Jerry: Hey Brad, it's good to have you on the show again.

Brad: Jerry, it's great to be here again.

Jerry: I want to say that I really enjoyed reading, uh, the Startup Community Way. And I've got a bunch of questions that I wanted to talk through. But before we jump in, my first question is really why Startup Community Way when you'd already done startup communities. And what's the difference between the two, the two books?

Brad: Yeah. So in 2012, when I, when I came, when I finished startup communities, the phrase startup communities didn't exist. So I, I started working on that book around 2010, I mean, out of the global financial crisis. And I opera- I was operating from a perspective and a premise that you could build startup communities anywhere in the world. And over time, I've come to believe that every city with at least a hundred thousand people needs a startup community to be vibrant and healthy longterm.

And with that book in 2012, um, it, it's timing was such that it was a very powerful, uh, uh, way for people to think about how to do this thing called a start up community coming out of the financial crisis, global financial crisis. About 2017 I started getting the question from people, uh, what should I do now? And, you know, one of the, uh, principles and the Boalsburg thesis from the first book was that you have to take a 20 year view. And I actually shifted that perspective. So I don't just say you have to have a 20-year view, but I say you have to take a 20-year view continually from today.

So you always have to have this very longterm view. And yeah, so there's a little element of, uh, curiosity for me is people were saying five years in, you know, what should I do now? And the answer, "Hey, it's a 20-year journey, was not a particularly helpful or satisfying answer to people." So I started thinking again about what was this thing called the startup community and what had I learned in the preceding five or six years. Uh, and as I work with my co-author Ian Hathaway, uh, the two of us started to really explore the idea, both of a new framework for how to think about what a startup community was, but also put it in context against the backdrop of other types of systems. Uh, I was inspired to do that by Eric Ries. So if you look at the lineage of Eric's books, he wrote a book called-

Jerry: Uh, the Lean, the Lean Startup.

Brad: The Lean Startup and then his second book was the Startup Way. And so he took the principles from the Lean Startup and applied it much more broadly, uh, to business and to other types of, uh, organization, you know, dynamics and evolution. So same thing trying to apply the startup community constructs more broadly so that, yeah, of course they applied to Startup Communities, but they could apply in lots of other places.

So that was the motivation. Um, during that interestingly, I decided to update Startup Communities 'cause I've made a few mistakes, handful of things in the book that I either didn't explain very well or that I was unha- unhappy, reflecting on how I had articulated them, um, and used it as an opportunity to both update and do a second edition of Startup Communities, but also add a few chapters around things that I'd learned a lot from. I learned a lot about, uh, working with corporations as a result of all the work that I've done with Techstars.

Uh, I learned a lot about non-urban startup communities or rural startup communities or startup communities in smaller geographies, you know, cities or towns with five or 10,000 people. And so I added a chapter around that and sort of extended this notion of how Startup Community has grown, evolved on a smaller geographic, on a smaller city scale, but on a broader physical geography scale.

And then the last that came out of it was there's a lot about startup communities that's very place-based and all about the geography of place and that, that rolls through both books and also is part of the Startup Community way in a significant, a significant way. Um, but we started, Ian and I started touching on, uh, the idea of communities and Startup Community specifically disconnected from place.

So virtual startup communities that would be domain specific or some other attribute. And of course, in, in this moment, uh, in the midst of the COVID, uh, pandemic, we're all experiencing the extreme version of place matters a lot in, in certain ways and in this moment, but much of our interaction is disconnected from the city that we're in all of a sudden and many of the premises, by the way around start up communities are democratizing entrepreneurship of having startup communities, anywhere in the world, being able to create companies anywhere in the world are incredibly accelerated by trends that we're experiencing in real-time, right? Remote work, distributed work, people being able to work from home.

People say, "Why am I living in, you know, on the 32nd floor in a two-bedroom apartment that I can never leave? Uh, when instead I could live in a five-bedroom house, uh, you know, in a town near where my parents live, because I can work for the company that I used to have to commute to and they insisted that I be near them," where all of a sudden we're all remote anyway.

