

Jerry Colonna: Morning Leslie. It's nice to see you.

Leslie Feinzaig: Nice to see you as well.

Jerry Colonna: Welcome to the show.

Leslie Feinzaig: Thank you for having me.

Jerry Colonna: Well. Let's take a minute, and if you could just introduce yourself, uh, uh, n- to us, and, um, and then we'll sort of dive in.

Leslie Feinzaig: Yeah, absolutely. Uh, my name is Leslie Feinzaig. I am the founder and CEO of the Female Founders Alliance. Uh, we are a social purpose corporation that runs a large community of women and non-binary founders of, uh, highly scalable tech startups. Um, we started three years ago as a, as a Facebook group. Uh, a very humble 25 person Facebook group that just took off from under my feet. Um, at the time, I was a new mom, uh, out trying to raise capital for my own startup. And, uh, hitting a wall, (laughs) after wall, after wall. And I started this Facebook group as a way to surround myself with people who might be going through a similar experience than I was, to kind of turn the lights on in the room, if you will. Um, and it's turned out to be what might end up being the most substantial, important thing that I do with my life, uh, professionally. Um, and three years later, that 25 person Facebook group is a 20,000 strong community, uh, all across the country. Um, and that's who I am. On, uh, when I'm not online, on Zoom, (laughs)-

Jerry Colonna: (laughs).

Leslie Feinzaig: ... uh, with my team, um, I am married, uh, to a wonderful man. And, uh, I have two little girls, ages four and one. And, um-

Jerry Colonna: Their names?

Leslie Feinzaig: Dora is my oldest and Ruth is my baby. And they're both named, after, uh, their great grandmothers, honoring, honoring the women that came before them.

Jerry Colonna: God bless them.

Leslie Feinzaig: Yeah. They're pretty cute. They're in daycare right now. Uh, otherwise, (laughs) they've been-

Jerry Colonna: (laughs).

Leslie Feinzaig: They've been crashing all of my meetings for the past four months. (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: That's funny.

Leslie Feinzaig: Um, you know, I, I've actually, uh, uh, when we started sheltering in place, um, i- everything was very raw but, but in the weeks that followed, I s- started very purposefully including particularly the four year old, into-

Jerry Colonna: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Leslie Feinzaig: ... my meetings. First, because we didn't have childcare, which was, uh, a, I mean, (laughs), really hard, I guess (laughs) is the best way to say that. Um, but also, I, uh, I realized I had an opportunity to, um, show my humanity, and, uh, you know, really strengthen my, my professional relationships in a very different way. And, um, you know, I sit in a privileged position now, because I am more reputable and I am better known. And, you know, a- At this point in time, (laughs) people don't really question my commitment to what I'm doing anymore (laughs). Or they, like, they know that, they know that I, I, I'm doing it.

And so I thought, "You know, why don't I just take the opportunity to really show the world what it looks like." And, um, and so I started just bringing the girls into almost every investor meeting, and, and everything I was doing. Um, and, um, they love it. And people on the other side love it as well. I, I think it's so special to, like even now I can kinda see into your life a little bit, and, and that makes you so much more human, uh, that you would be if we were sitting at some like corporate office.

Jerry Colonna: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: know I wanna create space to really talk about the things that are top of mind for you right now, but, I feel compelled to respond to the daycare question with a-

Leslie Feinzaig: Hm.

Jerry Colonna: ... story. So, I turned 57, uh, this year. And I have three children. Sam is 30, Emma is 28, and Michael is 23. And, uh, when Sam and Emma were rugrats and tiny tots, I worked for a company that had onsite childcare.

Jerry Colonna: It was one of the most humanizing experiences of my life to, um, to have lunch every day with my kids.

Leslie Feinzaig: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: And to change diapers at 11:45 every morning. Um, and to integrate my children into my life.

Leslie Feinzaig: That's beautiful.

Jerry Colonna: And I feel super privileged, um, to, to have worked, um, in an environment, uh, that prioritized that and made that available. Um, and looking back, now, I realize that, uh, as someone who identifies as male, um, and to be one of the few fathers who had, uh, who, who, who took responsibility for children in, in daycare, and then I became the only father who had more than one child in daycare, um, (laughs) which, uh, is, as you can imagine, I had to have lunch with the kids every day. And on the one hand, you know, um, you know, you're trying this, uh, this, uh, peel the skin from grapes because my four year old-

Leslie Feinzaig: (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: ... Sam, would (laughs) eat that. Right. While also being cognizant that my then two year old, Emma, needed a diaper changed, and, you know, I'm just balancing all of that and then rushing back to a meeting with a slather of spaghetti on my crisp, white-

Leslie Feinzaig: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: ... shirt.

