



Aquatrol's Bert Lowden on Buying the Family Business Back

Bert: My grandfather founded the company. Selling this thing was extremely difficult for me.

Gil: So I didn't realize that you are third generation.

Bert: He ran an engineering sales firm in Chicago and started spinning brass in a garage in downtown Chicago. And grew into a pretty decent company by the late 70s. Basically, I've got three daughters. They don't want to be involved. And a couple years ago, you start feeling, I'm 70 years old now. I sold it a month after I turned 70. I thought this was the plainest way out. Extremely difficult. for me, but the company's in great hands. It's going to continue to grow and there's some good things going to be happening soon, I believe.

Gil: Welcome to the show. I'm Gil Wellsford, third generation Valve entrepreneur and founder of valveman.com. Join me as I hear stories, learn wisdom, and get industry inside insights. This is More Than Valve's. It's business, legacy, and resilience. Let's get into it. Hi, and welcome to the show. I am here at the Valve Manufacturers Association headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, and I am very excited to have Bert Loudon from Aquatrol on the show. Thanks so much for being here today, Bert.

Bert: Yeah, well, thank you. I look forward to answering a few questions here.

Gil: So Bert, I would love to just start. I know you've had a long career, actually, I would say 2 careers. And I'd love to really start all the way back from your days in I guess we'll call it your prior career. I don't want to give away too much. But tell us a little bit about sort of where you started, where you came from. You owned Aquatrol for the, or ran Aquatrol for the last 22 years. And I know you recently had a transition in that business. But why don't we just kind of start there?

Bert: With the purchase of Aquatrol.

Gil: No, let's start all the way back from the beginning of your career and sort of maybe like, I guess, your publishing days and.

Bert: And then I was in print advertising for 24 years, 25 years. At the time, we were preeminent catalog printers for upscale, high quality catalogs in the country and sold serviced catalog print digital services and distribution for about 15 out of the 20, some 24 years, I believe. Fortunately, When this opportunity to buy Aquatro was in a family estate, the company was very underserved and kind of fluttering away, basically. I bought the assets out of the Loudon family estate. They were going to liquidate the company, basically. It was still surviving, but it wasn't doing, was very mismanaged and under managed for many, many years. Going back to the 60s, 70s, Aquatrol is a growing entity and a pretty well-known name in terms of brass, bronze valves within the United States. And that just kept sliding away for, you know, decades. When I left the printing industry, you know, people called me kind of a Nostradamus because that was pre-internet the explosion of Internet commerce and catalogs were a big entity back then. I mean, you know, people that were frequent buyers would get five catalogs a day. I mean, it was it was a huge part of the economy and a huge part of the printing economy. But it's not that I saw the writing on the wall. It's just that I was ready for a change. Okay. So I bought the assets. In 2000, we had to go through some litigation, but I got control in 2003. I started working there full-time in 2006. Going back to the print distribution industry as an example, we were, the big guys gobbled up most of the industry. There were three players left. And at one point we were about \$14 billion in sales, long since bankrupt. They had facilities all over the country, hundreds of thousands of square feet, lots of investment. And most of it shuttered. The remnants are Donnelly still around, but they went private. And I believe they went from 12 to 4 billion, maybe. And Quad Graphic in Wisconsin bought the remnants of Quebec or World. And Quad's total sales are maybe 3 billion. So I'm not sure of all the math, but I can tell you that it was a 30 to \$40 billion industry that today is under 10.

Gil: Wow. Wow.

Bert: You talk about some wonderful facilities and people and, you know, it's just it completely changed. But I didn't know that in 2006 when I left, when I started full time at Aquatrol, it was just time for me to make a change. I was 50 years old and, you know, Since then, it's been onward and upward.

Gil: Now, starting a new career at 50 years old, buying a company. Now, it might've been mismanaged and there was some opportunity, some meat on the bone that obviously you saw, but that takes a lot. I mean, that's a big risk. That takes, you obviously were well-established in this industry that at the time was booming and

catalogs were huge. Tell me a little bit about how jumping. I always say that entrepreneurship is you're like sitting at the end of the cliff. And a lot of people put their toes on the edge of the cliff. But what separates, I'll call it the men from the boys, is the ones that are actually willing to jump off that cliff. So obviously you did that in 2006. So tell me a little bit about like how that how that worked. I mean, how did you get over some of those fears and investing what I can only imagine is, a good amount of money into a business at the age of 50?

