

The COO Roundtable with Matt Sonnen

Episode 68 – Rachel Lebowitz

[00:00:00] Hi, I'm Luke Sonnen. Welcome to the COO Roundtable powered by Coldstream Wealth Management. Here's your host, Matt Sonnen!

Matt Sonnen: Welcome everyone to episode 68. We're going to call this the touchy-feely episode, because we're going to hit on a few topics that I've spoken to many COOs and operations professionals about; you could say this is the dark side of the COO position.

We're going to talk about burnout in today's episode. We're going to talk about our struggles to manage up with our bosses. We're going to tackle the sometimes codependent relationship between visionary and integrator — to use the words from EOS, which many of our listeners use to run their businesses.

And I just want to start with a quick story just to set the stage a bit. My first COO job, over 15 years ago, I went to my bosses and I said, you know, I'm not completely motivated by money. My biggest goal here is I just want to be considered the most valuable person on the team. And they stared at me with these blank faces and they said, “You don't bring in clients; how on earth could we consider you valuable in this organization?”

And I, I just didn't accept the reality of the situation. I made sure that I was the first person in the office every morning. I volunteered for any project, no matter how big or small it was. I routinely was in the office on weekends. I was running myself ragged, trying to get the approval from these people — who were very honest with me! They told me up front, “we only value those that bring in clients.” But I just kept thinking, well, if I work just a little bit harder, they'll finally accept me, which of course they never did or not in the way that I was hoping they would.

And if I'm really being honest, I think I still have some kind of nightmare about that job, at least once a month, even to this day. And the dreams are always the same. My bosses are — they need something from me. They're walking into a client meeting and I can't get them what they need for the meeting, or I can't get the TV in the conference room to turn on for their meeting. And they're just standing in the corner there with these disappointed faces.

And I really do: I think I've had that dream every month for over a decade, at least once a month. And so I was shocked when I stumbled across this new book. “*Empowered COO, Eliminate Burnout, Resentment, and Self-Doubt as a Second-in-Command*,” because it was literally speaking to me. It explained why I had these feelings of insecurity, and more importantly, it talked about how to overcome them.

I wish I had this book 15 years ago. It could have saved me a lot of nightmares. So with us today, I'm really excited we have the author of the book, Rachel Lebowitz. And so Rachel, thank you so much for being here.

[00:02:41] **Rachel Lebowitz:** Thank you so much, Matt. Wow. That's such a powerful introduction because it's a testament to why I wrote this book.

And, you know, for you to come and say it publicly is so courageous because the challenge with this book is that nobody wants to talk about it because it's like the dark underside of being that integrator CEO and second-in-command. It's funny because just today I'm preparing an email to go out and it's about: are you following the wrong Olympics? Are you trying to win the people-pleasing Olympics? You know, and I think that that's where many COOs and second-in-commands get caught up.

[00:03:22] **Matt Sonnen:** Well, before we dive into the book, let's just talk real quick about your career. Just give us your story.

[00:03:28] **Rachel Lebowitz:** Yeah. So I grew up in a business household, a lot of kids, parents both working, loved business, but the most important part for me, the most interesting part was observing how employees acted very differently when my parents, the bosses, were around versus not, and that's when I said, you know, I want to be a business therapist. I want to understand business behavioral science, why people act how they do in a business setting. So that's always been the theme around anything that I've done. I went to school for business behavior science. And then many years later, my husband and I bought up this company. We print on flexible packaging and we grew very fast because my husband is a very talented visionary.

But like any mom and good wife, I complained to anybody that would listen how he wasn't home. I wasn't present. And that's when we understood that we needed a system. So we put in EOS as our system. That was in 2018, I believe. You know, I tell people it gets you what you want from your business. We wanted growth and peace of mind. And we got that.

And when we got that, my husband looked at me and he's like, this is business behavioral science. It's everything you ever wanted to do. Why don't you become an implementer? So I became an implementer, but the secret truth to why I became an implementer was because I wanted to understand visionaries better.

