Speaker 1:

Welcome to Stayin' Alive in Technology, a series of conversations with Silicon Valley veterans touching on war stories from the past and practical advice for today. And now, here's your host, Melinda Byerley, founding partner of Fiddlehead, a digital marketing consultancy.

Melinda Byerley:

Welcome back to another episode of Stayin' Alive in Tech. I'm excited to sort of re-introduce our guest, Bob Alberti, since this is actually the second of a two-part episode featuring him, which is a first for us. So, if you have not listened to the first episode of our time with Bob, I strongly advise that you start there before listening to this one.

During part one of our time with Bob, you heard about his adventures in the 1970s during what was essentially the Wild West days of computers and the foundations of the internet. Bob talked about using the earliest form of chatrooms, playing multiplayer games across a network, and eventually helping develop Internet Gopher in the early 90s, which would become the basis of the search engines and browsers we now use today. You also heard him talk about what it was like to start and lose two whole companies by the time he was just 25 years old, and how he moved past that.

Melinda Byerley:

In this second half of our conversation, we make a pivot to discussing just how fast computer and internet tech have evolved, and assess the numerous consequences and social issues that have arisen from living in an age where we can now send swaths of data across the world in just a few seconds. As you'll later hear, Bob was already quite worried about this in the mid-90s when the internet was quickly picking up steam on a consumer level. Just as there was then, there are no easy solutions to what we're seeing with this now.

So, let's pick up where we left off in the first episode: talking about Internet Gopher, and what became of it. We hope you enjoy the second part of this enlightening conversation with perhaps the biggest internet pioneer you've never heard of: Bob Alberti.

Melinda Byerley:

How did the name Gopher arise? I know the connection between the University of Minnesota and the Gopher, but I think there's a bigger story there too, right?

Bob Alberti:

The program allowed you to "go for" things.

Melinda Byerley:

Go-for, like a coffee gopher.

Bob Alberti:

Right. It was your gopher to find something on the internet. And the fact that the gopher was also the university mascot was just a lovely synchronicity. But that's where the name came from.

Melinda Byerley:

That's really cool. And I liked how you said that people start—you said in the article—that people start up Gopher for services to this day. But as Wikipedia notes, on April Fools. You must get an influx every year in April.

Melinda Byerley:

So there you are, so there's Gopher. Talk about what happened. Why didn't Gopher win? It was first, and I love this story for young people, right? First isn't always the winner.

Bob Alberti:

No, no, it's right. Well, Gopher was text-only to start with. And it was not a hypertext. Hypertext is when you look at a webpage and it has integrated graphics and text and the text can be in different fonts and different colors. That's called hypertext. Gopher didn't do that. The reason Gopher didn't do that is because computers at the time were not fully capable of displaying it. They had a hard time with, "Now change colors, now use a different font." And their computer spins and goes off and finds a font file and loads it up. And it takes about as long as me saying it to do that.

Melinda Byerley:

Not to mention dial-up, not to mention very slow modem.

Bob Alberti:

In that time, modems at their fastest were about 2,400 baud, which is still dog slow. You can read 2,400 baud as it scrolls by on the screen, that's how slow it is. Gopher was this bridge when computers were slow and the connections were slow, from about '91 to about '94. And I have a paper online which you probably can link to, that explores the reason that Gopher stopped being used. But the primary reason it stopped being used was because around '94, a number of things happened at once. Modem speeds went from 2,400 up to 56k in a very short period of time.

Melinda Byerley:

I remember that. Christmas, 1995.

Bob Alberti:

Yup. And 56k is just at the bottom edge of when you can take a small graphic image and display it in almost real time. What they used to call it back then was the "world wide wait."

Melinda Byerley:

I remember.

Bob Alberti:

You'd load up a web page and then you'd watch the image kind of drop into—

Melinda Byerley:

Like a dot matrix printer just rolling.

Bob Alberti:

Yeah. And so, that was when you were at the bottom edge of being able to handle a hypertext page in an almost reasonable period of time. At the same time, computer manufacturers started including modems built into computers when you bought them.