Bert: There's a lot of different things. First of all, it's a family legacy business. And I didn't want to see it die. And I'd worked there as a kid, on and off. And, when I was younger, up till about 20, 20 ish. And when the opportunity came up, it had to go through litigation. It was a long drawn out process. But I got in touch with the plant manager engineer type that used to run the facility. And I said, Tom, you're willing to come back to work. So in '03, we got the company and Tom was in there first. He straightened it out and made it somewhat profitable. Between '03 and '06, we developed a new valve line. Tom did, along with some engineering folks. And the new valve line was approved by ASME, like in the middle of '06. So I decided to jump and start in January of '06 to help get that started. I mean, you know, it was, it was a lot of just little things to do, like, like a website, you know, for, you know, for one, some promotion, some customer contact. Fortunately, Aquatrol, I mean, the valve industry's got deep roots, you know, so if you look, if I look at their customer list in 2003 versus 1980 or 70s, they had the same customers, more a lot, you know. Or if you sell somebody and take care of them, it's a sticky business. And if you charge a reasonable price and, be somewhat aggressive in pricing. And that caught my eye, that I said, if we could, if we could add 10 accounts a year, it's going to mean something. Right. And we blew that away immediately. I mean, it was, I don't own the company and I can't really divulge that number, but it's quite different. And our image and our breadth and width and reach into the industry is entirely different than it was, 20 years ago. Yeah, that's something that I think is so great about this industry.

Gil: And I tell a lot of our young sales guys is this is a very, I was actually having this conversation with Scott Grimes from Donaldson Filtration on episode three. We're talking about like the stickiness of this business and how you have really longstanding relationships. Before we started the call, you were asking about my dad, right? Like we, and I tell our younger sales folks that join our team, Hey, this is not a flash in the pan career. Like, if you want to be here for three years, you might as well just leave now. This is the type of business that you're in. You form really deep relationships. And but at the end of the day, your customers or your partners or whatever you want to call them, end up, you know, working with you for the next 30 years, 40 years. And that's what some of the guys that have been at our business for 40 years, they have some of the same customers they've had for the last, you know, 30, 20, 30, 40 years. So I think, and now that also makes it tough because when

you're trying to replace that guy that has a 30-year relationship, that doesn't just happen overnight. But I think that's actually one of the cool things about this industry is just that there's, there is so much, like, relationship and installation base and that type of thing. And a lot of times, I mean, if there's a Aquatrol valve that was installed 15 years ago and it breaks, they just say, well, just replace it with like kind. And they use the same, 560, blah, blah, blah, number and just get replaced the valve. So, we've, you touched on family legacy. So When I was doing a little bit of my research prepping for this, I saw LJ Loudon founded the company back in, I think it was 1947. So who is LJ to you? And, you know, I mean, legacy is, I lived legacy.

Bert: It was my grandfather. My grandfather founded the company.

Gil: Your grandfather. Okay.

Bert: And he was an engineering, he ran an engineering sales firm in Chicago. I rep, believe it or not, names like Kunkel and Spence and all the guys that have been around and recognized the demand for delivery issues on a couple of small valves and started spinning brass in a garage in downtown Chicago or near West Chicago and grew into a pretty decent company by the late 70s.

Gil: Wow. Wow. That's great. That's great. So I didn't realize that you are third generation.

Bert: Yeah, that's, you know, selling this thing was extremely difficult for me.

Gil: Yeah.

Bert: Because of that. And, you know, going back, you know, 20 years ago, 15 years ago, some of the, you know, financial friends of mine and stuff that they said, well, Bert, what's your succession planning? And I said, none, you know, when I die, right? And, uh, basically, uh, I've got three daughters that are involved. I don't want to be involved. And, um, a couple of years ago, you start feeling I'm 70 years old now. I, I sold it when I, a month after I turned 70.

Gil: Wow.

