

Mastering Money: The Educators Edition podcast – episode transcript

Small Business Series

Episode 4: Futureproofing Your Business

Speakers: Garth Sheriff (host), Saeideh Fard (guest)

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[00:00:00.98] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:00:11.74] GARTH SHERIFF: Welcome to Mastering Money: the Educator's Edition, where we will talk about the latest in financial literacy education. I'm Garth Sheriff, a small business owner and financial literacy volunteer for Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada. CPA Canada provides no cost programs and free online resources that help Canadians own their finances and learn the language of money.

[00:00:39.30] This episode is part of our podcast focusing on helping Ontario small businesses get through the pandemic. Our guest will help us navigate through this new world, as well as provide insight on what the future may look like, including support and resources for small business owners. CPA Canada sponsor for this Ontario small business series is the government of Ontario. Their support helps make this event possible.

[00:01:11.02] You can find our podcast on PodBean, Apple Podcast, Google Podcast, Spotify, and wherever else you find your podcasts. If you have any questions, you can get in touch with us at financialliteracy@cpacanada.ca.

[00:01:30.34] Today, on November 12th, 2020, we are joined by Saeideh Fard, Senior Vice President of Finance at PointClickCare. Throughout her career, she has steered several teams through intricate and innovative change projects. She is here today to talk about future-proofing a business by walking us through how small business owners can prepare and plan for disruptions and being thrown off course.

[00:02:03.58] Thank you, Saeideh, for being here today. And you mentioned before I can call you Sae, so I will. And thank you for joining us and sharing your experience and insights. In reading your bio and getting to know you, I'm fascinated by your career and your career journey, and I was wondering if you could start us off by taking us through your journey into the world of technology and digital transformation.

[00:02:27.93] SAEIDEH FARD: Sure. So to start off, thank you to you, as well, for reaching out to recount some of the experiences, the questions that you have thrown my way have got me thinking about. So thank you.

[00:02:39.45] In terms of a background on myself, I have just under a two decade career. About a quarter of that career spans organizations that are quite large, actually. So I started at PricewaterhouseCoopers, as many CAs start out, in the big four. I had about a three-year career span there, working with fairly large organizations in the financial institution sector.

[00:03:02.32] In leaving for industry, my first experience was actually with a Canadian icon, Canadian Tire, as a member of their finance team. So I spent, in total, about five years with large organizations, looking at how they work, albeit from a fairly junior lens at the time in my career.

[00:03:20.92] So the second part of my career, and I'd say the 3/4 that have followed the years that I spent in large corporate experience, they have really focused a lot on transformation. And they started with an eight-year-- almost a decade-- eight-year stint at an organization called Marketwired. Marketwired is now owned by NASDAQ, so you can kind of tell where that story goes. So it was acquired at the end of my time there.

[00:03:52.06] And it was the first organization that really brought me into understanding the small and medium-sized space, which is very different than what you gain as experience in large corporate Canada. In terms of background on Marketwire, they are an organization that offered media PR and IR solutions to the broader corporate community.

[00:04:16.84] And in that space, what I experienced is really seeing the maturity of an industry. So I joined at a time where close to double digit growth was taking place. There was an acquisition of a US entity, which really gave the organization-- previously named CCN Matthews, for anyone listening in that's a little bit more familiar with the older brand-- really gave that organization the new name.

[00:04:39.88] And so I joined at a very interesting time, and saw the integration of two players in that space and saw a couple of years of growth. And then the market changed, and I think most of us are familiar with how the media industry has been affected by the forces of maturity. And really, during that time, I got to experience a pivot. I got to experience how leadership in organizations that size looks at staying relevant, but also pivoting into new arenas.

[00:05:14.59] And an acquisition in 2010 was that pivot. So Sysomos, which is the organization that was acquired in 2010, was that pivot for Marketwire. And Sysomos-- for anyone not familiar with that brand, which I assume most folks who aren't in marketing may not be-- it is a media monitoring tool using social media, really understanding the analytics that social media can provide to brands, large brands like Unilever or Coca-Cola, and also smaller brands.

