

Intro ([00:01](#)):

Welcome to the Workplace Forward Podcast, with your host, executive coach Tegan Trovato, founder and CEO of Bright Arrow Coaching. Are you a perpetually busy, always overstretched leader or executive who feels there's never time to keep up with leadership trends in an always changing landscape, much less self-care? Workplace Forward will help you overcome both challenges and gain peace of mind. Through Tegan's conversations with executives, experts, authors, and innovators about their leadership journeys, you'll get quick hits of two things you need the most: essential insights to help navigate the future workplace and best practices on the more human side of leadership so you're empowered to take care of yourself while leading others. Enjoy some well-deserved time for yourself to learn and recharge. Let's get started with today's guest. Tegan, take it away.

Tegan Trovato ([00:56](#)):

More than 25 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Justin Seamonds took the helm of Roti as Prime Minister of Fun/Chief Executive Officer in early 2020. Growing up in Connecticut, Seamonds attended Duke University where he majored in creative writing and economics and received his MACC at UNC Chapel Hill, holding active CPA and CMA licenses. Seamonds led upscale grocery market Dean & DeLuca as Chief Financial Officer, Senior VP of Operations, and President, where he expanded the company's footprint overseas and led to a successful sale of the business in 2014, returning to run it again for the new owners. His experience leading middle-market consumer businesses, driving top and bottom line growth, along with building brand value is what sets Seamonds apart. And it will help him usher in the next chapter for Roti as a brand of magnetic distinction.

Tegan Trovato ([01:50](#)):

His belief is that it's not enough just to serve great food. It should be food that matters because it tastes great and it's healthy, and it must be combined with a hospitality experience that will make you want to come back again and again. He's helped Roti build a brand philosophy for the new age of Roti, Crave Better: better food, better health, better vibes, better life. Although Seamonds loves to travel from market to market and spend time with the Roti team, his home is in Sugar Land, Texas where he resides with his wife, three sons, and beautiful yellow Lab. He loves a round of golf, live music of all types, exploring the world, exercising so he can indulge in his big green egg passion, and lots and lots of laughter and friendship. Justin, welcome to the podcast.

Justin Seamonds ([02:38](#)):

Glad to be here, Tegan.

Tegan Trovato ([02:39](#)):

Yeah, thanks. Listen, before we dive into all of your leadership experience or leadership journey, which I can't wait to get to, level set for listeners, what is Roti? What's the mission of Roti? Because it's an unusual, in my opinion, an unusual mission for what it is, the industry that you're in. And I think listeners should know about that so they have context for what your leadership's rooted in and the mission you're on.

Justin Seamonds ([03:05](#)):

Sure. I appreciate that question. Roti is a fast casual brand. We're Mediterranean-inspired food, bowls, salads, and pitas. We are for those who crave better. So we are at the intersection of quality, healthfulness, flavor at a price that people can afford to eat multiple times a week. Our mission is to

bring real food to the hearts and stomachs and souls of anybody that wants to feel better after they indulge and eat healthful deliciousness. So that is who we are, that's what we're trying to do.

Tegan Trovato ([03:42](#)):

Wonderful. I know that's going to resonate for a lot of leaders who are always trying to take care of themselves so they've got the energy to go do the jobs they need to do. I'm biased as heck because I ate a heck of a lot of Roti living in Chicago, one of my favorite spots. We're going to tease all of this apart as we go, but just to set the stage for listeners, you joined Roti right at the beginning of the pandemic. We'll go into that more, but certainly fascinates me that you would join a restaurant chain at a time when we were shutting them all down back then. You have certainly not been a stranger to leading in uncertain times, not just because of the pandemic, but even just, as we talked about in your bio at the opening, just leading through transitions and transactions. And those are uncertain times. So you're no stranger to this, but man, I bet your muscle grew in uncertainty at the last couple of years. So what do you think has been really important or proven to be really important about leadership at uncertain times, especially through that lens of the last couple of years?

