

Jerry Colonna:

Well, good morning. Well, good morning for me. Good afternoon. Good evening for you.

João Barros:

Almost evening. Yes. Hi, Jerry. I'm very well. Thank you. How are you?

Jerry Colonna:

I'm I'm great. I woke up this morning, and we've got blanketed with snow. And it's...

João Barros:

That's so different from where I am right now.

Jerry Colonna:

Let's start off and welcome Joao to the podcast. In, every time I see you, my heart expands. I have to tell you that.

João Barros:

Thank you.

Jerry Colonna:

So let me do a quickie introduction without the full bio. We have known each other for, what, 7 or 8 years, perhaps.

João Barros:

Mhmm. Yes. About that. Yeah. 2012 August, I moved to Mountain View, California.

Jerry:

From Portugal.

João Barros:

Exactly. So I was a professor in Portugal and Portugal was hit by a really bad financial crisis with the notation agencies all downgrading Portugal, and we were below junk, as they said in terms of our balance. And. What happened was that we had actually spent 10 years investing in science and technology and building up university institutes and departments and so on. And actually, everything was actually going great from that perspective, also for me as a young professor. But, from one day to the other, the country went bankrupt, and I had a 23% salary cut, and all my students were giving up. They were just saying, you know, there's no future for science and technology here in Portugal. We have to immigrate. And so I felt, you know, we have to do something.

And so I actually invited my research group to come to my house for a Christmas party of about 15, 16 people. And, everyone was so depressed and I felt like I had to do something. And so I told them, you know, 2012 is going to be the year where we're going to take all of these amazing

technologies that you've been developing in the lab, and we're going to take them to the market. And I have no idea how to do that. But in January, in January, we are going to start. And suddenly you could see the energy level, of the students going up. So this was in 2011, December 2011. And then in March 2012, we launched 2 startups.

So Veniam, the one I ended up leading for about 10 years, and Stream Soul Echo, which was led by 3 of my PhD students. Soul that's how it started. And then I, after raising Series A in August 2014, that's why I know it's Reboot about 8 years, actually longer. It's gonna be 10 years this year, Jerry. Actually, I was just 10 years. And they, basically I had my face board meeting, which now in hindsight went really, really badly because I had no idea what I was doing And my investors at the time, so Omalik and Rohit Sharma at True Ventures, were very, very kind after the the. And they came to me and said, you know, you're not doing anything wrong. Let us just establish that.

But we have found that CEOs who have a coach perform typically much better than CEOs who don't. And they asked immediately the question that I always as. So okay. So who is the best, CEO coach? And they said, Jerry Colonna. And I actually didn't know who you were. But I went online and I saw your talk, about your hair on fire.

Jerry Colonna:  
Standing still while your hair's on fire.

João Barros:  
Exactly. Exactly. And I noticed, in one of your interviews that you had said that you actually didn't like when, VCs or investors came to you and said, can you fix my CEO? But instead, you much preferred that founders came to you themselves and said, you know, hey, Jerry, I'm ready to work. And so a few months later, I remember vividly I was sitting in the plane and I was completely depressed because I felt like a total fraud. I'm a professor. I'm not an entrepreneur. Why am I doing this? This is crazy. And moved my family to Silicon Valley.

And I have no what I'm doing. And so I started writing, face a little bit of Of, and I thought, okay, I'm going to write to Jerry Colona. And so I started, dear, Jerry, my name is Joao. I'm a founder and I'm ready to work, which is just out of your interview. But then I couldn't stop writing. It ended up being a really, really, really long email. I don't think I've ever written such a long first email to anyone in my life. And you replied really fast.

And then I was working with Reboot and then we did the Bootcamp and it has just been, just a wonderful friendship, I want to say, because, over the years, we just got to know each other and I really cherish your teachings. But most of all, I, also Jerry, cherish you as a as a human being. So thank you very, very much for that.

Jerry Colonna:  
Well, I just wanna say I didn't know the facts of the December 2011 collapse and, I have always

loved and admired you from that first email because you opened up with your heart, and you leaned into the work. And everybody always says to me, well, what does it mean to do the work? It means leaning into the tough spot of, oh, shit. I don't know what I'm doing. And all of the feelings that come from that. And, you know, for folks listening, you have an incredibly, impressive resume both as a musician and as a scientist and, as a human, as an adult. And I know all about your backstory Reboot what how hard you've worked to help Portugal, and I can't wait to tell tell the story of where you are now. We'll get there.

