for a good company? Because if the answers the those questions are no ... then, what are you doing?

Chris: [00:50:00] It's, it's funny you say that cuz I, I've thought about that. And uh, I've thought about particularly with managers which is like what I want my daughters to report to somebody here.

Jerry Colonna: Brilliant.

Chris: [00:50:30] And um, that is like ... What does it mean to be a great manager at Wistia? And how do we train people on how to do that and how do we hold them accountable for doing that, just so that anyone can enter the organization and have that kind of experience? And it does change. It's usually the view in terms of like, um, how much you're willing to invest in people if you think that you're gonna have people here for that long, but also just it, it at least for me, it simplifies and re-frames a lot of things.

Jerry Colonna: Yeah.

Chris: I mean, I worry about that with tech in general. We've we've been working really hard to make Wistia more diverse and inclusive and, and we've got ... We've definitely got longer to go on the diversity side but we- we're working um and it's one of those things that's like, I think we will make Wistia much stronger by making our company more diverse. And it's not a quick solution. It's like, things take a long time.

Jerry Colonna: Yeah.

Chris: [00:51:00] Um, you're hiring, it's people's lives, it's people's livelihood. Um and so how do you change the process and the structure and um where you source [inaudible 00:51:08] from and how people are promoted and how you audit positions and all of those things ... because I want my kids to grow up in a world where ... they're they're privileged. Like, they the- they look like me-

Jerry Colonna: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Chris: [00:51:30] And like we're the leaders of this company. Like, they're already quite privileged. Um, how do they, how can they grow up in a diverse environment and not have that privilege. Like, change them in a in a negative way, um and make sure that they're kind and make sure that they are um inclusive.

Jerry Colonna: [00:52:00] Well, you know, I, I, a- again, speaking like the older brother here, um, if we go back to the organizing question that we used before which is, what is the outcome in effect, what is the, what what are we looking for in the end? And Chris, if you define that as a parent, and I started to hear that which is you know, 25 years from now ... those who look like either of the 3 of us, and I'm

[00:52:30] gonna pre- make some presumptions here that we're all 3 of [inaudible 00:52:11] gendered, white, straight white men. Um, you know, the winners of the genetic lottery to use, Warren Buffet's phrase ... If we recognize that 25 years from now, that we will be in the minority ... and that the world will thankfully be radically different. As- Assuming we have an all burned up in climate change.

Chris: Hmm.

[00:53:00] Jerry Colonna: Um ... in a changed climate, right? If we recognize that reality and we recognize that our children are moving into that world ... then what are we doing as leaders, as parents, as managers to prepare those who come behind us for that world? I think there is a moral obligation to ask ourselves those questions. And I think that there's a parenting obligation ... to prep that, you know ... Chris you have, you have 2 girls. Um, Brendan, how old is uh uh, how does your, uh uh-

Brendan: (laughs) how does he identify?

Jerry Colonna: Yeah, I was gonna ask you-

Chris: (laughs)

Brendan: Might be

Jerry Colonna: Well, this is a little Brown conversation, huh?

Brendan: Yeah (laughs)

Jerry Colonna: (laughs)

[00:53:30] Brendan: Uh, he is, he is a male.

Jerry Colonna: He's a boy, he's a male.

Brendan: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: So, um, so the question is, what kind of world are they gonna be leading? What kind of world are they gonna be inheriting? And that includes, what kind of work world?

Chris: Yeah. We spend most of our lives at work. I mean, it's ...

[00:54:00] Jerry Colonna: Right. We're not changing that aspect of our society. Um ... but there is an opportunity to build companies in a different way. Um, the guys at Basecamp have been remarkable work, promulgating a notion that there's a different

[00:54:30]

way to work. Um, you know, internally at Reboot, we, we, we really take joy out of the phrase that we've stolen from David White which is, "good work done well for the right reasons." You know, good work done well for the right reasons. So. Well, I wanna thank you both for this conversation. I wasn't sure where we were gonna go with it. I think we've had a good time.

Brendan: This has been great, thank you.

Chris: Thank you. Thank you for having us.