Leslie Feinzaig: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: But, the, the, the, the truth is, um, you know, and I'm experiencing that now so much, is people are living their lives in, in this remote way as so many lucky ones of us are able to continue working in that way. Um, but there was something really magical about that. Uh, and so, I just wanna respond to that and create space for that, because, uh, so much of what I believe to be true about humane workspaces and about the possibilities for human workspaces stems not from some intellectual experience of having listened to a great teacher, but in fact, having lived and grown as a leader in a seed bed where the female co-founder of the company that I worked for made sure that it was a priority that, uh, that family was a priority for us. Um-

Leslie Feinzaig: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry Colonna: And it's only now in the hindsight with the e- that comes from age that I'm able to realize just how rare an experience that was and how fortunate I was, and all of us were, to grow up in that environment. So.

Leslie Feinzaig: I was reflecting earlier this week that, um, this year, we had so many plans and, you know, FFA had conferences planned in like six different cities, and I had this like growing speaking opportunities and things like that, and, uh, since my girls were born, I don't travel a ton without them. Uh, you know, we, we, we don't have full-time help at home or anything like that. And so this year was very much about like, "Can my husband manage by himself if I travel once or twice a month?" And I was gonna be hitting the pavement and racking up those miles.

Instead, I have, I have cooked breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and sat with my girls and my husband every single day for four months. I have given them their bath every evening, put them in bed, every day. Like, I never realized that I would miss this if I'd been traveling. Not, not that I don't wanna travel. I, I m- I miss, (laughs) I miss the pace of my old life, but also, my goodness, what a time to be alive. I mean the ages that my girls are at right now are just delicious. They're just so cute, and cuddly, and they're a pain the butt, too, sometimes. (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: (laughs).

Leslie Feinzaig: Uh, or a lot of times, you know? My four year old is very much my daughter. She knows her mind, and she knows what she wants, (laughs) and, uh, and, um, she's got a gigantic personality in her tiny little body. Um, but, o- I can tell, even in the midst of what has been a super high anxiety period for me, I can tell that I'm gonna look at this period of my life with longing because, you know, every day, same song, every evening, we sing *What a Wonderful World*. Every day. Every single day. And it's really special.

Jerry Colonna: Hm. It's a *Goodnight, Moon* kind of time, hey?

Leslie Feinzaig: Yep, that's right.

Jerry Colonna: Um, and there's a dissonance that comes because as, a- you know, on the one hand, we're having this experience. Some of us are having this experience of closeness, and intimacy, and a reordering of our priorities. And then, coupled with a dissonance of the world as a dumpster fire. And-

Leslie Feinzaig: Yes.

Jerry Colonna: One after another, these announcements, and I know that you, you, you wanted to talk through some of those issues. And maybe we can, we can, we can move to that, and, and w- what is on your mind as it relates to all of the anxiety and all of the, the shifts that are occurring for FFA, but also for you as a leader.

Leslie Feinzaig: Yeah. You know, the, there's been a lot on my mind these last few months. I ... Part of that reflection that I was telling you about is s- um, you know, I left my last job that was for someone else, like not for myself it's gonna be five years in August.

Jerry Colonna: Hm.

Leslie Feinzaig: Five years of foregone earnings. Um, five years of entrepreneurship with all of the things, right, like all of the rollercoaster, all of it. All of that because I wanted to make something of myself and because I wanted to create the job that I loved and the team that I loved. And, and it turns out that when you force me to do that job alone in my basement, I actually don't love it anymore. (laughs)

Jerry Colonna: (laughs).

Leslie Feinzaig: I miss people. Um, I'm not ... When this is over, I will not be working remotely. I do not like having a screen between me and you, and me and every person all day, every day. I think that there's so much that I get from the in between moments, from the casual conversation. I'm a hugger.

Leslie Feinzaig: I, I really, really miss, uh, connecting in person. Um, and i- it's such a challenge managing a team and a community when everybody is just imploding on the inside, right? And like you can't be there to comfort each other. You, you can't really read cues as well. Um, you know, you, you get fatigued the longer you spend talking to each other. So you can't really resolve things. It's just incredibly hard. And then, and then you add to that, you know, we're pretty public facing, and communicating with the world at a time where you just don't know where the ... You know. It's really hard to read the room at all times because the room is on fire. It's just been a really, hard few months.

Leslie Feinzaig: one of my favorite, uh, quotes of all time, uh, I, I think it was F. Scott Fitzgerald, I, I might wrong, I have to look that up. And it's something along the lines of, um, "The test of a first rate mind is the ability to hold two opposing truths." And, and that's life today. Like you said it's like there's these incredibly special moments, and look how we're reevaluating our priorities and all this stuff. But also, holy crap. Everything is really horrible and hard. I'm like-

Jerry Colonna: Yeah.

Leslie Feinzaig: I don't know how to be a CEO right now. I, like, somebody give me instructions. I honestly ... Half the time, (laughs), half the time, I gotta (laughs) like sit there and (laughs) I look proud, and I'm like, "Who's the grownup?" Like, "Am it grownup?" Who, who's the grownup in the room that's supposed to ma- " And this is both on the family side and on the professional side, where I'm like, "W- What do you mean I'm the one?" Like, "I, I don't feel equipped to make a call on things right now." Um, but I have to because people are looking to me. It's just incredibly high pressure.