But I did not know, and it is completely fitting that a huge part of why you launched the 2 startups, but in particular, Veniam, was to actually provide employment and opportunities and economic prosperity to people you gave a shit about. Yet another reason to love you.

João Barros:

Thank you. You know, I felt very strongly at the moment that I was responsible for that group of people. And in a way, that's how I was raised. So I am the oldest of 3. And since I was young and before you ask me about my father, I'm gonna tell you.

Jerry Colonna:

You're on to all my tricks.

João Barros:

But that's how I was raised. I was The oldest, and I was responsible for my younger siblings, and I was responsible for also public service. I mean, in a way, 3 of my grandparents were doctors in the National Heart Care Service. My father was a judge. My mother was a high school teacher. So it was all about public service. So it was not a coincidence that I became a professor first before I was an entrepreneur because it just felt natural. But at that point in time, it was the mix of, this real need, for hope, and something to aspire to wins Portugal they that students didn't need to immigrate, that they could think, okay, we can actually create our jobs somehow, and here's how.

And so I wanted to learn, how to do that. And I had been exposed to, world-class research at top US and. And what I realized was that in certain areas of technology, certainly not all of them, but in certain niches, the research groups in Portugal were doing work that was at least as good as what I was seeing in the institutions, but Americans were 20 times better at creating, companies and products and bringing those technologies, you know, to customers, in a commercially viable way. And so I wanted to learn that and so that, hopefully, by learning they, I could help, others then replicate that and and prove that it was possible to do it out of out of Portugal. And the only way to learn entrepreneurship, I think, is to start companies and start somewhere. And so, so it was the confluence of all of those things. So feeling responsible for the students as the same time being very, very curious about how do you how do you do you do that and why are, you know, my colleagues in America, my friends in America so much better at they? And can I learn from them? So so as that mix of curiosity and a sense of responsibility.

Jerry Colonna:

You know, I immediately started making notes because I know that as we have this conversation and as it flows into some of the things you're bringing into the conversation and the question that that we're really working with. These are themes that kind of define you, not just as an entrepreneur, but as a man. As an adult. You show? The notion of responsibility and civic duty, if you will.

João Barros:

No. For sure. I also was very fortunate to actually live through a period in my country's history where we went from, you know, being backward and poor, to a situation where Portugal actually now today as, universities. It has a vibrant Startup ecosystem. It went from being, you know, this, irresponsible country to...

Jerry:

According to Germany and France.

João Barros:

Well, with a formidable history, nonetheless, but still with, in decline, let's say a country in decline to and where people could hope again and build again. And I went back to Portugal after my PhD in Germany with that goal of, of being part of, being part of that. Then it turned out to be actually a lot harder than I imagined.

And that financial crisis in particular, I think brought home to me the fact that there are many things that are outside of our control. And, but the fact that we were then able to, you know, lift ourselves up and then with the help of very patient, American investors, show that it was possible to bring our technology, to bring, the ability to build mesh networks of vehicles, have them, you know, share data with each other and with the cloud, give auto OEMs, a way to do easier over the heart, software updates, provide new functionalities, and ultimately, you know, help pave the way to to a shared autonomous electric and much more sustainable mobility. That, basically, the fact that we were able to embark on that journey was not obvious at all. But, I was really, really, really lucky to, also had, had the opportunity to work with amazing mentors and amazing people that basically, just also just asked why not, you know, just go into with, you know, why? So I realized that a lot of the barriers were actually inside our heads. They we thought, oh, we're a small country. Nobody knows we're at the end of Europe. And I'd always had, fortunately, from my PhD all the way to my research career, amazing, mentors in university and outside university that basically just asked me, why not? Why shouldn't you start a company out of Portugal, a tech startup out of Portugal, and why shouldn't it succeed?

Jerry Colonna:

Let's pause and describe Veniam because you kind of referenced and backed into it. So if I remember correctly, Veniam was placing, I guess, transceivers in primarily buses, if that's correct. And as a result, they would create a mesh network in the particular urban area in which they were operating with the idea of providing Internet access points in a and of mesh coverage

for local folks. And as a result of that, there was this communication that would go from the vehicle to the cloud and back. Am I getting that right?