[00:05:46.48] So that pivot was an interesting point in my career. It brought me closer to the software industry, which is actually where I am right now. So it's the start of my career in software and technology. And it really was the beginning of understanding the forces of change, because two organizations, you can imagine one very, very mature and another one having been acquired as essentially a startup, but with a significant amount of promise.

[00:06:11.73] Bringing those two organizations together, that was a huge part of the ride over the eight years that I was with this organization. And I really owe that stage of my career and the opportunities that came up in learning about transformation from both of those angles, again a mature industry trying to reinvent itself and an organization much smaller, but with a lot of opportunity, trying to get to scale.

[00:06:40.03] And the intersections of those two worlds is really where I spent a lot of my time on issues, such as incentive comp for sales and data and analytics. How do you glean insights out of what is previously just data? How do you create processes that lead to meaningful data and insights?

[00:07:00.01] And in looking back, I think that was that ride, and what was essentially, at the end, taking apart these organizations. I had worked very hard with management to put them together and to run parallel processes to make that happen, and there's a lot that comes with that. But really, at the end, we actually took them apart. We sold Marketwire to NASDAQ, and that marks the end of my time there.

[00:07:23.21] It also coincided with a bit of a personal journey. I became a mother just following that acquisition, and so with that came a new career as well. But after that came a career as CFO of a travel organization called TravelEdge. And really working through essentially what was a three-year transformation journey, in bringing together the back office of many small acquired entities that were being pulled together at the back office, was amalgamated in Toronto during those years.

[00:07:56.17] And really, a lot of the business partnering that I took on in my career, a lot of understanding the value of finance to the front office, to really what takes place by executives as a result of the executive work that others outside of finance do, the business partnering side, a lot of that I learned during those three years.

[00:08:15.29] And then the last career journey before this one, I went back into software and joined an earlier stage organization called Tulip Retail. And Tulip Retail essentially is transformation for the retail industry in the form of technology. So you can tie that back into the theme of transformation, which is something that I've been really thrilled to own in the last roughly 15 years of my career.

[00:08:42.31] So that brought me, again, back into the technology world, and that is actually where I am right now with PointClickCare. I left Tulip, interestingly, just a month before the pandemic hit, with no understanding, obviously no crystal ball, that this is going to happen. But left Tulip and I'm currently at PointClickCare, which is another software entity. It's one of Canada's largest. And I'm here now as the SVP of finance.

[00:09:11.07] GARTH SHERIFF: Sae, that's an amazing journey, and you've used a lot of tools and words that we're going to come back to-- pivot, reinvention. And it's interesting that your career went from large corporate culture in Canadian Tire. Then you went to Marketwire, Travel Edge, Tulip. And you've mentioned a lot the words of transformation and technology, so we really want to investigate that. And also, becoming a parent, that's also a part of the journey as well.

[00:09:39.53] So you've gone through a lot of change and seen a lot of change, both personally and within the organizations that you've helped. And one of the questions I'd like to ask you is with the move into software, what have you seen as the role technology has played with the organization that you've been, in helping the transformation helping bring change to these organizations?

[00:10:01.40] SAEIDEH FARD: So it's interesting thinking about the role that technology plays, which is the industry I'm right now, but the role that this industry plays in the success of the finance function. Even in the stages of my career where I have not been in pure tech play organizations-- so travel comes to mind, and even Marketwire, in the earlier days before Sysomos was acquired.

[00:10:26.89] Even thinking through the years in my career that I haven't been in software, it's really clear in looking back that the organizations that are setting themselves apart, from the back office perspective, are the ones that are thinking through transformation, digital transformation, and the use of technology in reshaping the role that finance teams play. Those are the organizations that seem to be set apart.

[00:10:57.45] And at the core of what I've seen in my career, and in the last 10 years in particular, prior to the pandemic, there's been a huge amount of focus that is coming to finance teams around the use of technology. And I think almost anyone listening with a leadership role in finance knows that the leadership roles in finance are actually changing quite quickly. And adoption of technology, really evaluating the value add tools and thinking through how exactly technology can be leveraged to ensure not just efficiency, but better insights for organizations, I think that's becoming a competitive advantage.

