

Jerry: Steve, it's good to meet you.

Steve: Yeah, same here, Jerry, thanks for having me on.

Jerry: Yeah. Um, I like to have my guests introduce themselves so that this way I cannot, uh, make the mistake of mispronouncing your name.

Steve: (Laughs).

Jerry: So, um, why don't you take a moment, just tell us who you are.

Steve: Yeah, well, um, I believe it's pronounced Steve [Farber 00:00:27]. I've been
[00:00:30] pronouncing it that way for 61 years.

Steve: I have been in the field of, you know, what we generically call leadership development in some form or another for 30 years.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:01:00]

Steve: And you know, I started as an entrepreneur in, you know, in, in my early days, a young entrepreneur. I, um, I started out, actually I started out as a musician.

Jerry: I see the guitar over your shoulder. It was [crosstalk 00:01:10].

Steve: Yeah, I've been playing since I was 13 years old. Um, so, but I started everything pretty young, including starting a family.

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: And you know, I discovered early on in my mid twenties to be specific that, um, being a musician and, uh, what do you call it, uh, feeding people-

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: ... Were mutually exclusive.

[00:01:30]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: So I gave up music and I went into business and I went into business because I had to make money. It wasn't, it wasn't driven by any particular love or passion other than I had to feed people.

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: And I had a friend who was in the commodities futures business who gave me a shot and I knew nothing about it. And within a couple of years I had my own small brokerage firm.

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: [00:02:00] So that's where I discovered I was an entrepreneur. And I also discovered that, uh, I love business. And I also discovered that even though I love business, I hated that business.

Jerry: Uh-Huh (affirmative).

Steve: [00:02:30] And it's an odd place to be when you hate your own business. So I, uh, and the reason I hated it was, um, I just had a moral dilemma with the nature of the beast because it was very speculative investment. And I got tired of seeing people lose money and we would make our money regardless on commissions and Whatnot. But, uh, I had just got a problem with that and I got out and, and I started to do this kind of work, um, by working for other people and, and working with other people's bodies of work. So I've had phenomenal mentors over the years. Uh, I was vice president of Tom Peter's company at one point.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: [00:03:00] Um, Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, uh, are significant mentors of mine, authors of The Leadership Challenge. And I just started on this, this journey in 1988 and 1989 and they've been added ever since. I've got, uh, three kids and three step-kids. Okay. So I, I have a, a dubious achievement as a parent-

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: -in that I raised, uh, teenagers for 25 straight years.

Jerry: Hmm. And, and, and, and, and your hair remains relatively not gray.

Steve: Yeah. That's 'cause I color it. (Laughs).

Jerry: Oh okay, (laughs).

Steve: [00:03:30] Otherwise, it's gray man, it's really gray. Gray down to the core.

Jerry: And so I appreciate that intro that it's incredibly powerful to actually hear a bit of folks origin stories. And, and, uh, there's a lot that I wanna follow up on, but I wanted, I wanted to set the context that part of the reason that, uh, I'm excited to have you on the show, not just to get to know you in this deeper way, but also because I've got in front of me a copy of your book, uh, titled "Love is Just Damn Good Business."

[00:04:00]

Steve: Yeah, thank you.

Jerry:

And, um, as folks who know the show know that I would resonate with a book called "Love is Just Damn Good Business." Um, in fact, I remember as I was preparing for this conversation, I was, I was thinking back to an episode of, uh, the podcast that we did a couple of years back, uh, where I was in conversation with two very, very close friends of mine, Brad Feld and Fred Wilson, both venture capitalists with whom I started my journey. And the title of that episode is What's Love Got to Do With It. Um, because back then what we were talking about was in effect love in the board room and the fact that, uh, that love has got a shit ton to do with it.

[00:04:30]

[00:05:00]

But I'm getting ahead of myself. I wanted to just sort of dive into some of the core concepts behind your book because it really resonates with me and I'm gonna acknowledge that I want to hear more about being a musician. I wanna hear more about life in and the business that you hated. Because I think it's actually all related.

Steve:

Oh, no question. No question.

Jerry:

Yeah. Yeah. So let's, let's start with the premise around the book and, and let me, uh, I'm going to read to you a little bit of your own words.

[00:05:30]

Steve:

Really. Okay. That's cool.