João Barros:

Yeah. Absolutely. That was the starting point as it was actually a technology looking for a market. So we knew how to we knew how to build networks of moving things. So that's basically where our research was coming from. And I was actually mostly interested at the time in using the vehicles not just as transportation machines, but actually as part of the wireless network. So providing Internet access to passengers, as you mentioned, but also as part of the smart city ecosystem. It's basically your over you were overlaying reliability on top of an infrastructure that was inherently unreliable and Precisely. Would would break.

Jerry:

And so it sounds brilliant. It sounds ahead of its time.

João Barros:

Way ahead of its time. Yeah.

Jerry Colonna:

I kind of know a little bit about this, but what happened with the company?

João Barros:

Yeah. Well, that face, Series A I mentioned before was on the premise that we were able to go from, what we, at the time, was the largest mesh network of connected vehicles in the world, which was in Porto, Portugal, my hometown. So we basically actually, were able to put, Porto on the map of technology because all the buses, garbage collection trucks, service vehicles were, part of this network. It actually still operates, still gives, you know, free With Fi to passengers, using this mesh technology that we developed. So we had like, a proof that it could work at city scale. But then the premise for the initial investment was to be able to scale it to buses and cities all over the world. And, and we had an initial success in Portugal, then wins, New York, in Singapore. But it wasn't a business that we could really scale.

The hardware was very messy, with still quite expensive. 10 years ago, the fleets, didn't have a lot of data yet to transmit. And turns out that offering free With Fi to passengers was not, you know, a priority for them. And, just in general, public transportation, especially in the US, but also in other places, is is a difficult market for startups because, very long sales cycles, public sector, changing priorities, and so on. And that was a very difficult moment because we had, already raised actually, Series B, which was 25,000,000 at the time, which was unimaginable for me. I was like, how but on and and and a few months later, we realized that this is not gonna work because we've contacted more than 100 fleets in the last 12 months, and we're not getting enough contracts to scale this business. And that's when we started working with carmakers and we pivoted, as one says today. But basically, we switched gears and started and made several difficult decisions.

One was to drop the hardware. So be software only and then leverage the fact that we were also using AI to optimize the communications and to do an intelligent networking platform for vehicles for the car manufacturers. Completely different business. So you only have like 25 potential customers worldwide, Even longer sales cycles because you have to do engineering with them for like 3, 4 years until, you know, something comes out of the factory with your software. But our investors were very patient. They believed in it. It was also a little bit the hype curve of the autonomous vehicles, and this was an enabling technology for autonomous vehicles, actually a critical technology for autonomous vehicles, one could almost say. And so essentially, what was really hard was they, obviously, we had people that were working wins, building hardware operations, deploying wins fleets, and, we, had to part ways with, with, with all these people.

So that was like the, my first time that I actually had to fire, people for reasons that had nothing to do with their performance. And and and and and especially also, people that had been with the company since the beginning. And so that was also very hard for them.

Jerry Colonna:

Let's just pause right there because I wanna take us back to the original impetus behind launching the business. And I just wanna honor and recognize how difficult that decision must have been because you were letting people go who were actually talented and working hard.

João Barros:

Yep. It was that moment. And then, fast forward 2 years with COVID, we had to do the same again. And, and that was heartbreaking. And fortunately, most of them, if not all of them, found other jobs and, and moved on. But there was something in the relationship and the trust relationship that I felt that I was, you know, breaking a promise, the promise that we would build this great company together,

But, during COVID, I daily hit rock bottom over those different hearts. The startup journey has a lot of ups and downs. I had been in California with my family. My family went back to Portugal because I was traveling all the time, so it didn't make sense for my wife and 3 kids to be, alone in in California. And that's actually when I had the Bootcamp with you, that because it literally took me like one and a half years to muster the courage to tell my board that it didn't make sense for me to be living in Mountain View, California with my family in Portugal and my business in now in Detroit, Tokyo, Munich, you know, where the carmakers are. And actually, the Bootcamp was actually the moment where, you know, I finally gave myself permission to just think what as where is the intersection between what the company needs, what you need, and what your family needs, and how do we get to that point. So I'm eternally grateful for that because it daily saved my family.

