Jerry Colonna:
Hey friends, as we move toward the end of the year, leaders everywhere are beginning a familiar ritual. We're looking at budgets, setting targets, reviewing what worked and what didn't. And we'll be deciding what the coming year will ask of us.

And all of that matters.

But anyone who's run a company knows that planning for a year is rarely just about spreadsheets. It's also a moment of reckoning.

What have we learned? What are we carrying forward? What should we leave behind? Where are we avoiding a difficult decision? What does the organization actually have the capacity to do as opposed to what it is that we wish it could do?

For this conversation in our Wisdom at Work series, I'm joined by two of my reboot colleagues, Virginia Bauman and Ray Foote.

What makes this especially fun is that my relationships with both go back long, long before we were colleagues.

Virginia is a software engineer and a two-time founder. After graduating from Virginia Tech, she headed to San Francisco and helped found Foodsy, an online marketplace for artisan food producers. She learned to build and lead a venture-backed company just as the 2008 financial crisis arrived. With all the lessons about fundraising,

boards, teams, and uncertainty that came with that. She later founded and served as CEO of Tonks Coffee, which helped pioneer direct-to-consumer coffee subscriptions and was later acquired by Blue.

Virginia and I first met in 2013 when she came to the very first Reboot Bootcamp. And because apparently we believe in making formative experiences as difficult as possible, she arrived with a flu.

Somehow she made it through. Over the years, she moved from founder to advisor to coach, bringing an engineer's mind, a founder's experience, and a deep curiosity about people to her work with executives. She knows what it feels like to make the call and how to help someone else think clearly about the call they need to make.

Ray's path is a little harder to summarize, which is part of what I love about him. He studied music and computer science at Bennington, left school to go on the road as a musician, toured for five years with a band he co-founded at Session Work, and eventually moved into film and production in New York.

In 1994, he and his brother started Bigfoot Communications, bootstrapping it into a 40-person music and sound company, doing about 400 projects a year with offices in New York, LA, and Brazil.

There's another layer to Ray's story that makes him, having him here, especially meaningful to me. Before Ray became a coach, I was his coach. For about three years, while he was still running Bigfoot, we wrestled with many of the same questions we'll talk about today. How to lead through change, how to know what's yours to carry, and how to build something out without letting it consume you, and how to recognize when it may be time for a new chapter.

Ray began stepping away from Bigfoot in 2017, trained as a coach, and has been with Reboot since 2018.

So this isn't a conversation among three people who have simply observed CEOs. Each of us have sat in the seat. We've made budgets that turned out to be fantasies. We've made plans that survived about three weeks into January. We've hired and fired, managed boards, worried about cash, stared at forecast, changed our minds, and discovered that what we thought was the problem often wasn't.

What I want to explore with Ray in Virginia is what that experience teaches us to pay attention to as one year ends and another begins. We'll talk about planning, priorities, budgets, goals, and the choices that come when there's more you want to do than time, money, or capacity to do it.

And I want to get underneath the mechanics a bit, because the most useful annual plan isn't necessarily the most ambitious one. It may be the one that reflects the clearest understanding of where the company is, what it's capable of, and what it needs now. Welcome, Ray and Virginia.

So, Virginia, let's start with you. When you were in the CEO seat and getting into the new year, heading into the new year, what did you learn to pay attention to that you wish you'd understood earlier?

Virginia Bauman:
I think, you know, the end of the year, frequently for me, was so much about the container of the business and so little about the container for myself. There was a lot of built-in structure and a lot of built-in expectations that allowed us to sort of say, like, okay, how did we do?

But because we were in a business that was always trying to make up the bulk of our revenue in the fourth quarter, it was such a busy time to actually set aside time for, okay, well, how do I feel? How do I, do I actually enjoy doing this? What do I need to change if I'm actually gonna continue giving it this much of myself? So, I think immediately, you know, it takes me back to a very overwhelmed place. Where it was sort of like it was customers, it was employees, it was investors, and where was I?