Jerry:

Yeah. So "I believe real leaders approach the act of leadership the way you would approach an extreme sport like ice climbing, snowboarding on a half pipe or cliff diving. These are scary things that some people choose to do. They aren't forced to do it. There's just something about it they love, they embrace the fearful moments that come with meaningful leadership. What I like to call OS exclamation point Ms, or Oh shit moments. Oh shit moments. Leadership is also scary when done well and it's always something you must chew." So tell me about that and tell me about putting love into action.

[00:06:00]

[00:06:30]

Steve:

Sure. Um, leadership, uh, is one of those words that we all use. Uh, we all agree is important.

Jerry:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve:

Um, and yet we don't really give a whole lot of thought to what it means or looks like. So we tend to throw the word around very loosely. We use it as a label or a title. We slap it on ourselves, we slap it on other people. We say, you made this position, particular position, you started a company, you have achieved X, you know, status-

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:07:00]

Steve: -and now you are a leader. And we all know that leadership ... I mean, I would hope that we all know that fundamentally leadership has nothing to do with your position or title. It's about how you engage and it's about your ability to influence people and have an impact on the world around you regardless of your position or title.

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: That's not to say that with position or title there doesn't come the expectation of leadership, but the practice of leadership doesn't automatically come with the territory. Right? That's why people have to hire folks like you and folks like me because we need-

[00:07:30]

Jerry: Thank goodness, right? 'Cause it gives us a business. I know (Laughs).

Steve: It keeps us in business. It's like health care, people were disease-free. Um, so, so there's, what I'm trying to say there is we can all make that choice, but just understand that the choice to lead is intrinsically scary because leadership is about the act of transformation on some level or another. And that by its nature is a scary thing. So the OSM, the Oh shit moment is, is a positive thing. It's in the right context. It means that we're doing something. It means that we're engaging.

[00:08:00]

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: It means that we're striving to change our piece of the world for the better or the world capital T, capital W for the better. Um, so love is, I like to think of it as love is the motivation. It's the impetus that gets us to step up, to take a stand, to stick our necks out, to attempt, uh, to really change things. The experience of putting that into action is the OSM. It's, it's scary. This isn't about hearts and flowers and, and you know, we wave a magic wand and suddenly everybody's in love with everything and everyone and, and, uh, becomes like a, you know, like a psychedelic, uh, you know, flower laden trip.

[00:08:30]

[00:09:00] Uh, it's, it's fraught with ah, with risk and this fraught with, uh, with fear. Uh, and all of that is good because that's all part of the human experience. It's all, it's really about what it is we're trying to accomplish and why. So if I love the cause, if I love the people I'm working with, if I love the, the folks I'm doing this for, in other words, my clients and customers, uh, and shareholders, um, then that makes the, the OSM is, that makes the fear of ... that makes the challenge worthwhile.

Jerry: Hmm. So that's What Love Has Got To Do With It.

Steve: [00:09:30] It's a big part of it. Is that the core of this thing? You know, it's really interesting, um, as, as business guys-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: You know, we're talking business guy to business guy, let's just put it that way.

Jerry: Some, some with more gray than others.

Steve: That's right. The same amount of gray or visible gray.

Jerry: (Laughs).

Steve: Um, I'm a business guy so I don't use the word love lightly.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: [00:10:00] Um, and what I've seen, you know, when you talk about, uh, you know, in your experience, you know, What's Love Got To Do With It, in, in the board room and in businesses been asking this question for a long time. I'm not the first one to ask this question. I'm not the first one to shine the spotlight on it, but here's what I've noticed. Uh, and tell me if you've seen the same thing. I'm curious. Um, I'm, I'm really not trying to convince anybody of this, my objective for writing this book and having these kinds of conversations is not to, um, let's say if we speak in, in, you know, uh, psychology, technical psychology terms, it's not to convert the assholes, right?

Jerry: [00:10:30] Right.

Steve: Um, I'm in the, I'm in the, in the confirmation business, not the convincing business. 78. So what I've seen is when I shine the spotlight on this and challenge people to think about it, most of the time people will say, "You know what, I've, I've known that. I've always felt that way. I thought there was something wrong with me."

Jerry: Right? Or I was afraid to say it out loud.

Steve: [00:11:00] I was afraid and I was afraid to say it out loud because people would think I'm crazy because that's not the way you're quote unquote supposed to do it in business.

Jerry: Right.

Steve: So I have a theory, I can't prove this theory is completely anecdotal, but from what I can tell, I'm gonna say, I'll go on a limb here and say most people-

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: -already know that love is just damn good business.

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: The problem is that most people, I think that most people don't believe that.

