

Jerry Colonna:

Well, welcome Chip. Welcome to the Reboot Podcast. Thank you for coming on the show.

Chip Conley:

It's great to be here with you. Look forward to our conversation.

Jerry Colonna:

Yeah, you know, when we plotted this out, about coming into conversation. The spark, if you will, is your wonderful, brilliant new book, *Learning to Love Midlife*. And it sparked a whole bunch of conversation and thoughts for me. But as we were preparing for today,

I was on LinkedIn, we're both on LinkedIn, and I saw you post something on LinkedIn. So I do wanna go back to that in a way. But let's take a step back and talk about *Learning to Love Midlife*.

Why do we have a hard time with midlife?

Chip Conley:

Well, it's a great question. Let me give you an answer in two parts. I'll talk about my own side of this, and then maybe the societal one. Personally, it was like midlife sort of was a lurker in a back alley. And one day it jumped on me and just said, "hey, I'm here, notice me, and I'm dangerous." And that was my late 40s. My late 40s were rough. Everything that could go wrong was going wrong. And not just circumstantially, yes, that's true. Things circumstantially were not going well. But also just internally. And I actually think that's a lot of what's going on with what's happening in midlife – the internal process and evolution. And if disappointment equals expectations minus reality, let me say that again, if disappointment equals expectations minus reality, it is often around our mid-forties to later forties where we can see the future and some of the expectations we had in our life may not be coming to pass.

And so we have to do something that my friend, Brene Brown, calls the midlife unraveling. We have to actually unravel ourselves from our emotions and expectations. And not from our emotions, we have to face the emotions, but we have to unravel our expectations. And that's what I had to do in my late 40s. And thank God I had an NDE. You don't hear that very often, do you? I had a near-death experience where I...

Jerry Colonna:

And you need to describe what an NDE is.

Chip Conley:

Yeah, and NDE is a near-death experience. I was, in the midst of all this bad stuff happening and losing five male friends to suicide during the Great Recession, ages 42 to 52, I had an allergic reaction to an antibiotic because I had a broken ankle and a septic leg. I ended up dying nine times in 90 minutes and obviously came back each time and sometimes it's because the

paramedics had paddles and paddled, you know, did the electric paddles to my chest.

But I... That was a wake-up call for a hotelier, because that's my background, was a boutique hotelier, one of the first in the US, and created one of the largest boutique hotel companies in the world. And long story short is I didn't want to do it anymore, I didn't want to have this life. And so the wake-up call sort of forced me to say like, okay, you know what, how might I change this? And I did what we now at MEA, the Modern Elder Academy called, I did a **great midlife edit**, I edited what wasn't working. I really, using discernment, tried to decide like, what do I need to change?

That gave me space in my early 50s to have a midlife atrium, space to imagine how I want to consciously curate the second half of my adult life. And because I sold the company at the bottom of the Great Recession. And I ended up being introduced to Brian Chesky, who in early 2013 reached out to me and said, "Listen, how would you like to help us democratize hospitality?" I'd like you to be my in-house mentor and the Head of Global and Strategy and within a couple months he and his two co-founders were calling me the "modern elder" which I didn't like at first because I thought they were making fun of my age but they said Chip you're twice the age of the average person here you're 52 and they said a modern elder is someone who's as curious as they are wise and this opened up my next seven and a half years, four years full-time, three and a half years part-time, helping them steer that rocket ship that led to AirBnB going IPO as the most valuable hospitality company in the world.

During that time, I had my 50s, which I loved. So I had my late 40s, which I hated, my 50s I loved on many levels, not just my career side of things. And that's what led me to starting to be very curious about midlife and ultimately creating the world's first midlife wisdom school, the Modern Elder Academy | MEA.

And what I can say to summarize, and then we'll go to the next question or your observation, midlife has a terrible brand. Let's start with that. The first word attached to it is crisis.

Jerry Colonna:  
Right.