[00:11:44.70] And the role of the finance professional, the partnering role that we play, is going beyond just the numbers to becoming a technology adopter, an evangelist for the rest of the organization on technologies that, again, enable better insights. Not just on financial reporting, which is I think what classically finance professionals are associated with, but really tools outside of what you consider the core, whether it's BI, whether it's incentive management tools, whether it's tools that really tie us together with sales team enterprise-- tools like Salesforce.

[00:12:22.26] It feels like every organization that I've been in has been having cross group conversations around adoption of tools like Salesforce, plug-ins that really tie together different parts of organizations and enable better decision making, enable more efficient outcomes. And finance, I think, has been at the core of that.

[00:12:43.68] The organizations that I've seen, even just through my network, that have been able to set themselves apart on the digital transformation journey have had a really good partnership between finance as a function and the rest of the business. And their finance leadership has had a really good grasp of technology as an enabler.

[00:13:07.74] So we're moving beyond what we have traditionally held the role of the finance leader to, and the lines are blurring, because technology is no longer a set of tools or decisions on adoption that are being made in a silo by the office of the CTO, or just product or PMO groups. Finance is actually playing a much bigger role in not just the adoption, but also the enablement of the rest of the functions in the organization in utilizing the technology.

[00:13:44.13] GARTH SHERIFF: That's really a very interesting insight, because for a lot of small business owners and small business entrepreneurs, this concept of digital transformation has been forced upon a lot of businesses. Because they've potentially haven't necessarily adopted some technology that might have been better for their business because they didn't necessarily have to, and because of the pandemic, they've been forced into this position where they either need to adopt technology or be open-minded to it.

[00:14:12.36] And you've seen a lot with the different organizations that you've been in. What would you say is a way of looking at technology positively? Because some small business owners might look at this and say, well, you know what? I might have to do that work myself.

[00:14:26.47] I might have to bring on a new accounting software or a new customer relationship software, and it just seems like a lot. And they might be resistant to it, even though it can really be a difference maker in this pandemic, to adopt these technologies. What might you say to them to just keep them open-minded to the importance of technology?

[00:14:47.64] SAEIDEH FARD: So it's interesting. Even before the pandemic hit, the organizations that were doing well in keeping the costs of delivering insights down, a lot of them had figured this out earlier. There's actually a cost to late adoption, and I think this is something that we don't talk about often.

[00:15:07.59] I think a lot of smaller organizations, as they're thinking through the decisions, the cost benefit, they're not thinking about that cost, that late adoption cost, as a true cost. And it really is one. It's not necessarily spelled out in the financial statements in the same way as other costs are, but it really factors into the growth and maturity curve that organizations have, their ability to capture more through better insights and through better partnering of the finance function with the rest of their organization.

[00:15:42.25] The pandemic, I think, has helped feature a lot of what the more forward-thinking organizations have known all along. And so for me, as a leader in finance that has been called into the ring to lead through transformations, this is something that was fairly apparent earlier on in my career.

[00:16:03.74] That force of change, that was already there. It isn't new. I think it's being absorbed as new, and a lot of organizations are thinking of the pandemic as being the impetus for the rest of what's coming. But it really isn't new.

[00:16:18.80] I think if you look at organizations that are keeping costs of enablement functions lean, they have really put the time into that earlier investment, and they've thought of it as a multi-year payoff journey versus one that you'll look at in a singular year. The other question-- and I just want to make sure that I address this-- you were asking about how can organizations think about adoption of technology.

[00:16:48.47] And one big thing that I will point to is that the entrepreneurs, or the organizations that adopt technology, with success are the ones that are getting advice upfront. They're getting advice on the tools that are out there. They're understanding the full cost of adoption, not just looking at whatever the sticker says at the beginning. They're really thinking full costing.

[00:17:15.38] They're also thinking about measuring the benefits that that technology is meant to bring. So if there are claims around what the technology being brought in is aiming to do, they're really taking the time to talk to other adopters to say, did you see that change? How much was that change worth to you?

[00:17:34.95] They're also taking the time to really understand their specific user needs. So if you're talking as an entrepreneur, as a business owner to other organizations or other adopters of technology, it's critically important to understand how different your needs are, or how similar your needs are.

