

Jerry: Brad, Dave, hi.

Dave: Jerry.

Jerry: Welcome. Yes.

Brad: Hey, Jerry. Good to see you.

Jerry: Good to see you guys. Thank for coming on the show. Um, Brad, I think this is, what, your fifth or sixth or I don't know. It's like, uh, every now and then we do a Brad visit for the Reboot Podcast.

Brad: I'm happy to do an infinite number of Jerry signings.

Jerry: Aww, thank you.

Jerry: (laughs)

Brad: (laughs)

Jerry: Well, I'm thrilled to have us come together, you know. Um, our relationship, you know, folks know that Brad and I have a longterm relationship. They may not know so much that Dave and Brad have, um, a much longer relationship. It stretches back to college. And, uh, Dave and I have had a relationship. How long have we known each other, Dave? Maybe 10 years?

Dave: Oh, it's longer than that. Remember, we were on Owen's board together. Um-

Jerry: Oh, my god.

Dave: Yeah.

Jerry: That's right. Owen Gates.

Dave: Back in the, back in the dot com days. Yeah.

Jerry: That's right. That's right, that's right. So long, long time here. And this is the first time we're having this kind of a conversation. And what really sparked this is the release of, uh, your new book, um, which is the *Entrepreneur's Weekly Nietzsche: A Book for Disruptors*. Um, and I'm stoked about having this conversation. And the first question I really want to, uh, just dive in on is, and I know you spent some time on this question in the book, but I want to give you a chance to sort of talk about it. Nietzsche? Like, what are you thinking there? Tell me.

Dave: Yeah, so, um, it's interes- it's an interesting progression. I mean, I, uh, to keep it short, um, I had, I had, uh, developed an interest in philosophy. Um, and my interest had, had

skewed, uh, not, this won't surprise you, Jerry, my interest had skewed toward the more analytical, um, or, you know, more terminologically correct analytics philosophy, uh, kind of the, the, um, uh, the American style of philosophy, of, uh, you know, very logical, logically-oriented, um, v- kind of rigid. And I thought that maybe-

Jerry: You, rigid?

Dave: I know, I know.

Jerry: (laughs)

Dave: And I thought maybe I should branch out a little bit. So I got the, um, the, the Teaching Company's course in Nietzsche and started watching it. And I was just struck by it and, and took an interest. And, and, and at some point, I realized that, um, unlike other, uh, analytic philosophy, continental philosophy and Nietzsche, um, seemed to speak more to living life than to technical questions.

So both things are interesting for, perhaps, different reasons. And, and, um, uh, and so, uh, I started reading Nietzsche. Uh, you know, beyond the course, I started reading Nietzsche, and, and, um, there, there is actually a story that Brad and I tell that, that is our best recollection of what happened, which is that, uh, we were both in, um, in Keystone. And, um, uh, I was reading something. It wasn't actually Nietzsche. It was a book about Nietzsche. And, um, but it had a lot of quotes, and I, I, I read this thing to Brad and I said, "Doesn't that sound a lot like entrepreneurship?" And he kind of looks up from his book, and he's like, "Yeah, it kinda does." And that was that.

But, uh, that was the germ of the idea. Um, and as I kind of, now that I noticed-

Jerry: Look-

Dave: ... that, I continued to read and noticed that there were a lot of things that sounded like my experience in entrepreneurship.

Jerry: And I wanna just sort of place this in time a little bit, 'cause we didn't really do a deep and dive introduction on either of you guys, but we'll get to that. This was after... Was this after you were an entrepreneur, Dave, or after your last founding company, or was it... Place it in time for me.

Dave: I think I was still running Standing Cloud at the time. Uh, I don't, I don't think it was, uh, I don't think it was after that that would have, that, that we sold Standing Cloud in 2013. It's about eight years ago. I think it was a little before that. So, you know, it, it, the idea germinated for a few years before we started to write the book for sure.

Jerry: So when... And if I remember correctly, you were a founder at Standing Cloud, and then you were the CEO for a number of years. Is that right?

Dave: Correct. That's correct.

Jerry: Right, right. So it was, it was... You were in it is my point.

Dave: Oh.

Jerry: You were in, in the stew.

Dave: Absolutely.