Bert: And, uh, I really didn't see any other options. You know, not that I could feasibly fit into because as long as I own it, I'm going to be involved. I couldn't sit in Sarasota and not be online all day long. And so, you know, like, or in Egypt or wherever, you know, wherever, you know, we go, we went to Europe last year and I'm logging in every day, you know, it's just, you know, as an owner, entrepreneur, whatever, it's very difficult to let go. And I felt even if I brought in talent or more talent, we've got some

tremendous people there, but even if I brought in more talent, I'd still be, itching at the, to go every day, and I decided, what, it's time. So, and then the, and then the succession planning with trusts and all that stuff comes into play with, separate owners, separate management group and, it could be messy. And I thought this was the cleanest way out, extremely difficult for me, but the company's in great hands, private equity, a group of theirs that, specializes in full control. Purchase Aquatrol, they're also looking for other bolt-on type acquisitions. The key people all got contracts, you know, employees are treated very well. And I wouldn't leave without feeling that. So they're in great shape and they're going to continue. to grow, grow upon the success that Eye Patrol's had in the last couple of decades. It's that, you know, it's going to continue to grow and there's some good things going to be happening soon, I believe. So.

Gil: Now, with your experience in the publishing world and sort of seeing all the consolidation, you said there were sort of like 3 large groups that owns all of the industry. Now, I think there were some like macroeconomic, you know, the advent of the internet, basically, that made a lot of that business go away. But do you see a parallel of what you experienced in your 24 years in publishing with the what's going on in the valve industry right now? And I'm referring to a lot of the consolidation and private equity, you know, gobbling everybody up.

Bert: I mean, if you go back 20 years ago with Tyco buying, you know, within within our niche safety valve, safety relief valves, Tyco bought all the big boys. And, uh, so I'm not sure from there where it might go. There's a lot of small to medium players that are still available, but, you know, I don't, they may be, they may be, they may be family owned businesses and they may be, they may have a son, they're grooming like yourself to take over, you know, or a grandson or something, but I don't see it, uh, being parallel in any sense.

Gil: Yeah.

Bert: It's two different industries, too. You've got, pipes, valves and fittings, and you've got advertising, promotion, marketing, direct sales versus the valve industry, so.

Gil: Yeah, and we, I was having this talk with Brian O'Leary from Rio Temp. I don't know if you know Brian, but he is second generation owner, and I had this conversation with him, I think it was episode 5. And we were talking about how, I mean, and I'm sure this happened to you, Bert. I literally, I probably get 5 emails or calls a week, if not more, of private equity that wants to buy our business. And we are, right now, I mean, I'm 35 years old, so we're building our business for the 4th generation, whether they decide to come in or not, that's up to them. But I think

Actually, one of the opportunities for us is acquisitions. And I've never once gotten a letter from another family-owned company that says, I'd like to buy you, which I still wouldn't sell. But we are going to end up coming into, that's something that we're going to be moving into is an acquisition strategy. here in the next year or so. And when we do that, I have a feeling that some folks are going to be excited that we're a family business. We're not like Wall Street trying to trying to, you know, just continue a family legacy. So I don't know. We'll see what happens with with that.

Bert: Well, like what I found. Gilbert, is the difference, because I contacted directly some manufacturing companies, just to see if they'd be interested, some larger companies that are trying to get in the US market. And the major difference is private equity understands how to play with dollars, I guess. Manufacturers don't. You know, they, and they, they're not willing to You know, you toss a number out there and they're like, well, can we make payments and can we, you know, because they've grown internally, you know, through the years and they'll invest in a new product or new product line. But the concept of the entire company, there's a lot of interest, but they don't, they don't understand the dollar side.

Gil: Yeah. No, that makes sense. So. So succession planning, I know you obviously you sold to private equity, but what does the management look like now? You mentioned there's a couple of the key people that are out of stayed and are in contracts to stick around. So what does that company look like now and what's your involvement in the business?

Bert: I'm a consultant for one year because part of my deal, I told them I'm not willing to stay on. I'll help, I'll consult, but day-to-day, I'm done. Fortunately, our engineering group, the head of manufacturing, Eye Patrol, has been there 18 years. He's a total home run. You guys know Renee. She runs inside sales and admin, and she's been there longer than me, and Renee's under 50. So, you know, she's still got a ways to go. So those people all got pretty good deals. Some ownership and they're being treated very well. That's great. It's been four or five, five, six months, but the group that they report up to are good people. Yeah. They're committed to furthering the growth within flow control related industries. They want to build a brand around, you know, different companies. And eventually, I believe, you know, they'd either probably sell it off, to somebody, but that'll be a while.

