

Jerry: Good morning, Sara. Good morning, Mathias. Uh, it's great to see you both and as a, you know, it's just weird to see the two of you simultaneously 'cause I've known you both from different angles and I'm just excited about that. Thank you for coming on the show. And let's take a minute and, uh, why don't you guys introduce yourselves. Sara, why don't you start us off.

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Sara Hicks: So, so Jerry, thanks so much for, for having us. It's so lovely to, to be here with you. So I'm Sara Hicks. I'm the co-founder and CEO of Reaction Commerce. Reaction is an open source in real time commerce engine for retailers and for developers. I'm based in Los Angeles and we're a globally distributed team. I think we're currently on four different continents and eight different time zones, which is probably a good lead into my business partner and CTO Mathias, who's based in Berlin.

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Mathias: Oh, now you already did the introduction for me.

Jerry: (laughs).

Sara Hicks: (laughs).

Mathias: No, I'm, I'm, I'm Mathias, a CTO at Reaction. Uh, I live in Berlin and in Germany. Um, I have, uh, in a former life, I was a COO and one of the co-founders of Travis CI, a company that originated here in Berlin as well.

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Jerry: And, uh, how did, I me- I ... well, before we go into the how, tell me, tell me just sort of briefly what would be helpful to talk through today.

Sara Hicks: So Mathias, I'll, I'll start and in obviously jump in, but, uh, so Mathias and I are about, I think nine months into our business partnership, uh, and we're wondering questions or answers to questions like what is us. Uh, we've come into this relationship, uh, eager to not repeat previous patterns. So we have previous challenges with co-founder relationships. So we've both entered in eager but also maybe even hesitant-

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Jerry: Hmm.

Sara Hicks: ... uh, and maybe a little bruised and a little scar tissue. And so we're, you know, we know that we carry our history with us and we're trying to figure out how do we, um, you know, do our best to, to not repeat some of those patterns and establish a good blueprint for this business partnership. And we wonder about roles and what does it mean to be CEO and CTO. And what does it mean to be boss versus manager and-

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Jerry: Hmm.

Sara Hicks: ... um, you know, some, some deep topics and we want to do this in a way that's uh, really values, you know, our, our history, our cultures. We're nine times zones apart, uh, work from different countries and, uh, so we're, we're at that stage where we're wanna, wanna put in place some sort of operating agreement for how we communicate and how we give each other feedback.

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Jerry: Hmm. That's wonderful. Um, Mathias, would you add anything or alter anything?

Mathias: Uh, no. I think Sara and I, we've, we've, we've talked through this, uh, often, often enough that she caught it very well.

Jerry: Yeah. Yeah. Well, before we dive in on that, why don't you tell me a little bit more about how you met? I actually don't know the story and I, I'm really dying to know this.

Mathias: Well, maybe I'll start with that one.

Jerry: Yeah.

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Mathias: Um, so I, I left my company, uh, working for a former company and about, you know, beginning, beginning of last year, 2018. Um, and, you know, I started ... well, it took, took a little bit of time off to recover and then started looking for, well, what I could do, I was, you know, doing a little bit of coaching and also mentoring specifically engineering managers and, you know, other people, people in CTO roles. Um, and I still got interested in the work basically, you know, helping others figure out things about the organization, help me figure out that I'm also interested in doing that.

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Jerry: Mm-hmm.

Mathias: Um, and so after a while, as you know, I zeroed in on what I, what I'm, what I'm looking for and started putting out a request, you know, like an outline of here's what I value, here's what's important to me. Here's what I'm looking for here is, you know, here are my values basi- here's what I'm, you know, what I'm thinking about,

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here's what I write. Um, and one of the, amongst the 50, 50 companies that I had contact with in that, uh, in that process, you know, one email came from Sara. Um, and I would say that her email, I was actually looking at it just earlier this week, was started on a very different tone or on a very different level. Let me put it like that where I, you know, she, she told me, she, she talked about what Reaction

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Commerce, it's an ... what they're doing and she also talked about, you know, being, uh, you know, have you been to a reboot boot camp-

Jerry: Hmm.

Mathias: ... and you know, being in a reboot circle and, um, that, something, something about that appealed to me because I've, you know, I've been, I've been an avid Reboot follower for a long time. Um, and there was basically, there was a signal to me that, you know, this is, uh, this could be an opportunity to, to not just find a job, but, you know, find a different kind of relationship, if you will. Um, and so we started talking. And so I think our first conversations were also, uh, you know, a lot more, uh, around, you know, relationship building, about, you know, trying to understand each other, trying to understand how we think, what we value. Um, and we also started, you know, with, uh, with chickens. Even our very, very first meeting, uh, we started with the traffic light and we kept, you know, we kept on going with that pattern I think until today. Um-

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Jerry: Well, I'm, I'm going to circle back to a bunch of things and, and really I really appreciate that.

