

Roz Usheroff Podcast - Ross Wainwright Transcript Official

Roz

Welcome to my podcast. Today's conversation isn't about quarterly results. It's not about the company's worth, and certainly not about metrics. It's about something special. It's about a rare breed of leadership, the evolution of the leader who understands that trust is the real currency of growth. I'm honored to introduce Ross Wainwright, CEO of Perceptyx, an AI driven company helping organizations transform employee experience, and it just got recognized by Fast Company, out of 20,000 companies for innovation. So awesome. Ross has served as CEO, also of a leader Dimension Data, and he spent 15 years in executive leadership roles at SAP, where I got to meet him. And over the years, I've had the privilege of working with Ross and his leadership teams. I've also had the opportunity to watch him lead through chaos, complexity and growth. What stands out isn't just the success, it's the way that Ross rises

through it with integrity, humility and real gravitas. And he shared that his greatest inflection points weren't tied to the biggest wins, interesting, but the bumps, the bruises and the moments that really require true courage. Now, in a world where leaders can lead into ego, we see that a lot, Ross models something very different. He leads with service, with transparency and the understanding that you don't have to be the smartest person in the room to have the greatest impact. So today, we're going to explore how he became the kind of leader others generally want to follow, and why the messy parts of leadership are often where real transformation happens. Ross, I'm so excited to have you. I wish I was there in person in Laguna Beach with you.



Ross

Well, nice to see you. Roz. We've been working together for, I gotta think it's probably close to 25 years, so it's, it's a privilege to be here, and I appreciate the opportunity to participate.

Roz

Thank you. We don't get older, we get better, isn't that it?

Ross

We do. Well, a little wiser at least.

Roz

Yeah. So how has been a father raising two beautiful daughters influence the life that you've built and the choices that you've made along the way?

Ross

Certainly, it's one of the things I'm most proud of, although, to be clear, I didn't really do the work I was out running businesses and traveling and meeting customers and building teams. You know, I give my wife a lot of the credit, but I think we need to make sure that we're paying attention to the really important things in life. You know, I think our families and our friends and our health are super important. Our kids are in their 30s, and I've actually had an opportunity to work with them, so it's been kind of fun all kind of fun also to work with them in a professional capacity. So definitely, it's been a privilege and honor and something that I'm particularly proud of, and I shouldn't take the credit my wife's done most of the hard work, as has the kids.

Roz

What's been the best advice you've given them that they come back and they thank you for it.

Ross

You know, it's an interesting relationship when you are the CEO and you're also their dad. And by default, I can only be one or the other, and the default position I'm their dad, so I'm, I'm here to do whatever I can to help them in their careers. And whether it be within our company, they don't, obviously they work in different parts the organization, so they're not aligned under me. So first of all, the role I play as a dad, and I think, like any parents that are listening to your podcast, will do anything to help our kids, but also they've got to realize that they've got to do the work. You know, I would never have advocated for them to get into the software technology industry, but they found a path, and they're thriving, and I'm super proud of them. I will maybe just provide a point of advice for younger parents. Don't miss Halloween and never miss the Easter egg hunts. There's stuff that, unfortunately we can't be part of, every parent teacher meeting or the birthdays or, you know, those go without saying, but Halloween is an Easter egg like, just don't miss those, right? Make those the priority.

Roz

So, true. When you were growing up. I've got lots of interesting questions to ask you. So growing up, when did you know that you had a natural leadership capability, like, was it a conscious choice, or did it evolve over the years and maybe share an early experience as a leader?

Ross

I don't think leadership *per se*, was a natural place for me early on, but I've always been very competitive, and I think my competition in the earlier stages of the development of my career and as a leader, the competition drove me because I like to win. I like to be part of winning teams. I like to make an impact. So very early on, actually back in college. I ran for a number of years College Pro Painters, and I did it for a number of summers. But my second summer, I had, I don't know, 30 people working for me, and we did a couple \$100,000 worth of revenue. And the building piece, the sales piece, was fantastic. I loved it. Loved building the pipeline, you know, the delivery and the execution, and making sure that my clients were satisfied with the execution. That was perhaps the harder part of the job, but I think early on, I think it was the competitive piece, and the fact that I realized early on that I had a knack for the sales and I like to build I like to build things. I love the twists and the challenges and the reinvention. You know, I was in my early 20s, but it was something that I really enjoyed doing.