So there's a lot of that sort of stuff that was in my head as we were writing the book that land, did [inaudible 00:08:01] clear [inaudible 00:08:02] a lot more focus on that amplified in this moment tends to be very relevant.

Jerry: Yeah. I, you know, as a, as I hear you describe that and I think back to, and I just finished the book, uh, two nights ago, the, the, um, what I'm seeing is parallels to sort of the outside world, if you will, outside of the book world, um, you know, there's, there's a well known shift underway whene- whenever we end up publishing this podcast, that shift will be continuing. And there's a well known shift going on right now, which is we see work environments, especially in the startups with which we are so familiar where people have been, uh, there are a few companies that have been remote only, or remote first, but there have been lots

and lots of companies where remote was an option in some form or another, with a little bit of agita thrown into whether or not we could make that work to now being remote, not by choice, but by, by fiat, if you will, we have no choice, but to be remote.

And so now the question is, well, when the pandemic ends and my lips to God's ears, it does end, um, when it ends, we'll be in, in that place where I think remote will be the default and the office will be in place base work, will be the option. And for many people they'll choose that option for a whole bunch of reasons, not the least of which is teamwork and in a similar fashion. I think that, uh, there's a relevant discussion to be had about inculcating startup communities within a given location th- th- where there's a tangential relation, uh, conversation about remote as well.

And the question is, you know, going beyond, you know, before we started recording, we were talking about school and I was telling this story about how my daughter has redesigned the curriculum for her charter school in Nashville, um, class-, uh Nashville Classical, um, uh, is the charter school has redesigned the curriculum to take advantage if you will of a remote only environment. And, uh, of course there were access issues and all sorts of tech support issues that you didn't anticipate. But I think that, that shift is going to be going on more and more. And so the question I think is, is as I know you weren't thinking when you were writing Startup Community Way, that all of the startup communities who might be following this methodology were in fact going to be primarily remote. But here we are.

Brad: Oh, and the "here we are" is a really good way to land the statement.

Jerry: Mmh.

Brad: Right? Because a lot of the dynamics of what's going on right now is, uh, a reaction now, you know, kind of in America, at least, right this really came to the forefront of mid, mid March, right. And so, you know, five, six months later, uh, here we are. And, you know, you made a comment, uh, two minutes ago about, you know, when the pandemic ends, well, what if, what if it actually doesn't ever end? Or what if the idea of the pandemic ending is not the determinant of a functional shift, uh, in terms of how we interact with each other?

             And the specific example you could use, school, right, is the way that K through 12 education place- based historically effective? Uh, you could use office work is the way that offices and commercial offices have existed for, you know, the past some period of time, uh, effective. And I used the word effective to try to use a nonjudgmental work, right?

Jerry: Right.

Brad: It's, it's intended to be asked the question of, is there a transformative moment where there are a totally different approaches, uh, that are more, that are

different, that are more effective. Um, if you go back, you know, 200 years, um, the idea of having skyscrapers and cities didn't exist.

Jerry: Right.

Brad: Um, are we at another transitional moment in civilization, you know, that 120 nanometers virus is stimulated, um, you know, that causes a very, very broad rethink of a bunch of structural systems. Um, the, there are many, many, many people, there's no doubt that there are many people who want to go back to February of 2020, or January of 2020. And, you know, the phrase, the new normal encapsulates that, right. When you hear people say, well, you know, we need to prepare for the new normal has an implication that there will be some adjustments, but there will be a thing that is normal. That feels like what felt like before.

And, um, that may be true, uh, but it also might not be true. And it's an interesting place to hold this discomfort of as a species, as people, as people who are entrepreneurial, people who are in startups, people who work for startups, people who are, you know, in your world of coaching, on their own journey of radical self inquiry and trying to understand what's important to them and what they need, and you know, w- w- what they are and what their shadow is against the backdrop of a bunch of norms...

That for the last five months, we haven't been able to live those norms at all. Can't go to restaurants, can't go to sports events, don't go to the airport to get on a plane, to be away from our family, because we've got to go to a business meeting in another city to sit in a conference room and do conference calls from somewhere else. (laughs)

Jerry: R- Right.

