

**Big Blend Radio Interview | Winemaker Insider
Dave Specter of Bells Up Winery in Oregon
Interviewed by Lisa Smith, Podcast Producer
August 18, 2024**

[00:00:00]

Welcome to Big Blend Radio Success Express Show, where we talk about business, leadership, and career development.

[Lisa] Hey everybody, you know we love our Success Insider Conversations, and one of our favorite things in the world, as you know, besides books and music and plants and animals, is wine. Who can live without it? We can't. And so we're going to have another winemaker conversation today with Dave Specter.

[Lisa] Dave and his wife Sara own and run Bells Up Winery. They're based up in Oregon, near Portland. Their wine is phenomenal. And so we thought, hey, you know what, it's time to do another Success Insider, because Dave, you kind of threw away one career for another. And that's a big leap, because number one, wineries are not cheap.

[00:00:50]

[Lisa] You've got big overhead, you moved, and then you're doing a whole new career. Like, this is a big leap. This is a little crazy, but it's super cool. So welcome back. How are you?

[Dave] I'm great, Lisa. Thanks so much for having me on. And yeah, you're right. You know, as we always say, you have to be a little more than crazy to do what we do. And I think we just sort of decided we hit a point in our lives where, you know what, if you're going to make some changes, why don't you make all the changes and just kind of deal with them all at once?

[Lisa] Well, I think we deserve to be happy in life, and we should be doing what makes us happy.

[00:01:26]

[Lisa] And, you know, we. We may not all become, you know, super millionaires, right? I mean, we can. That's cool. But it's about being happy because that's it. That's what it's about. It's not just the almighty dollar, though. We need to be sustainable and all that good stuff, right?

[Dave] Sure. Absolutely.

[Lisa] We want to have a roof over our heads. We need to be able to go for a vacation. But do we care about, you know, having our own private jet?

[Dave] No, no. You have to pay your bills, like you said. I mean. But at the same time, I think, you know, part of what we learn in life as we kind of move down the road for each of us is learning how we individually are wired.

[00:02:07]

[Dave] You know, what are the things that are important to us? What are the things that we need and not things necessarily that society wants to try to convince us that we need? You know, more is not better. You know, I mean, obviously, you know, we live in a country where just historically we're always taught consume, consume, consume more, more. You know, when you're in a job, you know, how high can you rise? Instead of asking the question, what is it that is actually going to make me happy in the short term, in the long term? How can I be the best parent and husband and, you know, and citizen? And just how do we strike that balance? And that balance will be different for each person.

[00:02:50]

[Dave] Before I got into wine, I was a tax lawyer for 10 years. I spent.

[Lisa] That's nuts. OK, like that's there's. Crazy. And then that's nuts.

[Dave] Or insane. Borderline insane. But it was the kind of thing where I was, you know, I never asked myself when I started doing it, was this something that I was actually going to enjoy or was it something that I was just good at? So I just kind of kept at it. And I'm from a time where, you know, now as we sit in 2024, we're now kind of more used to having the conversations of is what we do for a career meeting the balance of what we need just personally, individually. Back in those days, we were just beginning to have that conversation.

[00:03:33]

[Dave] You know, I talk to my father all the time. And one of the things that we talk about is, you know, in his generation, you know, you didn't have those conversations. But at the same time, in his generation, you could leave the office at the end of the day, close your door and not have to take everything home with you. And as time and technology and the demands of our lives kicked in, you know, if your listeners remember when BlackBerries were far more used than they are today. I mean, I was almost tethered to one of those things. And in fact, ended up needing a thumb operation because I used the thing so darn often.

[00:04:08]

[Dave] And, you know, when I when I was back back when I was an attorney, you know, what you see is that there are some people that that is built into their DNA and they love doing it. Whereas for me, I mean, I was good enough at it to where I could continue to advance in my career. But I was over time just less and less happy. Doing what I was doing

and really found that what was important to me was to create something that was tangible, something that would really that would really make a difference in the lives of other people. And there are some...

[Lisa] And wine surely does.

[Dave] Oh, absolutely. And there are a lot of ways to do that.

[00:04:46]

[Dave] And in our case, we took something that we were very passionate about, wine, and just found a way to be able to share our love of it with others. And at the same time, be able to craft great wines, and you know, just really make a nice life for us that way.

[Lisa] And it's challenging. I think that's also part of it. It's can't be just because, oh, I love wine. So I'm going to make wine. It's about you having to be ready for the ultimate challenge, really, because it's challenging to even own a business. Right. They always give you, oh, you've got your two years. But it's challenging to also work with nature and then also deal with the people side of it and the business part of it and the distribution of it.

[00:05:34]

[Lisa] So it's a challenge. And don't you think that sometimes we swear at challenges, right? We're all going to have our words at moments. Anybody running a business. If you don't have a moment of when you just want to kick the door or something, then you you're you're not really in it.

[Dave] Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, with the wine industry in particular. There is definitely a romanticized version of what our industry is now. Just to say at the beginning, I absolutely love what I do or I wouldn't be doing it. Number one, first and foremost. However, I think a lot of people believe that those of us in the wine business are all independently wealthy and sort of sit around with our pinkies extended and just sort of go through taste through barrels and sip wine all day.

[00:06:24]

[Dave] And, you know, maybe that happens at the corporate level. But when you're a small producer like we are and we call ourselves micro boutique because I only make about six, seven hundred cases per year. We're too small to even be boutique. We have no employees. I make the wine. I drive the tractor. I do the sales. My lovely wife, Sara, does marketing and schedules appointments and sort of utility infielder for other things. But that's it. So we work our tails off and it starts in the vineyard with farming. We do have a crew that we contract with that helps us with the hand labor, but I'm responsible for running the crew. I'm responsible for the tractor work.

[00:07:04]

[Dave] We can't make great wine without busting our tails out in the summer heat or in the rain or just sort of whatever nature throws at us. And then once we get to harvest, now it's the kind of the end of job one and the beginning of job two, where now we have to take all of that fruit, go through the processes and do a lot of very fine point detail work. You know, I think a lot of people think wine makes itself. But the reality is, you know, for what we do, even on a very, very small scale, it involves a lot of just physical work. And every year, you know, I'm about to turn 51.

