

Jerry: Hey David, how are ya?

David: Hi Jerry. I'm good, thanks, how are you?

Jerry: Good, good. So, um, it's evening my time here in Boulder, and it's morning in Australia. So good morning.

David: It's a very beautiful morning, yeah. Thank-you-

Jerry: Yeah.

David: ... so much.

Jerry: Yeah. Before we get started, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself. Give us your name and, uh, however you want to identify yourself right now, 'cause that may be part of the topic.

[00:00:30]

David: Well my name is David Ryan, and, uh, at the moment I think most people, uh, I think I identify most as the last four years of my life being the founder of a company called Corilla. And, uh, we have recently wound down and, and got caught up in a, an IP sale, uh, with some transitions in the open source world. We're a spin-out from a company called Red Hat, and, uh, it's certainly been an interesting four years over, I think, 10, 10, 11 countries around the world we've been traveling and based out of.

Jerry: Hm.

[00:01:00]

David: So we're ... right now I'm on a river in a place called the Gold Coast in Australia.

Jerry: Well, that's terrific. And tell, tell me what would be helpful to talk through today?

David: [00:01:30] One of the topics I think we've, we've spoken the most about is this idea of transitions for, for founders coming from that burning life mission. So, four years of my life has been totally dedicated to this thing, Corilla, uh, which is a SaaS product. And being a spin-out, you can imagine, uh, there's a lot of sense of momentum, and, and you tie your pride and identity up in, in taking an internal thing and take it out.

Jerry: Hm.

David: And, we've gone through the accelerated thing. We did the VC thing, went down that route. Um, hiring employees globally. Uses 95 countries. Just the metrics that

[00:02:00] fill your brain. Uh, at the moment, now that we have wound down, um, the team has landed safely. The IP's gone off somewhere else. Uh, that's a really interesting transition and-

Jerry: Hm.

David: ... and the next few months for me, or the next year for me actually now are ... Uh, I've been tapped to, to write a book about open source, and the evolution of open source.

Jerry: Hm.

David: Given, uh ... I come from Red Hat, and we spun out of Red Hat in Red Hat's recent acquisition by IBM.

Jerry: Hm.

David: Uh, so, it's a very, very interesting transition that we've been talking about going from a CEO of a startup, um, and one that's just hitting that high growth phase to, to a writer.  
[00:02:30]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: And that's completely blowing my mind.

Jerry: So let's just pause a moment and, you know, I- I- I- I will confess that, uh, David's been a member of, uh, a Reboot Circle, so we may, we may make references to, sort of, Reboot-isms and-  
[00:03:00]

David: Hm.

Jerry: ... if we do, I'll sort of pause and try to remember to explain them. But, let's, let's just take a moment and honor something that you just said, which was really powerful. Which was we wound down Corilla and everyone has landed safely.

David: Well ...

Jerry: I mean you said it quickly, but it's an interesting phrase.

David: Hm.

Jerry: Tell, tell me about I- ... what does it mean that everyone landed safely?

[00:03:30]  
David: That's the funny thing that I didn't realize being a founder, I thought at the end of it ... you know this fail fast mentality, um, industry, yeah, and, the ... It turns out

there's a wide range of exits once you decide that you're not gonna hit the window, you're not gonna 100x. It's, it's better to wind down. That decision really came from looking at my team.

[00:04:00] And I wrote a blog post about this and given we're from Red Hat, we always try to keep the open source culture. And, uh, some explanation might help, 'cause, uh, I emailed our investor one day, uh, a gentleman by the name of Bob Young, he's one of the co-founders of Red Hat. And I said to him, look, we're really struggling. We're, we're exhausted. Our numbers are okay, but not amazing. Uh, we, we need to evolve or we need to do something. It's just sitting with me that this ... we can't just keep doing this year after year. And Bob simply said, just ask your users, which made me-

Jerry: Hm.

David: ... laugh. And I used the ... and I asked the team, and I asked the users, and I said to everyone, here's where we are at. Here's some good things, here's some bad things. And the thing that sat with me the most is realizing it, actually, wasn't about the company. Um, when we write down a list of priorities, my, my care was the users, the team, and the investors.

[00:04:30]

Jerry: Hm.

David: And users are easy to keep happy at the end of the day. But with so many competitors, um, and colleagues, peers doing similarish things, that we were able to look after them. But it just sat with me that (laughs) when I started, and this might sound funny to, to admit, I guess. But, I was on a flight back to Australia. Uh, um, been living in San Francisco. And I realized what would it be like to work for somebody else?

[00:05:00]

Jerry: Hm.

David: And I sat and I thought, wow that'd be crazy. I'd have to believe in their vision, their ability to make payroll on time. Can they pitch? Can they raise money? And then it occurred to me, (laughs) and I actually laughed out loud on the plane like a madman for a while. It occurred to me that, that, that's exactly what my team had done for four years.

Jerry: Yeah.

David: It's ridiculous, right? And I thought, these brilliant people are going home every day and telling their partner, this is what we've done today, this is what we're doing this week, this is what David is leading us to. And it, actually, put a chill through me and-

[00:05:30]

Jerry: Or, or, or-

David: ... and that's just the teams's ...