Chip Conley:  
And the fact is, it's more of a crystalist than a crisis. It is a period of time. If you look at the famous biological journey of the caterpillar to the butterfly, the midlife is the crystalist. It's dark and gooey and solitary, but it's also where the transformation happens. And so it is a time, I would say, in midlife when much of what got us here is not what's gonna get us there, and much of what we valued no longer be important and it's time for us to actually start looking at the world with a new pair of glasses. It's also when our ego starts to maybe evaporate a little bit at least and our soulful spirituality and interesting meaning and purpose and something beyond ourselves really grows.

So for all those reasons I think midlife is extremely misunderstood and understudied. And that's why I decided to write *Learning to Love Midlife* because we've had over 4,000 alumni from 47 countries come to MEA's campus. And I've been able to study people in midlife to understand what they were going through as well as what I was going through.

Jerry Colonna:

Well, I appreciate all of that. I have a bunch of things to react to. One is, I really feel your journey. I really felt your journey. And as many folks know, my midlife chrysalis transformation really began at age 38, because I'm precocious as fuck. I mean...

Chip Conley:

You are precocious. Ha ha ha.

Jerry Colonna:

I am so precocious. And it was a time period, and it was marked by, and I think of your friends, the five friends who died by suicide, it was really marked by a profound depression that caused me to do what you would call as a midlife edit. To re-examine things. I often will advise people that pruning shears are the best tool for you in that time or even more the bonsai snips which actually strengthen that core beautiful plant that's in its own way an elder.

And so I really related to that and if we go back to the question... I have my own theory, you know, as an interviewer you want to ask questions to which you have an answer, but you also want to stay curious as to hear the guest's answer, right? And I think that part of the reason that we fear or that we have difficulty loving midlife is, it's kind of the shadow of death, isn't it?

Chip Conley:

Oh, totally. Thank you for... This is why I love, you know, collaborating with you. That's what I didn't talk about yet. It is... you know... Two key things here. Number one is, as a society, we're an ageist society. Ageism is the last socially acceptable bias. And Hallmark Cards is even in on the game. They're gonna make you feel bad about turning 40, 50, 60, 70 or more. So we have an ageist society, and there's a lot of reasons for that. And that's more true in the US than any other country in the world. But part of what's going on also is this fear of death and the fear of the body disintegrating and that's partly because we get come face to face with our parents passing, our friends passing. We see our own body start to not look as good as it used to I mean, I think of our body as a rental vehicle that we were we were issued at birth and by the time you get to 40 50 60 70 that rental vehicle doesn't look so good on the exterior. Or it doesn't look as good as it used to. It's all a matter of the beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

But what we really need to look at is, OK, why do we have this fear of death? And why do we have this infatuation, not infatuation, but obsession with loss and that midlife and later is about loss. And that's why the subtitle of my book, *Learning to Love Midlife*, is *12 Reasons Why Life Gets Better with Age*. Because as a society, we're really good at reminding us about what gets worse with age, but we're not very good about talking about what gets better with age. And

there's a lot of things that do. And so I really spent a lot of time talking to social scientists and academics and some of our faculty members at MEA to compile this list that is, you know, has some social science backing it up.

Jerry Colonna:

I want to go back to this fear that I see it. And to be fair, I agree with you about the ageism and our inability as a society to come to grips with, OK, trigger warning, I'm about to speak about Buddhism, the impermanence of aging.

Chip Conley:

Yeah, yeah.

Jerry Colonna:

I am fascinated by the first line of the Donald Justice poem, *Men at Forty*, which is quite gendered, so I want to acknowledge that. So the first line of *Men at Forty* is, "Men at Forty learn to close softly doors to rooms they will not be going back to."

Chip Conley:

Ooh, I love that. Yeah.

Jerry Colonna:

Oh, and you know, when I think back to my own transformation process, it was the realization partially because of physicality, as you write so eloquently in the book, and partially because of the impermanence of aging, but partially because of the loss of, in a sense, it felt like I was entering a period of grieving dreams.