Roz

I had this thought of you as a little boy building Legos and competing with your friends in the neighborhood. I don't know why.

Ross

Well, that happened too, for sure.

Roz

I've heard you say that you grew up in a shark tank early in your career. You know where you were, either survived or you're eaten, which is quite a strong analogy. How did this shape your leadership instincts, and what did you do later? Like, did you have to learn and learn things? That's probably the best way of asking it, because that sounds like a tough upbringing.

Ross

You know, I grew up in the 90s. I started my career in '89 and coming out of the 80s, it was, it was a very Darwinian world, you know, the survival the fittest, like all of that, very much applied to the management

philosophy of especially, you know, high octane sales organizations. I had to navigate it in order to survive, right? You know my first two companies. Well, my first three companies, I averaged, somewhere I don't know, seven or eight years per company, so you have to find ways to reinvent yourselves. I embraced it to survive. But I think as I evolved as a leader, I actually rejected the premise. Because I think I learned early on that the power of bringing people together is really where the magic lies. So the concept of pitting one team versus the other, or one individual or the other, I get the competitive piece with stack ranking and that sort of thing, but, but the concept of pitting one group against the other, it just, it just tears things down. It undermines trust, and that trust currency is so valuable to build businesses. And this is, you know, even in the time when we started getting together during, you know, my enterprise days at SAP, I realized that the power was in how you build the bridges and the alignment in order to do the hard work to deliver great performance. So I think I rejected it because I don't think was authentic to who I was. But I guess at the end of the day, I survived it at the same time.

Roz

Did you seek out mentors along the way, or was this something that your instinct told you, you know, to go in this particular direction?

Ross

I definitely had some really good mentors, both formal coaches along the way and then other executives. I had some great bosses along the way. Had some bosses that probably weren't great, but I had some fantastic bosses, and I think this was fairly natural, the team chemistry of building alignment, I would say, was probably a natural kind of leadership approach from my standpoint. What I did have to learn, though, is that it's not about me. When you're ultra-competitive, at the end of the day, you want to win, and it's the response that you get as an individual to win. And that evolved to I want my team to win. And then I realized at a point in time that it wasn't about me. It had nothing to do with me. It was really about the power of the team. Once I realized that's where the power from a leadership standpoint, resided. That's when, all of a sudden, things really started to take off for me. In my opinion,

Roz

I would imagine today with that mindset that it's not about you, it's essential to have that as a trust factor, and it's hard. I think I tell people, because then I'm coaching them, trust is so fragile, and if you make it about you, it instantly makes people not want to trust you. And it's so blatant, yet often leaders don't see it, and they move forward and they push people, and they really lack that empathetic gene.

Ross

It's interesting. I coach people about the power of vulnerability. And so if we think about the shark tank analogy that you shared earlier, not the Shark Tank the brand, but the concept of a shark tank, you would think that being vulnerable would mean that you're going to show weakness, which means you're going to be eaten, you're going to be undermined or compromised in some way in your career. But what I realized is that if you're really focused on the power of the sum of the parts when you actually show vulnerability, and that vulnerability could be in a number of different ways. I don't understand how to solve this problem. I need your help. Or, guys, this is really important. I'm struggling with this. I need the ELT to help solve this problem when you show. That vulnerability. What it does is it, it shows that you're human, A, and B, it really brings the team together because they want to band together to solve the problem, to help their leader, or to help the challenge that the team is driving. And that ties back to the concept that it's not about you, right? If you can get the team to go do the work, that's where the magic really happens. But I had a leader. Once upon a time when I was challenging him to show vulnerability, his message is, "I would never do that. That is so counter to you know, how I believe you have to lead to be successful. If I show vulnerability, then people won't respect me." And I said, "you don't have it, right?"

It's the opposite, that vulnerability will bring respect the authenticity. It's not more than just being authentic. It's actually showing vulnerability. Will bring a level of commitment and trust that's the power." And I have folks working for me today that have worked now for me, some of them for four companies over the last 25 years. And you know, I think that that's a product of the trust we've built the work that they've done, but I think vulnerability is part of it, right? Because it builds that trust, that bond of trust.