[00:11:30]

Jerry: Right. Right.

Steve: So it stays silent, it stays hidden in the corners until you shine a spotlight on it. And then, and then it emboldens people to do step up and act a little more fully on it. I mean, what's wrong? What is, what could possibly be wrong with creating a culture, or an environment in a business that people love working in?

Jerry: I think that there's nothing wrong with it and I completely agree with you. Uh, in my
[00:12:00] experience, a lot of this, um, misunderstanding, which leads to an apprehension stems from childhood. It stems from a belief system that all feelings are unacceptable.

Steve: Hmm.

[00:12:30]

Jerry: And that, uh, to be socialized as male means, if I'm gonna talk about love, it's gonna be talking about weakness.

Steve: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: If we may, we may elevate the word passion.

Steve: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: That's kind of acceptable, sort of it's borderline, but we're certainly not going to talk about love because if we talk about love, we might actually have to talk about hate.

Steve: Yeah.

Jerry: And we don't want to talk about that. And we might also have to talk about things like uncertainty and fear.

Steve: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:13:00]

Jerry: And we don't wanna talk about those things. And so all of a sudden we grow up with this, this, this, um, self-reinforcing phenomena where it's not okay to address these things. All right? It's not okay to build organizational structures that actually promulgate a sense of love.

Steve: Yeah.

Jerry: You know, in, in my parlance, which, you know, listeners are used to me saying, I believe that we're wired as children to seek love, safety and belonging, which are all attributes of love. And um, and so we end up creating organization structures that where love is unacceptable, where it's totally unsafe and nobody feels like they belong. And then we wonder why people aren't passionate about their work or engaged in the company.

[00:13:30]

Steve: Yeah. I think, I think there's a lot to that. I also think that there's something about the context of business that magnifies all of that.

Jerry: Yeah.

Steve: Because even though, you know, and some of the said generational of course, but, but in, you know, when we're growing up in ... it, it was probably more prevalent in more families that you didn't, you know, there's love. The love word wasn't even used very much. Or particularly if you're, if you're a man that's not, you don't show your emotions. I don't think that's quite as prevalent today as it was then.

[00:14:00]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: And ... but even people that grew up in that generation are doing pretty good for the ... I know I'm overgeneralizing of course. But even if we're good at, at getting better at that and coming from an acknowledging and encouraging emotions, et cetera, in our families and with our friends, and we go to work and we apply a different, a different set of criteria to it, that then, in other words, we acknowledge, we want love in every aspect of our lives. We want to love our kids. We want them to love us. We don't love our spouse. We want him or her to love us. We want to love our friends or them to love us. And then we'd go to work and it no longer applies.

[00:14:30]

[00:15:00]

Jerry: Right.

Steve: It's, it's insanity.

Jerry: Right. I, I, I, I-

Steve: I think quite literally it is insane.

Jerry: I agree. And I think one, one of the things that, that we encountered that I encounter as a coach oftentimes is the, the, the result of that in which, um, people are struggling with depression. They're struggling with anxiety. They're, they're, they're struggling, leave aside mental health challenges. They're struggling with, you know, toxic work environments. They're, they're struggling with a lack of creativity, lack of innovation, a lack of trust. Right? And, uh, and yet there's this,

[00:15:30]

[00:16:00] this, this, um, kind of splitting that occurs where you're told that, that who you are as a human being should not actually be brought forth in that workplace. Because if it were to be, be brought forth, it somehow triggers all these, these perceptions about what's acceptable and what's not acceptable. And then we sit there and we wonder, well, why is trust such a problem in our organizations? Well, because you're not making it safe for people to say what's actually going on.

Steve: Exactly. Exactly. Um, so which is, which is kind of interesting, uh, the, the, the contradiction that we set up for ourselves.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:16:30] Steve: Because there are certain things that we can all agree as business people, as human beings in the context of business. We all agree that we want, we want trust, right? I mean, Stephen M.R Covey wrote the Speed of Trust. Great book, great you know, uh, a great examination of what we already know is true. That, you know, teams that, that have a higher level of trust perform better. We know this. We know we want engagement. That's why we do all these enga- engagement surveys. Uh, we know what we want. There's no argument about that. But when we start to delve into what that really means and what it would take, and then we start into this, this neighborhood of, well, it's really about love.

[00:17:00]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: It's about love of the business. It's about love of the people that you work with. It's about love of the clients that you're serving, it's about-

Jerry: Love of the work?