[00:07:44]

[Dave] And the reality is every year you can kind of feel a little few more aches and pains than you can the year before. So it is always, but having said all of that. We wouldn't want to have it any other way because the benefits of what we get from it are being a small place. We get to establish wonderful relationships with our customer base. You know, I think in the wine business, you're only going to succeed if you're either really, really big and you go through distribution and you sort of show up in every supermarket and every restaurant or you're really, really small. And that's the path that we wanted to take. And.

[00:08:26]

[Dave] When we talk to our customers, you know, it's the sort of relationship that we get to build and the joy that you get to see in their eyes when they come to visit and they try the new wines or they take our wines home. And then they send us pictures of sharing the wines with family and friends, you know, whether it's sitting at dinner or, you know, just out by the campfire or whatever, just those little everyday moments. And the payoff for us becomes, you know, that knowing that your efforts. Everything you worked was a small little part of that moment of joy for the people that you've connected with. So, you know, you have to be in this business for the right reasons.

[00:09:08]

[Dave] It's as you said, it's not the way to fame and fortune. But that's not why we did it. We did it because we're passionate about the product. It's just one of the very few things I know of that just when you put something like that in front of a group of people, it just brings them together. You know, you're just not going to be mad when you're drinking a good bottle of wine.

[Lisa] Well, and it's that conversation about it. And, you know, it's like I had a friend once and him and his girlfriend at the time we were having dinner and we were getting to this point of like. Let's just sit down.

[00:09:41]

[Lisa] She had made something. I remember it was. I actually remember the whole meal. It's like a whole new recipe she had made with couscous and artichoke hearts. And I'm like, actually, I haven't had artichoke hearts done this way and all this. I didn't know, you know, I came from the bush in Africa. We didn't do that. We could grow them. But we were having this conversation about understanding where your food comes from. Understanding,

thinking about while we're eating. We're like, I wonder where this came from. Who made the couscous? Who grew the artichokes and who had the wine? And so it was like, let's read the label. Let's find out who they are. And you've got to think this was also pre-Google.

[00:10:17]

[Lisa] So now we're able to have all these apps and everything that tells us everything. But back then we didn't. And it was kind of this reflective time. And we were like, let's all make this concerted effort. I think we were all in our 20s at this time and also completely naughty 20s. But we were growing up at this point and going, let's make this concerted effort amongst us all to think about who is making all of this, who's behind it, you know, and you shouldn't learn and learn about the agricultural movements in our world and the people who grow, who you're out there like you're. They're saying no matter what the weather is that they've got to go out there and deal with it.

[00:11:00]

[Lisa] Right. And it's like the history of agriculture is fascinating because it The history of humans. Right.

[Dave] Oh, absolutely. And that all plays into its own stories. You know, we're now at a point in with our winery, we now almost everything that we make comes with fruit that we grow on our estate vineyard. That was not always the case, because when we bought our place back in 2012, there were no vines. So back in the very early days, we had to buy all of the fruit that we used to produce our wines. And, you know, that people understood that, you know, they were looking forward to the estate vineyard coming online down the road. But in those days, we really focused on working with vineyards that were very much like us, small vineyards, people that lived on the property and at a minimum drove their own tractors.

[00:11:50]

[Dave] And I wanted to do that for two reasons. One was I wanted to know that the people that were doing the farming actually had a personal interest in the quality of the grapes coming off their property. And when you have large corporate managed vineyards, it's really hit or miss. And frankly, you know, you don't really get a chance to establish partnerships with growers that are very, very large. But when you're small and you're taking, you know, and I may be buying, you know, in those days, let say, you know, maybe half of the of the yields coming off of that vineyard, you really had an opportunity to work directly with that grower to strategize, to talk about, you know, what should we be doing out here that's going to do nothing but increase the quality of the fruit that comes off of the vines so that we can ultimately share with our customers.

[00:12:38]

[Dave] The other thing that reason I wanted to do it was because I wanted to share those individual growers' stories with the customers when they were here. You know, so much about wine is the stories, you know, and it's in practically every step of the process. Is a

story in and amongst itself, you know, whether it's the weather that's involved, whether it's what we went through, you know, the broken down tractors and all the things, you know, all the things we had to overcome, you know, but it's as with any farming, it's just how do you overcome the obstacles put in front of you to get something that is going to make a lot of people very, very happy in the end.

[00:13:19]

[Lisa] I've heard it's always relationships in the wine world. And agriculture is, you cannot run a farm and be successful on your own. You need to be friends with your so-called competition to help each other out and to even make a region become known. I know you're in Oregon. Everybody knows Pinot Noir, but you do more than Pinot, right? So, yeah, you had to diversify, do something different. But those relationships that you're talking about, hey, oh, my gosh, it's harvest time. And suddenly the tractor said, I'm not working anymore. Who's got a tractor? Everybody gets on the phone, right, and starts helping each other. And isn't that like you're talking about those relationships?

[00:14:00]

[Lisa] You want relationships with your customers who are drinking the wine, but it goes further and beyond. I don't think the wine industry in this country would have made it to what it is today nationally. If it wasn't for relationships and people helping each other.

[Dave] I agree with that, you know, from my understanding, I know our region, of course, very, very well. But from what I hear, you know, there are some areas that are far more commercialized than what we have here in Oregon. There it tends to be not quite as not quite as mutually beneficial. And, you know, I guess that's just kind of the nature of corporate anything these days.

[Lisa] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[Dave] But for us, you know, there are stories, you know, when you come into this area and you go around.

[00:14:53]

[Dave] Different wineries, especially the smaller ones, you will hear stories upon stories of situations where, you know, you know, it was let's say it was a husband and wife team that came in and a couple of months before harvest, one of the spouse passed away unexpectedly. And now you're you're staring down harvest and, you know, it's coming whether you're ready or not. How many other wineries stepped up to say, hey, we'll make your wine this year. You know, we'll provide barrels, we'll provide space, you know, whatever it is you need. It's really been the way that the Oregon wine industry has developed as a region. You know, we have nowadays we have 800 wineries in the valley, and that is a heck of a lot.