Jerry: So what was it, Mathias, about the, Sara's note to you? Not so much about reboot, although it's, it's wonderful to hear that uh, were th- were there, but what, what did, what did you, what story did you tell yourself? What did you hear in her sharing of that?

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Mathias: Um, I think the things, the things I was hearing, they were, you know, here's someone who wants to build a different kind of companies, maybe a humane place to work and who focuses, who puts a lot of effort and focus on no building relationships and you know, finding people who, you know, share, share values. Um, and I think in the early stages it wasn't really, it didn't really occur to me that this is a, you know, potential business partnership.

Jerry: Mm-hmm.

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Mathias: Um, uh, I didn't know that that's actually what I was looking for, which I only figured out later.

Jerry: Mm-hmm.

Mathias: Um, but yeah, at that point it was the relationship piece because, you know, previous relationships have been challenging. Um, I, I was looking for a place where, you know, maybe that's, I think safe is the right word. That's safe where you can have open and frank conversations with someone. And this, you know, Sara's emails seemed to be well promising in that regard. And so I think this proved quickly in the conversations that we've had falling.

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Jerry: Mm. Sara, do you recall the email?

Sara Hicks: Oh, I do. Yeah, I recall the morning that I sent it. I, um, you know, it was, I, I happened to see that, um, Mathias had posted a tweet. It was early in the morning, local time. And um, I've been a, I called it yesterday. I've been a fan of Mathias' for some time. I call it the Mathias Admiration Society-

Jerry: Mm-hmm.

Sara Hicks: ... um, which I'm learning is a pretty big society.

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Jerry: Uh, count me as one.

Sara Hicks: Yeah, me, I'm in it, uh, and I just happened to see it and I, I knew it would generate quite a bit of interest and I, uh, also knew that he and I valued a lot of similar things in terms of culture and companies and minimum vacations and personal check-ins. And so I dropped everything. It was early in the morning and wrote a short but tried to be heartfelt, just connect with him on reboot and minimum vacations and coaching and open source. You know, I knew that that was also a connection.

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[00:10:00] Um, and as Mathias said, I think, you know, from there our very first video call was personal check-ins and I also felt a sense of urgency. I didn't know how many companies he was talking to you, but I knew it was probably significant. So I purposely, and maybe more so than I do with other folks I'm trying to recruit, I was more intentional. I put, I created a doc pretty early on, maybe after our first or second conversation and I outlined the different scenarios and it was, you know, it was like throwing something over that made me felt a little too soon in a little too risky. But it was, uh, it really helps give us, uh, a guiding kind of thing, something to focus on. And we ended up establishing an interim CTO for two months and moved it to full time CTO in the end of the summer last year.

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Jerry: It's a, it's a wonderful story. And I want to reflect back, um, a phrase that you just use, Sara, which was, um, "A little too soon, perhaps a little too soon, a little too risky."

Sara Hicks: Yeah.

Jerry: And there's this kind of, uh, sweet vulnerability in, uh, putting yourself out there in that way.

Sara Hicks: Yeah. It felt, it felt awkward to, I mean, in that document I already proposed salary options. I talked about equity and things that, you know, normally happen a little later after a little bit more kind of back and forth. And, but I, I was just in my heart and gut kind of what felt right and ultimately I think it was a really helpful, um, thing for us to focus on. And we didn't, you know, we didn't have to question too much. And now I'm thinking, why don't we, why don't I do that all the time? (laughs).

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Jerry: (laughs). We'll get there. We'll get there, because I think implicit in that may actual-implicit in this exploration of the, uh, uh, w- what is us, and I'm going to start calling it the story of us.

Sara Hicks: Hmm.

Jerry: Right? Implicit in this may in fact be not just a blueprint for the two of you, but a blueprint for how to be. Because, Mathias, what I also heard is that you in effect put the values of who you are out there. Perhaps a little too soon, a little too risky.
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Mathias: Perhaps.

Jerry: You know, and put that in the, let's call it the pragmatic practical bucket that we often use when we are thinking about taking a new position. That's, that's a thing.
[00:12:30] But I'm curious, you got this note, Sara extended herself and then perhaps at a follow up time or, or can comment with that in the Google doc she sort of opened up. How was that? What was that like hearing that and, and, and encountering that?

Mathias: I think that document at first was surprising given everything that was outlined in there.

Jerry: Hmm.

Mathias: Um, but I think, you know, I, I talked about transparency before and I think this was another piece where, you know, a, you know, like I, we, we talked about, you know, we've, we use, we call it putting, you know, Sara putting herself out there to me, it was just, you know, another sign of, hey, we can really be transparent and open. And I think back in the day we also use the word candid with each other.
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Jerry: Mm-hmm.

Mathias: Um, and so that just, it's, it reaffirmed, you know, what I've, what I've, uh, what I've felt or what I've understood in the, from, from the email that you originally sent.