I wanted to understand how they think. It was always very fascinating to me, how they think differently than the rest of the world. And then working with all these visionaries and integrators in my business. I suddenly saw these patterns that made so much sense too, and it lined up with my personal life being a spouse of visionary, of being somebody that is recovering from codependency and a professional codependent recovery coach dealing with spouses of addicts. And there were all these patterns that felt so much the same. And that's when I realized that we don't talk about the codependency and enmeshment that happens in the person that is supporting the visionary.

So that's basically a nutshell of how I got to where I am today.

[00:05:46] **Matt Sonnen:** And then, I mean, you've touched on a little bit there with that story, but then how was this book born? I mean, what made you actually sit down and bang out this book, which again, is incredible.

[00:05:56] **Rachel Lebowitz:** Yeah, so this book was born about a year ago when I had, you know, over 30 clients and I realized this pattern where each and every one of them got stuck.

You know, sometimes my clients didn't have an integrator and they would hire an integrator. And they would be very excited, and they would have high hopes for everything the integrator would achieve for them. Sometimes there was an integrator in place that has been there for a long time, and then suddenly we would all get to the same place where we thought the visionaries are the bottlenecks, but what I am understanding is that actually the integrator is the bottleneck, because if they become enmeshed and codependent, they're literally holding back the whole organization.

And I saw way too much destruction and self-destruction, you know: businesses not growing integrators wanting out. A big red flag for me is when somebody is designed to be an integrator in their DNA, they love bringing visions into reality. And they get so burned out and they call me and they say, I never want to work for a visionary again. I think I'm going to start my own business. And that's basically signing up to go against your grain every day of the week, and that is so painful, and nobody should be there. Instead, we should harness our character traits to be our best selves and do what we're meant to be best at, you know.

So about a year ago when this all just came together, going through my own recovery journey and working with spouses and I was like, wow, it was that moment that it clicked. Like that, that was really when it clicked. Also, Gino Wickman gave this keynote about how visionaries have addictive personalities. It's something that I knew innately, but I didn't — I wasn't able to confirm it. And then suddenly when he confirmed it on stage, I was able to take that and use that as the baseline for all these patterns that I identified, because it's what I call relationship math. It's that visionaries have addictive personality traits. They're technically workaholics to some degree or another, right? And that's that scale that I map out.

And at the highest level, you know, it's a glorified addiction: the people that have addictive personalities — compulsive personalities — tend to attract codependent personalities. People that, you know, anything that is too much is toxic. So codependency: we all have a normal degree of codependency and interdependency, but at the highest level, we lose our sense of self. We lessen our value, by just not valuing ourselves.

[00:08:34] **Matt Sonnen:** That's incredible. And I'll get into it in a little bit, but that — what you just said about you get burned out and you say, well, I'm gonna go start my own thing. It's exactly what I did. But now I'm back in the COO role because I realized these are my character traits, and I realized this is actually going to be better for me. We'll touch on that in a minute.

But before we before we get into what I'm calling the dark side of the COO position, let's start really high level. And how would you, Rachel, how would you just define at a high level, the role of the COO or the role of the second-in-command, as you call it in your book?

[00:09:05] **Rachel Lebowitz:** Yeah. So there is the role that everybody talks about, like bringing visions into reality, bringing logic, detail-oriented. And Dr. Doug Brackman, who wrote the foreword to my book and wrote his own book, "*Driven*," which talks about that driven personality, the D2D4 gene, that's the addictive trait. And he says the difference between visionaries and integrators is: visionaries can see the mountaintops. They're so excited they can see the next mountains. Integrators can see all the stumbling blocks, and

COOs can see all the obstacles leading up to the mountain. So at the highest level, a great COO is really good at discerning. They're very good at taking apart issues, seeing what's working, what's not working, taking all the ideas the visionary brings to the table, being able to prioritize: saying this is important, this is not important, this is going to wait for next year. That is the integrator's unique ability: using, tapping into that power of intuition and discernment, which that I lay out my book is if you have assertiveness and decisiveness, then you can have discernment.