[00:17:56.73] And there are mentors out there. I think the key thing that is important to recognize is that taking the time to network and find the appropriate mentors in the Canadian space-- and I'll speak from the smaller tech organizations perspective-- this is a huge advantage. And organizations, like Mars, are helping to enable the community to think of itself more as a community.

[00:18:24.48] But beyond just tech, I think taking the time to seek out the advice upfront-- and a lot of that is free. There's immense value to that. And it also means that a lot of the deferred decisions-- because entrepreneurs are too scared to take on something that might feel like a lot of additional work and thinking in the short-term-- a lot of that burden can be lifted through a community of mentors.

[00:18:53.67] And Canada is known for this, especially lately. I think this is a great time to be out there to seek advice. I can't say enough about what I've experienced in the tech community, just on the mentorship side of things.

[00:19:08.43] GARTH SHERIFF: Really great advice for small business owners. I wanted to summarize some of it. I really like that cost too late adoption. As a small business person myself with my own business that was all travel, hotels, trains, planes, and automobiles, it all came to a halt as the pandemic stopped travel.

[00:19:28.26] Thinking about technology and having to move, for me, to webinars and videos, it didn't feel easy, because there was some resistance to the way things were. I like the way things were. But this idea of the cost to late adoption, which is an opportunity cost, I think it's a really important one for small businesses to consider because they might not consider, as you said, that it's a real cost.

[00:19:49.68] Then the advice on communication, the community, and getting advice upfront. I really like the fact you said an important word for small business owners and entrepreneurs, free. Getting advice within your community, and you've seen that in the tech community. So I think that's fantastic, and hopefully, as listeners are hearing you they'll maybe think about this, maybe reach out to someone in their community, in their business community, or somebody else. Mentorship is free and important.

[00:20:18.37] I also want to ask, you've had a lot of successes in the organizations that you've been a part of. What have you seen, within those organizations, the individuals that you've been around, that has helped that success? That includes you as well. And what could a small business owner take from that that they could apply during this time?

[00:20:38.46] SAEIDEH FARD: I'm answering this question from the lens of a partner, or the partner that I've been to the business or that I've tried to be, or I'd like to think I am. So the three that jumped out at me, the first one is actually on listening and absorbing. I think entrepreneurs, as they're thinking about who their key partners are in the business, they need a listener and an absorber.

[00:21:00.54] And that really comes down to having somebody who understands their vision and their excitement, but also relates to their fears and their pains, because I think those are the two sides. And entrepreneurs are an interesting breed of individuals, and there is both sides to this.

[00:21:18.21] So you want to make sure, if you're partnered with an entrepreneur, that you're listening for both of those, and you're trying to understand not just the excitement, but also the risks or the things that are keeping them up at night. And on the flip side, as an entrepreneur, if you're evaluating folks in the organization or to bring in folks, I think it's important to make sure that you're looking for those qualities. So that's the first one.

[00:21:44.19] The second one, I think, is around storytelling. So the rule of a good finance professional in partnering with an entrepreneur is being able to tell the story back to the entrepreneur, using the data and the insights that are coming out, but also externally. Because entrepreneurs need advocates. They need to be able to tell stories to outside folks, such as banks or investors, depending on the size of an organization.

[00:22:16.96] So being able to retell a story in a way that ties back to that vision. And that storyteller role is different depending on who the audience is. If you're dealing with the entrepreneur directly, it's important to be able to speak in facts and figures, but in a way that tells the story of the so what. What is the importance of the financial information or the metrics that you are bringing back for the entrepreneur?

[00:22:43.83] If it's the banks, again, being able to tell the story of risk. If it's investors, it's where's the organization going? Where's the growth potential, and what insights are there right now to validate that strategy and to speak to the execution of that strategy that's taking place?

[00:23:03.13] And then lastly, the role is around alignment. It's really helping use numbers and metrics as a tool to bring alignment to the decision makers in the business. Because often, what you'll find is there's divergent views in organizations. And taking the time-- again, the listening part-- taking the time to both listen, and then also be able to storytell and take a view to what is really happening in the organization, to bring alignment through metrics to organizations, I think that's a very crucial role that good leaders, good analytical leaders, are bringing to the rest of their organization.