Gil: Yeah.

Bert: So it's been really good for the people there.

Gil: That's great. That's great. I think that's something that's really important in the type of position that you're in selling is a lot of times I've and I've heard this from

different people like Bruce Broxman that have that have sold to private equity that say, at the end of the day, like these, it's, I didn't do this on my own. Like I did it with everybody. And I want to make sure that all my people are taken care of. So.

Bert: Yeah, we have a, we have a great, or they have a great team. You know, it's, I think the average employee there has been in the safety valve industry for at least 20 years.

Gil: Wow. That's amazing. That's great. It's very similar to Wells for company, actually.

Bert: Well, it's a tough, it's a tough product. You know, the safety valves are very fickle. They're very unique. There's all different little specs within a spec and different engineering requirements and all, you know, well, you guys know you, you know, you sell them and service and on, so.

Gil: You really need to know what you're doing. I mean, it's safety, right? I mean, we're selling safety. When it comes down to safety, it's, It's really, you can't mess up. So one of the things that I had asked you prior to our conversation here is what's one piece of wisdom that you would give your 25-year-old self? And your response is very interesting. And I think, and so I'd love to dive into it a little bit because I didn't totally understand it. So you give three pieces of advice. You said there are new shortcuts. That piece I understand. You said eliminate debt, which I can understand that. The third is pick winning horses and winning jockeys. And I think I might understand that, but could you dive into a little bit of what you mean by pick winning horses and winning jockeys? And when you say that, do you, is a winning horse different than a winning jockey?

Bert: Yeah, basically it's just common sense. I mean, would you rather be, let's say, would you rather make, higher income at a company that's shrinking? or average income that a company is growing, right? You know, that's the winning horse. You know, you want to, you know, pick something. You know, when I got into printing, it was becoming very dynamic. And I rode that crust for 25 years. The valve and fitting industry is it's not going to have the same growth that the printing had, but it's predictable and it's growing. And there's infrastructure needs, you know, in the US there's going to be more manufacturing coming in. So that's, that's a winning horse. Winning jockey is the people. You know, you want, none of us got there without mentors. So you want to ***** ** a young guy to somebody that you respect and you can look up to and, you know, that's not afraid to allow you to grow. You know, you don't want to get in the political, that's what big companies are, you know, it's all the political jargon that goes with it. But That's what I meant by that.

Gil: And thank you for clarifying because I didn't, I actually didn't get, the winning jockey thing, the people, I've heard that, but I think the winning horse is a really great point and defining that as industry. And I, man, I don't know about you, but I just wish, I think the valve industry is just such an amazing industry. And I mean, you just you just laid out a couple of reasons why. I mean, it's sticky. It's needed. As my as Gil senior, my dad loves to say, valves make the world go round like you can't like water doesn't come out of your tap. You're not going to get paper. You're not going to anything that you need, like you're not going to get unless you have valves. Right. So I but when I go to, you know, valve world, at down in Houston, Texas, or I go to a Valve conference, I'm like the youngest guy in the room and I'm not even that young. And it's I just don't know how to like promote this industry. I mean, I guess it's I mean, I guess selfishly, I mean, it's kind of like an opportunity, right? But I just think that this and we have a group of fairly young territory managers and sales folks. And we're building a really cool culture and of bringing some young people into this industry. But what do you think about that? I mean, we're just not seeing that many young people come into this industry. Why do you think that is?

Bert: I don't know. I couldn't tell you. I mean, there's a shortage of engineers in this country. Most people, most people in the valve industry are engineering based. You know, they're not, you know, I'm sales, marketing, advertising based. And I'm selling against engineers that kind of really aren't salespeople, you know what I mean? Yep. Uh, and, uh, I looked at that as an advantage, basically. But, but, uh, we at Aquatrol went young about 10, 15 years ago for the same reason. We had older management there, uh, a couple of which I couldn't wait till they retired, you know? And, Eric runs the company, he's 45, or Michael runs engineering, he's 34. Renee's under 50, three key people. Our CIs are all, well, they're a little bit older. They're around 50, 55-ish. But they're the guys that are responsible for the quality of the belts. Sure. They've been doing it for forever. So you really want that. The machine side, we've got They're all under 40. So I purposely decided to go in that direction.