I call it, you know, integrators need to develop ADD, but not the visionary kind. And that's where assertiveness, decisiveness, and discernment comes out. I know that this is not the typical definition of an integrator, but what we do realize is that when we canvass people that are integrators versus visionaries — at their DNA level, that they're right hemisphere people versus left hemisphere people.

[00:10:36] **Matt Sonnen:** Interesting. Yeah. And so then you touched on it a little bit, but what about this role leads to burnout? Because I've talked to so many, and nobody wants to admit it. Like you said, we all try to keep it hidden, but, you just run yourself ragged. So what, what about the role leads to burnout?

[00:10:53] **Rachel Lebowitz:** So, I'm going to challenge everybody to go on my website, Empowered COO, and take the assessment: that assessment would rate you — how empowered are you? What that means: how strong are you in being assertive, decisive, and discerning in your role as a second-in-command?

And there's one question that 90% of the people taking the assessment get wrong, and I don't know if I want to give away the answer, you know — then I'm putting it out in the public. But the idea is what happens is that when we're kind of, there is that pre-recorded — what do we call it — messaging that we have in our head that if we are assisting somebody else with a vision, then we become secondary. Our needs don't matter. Our identity doesn't matter. We lose who we are as a person. That dissolvency of identity is what creates enmeshment, because if we don't have clear boundaries of where our role starts and ends, where our efforts start and end, our accountability and responsibility, for some reason, it's that an integrator assumes responsibility for things that they're not responsible for, and going over that line is losing your sense of self.

So when you lose your sense of self, that is when you become enmeshed and codependent. For example, if a business is not — you know, if a visionary who's a business owner is choosing to make a terrible business decision, technically that is not in the second-in-command role.

If they decide to take the profits of the company and go buy a piece of real estate or something else, or maybe expand the business in a way that doesn't fit the day-to-day, and you are trying to talk blue in your face to get that visionary to see that... Let's say if you are a contractor company and now he wants to go and buy real estate, right? And you would say real estate is not in your unique ability, you're not good at it; let's focus on contracting. But this visionary doesn't want to hear you, and you assume responsibility. You're going out of your role because really, we're forgetting to differentiate the difference between everyday responsibilities, and what's ownership responsibilities. If the second-in-command is not a partner, then the conversation has to be totally different. And what we forget is that we can hold CEOs and visionaries accountable, just not in the traditional way. And the way we would do that would be actually by mapping out the consequences for the visionary,

because one of the biggest traits about codependency and addiction is a lack of seeing consequences.

When an addict is in their active addiction, they don't think about how they're going to feel after they're drinking or taking that drug or, anything that they're doing. At the same time, when that visionary is hyper-focused on a goal — maybe the goal is money or fame — every visionary is in this for something else. It's not always about money. Ninety percent of the time visionaries say, Oh, it's not about the money for me. And they are a hundred percent right. Because it is for something else. It's the recognition they receive, maybe from their family or community, from themselves. And when they get hyper focused on getting that: that's the drug; then they lose focus of everything else, and they cannot think of the consequences. So the way we would map it out is say, look, from where I stand as an integrator, knowing your finances, being accountable for the P& L of the company, this is not going to work.

And you can map out and you can show them why it's not going to work, but here's where the consequences have to come in. You've got to say what's going to happen if they do decide to take that route. Is it that you won't be able to cover for them? Is it that you're going to decide to leave? You've got to discuss whatever the consequences can afford to be: like, for some, it's leaving, for some, it's like, look — I'm going to take care of the finances, you're not going to have access to the bank account. But that's like a little bit harsh, and that relationship has to have the foundation to be able to take that consequence. But if you don't discuss the consequences in advance, you're basically setting yourself up to be the fall guy. And then you're taking responsibility for things that are not yours. And then you're feeling resentful and then you go into that shame spiral.