Jerry: Hmm.

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Mathias: It was a, you know, the transparency, it wasn't just a, a one off so to speak. It was, you know, it was, it was a thing that we could, you know, build a relationship on. And that's ultimately drew me to Reaction.

Jerry: Hmm. So is it fair to say, and I'll, I'll reframe this a little bit, you let me know if this feels like it fits. What drew you to reaction was Sara being real.

Mathias: Yes. That's a good way to put it. Yes.

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Jerry: And so Sara, just let that one land because it's a little too soon in a little too risky to be real, isn't it? At least that's the way we're socialized.

Sara Hicks: Right, yeah. It's scary, but-

Jerry: It's really scary.

Sara Hicks: Yeah. And at that time I'm, you know, the, the CEO, sole kind of executive, I'm putting, you know, feeling pretty lonely. Uh, so yeah, it's, it's-

Jerry: Yeah.

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Sara Hicks: It feels great to hear that it's, you know, and Mathias and I have talked about this. This is what separated Reaction from the 49 other companies that were, um, you know, in, in pursuit. Um, and it, it's so clear that, that we've bonded and built pretty special relationship that's already on a different level. And I think we both understand that the relationship is more important than the roles and responsibilities. Um-

Jerry: Could you say that one more time.

Sara Hicks: I-

Jerry: That relationships are ...

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Sara Hicks: I, I think we, I think we have this understanding that the relationship is just as important, if not more important than the roles and responsibilities. Even though the real roles and responsibilities and the expectations in here and then those are very important. And that's what we're like, okay, what does, what does it mean to be CEO and CTO really?

Jerry: Right.

Sara Hicks: And what's, what's appropriate for giving feedback. And I'm, I'm the CEO, so there's inherent structure and hierarchy there. And, but I also want feedback and, and, um, help and a partnership. And so we're navigating all of that. And, it's an, uh, it's lovely and it's also a little scary and a little awkward in a, um, you know, there's, you know, it's-

Jerry: Well, they, they-

Sara Hicks: ... uncharted territory sometimes.

Jerry: I'm, I'm going to go out on a limb and maybe, maybe imagine if you will, and you again, you always correct me, either one of you, if this, if this doesn't feel right. But
[00:16:00] I'm imagining that in that openness, in that vulnerability, in that desire to craft a different way in the relationship, there's an ambiguity that can occur. There's a, there's ... and that, that therefore can create a sense of uncertainty and perhaps even some fear. Um, and if those, do those words land properly or land with you guys?

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Sara Hicks: They, they, they do with me. I actually think the word ambiguity is something we're I'm questioning right now is, um, you know, we've, we're, we're very iterative, experimental and we're early stage, so things are changing and transforming. Um, but I think there's now ambiguity in terms of, um, you know, roles and expectations and, and communication styles that now we need to maybe sharpen a little bit.

Jerry: Hmm. Mm-hmm. Does that, uh, does that word, uh, work for you, Mathias?

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Mathias: Uh, it does. I mean, Sara mentioned, you know, hesitation before. And I think the uncertainty, hesitation is a, is a result from, you know, the, the uncertainty or the ambiguity.

Jerry: Yeah.

Mathias: And, which could also lead to fear.

Jerry: Yeah.

Mathias: The fear of, you know, where's this going? Where are we going, right? You know, [crosstalk 00:17:21].

Jerry: Why doesn't she tell me what she wanted, right? And 'cause it c- it could actually, that fear can quickly turn into an aggression.

Mathias: Hmm.

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Jerry: And what I'm hearing is, based on your histories, I'm imagining that there was a, there, that you're coming into this relationship with a commitment to do things differently, to seek something different and to be different in the relationship. So I want to just pause and celebrate and honor, um, the bravery implicit in stepping into, someone used the word before, I think perhaps it was you, Sara, the intentionality, the intention of crafting this relationship. Because, and let's honor something else. This traditional command and control hierarchical, linear, transactional way of being has its place, because it rises as a result of the fear of the ambiguity and uncertainty.
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Sara Hicks: Hmm.

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Jerry: Most people are not sociopathic. Most people do not want to wallow in power over, but we often go to a traditional, uh, form of interpersonal dialogue and interpersonal relationship because it's scary to do otherwise. And Sara, you know, you noted that you've been in an a reboot circle now I guess for two years or so since the bootcamp you came. And, uh, I think that the experience in the, in the circle is to, to, there is no hierarchy.

Sara Hicks: Yeah.

Jerry: There's a relating. It's, it's, it's how to relate and you smile and laugh and I know a little bit of your journey during that time, you know, and Mathias, you, you know, you noted that you've been coaching and you've been coached and so that there's a, there's a way of being in that relating, right? It's somewhat mentoring, but it's also not necessarily mentoring. It's meeting someone as they are. And what I'm hearing is this, uh, really interesting wish to, to, to bring that more formally and to work with the ambiguity that arises from this and the uncertainty. Is that right?