Dave: And so it was, you know, the, the, um, the, uh, the experience of reading Nietzsche while I was doing it certainly was part of it, right? It wasn't... Had, had I been a few years done already, I might not have, um, I might have not have made the connections, because they weren't, uh, they weren't living questions for me at, you know, afterwards as much, right? Um, but while I was in it, for sure a lot of these things. And, you know, I, as you know, um, uh, uh, as, as my coach for some time, uh, during that period, uh, you know I was, there was some things I was really struggling with. And so, um, you know, some, some of these, uh, some of these ideas helped me think through answers, or at least partial answers.

Jerry: You know, I thi- uh, that's really the point that I was reading. You know, as I was rereading the book this past weekend, I was remembering some of our conversations back then and the things that you would struggle with. And, um, you know, Brad, I wanna bring you into the conversation a little bit. Remember what our friend Dave was going through?

Brad: Oh, I remember it quite well, 'cause I was on the board. And I would say my, you know, my relationship with Dave, which now goes back, Dave corrected me recently, I said 30 years, but it sounds like, uh, it's, what, 37 years, or something like that.

Dave: Th- 37, 30-... Oh, it would be 30- 38 now.

Brad: Yeah, which, which completely breaks my mind by the way. Like, the idea of being, you know, being best friends with somebody for 38 years is, is both delightful and terrifying.

Dave: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brad: Dave was a founder, but we really talked about the company even before it was founded. So, you know, my engagement with Dave as an investor was not Dave coming to me pitching me on a company, but us talking about this thing that Dave, then, became motivated to go start, and I provided the financing for. And I had, I had worked with Dave on multiple companies, and, and, you know, including ours where we were the co-founders, but also where I was an investor. So I, you know, I knew Dave really, really well in terms of his own proclivities as a founder and a leader, strengths and weaknesses, at least from my frame of reference. Some of them, my perspectives, I'm sure were not necessarily 100 percent correct, but I had my perspective on it.

Um, but I also was even more deeply cared about Dave as a person than I cared about Dave as a CEO and a founder. And my view of Dave as a CEO and a founder, which by the

way is not to similar to how I approach a lot of the relationships that I develop with other founders and some of the people that I've, I've funded, was while there was a very, very strong desire for the businesses to be highly successful and for it to be, you know, a significant, large, fast-growing business, I probably had more interest in the working relationship and the opportunity to try to create something from nothing from an idea than I did about the specific outcome and characteristics of what was going on.

So, you know, our resh- our, our personal relationship, or our friendship, had incredible depth to it, at least, you know, e- even in that time period, separate from the business.

Brad: Once, once the business went from that, you know, that, that very beginning organic phase where, you know, like you have money, you're working on an idea, th-... Nothing's at stake yet. You're, you're, you're still playing with this whatever the beginning is. And as it transitioned from that into a business with people, a product, a market focus, an effort to start to scale, and you could start to define whether you were having or not having success on the path, um, I s- I was in the struggle with Dave not on a daily basis, but I had a lot of awareness of the ups and downs that Dave was having as my friend layered against the backdrop of the normal ups and downs and the struggle of the business. So, uh, I wouldn't say I was in any of it with Dave, because it was just one of multiple companies that I was an investor and on the board of, but at a personal level, I saw the up and down. I saw the stress. I saw the anguish. I saw the frustration.

And there's a couple of very specific moments that I remember really, really well, um, that were different; different moments of, uh, of that struggle that, uh, that Dave had. And for me, I had to separate my brain into two halves whenever I responded to any of them. One half was, you know, Dave, the CEO of this company, and the other was Dave, my close friend.

Jerry: Yeah. I wanna, I wanna jump in on, on that point, um, because I think that, um, this is what I was sort of pulling together. You know, when you think, I, I was remembering some things in our, in our conversations, Dave. And I wanna know that, because I know a little bit about the history between the two of you, I know what Dave has been to you, Brad, in terms of your struggles and where he has been. So I wanna circle back to that. But I wanna read to you, uh, a, a quote from the ear- early on in the book. And Dave, um, you know, if the, if, if I'm not pulling the narrative together properly, correct me on this.

So you're CEO at Standing Cloud. I- i- you know, it's having, it's experience, right? Some wins, some losses, some struggles, some challenges, and you're exploring. You're starting to seek answers. And knowing you as I do, you seek answers a lot. So this is from your book.

*“Meeting great success often requires that you first experience great pain. This is one of Nietzsche's core principles and is quite common in entrepreneurship. Many successful entrepreneurs have failed at least once. Many great companies have gone through a period during which their viability was in question.”* I'm gonna skip ahead.