Jerry Colonna:

I wanna stay on that point for a moment because in this recounting of the journey, what I'm

sensing and what I'm picking up is what, our mutual friend, Jim Marsden, one of our coaches, would call competing commitments. Right? And you had a series of competing commitments. You had a commitment psychologically to being in Mountain View. That was the belief system that's where entrepreneurial startup need to be. There was a realization that the business had shifted. And in fact, many of the employees had been close to the customers, and they were all in these different locations. And you had a commitment, that was both beautiful but challenging in the sense that, you were gonna build a startup that not only provided employment but was emblematic of your belief in Portugal, emblematic of the potential. And then last and perhaps most important was your commitment to your family and to yourself. And there you were in this really, really tight spot trying to navigate. And as you said, for a year and a half, kind of frozen in place.

João Barros:

Yep.

Jerry Colonna:

How do I choose the right thing when there are 4 or 5 right things that could be pulling me in different directions? Does that resonate?

João Barros:

Yeah. Absolutely. So I felt like I couldn't live up to any of the expectations, because I couldn't really pick one. But what I also realized was the most important thing really was, my marriage, and and and my kids. Because if Ana and I have been together for 29 years, our our kids, 2 of them are adults now and, and and is a teenager. And we're we became really, really close during these different phases that were very hard emotionally. But basically, I just realized if my marriage and my family are okay, if we're doing well, if we're, you know, as close-knit as we usually are, then everything else is easier. Whereas, if that's not working, then everything else, has no chance of succeeding.

I was having panic attacks on airplanes, so my body was doing strange things. I also eat compulsively when I'm, under stress. So I start gaining weight. Then I entered this negative spiral of not feeling good with my body, not sleeping, all of those things. And I feel in a way that my life has been, you know, constantly switching between the virtuous cycle and the detrimental one that makes I'm I'm I oscillate a lot between these, they 2, but my wife, Anna, and my family have always been, you know, what keeps me grounded and about what is important. And so that Bootcamp just gave me for a few days, the the permission to actually remind myself of that. And turns out that my board just reacted very naturally to the decision. They said, yeah, makes perfect sense. Go. And I was and I felt really stupid. Oh. Oh, come on.

Jerry Colonna [00:27:15]:

Well, you know, I I one of the things I adore about you is the way you're able to laugh at your own absurdities, and I just wanna I wanna give space to the fact that we all build these cages around us. You show, William Blake, in in a poem called *The Mindforged Manacles*. These are

the stories we tell ourselves. And so when we're in the midst of that no-win situation, that double bind, I can't do this. I can't do that. We're frozen. Almost invariably, the key the bars of the cage that we find ourselves in are our belief systems which fuel that. And it's not to say that choosing a way through that is easy. You know? You may have had the unfortunate situation of having investors who didn't support you on the decision.

João Barros:  
For sure.

Jerry Colonna:  
It also doesn't surprise me that being who you are, you attracted the kinds of investors who believe in you because this is The truth about you, my friend. People have believed in you for as long as I've known you. And when you tell me the story about how this company was founded, those research students who became employees believed in you, and we all still believe in you.

João Barros:  
Thank you. You know, it's actually, so moving now to see where they are right now because at the time they were like 20-somethings. Right. So I ended up, for some of them as least, to be kind of a fatherly figure, being a little bit older and just generally soul still being, the professor in chief, even if I tried very hard to be a CEO. It's Jerry hard to stop being, you know, a teacher and a mentor if that's what you're supposed to be. I mean, it took me a while to realize that that's actually where my true vocation is. But, basically...

Jerry Colonna:  
I'll say this about you because I believe it about me.,you teach and mentor because that's who you are. It's essential to who you are as a person. That's why it feels like a vocation. That's why it feels like a calling. I coach because it's who I am, not the other way around.

João Barros:  
Yeah. No. I see that very clearly now. And looking at the Veniam heart again, COVID just brought that point completely home because suddenly we had to send everybody home. You know, it was for everyone in the world and for many people way worse than for us. But just being, you know, isolated, living on Zoom and Slack. And then for me, the biggest shock was that even though we were able to, save the business by working with, dash cams, so cameras that go into vehicles. And then eventually that became our direction.

And then the automakers started coming back. But basically, at the time, for me. Just not having this human face-to-face, physical of having had, you know, a life where, I would go to university and see literally 100 of people and be, you know, in front the class and giving talks at conferences and all of that. And it took me a while to realize actually how much I needed and. And I felt trapped again in the sense that I felt I gave up my academic career to do this company. Then it was a little bit of a snowball because the promises kept mounting. You raise another round of finance and you did another, you know, round of promises and it keeps



snowballing and getting bigger and the expectations getting bigger and bigger. And the truth is also that the CEO job was forcing me to do a lot of things that are actually not part of my nature.