Jerry Colonna:
Right. It brings to mind the fact that I'm one of those folks who finds the holiday period really, really difficult. From Thanksgiving through New Year's, my mood sort of reflects the darkness of the time, the coming winter solstice. And that sense of overwhelm always made, when you couple that with a kind of end-of-year planning, which, especially when you do the right questions, which is what worked and what didn't work. And you know, this notion of trying to craft a budget for the year ahead when, you know, lick your fingers, stick it in the air and try to figure out what the revenue is going to do next year was incredibly difficult, especially when we have a business that, you know, customers are not locked into to some sort of subscription.

And so when you were talking about feeling overwhelmed at the time of the year and worrying about, say, where our cash is going to be, know, right?

Ray, what was that time period like for you? And how did you, when you were CEO, how did you approach that sort of end-of-year time period and the planning?

Ray Foote:
Well, the way that I would approach it is I would I used… it took me a little while to figure out what my process was. But I ended up finding that the way that I could navigate it was actually starting the year-end planning in October.

Because I kind of knew that if I could start structuring things then, then I could start to be able to deal with the unexpected things that happened between, you know, the holiday season, because I realized that if I could start managing the things that I knew, like, I knew how much cash we needed to have at the end of the year so that we could flow through into the following year and not be totally cashed out on Jan. 1.

Or that I could start figuring out what those variables were early enough, then I could be clear enough to deal with opportunities or challenges that were happening, you know, in the two weeks before the end of the year. So for us in my business, some of the busiest times were right at the end of the year, when clients needed to, you know, spend money. Or it was also Super Bowl season, which a lot of our work would come right in Super Bowl season. So I had to kind of have the decks somewhat cleared. And so I found that the earlier I started, the more prepared I was.

Jerry Colonna:
How would you, Ray, just follow up on that, because I'm really curious about how would you manage resources? Because I know enough about your business to know that a lot of the resources, if I remember correctly, were freelancers. so you...

Ray Foote:
Yeah, well, they became freelancers. We were a little bit different in our business because we really kind of believed I you know, I'm I've been a band guy my whole life, and I like being part of

a team. So we had a core group that was that were really all a very tight team for many, many years. And then we always had lots of session players coming in to execute on tracks that we are making. So in that case, you know, we might on a Monday we might not have a gig, and then by Wednesday we're hiring a 40-piece orchestra. So we would have to scale insanely quickly and have all those pieces in place.

But the way that I would think when you asked the question about managing resources, I always thought about it from the point of view of cash. Because our cash, since we were just to get into the grittiness of it, our because we were a sub-S, we had to close out our year and anything that was left was considered income. And so we didn't want to end up with too much cash and have a whole bunch of income that we're paying double tax on. So we ended up actually starting another business, which was an equipment rental business, which had a different year-end. And so there was a strange rolling feeling that I had between how am I gonna make this feed into that, and kind of it was a bit like playing four-D chess.

Jerry Colonna:
Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. I hear that. What was, you Virginia, you mentioned before that, you know, the end of year, and I guess, are we talking about at Tonks, not Foodsy?

Virginia Bauman:
I mean both, frankly.

Jerry Colonna:
Okay, tell me about it.

Virginia Bauman:
Because you know, we were, I think, you know, I have a visceral memory of gift guides, and I have a visceral memory of…

Jerry Colonna:
Is this a memory or a PTSD?

Virginia Bauman:
PTSD, probably. I think that like the the holiday is all around sort of like maximizing your exposure in an inundated environment if you are selling a good that could be a gift, or if you're helping people buy gifts, and then you are sort of this, you know this trusted source that you can leverage your business on top of.

So in both businesses, we were in this mad PR dash to be in every gift guide that we possibly could. And we were always in this, we were always in this loop, this thing that we couldn't get out of, where we really, really knew that our best chance to grow the business into new customers was personal referrals from current customers. And so we tried to make that as easy as possible for them to give gifts to other people.

Which, we wrote all of this custom software for that's still in the Blue Bottle codebase, I think. But basically, like we we just wanted we wanted to do everything we possibly could, and we always overloaded ourselves. We tried to…we would create gift subscriptions, of course. We would create packages of grinders and little boxes of equipment with, like, pour-over drip things, and we would do these videos of like, okay, so l you're you're at home, your parents have an awful coffee maker. How do you make coffee in this horrible condition? Let us show you how. So, like, there's all these, like, plays that we we enjoyed doing.