[00:15:37]

[Dave] But it also means that there's a great support network out there for people that, you know, hey, we all at some point are going to run into situations where we need the graces of others to help us along. And knowing that you can count on that somewhere in the somewhere here in the valley is so, so important.

[Lisa] But the corporate side of things, when we look at this, if small businesses unite in their field, yes, there's competitiveness and that's important. It's healthy, right? When it's done in a healthy form. But those relationships that actually build an actual industry correctly, have better standards and things like that. And by the way, I love for those watching. Don't you think I'm a chameleon? Yeah.

[00:16:23]

[Lisa] I'm a chameleon with this color blue popping in and out. I don't know what's going on, but see, it just did it. But you're doing it on two sides, which I think is really fantastic. You're doing it with the relationship with your customers and the relationship with those that you work with, your vendors, your growers, everyone. But I mean, just now we just stopped the recording real quick because you had someone show up and want to have the experience. And so you're building the experience. And it's not just the wine. It's the experience of being there, the conversation, learning from each other. So, that's what you're seeing people?

[00:17:00]

[Lisa] Actually, I think I saw a post on one of your social media posts, seeing people as they learn by sitting down with you as a winemaker. Are they finding different likes in wine? Are they changing their palate by this kind of informative yet fun experience?

[Dave] I'm not sure so much that it's changing their palates. I think it's discovering that a lot of the assumptions that they have been making about their palates aren't necessarily true. I do see this all the time where, you know, because a lot of people, you know, you may come to a winery, but you maybe you bought a whole bunch of wine just in a retail setting. So you come in with expectations about, let's say, what a white wine should or is, quote, supposed to be right.

[00:17:52]

[Dave] You know. And we have our own style and it's very distinctive and very it's one of the things that sets us apart. And just to kind of give you an example, a lot of people think that white wine is either oaky, buttery, California Chardonnay or sharp, acidic, just ripping, just very, very crisp or something that is sweet, sugary, sweet. And what I show is that you don't really need to be any of those things. You can create a fruity wine that has acidity, but it is still gentle and soft on the palate. So, you know, challenging those assumptions really opens the door. What I tend to find is that people that are red wine drinkers end up really liking my whites.

[Lisa] I love your whites.

[00:18:37]

[Lisa] Yes, this is picky about white wine.

[Dave] And yeah, it's like this is way different than I was expecting. And I see the reverse to my reds tend to be softer, more elegant. So when I get white wine drinkers that say, oh, you know, reds are too big for me. They just make me feel overly dry. Well, if you've been buying big, heavy Cabernets or big red blends, yeah, you would probably would feel that way. But then you see that when you're doing things small and crafted, you know, you start to realize that the world of the of wine is just much bigger than I think folks expect it to be. And so you do get all those pleasant surprises. I can't tell you how many people that I've gotten in here.

[00:19:18]

[Dave] We make a Syrah. We make a very soft Syrah. It's very pinot-ish in its feel, and how many people before I pour that wine for and say, 'Oh, I don't like Syrah.' I don't like Syrah.' And it's like, trust me, trust me. And then they taste it and they look at me and their eyes are really big. And it's just that moment of discovery that they have to say, wow, I didn't think that a wine like this could be produced in that way. And so those are the moments, I think, that we really get to show folks that, you know, you. You don't need to be some ultra sophisticated wine person to enjoy wine experiences.

[00:20:00]

[Dave] You know, we see this all the time. How many folks will come in and say, yeah, I'm not I don't know all the sophisticated terms. And I say, you don't need to know that sophisticated terms, it's probably better that you don't because you are going to be able to actually enjoy the wine the way it was intended to be enjoyed much better that way.

[Lisa] Right. You know, that's something I talked about with a distillery recently. Casey Jones Distillery out of Tennessee and their their their history is like crazy, fascinating. Right. And I talked to him about the distillery started doing. It's interesting. Breweries have taken off. Right. And distilleries, you didn't see that many people go distillery hopping. Right.

[Dave] Right.

[00:20:41]

[Lisa] Now that's starting to happen, like in Kentucky, obviously, in Tennessee. Right. But I was talking to him. I said, you know, I think the brewery industry disrupted the wine industry because the brewery industry, because the wine industry at a certain era, you I felt like you had to wear high heel shoes and get dressed up. It's like going to the play like you're going to go to the Met or something or you're not going just to your local theater. You are going. It was so almost highfalutin. It was unapproachable would be the word. And I think now we've got a different era of winemakers and you're definitely in there where it's

like, let's go have some fun. I don't know about.

[00:21:23]

[Lisa] I don't know about that wine, but let's go taste it. Let's go learn and let's have an experience. And that's what travelers want. Travelers, no matter what age group they're from, want to have an authentic experience that makes some kind of positive change in their life, period. That I don't care who it is. And so I think you fit that, you know, perfectly.

[Dave] Absolutely. And, you know, it's so funny because you're right. Wine for many years. And here's the important thing in this country: Got this. It's a reputation that it needed to be. You needed to be highbrow in order to enjoy it. Yet when you go to the birthplaces of fine wines over in France and Italy and Spain, what you see is wine is not a production.

[00:22:07]

[Dave] It is an everyday part of their lives. And the experiences that we always enjoyed the most were going into the little villages, you know, get out of the cities, go into the villages where these wines are produced. And what you're getting is just the local village table wine, you know, you get a carafe, there's no label, you get a few euros and your hardest decision is white or red, right? And the wines are without pomp and circumstance or fanfare. And they are some of the best wines you will ever have because they're made in small quantities. They're local. They're, they're never intended. I shouldn't say never, but they're rarely intended to leave the village that they're produced in.

[00:22:45]

[Dave] And you just, you just get a couple of glasses and you don't get the fancy wine glasses. You're getting little juice glasses. And you're just sharing all of this and you're not psychoanalyzing the wines that we in this country are taught to do all the time. And it's everybody that gets involved in it. Right. And that's the sort of feeling that we want folks to have. And it just all gets back to this idea of connections and connectability. You know, I, I want to have real everyday human beings as my customers. You know, I mean, we, we talk about it all the time.

[Lisa] You're not going to care if I wear high heel shoes, cause I can't do that anymore.

[00:23:25]

[Lisa] I'm too much of a hiker in the woods, so like I'll fall down at the winery and you don't want that. Because we can't wait.