I like to be able to, you know, have a very sincere, authentic relationship with with the people that I'm I'm with. I like to be able to tell everybody the same thing, and not having to, you know, tell the story in 20 different ways to make sure that the investors invest, the customers buy the products, you know, the team is motivated. And part of the art of being a business leader is to be able to, you know, bend the stories in different ways, depending on the needs to be able to, play poker and negotiations when you have to play poker. These were all things that left me really, uncomfortable. And yet I felt I I never succeeded in finding someone for that job. So even though I tried, but I didn't I didn't feel myself for a very long period of time, especially then with with COVID and going home and everything. And soul, yeah, and so that was when it became clear that, since I couldn't find someone to scale the company, the, you know, the whole, Startup, scene changed dramatically as we show, also the financing situation, everything. So that's when, also talking with the board, I realized, that we needed to find an exit for Veniam, a way to, you know, land the plane, knowing that we have an amazing team, some daily, important pieces of technology that fit into the ecosystem.

João Barros:

And now they were needed because now cameras need to transfer huge amounts of data between the vehicles and the cloud. So it took 10 years to get there, but now the vehicles really needed to send a lot of data between them and the cloud. And so that's when we started thinking of how to, how to exit the company, or whenever when I started thinking how to, how I should exit this life also as was one of the things, but it took me another, one and a half years to actually get from that point of deciding, okay, I can't continue living like this to, okay, how do we, find a way for the company to for the team, first of all, to be well, for the technology and the company to find its way to the market, for the investors to get at least some return of their investment and for me to be able to close this chapter and hopefully start a new one. So it was a very long path.

Jerry Colonna:

And for you to be yourself. So you just said something really important, which I wanna lift up, which is I I wasn't feeling myself. And I remember, you know, we recently saw each other on a walk wins Barcelona. We have mutual friends and because of you, I'm connected to folks in Barcelona. So thank you. And I remember walking pleasure. And and realizing a similarity in our experiences. I remember walking and realizing they, like you, that in my late thirties, I no longer felt myself. I no longer felt connected to myself. As a consequence of living for so long and not resolving these conflicts. And, you know you know, he the quick end to the story is that you did find a place, you found a home for Veniam. You found a home for the team. You found a home for the technology, which was important because as a scientist, that's really important. And you found a place that, you could resolve, if you will, these conflicts with the exit Mhmm. Without necessarily ringing the bell on Wall Street and taking the company public. Does that describe it?

João Barros:

Yes. And I when when we met in Barcelona, you caught me completely off guard with a very simple question, which was, was Veniam a success? And in that moment, I really couldn't bring myself to say, yes. It was a success. And then I started wondering why? And we went on with and of other participant of the workshop that you were or the class that you were teaching. We went on this walk, 2 by 2 walk. And, and, and I found myself or I heard myself say that, I am still trapped in that storyline, Silicon Valley storyline, or you're only successful if you create a unicorn and, you know, and everybody celebrates the huge, massive valuation that your company, that, and the other thing that, I also heard myself, tell myself was that, in the end, I was honest with everyone that I dealt with, and I did the best I could. And that has to be enough. And I had never ever said that to myself, so I never really allowed myself to say that that's enough.

And that was really important to just allow myself to be happy about the fact that it was a very, very long journey. And that even if I was often forced to do things that were not in my nature, I still held strongly, I would say, to my to my values. And the one thing I'm most proud of, which was another question that somebody asked me, is actually that in the last, 3 years, I had an executive team of amazing people, this team just made it through wins a way that I felt, you know, was true to all of those, to my own values, and ultimately, the company values, which are actually pretty much the same. And I, I'm very, very grateful that I was able to have that experience even though it was a terrible time to have had the experience of working in a team like that and following many of Reboot's of the things that you teach of of Reboots teaching. But at the same time soul that we had more than 100 people, probably all altogether, I think probably about 150 people worked at Veniam at that point, maybe, even more.