Brad: Like why? And it's not as simple as just saying, okay, well, we had office-based work and a little remote work, and now we shift to remote work, but it's kind of this rethinking of what's, what's the actual dynamics underpinning all of this. And how do we then have evolution of entrepreneurship, innovation, again, whatever the values are that you're pursuing.

Jerry: What impact might that have, and I'm asking you to predict the future. So, but, but the future is happening right now. And you've had some experience, 'cause I know Techstars has run some, some Techstars anywhere programs and kind of remote first programs. What impact do you think that this is gonna have on say the startup community that's, that's, you know, you write about one in Madison, Wisconsin, what does this do?

Brad: I think it is an enormous amplifier of the dynamics in startup communities, uh, in physical place based startup community. So one of the challenges, you know, and this came out of the global financial crisis, and one of my motivations for the first book was the, you know, cliche that would go around regularly, that, eh, if you're serious about creating a company, you need to be in the Bay Area.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Brad: And, you know, I like to say that by 2020 that statement's been eliminated, but I got an email from somebody yesterday that said, uh, "Hey, I was talking to an investor, a well-known investor in the Bay Area that basically said, if you're serious about starting your company to move out here," uh, and you know, you know, how, how do I respond to that? And my response was, well, I think the response to that investor is that's nonsense. And, uh, unless you wanna move to the Bay Area, which is perfectly fine, if you wanna move to the Bay Area, um, that investor just disqualified himself for your financing.

Jerry: Right.

Brad: And then, I'm trying to convince that investor of it just, you know, recognize that, that's, that's reality. So when you start looking at places, Madison, people that are in Madison have affinity for Madison
people who were in Madison for a while and have left, but still have affinity for it. In a world that is, uh, uh, distributed where those connections can be, uh, more than either zero or weak connections when you're not physically in a place, which by the way has been something that's been enabled for a long time. That's not new. Right?

Jerry: (laughs)

Brad: But that relationship like the ability to have really substantive, personal and work relationships without having to have continuous physical proximity exists and that's not new. Um, the idea that people that have affinity for a place can engage with that play if they're not there, when there's an ability or an acceptance or a willingness to engage virtually with a startup community or whatever community you want, uh, is enhanced by this moment, not detracted from this moment.

Jerry: I, I think that there's a... I want to build upon what you're saying, because I think that there's another way in this, uh, reordering realignment of place-based work may impact the traditional startup community. I know for myself, when I think of the phrase startup community, I think of what Fred and I for [inaudible 00:20:10] and I experienced in the early days in New York, where there was a gathering of companies, the way we have in Boulder down a Walnut Street, right. A gathering of companies, not far from each other that gets together. Okay. And now what we're talking about as well if the companies ha- are made up of people in different places.

           The definition of startup community starts to be more virtual, but I'm going back to Madison for a moment. And instead of envisioning a startup community being a community of companies getting together, it's a community of employees core together. Each of whom is it, may be employed remotely by a startup.

           And so we're getting that same value of community of place- based community that is really important for many humans, introverts like me don't need it quite so much,

but some folks need it. But the difference is it's not my company hosting a Friday afternoon beer event for that company. But what's happened is that the notion of community starts to include people outside your own company in a more sustained way.

Brad:

Yeah. Very, very much so. And, and, and think of it, uh, sort of I'll add onto it. If I'm working for a company in the Bay Area and I live in Madison, Wisconsin. I have multiple communities that I belong to. I don't, I, they're not, they're not, uh, as exclusionary dynamics, right.

I'm part of my company. Um, if I'm a, a Python engineer, I might be part of a Python community. That's geographically distributed. Um, but I also am an engineer in a startup or a tech company. And I happened to be living in Madison. And if I'm interested in entrepreneurship and startup communities, I'm going to want to know other people like me.

Jerry: Right.

Brad: In that prism.

Jerry: Right.

Brad: And I'm going to want to know those other people who are like me in Madison, whether or not they're working for, um, similar types of companies, but that are interested in the domain of startups, the domain of entrepreneurship. I was part of a, uh, a organization called Young Entrepreneurs Organization now called YEO. And I was, I was a founder of the Boston Chapter. And when I moved out of Boston to Boulder, I started a Colorado Chapter at one point. But for some period of time I was still in the Boston chapter.