[00:15:06] **Matt Sonnen:** Yeah. You talk about it in the book: as a COO, you, you are second in command. You fall in love with the business, but at the end of the day, it's not your business and you don't have the final say in what's happening, but it just, it's gut wrenching, because you're just, you're so bought into the success of the company.

And again, you just, you don't have the final say in some of these decisions and, it just mentally, it's important to keep that in mind. And like you said, it's not your responsibility. Some of these things are not your responsibility in your role, and you just have to accept that and understand it. It's going to make your mental well-being so much better.

[00:15:44] **Rachel Lebowitz:** I think it's more than accept that. I think the missing piece is where you have to verbally have a conversation about it. This goes to personal relationships too. Couples, like one spouse — a wife — says, well, I don't want to pick up my husband's socks anymore, so I'm going to leave it on the ground. Well, that is passive aggressive. Instead, have that conversation and say: hey, Honey, I don't want to pick up your socks anymore. So when you're going to leave your socks on the ground, you're going to come back after work and you're still going to find them on the ground.

So you're basically letting them know what the consequence is going to be. And on many CEOs, because they're afraid of looking bad or not being Mrs. or Mr. Nice guy, they're afraid to have that hard conversation of like: hey, this is what the consequences will look like.

[00:16:28] **Matt Sonnen:** like. I love that. Well, speaking of visionaries and integrators, you have an amazing statistic in the book: it says, “only 22 percent of the world is cut out to be a visionary, but only five and a half percent of the world is truly cut out to be an integrator. So talk to us about those numbers. The 22 percent didn't surprise me, but the five and a half

definitely did. So talk to us about those numbers and where did these authors of that study — where did they come up with that?

[00:16:59] **Rachel Lebowitz:** So, those numbers that you see are actually directly quoted from Gino Wickman and Mark C. Winters' book, "*Rocket Fuel*." And what they're saying is that only five percent of the world qualifies to be what I would say is an effective integrator. They're not writing the word "effective" integrator, but what from my work, I'm discerning and understanding is that only five percent of people really have that empowerment of having assertiveness, decisiveness, and discernment to be able to constantly stand up to somebody that's a flaming visionary.

You know, visionaries are amazing. Their energy is so overwhelming, though. And if we don't strengthen ourselves and have the backbone to constantly stay, you know, centered, then we become ineffective.

[00:17:49] **Matt Sonnen:** Only five and a half percent of the world is cut out to be an empowered COO is what you're saying. I like that.

[00:17:55] **Rachel Lebowitz:** Right. And here's why I think my work is so important: because I believe that we can bring that number up. It's not that you're either born with it or not: it's simply that the skills did not exist for it in the world until today.

[00:18:10] **Matt Sonnen:** Yeah. Yep. No, that's great. Let's talk about codependence. You said you're a codependence coach. So describe how the visionary/integrator relationship can oftentimes be a codependent one.

[00:18:23] **Rachel Lebowitz:** Yeah, so we started talking about that when I said that visionaries have a lot of traits of people that are struggling with addiction. The fact that, you know, most visionaries — 10 percent of the world — has a D2D4 gene that is mutated that Dr. Doug talks about in his book, "*Driven*," which means that they don't get the message that they have enough dopamine in their brain. So they're constantly looking for more. When a visionary is constantly moving that goalpost — and we've all met these visionaries and at the highest level, they exist — of like, we were about to reach 10 million and the visionary walks in he's like, oh, let's do 20, right? Have you ever experienced that?

[00:19:05] **Matt Sonnen:** Yes, absolutely. Yeah.

[00:19:07] **Rachel Lebowitz:** So that's a moving goalpost and that concept of having a constant moving goalpost is actually the need for more adrenaline and for more dopamine. And people that have that characteristics have the same gene. It's the alcoholic gene, it's the exact same gene.