[Dave] It's whatever floats your boat as far as I'm concerned, but certainly for us, it is come as you are and it's better that way. Um, you know, because when, when do we normally drink wine in this country? Just, just when do we consume it? You know, we're at work, we come home, we're tired. You know, we don't want to have some, you know, deep, you know, thought experiments. We want to be able to put the wine glass in the dishwasher. Yep. And I want to be able to pop the cork on something and just be able to...

[00:24:00]

[Lisa] relax and be barefoot.

[Dave] Well, exactly. So, you know, that's when people are here, it really shouldn't be any different, right? I mean, this should be, well, okay. Maybe you need to wear shoes, but whatever shoes you wear are going to be perfectly fine.

[Lisa] I promise to wear shoes. Yeah. I mean, you know, this is about as nice as I. Dress, right? You know, I get my button down and my polo and, and, you know, that's all we really need. Oh, but Dave, you aren't having a shirt that changes colors as we talk. So I know we need to step up. Well, listen, this is, this is important because, you know, there's this relationship you're building with your customers.

[00:24:39]

[Lisa] They're sitting down, drinking wine, changing their minds, discovering, not changing, but discovering, like you're saying, Ooh, something new. The discovery aspect to me is very crucial in life because that's what we're supposed to be doing. We're supposed to be learning new things, having epiphanies and discoveries and Ooh, look at this, how exciting we're supposed to enjoy life. So that's why being in the right career that suits you is, and you can have multiple careers and enjoy all of them just as equal, right? Because we're allowed to, that's why we Re the blend, you know, but because we like all these different things and we can't say, 'Oh, we only talk about wine.' Oh, we only talk about you.

[00:25:17]

[Lisa] You like music and wine together, right? We'll talk about that. But it is. It is an art form, the culinary arts, winemaking. You keep saying the word crafting; you're crafting it small batch. It's caring. So it's a piece of art. Each bottle is a piece of art, and it's temporary art, which makes it even more special. And to me, that's it's heartbreaking too, because like you like, like a certain wine, you better savor that taste. It's about slowing down to enjoy that art. And you're allowed to go, 'I don't like this art.' It doesn't work for me. It, you know, but it gave you a reaction and art is supposed to give you a reaction.

[00:25:59]

[Lisa] You think about it, you can create an opinion. We're allowed to be opinionated. This whole thing of no judgment and no opinions. Nah, that's not true. We're allowed to create and have an opinion about what our tastes are, and then we can change it all up the next day or the next sip. We can.

[Dave] Completely agree. I think the key always is, you know, when you, you, and this is true, I think of any art form, you know, when you, you know, when you taste a wine that doesn't hit your palate the right way, or when you go to a museum and you see a piece of art there, and it's just not jiving with you. I've always said that the key is, can you still respect what was done to put into it?

[00:26:42]

[Dave] You know, I make 10 different wines for people that come in and, you know, not every one of those wines is going to hit everybody the same way that that's life. But what I, my intention is, can people walk out and say that whatever their favorites were, that they could tell that every one of the individual wines was really well-made and that they respected and appreciated and admired the process and all that that went into it. As a producer, this is really the best we can do because then it's up to every individual's preferences. And you just sort of see how that translates across the wines that you produce. But if you've done your job and just kind of left it up to,

[00:27:27]

[Dave] hey, we're just going to put this out into the world and we're going to get a lot of people that it's going to be their jam and we're going to get some people that's not going to be their jam and that's okay.

[Lisa] Yeah. I mean, that's, I know people click me off. They're like, you said that word too many times. I'm clicking you off. And that's okay too. You know, but here's the thing. You know, I'm not about when the more experiences we have, it's a different layer to our lives.

[00:27:50]

[Lisa] And I think wine and the experience you guys have created is a way that more people should look at doing just as part of, it's like, it's a holistic approach to creating wine and sharing it. And that builds relationships with, which changes everything. That's like a secret ingredient is the relationship part, I think with what you're doing. So, what's it feel like? With these award things like, you know it. Awards -winning wine, an awards -winning book, an awards -winning song – I have a love-hate relationship with the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; a love-hate relationship with the Grammys. You know why? Can't blues be televised at the same time as pop? I'm sorry, I think it's just as important, if not more.

[00:28:35]

[Lisa] Oopsie! So that's just my opinion, sure. But with what you're doing with awards – wine, you know winemakers go in submit their wines, and then if you win the award, it's really amazing, right? Whether it's bronze, silver, gold, all those different point systems, and all of that, but it's like you are competing against another grower, maybe their grapes did this that year, like what does it feel like to do that and do you even want to, you know?

[Dave] So I'm in somewhat of a unique position on this being as small as I am because what I find is that those uh the competitions that you're talking about where they matter the most is ultimately providing marketing opportunities for wineries that sell through distribution. So sell in stores and supermarkets and restaurants and those kind of things, you know?

[00:29:29]

[Dave] For your viewers that have you know that we all know what it's like. You walk into a wine shop or a grocery store, and we look at a wall and there are thousands of bottles sitting up there that look exactly alike; oh my lord, how am I supposed to pick the wine that is that is going to be the best for me? And one of the little ways that producers do that is, you'll see what we call shelf tags, that little piece of paper that's taped right underneath the one bottle that has either the award information or a score in the 90s, or something like that, just some way to make that bottle stand out from the thousands that are around it.

[00:30:06]

[Dave] And there are a lot of people who make it, and there are a lot of people who make it, and there are a lot of people who make it, and there are a lot of people who make it. And there are a lot of people buying decisions based on you know, hey, did this wine you know, was this wine well rated? Um, I've always kind of found those to be unhelpful um, because you know, who is the one that is doing the judging on the wines to provide the rating, and are their standards similar to what you enjoy? You know, there are publications that have inherent biases, and I'm not saying that those are either good or bad, but the biases exist.

[00:30:37]

[Dave] And if you're buying a wine that is your preference in your wines don't match those biases then their scores are going to be completely meaningless for you. Now I am lucky because I don't sell through distribution, the only thing that matters is when people are here. Are they enjoying the wines? Are they to their take to each individual's tastes um while awards are I'm sure would be nice for stroking your ego; they don't really benefit me on the sales side. I mean, I suppose they might provide social media marketing, but it it's unlikely that look if I, and I say this all the time: if I won every competition I ever entered, and my customers didn't like the wines, they wouldn't buy the wines.