Jerry: ... this, this is why you should still put up with me not making enough money.

David: (Laughs)

Jerry: And this is why you should still put up with me, uh, uh, being stressed out. And this is why, it's because I believe in this crazy guy, David.

David: It's terrifying when you think of it that way, right?

Jerry: Yeah.

[00:06:00]

David: It's very surreal. So that, that really sat with me and there is no ... I don't think there is a perfect landing. I think you, you follow the rule book, you reach out to people, you make sure everyone has options. Um, but it's, it's always that little bit of heartbreak and I'm really proud that I caught up with my, my right-hand guy. Um, we'd hired him as a chief design officer, and he just became, basically, a cofounder.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: Uh, and I had a drink with him the other day and I, I remember he just pulled me up and said stop apologizing, stop deferring, stop offering to pay for drinks. It's, it's, like, these were the best years. Or, we worked on something we cared about and this is ... We got to go around the world doing this, meet amazing people.

[00:06:30]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: And he was pitching me what I use to pitch him to join the company. And I just laughed so much.

Jerry: Hm.

David: It's, like, I've heard that pitch before but-

Jerry: (Laughs)

David: ... it's really hard to carry it on, that feeling of make sure everyone gets, gets to ground safety, uh, safely.

Jerry: Yeah.

David: Um-

Jerry: I ...

David: ... then you think about yourself.

[00:07:00]

Jerry: I, I, hear the care and concern in that phrase safely, in that word safely. I hear, uh, uh, it ... what, what is the name of your cofound-, or the guy who became your cofounder?

David: Uh, Ton.

Jerry: Ton.

David: Yeah.

Jerry: Uh, I hear it in his phrase, in his notion that, uh, we got to do, we got to spend a little bit of time, in effect, doing some great work-

David: Hm.

[00:07:30]

Jerry: ... you know? Um, we're big fans of the poet David White and he, uh, has this phrase, "Good work, done well for the right reasons." Which we've really adopted internally what ... at, at the company. And, you know, you used the term heartbreak and, you know, before we started recording we were s- swapping stories about writing books.

[00:08:00] And I have a book coming out in June and, uh, it's, uh ... There's a chapter in there, uh, on this notion of resiliency, and I talk about that, that the, that the ... even though I often speak about resiliency as a kind of goal that we're looking for, it's actually not true. What we're really looking for is the equanimity, or the peace of mind. The sense of satisfaction that comes at the end of the day when you've done good work, done well for the right reason. And I chart the fact that, um, the movement is actually from heartbreak, to resiliency, to equanimity.

David: Hm.

Jerry: And, you know, when I speak about it, when I write about it, I write about the fact that, um, one of the most heartbreaking experiences for me is just the impermanence of all things.

David: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: And there are few things more impermanent than our businesses that we start. And if that's true, and if that is mildly, uh, common among people, that impermanence is a source of heartbreak, and that our businesses are, in fact, always falling apart all the time-

David: Hm.

[00:09:30]

Jerry: ... then our businesses are a source of heartbreak all the time.

David: Yeah, wow.

Jerry: And, and, and, yet, the heartbreak can lead to the resiliency, which leads to the equanimity.

David: Hm. That's really interesting. It really ... it has me thinking a little bit. So at the moment I'm looking out at this beautiful river, and there's a big stack of books and, [00:10:00] uh, you know, you mentioned, uh, a friend of yours, Krista Tippett, who is in my bookshelf right now, Becoming-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: ... Wise, and, and ...

Jerry: A fantastic book in itself. Yeah.

David: Essential, I'd say, essential for anyone listening. Um, I was listening to one of her podcasts the other day and it got me thinking about the, the whole hold water, chuck wood-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: ... uh, quote from the [inaudible 00:10:18]. I mean just doing the work is the reward in itself at times. And, and the, sort of, how I'm tryin' to switch from, you know, day one of the startup, especially when we were always tied to story. We were always tied to narrative.

[00:10:30]

Jerry: Hm.

David: Always tied to, to brands. So we had to spin out of Red Hat and create this separate identity before we had our own line of code.

Jerry: Hm.

David: So there was always that sense of tryin' to fill the bucket, uh, you know, a shiny bucket. And the substance of the product, and the users, and successors, were always pawing through the bucket.

Jerry: Hm.

David: So coming into writing, and letting go of being a CEO, and just being a writer for a while. Um, telling the story has, is such a different approach. It's almost terrifyingly 180 percent degree change difference, where it's not just that chance to hold water and chop wood. And since you say it's, uh, it's that sense of just letting go of that narrative, that story. Putting the bucket aside for a while and, uh, just letting things be. And then equanimity can come as a result of letting go.

[00:11:00]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Uh, I- I- I- I think that the, the, the letting go, um, uh, it is, uh, essential in arriving at that place of, of a, a kind of peacefulness with the changes that are going on. And this word change is this, this notion of the transitions. And again, you've been through a lot of transition, and you've been through a lot of heartache, and you've been through, um, you know, a very powerful piece of advice from Bob to, to ask the users ... and, there, there's so much in that, and, yet, I also sense a little bit of the sadness, the heartache in you. Am I, am I reading too much into that?