Steve: Of the values that you stand for, love of the work that you're doing, love of the technology that you're involved in. When we s ... that, that's what it takes to engender all those other things that we're already measuring and say that we want.

[00:17:30] I think that, that's where people get, get, can get a little bit squeamish. But again, again, not, not as much as one would think you'd be su ... maybe you wouldn't be surprised, but a lot of people would be surprised at how little eye rolling I get when I talk about this subject 'cause I do a lot of keynote, right?

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: So I've been, I had been teaching this idea, sharing this idea with the most hardcore of hardcore business people in corporate environments for 20 years. Really.

[00:18:00]

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: Uh, and, and I get very little resistance and I, and I think that's not to say it, don't get initial resistance sometimes.

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: I'm in, there are going to be people that just hearing the word, their initial impulse to say I was gonna be a bunch of California touchy feely [who ha 00:18:15] crack, right? And I can say that cause I live in California.

Jerry: That's all right. And you can definitely say [who ha 00:18:20]?

Steve: (Laughs) And I can actually say who ha. Nobody's gonna kick me out of here for saying who ha.

Jerry: No.

[00:18:30]

Steve: And then how often do you really get a chance to say who ha, if you think about it.? So it's a ... but if you just do a little business analysis on it, a lot of that evaporates. And here's, so here's the way I like to lay it out. And this is why the title of the book is not just "Love is Damn Good," it's "Love Is Just Damn Good Business" because this is about business.

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: And business, you don't have a business without results.

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:19:00]

Steve: And we measure those results from everything, you know, to market share, to profitability, to et cetera, et cetera. Right? So the, the implication there is that this is gonna impact your results. So the way I like to think about it is this, we get as business people, so whether you're a startup entrepreneur, entrepreneur or you're in a, you know, working for a, a mature corporation, whatever, our competitive advantage comes from, our customers are clients loving what we do for them.

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:19:30]

Steve: Because anything short of that, uh, does not, um, does not assure, um, loyalty, uh, or continued business, word of mouth, right? It's when they love us, that they talk about us when they love us, that they buy more. Uh, th ... we know this. I mean, this is nothing new-

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: [00:20:00] Right? I mean, we should all know by now the customer satisfaction. If we, if we think we're doing okay, when our customer says they're satisfied with us, then we're delusional because there's, there's no correlation between satisfaction and repeat business, et cetera, et cetera. We've known this for forever. I mean, Xerox did studies on this years ago. Um, so let's start with that. We want our customers to love us. So then the question becomes, how do we make that happen in a meaningful and sustainable way over time?

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: And I would suggest that really the way to do that is to create a culture that people love working in.

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:20:30]
Steve: If I can't stand this place, what kind of likelihood do I have turning around and taking care of my customer in a way that they're gonna love. And by taking care of, I don't necessarily mean just front line, you know, like a retail store-

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: But you know, everything in terms of, you know, product development and innovation and, and, and, um, you know, customer service, uh, uh, policies, procedures, all of that. Is there a reflection of the people doing the work.

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:21:00]
Steve: So we want to create an environment that people love working in. And of course, that's our best retention strategy, recruitment strategy, and everything else. And if we back it up one more step, I can't do that. I can't create that kind of culture in a, in a real way as a leader. Well, I can't contribute to that kind of culture as a leader or anybody as part of that culture, unless I love it myself first.

[00:21:30] So it all becomes very personal very quickly. But it starts with let's, let's start with the customer and back it off from there. So when I, when I positioned it that way-

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: And I believe that is an accurate way of, of saying it, um, I get very little resistance to the idea. What, what's challenging of course is, is putting it into practice.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: Uh, cause it, it, it conjures up all kinds of stereotypes about what love should look like. You know, it's like, why are you saying that, that, you know, if I love, if I love

people in my company that, that, uh, they can get away with anything and [inaudible 00:22:00] you know.

[00:22:00]

Jerry: Okay, yeah, there's one that, uh, that I run into all the time. I, if you say that I should love that, love should be in my company. How's wall street gonna react to that? Or does that mean I shouldn't fire people? Or does that mean, you know, and so what's your response to that? I have mine. But what are your responses to that?

Steve: Well Wall Street is going to react to your results, obviously.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:22:30]

Steve: That's to your numbers. Um, and I can love you and fire you. 'Cause listen, I, I, there's a number of things, it gets complex, but there's a number of things that I have to love. First of all, as if this is my company, I have a fiduciary responsibility, right? So I need to love this business. I need to love the people that invested in this business.