So like it it just it was it was almost this manic feeling, right? And it was to the point where, you know, I don't think I was in the business long enough to get as wise as Ray did and do all that stuff in a timely fashion. It always seemed like we were playing catch-up. And at the end, you know, once the holiday was over, then we really had time. That's when we actually did a lot of our our our reflection, right? Because there was just no space to do it when we were trying to serve this commerce season that was on overdrive.

Jerry Colonna:
So one of the things I'm noting from both of you is that there are some general principles. Get started early. Do the planning, do the financial planning, do the budgeting early. Be mindful of your overwhelm. But there's also some specific principles that are related to your own individual businesses, whether you're selling physical product or that could be part of a gift-giving season or, as in the case of Bigfoote, Ray, you're really part of- your customers have marketing dollars that they have to spend. They're making commitments. And then you've got this big behemoth that's in some ways bigger than Christmas, the Super Bowl, that's impacting things.

But you both made reference to, well, in one, know, Virginia, we're talking about it being manic, and Ray, you were talking about like learning over time. I'm curious, and I'll share my own story. What mistakes did you make during those time periods? Yeah, Ray, since you laughed, why don't you go first? What mistakes that you can recall that you made? Because I know sometimes they can feel too numerous to remember, but.

Ray Foote:
Yeah. Yeah, I think that one of the big mistakes that immediately comes to mind is something about not understanding where things were with the one seventy nine deduction. And that's it's a little too deep, but that's that's

Jerry Colonna:
All right, all right, that's a little too nerdy.

Ray Foote:
That is the deduction you can take for buying equipment. And you can deduct it all right when you buy it. And because we were a creative shop and we had lots of gear, we had opportunities to spend money. And if we were if we had lots of cash, we could spend money on gear and write

it all off. And I can remember missing that opportunity to do that at one time.

I think that, but a little bit of a different thing that's coming up for me, though, is missing the opportunity to actually be a dad during that time and to actually show up at home. Because what ends up happening to me was that it got so busy and so frenetic and so many things, and a feeling of I'm never doing enough to prepare. And then missing things like my kids concert or not being a or, you know, doing some entertaining stuff. And so I'm out until two in the morning, and taking the train back home and being just zonked for three days. As we all know, as we get older, it's a little harder to come back from the 2 a.m. entertainment thing.

So I think that there were some really big misses that I had with being with my family at that time around the holidays because I was indexing for taking care of my other family, which was my business, which I had a very much of a feeling of family about, and taking care of the team and the container and holding the container all the time and constantly being aware of that.

Jerry Colonna:
You know, this is sort of a classic tension that we see both in ourselves and our clients. And I'm going to name the tension and then make sure that we circle back and talk to both.

So on your first point, the 179 deduction, Ray, I want to note that Ray's business was owned, I think it was owned entirely by you and your brother Sherman.

Ray Foote:
That's right.

Jerry Colonna:
So, like Reboot is, it's a business that really is an extension of you personally. And so you're incentivized, in effect, to reduce your net income in a way, to manage that so that a big portion of your cash is not going out in taxes, but is available for investment in the business and that kind of thing. That incentive is a little bit different when you're either venture-backed, right, Virginia, or when you're publicly traded.

But the similarity is that other forces external to you and your business start to impact how you want to do business. In one case, it might be taxes. In another case, it might be your investors' wish to be able to show you have, you know, 40% year-over-year growth in your venture-backed business so that they can go out and generate, you know, the kinds of on-paper returns so that they can raise money or so the public market. Every, this is an important point to make, this larger point that every one of us can be impacted by, as we think about end-of-year planning, can be impacted by forces outside of our control that we really have to respond to and react to. And so when we say, here's how to do it, it starts to impact things. So that's thing one.

Thing two. Ray talks about, and in some ways it's a reflection back to what Virginia was saying about being overwhelmed and overlooking oneself in that time period. And I'm going to let you

off the hook and say, think you heard, the question I'd asked was about the mistakes that you made. And I think what I heard was a regret, which is kind of a kissing cousin, right, isn't it, to that. And I regret that what I heard you say was that I regret, you regret that you chose one family over another, or chose- let's be less familial about it. You chose one set of responsibility, which you feel profoundly, right? As CEOs, we feel that responsibility over the other responsibility. So I just want to name that tension between the two polls that Ray introduced. And Virginia, give you some space to respond to either one or both of those.