*"We think about our actions and make course corrections, but are unlikely to question our basis premises. Why fix what ain't broke? We dig deep when things are going badly or when we are feeling pain. This may mean looking at the fundamental assumptions of the business or looking at your own psychology and facing up to some dark truths about you, our own behavior. If you find yourself at a low point, you have the opportunity to completely restructure your thinking. If you are at a low point, this notion serves as both consolation and guidance."*

I'm gonna draw an implication that could be completely wrong, but I'm curious if there's a correlation between the low points that you experience at Standing Cloud and reaching out to Nietzsche.

Dave:

Hmm. I don't think that's an unreasonable conclusion to draw. I don't know that Standing Cloud was only the last, only the final in a series of entrepreneurial endeavors that I had had. It wasn't my only company that I started. In fact, it was one of many. And, um, and, uh, you know, I like to say that there are two kinds of serial entrepreneurs; those who, those who succeed fairly early on in their first or second one, um, uh, do really well and love it, um, partly because of that, and they just don't have a, and there's, there's nothing else they can imagine doing that they would, that they would enjoy as much. The other is those who haven't succeeded yet and are trying to get there, (laughs) and I was the latter.

And, uh, uh, you know, so I was, I, I continue to do it. You know, starting companies is what I knew how to do. Um, and I had had my share of frustrations in all of these companies and of various kinds, stu- some similar, some not. Um, you know, when we went into Standing Cloud, um, and I was gonna comment, uh, Brad, that, uh, I don't know if you recall that the genesis of it was when we hiked Quandary Peak together, um, which is one of Colorado's 14ers for your audience. And, uh, uh, if you know Nietzsche, that's a very Nietzschean sort of, um, way to have an idea, uh, on a, on a, on a hike on a mountain. Uh, and, um, I'm pretty sure during that first conversation, I said pretty directly, you know, if we do this, I don't want to run it. I'll s- I'll run it to start with, but I don't want to run it. And I, I realized by this point that though, you know, varying assessments of my abilities as a CEO, but I'm not an organizational leader. It's not really my, it's not really my str- uh, strength. And, um, uh, I knew that I didn't want to run it.

And so, you know, we, we, we, we went through that path where, um, uh, or I ran it for eight or nine months. We brought on a CEO, uh, to run it going forward. Uh, I believe was another round of funding. Um, and that didn't work out. So we were faced with a very difficult choice of, you know, well, should I do this again even though it's not really what I love doi- that, that at, not the company, but the role in the company. Uh, should I, should I take that back?

Brad was very clear he wasn't gonna bring on another CEO, that we were either done or I was gonna do it, and which I think was, you know, uh, wise. Um, and, uh, I decided to go for it anyway. And, um, you know, that, that, that was where all of these conflicts came from in terms of what you and I talked about in coaching was I, I knew I shouldn't be

doing this, but on the other hand, that was kind of, that was kind of the, the rock and the hard place I was between in the entrepreneurial role.

So back to your question about did Nietzsche, um, was reading Nietzsche part of this? Absolutely, but it was, it was part of a longer train of things on both sides of the equation, on both, uh, the, uh, the struggles that I had had in entrepreneurship, whatever else was going on in my life, which I'm, you know, I'm sure there were other things. Um, uh, and, uh, and wanting to learn more about how, how, uh, somebody, somebody heavyweight really thought about how to live.

Jerry: Hmm. The, the, what I'm hearing is and, and I'm, I'm brought back to some of our coaching conversations, you know, especially around this, th- th- this notion of being conflicted about whether or not you wanted to take, stay in that position. And, and, um, you know, I, as I'm recalling it, there was even a sense of obligation that you felt, you know, um, and yet, there was also conflict about whether or not... And I think you, you correctly asserted yourse- your, uh, described yourself is, is there are things that you were good at and things that you are not as good at. And starting is something that you're good at, and, you know, overtime it became more difficult to be the guy who sort of manages, you know, large group of people and sort of navigate all of that space.

Um, what I'm struck by in the passage is the, um, is an invo- invocation if you will to use this. This may mean looking at the fundamental assumptions of the business or looking at your own psychology. And you both know me well enough to know that I'm a big fan of people looking at their own psychology and looking at their own experience and facing up to some dark truths about your own behavior.

What did you learn about yourself, Dave, in that time period?