Justin Seamonds ([04:41](#)):

Yeah, that is a great question. And for those who figure it out, there's a lot of value there for investors and for team members and for customers alike. To be clear, Tegan, when I joined Roti in February of 2020, there was no pandemic at that time. But five years after I started working in a new business, the pandemic hit and we were forced to get very, very, very focused and very aggressive about tactics and strategies and survival, extreme health, cash conservation, things that weren't in the consideration set when I started. So uncertain times, yes, and I would argue that all times uncertain, just sometimes more than others. Every decision as a leader, even decisions as a team member or as a customer, you don't always have total certainty when you're living in the normal world. But throw a pandemic on top of it, disruption of markets, supply chain, socialization, banking and financing, employment, health, that's a lot of uncertainties to lay out in any situation, even one as common as eating.

Justin Seamonds ([05:48](#)):

So for us and from a leadership standpoint, A, leadership is not a solitary exercise. Leadership is a communal activity. So whereas, I think that we had some really interesting successes and some distinct challenges navigating the uncertainties and severity of what we've all been through, and to some extent what we continue to live through, no one worth their salt should think that they could navigate that on their own. I think in those times when there is great uncertainty, I think the need for leadership, the need for clarification, the need for the glue that binds people to purpose of some kind becomes even more serious. I think leaders in that situation need to brighten the light when we're talking about things. They need to dial up their powers of persuasion. They need to act with a different sense of urgency and I think also a different sense of transparency. And among many, many, many other things and nuances and ideas, I think those are tools that really served us well as a business. You mentioned muscle, I would argue that this whole pandemic situation has been a combination of muscle and calluses.

Tegan Trovato ([07:05](#)):

Yeah, well said.

Justin Seamonds ([07:06](#)):

Yeah. Some of the things that get thrown at you just have to withstand. And there are no muscles strong enough or muscle groups big enough to fend that sort of thing off. That's where I think you had to be, and still have to be to some extent, resilient, answer the bell, come out of the corner for every round, and also think of ways to create clarity, transparency, trust, change, and see what it takes to just find a way through to the other side. Even if you don't know at the time what you're going to look like when you get there or what exactly the path is, face the direction you need to face, get everybody pointed the same place, and get everybody else to share that leadership burden to get there

Tegan Trovato ([07:49](#)):

Right. Let's dig apart some of this because it sounds wonderful, and I'm like, "I'm buying in." It makes a lot of sense to me. You make it sound intuitive. The truth is there was a lot of thoughtfulness. In preparing for our conversation today, you shared with me the level of thoughtfulness around your frontline employees. If you're willing to get specific for the listeners, I think that'd be helpful because that is where I watched a lot of execs struggle in our practice. You have the, yes, shareholder confidence, give shareholder confidence, please, but then how did you create that clarity all the way down, if you will, down to frontline employees who are out there wearing masks and serving people food during the pandemic?

Justin Seamonds ([08:33](#)):

Yeah. That's a great question. I got to say, I'm not just proud of our Roti team members who stood shoulder to shoulder with each other through the drastic uncertainty of the heart of a pandemic. It's easy to forget that we've had vaccine treatments for less than a year at this point. And it feels like, all of a sudden, masks are coming off everywhere with both team members and employees alike and people are back on mass transit. It was not that long ago that we had no idea how we were going to cope with this and think about how those things evolved. But I'm really proud of the entire hospitality industry, the people who stayed at the front desks of hotels and stayed behind the counters of food service establishments and stayed in the game with any kind of consumer-facing, grocery store workers, not knowing what to expect or how this was all going to play out or how long it was going to last.

Justin Seamonds ([09:31](#)):

I think the emphasis on safety and the variation in response, different states, different countries, like the variation in how we dealt with this was also extreme. Just like the pressure it exerted on all of our businesses and our personal lives and our families and our friends was also really extreme. You didn't know whose version of approach to trust. And so, you end up having to take a business, in our case that's in New York City, very severe in initial reaction, very early reaction, Washington D.C., very dependent on tourism, international tourism students on campus, government workers who still aren't back in the offices yet, Chicago which had a pretty conservative approach, and then in Texas, which was much more liberal about how they navigated the course of the pandemic, of course, Minneapolis.

Justin Seamonds ([10:19](#)):

So we took the role of trying to be the arbiter of the moves that we needed to make to do two really important things: ensure the absolute safety of our products and our customers, and not create daylight there for a gap that could hurt somebody and therefore hurt us, and also to preserve as much as we could the safety of our employees and make sure that our practices were good, hand washing, and mask wearing and temperature checking and everything. I think that our diligence with that really paid off and

really gave our employees the confidence to continue to stand shoulder to shoulder in a food service environment, customer facing, and deliver what, in our case, was a really important product.