I don't know the exact number, but people who experience that it's possible to work in a company like that where you're doing good things, but you're also being good to one another and, you know, and honest straightforward. I would say, irrespective of of what, the outcome of of of a company is, I think for me personally, I can say today confidently that, it was a success to be able to, you know, start this company out of Portugal, prove that we're able to raise, the interest and the finance from Leaders leading investors. And fortunately, we're not alone. So Portugal now has 7 unicorns.

And so I'm now a very strong believer, of actually before you start something, writing down your definition of, you know, success before you actually embark, then lots and lots of people are On tell you what success means. But if you have your own definition that you wrote down before everybody else tells you what success is, then at the end of the journey, you can go back to that and just say, and thank you for reminding me that that of the starting point and what we set out to do. And from that perspective, so no, we did not create a unicorn, but, we, achieved, those those those points.

We helped people believe it was possible to start a tech heart out of Portugal. And you know, and the technology and of 1000 of vehicles, and hopefully with will be in millions of vehicles, sometime in the future. I mean, it's out there. And, yes, So so from that perspective, I'm grateful.

Jerry Colonna [00:42:32]:

And I will add to that that, you know, oftentimes, I will say that the hallmark of a good leader is the number of leaders that they help create. I'll expand that right now. The hallmark of values driven leadership is the DNA of those values continues to spread. Every one of those and, 200 employees were touched by the values implicit at the beginning of this Startup, at the beginning of this journey, as very long 8, 9, 10 year experience

Because of who you are as a leaders, they have benefited. They have experienced what it's like to be led by someone who confronts the competing comp, commitments, who confronts the challenges, who confronts the stories that soul that can hold them back.

And so I'm gonna bring you back. Before we started recording, we talked a little bit about the notion of, what is it that Joao is bringing into this conversation they Yeah. When you asked me, how do you know if they if you've had closure? So let me ask you just as I did on our walk in Barcelona. How do you know? Do you have closure on Veniam on the Veniam story?

João Barros:

So, I feel now at the end of this conversation they that I might do. I wasn't I wasn't sure, in the beginning because just in anticipation of our conversation, and I knew of course that we were going to revisit the Veniam, journey, I did feel a certain amount of fear into going to certain places because, you know, I think scars is a good image. You, you have those heart. It has healed and, and so you have closure on the wound. But you have, I think I will always have some triggers. So some things that remind me of, of, of traumatic experiences, along the way. Mostly experiences that had to do with self-doubt and pain, and feeling that I was not being true to myself, more so than than with respect to to others. I've been very fortunate of not having had, you know, really mean, ugly things happen to me during my startup journey.

I think that's also fair to say. I was blessed with great investors and wonderful board, great mentors, so and great coaches. So I really cannot cannot say that that the pain was inflicted so much from the outside except for the externalities that everybody has to deal with. But I inflicted a lot of pain on myself over a number of heart. Partly so, I think because, I also always felt that, and I almost I hesitate to say this, but I always felt that, I had, in certain areas, exceptional abilities, so abilities to do to go beyond what I saw others being able to do. So I always felt a huge responsibility to do that. So and my father used to say, you know, the only thing you have is a good brain, so use it.

But basically, I had to live up to this image of myself as the one that does exception or, or, or that brings himself to do exceptional things. But always, I have to say at the same time, in service to others, I I don't think I've ever been so much, on there's always a phase where, where I did feel also that I need to prove myself, obviously, during the PhD, during the tenure track, there were always moments where, but very quickly, though, I found a lot more satisfaction when I saw the people around me doing well and, and, and going in the right direction and

building something exceptional themselves. And so, it became very clear to me that that's really my my vocation as really to, help others, do exceptional things.

And for a period of time, I thought that was leadership. Now I'm actually quite reflexive in thinking, whether, you know, leading an institution or leading a company or leading an organization is the right thing, but or with it's really just through presence, you know, and listening and and and and giving back and helping shape things, but not necessarily in a leadership position. So I'm still wondering about that.

Jerry Colonna

So let me make an observation and let me bring to close us out. And I think closure is actually a process. I think closure is not something that just you flip a switch and then all of a sudden, you know, those feelings. And I think that if we look back and we look at the process, it's about revisiting and remembering.

João Barros:

Yeah.

Jerry Colonna:

And, you know, I'm a huge fan, partially, because I write about this in Reunion. I'm a huge fan of taking that word remember and hyphenating it. Mhmm. Re-remembering that which has been disconnected.

João Barros:

Putting it together. Exactly.