Melinda Byerley:

You didn't have to unhook your phone and turn the handle upside down and put it in the cradle anymore.

Bob Alberti:

You didn't have to put a handle in a little thing, you can just plug a phone line into your computer. And then the third big change at the same time was that DARPA released the internet to general use. It stopped being—

Melinda Byerley:

Research.

Bob Alberti:

Prior to '94, the only thing you saw on the internet was .edu and .mil. Military and educational institutions. And that's it. And if you saw a .com like compuserve.com, that looked crass because this is an educational and research tool and here's somebody trying to make money on it.

Melinda Byerley:

I can remember that Christmas like it was yesterday. I was on AOL because I wasn't very sophisticated, but you could see everybody with $2,500 bucks and a Packard Bell basically got online. It went from a few of us hanging out talking about politics or whatever, computers, and then that Christmas, you couldn't get on AOL at all. It would wait and wait and wait and wait. And there was this flood. That's the thing I think is hard for people to grasp is how fast it all happened. When you said it happened at once, I think you literally mean like, within a period of months, all of this stuff happened.

Bob Alberti:

Within a period of months, all these changes happened. The internet became commercial, modems got much faster and computers started to come with built-in modems. And at that point, the web took over because you want to display what looked liked magazine pages on your screen.

Melinda Byerley:

Humans love images, we prefer images, yeah.

Bob Alberti:

Precisely. The other part of it is that humans, especially ones who work in computers, like porn. And you could start exchanging—

Melinda Byerley:

(Laughs) Internet is for porn, as they say in Avenue Q. The vices, it's all the vices. Porn drove Betamax. That's part of the history of it. I'm glad you brought that up, because that's an area that it's sort of never understood to me, like why it all happened so fast. I remember being like, "My God, everybody is here." No one was here and then everybody was here. And then from '95 on, it was just straight up, it felt like.

Bob Alberti:

And part of my argument is that without Gopher allowing things like people to find the latest web browser, you wouldn't have gotten on as fast, right? But people had their Gopher servers and they could say, "What is this web thing? What is Mozilla?" And the next thing you know, they're downloading Mozilla over their Gopher connection and running their first web browser.

Melinda Byerley:

They were bundled if I remember correctly. I seem to remember a disk that had Gopher FTP and Mozilla. I seem to remember that coming at some point. I don't remember exactly when.

Bob Alberti:

We actually wrote one. We had a project called SLIP dial and Minuet, I think it was called Minuet. And Minuet was a single three-and-a-half-inch floppy disk that had a crude web browser, a Gopher browser, an email client, and a dial-up tool all built into the one floppy disk. And I worked on that. I wrote SLIP dial and I wrote a lot of the Gopher client for that. You'd get this disk for free and plug it in your computer and you have everything you need to get on the primitive internet back then.

Melinda Byerley:

It was wild. You work your whole life on something, or a good part of your life on something, and then the tech just changes. And I'm trying to think of anything since then that's moved things that fast other than the iPhone. And even then, it took years for mobile to really sort of take the hold that it took. It took probably three, five years for that to happen.

Bob Alberti:

And what's funny is that could have gone faster. One of the things that Gopher is good for is when the last link in your communications chain is the bottleneck. So, when you have a 2400 baud modem on the end, it doesn't matter that you have a 10 megabit connection between the other two computers because it gets to you and it has to go 2400 baud. When the mobile phone industry was building, they could have used Gopher as their browser, but they didn't even know about Gopher by that point. Five

years later, it was like, "What's Gopher?" Instead, they took a web browser and they stripped it down, and they took the images out of it, and they simplified it. And they tried to turn it into a text-based web—

Melinda Byerley:

They couldn't turn it into Gopher.

Bob Alberti:

If they'd gone with Gopher, they could have easily had enough bandwidth to distribute things in a way that would have looked much more sensible. And instead, those of us who are old enough remember the horrible, hacked-up web browsers that these crummy old phones used to have.

Melinda Byerley:

They were awful.