Roz

And I've really witnessed you reaching out to people in your team and saying, Hey, I don't get this. Can you help me? You should. I don't know if you would notice it, but they were so I believe, felt honored that you would seek them out and ask them for their advice. It just made them feel that they mattered. And I think it's important, isn't it, today, to make people feel that what they do is important, it's meaningful, and that you trust them to seek out their advice.

Ross

And business is changing so quickly today, this AI revolution is changing everything, and it's, you know, businesses that were relevant are being challenged to stay relevant. Businesses that maybe at one point were essential to customers have become relevant, or now maybe even becoming irrelevant. So the pace of how you ensure that a business stays strong and healthy is moving so fast because of the technology innovation, which means this chemistry of the team is non negotiable. You have to have it. You have to have the trust across the team. I know we're going to talk more about kind of leading teams and some of those challenges and those bruises and bumps that you referred to in your introduction, but AI is changing everything, and certainly it's accelerating the speed by which we have to change and adapt

Roz

Ross as a leader. How do you comfort your people? I'm sure that most people are concerned now. Are they going to be replaced? What's their career going to look like in five years? Will they have a career or even in a year? How do you give them the assurance when we really don't know how much AI is going to either take over positions or reconfigure how we do the work that we do.

Ross

We just ran a program that I think you're probably familiar with, Roz. We called it the talent accelerator program. Once upon a time, we used to call it the Global Leadership Development Program, where we took top talent, we took three teams of, I think, six individuals, and we gave them a topic, and one of the topics that they had to solve for was how to leverage AI and how to drive AI, how to help use AI to drive performance, but also drive employee growth. We just wrapped this session up. It was a three month exercise, and they presented to the ELT, and we learned a lot about the power of AI. One of the observations is that people are really nervous. They believe if they lean into it, in some ways, it's going to lead to their job becoming obsolete. And it's actually the opposite. I think AI can help provide speed and transparency. It can help people drive and solve problems that couldn't be solved or would have taken a significant amount of time to solve. So one of the things that they talked about is they said, listen, from the top, we've got to set the tone that it's okay. It's okay to feel vulnerable or a little scared or intimidated, but you've got to lean in. It's non negotiable. You got to lean in, but it's okay. It's okay to color outside of the lines, right? It's okay to make a mistake if you're driving performance and you're serving your customers, whether you're in a direct customer facing role or an indirect role. These software companies that we participate in, AI is going to replace your job. AI is going to make you more relevant, more impactful and more strategic around how you contribute to the success of the company, but we have to make sure people believe right, we're going to meet them where they are.

Roz

It's so much how you look at AI, your mindset for it, and to look at it almost as a co pilot in your life. I mean, I use it in so many different capacities. To me, it's exciting, but I would imagine that some people will be feeling uncomfortable, insecure, and that's where leadership could make them feel that it's only going to get better, but it's really how you start out. Mindset is so critical, but Ross, you've experienced growth setbacks, meaningful. I call it influence. Action points that we don't always sign up for. Can you share a moment where most people maybe they wouldn't know about it, something that reshaped the direction of your own career?

Ross

I kind of go through the evolution. This is my third CEO assignment, and I didn't get it right. I didn't get it perfect the first or second time, but I learned a lot. We had some great success. But one of the things I recognized in this evolution is I love enterprise software. I love the power of leveraging software to drive a tangible business outcome that you can go measure. And I love working with a C level executive to go and help shape the performance of their business at one stage in one of my assignments, I actually got away from that software focus, so I chased the job rather than really being true to where my strengths are, where my passion is, and what I'm good at. I think it's important that you know you think about what's your superpower, what are your passions and leverage that intersection. Do you know what I mean? If it's outside of that zip code, then you know, don't do it. You know what I mean? Stick with what your passions are. But I don't know. Maybe that's just part of the learning and the growth that we have to go through to get to where we are today.

Roz

So what was it that tempted you to go against, perhaps your instinct to take on this position. I'm curious.