Jerry: Right.

Brad: And the way that, YEO worked then is when we had these sessions called forum meetings with 10 people, it was the same group of people every month, month after month, it was private and secret and you had to go in person. And in that, my group said, "Okay, Brad, since you've left, we still want you in the forum group, but we want you to, you know, we want you to dial in, we want you to be part of this, but not in person."

And I tried it in 1995 and 96 for a couple of years. And it sucked, it didn't work. Like the ability to have that engagement with this group of people when I wasn't physically with this group of people at the level of emotional intimacy and intellectual, uh, engagement that was needed, this wasn't possible. I would assert that today it's possible. Right? And so the, the dynamics of these things have changed a lot, even though we as humans are still organized, I'm going to hear over and over again, "Gosh, if you want to raise money as an entrepreneur, you really

have to go meet with the investors, no VCs are going to do deals by meeting people over Zoom."

It turns out to be nonsense, lots of deals getting done where the investors have never met face to face with the founders and with the entrepreneurs. So, you know, we're in a place where we can, I, it's not even questioning our assumptions. We're having to live in a totally different way for a period of time. And yes, there's a, I think there's a, a large constituency of people who believe that, or want very much things to be the way they were. Um, but I think there's another set of people that were not happy with the way things were.

Jerry: Right.

Brad: And this is not just on introvert extrovert dimension, but it could be on, you know, pick your, you know, pick your own adventure dimension, right. Uh, hey, how is, how is racial equity working for us, um, you know, not so, not so good. Okay. Well, you know, how does this environment make it worse or better? And on all the dimensions that this environment makes it worse, what can we do differently? And in situations where this environment can make it better, what can we do? So all of those things, I think apply to the question you asked about place and startup communities or any sort of interaction that people are having.

And, you know, if nothing... I mean there are lots of things will come out of the experience we're having as a species right now. Um, but I'm very hopeful that many people will reevaluate. I certainly am, will reevaluate their cultural norm and their assumptions about how things have to work, uh, which is extraordinarily uncomfortable. It plays back to one of my favorite lines of yours is how are you complicit in the conditions that you've created, especially if you don't like those conditions and, and what can we do as entrepreneurs? What can we do as people working in entrepreneurial companies, uh, to change those conditions in a way that better serves the people in those companies, which I think will better serve the companies and will better serve the customers and the innovation and dah, dah, dah, dah.

Jerry: I, I, I liked that set up because one of the points I wanted to get to was that w- what I think is one of the more effective, uh, framings that you and Ian used in the book, which is the exploration of Peter Senge's work, in understanding how, uh, how to approach complex systems and you, to, to be clear, you look at, uh, the, uh, establishment and evolution of a startup community as a complex system.

And you bring up this notion of the iceberg, which is, um, Peter Senge's term for understanding how complex systems work. And if I can ask you to just sort of step us through the iceberg for a moment.

Brad: Happy to, happy to walk through it. So, so, so Senge is a very, very important writer, uh, and, and thinker and professor all around management, management science, and system thinking in general, he wrote a book, uh, nine- beginning of the 1990s,

1990, I think called the Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of Learning, uh, of the Learning Organization.

So, um, the language is really useful there. Forget about the Fifth Discipline, that's the marketing language, the art and practice of the learning organization.

Brad: And he came up with a model, um, that, that he called the iceberg model of systems thinking. And, you know, when you think about an iceberg, the, the sort of general cliche is that only about 10% of the iceberg is seen. 90% of the iceberg is below the surface of the water, right?

So whatever you see above the water, 90% is what's below the water. And he used that model because basically the only thing that we really see and in, in, in a system, are the events and activities, right. In, in, in Senge's language. You know, we only, the only thing we see is what's happening.

Um, what's below the iceberg are three different categories, and this is in descending order of a descending order of longterm impact. Uh, and I would also say, if you think about an iceberg descending order of leverage in terms of the change of the structure of the iceberg. So one level down from what's happening, uh, is what Senge calls trends and patterns, uh, or, or basically what has been happening and what is changing.