So. I don't, you know, I'm not the one saying this. I'm just bringing the statistics and the science from the side of, you know, 12-step program and all people that are in recovery. But basically, anybody that has an addictive personality will attract somebody that will enable them to realize their addiction, and that cycle stops when the enabler says no more.

Now we have given the word enabler a bad rep because there is healthy enabling — you know, as a spouse you can enable your visionary husband to grow and be healthy and be

present, or you can enable them to say: it's fine, you don't have to be home, you don't have to be around.

And the same thing is what we're doing in businesses. So, as a COO, you can either enable the visionary to be reckless and make decisions that are going to hurt them and the company. And every person that takes a risk — the only reason people are risk takers is because they subconsciously know that if they fail, somebody will catch them.

If somebody — you know, nobody went flying off a cliff without anybody being on the bottom and anybody being there to catch them or having a parachute open up. They might not press the parachute right away. They might like the feeling of only pressing it halfway through, but they're hanging on to something.

There's no risk taking without somebody holding them, you know. So, when when a COO becomes the one that's catching everything without using their discernment, without holding up that mirror to the visionary in a healthy way — it's not in a way of like, a parenting relationship, it's not being the principal.

I find that, you know, from my knowledge of codependency, there's two types of codependents: that we can become overt codependent or covert, and overt codependency is where we become the control freak in the room. So we're becoming dominant. We're trying to control this visionary because we're so afraid of the risk taking or their craziness or all that.

Covert, on the other hand, is playing that victim card and being like — I'm so helpless and I have to please this person and I have no say in this and I'm going to do it because that's what I was hired to do. And we fall into that trap because we don't believe that we have what it takes to stand up assertively. And we don't believe that we deserve it and that it's in our role and that's what we should really be doing. But truly what I've seen is that every visionary appreciates a second-in-command that can stand up to them: they want it.

[00:22:08] **Matt Sonnen:** Yeah, I'm sure there's some listeners that are rolling their eyes and saying, oh come on, I'm not married to my boss, but I just — everything you're talking about, I have spoken to countless COO second-in-commands about, and again, one of the amazing things about your book is it kind of gives us this vocabulary, because I didn't quite understand where all of this was coming from, but I know myself: I've had this codependent inclination. And again, I've talked to so many COOs that have these same relationships with their boss. So this is amazing.

[00:22:36] **Rachel Lebowitz:** You know, I was so afraid to use the word codependent in my book. I definitely did not want to put it on the title because then I wouldn't have sold even one copy, but I weaseled it in somewhere there. And that's because we look at COOs with so much authority and they're at the highest level and they're so amazing. And the truth is: they are all of that. Yet there is that little part of a COO when they're under stress and they're burned out and they're losing control, and what happens is they're trying to control their environment and what they don't realize is that they have lost control over themselves: on their boundaries, on their wants or needs, their own personal vision. And that's why they're so resentful.

[00:23:24] **Matt Sonnen:** I love it. Yep. Well, I'm going to read a quote from the book. This is a positive quote, so hopefully we won't go too negative here. But the quote is — and I think a

lot of people will agree with this— so, “an empowered COO is like a triage nurse. When a trauma patient comes in, you assess situations quickly, determine a plan of action, see the necessary steps in your mind's eye, direct and delegate, and make it happen. You are strong and assertive and do not lose yourself under pressure or in times of crisis.” And you describe three core soft skills that every empowered COO has mastered. So it's: project management skills, people and emotional intelligence skills, and strategic thinking skills. So can you describe those for us?

[00:24:11] **Rachel Lebowitz:** Sure. It's really three words to explain — like, it all intertwines — when you take everything that Gino Wickman lists in, “*Rocket Fuel*,” what the skills of an integrator is, it's basically being able to manage people and projects and delegate appropriately. And the reason, you know, what do you think about this quote about the effective COO being a triage nurse?