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Sara Hicks: Absolutely. Yeah. I think that's spot on.

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Jerry: So I'm gonna keep using this, um, title 'cause it, 'cause it really feels right the st- in the story of us that is the two of you, um, there's some spaciousness and e- and expansiveness. There's some ability, I think, Mathias, you used this term, a, a humane part of their relationship and a wish for humanity in the relating and perhaps even extending into the company. And you're noting that actually there's a new requirement that comes about 'cause uh, uh, I'm imagining you don't want the traditional command and control. Sara's the boss. Here's your job description. Here are your OKRs here's your KPIs, please report in every 30 days. Give me a 30, 60, 90 day plan, blah. Right? You're both laughing and smiling because that is not the two of you.

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Mathias: I'm laughing because there was a plan like that and you know, the, and the basic level these things exist. But I think they've, they've come about on a different level. You do not on a, uh, on a command and control level, but rather, you know what, you know, what can we do in the, in, in there you know, to, to help the company grow, to help the company scale, you know, that's where they were coming from.

Jerry: Right. And so w- w- and that makes me smile because what I hear you realizing is that you're taking from those traditional structures, the values that they have, but not being bound and, and, and, and straight jacketed by those structures. I'm a-

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Mathias: Yeah.

Jerry: And so I'm going to suggest that, that, uh, what you set yourself to the task of doing is actually quite difficult. Um, and, uh, really quite worth it.

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Sara Hicks: Hmm. We sense that. We do sense that. Yeah.

Mathias: Yeah, we do.

Jerry: And, and, and the number one skill to focus on is communications.

Sara Hicks: Hmm.

Jerry: And what I'm hearing is there's a wish to design consciously, even further, more exquisite communications. Um, and I know you've had some conversations and we've used the term blueprint, um, and we've used the term operating agreements and operating manuals and all. Um, so let's talk about the rough spots because I think that that can reveal stuff now. Where does this beautiful relationship run into challenge and who went into the red just now?

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Sara Hicks: (laughs).

Mathias: (laughs). No, I, so, I mean the, we, Sara and I, we, we already had a conversation around this, uh, very recently. And so I can, I can speak from my, from my experience. I think you, you know what you said earlier, uncertainty and fear, I think those words, you know, they, they hit home.

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Jerry: Mm-hmm.

Mathias: Um, they, they, they, they were onto something. I think for me recently, it's been, you know, I've been wondering like, am I, am I doing the right thing? Am I, you know, or also what, you know, what expectations does Sara have of me? Or, uh, can I give Sara f- any kind of feedback, you know, and how, how, how should I give that feedback? So all of this is, you know, all it's all comes back to communication as you said, but all of the, all those are questions that have been going through my head-

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Jerry: Hmm.

Mathias: ... where I was like, um, just a, I think I boiled it down to the question of, you know, what do we need from each other? Because, and my coach pointed out, you know, like, what, well, what if, you know, you ask yourself all these questions and what if, you know, Sara asked her herself the same?

Jerry: Mm.

Mathias: So this is, uh, this question has been going through my head for, well, just about a week now.

Jerry: Mm-hmm.

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Mathias: And so that's, that's my, my angle. You know, expectations or what is, what is okay for us to work on, what do we work on, what do we each individually work on?

Jerry: Mm-hmm.

Mathias: And then, you know, how do we give each other feedback, guidance, uh, set expectations or also say, I just can't deal with this right now. You know, because that space also should exist.

Jerry: Okay. So I love the coaching that you've gotten and I want to take it in a slightly different way. And Sara, I'm going to ask you to allow me to just speak directly with Mathias and then we'll pull it back in. So can you go back Mathias, to some of those questions for a moment? What are Sara's expectations of me? Can I- say those questions aloud and just sort of tune into yourself as you're seeing those questions?

Mathias: What is, what is Sara's expectations of me? What kind of feedback is she open to? What expectations does she have for me? What guidance can I ask her for?

Jerry: Okay, so hold right there. How does it feel inside when you say those words? 'Cause even though you know that there's a c- podcast, we're recording and Sara's right here and all this stuff, what feelings are you having?

Mathias: It still feels tense.

Jerry: Yeah.

Mathias: It feels like these are, you know, these are questions that, um, that are uncomfortable to ask and that I, I'm hesitant to ask.

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Jerry: Okay. So let's hang out there for a moment. Okay. And one of the most important, uh, things to understand. Um, you know, I have a book coming out in a couple of months and, and there's a chapter in there called The Immense Sky of The Irrational Other. Immense Sky of The Irrational Other, and I talk about, I use the story of my relationship with my mother as an archetype for understanding the relationship with the other person who is always irrational. And the phrase immense sky comes from the real [inaudible 00:26:02] in which he talks about how difficult it is to be in relationship with someone else and how our wishes to see them as whole, W-H-O-L-E, against an immense sky. Just this expansiveness. And the challenge is to

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be able to see that other person with a, with an expansiveness. And the work is actually internal.