Dave: Oh, many things, but, um, I actually think, I actually think that, um, I certainly solidified, uh, the view that I had had about being an organizational leader. I think I characterized some of that in the chapter in which, for which I haven't of the narrative. Uh, in other words, you know, each chapter being a quote and an essay and a narrative, or so- many of them have a narrative, and I contributed one narrative. Um, and just this, this conflict between, well, how do, how do I do this? Um, how hard do I press people? Um, and, uh, you know, um, I think, I think, uh, some of that has been reflected in, um, my, uh, my direction since, uh, selling Standing Cloud, which wa- is that I have mostly resisted, uh, work, uh, working with organizations or in organizations, well really entirely resisted in organizations, and, and, um, uh, you know, whenever I'm working with others, it's a, uh, it's a, it's a warning signal, right? Do, do I really want to work with somebody else, or do I want to just do my own thing?

And, um, you know, uh, that has been an interesting exploration, right? That the opportunity to go off and do something different, really, that was the most important thing about doing something different was I, r- I really need to stop doing this. Um, and, you know, fortunately, for reasons other than Standing Cloud, I was able to do so, uh, economically.

So, um, uh, you know, that was a challenge even working with one other person who I've worked with closely and effectively for 30 years, right? And so, um, so, you know, the, the, the questioning of the assumption, do I wanna be working with other people at all, uh, is a, is a really interesting one, right? Um, there are other chapters in the book by the way that, that, that get at this, right? There, there's this, um, you know, uh, it's just easier before you have customers and employees and, and, uh, you know, I just wanna do this on my own. I wanna have a one-person business, right? That's not what I wanna do. Dave, what Dave wants to do, but some people, that actually is the right thing for them to do, right? Having a, having a one-person business that they run online and don't really ever have to work with other people and their customer, you know, customer service is all email, and that's the right kind of business for some people. And, and these are issues that you ha- must think through, I think, as an entrepreneur. And I, and I think I did.

Jerry: That, that reminds me of my good friend Steve Kane whose original business plan for, uh, Gamesville, which was a bingo site which I funded when I was a venture capitalist, uh, was originally called Nine Co. No emplo- no inventory, no employees, cash only.

Dave: (laughs)

Jerry: Um, and, uh, his choice at the time was either bingo games or parking lots. And, uh, you know, he chose, fortunately for me, he chose bingo games. But, uh, but I, you know, I think that that's one of those moments. You know, in addition to encouraging people to look at their own psychology, I, AKA what I refer to as radical self-inquiry, one of the theories that I work with all the time is that the experience of being an entrepreneur, the experience of being a leader actually gives us an opportunity to do precisely what you did, Dave, which was to really look at yourself honestly, to look at the, not the delusion that you carry about yourself of who am I supposed to be for whatever reasons; either because you're living up to somebody's projection of who you're supposed to be, or an internalized projection. But to say to yourself, "Who am I supposed to be?" Even with the added pressure, and I, I'm gonna go to the relationship between the two of you now. Even, even with the added pressure of I could lose my friend's money.

Now, God love Brad Feld, he's fine. Okay, he's had enough success that it's fine, but, um, it's remarkable and notable that you also have this sort of backdrop of this friendship. And Brad, you know, in some ways, you kinda put pressure on Dave. Said, "Look, you know, uh if you don't come back in and take this role as CEO again, we're outta here." Tell, tell me what, what that experience looks like for you guys.

Brad: Yeah, I'm happy to start with that, because I think, um, i- I think my goal with how I approach that was, um, was simple. And, uh, but it, but it was clearly simple from my frame of reference versus simple from Dave's frame of reference. Um, it's long enough in the past where I don't remember the exact conversations, but the, uh, having been through this multiple times, my view was I did not want to make the decision whether or not we shut the company down. We hired the CEO, it hadn't worked. That was a, you know, a collective it didn't work. It wasn't anybody's fault. It just didn't work. The business was at a state where it needed more money. And, uh, I was willing to invest

more money in the company. I still believed in the initial premise of the business. I still believed in the potential for it to turn into something interesting. I still very much trusted and believed in, uh, Dave and the people that he was, you know, assembling and his ability, if he was interested in taking on, uh, the sort of effort to turn this into something interesting.

Jerry: Hmm.

Brad: Um, but I also didn't feel the need for him to do that. It was totally fine with me to lose the money we'd invested at that point and to call it a day and move on, um, from a financial investor perspective. There was no need to continue the business.

Jerry: Right.