Justin Seamonds ([11:05](#)):

One thing that the pandemic really showed, which I'm also proud of and we're fortunate in many ways, dietary practices affected people's vulnerability to COVID. And people who eat healthier and address underlying conditions through diet tended to have less of a difficult time with this. And so, we are kind of front and center of that battle, and I hope there are no future battles of this type, but if there are, eating food like we serve at Roti is definitely a better thing for you. So let's focus on what we can also do to prevent susceptibility to that, both as a business and our internal team and providing people with the coping strategy to be healthier. I think those are brutally important.

Tegan Trovato ([11:51](#)):

Well, I love that you gave clarity to the employees. And then also what I'm hearing is you kept everyone mindful of your purpose in the midst of this, which, I mean, why else would people want to come to work, right? I mean, yes, to make money, but to come with their hearts and still serve the food, that's something to attach to, right?

Justin Seamonds ([12:12](#)):

It is. We often refer to an expression internally about food being the original social media. Food has always been the time when people have gathered together, either to cook and to eat, to socialize, to drink, to enjoy each other's company. And in a situation where fundamentally as a species, human beings are social, right?

Tegan Trovato ([12:34](#)):

Right.

Justin Seamonds ([12:34](#)):

We always have been, we always will be. We are best when we are communal in nature. And that doesn't mean in this environment, I think that's even more important now than ever. I think that we took it upon ourselves to make sure that we were clear amongst each other that we served a really valuable purpose, not just in the food that we serve, but the value of having a normal customer interaction with somebody was way higher. Even personally speaking, I moved to Chicago to start working for Roti and working for our team members and had this, relatively for me, a newer city to explore and figure out that immediately shut down. And when it started to open over the following months and the opportunity started to appear to understand more about the communities and the trade areas and where our team members live, where our customers lived, where our restaurants were located, just going in and having a normal interaction in a grocery store or restaurant or a bar, I appreciated it so much more because it was taken away from you. You didn't even have the choice, you just couldn't go.

Justin Seamonds ([13:39](#)):

And so, we had the chance to be in a position to make people feel a sense of normal and also a sense of doing something better for themselves by participating in what we offer, which it's food that tastes as good as it feels and feels as good as it tastes, and it does good for people. We try to do good for people through our actions and our hospitality and sharing a little bit of positive energy in negative times. I

think that energy reflects back from the customer too. I think our teams would, by and large, tell you that they're better service people and they're better people from having had the chance to do what we've done over the past couple of years. And we're going to keep doing it and keep getting better at it and never stop.

Tegan Trovato ([14:20](#)):

It's amazing. So following that chain a little bit, Justin, you mentioned earlier when you opened, leadership's a communal activity. Five weeks into your leadership, the pandemic hits. I remember you saying something along the lines, when you and I were talking previously, that, "Yeah, the pandemic hit. I was a new leader, new role," and that you really learn what your board is made of and what your investors are made of. It was such a compliment that you were paying them. So in the spirit of leadership is communal, how did you all tackle that together? Because, my gosh, there's no playbook for this one in the food industry, so what are you willing to share in terms of your leadership experience and your collective leadership experience with them through this?

Justin Seamonds ([15:03](#)):

Yeah, sure. There's a few layers to unpack there. First and foremost, I tell everybody, "I am lucky to have been at Roti during this time in particular. And Roti is lucky to have a lot of the investors and leaders involved in the business." Remember, leaders are everywhere. They're in the restaurants, they're hourly team members, they're board members, they're investors, they're executives, they're managers, particularly our general managers who were absolutely driving the frontlines of our fight for survival. I think that as a group, we managed to keep each other leaning forward through this whole thing. I think that I was inspired by certain calls to action by our investors and our board and our chairman in particular about, "Okay, we're in a situation, there are many, many things we cannot control, but for everything we can control, let's determine our own fate. Let's decide who we want to become and who we want to be and-

Tegan Trovato ([16:04](#)):

Yes, call to action.