Chip Conley:

Mmm, yeah. Yeah.

Jerry Colonna:

Grieving that which, you know, as I, as I often joke, people at midlife learn to close softly doors to rooms that will not be coming back to. I will not do the things that I had hoped to do when I was 7, 8, 10, 12, 15 years old.

And I think that there is a correlation, too, if we go back to the experience you mention your friends and their suicide. When we think about it, and Terry Reel has done a fabulous job examining this question of mostly men of the species, but not exclusively men of the species, are difficulty of speaking of depression, say from 35 to 65, what that is like. And I think that there's a correlation between our fear of midlife, our perceiving it as a crisis, and our inability to sort of make sense and sort through these powerful feelings of loss and the implication at the end of the line of death. Does that make any sense? Having become so much of an expert in midlife?

Chip Conley:

Well, I think what makes sense is that, yes, it makes a ton of sense, Jerry, and I think there are a couple things going on that are gender specific.

Jerry Colonna:

Hmm.

Chip Conley:

Around age 50, if you were to survey, and we have, but if you look at social science surveys on this, generally the thing that women are fearful at 50 is invisibility and men, it's irrelevance. And it's very interesting. It's pretty gender specific. Women are less worried about irrelevance because at times, actually, frankly, from a career perspective, they're on the incline. Women's confidence and career paths get better with each decade. Whereas men are plateauing and maybe actually coming down. And men, especially if you're a straight white man, you've actually never been face to face with any ism. You haven't had to deal with racism, sexism, or homophobia. And all of a sudden...

Jerry Colonna:

If you're white. Right, right, right.

Chip Conley:

If you're white, that's what I said, if white straight white man, all of a sudden you're in your 50s and people are looking at you a little differently. Now in certain industries, you're still, you know, if you're, if you're, you know, president of the United States, you're still rocking the, you know, we want you in your 50s. In fact, we like people in their 50s as opposed to maybe in their 70s or 80s.

And the reality is that in many industries though, especially industries that are very tech focused, gosh, being in your 50s is like being a dinosaur elder and you're as curious as you are wise because you have to be with both of those things. If you're just trying to be the wise one you're gonna try to dispense your wisdom and no one wants to hear it they're gonna say okay boomer because of the fact that you are not coming from a place of curiosity. You need to have context for and to be able to actually offer your wisdom. If you just offer it to a willy-nilly to anybody and say here's the way the world works, people will tune you out.

So for men, the idea of being a PIP, you know, a previously important person as opposed to a VIP, is really painful, made harder by the fact that men don't talk about these things. Women are so much better and socialized to have an emotional insurance policy. Other women often, sometimes other men, but other women that they can talk to about the things that aren't working in their lives. Men don't do this as much.

And this is part of the reason why peer-to-peer networks have become so popular because it is a way to socialize through YPO, Vistage, EO, and other programs like that the opportunity to

create the safe crucible to have a confidential conversation about things that aren't working.

Thank God because one of the things we have, you know, the living a life of quiet desperation as I think it was maybe Thoreau who said that, you know, very 1950s perspective was like, okay, you're the organization man. You have a path to live your life. It is the game of life. There's only one pathway in the game of life. There's not multiple choices. No. And you get tokens along the way in your little plastic car for getting married, having children, getting a promotion, buying your first home, etc. And we are in essence inflicted by successism, just like consumerism, where it is this societal definition of how success is meant to be carried out. And your job is to execute on that.

Jerry Colonna:

You're making me see something that I hadn't seen before, and I appreciate that. It's this tension between loss and a belief system that success and a meaningful life means accumulation.

Chip Conley:

Yes.