Brad: And in the context of there being no need to continue the business, I really wanted it to be Dave's choice as to whether we continued the business or not. In that context, my view was a constraint-based view, which is in some ways, I probably would have been, I probably would have preferred to not continue the business, but I was unwilling to be the one that made that decision. That was really the founder decisions, and that was really Dave's decision. And from that perspective, I wanted to make it a relatively simple decision for me, and in some ways, clarify the decision for Dave, 'cause it's kind of easy to say, for an investor to say, "Okay, we'll put more money in this thing. We'll defer sort of dealing with whatever the reality is. Okay, we need to go find a new CEO. That'll take us some time. Um, so more time will pass, and maybe the new CEO will work or won't work. And that new CEO will take time to ramp up," but it was still so early as a business that that wasn't really, in my own experience, a particularly effective or logical path. It could work, but it was a low probability work.

And what I wanted to do was have a higher probability of success, but also recognize that the probability of failure was still meaningful, 'cause it was an early company.

Jerry: Yeah, I, I, I'm gonna jump in here, Brad. As you often do, you're describing a, a complex decision point against a framework of, because I know you so well, a set of values you have. You used a phrase, "It's a founder's decision," and, and, and I've seen you over the years both choose to invest further in companies that are struggling and choose not to invest, which is a responsible way to approach this. But I'm gonna point out a variable here that I know you've done before, 'cause you've backed friends before, but, but this is a guy in Dave who I know from your stories. When you were in the depths of your depression, this is the guy who came to you and showed up and held your, held you when you were nearly paralyzed with depression. You know, he, he's gonna be uncomfortable. Dave's gonna be uncomfortable for me calling it out, but too bad. You're gonna have to deal with it.

You're actually a nice guy. He's the guy who would interrupt you when you would be in your most obsessive states. And he was there with you. And you actually have to make a choice about whether or not you're funding Dave. Ho- how do you navigate that?



Brad: Well, I think the way you set it up is really important, because I, I do think in those moments, um, I contemplated some of that, but I didn't let that dominate. So it wasn't that there was no contemplation of that, but it was also not the other end of the spectrum where it was, "All right. I need to, I need to make my decision as an investor in a way that is most accommodating to my relationship with Dave."

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brad: But it also wasn't the case that I was thinking about it from this standpoint of, "I need to, uh, make my decision in absence of that relationship." And I'll tell a short story that is from Feld Technologies, from our first business, which is part of why that was my frame of reference, which is not, "It was the founder's decision. That's my default," but that I wanted to set up from my perspective a series of acceptable paths, but let Dave ultimately choose the acceptable path from his perspective or the path he wanted to pursue.

I don't, I don't remember when in, in our business this was, but it was not at the beginning. It was kind of mid-stage of our business. So I'm gonna guess we probably had a million dollar company at this point. We were making money, we had employees, we were having our ups and downs. And we had plenty of conflict as, as, as f- as co-founders. I would say we were very good at resolving the conflict. The conflict didn't linger. You know, when it would appear, one of us would observe that the other was unhappy, uh, with, with what was going on and we, we deal with it. And they weren't explosive conflicts. They were, you know, let's sit down and let's spend some time and talk about it.

We were joking recently. We used to have a, a Japanese restaurant around the corner, and my mental model that I remember is whenever we had one of these conflicts, we'd go to Nara, and we'd have sushi, and we'd have beer, and we would sort of talk it out until we got to the end result. And in this particular moment that I'm remembering, I knew Dave was really, really annoyed with me. And it, it was persistent. I couldn't figure out why he was annoyed, but it was persistent. Um, and it had, it was an annoyance that was building over several events over a period of time. And I don't remember whether we went to Nara or we talked about it somewhere else, but I basically said, you know, "What's going on? Like, why you so annoyed with me?" And in a very direct way, Dave said some equivalent to, "Working with you is like starting by reading the last page of the mystery novel first. "It is, you know, you tell me what the answer is, and as a very first starting point, and I wanna go, then, do the work and discover the answer. Like, I'm interested in the process to discover the answer. I'm not only interested in the answer. And so then I'd go spend a bunch of time looking for the answer, and most of the time, the answer you started with was the answer that I realized is the best answer."