Jerry Colonna: I hear you. You know, it's a, a bifurcated experience, then, the dissonance that can occur from, from it, and, um, it's a very challenging experience. I mean, you know, we're famous at, at Reboot for our Red, Yellow, Green Check-ins, and you know, uh, uh, I don't think I've checked in, um, without a, an array of callers since the pandemic began. Because on the one hand, uh, I'm often green and feeling good. And on the other, I remain acutely aware of the world and its broken heart, whether it's because of the release that is so emblematic and, and the, the, the protests against racial injustice, um, and, and it's a release. Because, because the, the, because injustice has always been with us.

Leslie Feinzaig: That's right.

Jerry Colonna: And, and, there is a, there's a, there's a more visible, uh, experience for those of us who have been racialized as white, and, and, uh, uh, sit in that position of privilege where we're experiencing that which those of us who identify as, as other than, um, uh, White, uh, ha- experience it every day. So there's that experience. And then there's this, uh, profound, what feels like a visceral assault on our rights as human beings. Not nearly in the United States, but, but, but especially in the United States.

Leslie Feinzaig: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: Coupled with economic anxiety of the world turned upside down. Coupled, you know, all against a backdrop of, "Is that person's cough going to kill me? Is my sneeze gonna kill somebody else?"

Leslie Feinzaig: (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: I mean, and I just described the last three months.

Leslie Feinzaig: Right.

Jerry Colonna: Here we're in the-

Leslie Feinzaig: That's-

Jerry Colonna: ... middle of July and-

Leslie Feinzaig: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: I'm just describing what life is, has been like for the last months. And, and, you know, I wanna reflect back, something that you said was profound and moving, which is, quote, "I don't know how to be a CEO at this time." Well, I'll just add and build upon that. I don't know that anybody knows how to be a CEO at any time.

Leslie Feinzaig: (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: But when you add (laughs) this experience, and then, what I hear and I really resonate with is, that f- almost terrified gasp of, "Who's the adult in the room? Wait. They're looking at me to be the adult in the room." Am I, am I naming and reflecting back the experience for you?

Leslie Feinzaig: Yeah, 100%. 100%. Uh, yeah. It's like there is just too much all at-

Jerry Colonna: Hm.

Leslie Feinzaig: ... once. And all of it, all of it is coming through the same screen. And, you know, this week alone, I've sat at this desk looking into this computer and I've done media interviews, and I've interviewed candidates, and I've had difficult conversations with my team. And I've attended a wedding, (laughs). And I've talked to my mom and my dad and, and then I transition to my team standup. And the whole time I'm just thinking, " Will the airports open in time for me to see my parents again before they catch COVID?" Right, like, i- you just don't have time to process all of it. And did I make the right choice by leaving home and creating this life for myself? And at the end of the day, we're all stuck inside. And I could be stuck inside with my family. But-

Jerry Colonna: Yeah.

Leslie Feinzaig: I'm not, because 15 years ago, I chose to leave them. Um, and is this all worth it? It's just a, it's just a hard year.

Jerry Colonna: It's a hard year in what has always been a hard life.

Leslie Feinzaig: Hm.

Jerry Colonna: Hm. And I'm-

Leslie Feinzaig: I mean yes, but also a beautiful one (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: (laughs).

Leslie Feinzaig: Right? Like, I-

Jerry Colonna: Yeah.

Leslie Feinzaig: I, like, I find so much beauty and, and joy in life. I, I am the consummate cheerleader. But right now it just seems like everyone is, is in a dark place and sometimes even particularly with the past few weeks after, after, um, you know, when we added this reckoning to, to the pandemic and the economic upheaval. And then on top of that, like, it just feels like it's not even appropriate to find silver linings. Um, it just doesn't feel right anymore. And not being able to do that is so antithetical to who I am that I feel like I, this place is not for me right now. Like this country, I, you know, I just ... What am I doing here? (laughs).

Now, I'm, I'm even scared to say that out loud. I've always had, but something that, that I wanted to talk about. Like I, um, for, for context, so I moved to America, um, 15 years ago, in August. Um, I was born and raised in Costa Rica. I'm the granddaughter of Holocaust refugees, or pre-Holocaust refugees. I love my country. Costa Rica welcomed me and my family, um, at a time when even America wouldn't. Right? My, my grandfather, he, he escaped Poland in 1930, uh, with, I think it was a group of 10 or 11 other men. And they went to Ellis

Island and they were, uh, kicked out. They weren't allowed in. Um, and they were lucky in that at least they weren't sent back, uh, to Europe.

So they, they got on a boat and they, the boat kept sailing south. And it was going to Columbia and it stopped on the way in Costa Rica, which was a country that none of them had ever even heard of. (laughs). But, you know, the word spread on the boat that, uh, Costa Rica was allowing immigrants to come inside the country and the only requirement was that you had to have \$25 in cash so that you could support yourself. And these men were poor. Uh, they didn't have \$25 each. But they did have \$25 in between all 11 of them. And so they, the story goes that they pooled the money together and then one by one they like showed the same cash, and then-

Jerry Colonna: (laughs).