Bob Alberti:

They were terrible. And they could have just been Gopher clients, but that was a missed opportunity. I think about when we finally put people on Mars, sometime in the future, hopefully, the connection between Mars and Earth will be the slow link. Because if Mars is on the other side of the sun, it's going to be a long delay when you send packets there. That would be a good opportunity for people to use Gopher browsers on Mars rather than trying to use a web browser.

Melinda Byerley:

I was just thinking of the Martian as you were talking about that, yeah.

Bob Alberti:

It's a low-bandwidth connection. You just want to get your data, you're not going to want a web page, you're going to want a text directory where you download whatever it is from the slow interplanetary connection. So that's a place where if somebody pays attention, they could use a Gopher client.

Melinda Byerley:

So, now you work in information security.

Bob Alberti:

Yes.

Melinda Byerley:

How did you make that transition from coding on the web—or the early precursors of the web—to this place in your life? And with that, I know you recently finished your degree but we'll come back to that.

Bob Alberti:

Sure. So, about the mid-90s, I had been a coder for 20 years. I started when I was 15. And so I'm 35, and I've been coding for 20 years. I came to realize that coders were basically bricklayers. They would never get the credit for building the Chrysler Building. It'd always be the architect who would get the credit. And meanwhile, the guys who laid the bricks were like, "Who cares?" And I was really tired of being asked to write bad code as fast as possible in order to hit a deadline. That frustrated me. I'm a perfectionist by nature in that way and I liked writing good, elegant, clean code—and nobody wanted it. Nobody was interested in that. They want the code tomorrow. And it didn't matter how bad, slow, or buggy it was. And that's, of course, why we have this environment where we have to patch everything every single day constantly—because that's never changed.

Bob Alberti:

So I wanted to get out of coding. This is one of these things. People have different styles and my style is one that has a kind of dramatic name: I don't try to use it too much, but, "visionary." I can usually see what's coming. And I sat there in '95 and I looked, and I said, "You know what, the internet's going to go nuts. It's like an old Western town in California in the 19th century." And I thought, if I pinned a badge on myself now, by the time it gets big, I can call myself Sheriff and everyone will agree with me. And so I went into information security in the mid-90s. And I was right, I was exactly right.

Melinda Byerley:

(Laughs) Never more right than today. Literally, at this moment.

Bob Alberti:

I'm still in information security to this day. I got what's called the CISSP certification in 2001. That's kind of the default information security credential that you needed across the next 20 years to get jobs. Now, everything specialized out. Back then, information security was everything, you did everything.

Melinda Byerley:

Just like internet marketing was. That was all we were.

Bob Alberti:

You created the firewall and you also did penetration testing, and you also made sure people didn't misuse their email, blah, blah, blah. Now, it's all specialized. You have incident response people, and you have log management people, and you have email, security-only people.

Bob Alberti:

So, as a generalist, and again, a visionary, I'm an architect, which means I can look at the overall programs, that is to say, the systems of incidence response and log management and software development. And I can kind of coordinate close to make sure that they're comprehensive, and that the overall risk is reduced in an ongoing fashion. That's what I do as an architect. And part of that is because I have this long history of having coded things and run firewalls. And so I can pull that all together.

Melinda Byerley:

Also you've done a little bit of hacking. I think to being security—I always joke—you've got to be a little bit criminal. Because you've got to understand, how does the mind think when you were trying to break in?

Bob Alberti:

The security mindset is completely different and much more paranoid mindset. And that's a challenge, because for the past 30 years, we've been trying as a culture to get the internet to work at all. And that's not a security mindset, that's a functional mindset. "How do we get this damn thing to work?" The security mindset is, "How do we make it work right? How do we make it work safe?" And that's a different point of view. It's a constant push and pull between functionality and security and privacy. And that will continue.

Bob Alberti:

It's important to understand: The invention of computers and the internet, and more importantly, the invention of asymmetric cryptography—let's not even go there—is as important as the invention of the printing press. And as fundamental to human culture as the invention of the printing press.