And that's very frustrating in a certain domain of problem space. Like, in certain problems, like, go, go tell the answer all day long on that. Like, I don't, I don't wanna go discover that answer. I'm happy to have you discover that answer, but this is my domain. These are the answers I want to go discover, because I enjoy the process. That's powerful and meaningful to me in terms of my own experience and learning. And we

talked about that, and I realized that I was really being unhelpful. And it wasn't just with Dave. It was in other contexts where, you know, allowing the other person to get to a conclusion on their own was something that I need to create space for.

And I'll, I'll tie it to a CEO today independent of mine and Dave's relationship. Something I see all the time is, is especially true by the way with, with engineering, uh, or product-based leadership, which is when the person who is not responsible for doing the thing says, "This is when it must be done by, and this is how I want you to do it." The person, then, has to do the work, it's not their, it's not their schedule. It's not... They, they did not make the commitment to it. They now feel an obligation to try to satisfy somebody else's dictum. And as an engineering leader, that's a very ineffective way from, from my own experience, to be a leader. You know, if, if you tell your, uh, if you're the VP of engineering and you tell one of your teams, "I need this by Friday," as the starting point, it's not, they're not telling you, "Hey, we'll get you this by Friday." And so the idea that they're gonna have to do all the work and they're gonna stay up all night making sure they get it to you by Friday has been imposed on them versus them deciding it's something they wanna go after.

So I, I had, I had this, and again, it's, i- structurally for me, my view was I know that this is a hard situation. I know that this is a real decision. I know that Dave... I believe Dave is going to want to make his own determination as to which path to go down versus me make the determination. I trust him that if he wants me to make the determination, he will come back to me and say, "You know what, you tell me what you wanna do." But if it was unbounded where I'm like, "Hey, whatever," that wouldn't actually be that helpful, because we would likely, in this case where it was unbounded, and it's like okay, whatever. Here's some more money, go do whatever you wanna do. In some ways, that was even worse, 'cause it didn't put any constraints on the problem to make it a solvable problem.

Jerry: Wow. I wanna bring Dave back into this and get his perspective on that story and, and the conclusions.

Brad: Yeah, and-

Jerry: Dave?

Dave: So, um, by way of background, uh, I have a few things to say about this. By way of background, a story back again into the dot com days, um, for a period of time, I actually, uh, when I first moved to Colorado, I worked for Brad as an employee at, at, uh, Softbank Venture Capital, which became Mobius. I was, he was a partner. I was a, I was a, uh, an associate. Um, and, uh, you know, Brad and I had a good w- working relationship. And one day, I said to him, I remember standing in the parking lot and s- kinda, I, I remember a moment, and I said to him, "You know, I think you take too long to fire CEOs." And d- I'm sure it was in the context of some particular company, but, you know, we'd seen these things before. And, um, you know, I was probably working with one of these companies where it was just a disaster.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dave: And Brad got this very, very thoughtful look on his face like he, he understood what I was saying, um, presumably had thought about it before. And he s- he said, "Yeah, I think you're right, but what I found is that it doesn't usually work out anyway when that happens, so, um, I figure I, I figure I'll give it more time." So the reason I tell that story is it's sort of relevant tech- uh, substantively, but it's also, it's also relevant in the kinds of understandings that Brad and I had. And one of the reasons we were able to write this book together is that, um, you know, we don't have very similar styles. We have very different styles, and we don't agree on everything philosophically, but kind of for the most part, our philosophy in business is very similar. I don't think it's just that it co-developed. It's also that we just kinda came to very similar conclusions about what the right things to do are. Again, I don't want to overstate how much importance there is, but it's, it's, it's striking. You know, it's, uh, it's kind of interesting, uh, how, how similar our kind of assumptions about what's good and bad, what works, what doesn't are.

Um, and so at the time when this happened, uh, at Standing Cloud, um, when I was faced with that decis- when, when, when, when Brad said, "Hey," and I, I don't remember the conversation, either. It may not have been that abrupt or direct, but that was the basic choice that I had. I kind of already knew that that was the right choice, right? I mean, I didn't think we should go try to find another CEO. That was gonna, that was gonna be a, that was gonna be just another waste of money. Um, that clearly wasn't going to work, and, you know, to whatever extent, I was the problem by the way. In that, in that, uh, interaction that was an issue. Uh, in other words, we bring on another CEO, and it might be the, the, uh, you know, uh, uh, having me in that, uh, subordinate position didn't work that well. I, I don't think that's what was going on, but I'm sure that was part of it.