[00:31:21]

[Dave] I mean, it is far more important what their opinions are than the opinions of just a random panel or

[Lisa] that's a that's a life lesson though isn't that the truth because it Like, oh, they bought their way into that award or, you know what I mean, that's where you know they used to say about women, oh she slept her way up to the top, you know that whole kind of it's not authentic right, right. And exactly that authenticity comes from what your customers going to tell the truth, or youre not going to see the money come in right. And it's like they're either going to say something and we do have some loud mouths on social media unfortunately can we do it on the positive you know but listen can we tell the Grammys to put the blues up front I know you want classical up there more right and that Some come on,

[Dave] I get it,

[00:32:08]

[Dave] and you know the other thing too, I realize is that and I think bluegrass is more mainstream than classical is these days, but we understand that what we do is niche, um, you know, we are not everybody that is out there will value the experience we provide, we completely understand that, um, the benefit though of being our size is I don't need to make everybody happy, I just yeah that's too hard, right? People, yeah, over and over well,

[Lisa] I want to go back to this point system because you know I know I'm terrible, I look at labels, I do, I like you, yeah, I like your labels, I mean it's

[00:32:43]

[Lisa] got music attached, I like the word bells up, it's already like telling me it's cool but I read the profile right and we had to go uh it was earlier this year we were going somewhere as you know we travel and pet sit and do all kinds of that kind of thing and where we were going they're like oh come over for dinner we're gonna have this this this and she told me what we were going to eat because we have shellfish allergies and all kinds of stuff so she told me is this going to be fine so I knew what we were going to have, and on the way, I stopped at the store.

[00:33:12]

[Lisa] I said, 'Do you mind if I bring wine?' Because I hate to bring wine and find out, like you can't do that, you know. So, I read the wine; I read the profile, read where it came from, where it was, you know, sourced - Russian River, I think as I recall. It was red wines, and I didn't go, 'Hey, here's a more expensive one because that might be too heavy.' Did this middle-of-the- road kind of thing, right? But then I read the profile; would it go with the meal? It did. Got two bottles of wine. We got there; Nancy was finishing up a bottle of wine that she had purchased, so I brought the wines out.

[00:33:43]

[Lisa] You know what she did, and I can say this because I didn't didn't enjoy the dinner as much. She had the audacity or number one, I said, 'Well, do you want to taste them?' And she... 's like no no before we taste we do this she read the wine on an app and went and I looked at her like this is rude number one to me and i'm like oh my god i'm not going to drink that i'm not going to drink that i'm not you don't someone's bringing something to your table you open it up and you taste it and if you

[00:34:14]

[Lisa] don't like it you just go spit it in your bathroom or whatever but she looked this up and I remember going and Nancy and I are looking at each other going well this is odd like you know I know that we're in a new era now and people are apified and I thought and she turned to me and she goes oh my gosh your wine! I was higher rated at night, it was like whatever and I got it on sale so what. She goes it's rated higher than ours, I said well have you tasted it? Why don't we do the taste test then? She tastes it, she goes oh it's so much better and I'm like why did you have to look it up to see how you would appreciate it instead of just tasting it?

[00:34:59]

[Lisa] I don't understand. Like I read the profile does it match the food does it is it whereas I'm not trying to be rude or take this negative but I do feel that we're rating things according to things and like apps and stuff instead of just try it have fun, take that dirt road to the left if you don't know where it is, you don't have to always look at the map come on let's have some fun i want that fun back you know so i think you're doing that

[Dave] and and you know the thing about the reviews is you know i think kind of like any review system that we have these days you know you really have to dig into the reviews and you know you have to dig into the reviews and you know you have to

[00:35:38]

[Dave] individual reviews and just kind of get a sense of the profile of the person doing the reviews and you know again it gets back to the question of okay well that person may not have liked the wine but does that person's tastes match up with yours and it's nearly impossible to sort of figure that out then you you talk about the bottle itself, you know well, okay, you know with the labels it's it's very difficult because you know you're only going to get told the story on the label that the winery wants to tell you, right? um so you're trying to make this decision based on their marketing department, um and they you know they may write it in such a way that it's not quite clear what's going on.

[00:36:19]

[Dave] one of the things that pieces of advice that i always give folks that are sort of breaking into enjoying wine is don't go to the large, big box places. Go to a small uh independently owned wine store because the people that own that store curated all the bottles that they sell they know the characteristics of every wine in that shop and if you go and if you can develop a relationship with those people to say you know hey here's you know taking your example you know hey here's what we're having for dinner um you know what would be a good match with you know with this you know the kind of give the general thoughts of the wines that i'm thinking about um you know what would be a good match for that and inevitably you will find that the wine that you're buying is not the one that you're buying is the one that you're

[00:37:08]

[Dave] fgoing to find that going down that road is going to make you so much happier in the long term because you're going to be talking and learning from a position of strength from people that have actually tasted the wine right and so you can make decisions based on people that have actual experience with the product

[Lisa] are we back to relationships again?

[Dave] yeah because when folks are here it's the same idea right i mean it doesn't matter what other people think um you know it may matter as to whether you know you make a

decision to go to a wine store or not you know go to a certain winery in the first place um i suppose if you see enough negative reviews that could be something but at the same time if it's just a matter of personal preference, you know.

[00:37:48]

[Dave] Try it, enjoy it, you know. See what's out there, and as we always see people are surprised inevitably by what they discover about you know themselves and about the world of wine. It's just much broader than a lot of people suspect.

[Lisa] It is now for you. Just going in, all right. I'm going to make this life change of a career and purchase property. And I mean, this is a whole big deal. Then having to brainstorm and come up with, okay, this is how we're going to work with our clientele. Re: going to have them make appointments come in have this experience, you make these choices and then you have to run with it sometimes we all know as in anything in life and not everything goes as smooth as we want, but most times it will if you dedicate to it.