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Mathias: Hmm.

Jerry: Because the Jujitsu move is always, I feel tense, what do I need from the other person? Now when it gets really aggressive, it becomes like this, I feel tense, you're not making me feel better. We all know that move, and you're both smiling because you both have PTSD. I'm exaggerating. You both have trauma from past relationships, right? That ended with a lot of finger pointing.

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Mathias: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: Right? But there's a wonderful gift implicit in being in relationship with the other. It's a wonderful, painful, difficult gift. An implicit to, to understanding that gift requires understanding this Buddhist teaching, which goes simply like this, "Be grateful to everyone, including those who press our buttons for they show us where we are stuck." So the tension, what are Sara's expectations? Watch this. Mathias, what if you get the expectations wrong? Notice the story that you tell yourself.

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Mathias: Mm-hmm. I don't know what's going to happen then. Like I-

Jerry: I don't know what's going to happen.

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Mathias: Yeah. And that means the worst could happen or something terrible could happen or-

Jerry: Yes. Yes. Yes. And has b- have bad things happen as a result in your past, have bad things happened as a result of you not knowing, not being able to properly anticipate?

Mathias: I will say yes, they have.

Jerry: Right. It doesn't have to be directly related-

Mathias: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

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Jerry: ... right? To learn an old pattern. Sara has been to bootcamp, so you know the roots of a loyal soldier. We've talked about loyal soldiers before, which is this structure that gets embedded in us is the belief system as a wish to protect ourselves. And the loyal soldier might be saying something like this Mathias. You better know what she wants. 'Cause if you get that wrong, you're going to end up, maybe she won't

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hurt you, but you're going to end up miserable again. And you know how painful that is.

Mathias: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: And so I want to understand what's going on. Or even worse, this feels like a really great relationship, but what if it's not? What if I've been fooled? Now, this may be a projection on my part, but you hear how it starts to go. So we're going to unpack a little bit of that side of it. Okay. What's, what is it like for you? So what story do you tell yourself, Mathias, when you don't know what it is you need from each other? What happens if you never have the answers to those questions? Fill in the blanks.

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Mathias: There are so many blanks.

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Jerry: Mm.

Mathias: Um, um, I think we're maybe, maybe if I, you know, step back a couple more weeks. I think the, uh, the, the story goes into, you know, and probably even darker direction. It's like, I, it's the question of what am I doing here or am I the right person for this role or am I, you know, the- am I in the right place? Am I, I'm also a foreigner, so to speaking German, you know, in the, in the company. But that is, you know, looking back it feels like it's, it's just part of the story.

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Jerry: Mm-hmm.

Mathias: It just all felt like, you know, the, it accu- I accumulated stories over stories and that's where the many blanks came from. And I'd shared some of these with Sara when, you know, when the last one I was at the office. But um, it, it took me a while to recover from that. From, from those, from those projections or from those stories.

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Jerry: Yeah.

Mathias: You know, actually find a footing again and say, hey, what, what's, and have my coach basically pull on me. It's like, what's, what's happening?

Jerry: Yeah.

Mathias: What are you really, you know, what, what, what, what do you want to do instead?

Jerry: Yeah. The, the, the, the, um, one of the things I often say is that we're, it, it, it can be helpful to understand that so much of what we seek boils down to love, safety and belonging. And if any or all of those are threatened, we will go into this kind of red alert state that I'm hearing behind some of the questions. Now, what's, what I'm, what I'm appreciating is that you're being met and we're going to turn to Sara in a second to hear more from her. But if we, if I could ask you to name if, if, if

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those phrases feel right, love, safety and belonging, which of those or which combination might be implicitly threatened by having gotten these things wrong if you do get them wrong? You're in the wrong place. You're at the wrong company. You chose the wrong one of the 50 companies.

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Mathias: I think belonging is p- is probably the one that, you know, strikes me most and-

Jerry: Yeah, yeah. I heard that in the, I'm a foreigner.

Mathias: Yeah.

Jerry: Yeah. Yeah. I'm an other, I'm over here. I'm a remote worker sitting in my apartment, right? So just hang out there for a moment. We're not going to rush to make it go away and fix it.

Mathias: Hmm.

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Jerry: That wouldn't be Reboot. Um, so Sara, hearing all of this, what, what, what arises for you? What, what, what comes up for you?

Sara Hicks: So many things. Um, I was, I was listening to this really appreciating that um, Mathias and I have talked about all of, all of this. So there was nothing here that surprised me, which is really, um, a testament to what we've already been able to build. We've talked about um, how he is feeling in terms of being relevant or not feeling relevant or how can he be, um, efficient given the time zones and the um, you know, the, the limited overlap we have just in terms of, of hours in our days.