Um, so I already knew that choice that Brad was presenting me with. That wasn't really big news to me or some shock. Bu there's another really important thing, uh, here, which is that I'm serving this. I don't really know, but I think Brad knows me well enough that he, he knows that I wouldn't have wanted him to make any decisions or present me with anything like that because we were close friends, because I had helped him out in the past in this way. Like, this wasn't, this wasn't a friendship decision, right? This was a, this was a business decision. It was a financial decision. It was entrepreneurship decision, and, uh, you know, by, by not just shutting it down right away, he was already according me respective friendship, right, by even giving me a choice.

And so we're already there. I wouldn't have wanted him to, and I think he knows that I wouldn't have wanted him to kind of do me further favors, you know? Um, uh, uh, that's not the kind of relationship we had when we were working, when we're working together professionally. It was this, that's part of our friendship, too, right, is that, is that we knew that when we were working together professionally that we trusted each other not to just do stuff because we're friends.

Jerry: I'm glad you brought in the word trust, Dave, because that's actually what I'm seeing so clearly between the two of you. You trust enou- trust each other enough to profoundly

disagree if you need to. You trust each other enough to know in advance the best way to navigate this rela- relatively complex relationship. There's also a fierce truth telling I see that you do with each other. And at times, you know, it may generate some tension, but I actually think that that links back to the trust. It's like, um, I know you both well enough to know that, Dave, if you said, "Back off. Stop giving me the answer," it would come from a place of a kind of non-defensive stance, but a kind of, like you can trust, but that's actually gonna be heard, even if you have to say it two or three times.

You know, and we're not, part of what I'm extrapolating here is, uh, really perhaps, and I don't wanna put you guys on a pedestal in any stretch of the imagination, but there is a, there is a little bit of a guide path here for how to navigate a very complex, well potentially complex situation, which is where two friends were gonna go into business together and there are these differences. There's a power differential that can show up that you navigate well and it may or may not come to pass the way you want it to come to pass, but you can still all these years later, you're still friends.

Dave: Well, it's, I think it's important to, uh, characterize the trust, what the trust was and carefully, because it, it, I don't think in our relationship that the trust is that, um, that if I, if I, uh, were to say something or complain about it or visa versa, um, that there would be a response to that directly, that was what was desired. In other words, if I say, "Brad, I want you to, you know, do this or that," that's not the trust. Um, the trust is that if I say something like that sincerely, that he would take it seriously and think about it. In other words, that we, we have an adult/adult relationship, that it's not, and, and, and it, and that it's, and that it's, and that it's taken seriously. Not kind of, "Yeah, I don't really have time to worry about that. I don't care that much. It's not important to me, so whatever," which is what I see in a lot of entrepreneurial relationships. And of course, Brad, you know, has a lot more examples of these kinds of things.

But, um, you know, when I'm mentoring or advising companies, I see a lot of kind of... It's not j- it's not so much just that they're in it for themselves only, but rather that they, they're not, they don't even seem to be capable of kind of thinking about the relationship as an aspect of it. It's just kind of, uh, in the way. Um, and so that's the, that's the trust that I think helped us so much as partners in a business and as colleagues working together in a variety of capacities and in a variety of things, right, is that, that we, we take the, the point of view of the other seriously and, and listen and think about it. And then if we disagree, we say we disagree. We don't just kind of passive aggressively do our own thing anyway, right? It's, um, and, you know, you know Brad. He'll tell you if he disagrees. It's not really like an issue or anything (laughs). I'm kinda the same way, right?

Brad: I was just gonna say, Dave, you are exactly-

Dave: Yeah.

Brad: ... the same way.

Dave: Yeah, uh, and so that, you know, that, that works. I mean, being, being open about that. But the trust is that that's gonna happen, not that it's gonna, that that it, not that Brad's gonna come around and, you know, see it my way or anything like that. I don't expect that, but he does, uh, he does take it seriously. And I, I hope that I do the same.

Brad: I've written a bunch of books now. I am a very inconsistent and flaky writer. Um, I write a lot. I write episodically, so it's very, it's very lumpy. It's not like every day, I sit down for three hours and do my writing. I have a lot of things that distract me. I'm extraordinarily good at one of the writer's gifts, which is procrastination.

Jerry: It's called ABW, anything but writing.

Brad: Anything but writing.

Jerry: (laughs)

Brad: That's very different than how Dave approaches a project. He's very disciplined. He's very focused. He's, you know, he, he makes time for it, and off he goes. I did a lot of editing versus rewriting. I added a few things, and I did a few things, but at that point, I was being the annoying editor of the well-written work that was getting tuned up a little bit. And one of the things that we disagree on in terms of the editing style is the use of commas.