Jerry Colonna:

So when I've internalized the game of Life, that game that we played as children, if you remember at the very end there's a split where you go into millionaire acres or the retirement, right? and you know the corollary game which I played way too often as a child was Monopoly and so the I think the message that we internalized early on is that a meaningful life is measured by that which we have accumulated and I think that

Chip Conley:

Yeah, that's right.

Jerry Colonna:

You know, you have this lovely construct in the book, citing the difference between aging and growing. And I think part of what you're talking about in growing is growing towards a life where meaning is not derived by accumulation. Meaning is not derived by accomplishment or status, because there's that, uh, previously important person struggle. And, and in a sense, it points us to that which Brian and I guess, Joe and the others at Airbnb sort of dubbed you this modern elder, it points us to "what is an elder?" So let's go back to that. What is an elder?

Chip Conley:

Well, if we look back historically, first of all, elder is a relative term. It is not the same thing as elderly because elderly is often the last five or 10 years of your life. It's a time when you need interdependence and support. And to be an elder can be, you know, Tom Brady in the NFL was an elder at 42 as an NFL quarterback. You know, if you're a software engineer at 32, you might be an elder on your team because everybody else is 10 years younger. A fashion model is an elder at 26. So long story short is elder is a relative term.

Jerry Colonna:  
Right.

Chip Conley:

And it's a term that bestows a certain level of experience, maybe wisdom, and often power, historically. So if you look at the founding fathers of the United States, they wore wigs, gray wigs, that make them look older because they were young. So that's not the only reason they wore them, but that was a part of the reason, is to actually connote that they were more mature and wise than their years. We don't do that anymore, of course, we do quite the opposite with Botox and things. But the bottom line is, historically, the elders have been, from an indigenous perspective, those that passed on the spoken word lineage and traditions and wisdom, maybe a lot of it land wisdom, that was very relevant to the next generation. And so they were the meaning makers in many ways. And so that was a very important role.

And then we went from the agricultural era and the hunting gatherer to agricultural era to the industrial era, you know, over a hundred years ago and like, oh, well, the elders are not as important, you know, when you're talking about factory floors and assembly lines. So that was the start of the diminishment of the value of an elder. But still frankly there was you paid your dues in an organizational way the older you were in the organization the more power you had.

And then we went into the tech era starting 50 years ago. And, you know, it was frankly, 65 years ago that, uh, Peter Drucker said, knowledge workers will rule the world. And, um, in fact, that's true. Seven of the ten most valuable companies in the world today are tech companies. So knowledge workers became the thing.

And not only did elders not matter because it was like during the industrial area era, it was more like, okay, we need people who've got physical bodies to do things now it's all about and it's about the most recent knowledge you have around digital intelligence, DQ, and EQ became less important, emotional intelligence. The truth is the best organizations that are tech focused are a combination of DQ and EQ. And that's what I tried to have us embrace at Airbnb.

Long story short though is elders today are, it's a word that people are scared of. The reason I called the first Midlife Wisdom School, Modern Elder Academy is because to me, once I owned the idea of being a modern elder, someone as curious as I was wise, I thought it was an aspiration that we should make in society. So I think the idea of being a modern elder was aspirational. And yet still, we now call ourselves MEA, partly because there's a lot of baggage attached to the word elder, even if you give modern, you know, right before it.

But I think that at the end of the day, I think the most important thing is to see the symbiotic relationship across the generations. That's the big difference. It is no longer about respecting your elders.

Jerry Colonna:

Yeah, you know, I think that one of the things I'm taking away from your work and our conversations and quite frankly my own experience, I turned 60 in December and one of the things that's been going on for the last couple years for me has been a sometimes conscious, sometimes unconscious embrace of my own eldering, my own movement towards that. And when you reached out and we connected live, I was partially excited to really learn more about this phase of my life that I was going into. And one of the things that I have been kind of internalizing is one of the elders in my life, one of the many elders in my life, is the American Buddhist nun, Pema Chodron. And I've...

Chip Conley:

I love her.