Leslie Feinzaig: ... handed it to the guy behind them. And, i- it's like lore of the Jewish community. Um, and that's how my, my family ended up being in Costa Rica. And, and that's the story of the Jewish diaspora, right? Like that's how-

Jerry Colonna: Right.

Leslie Feinzaig: ... there's Jews all around the world. But I grew up, you know, I am Costa Rican born and raised. I, uh, love my country. I travel there twice a year. And my entire family is down there. And when I moved to America it was because it was for professional reasons, right? I thought, I, I wanted to do something bigger, and I, um, had this, uh, miraculous ... And I do mean miraculous, (laughs) um, scholarship to Harvard Business School. Um, life changing for someone like me. Uh, and, and moved here. And for a long time, I really didn't even look back. I just, my God, the opportunities that I've had here have been amazing.

Even in the context of a really difficult immigration journey with like challenges with every single visa, green card, like everything, all the way down to like I was rejected for citizenship under the Trump administration. Like it's been hard at every single step. But not once had I ever thought that I'd made a mistake. But then the past few years, it just s- my God, you, you just wonder, like, did these people really even want me here? (laughs). Like did they want me here? Like what, what are we doing? You know? And like ... Oh, man, Jerry. Like, I gave this speech once, and I tallied up how much I've paid in taxes and how many jobs I've created. And like, and this was even before the Female Founders Alliance. Through the Female Founders Alliance, like I've personally helped unlock tens of millions of dollars in venture capital for hundreds of companies.

And all of those companies are out there creating jobs, and launching products that are gonna make the world better because they're made for all of us and not just for some of us. And these companies are creating new role models for my daughters and for all of our kids. I did that, so why the hell do I feel like I should have done it somewhere else? And I'm even scared to say this out loud because



I think that, like, every time, I mean, it started with the travel ban. And then the family separation, and then the limitation on the H-1Bs, and, and now the F1s, and you know, it's ... We're not that far away from revoking my naturalization. And why, why am I fighting? (laughs). I think, I wish, I wish that more s- more people would speak with me about this.

There's that famous poem from, from, from the Holocaust that, you know, "First they came for the communists, and I didn't speak up because I was not communist." Now, I don't like to draw, uh, comparisons between this and the Holocaust. Like I have family that was murdered in the gas chambers. Um, and I don't, I, you know, we, we don't compare to that atrocity. But you have to stand up, and say something, and do something. Because it just feels like this world doesn't want me here anymore. This, this country doesn't want me here anymore.

Jerry Colonna: Leslie, I hear you. And, uh, I think you have every right to the feelings that you have. I was born on East 26th Street between Avenue D and Clarendon Road in Brooklyn, New York.

Leslie Feinzaig: (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: And I speak for millions of Americans when I say you belong here. And I want you here.

Leslie Feinzaig: Thank you.

Jerry Colonna: And I understand. And you are right, that the promise, and it's only ever been a promise. It's been a promise unrealized since this country was founded. And that is part of the awakening, the reckoning that is going on. Because as Langston Hughes wrote in that famous poem, "America was never America for so many people."

Leslie Feinzaig: That's right. That's right.

Jerry Colonna: But that does not mean that the promise isn't there. And that promise is worth fighting for, and speaking out for and speaking up for.

Leslie Feinzaig: Wow.

Jerry Colonna: And it is the responsibility of those of us who are in the meat bags that I am in, whites as gendered male, power and privilege, to speak, and to advocate, and to stand, and as my daughter would challenge me, to be a co-conspirator for-

Leslie Feinzaig: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: ... the realization of that dream.

Leslie Feinzaig: Imagine how beautiful.

Jerry Colonna: Yeah.

Leslie Feinzaig: Imagine how beautiful.

Jerry Colonna: Yeah. Yeah. This is not, this feels like a country that would turn away a young Polish immigrant from Ellis Island-

Leslie Feinzaig: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: ... in the 1930s. And I will remind everyone that this is a country that turned away hundreds of thousands of refugees. This is not-

Leslie Feinzaig: That's right.

Jerry Colonna: ... a new phenomena. There's a viciousness about this new phenomena. But this is not a new phenomena.

Leslie Feinzaig: I went to look at ... You know, for the longest time this, the story that they were turned away at Ellis Island was like lore.

Jerry Colonna: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Leslie Feinzaig: You know, we never really understood why, like what had happened. Especially since the America that I, of my childhood was more of a concept than a reality, right? Because I, I, I was i- in Costa Rica and like America was a really great be and, (laughs), right? Like, and the cool computer that my cousins had, and like that, that was America. It, it, it was this like, just incredibly aspirational place, and concept, and idea. And, and so we never really understand why, you know, were, was it a joke? W- Were they always going south?

And like, so I, I went in and started to do some research recently, um, a few years ago, uh, that I decided to kinda look into my past. I went to Poland to see where my grandparents had, uh, lived. And turned out that it was, uh, i- it was legislation. Uh, there was a legislation passed in 1928 called the Johnson-Reed Act. And the Johnson-Reed Act established that basically immigration quotas from each country, um, that were dependent on the number of people that were already in America from that region of the world. And so it resulted in dramatic limits on the people that were the, the undesirables at the time, which were Jews, and, uh, East Asians.