Ross

I think we get at different stages. We get distracted by different things, right? The size of the role, the size of the business, the amount of people, or the amount of revenue, the compensation. You have to love the work. These jobs are way too hard. Roz your job is a hard job, but you are so good at it, that it makes it easy. You know what I mean? We have to love what we do, and if it's not the right fit, then you'll struggle with it. I mentor and coach a lot of young people, and I tell them, do what you love. You know what I mean? Figure that out. I realize life is complicated. Things are expensive and bills pile up. You got to make money at the same time, but you got to do what you love. I think that that's particularly important. Part of that is knowing who you are, right? And the only way to know who you are is to go through some twists and turns and some reinvention along the way.

Roz

No, it's not negotiable.

Ross

That's true. I think it's also, you know, I also encourage people to lean into the hard stuff. So let's say you're in the type of job, in the right company, in the right industry that you're passionate about, but it's inevitable that there's going to be a tough year or a tough budget or a tough customer, or, you know, a tough boss, right? And I would encourage you to just lean into it, do the hard work, right? Because that's really where the growth is. We don't grow as much when we're the top of the waves. It's when we're fighting to get on top of a wave where I think that the magic really happens. So you got to lean into the hard work, and you've got to go through that reinvention. And when you come out of the reinvention, you'll say, Wow, that was really hard, whether it killed you or whether you survived it or you know, kicked on your backside, you got to dust yourself off and get back on your feet. It's the challenges where we

really understand who we are, and we get more comfortable in just managing through that adversity. It's part of the challenge. It's part of the journey we're on.

Roz

Yeah, it takes a lot of perseverance. And really, I think, believing in yourself, knowing where you have the greatest ability to contribute. It's a lot of different factors coming into one. But certainly I love what you're saying is it's not going to be easy and not to look at it as failure, correct? Because I don't see you look at something and say, Well, I failed at this. You probably would say, well, here's what I learned. Here's what I could take as a lesson from my new position.

Ross

I think at the time, I probably would have said I failed on the assignment. But you know what I think? You know, hindsight is 2020 and with time, you realize I actually learned a lot, and I learned a lot about myself. And you know, when I think about the company that I'm leading today, we're in the employee experience space. We are using AI to help drive growth for employees, and we do that as a market leader, and we've made some whole bunch of acquisitions. We've built this agentic AI strategy. And I love the purpose, the higher purpose, of going and helping employees grow their careers. I've got a colleague of mine, and he shared with me that the power of what we do isn't just growing the individual. It's building a better workforce. It's empowering people to be their best selves, and they actually take it back to their communities and their kids and their marriages, and they they go have an impact on the back end. And I think it's all about the concept of employee growth. So that's that's kind of the intersection that we sit in here at our company, at Perceptyx and and it's just it's such a privilege to be part of that because you are driving and making an impact, that's even better and even bigger than just delivering on a bottom line and hitting revenue and profits and serving customers. So that's kind. Cool, if you can hit that higher purpose, that's something to celebrate.

Roz

And really and truly, what you're saying is, is, where do you make a difference, and how could you make a bigger difference?

Ross

That's true. That's true, the role that you play. How do you lean into the hard stuff to go and make an impact?

Roz

Right? Yeah, years ago, I had a mentor, and I was going into my own business, and I asked him, you know, will I be successful? I've checked out competitors, and I was very competitive in those days. You would have related to me, probably years back, and I checked out what my competitors are doing. And he said, You've done everything right, except wasting time checking out competition. I said, why? And he said, be so different that you no longer have competition do what no one else is doing. And then he said, as you echoed, is really make a difference. It's really about difference. I'm going to put you to the test. I have a question for you that, let's do it. What's the hardest decision you've ever made a CEO, and how do you know that it was right?

Ross

I kind of struggled with this question because I was kind of looking for the perfect answer. I think being a CEO is actually quite a lonely job. You think that you reach the CEO status so you've got all the power you're in the corner office, or the, you know, the undefined, virtual corner office, but it's actually a lonely job, and sometimes you just have to make hard decisions, right? And I hired an executive at one point in my career, and I hired him, and it didn't work out. I had to take him out. That was on me. How did I know

it was the right decision? Because I felt that the ELT is such an important part of a company if you don't have a healthy, agile, you know, balanced ELT, it'll come back and bite you on the backside. So this concept of equilibrium is very, very important. We'll talk a little bit about the ELT. But how did I know it was the right one when I actually removed the individual, you know, I brought him in, I took him out. You know, when I realized, when I made that decision, the actual performance of the business improved? All of a sudden, people could breathe. I knew I made the right decision. But that's on me. That's tough.