Jerry Colonna:

I've had the great good fortune of being her student for almost 20 years now and we're pen pals. We write letters to each other. And this past fall she sent me a copy of her latest book which I highly recommend and I want to read just a little bit of it to you and come back to it. And her latest book is *How We Live Is How We Die*.

Chip Conley:

Please.

Jerry Colonna:

She says, and she's speaking about aging, and she's speaking about what we've been talking about, although she doesn't use the word midlife and the chrysalis transformation. But she is talking about transition and change. And she says, "*We don't enjoy uncertainty, insecurity, and groundlessness. We don't seek out vulnerability and rawness. These feelings make us uncomfortable, and we do whatever we can to avoid them. But these states of mind are always with us, if not blatantly, and I'll add, as they might be in midlife, then at least subtly in the background. To some degree, we always sense that we're on a plank, 40 stories up. This is the all-pervasive suffering the Buddha described.*" Now, I read *Learning to Love Midlife*. And I kept thinking about Pema's teachings in this book, partially because at one point in the book, you talk about your own experience with NDEs and your experience of your friends.

And so implicitly, I think you and Pema are seeing very similar things. How we live is how we die, and it matters how we live. And I'm going to argue that I think part of my definition of elder is learning to be comfortable with uncertainty.

Chip Conley:

Yes, yes. Yeah, I think it's learning to be comfortable with uncertainty. It's learning to not be stuck in the ghetto of your mind and ego. It's learning to get comfortable with liminality. Liminality for those who don't know that word is spectacular word. It is the idea of transition and life is just one constant evolving transition and yet we, as Dan Gilbert from Harvard in his TED Talks



speaks to, like, people vastly underestimate how much change they have coming ahead of them. They overestimate how much is coming in the next year and underestimate how much is going to happen in the next 10 years.

So if it's true that we're in constant evolving, in evolving state, why is it that no one taught us how to get a master's in transitional intelligence, TQ, and to be able to understand how do you navigate liminality? And that's really part of what we teach at MEA. That's a big piece of it because quite frankly we go through a lot of liminality in adolescence, in our teen years, and we have so much love, support, and guidance during that time. And peer-to-peer connection because you're going through it with the same group of people and you're talking about it. But you go from adolescence to middle-essence, middle-essence being midlife, when you're going through the same kind of hormonal, emotional, physical, and identity transitions. But we have no roadmap. We have very little in the way of support and frankly not a structure that helps you to understand what are the important questions to be asking and how do you execute on a liminal journey during that time. And so that's part of the reason why MEA exists, part of the reason we're very popular is because there's so little out there for people to understand that what Pema's talking about is life. And yeah, it is just life, yeah.

Jerry Colonna:

Is life. That's right. The fear of transition, the loneliness that one can fear in transition, gets labeled as a fear of death. But I think it's actually a fear of life.

It's, you know, I think back to Pema's teachings in *When Things Fall Apart*, is that notion that the grip that we want to hold on to, to things as they are, is actually antithetical to the way life actually unfolds, which is constant change and constant impermanence.

The, I wanna go back to the definition of elder and I want to play with this a little bit because I think one of the challenges in a corollary word to elder is the word wise. And I think it's a challenge for this reason, Chip. I think that there is a misunderstanding of what that word wise means. I think it implies you have all the answers.

Chip Conley:

Hahaha

Jerry Colonna:

And you laugh because, I mean, think about it from our own experience. Brian and others might look to you and say, well, what should we do? How should we live our lives? Think of the great Clay Christensen's book, Right? And I think what I'm... How shall I measure my life? Right. And I think the thing that's uncomfortable...

Chip Conley:

Yeah. Yeah, yeah. *How Should I Measure My Life?* Yeah.

Jerry Colonna:

...that I'm coming to grips with is that part of the task of being an elder is being okay with all of this uncertainty, impermanence and change, but also letting go of the need to not only know it, but to be right, to have the answers. And you know, if we go all the way back to the challenge to our ego that says, well, "Who am I if I don't have the answers?"