Virginia Bauman:
Well, the first thing that came to mind, I don't even remember exactly how we got in this cash crunch, but the most visceral sort of like mistake that I came up when you ask asked that question was, you know, when I was on the phone with an investor early, like when we were basically just emerging with some angel capital, where if I was gonna make payroll on the holidays, I had to get that check transferred. Like I had to get that wire in the bank.

And so I was going between, of course, family conversations and trying to be present while also freaking out because of my obligations that I needed to meet. And, you know, it's not like it's easy to get a hold of people during that season. We managed it. We brought on some new capital. That never happened again. But I also think it reminds me that there's sort of a choice when you do your year in planning, right? Like if you've overstaffed, right? When do you take care of it? Do you take care of it before the holiday or do you take care of it right after the holiday?

That's an ethical dilemma for a lot of us. It's a moral dilemma for some of us. But it sits with us. We have to make that call. And, you know, sometimes when you make a call, it reverberates for months. And that to me is what the holiday season is about. It's the reverberation of all these choices that may have, you know, may have been mistakes, may come with some regret. But they're yours, and not a lot of people are holding it with you.

Jerry Colonna:
Yeah. Yeah. I love how you brought that back into the dilemma, and then sort of linked it back. You know, Ray, by bringing in those poles of that experience, you know, in a sense, you're viscerally talking about how difficult it is to be making those decisions at that time period when some part of you really would rather be someplace else and feeling the tension.

Okay, so my mistake, the one that I remember the most clearly is, actually had to do with not quite the end of year, but just after end-of-year planning. In which I… based on the trajectory of growth that we had experienced year over year for a number of years and based on an early forecast for the end of the year. I made expense commitments, increased salary, brought on additional staff that ended up being a mistake in the sense that by the time the books actually closed on the previous year, what we thought was X amount of net income turned out to be half that.

Ray Foote:
Yeah.

Jerry Colonna:
And part of that had to do with other mistakes upstream, but part of it had to do with how revenue got booked and where it was getting booked and how expenses were being booked, which gave me a false sense of our cash position. And so, you know, and in a sense, it kind of links back because I like playing Santa Claus, right? I like giving good news at Christmas. Hey, here's a salary increase. Hey, you know, that job you've been working freelance or part-time is now going to be a full-time, you know, full benefits position, only to then really regret the position that the company in with regard to that. It felt like I took my eye off the ball.

And you can both relate, like as CEOs, I don't know about you, but we can never take our eye off them.

Ray Foote:
Definitely not. And not only just to add on to what you're saying, there's always the feeling that I had that somewhere my eye isn't on the ball.

Jerry Colonna:
Right? Or there's too many balls and not enough eyes.

Ray Foote:
There's a client that I that we were in a session on this is a couple of years ago, and we were talking about his perception, which I could really relate to that somewhere in his company, something was breaking. And it just didn't know what it was or where it was or how it was gonna show up. But he's absolutely confident that something was breaking. And I really could relate to that there's something that I'm not seeing here. And so I would spend, you know, hours. I would commute on the train in and out of the city. And so I would spend hours looking at spreadsheets and hours trying to figure out what am I missing? And that's something that I really can feel that somatically right now as we talk about it.

Jerry Colonna:
Yeah. Now I'm having PTSD. I remember being on the board of a publicly traded company, and I was, I was on a vacation with my then-wife and kids. And I'd gotten this phone call as we were driving up to the house that we were staying in. And it was like an urgent phone call from the CFO of this publicly traded company. And I remember walking in just as he explained to me that the forecast that we were about to give to the public and market investors was wrong because there was a mathematical error in one cell in a 40-page spreadsheet. And you talk about, like, somewhere, there's something that's broken.

How many people listening to this who are responsible for such things have actually gone through and looked at the formulas in every cell in the spreadsheet to make sure? Now, maybe

we'll have Claude do all this stuff at this point in our lives, but I remember just going, are you fucking kidding me? You have an MBA from Harvard. Right? And it just reinforced in me that sense of like somewhere, to quote your client, right? Somewhere something is broken, or something is about to break. It's breaking.

Ray Foote:
It's breaking.