Roz

And I've heard that it's slowly as a CEO on top, so you're just validating it and the decisions sometimes you don't really know, but you know you have to make them. And I think it's better to make a decision than just sit there and hope it'll go away.

Ross

This is an interesting point, Roz and maybe it's a little bit about the software industry, right? Because things move so quickly, but speed of decision making is really, really important. So if I have to make 10 decisions in a week, you know, even if, let's say seven of them are great, two of them, I'm not sure, and one of them was terrible, I'd prefer to make 10 decisions versus being absolutely certain on making five of the 10 that I need to make. Because as a CEO, you've got to set the tone for the business. You have to run a little bit faster than your competition, you have to run a little faster than your employees, because part of our job is to get them out of their comfort zone in order for them to grow. So as a result, there's just a very high level of accountability. But it's a choice. If you're a CEO, you're a CEO because you really, really want to be in that seat if you're trying to decide if it's the right fit. You know, I think the CEO really you have to decide whether this is what you really want

Roz

to do. So interesting, isn't it, as you think about all of this. So I see this often, and I hate to use the word, but it's "entitlement." It sort of shows up in a very soft way, and then it builds, it creeps up, and then it erodes trust of teams. And you've said, entitlement is at the root of many failures. How do you spot it early and address it before it impacts the team? Because having just that one person, it could destroy the whole trust factor of the team.

Ross

I've been using the expression that entitlement is the root of all evil. And I always challenge. I used to say to my kids, right? I think they probably understood it. They heard it enough. Tell me one good thing Roz that comes from being entitled, just one positive outcome or attribute or character, something great that happens from being entitled, doesn't exist.

Roz

It's destructive.

Ross

It's destructive precisely so I think when you identify it, you have to go and address it. You've got to call it out, and you have to have the courage. I think we usually see it. It's whether we act upon it to say, time out. This is not the way culturally we want to run our business. And when you apply it across an ELT, you know, ELTs are organic. They're they're moving and growing and morphing and flexing and deflecting. They're moving all the time. And you have to, you first of all, need to understand. The individuals on your ELT, you have to embrace what they're great at and leverage that and empower them and and help them where they need, things that they're working on that are part of their jobs. But you've always got to be thinking about the equilibrium of an ELT. And the one thing that can be very destructive, as you just said, Roz to an ELT, is if you get entitlement, it can be quite damaging at the end of the day. So I think my advice

would be, is, if you see it, identify it and just call it out. Never compromise the power of trust across your ELT, because it has a direct correlation to the culture you build. And world class companies, they perform for a whole bunch of different reasons, but a culture of trust is absolutely foundational in any successful business out there, and that rooting out the entitlement or just getting the right balance across an ELT is super important.

Roz

It's also interesting. I was working with a company a while back, and they had two people, we call them legacy employees. They had been in the company a lot longer, and you could see the entitlement. And it was actually unfortunate that they weren't having greater self awareness, but it took away from the team coming together in a cohesive fashion. Is you can't go to someone and say you've got entitlement. I mean, you could, but you just hope that they can see how it's not allowing the team to come together in greater collaboration, and it stopped the ability to have courageous conversations. It was so destructive. But, you know, I would have to fault the CEO because he didn't call it out.

Ross

That's part of the lonely job, right? The buck stops with you. You're accountable. And you know, there, there are two challenges, either you don't see it and that's a problem, or you see it and don't do anything about it, and that's almost worse, in my opinion. I think this is where you need to show the power of vulnerability. You got to you have to trust your ELT. You got to empower your ELT. And in terms of driving performance as a CEO, I think the other thing you need to think about is you have to be consistent. You have to show up. You've got to do the hard work. Don't expect your people to do anything that you're not going to do yourselves. If it's broken, then go fix it as an ELT. Go lead from the front and listen to your people and empower and creating a safe environment where people can make mistakes.

Ross

I've had a leadership call every Monday morning for, I don't know, the last 30 years of my career, right? That's how you start Mondays, right? You start by getting your team together to go and start the work so consistency and how you show up, and leading from the front, all that good stuff, I think is particularly important.