So in systems, we don't really observe what has been happening and what is changing very much. We spend all our time on what is happening. Um, if you go down to that level and you start to think about what has been happening and what is changing, let's use the last, you know, six months, and the COVID crisis, all the crises that we're, we have colliding, uh, which I refer to them all as complex systems, right? Health crisis that triggered an economic crisis. That's triggering a mental health crisis, which has amplified a racial equity crisis in the US, right.

Th- that is what has been happening. And then you get to the question in trends and patterns of what is changing. And I think we just spent the last 15 minutes, not in a particularly focused way, but sort of wandering around a little bit of what is changing.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Brad: Then you go to the next level, again longterm impact and leverage across the system is to look at structure and behavior and Senge's lines, there are, what is driving the events and trends, what is causing them? Right. So now you're in the system, you're observing what's been happening, you're starting to observe what's changing. And now you're trying to figure out what's driving the things that are happening, and what's actually causing them to happen and causing them to change.

And then you go one more layer down to the bottom of the iceberg. And, uh, for that, he refers to them as a worldview or mental models, mental models I like is, is,

is better language for me. And that is what assumptions, values, and beliefs drive behavior.

So the challenge for most people is that they spend time at the top of the iceberg. Again, the, the, the depth-wise view of it is you go deeper, it's things that are more longterm, and there's more leverage on the system if you can understand and modify those things, if you can understand and modify your mental model, you have much, much, much more impact on what's happening. And if all you're trying to do is adjust something, say at the trends and pattern layer, the inverse is true, as well as you move from bottom to top, you move easy, the, the ease of change and the speed of change.

So at the bottom, it takes a long time, and it's very hard to adjust systems based on mental models. But at the top, if you're just focusing on what is happening, uh, you can pretty quickly make changes, but the changes aren't that again impactful. So you have this interesting phenomenon. And I think as humans, when you use this model, whether it's in, in a business, uh, in a startup community, uh, or in any other type of system or activity, uh, especially when there's stress, especially when there isn't radical self inquiry to one's own mental models. We spend a lot of time at the top of the iceberg, and we spend a lot of time chipping away at the little bits and pieces of ice at the top of the iceberg, rather than spending time at the bottom of the iceberg, really mining the core of what's going on and really exploring the assumptions and the values and the beliefs, you know, you'd wanna use, uh, we can use any of the topics we talked about. Let's use racial equity as, uh, for a second.

Jerry: Right.

Brad: Um, uh, at the top of the iceberg, uh, you know, making a statement that black lives matter, uh, is, is, you know, is good. It's a thing. It's, it's something that is happening in the moment. If that's all you do, it's better than nothing, but if that's all you do, you're not really adjusting and impacting in a meaningful way the system, uh, if you think that you're going to eliminate racism in six months, that's a, uh, fallacy error, right? I mean, race, racism has been an issue in our country for 400 something years since the beginning of our country.

Like the idea that you can eliminate it in six months is illogical, but the idea that you can change people's assumptions, values, and beliefs to then change behavior to then working your way back up, fundamentally changing a system is very powerful. So that's how the, that's how the iceberg applies.

Jerry: Well, I, I, I appreciate that. And I appreciate the depth of that. I want to build upon this because I think you backed into something that I think is really cru- crucial, and to go back to my infamous question. How have I been complicit in creating the conditions I say I don't want. Right now, it's very, very popular for folks in meat bags like ours, white men of power and privilege to in effect, put a hashtag black

lives matter in almost everything that we do, we are all in some ways, so many of us are committed to looking at finally looking at say, uh, the lack of representation throughout let's call it the tech sector, but throughout the startup community writ large.

And I think that what you've done and look in applying Peter Senge's, uh, iceberg model is hit upon what may be the way in which we can really change the ratio and change the dynamic around underrepresented founders. Now let's acknowledge that part of the way to change that ratio is to change the way dollars are spent for sure, but perhaps an equally important question is to go back to each one of the startup communities, all of those people who read your first book and are now interested in the second book. And I would put the question, my infamous complicitness question to that and say, you have committed yourself...