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And um, I found myself already looking forward to real listening to this. Um, 'cause there was so much, um, so much in there that I think is you were really tapped into, um, and me wanting ... then there was also a part of me that was like, hmm, like a little bit of maybe imposter syndrome too. Like, wow, if I knew ... if I could do my job better, maybe he would know his, I, he'd have his expectations lined out and um, he, you know, I-

Jerry: Right. So stay with that. What story did you tell yourself?

Sara Hicks: Right. I- I mean, I literally was thinking and have thought multiple times like, what this, you know, I should be able to give him more guidance or help more-

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Jerry: "I should be able to."

Sara Hicks: Right, right. And that voice was in my head through, through, you know, some of this and-

Jerry: Right.

Sara Hicks: ... um, you know, that like, if I, yeah, I think it's partly, you know, some imposture syndrome or, or just not feeling, uh, feeling alone in this role and, um, wanting so bad. It's partly why I think we've, we've talked about this being a partnership, like, let's, let's figure it out together. But then there's that inherent structure that, um, goes with these titles. Uh ...

[00:35:00]

Jerry: What does the inherent structure imply in the story that you tell yourself? Finish this sentence for me, Sara. "I should be able to ..."

[00:35:30]

Sara Hicks: Uh, yeah. I mean, I, I should be able to craft clear roles and responsibilities and expectations and, uh, agreements and, and feedback systems. And now I'm saying that, uh, those are complicated things. Uh-

Jerry: And do you hear the wish to fix it all behind all that.

Sara Hicks: Yeah. Um, I'm a fixer for sure. I do. I, I want to like get in there and default to action and it's uncomfortable for sure.

[00:36:00]

Jerry: It's uncomfortable to be in the space where it's not fixed, where you're hearing his experience, which by the way, I did not hear a single accusation.

Sara Hicks: Yeah. Me neither.

Jerry: Or even the demand for change.

Sara Hicks: Yeah.

Jerry: But I want to put some context on this. One of the, remember the s- the context setting, uh, observation I made was that this is hard and it's going to require a higher degree of exquisite communications and self awareness. And so what I'm really en- eh, um, encouraging is to not get lost in, yet, in the action oriented fixes, but to hang out with the un- with the uncomfortable, in the uncomfortable spot of actually feeling what was going on. And Sara, I'm going to reflect back when you were sharing the story of the origin story. You spoke about feeling alone and then you spoke about no longer feeling alone when you had Mathias. Then you felt alone again. Just hearing his experience. Does that resonate?

[00:36:30]

[00:37:00]

Sara Hicks: Yeah, absolutely. I was just thinking of the, it's still a little awkward. It's still a little scary. Uh, and it's still, you know, a little bit lonely and I'm just-

Jerry: Yeah, yeah.

[00:37:30]

Sara Hicks:

... recognizing that, that even with, you know, with Mathias here and the foundation we've built, it's still a little awkward. Still a little scary and-

Jerry: Yeah. Yeah.

Sara Hicks: Um ...

Jerry: So, but it's scary. And so let's honor your bravery on the part of both of you. Not, not just to talk to me, but to actually be with the feelings and to allow me to hold you in that place of those feelings because they're not done being cooked. They're not done being processed. And I know that they're not being done process because they keep coming back, because the wishes for the standardized blueprint to, to figure out how, so we don't have those feelings anymore. Okay? So hang out-

[00:38:00]

Mathias: [crosstalk 00:38:17].

Jerry: Go ahead, Mathias.

Mathias: I caught you.

Sara Hicks: (laughs).

Jerry: Well, it's, it's a very human phenomenon. It's uncomfortable. And so we draw- we pull away from it. Right? But there's just as the author, just like the author teaches us where we are stuck, those experiences, if we approached them as opportunities for practice, opportunities to be worked on, give us the opportunity to then craft the answers that we're actually looking for, which is in this moment of uncertainty, ambiguity and fear and all the story making that I go through. Your coach Mathias gave you a question, what do we need from each other in that moment? Oftentimes all we need is to be heard.

[00:38:30]

[00:39:00]

Mathias: Hmm.

Jerry: All we need is a little air taken out of that story. I'm telling myself, because the story that Mathias tells himself is that he doesn't belong. And the story that Sara tells herself is she's not as good as she, as everybody thinks she is. And if Mathias finds out, what's going to happen, Sara?

[00:39:30]

Sara Hicks: He's going to go to one of these 49 other country- c- companies that are out there.

Jerry: And I'll, and I'll be alone again.

Sara Hicks: I'll be alone, yeah.

Jerry: Again.

Sara Hicks: Yeah.

Jerry: Right? The threat to belonging is so powerful.

Mathias: Mm.