Roz

I love that you brought the idea of consistency, because I used to work for someone I never knew who was showing up on Monday morning. I wish I would have worked with you, but it's off putting to people you know, and when they bring their personal life to work also, and it's not necessarily a good point, it could be so destructive. I love the fact that whenever I've been with you, you're always consistent. I never have to wonder. And even I take it if you're having a rough day, I would never know. And it's I don't see you as being fake. I see you as being very sensitive and tuned into people. And that's what one of the attributes of a great leader, never stop. I imagine, however, Ross, that there are moments when driving results and caring for your people, it could feel like you're being pulled in different directions, and you're known for being fast. You do everything fast. I describe you as unstoppable to other people. You know, someone says you can't do it. I say, Ross will make it happen. He'll take it to the finish line. So how do you balance humanity with the speed without sacrificing either?

Ross

Well, I think, first of all, I think you need to have a release valve at the end of the day, like, these are marathons. These aren't sprints, even though you feel like you're in a sprint, this will be my 150th fourth quarter of my career, the most important quarter in our company history. Every quarter is the most important quarter in our company history. So you need to have a release valve. I like to ride my bike, and

I try and do it every day. I try and burn off a little bit of steam. I think we have to stay healthy and recognize that our health is super, super important, and pay attention to that, not just for us, but also for our executives and their families, we're looking at a holistic view of the health of the employee. It ties back to their performance. I think we also need to pay attention things that matter the most. Like, we have two weddings coming up this year, which is super exciting. Daughters are getting married. I'm very, very excited about that. It's going to be a major, major milestone. And, you know, I think we need to be present, and we need to really pay attention to the things that really matter in our lives, in addition to our work, another balance issue, something's going to get out of balance, and you know what? It's going to manage you. So you got to pay attention. Pay attention to those important things.

Roz

Staying present seems to be the biggest challenge of. I'm on so many zoom calls, training discussions and getting people to really be present. Is there something that you do that gets them to tune in, to really be there?

Ross

I think you have to be attentive and be in the moment and be curious, ask a whole bunch of questions, seek, first to understand and then be understood. It's hard, right? Because we're moving fast, and we just want to tell them to do just do this, and things will be great, but sometimes you got to slow down to move fast, and that means you have to listen to where they are in the mix.

Roz

And sometimes it's difficult because there's so much going on, there's so many moving parts, so leaders are expected to project confidence, and they're navigating uncertainty every single day. How do you stay steady and confident when the pressure gets, you know, a little bit high it rises and you're not really sure about the path. There's so much uncertainty that we live with every single day. How do you manage that?

Ross

I think we need to pay attention to the things that we can control, and there's things that we can't control, and you can't worry about those things, because there's nothing you can do about it. I think you have to over communicate with your team. I think you got to be recognized that businesses that are performing well don't have a straight trajectory. They have one step forward, a step sideways, two steps forward, a step back, and all portions of their business may not be performing perfectly, and that's the job. The job is to go continue to drive growth. We were talking this morning on the back of this leadership call I had with this top talent team, and we were talking about the connective tissue between departments, between sales and product, or product and service, or the role of finance and rev ops in supporting sales with data and how we apply AI. We were talking about the connective tissue between these different departments, and I think AI has given us a huge opportunity to reassess how these pieces of the puzzle come together. Focus on that. Focus on the customer. I had a CEO that I worked for for a long time along the way, and he defined what I would call a true customer centric culture. It is all about the customer. Just put the customer in the center of everything that we do, and great things will happen. You'll pay your bills, you'll build great products, you'll get promotions, you'll grow your career, but put the customer in the center of all of that at the end of the day.

Roz

One of the greatest compliments a leader can receive is that people follow them again and again and again. You've earned that followship. What do you believe creates it and sustains it, and people always want to follow you, and it's such a compliment to you, and I know you're very humble. So this question

may feel awkward, but I'd love you to offer advice, and how do you build that followship, especially in the world of AI.