Justin Seamonds ([16:05](#)):

Yes. "What we need to change about ourselves." We embarked on something internal to the business called a Roti Revolution, which was, fundamentally, it was changing things about ourselves that we had already knew that we wanted to be different. The pandemic allowed us to do some things that were unique. In any company's normal history, when you're trying to make changes in a 40-something location business while it's running full till, it's like changing the engine out on a bus while it's going 50 miles an hour. Well, the pandemic slowed us down to five miles an hour, and you can do different things. You can make things happen faster. You can create more focus around things. There's fewer moving parts. There's less static and noise coming from the business that you can move through and move past in a different fashion.

Justin Seamonds ([16:55](#)):

And so, we took massive advantage of that, and we remained different probably now than we would have been if it wasn't for COVID. And that's, again, why there are reasons to focus on the gratitude that comes through a situation like this, the benefits, the positives, because life is too short to focus on friction when you can turn it into momentum. I probably wouldn't have felt as sharply about that if it

weren't for the quality of people that I found myself with, from the team members all the way up through the long-term investors in our business and people who could help us influence that thing. When I was down, I got picked up by other people, and when other people were down or confused, then they got picked up by other people. And as a leader, I think we try to make everybody the very best version of themselves.

Justin Seamonds ([17:45](#)):

I think a lot of my concerns and frustrations over the course of that were with not being able to create enough energy, momentum, and positivity around our folks and enough focus around the things that we could control and enough comfort and confidence in the things that we couldn't understand or couldn't control so that it didn't interfere with continuing to lean forward, continuing to lean in, continuing to try to evolve and be different. I will say, I've never been more proud to be associated with a group of people in my entire life. I mean-

Tegan Trovato ([18:17](#)):

That's huge.

Justin Seamonds ([18:18](#)):

... it changed everything about how I think about business and how I view what we can be capable of when we do things together and when we're all pointed in the same direction, we have this same sense of urgency, we have the same transparency about the reality of our situation. We're running out of cash, we're running out of restaurants, we're running out of restrictions. We don't know how we're going to heal. Those are monstrous things. And what a phenomenal, phenomenal navigation play. Always can do it better, but I got to tell you, a lot of it shows you the character of who you're together with and who you can count upon and in what different situations you can count upon them and also how to inspire and motivate people to create solutions to keep leaning forward. And I needed as much help as everybody else did. I really did.

Tegan Trovato ([19:09](#)):

Sure, of course. You are human still, yes.

Justin Seamonds ([19:12](#)):

And we all are.

Tegan Trovato ([19:15](#)):

One of the biggest things that stood out there for me is how you all collectively as leadership, and I appreciate you being clear, leadership for you is in your restaurants, it's at the frontline, it's in the boardroom, so yes, and so collectively as leaders, I love that you all not made sure he kept the lights on and stayed solvent and healthy, but that you said, "Hey, let's use as an opportunity to go ahead and shore up what we know we want to shore up." I can't say I've heard a ton of that. That's extremely conscious and intentional of you all, and that is exceptional. That's just very unusual, I think.

Justin Seamonds ([19:50](#)):

Yeah. I hope people were inspired. We invoked that... I don't know if it was Winston Churchill or Ram Manuel or who it was, but you know, never wastes a crisis. We invoked that to create a, "You've got to

lean into things." And I would say, the harder the wind is pushing against you, the steeper you can lean forward without falling over, right? And you want to talk about a gale force headwind, this was it. And it was multi-layered and it was blowing from different directions. I mean, it was really something. But it was something that you can either lose the opportunity to take advantage of, or you can really try to grab and shake loose. I was pleased that we were so inspired and we took it upon ourselves to create the motivation and create the momentum to go and work on a lot of really good things.

Justin Seamonds ([20:41](#)):

Anecdotal story about that, we made some very substantial changes to our menu during COVID. We wanted to do some different things as a business from a food standpoint. I remember, we tested new food items with hundreds of consumers in the back half of 2020, like late summer of 2020. We were recruiting customers digitally with the help of other people and packing out these boxes and creating these digital surveys. People were driving up in the middle of the loop in Chicago, and we were handing the bags through.

Tegan Trovato ([21:12](#)):

Awesome.

Justin Seamonds ([21:12](#)):

... the window of their car so that we could get feedback from people because we needed to change. And people still eat, they still go to the bathroom, they still go to sleep, they still wake up, they still enjoy each other's company when they can have it. And so, let's focus on those things that we can really take advantage of and maximize and think differently about and evolve. There's still a long way to go for Roti and a lot of things to figure out, but we are significantly stronger because we became different during that experience.