[00:38:31]

[Lisa] How has it been for you making that decision even with your family because it changes everything for a family when one person goes, 'Hey, I'm going to do this instead.' so you kind of all have to be on board and understand like there's sacrifices and commitments right that go hand in hand there

[Dave] there are um and and those sacrifices have happened in a couple of ways um my lovely wife as she always likes to say she still has a full -time job uh she is a freelance marketer and her business is very successful to the point where you know in particularly in the years of the winery could really help support the family while the winery was getting to the point where it could at the very least pay its own way um you know we're at a point with the winery where it can't cover uh it can't cover all of the household expenses, but it can absolutely pitch in where needed.

[00:39:26]

[Dave] Uh, and but to get to that point, you know Sara needed to be able to step up and help, and God love her for doing that. It's also is a lifestyle issue when we tend to take appointments, um, you know, and they do happen of course during the week, but most of them are going to be on weekends, um, you know, the times when I think folks normally think, 'Oh, you know, hey this is our our time to rest and chill. 'Well, you know, for us that's when we're going to be, you know, and more so me here, but doing tasting appointments, so you know, you're gonna give that up, um, and make that the trade-off that you make is that you get to live in an amazing place. You get to do something you're really passionate about, get to meet a lot of people that really share that passion that we have.

[00:40:15]

[Dave] I mean, being as being our our size and being by appointment it does self-select in a lot of ways, you know. Our ideal customers are people that love wine but are not snobby

about it and it's not a matter of life and death you know people that you know as we've been talking about want to have the new experiences that want to broaden their horizons and want to just sit down and have a glass or two with a friend um and so you know we get to do that in a lot of ways too you know the winery becomes our social life in that way because a lot of times

[00:40:49]

[Dave] the customers that we get because we get to you know be directly with them the whole time they become friends

[Lisa] that's awesome see i love that that's like for us too the way our world works and it's like you know when you half of our friends are bed and breakfast owners it's the same thing they're working their butts off, everyone's checking in at three o'clock or midnight or something, but it's this relationship you build and I think this is the biggest lesson that you've shared today: it's all comes down to relationships, whether it's your customers coming in, relationship dynamics within your family, the relationship with your vendors so it's all about cultivating that.

[00:41:28]

[Lisa] Did you think that's how it was going to be when you first said, 'I'm going to go into wine because I like wine like even making that decision and then going, 'I'm really going to do it's and then it starts to happen that's going to be wild

[Dave] i think that a lot of times a lot of the decisions that you make lead to some natural consequences um if you decide as we did that you're going to be a small winery they're going to be some realities about how you're going to have to operate as a result of that um you know because we we knew that we were entering an area that is known for really high quality wines almost across the country and so

[00:42:07]

[Dave] across the board so you know i it's the idea that you're going to come in and set up shop and say well my wines are great well yeah but your neighbor's wines are probably great too and their neighbor's wines are great too so what are going to be the things that you will do to set your business apart. well if you're going to be a tiny micro producer the way we are well okay what are the things that we can do to maximize our size and leverage that. well first of all we're not going to throw the biggest most lavish parties we're not going to have a

[00:42:41]

[Dave] building that looks like the taj mahal um you know we're not going to be you know we're not going to give you a song and dance and all that stuff but what we're going to give you is great company, a great explanation of what went into the craft of each individual wine, um and it really starts there but it doesn't end there because you know, once you've sort of done that, I always say that when I meet a group for the first time, it's like going on

a first date, right?

[00:43:10]

[Dave] Like you're telling your background stories and you know you're telling a lot of stories but once you've have established that relationship and people come back; we tend to find that we spend almost no time talking about the lines, um, because at some point one, the wines have to speak for themselves, and then the relationship that you built then leads to 'hey, what are your kids up to?' You know, I mean, you talk about oh my god, our lives are so complicated you know you're lives' and our craziness' and all these little things that happen, the stuff that we talk to, you know, our friends about. And that is sort of how that develops.

[00:43:46]

[Dave] So, no, I mean, I don't think it's possible to kind of see every little detail that's going to come from that. But I think it was certainly possible at the beginning to see that, you know, yes, I was not going to be spending my time driving around with wine distributors in other states. You know, we knew this was going to be all about, you know, us leading people through, you know, our world and kind of showing them what it is that we do. So, you know, from that perspective, you know, a lot of the things, the little details we were going to figure out as we went along. But I think the kind of main focus we had down very, very early on.

[00:44:28]

[Lisa] Well, let's talk about going into this new chapter that you guys did, going into the winemaking and running the winery. And going into a small business, you've got a background in music. You've got a background as a tax attorney. You know, you've lived in different places in the country. We talked about before we recorded in your background. So you've had different experiences. Do you think having all these experiences, every time you do something new in your life, you draw from the past and bring it to the future, what you want to bring in. So have those qualities from travel from and even traveling to taste. Wine in different countries. Has all of that helped you today? Are you seeing your past help you now?

[Dave] Oh, absolutely.

[00:45:13]

[Dave] Absolutely. And the key is the experiences that you've had and the lessons that you draw from the experiences that you've had. You know, when we started to get into the wine business, you know, I was a lawyer for 10 years and you stopped being a lawyer and people look at you and say, 'oh, you know, don't you feel like you, you know, you threw away, you know, your previous career? No. I mean, those lessons that I learned in that business, I apply every single day. You know, the fact is a winery is a business and it needs to be run like a business. Now, I mean, I know that for some winery owners, this is a pet fun vanity project for them and they don't necessarily care whether they make a living off

of it.

[00:45:58]

[Dave] For us, this pays bills. So this has to be done in a sustainable way, in an intelligent way. Without it looking like that, you know what I mean? I mean, we've got to be able to provide the experiences that are such that people don't even really think about that as much as other than just kind of being in that moment. So there definitely are challenges there. And, you know, we certainly recognize that. But, you know, also, you know, having been a musician, right? I mean, I was a French horn player for 20 years. And that's, you know, I've been a musician for 20 years. The reason why the theme of our winery is centered around music. The French horn is our logo.

[00:46:42]

[Dave] All of our 10 wines are named for specific pieces of music or a composer, something that captures what that wine feels like. I'm big. And when I'm talking about wine, I'm always talking about texture. I'm always talking about what you feel. I can't tell you what you taste. I can't tell you what you may smell. And I don't want to. I mean, those are connections. I can't tell you what you

[Lisa] Yeah, that's your discovery.