[00:23:48.60] GARTH SHERIFF: Those three really resonated with me-- listening, storytelling, and alignment. And storytelling, for me-- I don't know if all entrepreneurs and small business owners are like this. I think there's an acronym for learners, VARK-- visual, auditory, reading, kinesthetic. And I'm very much on the V side. I like to think in images and visualize.

[00:24:07.59] And if I can tell that story, I feel not only a growing sense of confidence and motivation, that other people might be able to help me with my story. And I thought that was a great point of thinking about your organization, your journey, the challenges, and finding a way to partner in with these three tips of listening, storytelling, alignment.

[00:24:28.14] The next part-- because we have a lot of experiences with different organizations, helping these organizations in different phases-- is that you have seen different organizations and you have been part of successful organizations in different growth phases. And part of the stress of what might be happening for some small business owners might be around their culture and what they might be trying to maintain with their workplace culture, as there might be turnover and other stresses. And I was wondering, for you in your experience, what have you seen that makes a positive or successful workplace culture?

[00:25:01.61] SAEIDEH FARD: On this one, I think one of the biggest differentiators that I've seen in organizations-- and I've worked across the gamut, in terms of leadership styles and cultures. But one of the biggest differentiators that I've seen, and it seems like it's a very relevant concept, in particular during the pandemic, is this concept of empathy.

[00:25:21.56] And so I'll break that down into two parts. I think organizations that have great empathy for their employees are set apart. But those are usually also the same organizations that bring an empathetic lens to the customer experience. And so I can speak to the tactics of my current employer, PointClickCare, just around some examples to this, because it might be good to bring home with a few core examples.

[00:25:53.01] But before I do that, I just want to point out that this concept, while it's relevant during the pandemic, it's actually been a differentiator for many organizations, ours included, prior. So PointClickCare has had a great history of success, in particular over the last five to 10 years. We're one of the largest software homegrown companies in Canada. We're quietly one of the largest.

[00:26:17.15] And it might surprise some folks on the call to hear that while we're quiet, we're actually on the Forbes 100 list, which means we're one of the top 100 SaaS providers in North America, a Canadian company that is servicing North America's market with a SaaS product.

[00:26:36.59] And I'll take us back to the question you just asked around culture. I think culture is a huge differentiator for PointClickCare, and notably other organizations, as well, but in particular, with the examples that I promised. The first one-- and I'm about eight months into my tenure at PointClickCare. So if you do the math, you will know that I actually started the day we all went into hiding from the pandemic.

[00:27:01.41] So that was a very unique lens on the organization. You join the organization at one of the most high stress times. Any organization, in Canada or the world, during that week in particular, during that month in particular, was going through immense stress.

[00:27:15.65] And so what did I see in coming in as a new employee? The first thing that happened that month-- and that was in March. That was roughly around the midyear mark for us. We're not on a calendar year end, so it was roughly mid-year. The executive actually declared a mid-year bonus.

[00:27:33.50] And as a finance person walking in, I thought, OK, this is a very interesting thing that's happening. I'm going to try to figure out, where's the rationale to this and how are we justifying this? We're a fairly successful organization, cash flow positive. And while still, from a sales perspective, we were under stress, we knew that selling to the senior care markets-- software to the senior care market, one of the most understressed parts of the global economy-- that would be difficult.

[00:28:04.70] We knew we were cash flow positive, and we knew that a lot of our employees, their spouses, family members, had either lost jobs or they were in precarious situations where they would potentially lose jobs coming up. And so reassuring the employee base that we were committed to them, that was incredibly important. So midyear bonus, when we normally pay bonuses at year end, with the messaging that we are here for you, we have been very successful because of your hard work up to this midyear point.

[00:28:35.21] And so distributing that bonus early was meant to calm the nerves of employees that were feeling quite frayed, and to really bring them to the table so that we could execute on the rest of our strategy, which was to be there for our customers in an empathetic way, that in the end, translates into great financial performance as well.