Tegan Trovato ([21:45](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). And acted with clarity, right? This whole first part of our conversation has just been so obviously all about clarity and creating safety for people with that clarity. So given the amount of effort you specifically as a CEO put into that, what have you seen result from the clarity that you have been striving to create?

Justin Seamonds ([22:05](#)):

Clarity in its own I think is a really powerful thing and something that needs to be treated with great respect. Our business historically, I think, had been a little bit less willing to provide insights and context about business decisions. I think that people who are the most interesting to work with and the most interesting to try to engage to join any team are the ones who can take that context and turn it into something that's meaningful to them, or be receptive to having you present something to them in a way that they can understand and assimilate and internalize and can add some coal on their own fire to help move forward. And that's having one next great customer interaction, building a bowl better, whatever it is. That's from the small to the really substantial.

Justin Seamonds ([23:00](#)):

I've always throughout my career been very willing to share the realities of an underlying situation in context so that people can attach to not just what we're doing but something deeper about why. I've worked with people that I've worked for directly as I was coming up through my career who've been

very uncomfortable about the truths of a business. That doesn't mean that every truth gets evenly shared because some should be born as a burden by people who are in a position to-

Tegan Trovato ([23:30](#)):

Well said, Justin. Well said, yes.

Justin Seamonds ([23:32](#)):

You have to carry some of things. You have to carry a certain amount of weight. But the rest of it, I mean, if you can democratize transparency and truth about things that matter and create some understanding about why, then I think you develop a much deeper attachment from the people who have to actually go and make the difference for your business. And for us, it was we have to do different food. Guess what? We don't cook food in our corporate office and send it out to the restaurants. They cook it in every restaurant. So if they don't understand more about it, then that's going to be difficult. We had to get better at our hospitality, and I think our hospitality, what we call our vibe, is absolutely a no- so-secret weapon for our business. We don't execute the hospitality in our corporate office, our team members do in the restaurant.

Justin Seamonds ([24:17](#)):

And so, when you talk about those things and who has to do it, providing context and helping to shape that into something that people can grab hold of, I think it builds bonds of trust, which in uncertain times, very important. I think it builds depth of character and relationship, and I absolutely positively think that it is the fastest way to move from a place of being less competent to greater competence and less information and more information. I think it's great the depth of transparency around communications, the ease with which you can find out about the realities of companies and the realities of executives or individuals, the pervasiveness of social media. I think great truths and great contexts about a business are meant to be shared well beyond just your team and your four walls of your restaurants. We want people to know where our stuff comes from and how we cook it and why hospitality is important to us and why we had to increase prices during the pandemic and why we don't like having higher prices and want lower prices. But the reality of our business helps people understand you better. And I find that that is a very powerful thing when you dedicate yourselves to it. We still have muscles to build in that area, but I think... a long, long way over the last couple of years.

Tegan Trovato ([25:42](#)):

Amazing. Great. You said earlier on, too, the demands of the last couple of years and even your experience in working with your collective leadership across the boards, you just feel like you lead or you're thinking about leadership totally differently. I'm paraphrasing, so forgive me. So how would you say the demands of the last couple of years affected your leadership style, your approach? Who have you become now?

Justin Seamonds ([26:08](#)):

Oh, Tegan, that's a great question. Hopefully, a better version of myself. That's my goal for everybody that I get to work with and have the privilege of trying to support and help find better ways to be better versions of themselves. I think authentic leadership, trust-based leadership, contextualizing information, creating that separation between uncontrollables and controllables and focusing on things that can be realistically engaged upon and trying to compartmentalize and put the uncontrollable things in a place where they minimize the impact or the drag on people. Because you can spend a lot of time and energy

getting completely consumed about things that you can't affect, and it affects how well you can perform on what you can. We can't abide by that. That's not an acceptable place to live. So I would say that this has, if anything, made me appreciate speed. I have to admit, you ask anybody that works at Roti that interacts with me with any regularity and they will tell you that I have an undying need for speed, for how fast can we get something done, how quickly can we move.