Jerry Colonna: That's right.

Leslie Feinzaig: Um, and now that I'm here, and I'm a naturalized American and a proud one, there's so many echos of the past. So many echos. Um, it's like we're not learning.

Jerry Colonna: Yeah. I think that, um, m- myth of America was so powerful and alluring. It's like, um, many people, not the least of which, Americans, projected into the myth, the ideals of, of what they would want our country to be.

Leslie Feinzaig: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: And it gave rise, and it's given rise to this notion of an American exceptionalism. Um, and the truth is that exclusions on immigrations from China, for example, um, go back to the 19th century.

Leslie Feinzaig: That's right.

Jerry Colonna: And, um, it was very specific where under the Chinese Exclusionary Act, I believe, um, only men could come. And so a policy of family separation, as viscerally horrifying as it is right now, has actually been part of the law of the land for well over 100 years.

Leslie Feinzaig: Dear God. I don't think anything gets me as hard as family separation. Nothing. Oh my goodness.

Jerry Colonna: Right.

Leslie Feinzaig: Oh.

Jerry Colonna: Well, if you thi- think back to, to, to that shared empathetic moment we had where, you know-

Leslie Feinzaig: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry Colonna: ... you talking about Dora and Ruth brought me back to talking about Sam, Emma, and Michael and brought tears to my eyes as I related. Because one of the most universal experiences cross culturally is the experience of, of, of, a- of, you know, a baby resting in the, in the nook of your shoulder.

Leslie Feinzaig: Absolutely. (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: Right? It's part of that human experience of being able to connect. And, and of, and again, not everyone has had the privilege, or the honor, or the wish for that experience. But there's a humanity in that shared experience, uh, of togetherness. And there, and the, and the root of that being, being family however it, your family is defined. And that, and the notion of separating, uh, uh, goes right to the heart of it. Think about, uh, you know, uh, I once speak, uh,

from a place of empathetic knowing about surviving pogroms and genocide the way the Holocaust was a genocide. But, but think about family separation in the context of that.

Leslie Feinzaig: Yeah. I, I, I think about that a- a lot. (laughs). I-

Jerry Colonna: Yeah.

Leslie Feinzaig: Well, maybe not a lot but, um, because my ... I mean, my family was born of that, right? Like, my grandparent's siblings, um, the ones that didn't make it out of Poland left. They say that my great grandmother, my, um, uh, on my mom's side, she was able to escape, but not with all of her children. And she passed away in Costa Rica, um, I think maybe in the late '40s or 1950s. And what they say is that she died of a broken heart, um, that she was never, when, when they learned what had happened, um, can you imagine?

Jerry Colonna: I can't.

Leslie Feinzaig: I often wonder, when I went to Poland to visit, uh, Lukow and and these, these towns that, uh, by and large, there's nothing left, nothing.

Jerry Colonna: Right.

Leslie Feinzaig: Like the, the Nazis like burned Poland to the ground. They really did. But, all I could think about was like, when I left my home, I left with like, a ticket to an amazing future. Right? Like Harvard Business School, look at me, full scholarship. When my grandparents left, they woke up one morning, and they packed what they could. And they walked, God knows how long. And they took a train. And then they took a boat. And they didn't know what was in front of them. They didn't know if they would ever return. What, what was that like? How bad must your life be for you to do that to yourself and your kids? And you think of like the little boys and girls in Central America, right? Like a region that I'm very intimately familiar with. Would people think that they're escaping (laughs) ... Like, wha- what do people think these people are paying the for?

Jerry Colonna: The smugglers.

Leslie Feinzaig: It's because their lives are horrible. Like-

Jerry Colonna: Right, right.

Leslie Feinzaig: You know, you-

Jerry Colonna: Right.

Leslie Feinzaig: ... don't uproot yourself on a whim. You don't uproot yourself, and your family, and your babies, your like babies in diapers, for God's sake. Like you don't, you don't do that if you're not fundamentally afraid for your life.

Jerry Colonna: Right. You don't risk your life-

Leslie Feinzaig: No.

Jerry Colonna: ... trying to es- get yourself safe if your life isn't fundamentally threatened. This is not about-

Leslie Feinzaig: Absolutely.

Jerry Colonna: ... like taking advantage of, of, you know, uh, some sort of economic, uh-

Leslie Feinzaig: No.

Jerry Colonna: ... means. This is about survival.

Leslie Feinzaig: Exactly. Exactly.

Jerry Colonna: So, I, I'm gonna s- bring you back to your statement. "I don't know how to be a CEO right now."

Leslie Feinzaig: (laughs). Are you gonna tell me how to be a CEO? That would be awesome.

Jerry Colonna: (laughs).

Leslie Feinzaig: (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: Um, eh, a few months back, um, uh, I was in a public forum. I was doing a book reading with Jeff Lawson, who's a client, is the CEO of Twilio. And he said to me, you know, "Jerry, I read your book. And finally, I understood why, for all those years you never fuckin' told me what to do."