[00:28:58.68] So on the other side, what happened with our customers, if you ask-- so at that point, management also decided to not actively sell, because it would come across quite tone deaf if we were to have our sales folks still doing the same things as the pandemic was raging on as we were doing the month before. And so in its place, we actually placed our sales folks on customer initiatives, outreach to say, what can we do for you?

[00:29:27.54] And in the end what that resulted in was two things. One, we had employees step up. We do have a lot of nurses on staff who are working in customer care, or even in sales. And we had employees step up to say, I'd like to go to the frontlines. I'd like to support the senior care community. They're under stress. These are organizations I work with regularly. I'd like to be there for them in my state or province. So we saw a number of employees step up to do that.

[00:29:55.38] The other thing that happened is we heard from customers that certain products that we had either just built or we were just about to finish-- in particular, an infection control product that we had built-- that they really could use access to a product like that. We rolled out a freemium, actually. And so I think it was a six-month period, a three- to six-month period, we offered products that we normally charge for, we offer them as a freemium.

[00:30:23.43] And in the end, this empathy actually ended up being an immense part of our success to come. Because as we think about what's happening in 2021, which is a year we're just kicking off, a lot of these clients are actually interested in products they had never tried. That freemium experience, which was that pivot that we offered the customer, that helped us gain the credibility from our customers during a crucial time where we otherwise would have had no ability to put ourselves out there.

[00:30:54.75] So our sales tactics, if you think about it, they completely changed as a result of the pandemic. And interestingly, as a result of this unforeseen circumstance, we learned a lot about how the customer prefers to experience products, touch and feel them in advance. And so we're now in the process of applying those learnings to, how do we change our sales process as a result of what we've learned?

[00:31:21.60] And it goes far beyond the months that could be ahead for us in the pandemic, and there's quite a bit of learning. So I think that these are good examples of pivots with empathy that have really worked for organizations such as ours.

[00:31:36.28] GARTH SHERIFF: Yeah, and these are really great examples, because when we talk about empathy, it sometimes feels esoteric. It doesn't feel tangible. And you gave us tangible examples of PointClickCare, the midyear bonus. And the trickle-down effect, you said employees stepped up. And I imagine they felt motivated, and that would also work on the customer side as well.

[00:31:57.25] And so I was also curious, as you came in new to this organization and you saw this, how did you feel about it when you saw the midyear bonus being provided during the pandemic, where a lot

of organizations might not have done that? How did that affect you and your views of the organization as you entered?

[00:32:15.36] SAEIDEH FARD: It was an interesting time, I will tell you. Because I came in both, obviously, as an employee and a leader in finance. And to me, it was a really clear example of how focusing just on numbers and profits is not necessarily the long-term indicator of success.

[00:32:36.76] And so if you think about it, in the short-term, the impact to our cash, or our profitability of declaring a bonus in a year where we didn't have enough visibility to say, OK, by the end of the year, we're going to be at x spot. So in the short-term sense, I really recognized that this is a long-term bet on employees and their ability to influence our success and outcomes in the three- to five-year strategy.

[00:33:05.82] And for us as an organization, passion, and that comes down to employees, is one of our core values. And it was interesting to be able to see that core value in week 1 at PointClickCare, and in such a very real and tangible way that, for me, this is a lesson and a learning that I'm going to take into the rest of my career.

[00:33:28.98] Because as much as I'd like to say that the last two decades of my career I had natively understood that concept, I can't say that that was true prior to seeing this example and what it led to. As I said, we've had a lot of successes that came as a result of what our employees were able to achieve during tough times.

[00:33:52.92] The conversations that we're having with our customers are very different than the type of conversations that take place during a pandemic with stress on both sides. And so we were really able to shift the dynamic of who we are in market as a result of this-- you called it esoteric, but as a result of this concept of empathy. And for me, I'd never seen that in play in such a crisp way. And so it's a learning I take with me to the rest of my career.

[00:34:23.50] GARTH SHERIFF: That's a really powerful message, and we talked about culture to enter this conversation. I think you've mentioned this a few times during our conversation. I think it's hard for a lot of small business owners to find that longer term view for their business and the stakeholders around them, but you've given us some really great and positive examples of trying to make that look a little bit ahead, both maybe for empathy and also looking at technology.