Melinda Byerley:

Say more about that.

Bob Alberti:

Sure. So think about the world in the Middle Ages. The church was pretty much the power structure that tied all the different cultures together. And all the kings and emperors, they all answered to the church in some respect. And then the printing press was invented. And Martin Luther had a difference of opinion with the church. And so, he printed up something and he nailed it to the church doors, and you had the Protestant Reformation, and the world still is wrestling with some of the implications to that. That was kind of a side effect of the invention of the printing press: that you could take ideas and convey them and put them into a document and make many, many, many, many copies of that document. Not just a roomful of scribes inking things together on vellum, but you could just run a machine and come up with 100 copies of something.

Melinda Byerley:

So then people become educated and knowledgeable, they have their own opinion. And as a result, there will be change.

Bob Alberti:

And the way I think of it is, this is the culture thinking as an entity. So, this is the way civilization thinks. We exchange ideas and we change and we grow. And so the printing press facilitated the faster change of thought. We could think faster as a culture because we had books and we'd distribute them. Well, the internet allows us to think extraordinarily faster. Now an idea can go around the world in an afternoon. And we're dealing with the repercussions of that right now. We have a complex sociopolitical situation with a pandemic and a corrupt leader, and a planet that's on the edge of ecological collapse. And we're

thinking about it and we're thinking about it in a way that's driving us crazy, because what we haven't figured out yet is how to sort truth from lies.

Bob Alberti:

It used to be that you could have a slow-paced, reasoned debate about things and maybe change some people's minds. But now we're doing it so fast that we're literally driving ourselves crazy. And so what we really need is a way to sort truth from lies in a very fast and effective manner. And I don't have that answer but that's one of the most important things we could work on right now is how to sort truth from lies. Because instead of sorting truth from lies, we're selecting the particular story that we prefer. And that story is one that many people are sticking to whether or not it corresponds with reality.

Melinda Byerley:

And the cognitive bias thing is something I think a lot about. It's just something I'm very curious and interested in, maybe it's the way my own brain works. And the longer I live, the more I see that the challenges and the companies I advise have nothing to do with technology or even process. They have to do with cognitive bias, and overcoming it and building trust. And I've been thinking for a while that the technology is going faster than the mind.

Bob Alberti:

Yes, exactly.

Melinda Byerley:

We evolve. It takes us millennia. It takes us a very long time as a species for this buggy wetware to sort of go to Version 2.01.

Bob Alberti:

Right. Right.

Melinda Byerley:

And so, we've almost grown these tools that have outpaced us.

Bob Alberti:

We certainly have.

Melinda Byerley:

Is this about throttling the tool?

Bob Alberti:

No. It can't be about throttling the tool. You can't throttle the tool. That's a waste of time. What you have to do is think of a way to make the tool work better on its own. What I call it is—in the information security field—I call it putting up guardrails instead of roadblocks. You put up a road block—

Melinda Byerley:

It's like bumpers and bowling. Keep them on the path, or training wheels on the bike so you don't fall over.

Bob Alberti:

If you put up a roadblock, people will go around to the roadblock.

Melinda Byerley:

Of course they will. Internet wants to be open.

Bob Alberti:

If you put up guardrails, people can go faster, safely. And that's the better solution, the more natural solution. So, what we need is some way of communicating truth. Now, that sounds philosophical, but when I talked about asymmetric encryption before, what asymmetric encryption allows you to do is communicate trust.2

Bob Alberti:

Asymmetric encryption allows you to say, "I really am who I am and I can prove it, and here you go." So when you get a message from someone over asymmetric encryption, you can be confident that the person who sent you that message is who they say they are, and that the message was not changed in transit. And that was invented in the 70s.

Bob Alberti:

Prior to the 1970s, you only had symmetric encryption. And symmetric encryption, in other words, a password or a code, doesn't scale. You have to give every individual their own key to every other individual in order for symmetric encryption to—

Melinda Byerley:

Asymmetric is like PGP, equivalent of.