Virginia Bauman:
There's this image, the “I Love Lucy” scene where there's the the the chocolates coming down the conveyor belt, and like you just can't keep up.

Jerry Colonna:
The Chocolate Factory.

Virginia Bauman:
Like, right, so you j so how do you cope? And some ways of coping are funnier than others. But I do feel like that is a good representation of the holiday because whatever you miss, whatever you don't look at, you still have to hold. And you feel that.

Jerry Colonna:
Right. I think the other thing that we haven't named, but I think it's really important, is this notion of cash management. I don't know that people know, but managing a P&L is really, really important. Managing cash flow is life and death.

Ray Foote:
Right.

Jerry Colonna:
You know, and it's really important. I remember early on in my days as an investor, being one of our portfolio company CEOs, I was not responsible for this investment, I will point out. You know, the partner, my partner comes into a partners meeting and says, you know, company X is out of cash this week; they can't make payroll. It's like: What the fuck are you talking about? How could you not know that you're that low on cash?

Ray Foote:
Right.

Jerry Colonna:
Now, I think in this case, or in that case, it was really a function of the CEO, living with kind of wishful thinking and expecting, you know, we used to talk about, you know, driving the car down the road, expecting the brick wall at the end of the road to somehow magically disappear as you get there. And I think we can all be guilty of that sometimes.

But Ray, I know you've got some thoughts about how much cash one should have. Which, by the way, trigger warning: this is a trauma response on Ray's part. What are your thoughts about how much cash a company should have?

Ray Foote:
Well, I think it depends on the company. I know for me, I had a really hard time when I first started the company, you know, as a bootstrapper, you really live and die by your cash. But I do, you know, as I've worked with so many clients now that are venture-backed as well, you know, you're kind of living and dying by your runway. And so I like to think of that. I've always liked that metaphor of runway, but I never really knew how much cash we needed, and we had a it was very difficult for us in our business to look ahead and see what was coming down the road, because we were project-based. And so, yet our HVAC contractor didn't care that we were project-based, nor did our, you know, nor did our leasing payment.

So we had a burn, and so you know, a fog bank of only sometimes only a month and a half of incoming. And so what I like to do, there was something that I had read somewhere where Bill Gates was talking about how much cash he felt like he needed to run Microsoft. And it was six months of cash in the bank without any sales whatsoever.

And so when I read that, I redid our reporting structure because I would do a cash flow report every week throughout the whole history of the company, just so I always knew where we were. And I had that at the bottom line. This is our target: six months of burn, basically, a six-month runway at all times. And suddenly I could sleep.

Suddenly I didn't wake up feeling like I was going to throw up in the middle of the night. I could then start to make decisions that were more strategic in nature rather than purely from a place of scarcity mindset or not knowing.

So that's kind of how I believe that it's come up with that number. Whatever the number is, for me it was six months of cash. And then use that as a North Star metric that you kind of it's always gonna oscillate around, but when it's above that, it feels pretty good.

Jerry Colonna:
Yeah. Virginia, you were telling the story before about over the holidays trying to secure the cash, secure a check to make payroll. What's it like in a venture-backed startup in that way? I know the answer to my question. I know you can't just call your investor and say, oops, sorry, I need some cash.

Virginia Bauman:
No. No. In that case, you know, I had to be transparent about where we were and what was going to be unlocked with that cash, right? I had to be like, look, I'm not gonna make payroll if I don't get this, but I think you should still do it. And I think this is the best time to do it, right? And

in that case, if I remember correctly, it was actually someone who was a key hire who I had been trying to recruit for many, many months. Took an offer from someone else before he sort of committed to us; it was our deadline, right? And I basically was like, give me 48 hours. And I got the cash, and that gave us enough of a buffer that he felt comfortable hopping on, and we were gonna make payroll with him on, right?

Jerry Colonna:
Mmm.

Virginia Bauman:
And so we were able to sort of like, and that person ended up being key to the acquisition. That person is still very close with me to this day. It was it was it was a strategic decision, but it wasn't something I could control because this other person has a life. And if we were gonna play ball, if we were going to do that when we had the window of opportunity, we had to move.

And it was like my fourth hire. It was before we were like, we didn't have a lot of capital. We hadn't brought on any venture funds at that point. It was mostly just friends and family. And so it was, it was kind of a unique experience in saying, like, well, how much conviction, confidence, and courage do I have to actually like close this money during this time with this scarce of a cushion?