[Dave] Yeah, exactly. And that's going to be every individual's palate is different. Their experiences are going to be different. They bring all those things in with them. So I don't want to get in the way of those particular connections.

[00:47:18]

[Dave] But what I will do is talk about, you know, my winemaking always comes down to making wines that work with your palate, not fighting your palate.

[Lisa] Right.

[Dave] And that can be in a lot of different ways. You know, but we those are things that we share with everybody that comes in. And I think that's a really important thing. But it's that feeling that the music ties into so well, you know, for lack of a better way to describe it, when I am tasting a wine, I am my brain hears it as much as it tastes it. Right. So it's that same idea of feeling is dynamic. Exactly. You hear a melody. Does the melody make sense? You know, you don't need to have you don't need to be a professional musician.

[00:47:59]

[Dave] You don't need to be a performer to when you hear a passage. Yeah, that makes sense. There As a balance there, it's telling a story. And that's where the tie- in with the wine comes in so well, because we're essentially doing the same thing. Every wine is going to tell a story. And we can describe those in kind of musical, musical ways. I mean, obviously, we're not going to, you know, break down technical things. But that idea that,

you know, it's just something that just will hit you.

[Lisa] Right. It's an atmosphere. Yeah, it's a feeling; it is. So do you have a playlist for the winery?

[Dave] We do. We have one on our website, we have a Spotify playlist.

[00:48:40]

[Dave] And every one of the pieces that we have or composers that we have named a wine in honor of is featured there. And that's very helpful for when people take the wines home, where, you know, you can actually do a at-home wine and music pairing. Yeah, totally. I mean, we're all taught to think of like wine and food, wine and food. Those things are nice. But of course, everybody will have their own idea of what fits the best there. If you really want to get behind and into the head of the person who's doing the crafting, I just think music is a much more direct way to accomplish that.

[Lisa] Do you listen to music when you Re- doing like tests and taste tests and all the those behind-the- scenes, like even driving things around, and, you know, getting on the vineyard?

[00:49:29]

[Lisa] Do you listen to music all the time?

[Dave] Oh, all the time. I mean, it's what makes my day go by. It's what helps me to absorb, you know, what is going on around me. You know, it sets a mood. It allows me to relax. You know, I have anxiety issues, as I think a lot of people do. And this is just kind of one of the ways that just helps me to provide some balance and Zen, and just kind of more than anything, just kind of allows me to be receptive to what the grapes or the wines are trying to tell me.

[Lisa] Yeah. See, to me, it should be blasting music out into the vineyard, not blasting in a negative way, but just like the music.

[00:50:13]

[Lisa] To me, the growth of a vine looks like music to me. If you, you know, did it like a time lapse and you put it with music, you can see what I'm talking about, right?

[Dave] Oh, yeah. Yeah. There's a there's a cycle. I mean, and that cycle, it is so, you know, when you're doing this and you start to see the agricultural side of it, that cycle just plays every single year, although it is always different every year. And that's that's the one thing, you know, especially where we are in the Willamette Valley. No two growing seasons are the same. And they tell different stories every time, which is, you know, helpful in a lot of ways when folks come in, because it allows us to tell, you know, not just the how I crafted it part from, you know, taking 10 percent from barrel one, five percent from barrel two, so on and so forth.

[00:51:04]

[Dave] It's, well, a lot of those decisions I had to make because here were the weather patterns of that particular year. Sometimes we get years that are really hot. Sometimes we get years that are cooler, wetter, dry, you know, all those factors that just go into what you get when you harvest. And because of that, it will always be a slightly different story. But what I want folks to be able to notice is that the consistency of the storytelling. Right. I mean, you can always, obviously, what the intention is behind what we're trying to do the same as in music.

[Lisa] Right. You can learn from different musicians and emulate and even cover their music. But you still have to have your own signature sound, you know.

[00:51:49]

[Lisa] So somebody knows even if it's the same song - oh, that's so -and -so playing because of that specific sound.

[Dave] And it's not and it's not a, you know, especially for us, it's not just a cookie cutter sort of thing. I mean, one of the trends that we've seen in Oregon is that we've got sort of these, I guess, warehouses, for lack of a better word, where you've got one winemaker that makes wines for a lot of different people. You know, a lot of small, a lot of smaller producers do not physically make their own wine. So you've got, you know, somebody making wines, like I say, for 50, 60 people.

[00:52:28]

[Dave] And when you go to those wineries and you start to say, 'Boy, these wines taste very, very similar to the last people.' And then you start to say, 'Well, these wines taste very, very similar to the last people.' And then you turn around. Now, they may all be really good, but is it really telling a story that is distinctive to that particular winery? Or is it just telling you, know, the same story that you're getting in a place down the road? You know what I, for better or worse, what you're getting in the glass is me and I don't make wine for anybody else. So, you know, what we are able to do is tell, you know, through my lenses, a very unique story that is going to be interpreted different by everybody.

[00:53:06]

[Dave] And that's okay.

[Lisa] Now, in closing, if you could have a tasting with three people from the past or the present or the future or fictional, I don't care, but you want to hang out with them and maybe learn from them, you know, or see what they think about your wine. Who do you want?

[Dave] Oh, goodness. You know, one of the things that I think about is just sort of when I grew up in the eighties and what our society was like then. I mean, it's, it's never perfect, never perfect versus what our society is now.

[Lisa] We had fun.

[Dave] We had fun and things, life did not feel, I mean, people had differences of course, but it did not feel anywhere near as tooth and nail as it feels today.

[00:53:52]

[Dave] So from my perspective, you know, the people that I would love to talk to are people that are uniters, people that can talk to a wide variety of folks and kind of have a conversation with each other. And I think that's, I think that's how do you establish those connections? So Martin Luther King would be on my list for that. Gandhi would be on my list for that. And the other person, and this might surprise folks is Walt Disney. Yeah. Because the thing about Walt Disney, and you know, and a lot has been written about Disney and what he was like in person. And, and yes, I mean, I get that, you know, there are definite downsides to Walt Disney on a personal level, but what that man accomplished was to be able to connect, you know, in a way that was so unique to billions of people in this world on a level that has not been seen before.