[00:34:54.25] Even though it's hard, the benefits hopefully will be there as we move along. So that's, again really, really great insight. And one of the things that we've been asking all of our guests on our podcast, to keep things positive. It is a stressful time, as you've mentioned, and you've given a lot of great insights, experiences, and points for small business owners to consider.

[00:35:18.04] And actually, a lot of them are already very positive. We end with this last question. What is one thing you would tell a small, medium business owners to help them stay positive during this challenging time?

[00:35:30.79] SAEIDEH FARD: This one was an interesting one, just in the list of questions that you had sent me, and it's probably the one that I gave the most thought to. As I was jotting down notes for this, I had a memory of an earlier conversation that I had with an entrepreneur who I admire in the tech industry.

[00:35:50.53] And he was talking to me about the stress that his organization is under and just his reaction to it. And it stood out for me, and I think it exemplifies what I'm about to share. And it has a lot to do with this concept of understanding what is in our control and working towards optimal outcomes for that, and then accepting the pieces that are out of our control and knowing the difference.

[00:36:19.91] And I think even just outside of an entrepreneurial capacity, I think most of us, in our own personal reactions to what's happening with the pandemic-- I can say I took a lot from that. I'm not an entrepreneur. I support entrepreneurs, but I know on a personal level, that this message really resonated with me.

[00:36:39.22] And I think most of us who are familiar with the serenity prayer can recall that one. I'll share for the audience in case folks on the call aren't familiar with that one. So the serenity prayer is a prayer that's written by an American theologian. His name is Reinhold Niebuhr.

[00:36:56.92] And it goes as this. It says, "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things that I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." And I think this concept for entrepreneurs, but also the rest of us, as those who are working to support entrepreneurs, are just as humans.

[00:37:21.46] I think this is a very important distinction that we should all try to make. Sometimes it's that last part, the wisdom to know the difference, I think that is ultimately where it's hard. Because it is easy to know the things that you have control over. It's hard to accept the ones you don't, but sometimes that's also easy to identify. But just the difference and saying, OK, this is in this bucket and the rest is in the other bucket.

[00:37:46.99] And the controllable factors, I think that's what we can all double down on. And I think taking away the attention that we may be spending on what is uncontrollable and reallocating that energy, turning it into positive energy into what we can control, really going with the pivots on that side, I think that is where I landed with the notes on this question.

[00:38:10.15] GARTH SHERIFF: What a wonderful sentiment. I look to that serenity poem now and again for that sage wisdom on what we control and the wisdom to know the difference, and I think that's absolutely a great way to come to an end of our conversation, to provide that wisdom to our small to medium business owners, entrepreneurs, and other listeners.

[00:38:32.89] And I've learned so much from this conversation, Sae. It's been really great. And I love the positivity you brought to your advice and to bring in your experience. I've written down a lot of things. And the things that resonated with me, from your experience, you talked about communication and how important that is, and mentors, and really looking for advice, maybe seeking advice with the community. And you've been part of the tech community, and that's been an important part of what you've seen with successes.

[00:39:00.46] And with your culture, your corporate culture, what you saw at PointClickCare, and all of the things that you saw just right in the beginning of your career there. And you mentioned a word that's important to me. But you provided a real great example how to functionalize that with empathy, and how important that is for small to medium business owners to think about and also maybe functionalize around their stakeholders.

[00:39:25.60] And the other note that I wrote down from our conversation is just doing as much as we can to think about the long-term. You mentioned the cost of late adoption and thinking about things we can do today that might be difficult, might take time, might be some cost, but the cost might be greater if we don't try to make those changes, those transformations. So that's absolutely wonderful. Thank you so much, Sae. I really appreciate your time today.

[00:39:56.30] SAEIDEH FARD: Thank you for the opportunity to reflect and share. I enjoyed the conversation.

[00:40:01.12] SAEIDEH FARD: Thank, Sae, for sharing your journey and your best practices in future-proofing businesses with an uncertain landscape, such as what we are dealing with today.

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[00:41:29.94] [MUSIC PLAYING]