[00:12:00]

David: No, it's, it's absolutely a heartbreak to, to build a thing, and if that thing had just failed, then ... especially in our current culture, and even in 2019, that's the start of fail culture. But to choose that that thing is, is working, but not working how you went out to work it. To take the responsibility and land that, and to take that story away from people.

[00:12:30]

And so it reminds me of my early 20s. I was in a band, and the band did okay. We went on tour, we played some big festivals. And when I stopped that band, I remember the band mates' look in their eyes and feeling, oh, okay, uh, we don't get to do this anymore. And it's just a, it's a very similar thing. Are we doing this thing in service of what it could be, and can we achieve it? If not, then we have to, we have to deal with the, the negative feelings of putting that thing down and moving to the next thing.

[00:13:00]

And change is scary, and change is, is especially heartbreaking when moving country, changing roles ... I don't think there's a founder on the planet that really, really knows what they're gonna do next when you shut down this thing that you've built around you, and you build a house around you. How do you leave that house without being scared to leave that front door. When every architrave door, window pane, carpet. You've built all that around you over the past few years, and you have to step out of that house into the scary outdoors again.

Jerry: Hm.

David: It's, uh ... Yeah, it, it's, it's all the emotions. Feel the feels has been a, a, a joke, from, from my partner lately.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: And, uh, it's a damn humbling experience.

Jerry: So, once a coach always a coach. Can I, can I stay with this for a moment?

David: Sure.

[00:14:00]

Jerry: Um, I want to offer a framing that has been helpful for me. Um, and quite honestly, you know, as I was sharing with you before we started a recording, you know, the journey of writing the book was an ass kicker for me.

David: Hm.

Jerry: Um, because I had to, actually, work with my own issues that were arising. Because as I, as, as I say in, in the introduction to the book, I, I could not do something that was not me, that was not authentically me. And so I really relate to, um, your statement that, that change is, change is painful for me.

[00:14:30]

David: Yeah.

Jerry: Um, um, leaving one house and going to another is painful. Um, it ... and, and there's, uh, you know, I have ch-, I have three children, they're all adults now. And I wrote something the other day that, uh, to her friend who was, who was speaking about being in anticipation about her pre-adolescents becoming adults and how cool it would be to have adult children. And I said it is, in fact, cool, but it's, also, bittersweet because what you're watching is their, their, their individuation. And becoming adults means by definition, a separation and change.

[00:15:00]

David: Wow.

[00:15:30]

Jerry: Um, and, you know, I was traveling recently on the solstice with my daughter, and it happened to be the anniversary, the 25th anniversary of my father's passing. And, um, I was thinking about that day as a necessary day of darkness and, and closure, in order for the lightness to come.

David: Hm.

[00:16:00]

Jerry: So, a, a lot of these feelings ... Uh, I'd been with a lot of these feelings recently. And, so I'm gonna offer something that comes from that place, and that is that life for me ... the realization is that life is more like, um, a film than we realize. Film has the proximity of fluidity, but it's, in fact, 24 frames per second. 24 still moments per second. And if we watch our film, trying to catch each 24 fr-, each of those frames, we don't actually enjoy the film.

[00:16:30]



David: Hm.

Jerry: And one way to think about ... of everything that you've been going through, every single transition, every single pos- position, is this one large film called David Ryan's life.

David: Hm.

Jerry: Dude, you're still in the band.

David: Hm.

[00:17:00]

Jerry: You're just playin' different music right now.

David: Hm.

Jerry: And, so, we don't ... the heartbreak ... when, when one song ends and another song begins, there's much less heartbreak there. There's a little bit, especially if it's a good, tangy, juice song. But that song needs to end in order for the next song to begin.

David: Hm.

[00:17:30]

Jerry: And then looking backwards, boy I'm really feeling, feeling my oats as an elder right now. Looking backwards over my life, I think that, that, uh, one of the ways I mitigate the pain of impermanence is to see the permanence, if you will, of the things that I believe to be true about the worlds. Not even my meat bag of my body, 'cause that's not permanent. But of my children, and someday their children. [00:18:00] Of my father, and of my mother, of their parents, of their grandparents. This continuation, and, you know, your friend who- who spoke to you about that moment in time, that brief iteration known as Corilla-

David: Hm.

Jerry: ... that band. He said "Dude, we played some really good music together."

[00:18:30]

David: Hm.

Jerry: And one of the best ways that we can see this is to lift our gaze, and to look at our colleagues, and see what they've done with their lives since we landed the plane safely.

[00:19:00] Um, back in my youth, um, Fred Wilson and I launched this firm, Flatiron Partners. And for a variety of reasons it came to an end. One of those reasons was the fact that my depression was such that I could not continue to raise money,

David: Hm.

Jerry: And I remember at our closing barbecue, and I remember saying to the team that I wanted nothing more, that however long we were together, for them to go forth in their lives and say, that was the best company I ever worked for, however brief it was.

[00:19:30] Years later, last year in fact, I ran across somebody who actually used to work for us at that time, and he's now a very successful publicist and all. And we went for a walk here in Boulder, and he said, Jerry, I remember that moment, and it was, in fact, the best company I ever worked for. And I think that's what we've got. I think that's the gift of those experiences.