You are raising a fist in the air and you're saying black lives matter. Are you willing to, to examine the underlying worldview and mental models in your community, whether it's Boulder, which is whiter than white or Madison, Wisconsin, or Boise, Idaho, or Portland, Oregon, are you willing to look at those underlying mental models and the ways those mental models have unconsciously supported you in order to effectuate the change that you say you want to make?

See, the thing that I think you did in this book Brad, which I don't know that you realize that you and Ian were doing was not only gave a framework for understanding the startup community way, but you gave a framework and a path and a pointer. In Buddhism we always toi- talk about pointing out instructions. You gave a pointer to how we actually might change startup communities to represent that, which we say we want.

Brad: Love it, yep love it. And, uh, uh, uh, I'll add to that, like a practical, a practical example of that in real-time, uh, is something that, uh, has occurred in Boulder, uh, around this particular topic. So, um, a, uh, a white, uh, entrepreneur, white male entrepreneur who, uh, is very focused on, uh, in his business and broadly in his value system, um, uh, inclusivity, uh, uh, for what his business does, uh, was very upset, um, after George Floyd was murdered. Was very clear that the work that he has been involved in, in the Boulder Startup Community was, as you say, whiter than white, it was not an inclusive, uh, dynamic for people of color.

And he was very motivated to do something about it He reached out to a, a friend of his, who was black, And said, "I, I, I want to build a coalition of leaders in the startup community to do something about this. I don't know what to do, but I, I'm motivated to do that." And that then evolved to include, uh, in total, it's probably about 30 people that are all in, in the Boulder, primarily Boulder Startup Community, a few Denver people, and it's 20 people who are white and who are leaders in the community and 10 people who are entrepreneurs, who are, uh, people of color, men and women, um, all of whom are, uh, have and their experienced, uh, activity around equity consulting.

And it's something that we, we, we definitely focused on after we realized a configuration that had come together where the commitment of the, uh, the 20 white people we're, we are willing to commit or were, were going to commit time and energy to engage in a, in a conversation and training around equity with you, the 10 consultants or the equity consultants helping us not to tell us what to do, but to engage together over a period of time in a series of very uncomfortable conversations, to understand, essentially, I'll use your words now, how we were, how we are complicit in the conditions we'd create and what we can do within ourselves to both define different conditions that we want. And then start to understand things that we can do, uh, to modify our behavior and the behavior that we're involved in to change those conditions to be more in this particular case, uh, uh, inclusive of people, uh, of color.

And in this particular case, I would say most of the stuff we did over the last four weeks was all about mental models and our own mental models, you know, bringing to the table of that in the context of the community. Um, and by the way, uh, the, the, the side effect of that is not, "Oh, look at me. I'm good. I did this." it's okay, I'm ready to now really challenge a bunch of my assumptions-

Jerry: Right.

Brad: ... uh, uh, around my behavior that's caused me to end up with these types of conditions in the community that I am part of and that I feel like I'm a leader in.

Jerry: The, the restating of my infamous question of late that I have taken to use is how have I been complicit in maintaining the systems of oppression that I say I don't want and more important, what am I willing to give up that I love that I say in order to have the world that I want to have come to, to pass.

Brad: Yep.

Jerry: And, you know, to build upon your iceberg [crosstalk 00:47:41].

Brad: I'm going to have to hear that three more times to memorize it. But-

Jerry: (laughs) Um, I think what we're both talking about doing is to use Peter Senge's model is tipping over the iceberg is revealing those mental models first so that we can actually establish those.

Brad: O- o- o- one last comment [inaudible] the iceberg is important. Like if you think about it physically, instead of metaphorically, if you try to move an iceberg or tip of an iceberg, if you put all the effort of doing that at the top of the iceberg, ain't nothing going to happen.

Jerry: Right.

Brad: If you put all the effort at the bottom of the iceberg, you have a chance of something meaningful happen, it tipping over and moving.

Jerry: That's right.

Brad: So just, just to make it physical for people, instead of just metaphorical for people.