Chip Conley:

So, I wrote a book called *Wisdom at Work, The Making of a Modern Elder*, and it was a book chronicling my time at Airbnb. And what I really believe is that the process of becoming an elder or a modern elder starts with being, there are four steps, being willing to evolve. And you know, I had to evolve at 52 joining Airbnb, whereas two years earlier I had been CEO of my own company for 24 years, grew it 3,500 people, and 52 hotels and all of a sudden now I'm going over to Airbnb and I'm not the CEO I'm like you that someone called me the CEO whisperer and you have been called that before. My role was not to be the sage on the stage I was to be the guide on the side I was my job I had to right-size my ego and get really clear that I am evolving my archetype, my identity in the workplace. And so that was the first step.

And the second step was to learn. So instead of being the elder who comes in and teaches, I had to come in and learn because at 52, I never worked in a tech company before. And I was in charge of, yes, all the hosts in the world, that made sense because I was a hospitality guy, but I was in charge of strategy for the company. I was in charge of strategy for a tech company. I didn't even understand what the word product meant. So long story short, I'd never been involved with UX, UI, et cetera. But I had to learn and I had to be willing to turn my fear into curiosity to be great at packaging questions. You know, Jimi Hendrix famously said, "Knowledge speaks and wisdom listens." And I had to be a great listener. And I had to be not a motivational speaker, but a motivational listener. And to really understand things, and maybe before I opened my mouth, I would try to grock what I was hearing. And I was mostly looking for what wasn't being said. And so that's the second phase. So it evolves first, listen.

Third is to collaborate. As an elder, it's not about us being the hero to sort of like dispense wisdom. You know, as we get older, we get better. One of the twelve things that gets better with age is we're smarter emotionally. We have greater emotional intelligence, more emotional moderation. We know how to collaborate well. And that's not everybody. I mean, for those of you who say like, oh my God, of course, my uncle is like awful at that. These are averages.

But the reality is collaborates the third step and the fourth step is the thing that some people think is the first step... It's to learn how to counsel, how to be the confidant, the person who gives confidence to people younger than them in the role of the elder. But you've earned that if you've done evolve, learn, and collaborate first. Then you will have people leaning into you. And, you know, over the course of my seven and a half years at Airbnb, I had over 100 mentees. Now, many of them were not deep, long-term mentees. It was more like I was the librarian and my job was to have the know-how and know-who and say, like, point people in the right direction, have three meetings with them, and that was as much as the mentor relationship

worked. So, it really was less of a mentor and more of a scarecrow pointing directions, as well as the librarian knowing, hey, have you read this? Have you talked to this person? Et cetera. But...You know, people will lean into you if you know those first three things first. And so if people find that interesting, you know, read *Wisdom at Work*, which is really a testament to what does it mean to be a midlifer in the land of millennials, you know, for me back then when I was twice the age of the average employee there.

Jerry Colonna:

I'm going to pull some things together, which is the way I'm learning from you in this moment... You know, I opened up by bringing our attention back to death. I opened up by bringing our attention back to the sense of loss and the grief, you know, to doors, to rooms that we will not be going back to. And in some ways, the avoidance of the pain of that loss morphing into a kind of low-hum pervasive depression. And what I have found from my own life, and I wonder if this relates back to the experience that you've had being an elder to those emerging elders, if you will, is that an embrace of not knowing, an embrace of that uncertainty, an embrace of this guide on the side role where you ask more questions and provide answers, for me has been an extraordinary uplift in my emotional well-being.

Chip Conley:

Yes.

Jerry Colonna:

I spend so much of my time bemused by the world. When I'm not outraged at the way we hurt each other. Right.

Chip Conley:

What a great word. I love that word.