[00:24:41] **Matt Sonnen:** I think it's exactly right. I mean, it's one of the things I love about the job is you — it's different every day. You never know what's coming in. And so crisis or project, opportunity, whatever. Again, I don't want to make things too negative. So maybe it's not a crisis, but anything that comes across your desk — I think what makes a good COO is they assess it quickly, they know what the plan of action is, and they get the right people involved, and move quickly to get the job done.

[00:25:08] **Rachel Lebowitz:** Absolutely. All of that. And plus, what I am implying is that many COOs and integrators base their value on what they do and not who they are.

[00:25:20] **Matt Sonnen:** Right.

[00:25:21] **Rachel Lebowitz:** The triage nurse is not going to start stitching up somebody, but they will make sure that that person gets stitched up ASAP, right? And that's the idea. Most COOs — what happens is they become hoarders. They want to do everything themselves. They don't want to delegate because they are afraid that they will lose value of who they are if everything is running perfectly and everything is delegated.

I think the best COO isn't full-time. They have a flexible schedule. They come and go as they need, but everything is running perfectly. Nowhere does it say that in order to be a perfect COO, you need to be working a nine-to-five job. It basically means that you're respected, you're valued, you are great at delegating, you're great at pivoting because all the chaos does land at your desk. So you cannot get lost in chaos. You got to know how to quickly make discerning choices of prioritizing: what's true, what's not true, what needs my attention most, what's urgent versus important, right? That's where we're getting stuck.

And the reason we're getting stuck is always based on our personal beliefs and fears. It's fascinating because I've been, you know, coaching COO's one on one for a while now, and whenever it comes to them making big decisions — getting a team member off the team, making a big financial decision, you know, closing down a process, changing a process — and the thing that holds them back is usually a fear of how people will see them, if they're effective, what the visionary will be thinking, what the leadership team will think, and it's fascinating, because it has nothing to do with the actual doing — it's who they are as a person that they are worried about.

[00:27:07] **Matt Sonnen:** I love that. That was great. Well, then, the meat of the book — you've already talked about it a little bit — but the meat of the book says that the path to

becoming an assertive leader is based on embracing three specific skills: discernment, decisiveness, and assertiveness.

And so we'll take them one at a time. Let's talk about discernment. And to go back to what we were talking about earlier, when I got burned out and said, ah, I'm going to go do my own thing. So, I was a consultant for many years. One of the first things that kind of made me stop and go, hmm, maybe I should think about going back to being a COO is I took — and you mentioned it in your book — the book, "*The Six Types of Working Geniuses*" — I took that, I read that book, loved it. And I took the assessment and discernment came up as one of my big strengths. And I knew before reading your book — I knew this is a big component of the COO's job. So I said, hmm, maybe that's a sign that going back to the COO job is it's exactly what you said earlier, you know? That's my core competency; that is my character trait. So, but talk a little bit to us about discernment and then we'll go into decisiveness and assertiveness in a second.

[00:28:13] **Rachel Lebowitz:** Thanks. So I'm not somebody that follows rules, so I'm going to switch it up here. Okay.

I say that COOs need to get some ADD, and not the visionary kind, and that is assertiveness, decisiveness, and discernment. We've got to start with assertiveness because if we're not assertive, we can't get discernment. And you're 100 percent right that COOs need to have discernment.

I think that the six working geniuses having that discernment is a huge way of confirming, like: are you a visionary or an integrator? Because I have not yet found a visionary that is very strong in discernment because they get cloudy thinking by that dopamine, you know, deficiency of constantly wanting to just hit the next high. You know, so assertiveness. Okay, so let's talk first about assertiveness. Assertiveness is, you know, what I say is, like, being able to say what you mean and mean what you say, going back to this concept of being able to lay out consequences.