Gil: Yeah, that's something we've been very purposely doing as well, because three years ago, our workforce was just, very seasoned. I mean, they'd been in the industry for a long time and everybody, like literally almost all of our workforce was talking about retirement in the next few years. That means they retired five years ago. Yeah.

Bert: Making a paycheck. That's all.

Gil: Yeah. Yeah. And so it's been, it's been fun to bring in just some, newer, fresher blood. And it's, and I think it's, I actually, I don't think, I know it's actually reinvigorated a lot of the seasoned people because they're like, oh, this is fun. I love like mentoring these people and I love growing them. We're building a mentorship model within our company to help. some of these seasoned folks grow the other people. But I mean,

it's I think your winning horse is a really good point. And it's one of the reasons that I'm trying to do this, that I'm doing this podcast is like, let's just try to promote this industry and bring some younger people in that can do stuff. I mean, it's funny because doing Valveman and running a B2B e-commerce business, you would think people are like, my gosh, that's like the most innovative thing in the world. When you go outside of the valve industry, it's like not that innovative, right? But inside the valve industry, everybody thinks we're like, we're like the most innovative people ever. And we are doing a lot of innovative stuff with AI and whatever, but in sales and marketing. But the overall concept is actually not that novel, except for in the valve industry, just because it's been, you know, it's a bit of an older industry, so. So you mentioned mentors and having a mentor and growing, and that's something I've, I'm a huge proponent of mentorship and I have a lot of mentors in my life and I try to to give back and turn around and pull the next person up. Is there anyone that you really looked up to in the valve industry that really helped you form what... Aquatrol is today.

Bert: Well, I guess going way back was my grandfather, the founder of the company. But when I, Tom Bauman, I was a kid and I worked for Tom who ran the company. He was the manufacturing manager. He came back when I bought the company, right? And he was somebody I really looked up to. Tom worked until 68 and decided to go to greener pastures. And he's probably about 80 now and doing great. Wow. But he, you know, he came back and right sized the internal part of the company and helped develop the 560 line back then. Yeah. And, you know, he was a mentor in some respects, different side of the industry. I don't even know how to turn a machine on back there, you know?

Gil: Sure.

Bert: Yeah, I didn't want to know, you know, so. But. That's in the valve industry. That was one five or six people that resell valves in the United States. So I immediately went out and flew out and saw them. But I had to bring Tom with because I was afraid that if they asked me a question about a valve, I didn't know what the hell they're talking about. I can strike up the conversation, but I need to pass it over to this guy. Right. And that was pretty good. We've got business and still do business with all of them.

Gil: That's great.

Bert: And, you know, that's In the, within the valve industry itself, yes. In the print industry, Alden Press was a, I don't know, \$200 billion smaller company relative to the big guys.

Gil: Yeah.

Bert: Trying to think a couple hundred employees, maybe 250. And I got a lot of exposure there and a lot of help along the way and eventually went into sales. And, you know, back then it was like, here's your shovel. Outside that front door is the pot of gold. See you later. And I started selling and it worked out very well, but I had a lot of good people helping.

Gil: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I think mentorship in, specifically in sales is really important.

Bert: Oh, it's like bootcamp the first year or so, you know, it's, but just keep hanging in there and chipping away.

Gil: It'll work out eventually, right? So when I was doing a little bit of research on your website and I was reading about your company and I was reading about your grandfather, LJ Loudon, the one thing that really stuck out to me at the very end was, I call it a mission, like a single statement. And the mission that was on there was to produce industry-leading quality safety relief outs backed by services second to none. Is that still, has that been, it sounds like LJ set that mission statement at the beginning. Is that still a guiding principle for Official today?

Bert: Absolutely. And the culture as such today, it hasn't changed. Except the old guy in the office, in the corner office saying, what about this, what about that? But it's ingrained in everybody over there.