[00:40:00]

Jerry: And in the story of us, it is the two of you, there's the mutual wish for belonging. Oh, this is the person, this is my partner. See, now what we're doing is we're identifying the thing that bridges the two of you. How you both relate to the fear of not belonging, maybe a little different, but you have the same fear. Because if I don't belong anywhere, Mathias, where am I?

[00:40:30]

Mathias: I'm alone.

Jerry: Yeah. Yeah. And part of what human beings want, even if they crave solitude as I do occasionally, they don't want to be alone.

Mathias: Hmm.

[00:41:00]

Jerry: So in building a blueprint, in building a conscious set of agreements for the two of you, we won't be able to walk through every step, which is what the wish is.

Mathias: Hmm.

Jerry: Tell me what questions that we know and so that we can have the agreement so that we can place that thought.

Sara Hicks: You mean the checklist (laughs).

[00:41:30]

Jerry: Yeah. You want the checklist, you know. I'm going to give you the most important tool. And that is to disrupt, to identify that you're telling a story, even when you're making the question, uh, the questions. Brené Brown does this very well in her work. The story I'm telling myself is that I'm gonna- and usually it's gonna end up with a threat to love, safety or belonging.

Mathias: Hmm.

Jerry: So Sara, when Mathias is not really sure what you meant in that email, he's not really sure what you meant, right? His wish for more clarity may be a wish to not get it wrong. And Sara or Mathias, when Sara is, um, perhaps looking for structure that, that may feel awkward in some pints or, or whatever it is that triggers it, she may be wishing and not fail and be found out as not being as good as people think she is.

[00:42:30]

Mathias: Hmm.

Jerry: And a really, really powerful tool, uh, might be to say, what's the story you're telling yourself right now? Rather than giving into solving the question. When you do that personal check in when you do that, whether it's red, yellow, green, or whether it's just that moment where like you're coming into the conversation. And, um, it's not an accusatory, it's not an, a license to accuse the other person. It's an invitation for someone to look inward and say, this is what I'm bringing into that relationship. Because in order to see the other as not a rational and against an immense sky, we need to understand that there's always a rationale behind their behavior. And it's usually love, safety or belonging. It's usually a wish for love, safety, or belonging. The challenge is that their behavior can trigger us and our behavior can trigger them. And so the trick is to really interrupt that pattern and go back to sort of the previously agreed upon structures. Does this resonate?

[00:44:00]

Sara Hicks: Yeah, it, it does very, very much so. And I've been thinking a lot about the question, you know, how do we regularly, regularly connect with purpose? And I think that question really, you know, what is the story I'm telling myself, uh, is, is helpful. I'm giving that framework of stopping and pausing, um, with so many uncertainty and so much, you know, just the company itself and ambiguity within what we're trying to do here. But how do we- Mathias and I regularly and purposefully connect, um, and find- and car- and carve out that time and space.

[00:44:30]

Jerry: Yeah. Yeah. You know, it's um, operating agreement exercises, um, things like, uh, it's w- w- where we, where we seek to answer the same questions such as, you know, when I'm angry, I need, or the best way to approach me is, um, or when I'm feeling overwhelmed and stressed by too much email, the best thing to do is not to send me more email. Right? I mean all s- just simple little tools. Those are really, really helpful.

[00:45:00]

Mathias: Hmm.

Jerry: But they're most effective against a framework of being able to check right back in and strengthen what is going on inside of you. Because here's the thing, you know, a core message of everything that we do at the company and everything I do in the, in the, corpsman, the book is called *Reboot Leadership and the Art of Growing Up*. Why? Because I fundamentally believe that leadership challenges give us the opportunity to complete our process-

[00:45:30]

Mathias: Hmm.

Jerry: ... to become the full catastrophe adults that we were born to be.

Mathias: (laughs).

[00:46:00]

Jerry: ... to like grow up

Sara Hicks: (laughs). I love that.

Jerry: And what's wonderful about consciously committed, intentional relationship is that is like gasoline on the fire of the leadership journey. And so what I'm seeing is not just the commitment to each other for a more humane workplace, but perhaps a commitment to each other to work with each other, to be each others allies-

Mathias: Hmm.

[00:46:30]

Jerry: ... compadres in your own individual development process. Does that feel resonant?

Mathias: I, Yes. I, I this, this for probably the last five minutes, I had to think back. I remember we talked about structure and all that and CTO versus CEO. And it's like, for me, like I've been in Sara's seat, you know.

Jerry: Yes.

Mathias: I've, I've been, I've, I understand what the, what is like to be in the seat. Uh, and it's this, this, this, you know, kind of bond of, you know, me being in this similar spot of as you call, as you put it of growing up, uh, which I think is a good one. It's like, we, you know, we sh- we share, we share that experience in a way that, you know, I think adds, adds to the relationship. But maybe it's something that's just, you know, gotten a little bit lost in that we, you know, we, uh, you know, that we can use
[00:47:30] basically to, to, to bring work to continue working on the relationship and the partnership.