Jerry Colonna:

You know, I look at the world and I want to be clear. It's it's with empathy and it's with compassion. But it's I find myself less likely to be riled up. And more likely to respond with empathy to what I see. And therefore to bring it back, I'm less likely to be depressed.

Chip Conley:

Well, I think part of that, first of all, this is really deep. I can't wait to go for a long hike with you here in Santa Fe, because you're going to be teaching with me here in Santa Fe later this year on our campus. To take off the cape of the hero is incredibly liberating. And to go into a place, a state of curiosity and bemusement to see what is happening there and to become a first class noticer in the movie *The Intern* with Robert De Niro and Anne Hathaway. He was twice her age and she said at first that she didn't want him to become her senior intern because he was a little too observant.

Don't we all wish we could be a little more and too observant? Because it just means we're

observing the world. We're becoming a first class noticer. And I think the process of becoming a first class noticer takes us to that classic Viktor Frankl statement, which is between stimulus and response, there's a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. And in our response lies our growth and our freedom.

And so to be able to take away the reaction and instead to be able to respond to life. But in order to respond to life, you have to observe it. And you have to be open to the fact that you're not there to fix it in a moment's notice, which is how I've lived my life. So I've said in one...

Jerry Colonna:

Hmm. Oh, and it's how you were rewarded by life.

Chip Conley:

That's true, how I was rewarded as well. And so to be the can do it here, I can do it, I can do it. There was a year, a few years ago, when I, in my hotel company, I gave away 3,500 copies of the book, *The Little Engine That Could*. You had that little engine that says, I think I can, I think I can, I think I can, because the number one variable for our loyal guests in the hotel business was the can do it attitude of our employees. So I wanted them to all feel like, I can do it, I can do it, you know, sort of like the Obama thing, you know, si, si puede, we can do it. You know, there's that sense of like, okay, we can. Yes, we can.

So I've tried to move from being the conduit hero to the conduit, from conduit to conduit. Because conduit is something that comes through you. And it is, but you have to make the space for it to come through you. If you are in constant motion and trying for your ego benefit to actually be the one solving the problems, there's not a space for something to come through you. And so that's a big, big change for me in the last 10 years.

Jerry Colonna:

I'm going to give you an image that comes to mind. And it's one of my favorite images. It comes from Pema Chodron. And she writes about this in her book, *Comfortable with Uncertainty*. And she talks about how all around us, the world and its emotions are like the weather and it's storming all around us. And oftentimes, that weather just sort of flows into us, and we storm, and we ebb and flow, and we feel these things. And her elder advice, that wise advice, is to sit like a mountain in the midst of a hurricane.

And when I think about my movement, my movement from in my 30s being an investor and really living with a kind of hollowness and an emptiness inside of me that was just painful into where I am now in my 60s. I think more and more I sit like a mountain in the midst of a hurricane. I still internalize the rage and the weather. I still internalize the fear of impermanence. Will my children continue to love me as I age? Will I be abandoned? Will I be alone? Those feelings come up for me.

But more and more, I internalize that notion of this sort of rooted rock of ages that has a core

that goes down miles into the earth and is immovable but not obstinate and is the thing, this is what I wish more than anything, the thing upon which others may rest and seek shelter. So even as I sit there and bemused, it's not without empathy, but it's the ability to sort of reach down and say, as one elder, my psychoanalyst of 30 years used to say to me, this too shall pass.

Chip Conley:

Of course. Yeah. Well, weather's a fascinating metaphor for our emotions. I mean, I'm a big fan of the Rumi poem about the guest house. Of course, I love that particular one because I was a hotelier, a hospitality person for all my life, all my career. And so the idea that we are a guest house and these emotions come, you know, rushing in like a guest who's just, you know, lost their, you know, luggage at the airport. And they're checking into your house, your hotel of emotions, but they're not there forever.

So the idea that the external weather, you know, right now as we're talking, there's a major thunderstorm, not just a thunderstorm, but like a craziness in Southern California with weather and it will end. It will subside. It will move on. The problem for us with our emotions, because we have, there's the external weather and then there's our internal weather.