Jerry: That, that's right. Well, in the, in the same vain, and, and, you know, Brad, you've been subjected to this by me many, many times. I'm going to go there one more time here. Um, why do you care so much about Startup communities? I mean, I have my theories of course, 'cause I've been your friend for over 20 years now, so, but why, why does it matter so much to you?

Brad: All, all, all of my work domain as, as an adult, you know, from the time that I was 19 has been in and around entrepreneurship and innovation, right. Helping create companies, investing in companies, uh, funding companies, developing companies, selling companies, buying companies all around the innovation, entrepreneurial sh-, entrepreneurial dynamics. Some of it earlier on in my career was technical, you know, later on in my career, uh, was financial and functional and operational with some product and technical underpinnings, but that's the domain and I've, uh, I've limited myself to that domain of work, um, pretty deliberately, um, some of it just because there's so much of it to do in terms of expansion of time, but also because I have felt like to, to get good at something, uh, it's worth doing for a long time, knowing the number of mistakes you're going to have to make along the way, and the amount of learning that you have to do.

                Alongside of that. Um, I am constantly interested in learning and I'm in- intrinsically motivated to keep learning. And one of the challenges, uh, around the, the world of innovation that I've been in and the world of entrepreneurship I've been in is that it's very constrained with, you know, and the word, the word that constraints it for me, that I hate is a playbook. I hear this, you know, you hear it over and over again, but you just have to execute the B2B SAAS playbook.

Jerry: Right.

Brad: Uh, uh, you know, and having been, you know, having been an entrepreneur, it's like, and understanding how complex systems work. Yeah. The playbook is helpful as a guide, set of guides, but the playbook does not apply. Like there will be things that happen where the playbook doesn't work and that's not how a complex system works. As I encountered this and innovation and investment around the US mostly, but also some around the world. Um, I started to believe, and it probably around the internet bubble, you know, around 2000, the same time that we were active together as investors, um, that innovation and entrepreneurship and the creation of technology was like so many other aspects of the human experience, a very powerful, positive, transformative function.

There's definitely negative characteristics about it, but there were a lot of positive characteristics. And, uh, my, uh, advisor at MIT was a guy named Eric Von Hippel who believed in the democratization of innovation. So Eric's view was that innovation should come from users, not from manufacturers, not from, you know, GE is not the source of innovation. It's whoever uses the GE products, they're the ones that are going to come up with new innovation. That's evolved today where most new innovations come from entrepreneurs rather than large companies. And I really love this concept of the democratization of entrepreneurship.

It didn't make any sense to me that entrepreneurship and innovation should be constrained and limited geographically, uh, to a particular place. Um, that functionally, it should be something that was hard to understand, that there should be a top down control mechanism associated with it where the people in power perpetuated it. But, you know, the whole notion of disruption comes from bottom up activity.

Um, I've also always had an element while I, you know, I know how to be part of things and participate with others. Um, the power of the individual has always fascinated me and the ability to have loose collectives of people engaging in things has always been interesting to me. And then the last, uh, and I, I'll see if I can answer the question, like, what is it that interests or motivates me to care so much about this is that the learning for me comes from the interactions, not from the stuff, not from the parts. And so, as I started to in Boulder, build a community with other people, that [inaudible 00:53:05] of being part of something in a domain that I understood really well.

And I started to recognize that those ideas could be applied anywhere, or I started to believe that those ideas could be applied anywhere. Um, it became important to me to understand that better so I could assert it and have this sort of cycle of learning that's continued. And so for me, it ends up being a way again, why is it important? It ends up being away from me to instantiate what I think is so interesting about the work that I've been doing for so long and allow it to be amplified to many, many other people in many other places, without me having to control anything and physically be proximate to those things and make those things happen.

And simultaneously, and it's very evident in the last 10 years, if you read the two books, how much I've learned from 2012 to 2000 or 2010 to 2020, it allows me to continue to learn a lot, which is very motivating to me in a domain that I care about. That's, that's a long-winded version. I'm curious what you think the answer is.

Jerry: (laughs)

Brad: You're going to say, I predict it will include something about my, my desire to be loved.