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: Ideally, it doesn't mean that I'd want to hang out with him, but I can, I can love, I should definitely love that they entrusted me with their funding.
[00:23:00]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: Right. And I need to love my team. So what happens when those things are at odds with each other?

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: Well, if, if you're not doing your job or if you're ill suited for your job, uh, and there's a, there's a real issue with you, the individual that works for me, I can, I can love you enough to tell you this ain't working out. We'll see you later.

[00:23:30]

Jerry: Uh, your, your, your statement reminds me of something a client once said to me that she had to fire an employee. She set up in front of the entire team and she said, "I love chocolate and I love olive oil, but I don't love chocolate and olive oil together." This person who's been fired is olive oil and we're chocolate.

Steve: Yeah.

Jerry: Olive oil is great, but it doesn't belong with chocolate.

Steve: Right. Yeah. It's, uh-

Jerry: I love that line.

[00:24:00]

Steve: Yeah. No, it's, it's, uh, it's, it is beautifully said and, and it can be done with kindness. Uh, no matter what, no matter how difficult it is. So here's, again, this is kind of the, um, the collective, um, idea that we bought into-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: That somehow love means, um, lower standards.

Jerry: Yes.

[00:24:30]

Steve: And nothing could be further from the truth. Love means higher standards. If it's really, if I really love this, if I really love you for example, and you work for me and, and you're not living up to your potential, you're not following through on, on what you said you would do, your whatever the, the HR-

Jerry: [crosstalk 00:24:47]

Steve: -you know, issue might be. If I really love you, I'm not going to let you get away with that.

Jerry: Right.

Steve: Because I believe in you. And so I'm gonna give you every chance that I can. And if it's, if it's, you know, chocolate and olive oil, then, you know, go, go, go though-

[00:25:00]

Jerry: [crosstalk 00:25:02].

Steve: -in search of go though in search of a nice baguette. (Laughs).

Jerry: (Laughs).

Steve: You know, so, uh, it's, it's not, I, I think we, we wanna, we want to take that word and turn it into some, you know, two dimensional thing. And this is, this is fundamentally human as it gets. It's just complicated.

Jerry: Uh, it's complicated and it's highly energizing.

Steve: Very energizing. Yeah.

[00:25:30]

Jerry: You know, um, uh, the image I had was a, uh, piece of advice, I think I'm, I'm gonna internalize which is that, um, here's a high standard, you know, one of the folks has

[00:26:00] been on the show is Patty McCord, uh, who wrote the, the culture deck for Netflix and, and was Head of People and then wrote a beautiful book called *Powerful*. And one of the things she said was that, um, Netflix early on internalize the belief system that they should be a great place to have worked, meaning to have from meaning that when people inevitably go off into the world, they look that others hire them and say, "Wow, you worked at Netflix, you must know something." So I'll build on that and build on that and connect it back to, to what you were saying, I'm imagining it might be a wonderful aspiration to hold on to where people have been fired from your company and they say, " But boy did they do right by me?"

Steve: Yeah.

Jerry: And I don't mean by, by the check that they got on their way out, but they held me to high standards. They gave me the things that I needed to succeed and when I failed, they treated me with dignity on my way out.

Steve: Yeah. And that is love.

Jerry: And that is love.

[00:27:00] Steve: Yeah. So, so you should, you know, this, this whole, I love that notion and of, uh, you know, you'll be better for having worked here, which is very different from we're gonna give you a job for life.

Jerry: Yes.

Steve: Uh, and this started to, I mean, I first started noticing it, I noticed the first time that it emerged-

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: -but the first time I remember it emerging was in the early nineties.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: This was actually during my tenure at the Tom Peter's company. And you had Apple saying, uh, "We don't promise you a job for life, but we promise you that you will be more marketable by having worked here."

[00:27:30]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: And Tom Peters, you know, one of my mentors, uh, he was fond of saying, "You shall be known by your alumni."

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: And yeah, that's, that's part of, part of your legacy. Of course, he came out of McKinsey. So, um, sometimes people get fired, sometimes they leave and sometimes they leave and then come back.

Jerry: Yes.

[00:28:00]

Steve: Uh, that boomerang sort of effect. You know, it's like, I'm, I'm ready to go spread my wings. I want to, I want to try somewhere else and, and they leave and get a nice sendoff. No bridges are burned.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: Uh, you know, we wish you the best in your endeavors. We wish you wouldn't leave but you because you're leaving and we're gonna support you, send you off with that love and kindness. And then a year later, "Um, can I come home though?" (Laughs).