So I say that, you know, it's certainly one of these situations where I feel like I was balancing: is this responsible, or is this not? And I didn't really know the answer.

Jerry Colonna:
Yeah, well, I mean, it's emblematic of so many decisions we have to make as CEOs, right? We don't really know. We guess. Who did you get the money from?

Virginia Bauman:
It was an angel investor. And this person was basically also a startup person and had been through a couple of acquisitions, right? So he knew what I was going through. He believed in me. He'd seen my prior execution. He's known me for over a decade. But it was a it was a situation where I'm so thankful to him t to this day.

Jerry Colonna:
Yeah, I wanted to draw that out because, you know, I was an investor for many years, and I've been a coach now for more years than I was an investor, but I've been connected to both worlds for almost 40 years now. And, sometimes it's not often the case, but it happens often enough, that the negative rap that investors get, especially early-stage investors, angels, first check-in, that kind of thing, people don't realize how frequently someone actually comes to stand shoulder to shoulder with the founding CEO.

I won't reveal names and all, but I know of one investor whom I really respected and admire,

who, when his portfolio company was really struggling because of regulatory reasons, for no other reason, that was really crushing their cash position, he personally wrote a $2 million check to keep payroll, to make payroll. And the returns were outsized, legendary on that company, but that's not why he did it.

Virginia Bauman:
Yeah.

Jerry Colonna:
You know, that's not why your friend wrote that check. You know, earlier in the introduction, I spoke about that end of year being a time of reckoning. One of the things we reckon with is who really believes in the business.

And the employee came, I mean, they understand if there isn't cash to make my salary, I'm not necessarily going to take that job. But by the way, the fact that you had just put enough cash in the bank, that's not a tremendous vote of confidence. mean, or it's not, it wouldn't give me enough confidence. Certainly wouldn't give Ray Mr. Six Months of Cash confidence, right? There was enough belief there.

And so, in addition to it being a time of reckoning, in some ways, I think it can be a time of belief exploration. What do we believe in? Who do we want to be as a company? Should we keep going? We haven't talked about that question. Do I still believe in the business as a CEO or as a founder?

Virginia Bauman:
Oh gosh, yeah.

Jerry Colonna:
Am I throwing my investors' good money after bad by keeping going? Or is my exhaustion and burnout leading me to fail to see the opportunity that's existing in the business right now?

Virginia Bauman:
I mean, it's practically a commercial for our bootcamps, which I'm hesitant to say, but of course I came to the boot camp and decided to sell, right? Like, I came to the bootcamp sick, knowing that I had to go because I needed reflection time. And it I if if I remember correctly, it was October, right? It was this season. It was coming into this time where I knew that I had to make a call. Could I continue to do this for another year?

And when I left that bootcamp, I realized that, you know, if I continued down this route, it was gonna be resentment, it was gonna be destroyed relationships, it was gonna be, and so we decided, you know, during Christmas to have talks with acquires. Like we were talking with people in the holiday season, and that was, you know, I it was one of those times when I think, you know, when you say it's a time to check in on what you believe, that choice to sell, being

alive in that moment during that season, I was sitting with that belief nonstop.

Jerry Colonna:
Yeah, and I made light of it. You were a mess at that camp. You're still you, because I could see the extraordinariness that was you through it all, through the haze of watery eyes and runny nose and an awful hack, which in a post-COVID era, we would have thrown you out the door.

Virginia Bauman:
Absolutely. It was irresponsible. I feel bad to this day.

Jerry Colonna:
But you were really being cooked by the experience. Yeah, I mean, when we talk about wisdom at work, and let's talk about planning and let's talk about the pragmatic and practical aspects of it, as is true with everything with Reboot, you cannot divorce the context of where we are emotionally from any single one of these actions, because they have repercussions like hiring somebody that should not have been hired or giving them an increase in salary or investing in equipment that the business can't really support and afford or signing a lease that you shouldn't be signing. It's a constancy of that.

Ray Foote:
You know, you're also bringing up something for me, which is, you know, I think that in our seats as CEOs, there is this swirl and this thrashing that's kind of going on. And yet it's also going on for our teams are also going through all this stuff. And so then it becomes like, how do we message optimism or guarded optimism or

Jerry Colonna:
Mm.