Ross

Well, first of all, you have to care about the individual, and that has to be authentic, I would say, if you provide them growth opportunities for their career, but also growth on how they can develop their skills, and you do it with an authentic leadership, and you do it at the same time you care for the individual. I think the rest takes care of itself. Owning your mistakes, I think, is important, right? If you don't get it perfect, then call it just call it just call it out, like this was not my best work. Okay, let's move on. I think that there's a correlation between the growth of the individual the opportunity you help to provide them authenticity of a leader, having some of the things we talked about, like vulnerability and leadership and challenging your team to help you the equilibrium across that executive team. But you have to believe in the individual. And if you believe in the individual, and you authentically believe in the individual, they're going to want to follow you into battle, because they believe that you can help them grow their careers. You know, I think I'm just super lucky at the end of the day, Roz, because I've been associated with so many really bright people, and, you know, they've crossed my career in a certain point in time, and, you know, and we've had some fun together and had some success, and I'm just grateful for the people that I've had the privilege to work with and work for along my career. Yeah, there's just a lot of gratitude.

Roz

I have to share a story. I don't know if you would remember this, but this goes back to 2016 and I was delivering a training program to your people. There may be, I guess, about 30. There happened to be one individual that was really challenging. And you probably know who I'm talking about. He's just whatever. He didn't like my slides, he didn't like my style, whatever it was. Maybe it was justified. I can't say it was a long time ago, but anyhow, at the end of the day, you came over with this big smile. You were so warm and loving. And you said, so Roz, how'd you think it went? I said, I don't know, but I said, You didn't tell me about him. Why didn't you warn me that he was going to be very confrontational? And you said something that really impacted. And he says, Roz, I knew you could have handled it. You did wonderful. And it was such a gift that you believed in me. I believe that's what you do. I believe that's what leaders have to emulate. Show your people that you believe in them and here I was an outside, you know, contractor, but I'll never forget that you said that. So thank you. Many years later, you're welcome.

Ross

The other is, you can't win them all, by the way. If our jobs were that easy, then you know, you know, they wouldn't need us, right? Right? No, I'm grateful for what we've done together. For sure, it's been a lot of fun.

Roz

All right, so when your leadership chapter is written, we're coming to the end of our questions. So think about your leadership chapter. It's just out there. What do you hope it says about you, and, more importantly, how people experienced you? What would you like it to say?

Ross

Well, first of all, I think I'd like to be recognized that I made an impact. And I'm not talking about financial performance. I'm talking about the impact in helping people build their careers and fulfill their potential and help them to grow and not not only as individuals, but help them with respect to their families and you know, and all the things that go all the all the stuff that's part of life, so I'd love to be known for that, and I never lost kind of a an understanding of who I am. At the end of the day, I stayed true to myself, and I showed up to do my best work, and I did it with a lot of positivity and authenticity, although I think that's

an overused frame. I think I just showed up. I showed up to do the work, and I cared about the people, and I made a difference.

Roz

Sure. And my last question just to think about it, if you were speaking to a younger version of yourself and to those people listening right now, what advice would you give them?

Ross

It's not about you. Don't for a minute think that it's about you. If you want to build businesses, it's the opposite. It's about the cause. It's about the higher purpose. It's what we're trying to fulfill as an organization, and it's not about you. And once you figure that out as a leader, if you really have a good leadership DNA, and this is what you want to do, that's when the hard work starts. But that would be my advice, and you'll get there. You know, people get there, it's just how long it takes until you get there.

Roz

Just leaving us on this wonderful note of positivity. What are you most excited about in the future?

Ross

Well, I mean, I'm excited about welcoming two son in laws, two sons to our family, and celebrating two weddings. I'm excited about the trajectory of the business that we're working here in the employee experience space. We're the market leader. I've got an amazing board that I work with. I've got super smart people that are collaborative and they provide some great counsel. I'm a very positive kind of half full person. Roz, even if the world's a little crazy right now. I'm excited about what the next adventure is for me and for my family and for our business.

Roz

You've given us a rare look into the kind of leader we want to follow. I look forward to working with you again, Ross, and I'm so honored to have you in my life and the difference you've made to the people listening to this podcast, thank you.

Ross

Well, thanks for the opportunity, Roz and your kind words. It's been fun, great to reconnect after all these years and look forward to continuing to do some great work together.

Roz

Thank you. If you wish to listen to our past episodes or more information on the Usheroff Institute, please visit Usheroff.com. I wish you a wonderful rest of your day.