Jerry: (Laughs).

Steve: And that's a wonderful thing.

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:28:30]

Steve: Because the whether they're coming back with a fresh perspective-

Jerry: Right.

Steve: a greater appreciation of what we have

Jerry: And they've grown.

Steve: and the more knowledge and experience that they, that they learned somewhere else and it's great instead of that petty kind of, "Well, you know, your, you said you would stay and now you're leaving and how dare you?" And just we're, we're all on our own journeys and the, the better we can support that in each other. It comes home to roost in a, in a positive sense of the, of the phrase.

[00:29:00]

Jerry: I hear you. So I want to take you back in time a little bit. Um, I did not write it completely, but there was something that you said, um, about hating the place that you worked. Tell me about that.

Steve: It what was worse than that. It was worse than that. I didn't hate the place I worked. I hated my own company. That's, that is so much worse. Um, and so, you know, looking back and this was, so I'm 61 years old. I, that was when I was like 28,

[00:29:30]

maybe 27, 28. Um, so it was really in my formative years as a, as a business person, as a human being, but also as a, as a human being in business. And I loved so much about it though. So I really loved, I loved my team.

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:30:00]

Steve: I loved the excitement. I love the challenge. I love the idea of it, of being my own boss and being an entrepreneur. I had big vision, I had, you know, audacious goals way before we even used that term.

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: I had, I had all of that, but I, but fundamentally I was, I was miserable and I was making myself sick.

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: Um, I, and I was trying to support a family and you know, so if you, if you tack on, you know, all the things that, that start up entrepreneurs, uh, have to deal with, like for example, making payroll.

[00:30:30]

Jerry: Right.

Steve: If I hate this business, then the challenge of making payroll, I mean, obviously I wanna pay people, I, they, they depend on me for their paycheck. But my own energy reservoir was, was deeply depleted-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:31:00]

Steve: -beyond empty, uh, if such a thing as possible. So for me, uh, there were a series of circumstances that made it really obvious that it was time for me to get out. And one of those circumstances was my partner in the business who was the financial side of the equation, uh, bailed, just bailed on me.

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: So the last time I talked to him, he said, I'm sending you a wire for \$25,000 to pay for renovations. We just did an, an expanded office. That was the last time I talked to him. (Laughs). The money, never, never came and he disappeared. He lived on, he wasn't local. He lived, you know, on the East coast, and I was in the Midwest at the time.

[00:31:30]

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: And you know, I kind of looked at that and said, "Maybe somebody's trying to tell me something here." And I got out.

Jerry: What, what was it that, that the "somebody" was trying to tell you? What, what, what do you think that was?

Steve: Uh, that I was, I was completely going down the wrong path in my life.

Jerry: Yeah.

[00:32:00]

Steve: It was not, I was not suited for that industry. Um, I didn't take it as I wasn't suited for business or for being an entrepreneur, but that industry was killing me.

Jerry: Yeah.

Steve: Uh, and, and I mean that literally, I mean, it was, it was making me ill. So-

Jerry: You've mentioned that twice. I'm going to interrupt you.

Steve: Yeah.

Jerry: You mentioned it twice. What was the illness?

[00:32:30]

Steve: Um, I was, uh, way overweight. Uh, I had started smoking again after years and years of not.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: I smoked when I was a teenager and then gave it up and then started that again. Um, and I was, and I was, I was deeply unhappy, which to me feels like an illness because I'm a happy guy.

Jerry: So in my own story, which, which folks on the show will listen to show, no, I was 38
[00:33:00] at the height of a career as a venture capitalist. I weigh 249 pounds. I'm 180 today.

Steve: Yeah.

Jerry: And I was suicidally depressed.

Steve: Hmm.

Jerry: And so I felt trapped in a life that was not mine.

Steve: Yeah.

Jerry: And I had, I had a great business and a great partner. Uh, I saw, I'm really relating to what you're describing here.

[00:33:30]

Steve: So what happened to me, Jerry, was I, here's what I knew. So when I got out of that business or right before I got out of it, I had, by this time I had moved to San Francisco, moved my family across the country to San Francisco and I was walking downtown in the financial district one day. And just feeling that, uh, h, h here's what I knew. I knew two things with absolute crystal clarity. I knew that there was something I was supposed to be doing on this planet. I knew it. It was, there was no doubt in my bones.