Most integrator second-in-commands fall into the passive aggressive category. So they're not passive or they're not saying anything. They're just sitting there silently because if they do that, they're basically either working in a much smaller company and they're acting like an assistant, not like a COO, or they're going to get fired fast.

They're not aggressive, usually, because that really is at the end of the tether. That's when the relationship is really bad; the visionary has become the codependent one. And the middle, where 80 percent of the COOs fall, is where we become passive aggressive. And that means that we believe that our needs don't matter.

And we're only giving credence to the other person's needs or wants or opinions. And, but, we're letting the other person know in a passive aggressive way that we're not happy and this is not okay. So either with body movements or with snide remarks or other ways of letting them know that we're not happy with how this is going.

[00:30:21] **Matt Sonnen:** Let me ask real quick — this passive aggressive nature; is it just geared towards the visionary? Is it only, you know, from the COO's position, is it really, are all these problems only looking up or do they have problems with their direct reports as well and being passive aggressive? And I guess once you're burned out, you're kind of doing it

with everybody, but is it primarily just, oh, I just can't deal with the person above me or do we just kind of fall apart all around?

[00:30:46] **Rachel Lebowitz:** No, I think it's, it's across the board. It's with direct reports and with a visionary; it's who we become as a person. And the fascinating thing is that when a visionary is not very aggressive — so they're not fully self-focused, they're not very narcissistic, but they're also unhealthy — they fall into passive aggressiveness too. So, take a step back and look at their relationship and you'll realize that there is like a passive aggressive visionary, passive aggressive integrator, and they're dancing around each other. Nobody wants to say what they really want to say, but they're, you know, shooting daggers at each other.

And that's where that toxicity starts to ferment. And we develop these characteristics. Usually it's not one directional; it's who we are across the board. We might even go home and be like that. And it becomes our like, nature, because we believe that that we don't have what it takes to really, you know, get the message through.

So, what I talk about in the book is about how do we become assertive, and assertive is being, you know, situation-centered. And doing what's best for the greater good. But really what it means is also acknowledging the other person's needs, wants, ideas, and then stating how you feel and then coming up with a solution that works for the greater good of the company.

So it's not a compromise. It's not an either or. It's what's best for the situation. So in order to do that, you have to be able to really know yourself, be confident, right, and not have your own ulterior motives involved. You've got to be aware of your feelings. If an integrator is not good at identifying what they're feeling, then they're automatically going to become passive aggressive. So it's, you know, hey, visionary, I noticed that you want to start this whole new second business and it's really exciting — talk into it, let them know that you hear them, that you see them, that you understand why it's important to them.

There's so much passive aggressiveness that looks like disrespect. It's not — visionaries, they're just like messaging me privately all the time on LinkedIn. I'm like, I feel disrespected by my COO because basically what they're being told is like, oh, you're this crazy visionary with a million ideas and the ideas don't matter, but really, if not for them, there is no business. So we need to value what they're bringing to the table. We need to speak into it. We need to make them feel heard. And then we have to show them why it would or wouldn't work.

[00:33:23] **Matt Sonnen:** I like it. So then, so that was assertiveness. Now let's tackle decisiveness. We'll do it in the backwards order. Like you, like you, uh, advised us to: ADD.

[00:33:32] **Rachel Lebowitz:** Yeah. So decisiveness is actually knowing your goal, whether it's personal or professional — like, where am I going? What's the goal of this conversation? What's the goal that I'm trying to get out of this project, this conversation, this person, you know, the step we're taking; if we don't understand where we're going and what our needs are and what our boundaries are, then we end up falling into passive aggressiveness. So, if you know, and I talk a lot about boundaries, because those are goals. If I don't know what my ideal time that I want to give — I look at it like your personal inventory. So how much inventory do you have with emotional energy, physical energy — you know, your intellect, people — you know, I've worked in businesses where somebody sits down next to your desk and just starts picking your brain and either you don't want to get your brain picked. And

even as a somebody that's a solopreneur now, so some people would get on a call with me and it's just a discovery call, but they're picking your brain and you're like, wait, I gave way more information than I wanted to because I want to get paid for my time. Right? So as an integrator, we have to understand, like, how much time and energy do I want to give to who and who is most important?