Jerry Colonna:

Yes. Exactly. Yeah. Putting the members together. Retelling your story remembers that which, over time, because of the conflicts that you were feeling, got dismembered. And that part of closure is pulling it back together so that we can then look back with fresh eyes and say, what actually happened?

And I wanna lift up what you said about and so now I see what my what my version of leadership is, what your version of being a vocation is, which is about helping other people do exceptional things, extraordinary things, which to me is a perfect setup for the epilogue. Because we can't tell this story without talking about where you are in this moment and why you're there. So tell us, where are you and why are you there?

João Barros:

So I moved to Kigali, Rwanda earlier this month. So 4 weeks ago, exactly 4 weeks. And I have to say, I feel tears coming in my eyes because it's just as been, you know, a, a wonderful, wonderful moment in my life where actually remembering, it's a perfect expression. Everything is coming together. Why am I in Kigali, Rwanda? Well, last year I visited some friends in

different universities because I was trying to figure out, you know, I gave myself soul time to just talk to friends and figure out who I am and what I want to do next. And I visited Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh with whom I had worked before. And, and they told me the, their campus in Rwanda, as in in Africa, had just received a large endowment from the Mastercard Foundation, and to do 3 things. So and is to train future leaders for Africa in technology, particularly information communication technologies.

João Barros:

The second is to use AI engineering to help advance Africa in in all the different downs. And, number 3, to help, innovators and entrepreneurs, you know, grow a Startup ecosystem. And the Dean of Engineering asked me, so, why don't you go and visit? And immediately, soul know, I went back and told my wife, we always wanted to do something in the global south. I had thought of of India because my mom's family as from Goa. In India, I had thought of Brazil because of course, Portugal, is very tightly connected to Brazil, but Africa had always been on my mind. And, and when we came to Rwanda, we found, this incredible campus, outside of Kigali, where and students from 22 different African countries are pursuing their masters in electrical computer engineering and With, in AI. And I had the chance to talk 1 to 1, with The number of students, about 12 students they signed up to talk with me when I came for a visit. And every single story was just breathtaking.

João Barros:

And started asking, you know, where, what do you call home? What as growing up like there? And, and for the face time I was talking with someone from, Burundi, for the face time I was talking with someone from Ghana, I was talking with someone from Ethiopia of, from all these different countries. I realized how ignorant I was also about Africa. And now I realized Africa is not at all the story that we've been told, but that's a subject for another program. But, basically, the more I thought about it, what happens to me is that I'm naturally curious, but I'm also obsessively curious. So I started watching, you know, as many YouTube videos and reading as many books as I possibly could. And, and now, you know, I'm it's very clear to me they, this is really where I, where I should be. I am in the heart of Africa, in a beautiful, safe country, Rwanda, surrounded by these incredibly high energy, really, you know, ambitious but also humble and and kind, African students and also, hugely idealistic colleagues that have come here, you know, to make a and difference in the world. And so I'm now a professor here and, it's a huge honor and also, you know, just fills me with, with gratitude because it's not obvious they, again, coming from Portugal through this, you know, startup journey that at the end, I, for for a long time, I was actually I'm 47 years old.

I'm I'm too young to retire. I was, you know, joining boards and and doing some consulting, but it didn't feel right to me. And now having arrived in Africa, seeing how much there is to do because there's some really big challenges and big barriers here. But at the same time, all these young people with huge aspirations and huge dreams, they remind me a little bit of my students in Portugal 15 years ago. And, but I feel now that all those different pieces of the Vinium story and, all the scars, now, also, make it possible for me to, you know, talk with

students soul on Saturday morning.

Jerry Colonna:

You know, what comes to mind... there's an old bit of saying, which is, which goes like this. Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water. The Veniam experience was a profound experience. And before Venium, your job was to take exceptional people, to do extraordinary work to help their communities. And after the enlightening experience of and of them, Your job is to take exceptional people to do extraordinary work. Yes. That is a profoundly important contribution to the world and I can't think of a better person to bring that forward than my friend, Joao.

João Barros:

Thank you so much, Jerry. It it means a lot. Thank you.

Jerry Colonna:

Thank you for coming on the show and sharing the story. It's, I know people are gonna be moved by this.

João Barros:

I appreciate it very much, and I've been very moved by you many times. So it's as honor and a very big privilege to to be here. Thank you very, very much.

Jerry Colonna:

Thank you.