Ray Foote:
You know, how do we look into what's coming? And one of the things that I, a practice that I adopted was to was to actually talk about what we shipped in the prior year. To actually try to tend to my default mode is to not be a great celebrator. And so it's something that I've tried to cultivate in myself to celebrate, and one of the things I would do is to actually go through and see, you know, what did we ship this year? What were the things that we did that we could be proud of as we're looking into the next year? But just to try to have a time when people can, you know, sort of goose the esprit de corps, if you will, even when there's a culture, or there's a, you know, almost like a gestalt of stress and anxiety that everybody's feeling.

Virginia Bauman:
I love it, it's kind of like awards season.

Ray Foote:
Everybody gets an award.

Jerry Colonna (49:55.351)
Yeah, yeah, well, it's like this is a very Eurocentric Christian response, but it's like that dichotomy between, you know, say what Christmas can feel like- commercial, frantic, obligation, disappointment versus what to me is the pagan notion around solstice, quiet reflection. Yes, I'll acknowledge I'm coming off of a couple of days' meditation retreat. So that's very much in my DNA right now.

Once you are past, say, counting the cash, once you are past correctly, unlike me, closing the books, it might be a good time to then reflect on what are the objectives for the coming year. And not merely, okay, these next 12 months I want to grow the revenue 30%. But I would often say, and this is a question I put to my clients a lot, to what end? What is it that we're aiming for? What is that North Star? To use a phrase that Ray used before, I think it was Ray. What are we aiming towards?

So that when we're building the financial and container representation of the content of the business. We're doing so mindful of the outcome that we're really seeking.

Virginia Bauman:
Yeah.

Jerry Colonna:
You know, for me, it has always been creating the conditions where people that I love and admire can do the best work of their lives. And that they can, you know, feel financially well compensated for doing those things. So that work itself becomes a manifestation of love.

And you know, my job as CEO is to be the steward of that container in a way so that that content of the experience becomes something that's worth getting up and going to work for.

Nobody goes to work because the spreadsheet told them to go to work. I mean, maybe on a personal cash flow basis, yeah, but that's not what motivates us.

Ray Foote:
Maybe.

Virginia Bauman:
It's not too infrequent that when I pose that question, the answers are not easy to find. And I do think that to what end we are doing these things is a question that we get to ask more and more as change happens faster and faster. There's a real there's a real need to authentically…
I still remember some of the quotes that I read at that bootcamp that were really tying the authentic expression of self to whole leadership and how that is what inspires people, right? How you become somebody that people want to follow by accepting all of the pieces of yourself. And that includes what motivates you. That includes why you're getting up in the morning. So I

think it's a really good time to ask yourself, why, to what end are we building?

Jerry Colonna:
Your response, because now you've got me thinking about quotes again, I remembered the line from William Wordsworth's *The World Is Too Much With Us.* And just to pull it up, he wrote, “the world is too much with us, late and soon, getting and spending, getting and spending. We lay waste our powers. Little we see in nature that is ours.”

That time period of freneticism that we talking about before, that's what provoked the memory of that phrase, “getting and spending; we lay waste to our powers.”

Virginia Bauman:
Mm-hmm.

Jerry Colonna:
We forget that we are frenetic for a reason. We lose touch with the purpose of all that activity, and as a result we lay waste to our powers.

Virginia Bauman:
Beautiful.

Jerry Colonna:
Well, I think on that note, it might be a good moment to pause and go into our own reflection. And I want to thank you both, not only for this conversation, but for being on this journey with me for all these years. It's really an honor to hang out with people, and you know, with each of you, with both of you over the years, I've had to navigate being the old fart coach in this group, coupled with being CEO; I've actually relied on each of you for that other perspective. “Am I seeing this right? Am I feeling this right?”

And you've both given me a gift in being able to say yes or no, and not being shy about saying when you think I'm missing something. And for that, I am deeply appreciative.

Thank you. Any last words before I sign us off?

Virginia Bauman:
None for me, other than I'm glad the riot is continuing.

Jerry Colonna:
Amen, sister. Yeah. Here we go to 2027 and beyond.