[00:34:00]

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: And what I also knew with equal clarity was that I had no freaking idea what it was.

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: And there was just this moment where, um, I literally looked up at the sky and said, "Come on man, just tell me what I'm supposed to do and I'll do it." And that's the kind of yearning that I felt. And then shortly thereafter, and this is the way it happened, I'm not exaggerating, I was talking to a friend on the phone, and we were just talking about mutual friends and she said something about a mutual friend of ours who was doing some kind of workshops and training for corporations.

[00:34:30]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: That was the extent of the detail.

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: And all my lights went on.

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:35:00]

Steve: I said, "That's it. That's what I'm supposed to be doing. I have no idea what that is. But that's it." So I started doing some research and I found, I found that there was this whole industry called at the time, you know, mostly it was called training and development.

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: And I, and I said, okay, I've got a business background. I'm, I'm good in front of people 'cause I'm a musician and performer and all that. I can put all that together. And that's what started me on this path. And it's been like a freaking rocket ship

ever since. That was the late eighties. So, so by contrast, I came from, from a scenario where I hated-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:35:30]

Steve: - my work as an entrepreneur and discovered what I loved. And the difference was so dramatic in everything from my business success to my wellbeing. And then when I started doing work with, with corporations and you know, I've had so much exposure to so many different businesses and industries over the years that I guess it made it more pronounced when I saw that in other people.

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:36:00]

Steve: And I began to see that this is pretty universal, you know, every day, pretty much everywhere I go. The best leaders, the most successful teams, they love what they do, they love the people they do it with. And then when I, when I went to work at the Tom Peter's company and I got into, and you know, Jim Kusas um, became my, we were on the executive team together. He was a president, I was a vice president and I taught his stuff. And one of their five practices of leadership is encouraging the heart, is what they call it.

[00:36:30]

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: And Jim used the word love and, and talked about it. It was kind of a, an Oh, by the way.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: It wasn't right front and center, but it was part, it was part of the mix. It. It reinforced that and it became like a, a lens through which I began to look at everything and it just became increasingly obvious to me over the years.

Jerry: I, I, I'm going to use a, I'm going to reflect back what I'm hearing and, and, and put it within the larger context of, uh, what we offer referred to both in terms of my book, but also in terms of the company. Here's a little branding thing. I think what I just heard in your story was there was the hate, there was the ... you had built a successful life that was not your life. And then there was this life on the other side.

[00:37:00]

[00:37:30] And then there's that moment almost as Saul on the road to Damascus moment, where you walking through the streets of San Francisco and you're looking up at the sky, at God, the divine at whomever at whatever and saying what the fuck? Like what the fuck?

Steve: Yeah.

Jerry: Or to use your language in "Oh shit moment."

Steve: Yeah.

Jerry: [00:38:00] And it's that moment. I ... what I acknowledge and what I see is that there was a man who is brave enough to allow himself to be rebooted completely, to, to basically say, I am, I built this thing. It does not work. This is not right for me. I'm gonna do, I'm going to start in a different place in a different way. I know nothing except that I just lit up like a Christmas tree when someone's said workshops.

Steve: Yeah, exactly. Right.

Jerry: And you followed your heart.

Steve: Yeah. And listen, I don't wanna, I don't want to give the impression that it was a, it was a straight up trajectory from there.

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:38:30]

Steve: But really it kind of was, I mean, obviously there are ups and downs and setbacks and all that and there are to this day of course, but, uh, but in terms of, of the overall direction and, and setting up the, the, the right ingredients and environment to discover and reveal my life's body of work, that's what it led to.

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: And, and I deeply love my work.

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:39:00]

Steve: Um, I don't love everything about it-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). But isn't that love?

Steve: Yeah.

Jerry: The capacity to be able to say, I don't love this part-

Steve: Yeah.

Jerry: -but I love that.

Steve: Yeah. So the, the way I like to frame that up for people, Jerry is, is, is look, you know, the expectation that I'm going to love everything, everything that I do is, is not realistic. So for me, for example, I don't love airports. I don't love, uh, the mechanics of marketing. I don't love, um, numbers, but there are things that I have

[00:39:30]

to do that I don't love in order to do the work that I love. And the technical term for that is called being an adult.

Jerry: (Laughs).

Steve: It's so, you know, but overall, man, I mean, this is, this is, this trips my trigger, this is, and, and one of the things that I love, of course, is seeing how other people light up.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: And they begin to embrace and act on, on these ideas.