Leslie Feinzaig: (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: "I was so frustrated." (laughs). And I said, "Jeff, if I actually tell you what to do, it's gonna reinforce the notion inside of you that you don't know what to do. So I'm never gonna tell you what to do." But I want to tell you.

Leslie Feinzaig: Oh, man. Well, that's too bad. Sometimes you really, like-

Jerry Colonna: You just wanna know.

Leslie Feinzaig: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: So, I, (laughs) so, uh, so, I, you know, in, in, in the spirit of my teachers who have often responded to my questions with stories, I will tell you another story.

Leslie Feinzaig: Okay.

Jerry Colonna: So, a- a- and this is how I am responding, as a CEO in this time. And I am not offering this as a prescription, but merely as a description. So I had a dream a few weeks ago. And the dream, uh, my partner Ali and I were in a brand new house. Now, we've recently moved, and so, um, there was some reality coming in. And, uh, and we were on the first floor of the house when outside it started to rain. And the rain got high, uh, stronger and stronger, and then the water started to build up. And I could stand, we were standing inside looking out the windows as the water rose, and, a- and, and you could see the water from the windows.

And so finally, I said, "Come on, we have to get upstairs. We have to go to the second floor." So we went to the second floor. And as we got to the second floor, all the sudden, I realized that there was a structure, a, a kind of steel structure that was holding up the roof and keeping the house together. I shared the dream with my therapist and we unpacked it. And there's a couple things to know about dreams that include flooding. One of the things is that flooding often indicates that the unconscious is overwhelmed. There's just too much. And the dream told me what it was that I should do, which was go upstairs.

Leslie Feinzaig: Upstairs.

Jerry Colonna: Go to the next level. Okay? And what I take from that, 'cause, uh, the unconscious is often giving us instructions on what to do with the world, what to do with our feelings. So if we go back to your observation, I don't know how it, how to be a CEO right now. I'm gonna suggest to you go upstairs. And what does that mean? That means the higher order function. The higher faculty. Now what does that mean in this context? Well, I'll bring your attention back to the work of Viktor Frankl, who might, I'm sure you know his work, Man's Search for Meaning. And just to remind, what Frankl sought ... Frankl, who survived the death camps of the Holocaust, became a psychoanalyst and a philosopher.

What he sought to understand was a very profound question. Why did some survive and others not? And I don't mean because that person was unfortunate and got a bullet in their back. But why did some people break and others not? And what he hit upon was the notion of logotherapy. And what logotherapy basically says is that the way to heal ourselves is to go to the second floor. And the second floor in this case is purpose, is meaning. Why do we do what we do? Why? Yes, you got the golden ticket. Willy Wonka's golden ticket. Come to Harvard. Yay! You got the golden ticket.

Leslie Feinzaig: That's right.

Jerry Colonna: Why? Why? And I think the answer to the why is the answer to the how. Because in the why, you presented to images, two stark contrasts. Your, your, your, your, your grandfather turned away to Ellis Island. And what was his first name?

Leslie Feinzaig: [Louis 00:51:09].

Jerry Colonna: Louis?

Leslie Feinzaig: Mm-hmm (affirmative). (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: Okay. So, Louis, young man, penniless. At the, at the door to the Willy Wonka Chocolate Factory, "Sorry, you don't have the golden ticket. Move on. Next." But you, his granddaughter gets the golden ticket. And so, yes.

Leslie Feinzaig: Huh.

Jerry Colonna: You've come to the United States and you've helped create all these jobs and you've made, changed the lives of all of these people identify in different ways as founders. Yes. That's powerful purpose. But perhaps there's another purpose, here, which is that your family is here. And fuck those people who question whether or not you should be here. Because this boy from Brooklyn will stand shoulder to shoulder because my grandparents were not turned away to Ellis Island. They got the golden ticket. And the truth is, there's an endless supply of golden tickets. And so purpose, here, may be the path about how to be CEO. You-

Jerry Colonna: ... look to Louis.

Leslie Feinzaig: (laughs). When he had a sweetheart in Poland. And, uh, he landed in Costa Rica, and they worked the fields. Uh, and then they, uh, he did door to door sales. And he saved some money and he sent back money for his sweetheart, Dora.

Jerry Colonna: Oh.

Leslie Feinzaig: And they married. And they had a daughter, Ruth. And, uh, the purpose are Dora and Ruth, my girls.

Jerry Colonna: Oh.

Leslie Feinzaig: They had two sons as well. (laughs). But I'm-

Jerry Colonna: (laughs).

Leslie Feinzaig: ... not having any more kids. (laughs). But it really, it's for them. There's something about bringing a child to this world. And in, in my case, physically

going through the physi- like the, the equivalent of a marathon. I pushed Dora for four hours and 20 minutes-

Jerry Colonna: Oh.

Leslie Feinzaig: ... of, of pushing, of active. Yeah. That, that sucked. (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: (laughs).

Leslie Feinzaig: That was (laughs) ... Um, by the way, if you can do that, you can do anything. (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: Amen.