Justin Seamonds ([27:19](#)):

Because, I would say, every day in reality, and even more extremely during COVID, our survival depended on being able to change and change quickly and learn quickly. And then refine and redeploy. And I think that's the same with the information that led to vaccines. I think it's the same with the information that led to how can we begin to socialize again and get kids back in school and get back to the office. I think that sense of urgency is a very impactful and powerful thing that I have a very, very new appreciation for. I was always more of a transparency-based CEO, but I think I learned how to become faster and more efficient with distilling things down to those pieces that were the most important to create the motivation without overexplaining.

Justin Seamonds ([28:12](#)):

So I became faster at how to get to the essence of something. And I also became much more preemptive about, okay, there's this whole set of circumstances out here that have nothing to do with us controlling our own destiny. So great, acknowledge them, recognize that they're there, understand that we may bump headlong into them as we go forward, but these are the things that matter to us, this is what we have to do as people. I think those are three really good territories to have explored, and I think that there are echoes, there're continuing ripples in the pond around those that I think are going to continue to help us as a business be faster than our competitors and be more aggressive and urgent about changing ourselves and seeking out things that work for our customers and things that make our food better and things that improve our hospitality, those things that we want to share with the world. And I think Roti is a phenomenal and unique platform through which to do that.

Tegan Trovato ([29:12](#)):

Yeah. What's peeking out from under some of these things that you just shared, like understanding separating controllables from uncontrollables, the need for speed, right, which it's your new tagline behind the scenes, okay, is intuition. I know you're a data guy because we've talked a lot about data already today. There's surveys. You're looking at customer feedback, employee feedback. I think you said to me at some point in our first conversation, "Sometimes we have to make decisions we may not understand for weeks or months." I interpret that as you're going to use all the data and facts you can, but to move quickly, we have to use intuition, right? So tell us a little about how you've incorporated your intuition? Because it's hard to put words to this, I'm just going to give you that disclaimer for those listening, it's hard sometimes to put language to intuition, but tell us how you incorporate yours or when you know it's speaking, any examples?

Justin Seamonds ([30:06](#)):

Yeah, Tegan, that's a dense question. So yes, I would say that all things equal, I would prefer to have a lot of data and supporting information. No decision is perfectly made without some leap of faith, right?

Tegan Trovato ([30:24](#)):

Right.

Justin Seamonds ([30:24](#)):

But it's the distance of the leap of faith that I think is involved, particularly with things around less quantifiable characteristics of a business like, is hospitality good enough? Is food flavorful enough? Are restaurants in the right place or less the right place physically, geographically? Is the journey and a digital experience for our customer, for example, is it efficient enough? Is it rich enough? Does it look appetizing enough? So you do at some point have to make a decision about, okay, this is where we're going, this is what we're going to do. Amongst the whole pallet of options that I have in front of me, I know that this is where we want to be.

Justin Seamonds ([31:08](#)):

I think there were a couple of good examples of how we navigated some of that along the way. We got very aggressive about seeking opinions in an environment that was not very conducive to opinion seeking. Perfect example is, I mean, hundreds of food tests with consumers when people weren't even allowed in restaurants at the time. We said, "Well, we still need this, so let's just go create a way to do it." I think that allowed us to minimize that intuition gap that we had to still jump over to a jumpable distance. And what it allowed us to do was to, again, controllable, uncontrollable, like this is what we know and try to build as much to that as we could, as quickly as we could.

Justin Seamonds ([31:52](#)):

I think where we probably pivoted where we don't have to pivot quite as much or at least a lesser amount today that it was then was, in a normal case, let's say an ideal decision is 80% information and 20% intuition. I would say we might have been comfortable working in 6/40 at that point in time and then maybe 70/30 on some things, and then trying to really get excited about those 90/10s. But inevitably, we had to try to find a way through it. I think to the point of our conversation today about leadership, I think one of the things that I really tried to focus on and had a lot of encouragement from our board, our chairman and our investors to also focus on, and our team, was to make sure that we were gathering as much about these decisions that needed to be made from the rest of the people who could really influence us.

Justin Seamonds ([32:45](#)):

One of the most important things we did summer of 2020 during this Roti Revolution, we created general manager engagement teams. And remember, our GM population was almost the only restaurant level of team member that was still the business. So many of our hourly team members were still on furlough because we were doing so little sales volume and had so little trade at the time. Even though we were coming back, it wasn't enough. But we created these engagement teams with our field operators around how is our technology and what can we make better about that? If we mentioned food, hospitality, even cultural things like uniforms, we completely changed the look and feel of our team members in the restaurants directly through impact from our restaurant people, instead of saying, "Why don't we just change this corporately?" and then cramming these things down into our business.