David: Hm.

Jerry: I don't know. Does this land at all?

David: Yeah, yeah. That's, that, definitely resonates. And, what I love about that, too, is that it allows something to, to be the experience in it, it's full self, right? Well it has to be a chapter, or your analogy, your-

Jerry: Exactly.

David: ... personal [inaudible 00:20:21]. And it, it makes it, uh ... Any former founder will probably resonate with, with this moment of you think, okay, I delayed too long in shutting that thing down. I let that song play too long. I think endings are always overdrawn out, unless there's miraculous people out there that have the foresight, the strength to do it quicker. I think we definitely ... I definitely fell in the trap of, of keeping this thing running and going, and, and being probably default dead, you know, in that sense of were we 100xing, no.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: [00:21:00] So, then, there's that moment of what next. And I feel grateful that w- with the transitions of things happening in my industry, with the way open source is evolving, it, it feels like I can be in service to, to a story for a little while. But having this conversation with you and that topic you raise, it does also help frame the future, to do the next chapter, and approach a next project, whether it's, um, it's specifically a company or something else. And, know that that is impermanent, know that that has an end.

[00:21:30] I guess, uh, the gratitude I have, having shut something down now, as old as that sounds, is those battle scars are well earned-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: ... and I certainly don't want to make it seem trivial to how, how absolutely heartbreaking at times it is to look at a thing, a team, a customer-

Jerry: Hm.

David: ... base.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: All the people that rely on you and-

Jerry: Hm.

David: ... say how am I gonna tell these people that ...

Jerry: Hm.

David: Hi, I've just let you down, we're pulling the plug.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: That-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: ... that is the hardest. It's the money, it's not even you're own ego. It's-

Jerry: Hm.

David: ... I think for me, it was that sense of disappointment. But that means I can approach the next thing in a sense of (laughs) it's still gonna suck at times and-

[00:22:00] Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: ... I don't even know how I'm gonna get through this book. Like that's-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: ... uh ... I've, I've written hundreds of articles on the long-form journal, but I've never written a book. So, uh, I think I'm gonna be lying on the floor at three a.m., in six months time, thinking-

Jerry: (Laughs)

David: ... how can I edit this.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: That's the power of nonsense, but-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: ... knowing that that experience in itself, that, that book is about the active doing and, and the community that we're getting value from it, and it's gonna sit on some shelves and rot and be a, a link on Amazon, in a few years time, that won't matter, and I'm okay with that. But-

[00:22:30]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: ... it'll, it'll tell the story it needs to tell. And whatever they appreciate from conversations with you is, is framing them. It's being ... having one from Corilla, which we thought would be a forever thing.

Jerry: Hm.

David: We're spinning out to do this thing forever. It was, it was the, the best way to manage knowledge for technical teams on the planet.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: Absolutely.

Jerry: Hm.

David: And then it wasn't.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: And it doesn't matter.

[00:23:00]

Jerry: Well, it did matter.

David: It mattered so much.

Jerry: That's right. So I'm, I'm gonna offer, again, another piece that may be helpful. Um, 'cause I said something before, which is, which I want to bring back here. Which is that the form changes, the form disintegrates.

David: Hm.

[00:23:30]

Jerry: But the values, the meaning, the content remain.

David: Hm.

Jerry: And in one sense you're still playing in the band, and in one sense you're still a story teller, and there are values implicit in all of this. That, um, I suspect will continue to manifest every single chapter of the story that is David Ryan. So, for example, tell me the story of why open source matters to you.

[00:24:00]

David: Cool. I love how you framed that, because there is once a founder, always a founder.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: I could pitch you the, the pitch that landed me. The book, all that. You know, I could tell the story about being in a certain corporation, and a Fortune 500, and the only way we could really solve their problems was sneakily using open source, which we had on a thumb drive and, you know, that, that's a well-rehearsed narrative. And that's true that ... it's true to the point now, I think a parable.

[00:24:30]

The reality is that this, this thing that I gained value from was really a community to come home to. It was a, a group of like-minded people. It was a series of events that seemed random, that, that put me in a place where ... I'd come from a extremely corporate role. And, uh, I won't launch into the well-rehearsed story, but, you know-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: ... coming from immigrant families-

Jerry: Hm.

[00:25:00]

David: ... growing up, working class, knowing what it's like to miss meals, then being in a, a giant corporation, having a, a very good role. Flying around business class, and then realizing everyone around me was not only unhappy, but just a lot of bad people. You know, this is your classic, kind of, someone hits Wall Street and then goes the other direction narrative. But, to, to live that, not just read that. And, then, fast forward a series of events and I find myself working at Red Hat.

Jerry: Hm.

[00:25:30]

David: And the very first day I come in and a random person asked me, you know, "Hey, um, you rode a motor bike to work." I was, like, "Yeah." I was very excited about my new motor bike. Um, and he says, "Well, there's a park downstairs. Hi, I'm, I'm Paul Gampe, I, I run Red Hat in Australia, and, um, yeah, just use my park."