Leslie Feinzaig: (laughs). Um, bringing child to this world and being their everything, being their everything, right? They're so dependent on you and then slowly they, they, they become their own people. I just think it gives you this empathy towards others and, and a purpose unlike anything, right? Like if you really let it. And I kinda wish that, you know, when I think back to like why do I do what I do? I, I really do it for my daughters.

I really, really do, like when you look at the written mission of the Female Founders Alliance, (laughs) in our internal documents, you know, a- i- it's actually the vision. The vision is for the world's top business leaders to be more representative of the world that they lead and serve by the time Dora graduates from college. So we got, we got 18 years. (laughs). Um, 10 if you ask my husband, who thinks that, uh, we have a little Doogie Howser, but we don't, she's a normal kid.

Jerry Colonna: (laughs).

Leslie Feinzaig: Uh, (laughs). Um, it really all goes back to we are here for a short, brief time. And we measure our lives, or I measure my life by what I create for the girls that I brought into this world. And hopefully leave it a little better than I found it. And I wish that more people who were primary caretakers of their children, were also primary takers, primary caretakers of the world's biggest companies. I really do. Like I wish that like the biggest CEOs and like the most powerful investors were having lunch with their kids every day like you did. And were not reliant on an army of servants and a stay at home wife, or partner.

I wish they had that experience of like scrambling to find the infant Tylenol at 3:00 A.M. because you think maybe they're teething but really you have no idea, 'cause they just won't stop crying and you're just so tired. And then you still have to be human in the morning, and put makeup on, and show up, and work on like systems and technologies, and, and remember that all of the stuff that you're working on is for that little one who's in pain because they're teething.



Leslie Feinzaig: That's what I wish for.

Leslie Feinzaig: That's why I do what I do.

Jerry Colonna: I hear you. And I, and, uh, I think that, that, that feels like the second floor that you can go to to get above the overwhelm. And if I can build upon that and offer something to consider, um, there's a cha- transgenerational experience going on, here, even in your own story. Um, because of course, there are two Ruths and two, Ra- and two Doras.

Leslie Feinzaig: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: And so, consciously you may only be doing this for your daughters. But I think that, uh, your grandmother and your mother are very aware. And i- i- it is not just the future generation for whom we live out our purpose. But it's to live in to the dream of our ancestors. Because in addition, your ... Louis left the pogroms because he believed in the future. He did not know that that future would be a little bundle called Dora, whose mother will found the Female Founders Alliance. He didn't know that specifically.

But, at some transgenerational, transpersonal experience, the purpose, uh, uh, e- exists i- in, is embodied in all the generations. I do what I do not merely for my children, but to live out the experience of Dominic Guido, the iceman who do- who, who traveled from Palo del Colle in Puglia, in, outside of Bari in Italy and made his way through Ellis Island only to then send back money to create opportunity for brothers, and sisters, and cousins, and ... Right? And, and I live into his entrepreneurial dream every time I coach an entrepreneur.

Leslie Feinzaig: I love that.

Jerry Colonna: And so, maybe the answer to the ... what was ... to the implicit question in the observation is, "I don't know how to be a CEO at this time." It's to remember. Remember both generations, remember both. Look, look to the past and to the future.

Leslie Feinzaig: It's hard to look-

Jerry Colonna: 'Cause you're that bridge.

Leslie Feinzaig: [crosstalk] past, there's just so much pain.

Jerry Colonna: Hm. Hm. What was that pain for, other than for the future?

Leslie Feinzaig: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: You, you, you, you, went through four and a half hours of pain-

Leslie Feinzaig: (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: ... for Dora.

Leslie Feinzaig: (laughs). Oof.

Jerry Colonna: Would you take away that pain if it-

Leslie Feinzaig: No.

Jerry Colonna: ... meant no Dora?

Leslie Feinzaig: No.

Jerry Colonna: So this is not silver lining. This is purpose. This is resources. Think of the strength of those generations who survived the pogroms. Think of the strength of those generations who survived watching family members or knowing family members were or are being murdered. You carry that.

Leslie Feinzaig: I carry it. I carry. When a few years ago, um, I think it was around the time that I was engaged to be married. Uh, and my mom came to visit. She visit- She used to visit frequently before COVID. Um, and I remember we were, we were at a museum and there was some exhibit on cooking.

Jerry Colonna: Hm.

Leslie Feinzaig: And, um, and so we started talking about, uh, my grandma's cooking. My grandma on the other side, this is like Sarah, uh, my mom's mom. And I'm, I'm a fan of cooking and baking. It's, it's very kinda, um, it's a very zen experience for me. I just love the chemistry of the kitchen and especially if I can spend some time alone. Um, and so I asked my mom, like, "Where are her recipes?" Right? Like, "Who has Grandma's recipes?" And she said, "I, we don't have them. When ... " And I said, "Why?" And she said, "Because she never learned how to read and write properly. I never knew that. And it broke my heart in a million pieces. My grandma on my mom's side was forced into marriage at 13 years old with a man who was 28.

Jerry Colonna: Hm.