Justin Seamonds ([33:38](#)):

I will say this, and this may sound slightly spiritual or even naive, but when you have a high level of collective energy around a decision that gets made that involves a lot of intuition, I believe, truly, because I've seen it again and again and again, that when the team has collective commitment to something that has a certain proportion of unknowability to it, I think your odds of success with those are better when you've got more people who have laid eyes on it, touched it with their hands, put their

brains around it, wrapped their hearts around it, and you've ended up somewhere that incorporates all of those little tiny, small gestures and even bigger ones, and you end up with a leap of faith that is directed instead of totally random. I think that you're more likely to be successful with that.

Justin Seamonds ([34:26](#)):

I think that the level of engagement that we had within our businesses in total from restaurants to corporate employees from end to end, side to side helped us because we were all committed to those things, when we all felt more rather than less consistently about those things. I think that made the leaps of faith that we did take much more interesting and much more enjoyable. I also think because every business has to fail, fail fast, fail hard, move on, and I think that also made the way that we experience failure and lack of success, because we had quite a bit on a number of things that we tried that we thought would be great, much easier to withstand and move on from because you didn't have this huge constituency of people saying, "Well, I told you so." "Well, you didn't tell us so, you were in this with us." We were all in the same boat, and we all decided where to jump and we all jumped there and these worked, these didn't. I think everybody moved on from those things very, very constructively instead of getting stuck into them at a personal level, if you will.

Tegan Trovato ([35:32](#)):

Right. Right. So what I'm hearing when it comes to intuition is you leverage it most often, it sounds like, when you have to ask the question, is this right? Is this enough? And is this a worthy leap of faith?

Justin Seamonds ([35:44](#)):

Yes. And deciding which leaps to take, figuring out which ones could create the most impact to our business was, I would say, a bit the easier part, to be honest. As a new leader in a new business, you get to come in and you get to see more objectively and without the historical context or baggage that you carry into a situation like, "Hey, we've got three or four really important things that are big to our business that we need to fix and we need to address, we need to engage with and figure out." So I think where we focused was a little bit the easier part, but the bigger the issue, the broader spectrum of things that you could do. And so, in ways where it makes it easier, you're also dealing with big, heavy, immovable things, and the number of opinions around those, it's like moons versus planets, if you will, and the gravitational force that each one exerts.

Justin Seamonds ([36:41](#)):

I really think that we were able to make some great calls because we bridged the gap to a distance that we could confidently leap. And we knew directionally, maybe we were off 15 or 20% or 10% or five, but we weren't 180. We weren't jumping over the wrong gap.

Tegan Trovato ([36:59](#)):

That's well said, yes. Or hitting the wall because you didn't see the leap that you needed to make, right?

Justin Seamonds ([37:07](#)):

Don't kid yourself, Tegan, we hit a few walls. But we [inaudible 00:37:11] from them.

Tegan Trovato ([37:11](#)):

Healthy balance of hitting some walls and making the leaps. I hear you. I want to ask you a couple of questions that are a little bit off tangent, a little off topic, if you will, from some of the things we've been talking about. But we have a bunch of leaders listening to you right now. I will tell you, and I know you've seen this probably in your own leadership teams, even for yourself, leaders have been so exhausted and taxed in just ways and levels I've never seen. This is just an unusual time. So I'm asking everyone I can the question of: what do you think leaders could be doing in their personal lives that will positively impact how they lead at work?

Justin Seamonds ([37:51](#)):

Ooh, what should leaders be doing in their personal lives positive? Off the cuff?

Tegan Trovato ([37:57](#)):

Yeah.

Justin Seamonds ([37:57](#)):

You've caught me here, this is a tough one. I admire this question. Off the cuff, I would say that it is much easier to lead from a place that you live. So, if you believe in the value of transparency professionally, then hopefully you are a really avid practitioner of transparency in your personal life. If you lead from a place that relies upon forward momentum and positive energy, then hopefully you are also practicing leaning forward and being positive in your personal life, whether that's with family, religion, your own personal habits, your own sense of joy. So I do think that there's a certain integrity and authenticity to being able to exercise the same kind of influences over a business that you would personally. I feel like it would be very hard as a leader to authentically go and do something in a business context that you won't do or wouldn't do personally. So I think that's a really important thing.