Jerry: It does. It does, but actually I think it, it, it speaks to your desire to belong.

Brad: Sure.

Jerry: And I think it speaks to a wish that I know you have, which is that others feel like they belong.

Brad: Yep.

Jerry: You know, throughout reading the book. And I was so impressed with the scholarship in the book. I kept wondering about my friend and one image kept coming back to mind and somewhere we'll probably post this on, on the internet. I once sent you a photo of myself wearing a yellow shirt at like 18 years old. And you looked at that and you sent me a photo of you about the same age. And we looked the same. God knows our hair is completely different now. You actually have hair. I don't.

Brad: It's skinny, scrawny, nerdy kids, right?

Jerry: Skinny scrawny, nerdy kids. And what, and, and, but the image that came to mind was a young kid in Texas finding community in Dungeons and Dragons.

Brad: Yep.

Jerry: Finding community in, in, in the fraternity at MIT. And I've wrote a phrase as you were talking.

[00:55:30]
Brad: Right.

Jerry: Collects people, you collect people, you gather people around you and for all of your vaunted introvertedness and your hold up in your acreage there, the fact is I think the community serves you. And I think that the intellectual part of your answer, which is you're fascinated by startups, you find startups, a source of incredible learning and energy. I think all that's true and the community is really deeply important to you. You, I, I have been a part of that experience with you, and I know people who are in your orbit and they're, they're pulled into this sort of gravitational field around you and the heart of that gravitational field. I actually don't think it's that you need to be loved as I think you need to love.

Brad: Hmm.

Jerry: Right. In my, in my infamous construct of love, safety and belonging, it's we need to love or be loved and be loved. And I think that one of the ways you feel your way into the world is to actually express love.

Brad:

That, that lands well, very strongly, because there's no question that I, uh, that giving love-

Jerry: Yeah.

Brad: ... is more powerful to me than receiving love.

Jerry: Yeah.

Brad: And you know, I talk about it in lots of different ways. You give me an award, you tell me I'm good. Yeah, that's fine. But it doesn't really do much for me or I'm embarrasse, but it gives me great satisfaction to provide love for others, to provide, you know, the help support, to be of service, like that is foundational. And this is an area in business where that, that is a vector that I can, uh, uh, play on, uh, or engage in a meaningful way.

Brad: It's nice to be loved for the love you give.

Jerry: Yes.

Brad: And, and that's rewarding and that's powerful versus to be loved for a th- a thing you did or a thing you represent or a thing you assert or a thing somebody else promotes you. So at least for me like that circle, uh, that's very powerful. Thank you.

Jerry: Yeah. And you, you, and thank you because of what you do for communities around the world. And I'm gonna bring the emphasis and we'll start to close on this, this notion of community. So I've been asked to do a lot of speaking since the pandemics, since one dumpster fire led to the other dumpster fire to whatever.

             And people were saying, well, how do we hold ourselves? And I, I, I reach into two basic teachings. The first being that, that this time period is a visceral living expression of what Pema Chodron teaches in *When Things Fall Apart*, just that life is falling apart all the time. It's just that right now it's undeniable. And the antidote to im- im- impermanence is interdependence, is us needing each other.

             It's like you wearing a mask to keep me safe. And we, me wearing a mask to keep you safe and not just 'cause we might see each other. And in a sense, I think one of the greatest things that you guys did with this book that you did with this book is again give out pointing instructions to how to create sense of belonging for an important part of our community. And that is a really, a gift of love.

Brad: It's good, good, good ending to, to, to underscore the word belonging.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Brad:	Um, especially in this moment where one of the ways we feel like we have belonging with each other is the physical interaction.
Jerry:	That's right.
Brad:	And when all of a sudden you can't have the physical interaction how that goes away. And so what can you do to still have that, that feeling?
Jerry:	That's right. That's right. Maybe in the end, belonging is a core component of the startup community away.
Jerry:	Brad, thanks so much for making time for this, uh, conversation. It's totally been a blast.
Brad:	Thank, thank you for doing this and, uh, love you.
Jerry:	I love you too, buddy. Be well, take care.