Gil: So tell me about how important you think a mission statement is. And the reason that I ask is we're actually going through this process right now of like vision, mission, values, and like three-year outlook. And we're going through this whole process. And it's like a very arduous process to go through. And you know, what the consultant we're working with, has told us, he's like, your mission statement, that doesn't change. Like your vision, that will adjust. Your values, they pretty much stay the same. But your mission is this like one sentence and maybe two sentences, and it really is the guide of your business for the next 50 years. And honestly, I find a lot of pressure in that. Like, it keeps me up at night because I'm like, my goodness, what do we want this business to be? I don't want to pigeonhole ourselves, but I also don't want to be too broad because then you're just anybody. So how, I don't know, did you find that that was your guiding factor? And are there any instances that that helped you make decisions because you had that guiding mission statement?

Bert: I think You know, it's a good question, Gilbert. I think part of the, I came out of print advertising, which was very, you know, it was like, you'd get customers filament on a Friday, you'd be printing 5 million pieces by Monday and ship, you know, beef,

you know, labeled printed mail by the following Friday and a lot of last minute changes. So that culture in that industry, especially the company that Jerry built, it was everybody was back on their heels and on their toes. I mean, it was it was a culture. I think all businesses are service businesses. I don't care what what you're doing. If you're manufacturing Volkswagens or Amazon or whatever. And I think you have to instill instill the culture by example from the top down. If the guy in the corner office is sloughing, well, it's going to happen. You know, that's why bringing younger people is a good, you know, they don't know any better. Well, when I bought Aquatrol, the manufacturing industry was like the opposite of print advertising. You know, well, you know, well, you know, this and that, you know, you talk to a vendor, we've got a set of patterns, you know, it's a hundred thousand dollars for the line, you know, just as an example, can you help us on that? but we'll get you this business. We're okay with the price per piece. So I purposely decided to go in that direction. Yeah. So Eric has a lot of what I have in terms of a sense of urgency. And, you know, he's stressed. He's got a big a big role there. We've got all fast thinkers and fast people. And, you know, I think I think that I didn't look I didn't look at that as our as our marching line or anything like that or whatever culture, or not, what'd you call the...

Gil: A mission statement or...

Bert: I didn't think of that a mission statement. I just thought of that's who we are.

Gil: Yeah.

Bert: How do you get better than that?

Gil: Yeah. One of the things I preach all the time, and I've talked about this on the show, but I, we, we talk about is just creating the best B2B customer experience in the world. And outside of valves, beyond, beyond valves, it's, you know, it might be print advertising and it might be, I, and, you know, I think if I love, some people call them BHAGs, a big, hairy, audacious goal. I just call it a bag, a big, audacious goal is I want to be the best B2B customer experience in the world. And I think you guys have, you know, backed by services second to none is very similar. And I think that's probably one of the reasons that our companies have, have worked together for so long.

Bert: It ties into, you know, it ties into also a lot of investment in the back end. We had decided years ago, we're not going to outsource, we're going to manufacture in the United States. Some stuff is brought in, but not much, like 3% of the SKUs. So we can service the customers, you know, it's, if you ain't got it, you can't sell it, you can't ship it, right? So, the investment on the back end and inventory and equipment, through the years has been significant, but it's allowed it's allowed us to grow the

company exponential eventually many, many, many, many times. because we because we have that service, we're committed to that that side of the industry.

Gil: Yeah, I think that having those guiding principles like that really does make help you make those decisions, right? I mean, manufacturing in the United States, that's a it's a hard decision to stick with when, you know, offshoring is so popular and getting stuff made overseas is so much less expensive. But if you do have those guiding principles of this is, we're going to, produce industry leading quality safety valves backed by services, second to none. I think that it does help you make your decisions. And that's where I'm, we're pretty close on our mission. Like we're like really like, kind of debating like single words at this point. But I'm excited. We're going to be doing a launch event with our team here in November. So I'm excited for it to, to, because we like as my brother Jason and I, like we know what the business is because I literally was playing with valves as a kid and I grew up on sitting at the table talking about valves in the, in our business and all that kind of stuff. So I know like instinctively what the business is, but to be able to put it into words and, and what are those, what are those core values that we have, I think it's just going to be really helpful. So that day one, when somebody walks in the door, because we're doing a lot of hiring right now, when somebody walks in the door, we can say, this is who we are and this is what we stand for. And by the way, like you see it everywhere. Like this isn't like what we say and then we don't live it. Like we like this is what we're living. And then we just put it into words, you know, so I'm excited for it. And hopefully it helps us be able to make some decisions like you've been able to make.