Jerry: Hm.

David: And from that point on, every series of interactions at Red Hat, and open source in general is the case of generosity, and community, and, and anti-status.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: Just, just-

Jerry: Were ...

David: ... getting things done.

Jerry: Uh, e-, a ... Uh, and, and I think back to Bob Young's advice to you. Bob Young who's  
[00:26:00] a legend and, um, many of the folks who are listening to this might be too damn young, to know how-

David: (Laughs)

Jerry: ... [inaudible 00:26:06] Bob Young was and is. But shout out to Bob. Um, Bob Young's advice was to turn to the community wasn't it?

David: Yeah. And I'll admit, Bob will get a laugh out of this when he listens. But, I turned to my team and this, this was your classic, all right, uh, we're in a hard spot. Uh, we  
[00:26:30] want to wind down. Let's speak to Bob because apart from being, you know, cofounder of Red Hat, the first CEO to raise Venture Capital, and Open Source. His list of achievements continues, and still doing business this, to this day, and still building successful companies. Bob's gonna save us. It was one of those hail Mary's, um ...

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: And then his email was succinct, just ask your users. And I turned to the team and I might have cursed a little bit, not at Bob, but at the situation. And then it occurred  
[00:27:00] to me, like, that night once team had gone home, and I was still in the office, he's totally right.

Jerry: Hm.

David: And it's, uh ... you have to unravel the narrative you've just told everybody in the industry. The partners, the competitors, the ... Then a really weird thing happened. Now I should also disclaim that we were a hybrid company. We're part open source and part closed source. This is, kind of, what makes Corilla interesting coming out of Red Hat.

[00:27:30] Um, you know, when I'd speak at events like All Things Open in Raleigh, there'd always be people in the crowd asking me but aren't you a hypocrite? You're part closed source, part open source. But we were, basically, what is now normal, is choosing the tools available, but building a beautiful community around you. And to turn to that community and say, "Hey, um, we don't think we're really in service to you, including our competitors. We just open the doors to everything. It's the most terrifying thing that actually, literally, I have done outside of, you know, some Reboot conversations, and some relationship stuff, and some family stuff. Professionally, to open the doors to everything. Here's our books-

Jerry: Hm.

[00:28:00]

David: ... here's our numbers, here's what we've done, here's the bits where you thought we're better than we were. That, actually, became hilarious once undertaken. The first post was super difficult, and I, I-

Jerry: Hm.

David: ... edited it a 100 times. It's still up on Medium. But when all of our competitors reached out, all of them, and you could filter it quickly. Whose the ones that just want-

Jerry: Hm.

David: ... to snap up your users? Push-

Jerry: Hm.

David: ... them aside.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: Three specific companies have been there from day one, and I've never thought about competitors as enemies, because of something, um, Scoville of all people said, was that-

Jerry: Hm.

[00:28:30]

David: ... you're probably gonna end up being acquired by them, or work with them in the future.

Jerry: Hm.

David: Or vice-versa. You might, you might buy them. Why hate them?

Jerry: Hm.

David: So that was a really interesting thing. And I, actually, went to meet a bunch of them around world 'cause I was, I was traveling as part of this IP, um, IP roadshow. So, basically sell off what we could. Um, and I had an absolute blast, um ...

Jerry: Hm.

David: I'll keep the omni-, uh, anonymity, but, uh, this once company in France, in particular, it's the ... When we met we just thought, man we could be best friends if, if we were, if we were in the same city ... Like, how, how can we, how can you hate a competitor? How do you hate your community?

[00:29:00]

Jerry: Hm.

David: It has to come from respect. Um, but that journey too-

Jerry: Uh ...

David: ... I got ...

Jerry: Uh, uh what, what I'm sensing, David, is, you know, if you think about this transition, as you think about the next chapter, there's a common theme that's here, which is the story of community. The story of belonging you know> I- I- I will al-, oh, often, repeatedly, talk about the fact that our deepest wishes are for love, safety and belonging.

[00:29:30]

David: Hm.

Jerry: And, um ... And what I'm hearing in your story, is a story of a wish for belonging and the story of community, whether it's with ...

David: Yeah.

Jerry: ... with your band mates then, and your band mates now, and the community. And the elder in your open source community Bob saying to you, turn to the community.



David: Hm.

[00:30:00]

Jerry: And whe-, you know, at the risk of provoking another pitch, why isn't open source important?

David: It is community. It is belonging. 100 percent. It is having an impact on the planet and understanding your, your contribution, however small, to this thing that persists outside of a ... one company one brand. It's something that nudges the dial

[00:30:30] forward, and in doing so gains the recognition of your peers, and feels valuable. It ...

Jerry: So Open Source isn't, isn't a technology, it's a philosophy.

David: Absolutely.

Jerry: It's a way of being.

David: It's been very interesting.

Jerry: In a spiritual community, it might be, it, might have found a home in Quakerism.

David: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: Right? I mean, it might have found a home in a Monastic culture.

David: Hm.

[00:31:00]

Jerry: The point is, is, is i- ... and, and, and, and, and, and in a world that seems consumed right now, by the exploitation of attention, by the exploitation of personal data, by the manipulation for political means, for the aggregation and accumulation of power-

David: Hm.