Bob Alberti:

Asymmetric is PGP, it scales. It allows everyone to trust one person based on one set of keys. And that concept is important. You're able to communicate trust. If I don't trust you but we both trust some third party, say, Fred, I can say to Fred, "Hey, is Melinda on the level?" And Fred will say, "Yeah, Melinda is on the level. She's actually Melinda, because I trust her too." And that communicates Fred's trusting you to me. That's what asymmetric encryption allows.

Bob Alberti:

We need to find asymmetric encryption for verity, we need to find asymmetric encryption for truth. We need to find a way to verify true facts and only communicate true facts and have false information immediately flagged as false. And we need to be able to sort that on the fly because what's driving us crazy as a country today is the fact that we don't know truth from fiction. We don't know if masks really

work or do they. At a fundamental level, scientifically, we can prove masks work, but we can't get people to trust that information.

Melinda Byerley:

Yeah. And there's this whole idea that data does not convince people. There is this element, I've been thinking a lot because I work in marketing analytics, which is, how do you convince executives to spend on marketing? If their bias is that marketing doesn't work, no amount of data will ever convince them that it does. And so then there becomes this element back to trust again. Do they trust you? And oh my god, is that subject to bias. It's subject to racial bias, gender bias, class bias, status bias, all that stuff. It becomes biased.

Melinda Byerley:

And I think a lot about this, and I would love to know where your head is at, because that's a fundamental question. Obviously you're the genius here, that's why I'm interviewing you. But it's like, what happens next? What are you thinking? Like you said, you see ahead. Are you still an information security person in 20 years? I mean, assuming you live forever like we all will.

Bob Alberti:

I have been in computers now for 50 years, I guess getting there, maybe 45. I'll be fine if I never touch a keyboard again. I currently have a number of other interests. I do comedy. You can watch some of my comedy shows on YouTube if you want to.

Melinda Byerley:

And you should because he's hilarious.

Bob Alberti:

Vilification Tennis is the name of the .com. And I helped start Fearless Comedy Production here in the Twin Cities. We do comedy shows, I've written comedy plays. I also do photography. My photography is at Albatross.org. The website is sad and shabby, as all websites are.

Melinda Byerley:

That's a sign of a good coder. It's like, "I'm so good, I don't have to bother with my website."

Bob Alberti:

I would rather at this point move my life into doing the arts. Just because after you spend 45 years, it's something I want to change. But probably because I need to pay the bills, I'll be in computers for the next 20 years anyway, because the comedy and the photography does not pay the bills. It's just fun.

Melinda Byerley:

This BFA in theater says truth, speak on it.

Bob Alberti:

What do I see happening in the future? Let's pretend that the world doesn't collapse. Let's pretend that we figure out a way—

Melinda Byerley:

God willing.

Bob Alberti:

Let's pretend we figure out a way to address fascism—

Melinda Byerley:

Climate change.

Bob Alberti:

End-stage capitalism and climate change, and we figure that all out. 100 years from now, we might be starting to get our feet under us in regards to the impact of the internet. We really don't know what we're doing with computers right now. We're getting there, but there are still CEOs who have a data center in their company and think of it as a cost center rather than a profit center. And that was worse a few years ago. But if you're a business person and you can't tell your cost centers from your profit centers, you aren't a good business person.

Bob Alberti:

But we're all trying to figure out what we're doing with computers, and that is going to be a long cultural change. And 100 years from now, we may be getting some standards behind that. And we may understand what we're doing a little better than we do now. But this kind of cultural shift takes a long time for the rest of the world to adapt. Business is very, very, very conservative; it changes very slowly. I look at banking. In banking, they've known for a long time that your biggest threat from a security standpoint are your insiders.

Melinda Byerley:

Always.

Bob Alberti:

Those are the ones who are going to arrange to rob the bank.

Melinda Byerley:

Same thing is true in the vault, it's true in the casinos, it's true anywhere there's cash.

Bob Alberti:

And that's the same thing now. Even though it's facilitated by the internet, it's still the insiders who are the biggest problem.

Melinda Byerley:

Yeah, whether it's both accidental or malicious.