Leslie Feinzaig: She was so scared of him, they said. (laughs). This is my grandfather, who I love by the way, I love-

Jerry Colonna: Hm.

Leslie Feinzaig: He was a child, too, right? Like-

Jerry Colonna: Hm.

Leslie Feinzaig: He was forced into it, too. She had a daughter who was severely mentally disabled. She never finished elementary school. She had another daughter that she buried way too young. And then she had my mom. She, she just had such a difficult life. And when, when, when she died, um, we were sitting at the Shiva, right, like the ... When, when Jews die you do this like one week of mourning where you sit at the person's home, and, and people come, and m- basically, they bring you food (laughs) and, and comfort. We were sitting at the Shiva and everybody just kept saying, "Oh, she had such a hard life." (laughs). "She had such a hard life."

And I was like ... That's not how I wanna think of my grandmother, right? 'Cause to me she was Bubbeh, she was all kind of love and comfort. And, um, but she did, she, you know. And I think a lot about, "Okay, like I'm two generations away from a forced marriage at 13 years old and taking her out of elementary school so that she never learned how to read and write properly." Two generations away from that is, is the, the golden ticket Harvard graduate. Imagine what my daughters can do if we let them. In a, what is a very full circle moment. (laughs). Right now it's feeling like a very full circle moment. Um, when my grandma died, it was, uh, December 30th, uh, 2004. Three weeks before that, I sat down and I took a GMAT.

Jerry Colonna: Hm.

Leslie Feinzaig: Uh, a GMAT test that, at the time in Costa Rica, they only offered it twice a year, once in December, once in May. And it was an all or nothing moment for me. The deadline to apply to Harvard was January 7th. And, in between that GMAT and that deadline, I sat for a week of Shiva-

Jerry Colonna: Hm.

Leslie Feinzaig: ... for my grandmother. And I sat there, and I wrote my essays about why they should admit me, and I stood up and I read them aloud, (laughs), to my big brother. And he pushed me and pushed me, and said, "Your essays are not ready until you blush when you read them out loud."

Jerry Colonna: Hm.

Leslie Feinzaig: And that's how I ended up here. I guess I carry too much of the past with me.

Jerry Colonna: Too much?

Leslie Feinzaig: Well, not too much but like there's a lot for me to live up to because I feel like I owe them that. I, I-

Jerry Colonna: I hear that.

Leslie Feinzaig: ... honor my family with my work.

Jerry Colonna: It is possible to see that less as a burden and more as a resource. And the resource is, uh, their strength. Um, consider the wishes that they hold for you.

Leslie Feinzaig: What do you think, what do you think those are? (laughs). I was so young. I-

Jerry Colonna: What would Louis say?

Leslie Feinzaig: I never met him. He-

Jerry Colonna: What would he say?

Leslie Feinzaig: ... died in his 40s.

Jerry Colonna: Ask him. Yeah, right there. You know. It's hard for me to conceive of a man of that strength looking at you and saying, "You should carry a burden." (laughs). It is easy for me to see him sitting there kvelling to all of his friends-

Leslie Feinzaig: (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: ... about what an extraordinary-

Leslie Feinzaig: (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: ... person Leslie is. Ah. See? I'm not above you-

Leslie Feinzaig: (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: ... using a little Yiddish.

Leslie Feinzaig: (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: (laughs).

Leslie Feinzaig: Appropriate use of Yiddish is always appreciated.

Jerry Colonna: (laughs).

Leslie Feinzaig: (laughs).

Jerry Colonna: Yeah, there's a whole generation of, of family members who are sitting around kvelling.

Leslie Feinzaig: That's right. That's right.

Jerry Colonna: They're proud.

Leslie Feinzaig: I wish for nothing more than to make them proud.

Jerry Colonna: You have.

Leslie Feinzaig: I hope so.

Jerry Colonna: Right. That's the purpose. That, and your Dora and your Ruth, connected. That's that second four. That's the way. Right? You stay connected to remembering who you are. Remembering the past and the future and staying connected to that as a source of inspiration, as a source of strength, so that you can then go forward and figure out the day to day. And the day to day is hard. No question about it. It's super hard. And it's made harder every day by mendacity and the forces of evil.

Leslie Feinzaig: Yeah. Whoo.

Jerry Colonna: But we are not the first generation to battle mendacity and the forces of evil. And we won't be the last. This is, this is our work. And it's hard. And we stand shoulder to shoulder. Me with you, you with others. We say, "Okay. We have work to do." Leslie, I wanna thank you for coming on this show. This was an extraordinary experience for me.

Leslie Feinzaig: For me as well.

Jerry Colonna: You know, um, uh, to, to meet someone who is so well connected with the stories of their life. And, and to see that relationship m- my deep and profound wish for you to, is for you to know that, um, this kid from Brooklyn is with you.

Leslie Feinzaig: Oh, thank you. Thank you. And I am with you as well.

Jerry Colonna: I feel that. Thanks for coming on the show, and, and, uh, good luck with all of your endeavors.

Leslie Feinzaig: Thank you, Jerry.