Jerry Colonna:

It will end.

Chip Conley:

The problem with our internal weather is we hold onto a resentment or we hold onto a feeling of being irrelevant or we hold onto a sense of guilt or shame as if we're trying to control the weather, as if we're saying that weather system that has come in the form of an emotion is something that I'm not going to let go of. And therefore we are trying to be God of our emotions. And if we can actually learn how to be that Rumi guesthouse of those emotions coming through us over time being less affected by them. Because if the thing about the Rumi, those of you who haven't heard it, go Google it, the guesthouse by Rumi.

It can be frightening to have all these emotions coming and then going but if you actually if you show up as the gracious Hotelier or host recognizing that they're not staying they are checking out your job is to actually just help to be the Sherpa and the hotelier of these emotions so that they actually don't overstay their welcome and even the good ones.

Jerry Colonna:

Yeah. I think, you know, as we start to wrap here, I think that we've hit upon something. You've certainly given me something more of that definition of what I'm striving towards more of that definition of what I'm becoming in this discussion. You said it will end. Now I'm going to lift that up and, and highlight that.

Because I think that is perhaps one of the most profound pieces of wisdom out there. It's not just as Dr. Sayers used to say to me, this too shall pass, but I'm going to expand upon it. It will end.

The weather will end. The storm that you're dealing with will end. Your life will end. And here's the corollary good news. And that's okay.

And that's OK. You know, in a sense, that honoring of the endings, which I think so much, I certainly think about my own transition, but the liminal space between my 30s and 40s, which so terrified me, doors closing and rooms that I will no longer enter. That space, understanding that end is not this greater end, but this interesting new space of a beginning.

Chip Conley:

Yeah. Well, the three stages of a transition are really the ending, the messy middle, and the beginning you know, trying to use that frame at the MEA website, which is MEAWISDOM.com, there's a free resource in the footer, which is called the Anatomy of the Transition, that goes through those three stages, the ending, messy metal, the beginning. And how do you cope through each of those three phases? Because frankly, for a lot of us, when we're going through a really difficult transition, we feel like we're stuck in the chrysalis, in that messy metal, and it's never going to change. And it might be...

Jerry Colonna:

And that's okay.

Chip Conley:

And that's okay, and that may be partly because we're trying to control the weather.

Jerry Colonna:

That's right. That the suffering comes from thinking that transition is wrong, is bad, is negative, when the liminal space is a necessary part of life. And, you know, uh, if we can approach all of it in that way, I think we end up transition, we end up passing along to...I'm fascinated with this notion of ancestors and descendants. I write about them a lot in my new book, *Reunion*. As I think about, I spend a lot of time thinking about descendants. And not just my children, but their children, and their children, and their children. What does that mean? Can I be a mountain of an ancestor that my descendants, two or three generations forward, can look back and say, there was a wise elder.

Chip Conley:

Well, Eric Erickson, the developmental psychologist, says that in the later stages of our life, the question we need to ask ourselves, or actually the statement we need to own, is "I am what survives me. I am what survives me." And you know, I am not my stuff that I own, I am not the books I write, I am not, you know, some of those things will survive us. I am not the trauma that happened to me, I am not my successes or my failures.

Jerry Colonna:

Oh, beautiful.

Jerry Colonna:

I'm not even the trauma that happened to me.

Chip Conley:

I am what survives me. And to really ponder that question is, what do you want that to be? And how will it show up? And in a seventh-generation kind of way, what seeds are you planting today that will survive you? And to me, at the end of the day, mentorship is a big piece of that. Because if I help someone to be a better human, I hope that they will continue that legacy.

Jerry Colonna:

Yeah. Well, Chip, my friend, my deep new friend, God bless you. God bless you for the work that you've done. God bless for who you are becoming.

Chip Conley:

Yes. Thank you.