Bob Alberti:

Yeah. If I wanted to hack a company, I would not sit on my computer and guess passwords. I would start a consulting company and I would get a consultant to go in there as a consulting employee for a year and get all the information out on a thumb drive. That's how I'd steal stuff from a company. Some of these fundamentals remain unchanged as the culture changes around it. That's what I mean by the slowness. 100 years from now, we may finally have the business processes in place to efficiently and sort of adroitly handle some of these information security challenges. But right now, we are trying to figure everything out. We don't know what we're doing with computers quite yet.

Melinda Byerley:

It's so fascinating. I was just as impatient as any young person when I was younger. Why can't we get it done, faster? Why can't it go sooner? And then as you get older, you start to see how humans don't change very fast. And you start to realize that you have to be patient. You have to back up, go slow, explain more, build trust, build relationships. If you want to do change, you have to be patient. There's no fast change, unless it's externally imposed. It's remarkable. Yeah, and also coaching young folks, to remind them, you've got to be patient.

Bob Alberti:

Here's a good example. Here's a good example. We've been able to facilitate work from home for years. But we couldn't get business to adopt it because our managers, they want to see the backs of our heads. They want to see our butts in the seats or they don't believe we're working. Well, then an external force comes in, this pandemic. And suddenly, we're all working from home. And suddenly, it's acceptable because it has to be, right. It was forced upon us. If this pandemic hadn't happened, we'd have continued to sit in cubicles for the next 20 years.

Melinda Byerley:

As someone who runs a virtual company, I felt like we were on the Wild West of doing that. We were virtual from inception. We were lucky to have clients who started to see that as well. Even though they were all in the offices, they started to see the value of having a remote and distributed consultancy. But yeah, we were an outlier, and now we're not, which is really interesting. And the difference between the firms who worked remotely before and who didn't? Right now, you can see it. You can see it in their process, you can see it in their people.

Bob Alberti:

But that's what I mean by businesses being conservative and slow to change, right? Because you could propose a virtual company to most business people, and they'd stroke their chin and they say, "We need an address and a receptionist and a lunch room, we have to have these things or we're not a business." And you don't. You have to have a product and a service and customers, and then you're a business. You don't need premises. But business wasn't eager to buy that until the pandemic forced it upon them.

Melinda Byerley:

So, a couple of last questions, fun ones. You see a lot of students, because you're working at the university, I'm assuming. You've got a raft of them in your office, so you probably get this question all the time. But if someone is considering going into computer science now, whether they're going to go to college or not, whether they're going to start hacking or not, what advice do you have for them?

Bob Alberti:

Well, it's got to light you up. Whatever you do has to excite you and motivate you in itself. If you do it because you have a goal of making a certain amount of money, that probably won't fulfill you. And what I mean by that is, in the long term, you'll get really, really tired of it and you'll want to do almost anything else.

Bob Alberti:

Computers light me up. All this stuff excites me and it's powered me through 45 or 50 years of this so far. But even now, I'm finally getting tired of it. You need something that you won't get tired of for 45 or 50 years. And so, be more honest with yourself. Don't let people pressure you into what you want to do. If you want to do computers, you'll know it because in your free time, you'll be getting a Raspberry Pi and you'll be coding that and hacking things together and making stuff happen.

Bob Alberti:

And if that's not what you want to do, find something else. And if you have a hard time finding something else, keep looking and keep talking to people because whatever you do has to light you up. If it's trimming nails on dogs and that's what makes you happy, then by God, go do that. It doesn't matter what it pays because that's going to be the thing that keeps you going. You'll make money, you'll figure out how to get by. You'll learn to live however best you can live. But you won't do it if you're not happy. And you got to try to find a way to be happy in your work.