[00:31:30]

Jerry: ... in a hurtful and harmful way. What I'm s-, when I sense is, um, a yearning for belonging that is an activist belonging.

David: Hm.

Jerry: A sense of connectedness. And you keep smiling as I say these words, but do you understand that I'm just reflecting back-

David: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Hm.

Jerry: ... what you are saying to me, it's only from the [crosstalk 00:31:54] ...

David: I'm smiling from recognition.

Jerry: You're smiling-

David: Yeah.

Jerry: ... from recognition.

David: Yeah.

Jerry: Right, right.

[00:32:00]

David: This is ... it's really interesting to have stumbled into that world, and you're absolutely correctly. And it's not a technology. Even watching ... when I was at Red Hat in 2012-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: ... and this is fun. Someone, someone with access to the, the email libraries could probably check on this, check me my list. But I remember being in debates where I was arguing on a, uh, a company-wide email, uh, email list called [Me and my list 00:32:25]. It's quite famous where you can ... jokingly you can call the CEO an idiot and not get fired. It's, like, uh ...

Jerry: Hm.

[00:32:30]

David: It's a kill switch for sanity in the company to do the right thing. I remember just arguing relentlessly that open source wasn't about bearded guys in a basement coding Linux kernels.

Jerry: Hm.

David: It was now about community and just how humans organize themselves.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: I don't want to say the word meritocracy, 'cause in different countries it's, it's taken different meanings. But there's an idea that every contribution is valid and that peers will group around righteousness. It's, it's slightly naive, but, also, quite powerful when you enable it, and the effort it takes to enable it.

[00:33:00] Um, the punch line to that ... I remember thinking, sitting and thinking I need to explore this more. And when I look at the book that Jim Whitehurst, the current CEO of Red Hat ... well, just a fantastic individual, has written on the open organization he articulated all those things that some of us around the company were trying to articulate perfectly as well. It's not technology, it's just this human need.

[00:33:30] And I can probably speak for most of everyone in open source, it's not driven by, by relentless ego, it's usually driven by some, some, feeling that we just didn't connect, you know? I doubt any of us were captains of the football team in open source. And if you are, that's great, but I think a lot of these communities of practice, that get put together, whether it's yoga, or rock climbing, uh, both important parts of my life.

[00:34:00] Uh, I think it comes from a ... that, a weak human awareness that you grow up feeling outcast and alone and, you know, all of us that try to do these crazy things, band, startups. There's an element of ego in that, there's an element of projection, I'm sure. And I think the first two years, or maybe even the first couple of startups for some people, is trying to get over that. And this is, like, where Reboot Circles was invaluable for me where I grew from my peers.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: You know, for those listening that haven't, haven't heard of it yet, it's, uh ... We have a call every two weeks that runs over six months, selected group of peers. And I just remember one day I was so pissed off at some feedback I got from my, my peers. And I, I don't ... I love these individuals. They were so right about something I kept doing.

Jerry: Hm.

[00:34:30] David: It annoyed me so much to hear it. I can vividly remember after that call. I was in Galvanize in San Francisco, before we'd taken offices. It was a co-working space and I looked around and, uh, I felt like the shame of being pegged perfectly by someone. I got up and I walked around the block. (laughs) I walked around-

Jerry: Huh.

David: ... the LinkedIn Building, and around [Somar 00:34:47]-

Jerry: Hm.

David: ... and I came back.

Jerry: Hm.

David: And I was, I was alm- ... I was pissed off, I was ashamed, I was frustrated.

Jerry: Hm.

David: [00:35:00] But the feedback pretty much pegged ... it was just simply that, that I wasn't being in service of, of working with the shadow as [Rupert 00:35:00] would say. Getting through my-

Jerry: Hm.

David: ... own shit to have a better company.

Jerry: Yeah.

David: I was making' company decisions based on fear and ego.

Jerry: Hm.

David: Um, hard, hard lesson, um-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: ... to get through. But, things that helped me fall back on it again was the community. Once I realized they're right, they're right, I need to fix this.

Jerry: Hm.

David: I just reaching out to part of our community and said, you know, what ... here's the thing where we haven't been doing for the right reasons. Would you like to be a part of us doing it better?

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: And, um, easy to say. Actually, easy to type and hit enter-

[00:35:30]

Jerry: ( Laughs)

David: ... on that section, or on that email, but very hard to sit with and, um-

Jerry: Yeah.

David: ... and that's a, that's a long, long journey.

Jerry: Hm. So as a, as a kind of elder in the Reboot community, um, I want you to be easy on yourself. I want you to be gentle. You're allowed to be human. Even as you hold yourself aspirationally to working, and looking at working on these issues and looking in the mirror, you can, you can be gentle with yourself. Because being harsh with yourself is yet another expression of that inner critic-

[00:36:00]

David: Hm.

Jerry: ... right? And, so, we want to go a little easy.

David: Hm.

[00:36:30]

Jerry: And then I want to reflect back. Um, how powerfully moving is your story of community? Is your wish for belonging? Is your wish to overcome feeling outcast? Cast out. That's what outcast means.