Jerry: That's right.

Mathias: That's what's been going through my head for a while, for a couple of minutes now.

Jerry: I mean, there, there is this I, this is funny little image I just had in my head of the two of you, even across nine time zones, even across, you know, the video screen, to be able to look each other in the eye and go, oh, okay, are we together? Yep. We're together. Right? And so you have your pile of work, Mathias, you have your pile of work, Sara. Right? But the bridge is that empathetic connection. So implicit in what Mathias said is, I have been in your seat and I know those feelings. And so then you look across screen, you look each other in the eye, you give each other a high sign, I'm with you, shoulder to shoulder, not standing behind, not standing in front. Sara, easy on the I am the CEO, I therefore must have all the answers.
[00:48:00] Mathias, easy on the, I'm an engineer and so I need to be able to plot this all out to a logical conclusion. I'm teasing you, but you know.
[00:48:30]

Sara Hicks: (laughs).

Mathias: No, no, you're right, you're right.

Jerry: Right? Right? And just easy, easy, easy. And you look each other in the eye and you're together. Okay? Now, I'm going to give you a mutual challenge that will bind you together. We started off this conversation by really asking the question is what is us? And we explore the story of us. And even though you weren't co-founders in the technical sense, there is something magical that's being created here. And Sara, your head is nodding, you're like, "Oh yeah, there's a feeling here." So here's the deeper challenge. Built a company to which you each want to belong. Work on this relationship in this way so that everyone else can model, can, can see it modeled in front of them. For what does it mean to have colleagues, compadres, allies, good friends who hold each other to the fierce commitment of growing up?

[00:49:00]

[00:49:30]

Then Reaction becomes not just another successful company, yay. But becomes the means by which not just the two of you grow up, but everybody grows up. And in 10 years time, the diaspora of X company employees who go off and found new companies recreate the whole experience all over again and isn't that glorious?

[00:50:00]

Mathias: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: Talk about purpose. How do you feel about that mission guys?

Mathias: That's a pretty good picture.

[00:50:30]

Sara Hicks: Yeah. Sign me up. It's a, that's what I'm here for and I think that's really what we, we connected on early. You know that, I love the term compadres. I love the side by side, looking at each other's eyes. Mathias- I was in San Francisco this week and Mathias and I were texting back and forth and just a simple, I was going into some important meetings and just a simple, you got this was-

Jerry: Yes.

Sara Hicks: ... exactly what I needed at that time. And I was venting about something and he was like, "You can vent to me any anytime, always here for you." I was just like, that's all I needed."

[00:51:00]

Jerry: Mm- hmm. Mm-hmm. I am proud of the two of you. And, and I want you to hold that image of shoulder to shoulder. Not ... yeah, sometimes back to back, but back to back is, is against the world. But shoulder to shoulder.

[00:51:30]

Jerry: And just imagine that the entire company stands shoulder to shoulder in one big circle. That's a powerful, powerful company. That's a company that people want to work for. That's a comp- that's a company that gives a sense of belonging and safety and dare we say love. I wanna thank you both for some really powerful

[00:52:00] questions and, and a really important, um, discussion around building this kind of relationship. Would you like to say anything on as, as we start to wrap, Mathias?

Mathias:
[00:52:30] I'm, I'm just thinking that this was just such a, a powerful stepping stone towards well what comes next basically, which I think maybe even Sara and I both have hoped it would be or um-

Jerry: Hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sara Hicks: Yeah, I think the timing of this couldn't have, have come at a more important time for our journey and um, yeah, there's a, I was just thinking of, this might be corny, but I'll, I'll say it. There was a-

Jerry: Corny is good (laughs).

[00:53:00]
Sara Hicks: (laughs). There's a line in a song that I've always loved, which is, uh, "Only the curious have something to find." And um, I know that in, in this journey with you, Jerry and with Mathias and, uh, that we were, we're looking to find a deep, soulful relationship and that's gonna be hard and it's going to be exciting and we want to do it together and then broaden that to the company and to our global community.

[00:53:30] And that's, it's exciting.

Jerry: That is exciting. And, and as soon as you said that global community, all of a sudden I felt like my body relaxed because it's not just you all, and it's not even just the employees. It's actually the implicit, beautiful commitment to open source.

Sara Hicks: Right.

Mathias: Hmm.

Jerry: Which is, we're all in this together. We're all compadres.

Sara Hicks: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:54:00]
Jerry: And that extending that net of belonging as wide as possible, I mean that, that, that sounds beautiful. I, you know, I want to thank you both for the, for the willingness to, to be risky and to take this first step together in public in this way. It's, um, I know that you both have helped other people, um, in the process as well. So thank you for coming on.

Sara Hicks: Thank you.

Mathias: Thank you for having us sir.