Justin Seamonds ([38:56](#)):

I'm trying to think if I have another good example of what you would want to do personally in order to be more impactful professionally. I don't know, I think that probably encapsulates it. I mean, when I talk to people about working at Roti, the only reason I have a job at Roti because of our restaurant team members. Period. End of story. And our customers, of course. I think treating them with the admiration, respect, the willingness to invest time and energy, resources, reflect positive energy that they give me back to them and hopefully probably give them some positive energy that they can reflect upon our customers and our food, I think those are really good things to do, but those are things that I try to do personally as well so I think it sort of fits in the first bucket.

Tegan Trovato ([39:44](#)):

That makes sense.

Justin Seamonds ([39:45](#)):

As somebody who has the great fortune of being in a leadership position in a consumer-facing industry that relies on lots and lots of people to be great, I think we all need to try to be the best versions of ourselves we can be, try to be good human beings, try to inspire other people to be good human beings. I don't see any downside in doing that. I don't see any drawbacks in that. I don't see any failures in those types of things. Again, I think those are very much personal and professional practices that have very little daylight in between them.

Tegan Trovato ([40:18](#)):

I love that. I mean, authenticity, congruency coming out of that practice, I love that. So how can listeners find you online and learn more about you and Roti?

Justin Seamonds ([40:28](#)):

Oh, for sure, well, you can follow us on Instagram and you can follow us on Facebook, @roti, www.roti.com. You can go on the app store, either iPhone or Android, and we just launched a new app in January of 2022...

Tegan Trovato ([40:45](#)):

Congrats.

Justin Seamonds ([40:46](#)):

... which has been absolutely fantastic, being downloaded like mad. Anybody that downloads the app gets 10 bucks in their account immediately, my gift to you. Learn how to use this. We're available on all the third party systems across the third party ecosystem. You can stop by, bring your own smile into our restaurants. We've got over two dozen restaurants in five cities and growing. You can find us however you will allow us to find you, and we'd love-

Tegan Trovato ([41:15](#)):

Love that.

Justin Seamonds ([41:15](#)):

... to see you. We'd love to see all of you.

Tegan Trovato ([41:18](#)):

All right, great, I'll be sure to include all those links in the show notes. So thank you for that. In closing, Justin, I'll ask you our signature question. A reminder to our listeners, the podcast was created to discover the behaviors, practices, beliefs, and skills the future leader needs to possess so that they can lead these systems that are changing and continue to change at warp speed. So Justin, to get your read on that, finish the sentence for me, leaders of the future will...

Justin Seamonds ([41:45](#)):

Leaders of the future will crave better. That is our primary corporate mantra, Crave Better. We love it because it has this overarching theme and you can push it into any situation. So I crave being better as a leader every day. I crave better quality of life and ability to inspire our team members. I crave better food. I crave better dietary practices for our country and our people. I crave better from an overall health standpoint, political environment. You can lay it on top of anything.

Tegan Trovato ([42:25](#)):

Yeah, I see.

Justin Seamonds ([42:26](#)):

But I really think that leaders of the future need to... If you have the opportunity to lead and everybody does, try to do it to the betterment of something much more meaningful than just profit or something material. Crave better. So I think that that suits me, that suits, I think, any situation, and I think we should all be tireless cravers of better in everything that we do.

Tegan Trovato ([42:53](#)):

I love it. And on that note, we can sign off, Justin, that was fantastic. Thank you so much for sharing your journey at Roti, Roti's journey, and the journey of all of your leadership. We have learned a lot from you today. Thank you so much.

Justin Seamonds ([43:09](#)):

Thanks, Tegan. It's been a pleasure to talk to you.

Outro ([43:12](#)):

Thanks for listening to this episode of the Workplace forward podcast, where leaders and executives can stay ahead of the curve on emerging leadership ideas and self-care best practices, guided by executive coach Tegan Trovato and her expert guests. Please take 60 seconds to help others discover the Workplace Forward Podcast by going to iTunes to subscribe, give five stars, and leave a comment. Want to learn more about Bright Arrow Coaching & Leadership Development, visit the website at www.brightarrowcoaching.com. See you next time. And while you're filling your team's cups, remember to take care of yourself too.