David: Hm.

Jerry: Actively cast out. You do not belong, and it is unsafe in the dark wood, outside the cave where the tribe is.

David: Hm.

[00:37:00]

Jerry: And, so, the story of your transitions, the stories of each chapter have, have some permanent themes. One of which is the wish for love, safety, and belonging, as manifested in community.

David: Hm.

[00:37:30]

Jerry: That, my friend, you can hold onto. That's an anchor. And you can live into the expression of that again, and again, and again.

You know, a long time ago, one of my Buddhist teachers, [inaudible 00:37:40] Pema Chodron chastised me for, uh, positioning myself as a, sort of, well I'm just a student in the back of the classroom. And, and she, and she said in her way, bullshit. Stop playing that game. That's just your ego talking.

David: Hm.

[00:38:00]

Jerry: Your karma is to somehow combine leadership, and dharma, and all of this in some unique expressions that you, that are you. Well your karma, my friend, has something to do with the story of community. I'm not a 100 percent sure, but I

[00:38:30] think you know what I'm talking about. It's that passion that comes up when you speak about open source. Not as the tech-, technology, but as the philosophy. As a way to bring in the outcast. There's a way to make the world safe.

[00:39:00] And, you know, the, the really ... if, if you think p-, transitions are painful, if you think is impermanence is painful, take in the fact that the work you're setting yourself to do is, perhaps, amongst the most painful, which is to weigh ... help make the world safe for outcasts and misfits.

David: Hm.

Jerry:  
[00:39:30] Because the world ... we will always advance the cause and it, the world will always slip backwards. But we still get up every day, and we do it again. Just like we get up every day, and we try to create a great company for people to work at. A company where outcasts can thrive.

David: Hm.

Jerry: Where the, the island of misfit toys is the norm.

David: I like that.

[00:40:00] Jerry: Yeah. I don't know the ways in which your life will iterate, and change, and transition, but I can't wait to read the next chapter.

David: (Laughs)

Jerry: You know, this, this is a really powerful story.

David: Thanks. Um, I like your framing of that.

Jerry: Well, it comes from that place of elderhood. It comes from the place of having steeped in my own heartbreak.

[00:40:30] David: Hm. Yeah, we could talk a whole other hour sometime about the realizations of, of time scale, of ... Uh, I turned 38 not too long ago and-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: ... what a gift it is sometimes to, to have a little bit of gray hair, uh, a few projects under your belt. It, it just ... Every cliché of steadying the, the [keel 00:40:50] is slowing down. You know, aiming more truer, being more resilient, I think that comes with age, just amazing. No disrespect to, to anyone under the age of 30-

Jerry: Hm.

[00:41:00]

David: ... listening. But, um, oh boy, those gray hairs, uh, every single one of them I, I cherish, actually and think there's a story behind every single one of these.

Jerry: Well I ... as, as the older of the two of us, I will tell you that, um, I think you are, are holding the right attitude going into this time period. Um, this is a difficult time period. Those ages between say 35 and 55, are, are, are ripening. It's, uh, it's the emergence of second adulthood. It's the, it's that time period when we slough off that which got us out of adolescence and into chronological adulthood. But now we get to start to take on the true meaning of adulthood.

[00:41:30]

[00:42:00] And, and, uh, um, the term midlife crisis doesn't do it justice, because it, it, it doesn't really respect and honor the transition that's going on there. Um, and I will tell you that it was a painful period for me. An incredibly painful period for me. It was the period in which I walked away from being a VC-

David: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: ... but walked into the rest of my life. And, um, I will tell you looking backwards, having just turned 55, um, it was a gift.

[00:42:30]

David: Hm.

Jerry: Um, and now I feel more settled and more in my seat, if you will, then I have ever felt in my life.

David: That's amazing. [crosstalk 00:42:44]

Jerry: [crosstalk 00:42:45] I, I, I think that's what you have to look forward to.

David: It's interesting how you say that. It reminds me of your comment before about, essentially the, the virtues you learn, or that you gather around you doing, whether it's a book, a band, or a startup. In this context let's focus on startups.

[00:43:00]

[00:43:30] Bein' a little bit older, and I don't know if this is the same feeling if I would be 28 moving onto my second thing. But, I know I'm building another company. And what we didn't touch on is, like, a lot of founders coming out, you have that feeling of what next? That you can always get engineers jobs, especially in the Bay area, but, but anyway. You know, we had a global team. But when you're a founder, when you're a products building founder, whose stepped out of techs, um, technical background and I'm, I'm a product guy.

Jerry: Hm.

David: Uh, the ... I have thought, you know, it's, it's just the wastelands, the deserts. You've ... Everyone else is feeding, then I'll walk off, uh ... Uh, I'm on the ose flow, the ice flow peddling off into the Antarctic to, to go-

Jerry: Hm.

David: ... die in the snow somewhere. But, um, like a lot as I, I did, I did get tempted for something. I did take a role. Um, you know, when you become a product leader for a company and, and there's one with quite a big names around it, and very well funded.