[00:40:00]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: Uh, it's a phenomenal thing.

Jerry: Yeah. I'll, I'll make the observation that, you know, you and I, we come at our work from different angles, but I think we come at the work in a very similar way. And I, I suspect you'll share this as well. You know, we're often called in to help individual leaders but also help cultures develop in a way in which, um, really the best of humans get to come forward. And those adults get to come out and, uh, when we can, uh, find the bagget for that olive oil, when we can match it properly. Um, uh, then to me, love becomes a byproduct, a natural organic expression, which then creates a culture within the organization. A culture of kind of a, a fierce love in which we hold ourselves accountable to a higher standard as before.

[00:40:30]

[00:41:00]

Steve: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: And, and we do the work that we need to do in order to do the work that we love to do.

Steve: Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Jerry: Yeah.

Steve: Um, which was reminds me of a, uh, of the, it sounds odd to say that it reminds me of my own words, but it does. (Laughs).

Jerry: "(Laughs). Is it? I'm an author too, that so much reminds me of my own words. (Laughs).

[00:41:30]

Steve: If I can be so presumptuous as to quote myself from, um, the sub, the subtitle of the book is do what you love in the service of people who love what you do. It's

also the structure of the book and it's, and it's a framework that, um, that pulls a lot of this together. So let me just break that down quickly.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: Do what you love is the foundation for this.

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: It's like you were just saying, if I'm doing what I love, a lot of these things emerge organically and naturally, but it's also not the whole story because if all I'm doing is what I love then and I don't really care about anything else, take it to an extreme. That's called narcissism, right?

[00:42:00]

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: So yes, I'm doing what I love. But the second piece of that is in the service of people. That's the context.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: Uh, is it's both the moral and the ethical context and it's also the business context. So I guess I'm doing what I love, but I'm, I'm using that energy-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: -et cetera, to serve you, to serve you, my employees, to serve you, my customers to serve you, and my community, et cetera.

[00:42:30]

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: Uh, but I'm serving you not just because I feel obliged to-

Jerry: Hmm.

Steve: -but, and I'm trying to meet some minimum requirement that can say that equal service, but I'm serving you in such a profound way that, the result of that is reciprocity. You, you, you love me in return.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: That's when you know you have a phenomenal customer. Right? Uh, so it all kinda ties in together, becomes this wonderful kind of virtuous cycle.

[00:43:00]

Jerry:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Uh, your words remind me of others' words, not mine. Thank goodness. Um, but one of my favorite teachings is from Judaism, and I believe it was rabbi Hillel who said, "If I am not for myself, who will be?"

Steve: yeah.

Jerry: "If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now when?"

Steve: Yeah.

[00:43:30]

Jerry: And, uh, you know, sometimes some of the best business advice comes back from the ancient wisdom traditions-

Steve: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: -that sort of teach us that, uh, what love is and where love belongs in our lives. Right?

Steve: But so this is just the way my twisted mind works. It also reminds me of the famous Groucho Marx line.

Jerry: Which is?

Steve: "I'm standing up for your honor, which is more than you've ever done."

[00:44:00]

Jerry: (Laughs). Well, Steve, I just want to thank you for coming on the show. It's, it's really been at the light. I will also want to thank you for the book. The book was really a delight to read and, uh, and recommend, uh, heartedly, um, you know, despite the fact that we both encountered sort of the, um, uh, obviousness of some of this, you know, one of my lines these days is that better humans make better leaders and everybody goes, "Oh yeah, that makes sense." And then like, then why do we have such shitty leadership? Right?

[00:44:30]

Steve: (Laughs).

Jerry: It's like, and it's the same thing. If it makes sense that love is just damn good business, then why do we struggle.

Steve: Yeah.

Jerry: To actually have those environments.

Steve: So, uh, yes, because knowing something and practicing it are two different things.

Jerry: Yeah.

Steve: So it takes, it actually takes work and discipline to be a good human being.

Jerry: Yes.

Steve: And, and it takes work and discipline to operationalize love and the way that we do business.

Jerry: Yeah.

[00:45:00]

Steve: Uh, but, but there is no, uh, there is no more worthy of an endeavor that I can think of.

Jerry: Yeah. Well, thank you for writing the book and thank you for doing the work that you do. I think it's really important. And, uh, at another point in another conversation, I wanna hear all about being a musician.

Steve: Yeah. I would, would love to have that conversation with you. Thank you so much, Jerry.

Jerry: Thank you buddy.