[00:54:42]

[Dave] And I doubt will be seen since. And I want to get, I would love to get a sense of his thought creativity and thought process behind that. I think that would just be absolutely fascinating.

[Lisa] It's the creativity. I mean, he really dreamed he's like, go for your dreams, you know, he did.

[Dave] And then the other thing about Disney that I admire so much is, he hired amazing people. You know, when, when you look at how that enterprise developed, and I'm talking about before the days when it was a publicly traded company, you know, way back when the Imagineers had so much of the power in the design and the implementation of things in the parks and the movies, he knew how to find and retain great people, which is an amazing skill.

[00:55:31]

[Dave] It's a skill that I wish more people had because so often I think, you know, you, you have a business or you own something and you think you've got to, you've got to make, do everything. You've got to have your hands in everything rather than just say, 'Hey, I recognize talent. I can hire that talent and that I can let that talent do what I hired the talent to do and go do something else.' That's a better use of my time and my skillset.

[Lisa] It's huge. I know people in business where they stepped aside because they were just, they, they, it was time for them. They hadn't grown like they own the company and they weren't growing as they should, because and this is an interesting world.

[00:56:14]

[Lisa] I mean, people can be in their eighties and open a business, which I think is great. Right. But there's people who didn't progress with the times. Our industry sucked in regards to people not jumping on the bandwagon. I mean, we come from print and back in the day of old school typewriting. I mean, like typesetting. I mean, we've gone from, you know, we've gone from, you know, we've gone from that to developing our own film, to being digital, to podcasting, to all these things that changed and how many newspapers didn't was all about change. Right. How many newspapers refused to even have a website back in the day.

[00:56:48]

[Lisa] I mean, we were doing a lot of this pre-Google and it's like, people look at us like, like, yeah, we are that old, but it's about that progression. And it's so important as companies and, you know, no matter what, if you can hire or work with people that can help you progress. As things change and then even be ahead of the progression, which sometimes is really painful because you're doing the dirty work. You know what I mean? There's a weird balance in that, in being the pioneer. Pioneering is hard. You take the battles and then somebody could come up and just take everything you've done and skate off of your back. Right. But there's a thing in your soul that's important.

[00:57:29]

[Lisa] But I love, I love that because I just think higher, who's going to be better and don't let yourself get in your own way. If you don't want to progress in something and you're progressing in a different area, that's okay. I have a friend who her company, she said, you know what? My staff are better than me. I'm going to go do this over here. It's still my company. I still listen and all that, but she went and did something else. That's the way to be in her company rocks and they're all happy.

[Dave] And guarantee you it's a place people like to work because they're empowered. And they recognize their skills and they're allowed to do what they were hired to do.

[00:58:11]

[Dave] I mean, when you, when I, ever you hear about bad environments, it's always because people are being micromanaged. And it, it doesn't become about, you know, what is best for the development of our company. It is what is best for my personal ego or my pocketbook or whatever it is. I've always kind of found that if you do the right things, those issues will inevitably take care of themselves. I mean, there's a reason why Disney is now the empire that it is. Right. And, and I don't think it's whoever it's whatever Walt intended, but you know, in Walt's lifetime, he was plenty successful by following those strategies.

[Lisa] I agree. I agree. Well, it's been real fun chatting with you, Dave. Anytime.

[00:58:54] **[Lisa]** I know we'll be doing more shows and you've got to come on our happy hour parties because you know, we like a good happy hour. Don't you?

[Dave] Anytime. Anytime.

[Lisa] Happy hours. Happy hours. Everybody, remember bells, bellsupwinery.com. Go check them out online and make that appointment when you go to Oregon and the Willamette Valley, but you also ship online.

[Dave] We do ship. We ship all over the country. There are only two states I can't ship directly to, that's Utah and Kentucky, but any other state we can ship to, yeah. Check us out. We have our list of our wines on the website, which you'll see, but also just reach out to us directly by email or by phone.

[00:59:33]

[Dave] One thing I'll say about our website is it's a little bit different. It is specifically designed not to do point and click ordering for the exact same reason that we've talked about on the rest of it. We want this to be more personal. So, email us, call us if you'd like to place an order, because we want to have a conversation with you. We want to get to know you and, and figure out, you know, Hey, what are going to be the best wines that we make that are going to be a match for what you like. And we don't want to sell you things that you're not going to want.

[Lisa] Because it's different too. Isn't it?

[01:00:02]

[Lisa] A lot of people that have come to us and then maybe they live outside the country, or outside the state or region, it's not like you just start buying wine online and hoping right.

[Dave] That's certainly most of our business is what you've described, but you know, we, we will get situations where um, you know, in, in particular one of the things that's happened is we've gotten, um, because we have the theme, the music theme, we've gotten a lot of symphony musicians that may not have come to visit us, but because they love the theme so much, um, they've, they've bought wine and tried it for the first time.

[Lisa] And gifts. And gifts because it's a good thing. Yeah.

[01:00:38]

[Lisa] It's like, Hey, you know, and, and Oregon wine month has got to be, isn't that May? Oregon wine month is in May. So everybody start planning now, start, start planning, but you, you know, every day is an Oregon wine day. You guys have awesome wine and it's been a pleasure even being in Willamette Valley. We'll be back in your neck of the woods next year.

[Dave] Excellent.

[Lisa] Not during, not during your snow season. We're leaving at that point. So we'll see you. We will actually get to see you both. We're going to.

[Dave] We will look forward to hosting. We can't wait. We can't wait.

[Lisa] Well, everyone again, Bell's Up Winery. com. They're up in the Willamette Valley, uh, very close to Portland.

[01:01:13]

[Lisa] If you're flying into Portland, close to Seattle, even in, you know, it's not that huge of a state. Well, it's big, but it's not, you know, it's doable. You can, if you go to Oregon, you must go there and report back. Thanks so much, Dave, and say hi to Sara for us.

[Dave] Will do, Lisa. Thanks so much for having me.

[Lisa] Thank you for listening to the Big Blend Radio Success Show. This show is brought to you by Big Blend Magazines. You can keep up with us at bigblendradio.com, and check out our magazines at blendradioandtv.com.