[00:44:00]

But, your comment about virtues and ethics is ... that's something I had to pull the pin on and realize in myself that, at this age, and with the journey I've had, and it's not that. You build up a reputation, but you build up, um, a community and a sense of what's right. And it was a hard, hard thing to say, "Oh I jumped too early after." That was a ... I said yes too quickly for, for status, for money, for whatever. But, it's more important to me to be in service of those virtues because when I'm 60, 70, 80, it won't matter that I was chief product officer for somewhere.

[00:44:30]

Jerry: Hm. Yeah.

David: It'll matter that those lessons I learned the hard way from whether it's someone on Reboot Circle telling me some feedback that they want to hear. Or my team members telling me this or that.

Jerry: Hm.

David: Every one of those mistakes, every gray hair, every battle scar is something that I've earned.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: But it's very hard just for the sake of money, safety, status, and those aren't the things that you say. It's the sense of belonging, the health, the, the being loved. So-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:45:00]

David: ... that, that, that is something that is a reoccurring theme and I think I take away from our conversations is, as long as it feels right, and it's, it's right forward, right action, right virtue-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: ... right livelihood.



Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: Those aren't just things coming from a mysterious country on a scroll. It's all antagonism. Even in tech and startup culture. Like even in an accelerator, we know if that growth factor is just a growth factor. If that's not something that's gonna provide value long-term it's ... the same applies to our life. And it's funny we learn more for our startups than we do for ourselves as humans and leaders at times.

[00:45:30]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). The, uh ... I'm smiling because I love the way you slipped in the eight-fold path, uh-

David: [inaudible 00:45:40]

Jerry: ... is the fourth noble truth there. That, that's what the, the references to write was. And, yeah, um, we learn more for our startups than we do for ourselves. Well, what I would pull back and pan out a little bit, and zoom out and, and take a wider view a little bit and say, um, the opportunity in all of our journeys is to grow, to, to use those challenges in our startups, to grow ourselves as human beings.

[00:46:00]

David: Hm.

Jerry: Um, you know, a central message of that book, uh, of my book coming out is that better humans make better leaders. And since we spend so much energy worrying about this thing called our startup, why not use it to grow? Why not use it to confront that feedback that we get from peers? To, to work with the issues that arise. To, um to, to really look deeply into our past, into our structured way of thinking, and to really extract out of it the common operating system principles that we hold. One of which, uh, for you is, uh, the primacy of community, and meeting the needs of the outcasts. Um, that is an operating system dictum. That, that is a, a principle by which you can live your life. And you can navigate all of these transitions.

[00:47:00]

David: And then it just occurs to me as you say that, I'm in total agreement. And it's interesting how the different principles that come to you in different roles. The things that you gravitate towards and then overlap.

Jerry: Hm.

David: As a designer I love Ray and Charles Eames, and their quote of building the best, for the most, for the least.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: That's, then, doing the best work for the most people, for the less price of pretention.

Jerry: Hm.

[00:48:30]

David: Uh, that's always amazed me with their story in terms of we're not ... Some people want to build the, the Mercedes.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: Um, and some just want to build the next best thing for everyone.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: Build a Mercedes for everyone-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: ... and be [inaudible 00:48:47], And I think that overlaps nicely. And it's, like, a lesson to take for this into community is what ... and this is why I'm working on the book. Or when I got asked to do it, and it actually terrified me the first time because it's just a running conversation I have and a private mailing list I have in, in-

[00:49:00]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: ... the community to help myself constantly or convey this evolution of, of ourselves.

Jerry: Hm.

David: As you say the best product of a startup is yourself as a leader?

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: Or, or I guess that reminds me of the [inaudible 00:49:15]. The number one product, the CEO has his, their own psychology.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: Uh, that's what led me to Reboot personally.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: And then, to think that, that's what I was thinking when I, when someone pointed out. You just keep talking about this topic and you're from this organization originally and your investor was the one that made it. And, you, you're just in this, this nexus and you have to write about this. It wasn't a do you want to? It was so

[00:49:30]

many people telling me I had to. Or that, that ... not just opportunity, but almost a service to a community.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: But, if I was 100 percent [doc 00:49:51] train, open source, pure blood, old school, that doesn't have the nuance of, of an organization that said we're gonna leave the safety of this nest and, and do what a lot of open source people hate. I have to be honest this ... I didn't realize there's so much animosity between, you know, the punk rocker open source and the Venture Capital world.

[00:50:00]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: So we were, we were, kind of, sell-outs in a way. We were a hybrid. But that hybrid journey is the feature of its community and I think, um, I would be doing a disservice to what we've gone through as a team, and a disservice to our community not to, to voice that-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: ... to capture that. But, uh, as Krista said to you, "It does kick you in the pants to, to write a book". It is, uh, it's a humbling and a, a heart opening experience even to write other people's stories.

[00:50:30]

Jerry: Yeah. Well, uh, may your heart be open and stay open, um, in that process. David, I want to thank you for coming on the show and having such a kick-ass conversation. Um, it was really a delight getting to know you and hearing your story, and I know that folks are really gonna enjoy this conversation.

[00:51:00]

David: Thank you so much, uh, for the conversation Jer.

Jerry: Thank you my friend, be well.

David: You too, bye.