Melinda Byerley:

I feel the same way. One of the things I love most about this world we live in is finding people like you, and the people that we talk to that just love what we're doing, love technology, love talking about where it's going. Even though we didn't get rich, we're not on the cover of Forbes, but we're still here, we're staying alive. That's why I called this podcast that, because there's a lot more of us than there are of them. And the chances that any one person going into technology, it's like going into the NBA. It's like that's it, the chances that you're going to be at that apex are very small. So come in if this is what you love to do. But if it's just for the money, that's no different than going to be a doctor or a lawyer. It's got to be what you love. One way or another.

Melinda Byerley:

Maybe you're in finance and you're in tech or you're in marketing. I tell MBAs that come to me to this, I say, "What kind of phone do you have, and why?" — is a question I will ask a marketer who wants to come out of business school and come into tech. And when they can't tell me why—there's no right answer, whether you have Android or Apple, I don't care—but if you can't tell me why you chose that, you probably shouldn't be in tech, because it's not interesting enough to you. You're choosing an

ecosystem here. There's a reason to choose Android or Apple. And if you're not thinking deeply enough about it as a marketer to think about it, you're not going to be happy in tech, because that's what our cocktail parties are all about, which could be boring as hell if that's what you're not into. (Laughs) Choose something fun.

Melinda Byerley:

I'm so excited to ask you these two questions. What's the best advice you were ever given, first? The best advice anyone ever gave you?

Bob Alberti:

So, I was working at a job and there was a contractor there named Mike Bruznak. And he saw me looking at a pamphlet for wedding rings. And he saw me looking at the pamphlet for wedding rings because I was thinking of asking my now spouse to marry me. And he comes up and he says, "I'm going to tell you one thing, I'm going to tell you right now, go into marriage counseling now. Start now and you'll be able to keep things together. Don't wait till stuff gets bad." And that was the best advice I was ever given. We went through many, many, many years of communications. Basically it's communications training, that's what marriage therapy is. It's how to communicate with each other. And it's served me well in all aspects of my life.

Bob Alberti:

Right now, I'm in a program called DBT, which is Dialectical Behavior Training. And it's a way to think about things and work on things and be effective. And so, keep improving yourself, keep improving how you communicate, because how you communicate and how you interact with people is the key to everything in life. Nothing gets accomplished alone, and you have to work with people—even people you don't like. So learn to communicate effectively and you'll be a much more effective person in your life.

Melinda Byerley:

One of our guests—who shall remain nameless to protect them—I asked them how they were able to stay married for so long. They married their spouse in college, or just outside of college, and recently celebrated (I think) their 30th wedding anniversary. And I said, "What's the secret?" And they'd had a couple of drinks, so they leaned in, whispered in my ear, "Lots of therapy." (Laughs) Which is exactly the same advice. And I think that's really, really thoughtful.

Melinda Byerley:

My last question for you is, and I thought of this question just for you, I have not asked anyone else this question. But looking at sort of the things I know about you so far, what's best advice you were given that you didn't take?

Bob Alberti:

You should buy stock in this Yahoo thing. You should be investing in your 20s.

Melinda Byerley:

You're like Back to the Future. (Laughs)

Bob Alberti:

You get this advice when you're in your 20s, "Oh, you should be socking away money for your retirement." A, your retirement seems like this distant dream that you may never reach in the first place. And B, you have no money. You're in your 20s, there's no spare money. You're eating ramen soup and you're living in a place with a leaky toilet and someone's telling you, "Sock away 100 bucks a month, it's easy." It's like, no, it's not.

Melinda Byerley:

Compound interest is magic.

Bob Alberti:

Compound interest is magic, but, "spare money is fiction" is the problem. And goodness knows I didn't have any of that. I had twins and then a third. And yeah, it was everything just to keep—I mean, I worried about money until my kids got out of college. And after that, I was like, I don't care anymore. I can live on ramen soup again. I just wanted to take care of my kids and now that they're on their own, it's like, I don't need to make tons of money. I just want to be not unhappy in my work.

Melinda Byerley:

Awesome. It's such a joy to have you and I thank you for coming and keep us posted on what's going on, and when you're ready to talk about some more history of tech, I hope you'll come back and join us.

Bob Alberti:

I'll talk to you anytime. It was a pleasure.

Speaker 1:

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