Jerry: (laughs) I think you did that on my book, too.

Brad: We just didn't agree. We just, it's a, just a different style. And by the way, I think grammatically, probably both styles are valid-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brad: ... you know, with, with tone, but we just disagreed. And I was changing commas left and right. And at some point, it became, "No more fucking changes to the commas."

Jerry: (laughs)

Brad: And for me, it was, I kinda looked at it. I'm like, "You know what? It, this is marginal improvement of something that maybe actually marginal dis-improvement. I may be making it worse by the changes I'm making and, and clearly, I'm aggravating the shit out of Dave with this level of pedantic, uh, you know, changing. What am I doing, right?" And so again, the trust that when he says, said to me, "No more fucking commas," my reaction wasn't to actually care about the commas, but to be tuned into the fact that I was now doing something that was truly not helpful in our collaboration because my own proclivities, nothing to do with Dave, right?

So, the back and forth of that dynamic, this is the adult/adult relationship comment I think that Dave makes is, is it's not a game that we're playing with each other. It's just, you know, there's some point where my different style starts to crunch on his

boundaries or his different style starts to crunch on my boundaries. And I think we're both quite good at saying to the other, "You know what? Enough." And, and that, and, and it's like, "Oh. Got it." And, and on to the next thing.

Brad: My meta on that, though was, was the, the notion of us knowing the other's boundary-

Dave: Right.

Brad: ... and being comfortable when the other says, "You've crossed my boundary, right? Your, your, your different style is now hurting me or hurting what we're doing together." Um, when, when one of us hears that from the other, we listen. This is the trust. This is what I think Dave was saying, and I was just trying to make another example of him maybe ham-handedly. It's when I hear it from Dave, I don't react to it. I'm like I trust that he is expressing a real feeling, and I think about it. And I realize that I am treading on a boundary. The inverse is true, too, right? When there is something that Dave does that is bothersome to me, he doesn't have to wonder whether he's crossed a boundary or not. He trusts that if he has, I will make a comment about it.

Jerry: You know, um, I'll bring in my favorite German philosopher. Um, I'll call it and start to wrap us with this. What I see beyond the trust here is something that Rilke, uh, refers to. And one of my favorite passages from *Letters to a Young Poet*, in which he's advising the young poet who's written to him about the difficulty of relationship. And he says broadly speaking to love one another is the most difficult of all things, and that his, uh, advise and council is to try to see the other as this expansive being against an immense sky. I love that phrase, the immense sky.

And, you know, it's one thing to have a level of trust that is born out of 37, 40, almost 40 years, guys, 40 years of friendship. It's another thing to allow the other person to be exactly who they need to be in that moment, you know, whether it's backing off giving the answer to the puzzle or allowing comma choices or allowing someone like Dave to go through the learning edge experience of actually figuring out who to be CEO, because if I'm right and, you know, I am being a leader is an opportunity to grow the hell up, right, to quote from my own book. It's the opportunity to s- to, to look at the monsters that you speak to, that Nietzsche speaks to, to look at the parts of ourselves that we really don't wanna look at. And the, in order for that to happen, you need a container that I think you created for each other over the course of these 35 years. Yeah, you go do your thing, and I'm sure it wasn't always that way, and I'm sure there were bumps and hassles, but I think with, that's what you have learned with each other is the ability to see each other and let each other be against that immense sky and have your own experience and trust that the other person ain't, is not gonna drop you and leave you.

Jerry: This is very powerful.

Jerry: I think that, you know, part of the elder wisdom and all of a sudden, it just occurs to me that we're all a bunch of elders. We're all just sitting around, right, talking about it from that stance. It, it got, does go beyond, "Don't sweat the small stuff," but to notice our own reactions, notice our own proc- proclivity to tell, to fix, to, um, you know, set

straight, to somehow not intentionally diminish the other person, but to actu- but that's the, that's the, that's the effect of it. And I, and I see in this collaboration, even the latest entrepreneurial endeavor being the book, this collaboration of allowing each other to actually go about it in the way that actually is in service to them and trusting that the book's gonna get done. And the book got done.

I wanna thank you both. I really appreciate your, um, joining in the conversation today. I found the book incredibly helpful and thought provoking.

Dave: Thanks, Jerry.