Bert: Yeah, yeah, it's the sum of all parts, you know.

Gil: Yeah.

Bert: You know, you get good people, good leadership, you know, and stay out of their way and create excitement and a buzz and that'll filter throughout the whole service concept.

Gil: Good jockeys, right?

Bert: Yeah, right.

Gil: Awesome. Well, so Bert, what's next for you? I mean, you've been in, yeah, obviously you've had two careers. So you're in print advertising for 24 years. You're in the safety valve business for over 22 years and you're only 70. So I mean, you got another, I think you have another 22 years ahead of you. So is that... But is that career going to be fishing down in Sarasota or are you going to be staying in the valve business at all? Or what's that going to look like?

Bert: I've started on the side a robotics company.

Gil: Okay.

Bert: And Elon's coming over this afternoon. We're having lunch. No, no, I don't know. I'm looking to invest in something.

Gil: Okay.

Bert: But I don't. It's early on.

Gil: Yeah.

Bert: And this whole cell concept hits so quickly. that I really have a bad time to digest it all.

Gil: Yeah.

Bert: But it'll be something down the line. It'll be manufacturing related.

Gil: Sure.

Bert: I don't want to be on the retail side. You know, I don't know. Yeah. But we'll figure it out.

Gil: That's great. That's great. Well, one of the things that Brian O'Leary and I were talking about the other day, of RioTamp was maybe this concept of in trying to like promote this industry and create more opportunities of US manufacturing and valves, valve manufacturing in the United States is maybe trying to create some sort of group that, you know, mentors, incubates, invests in startup manufacturers. I mean, I just don't hear of startup manufacturers anymore in the United States. It just really, it happens so rarely. And I think the rate of private equity gobbling companies up is happening at a much, much faster rate than new companies being started. So maybe there's something there?

Bert: Yeah, you never know. Yeah, I'll be kicking the tires, but I can't be within, you know, there's a, I'm not even sure what it's called, but I think if I was in safety valves, they'd come after me in a bad way. You don't want to do that. It'd have to be non-related.

Gil: Yeah, Awesome. Well, Bert, thank you so much for being on the show. I really appreciate it. It's great. I know our companies have worked together for a very, very long time, and we have a lot of the AquaTrol products on Valve NAND, and we also sell a lot of your products through Wells for Company. So thank you for the partnership. Excited to see what's in store for Bert in the future. And thanks for the wisdom today. Appreciate it, man.

Bert: Yes. No, I appreciate it. And, you know, I'm still a consultant, so I'm technically on the payroll for a few more months. But even beyond that, if you guys want to go see a real safety valve manufacturer, dynamic little company, You know, when people come in, we've got, I think currently there's nine CNCs. Six of the nine run lights out. So there's three or four robotics and then other bar feeders. So I liked, you know, back when I was there, when I worked there, and prospects would come in or vend, anybody. I'd take them through the machine shop side and turn the lights off. And so this is what's happening on Saturday night and Sunday night and tonight. And it's not ideal. I mean, it's not 100%, but it could be worth it for a little field trip for you guys. And if you do, you talk to Eric, he'd love to have you. Yeah. And, you know, think about it.

Gil: That would be great. That'd be great, Bert. Yeah, thank you so much for that invite. We appreciate it.

Bert: Yeah. And, you know, think about it.

Gil: Awesome. Well, thanks so much, man. And I hope you have a great rest of your week.

Bert: Yeah, I've got Joe Rogan in about an hour.

Gil: Sounds good. We don't want to get between you and Joe.

Bert: No.

Gil: Especially since you have Elon coming over this afternoon.

Bert: Yeah. Okay. Thank you guys.

Gil: All right. Have a good one, Barry. See you. Bye. Thanks for listening to Fully Open. If something stood out or sparked a thought, I would love to hear it. See you on the next one.