What we tend to do sometimes is we would conflict our order of importance, and that is sometimes because we have a need to look good, we want to come through as the nice guy, we might turn our backs on the people that matter the most to us, and we might give away too much information to the wrong people.

For example, the visionary, you are in the discourse about letting go somebody or doing something, and then you find yourself telling that person, oh, the visionary wants to let you go, but I'm trying to advocate for you. So you've just switched out the order of importance because your first order of importance should be the visionary/integrator relationship. So that is information that is inappropriate at that level.

And we tend to do that, not because we're bad, but we're just, we just don't know how to show up in a way where we're kind and not nice. Kind is for the greater good. Kind is being able to tell a story without telling a story, being able to tap into people's emotions and make them feel heard without having to agree with them. And being nice is just wanting always to look like Mrs. or Mr. Nice guy.

[00:36:01] **Matt Sonnen:** I love it. It's — you hear at a high level — oh, a COO needs to be decisive and it's, oh, they need to make decisions quickly. But what you're saying is you need to be decisive with your own career, with your own position within the company, your own relationship with the visionary — I love it. It's more, it's more internal looking decisiveness than external.

[00:36:20] **Rachel Lebowitz:** Absolutely. And it's knowing and having your own vision. You know, the average engagement of a COO is 2 ½ to five years. I'm not sure that I would advocate for it to be longer because, you know, what got you here won't get you there.

We all have different skills. And at different times in a business's history or evolution, we need different people to get us different goals and that's okay. But make sure that your personal vision that when, by the time that engagement ends — first of all, don't be shocked that the engagement is over — and take it gracefully and plan for it, you know? Say, okay, what am I doing after, or what do I, what's the goal that I want to achieve? What's my financial goal? What's my, where do I want to be academically? Where do I want to be with my family? Don't wait to build a family because you're just investing yourself now in the business, if that's what you want, don't, you know, forego on your own personal goals because you're serving this company, that trade-off is just not worth it.

[00:37:26] **Matt Sonnen:** Yeah, no, that's great. So now the last one, discernment, we've talked about a little bit, but what else do you have to say on discernment?

[00:37:34] **Rachel Lebowitz:** Discernment is really — once we're confident, we know where we want to go. We know what the goal is. It's connecting to your higher power. It's getting in touch with your inner intuition and being able to separate truth, facts, and feelings.

Being able to see the picture from a third-party perspective, and not getting stuck emotionally into what's going on. Not being reactive; being proactive, being assertive, coming at the situation from a place where we're not entangled. That is the most powerful, most highest level any second-in-command can be in.

Because they don't take things personally. You can have more clarity. You can see things from a different perspective and say, oh now I get it: this is what he says, this is what she says, and this is where we need to go. Because if you don't take the visionary personally, if you don't take their bad reactions or bad day personally, you're able to have more clarity. Your self-value isn't reliant on another person's mood.

[00:38:39] **Matt Sonnen:** Great. Well, Rachel, I've already said how much this book has helped me and how I approach my career. It helped me better understand some of the past trauma in my previous roles. And, I've recommended this book to several people already because I speak with a lot of COOs, a lot of second-in-commands about these struggles.

And just like me, they don't always know how to articulate what they're struggling with, but they just know they're struggling. And so you mentioned it at empoweredcoo.com. There's the assessment, I know there's a free workbook there as well. So we will definitely have a link to your website in the show notes. Obviously we'll have a link to the book as well. "*Empowered COO*": I can't recommend this book enough. So, Rachel, thank you so much for being here today.

00:39:21] Rachel Lebowitz: My pleasure. And thank you so much, Matt, for having me. And I just want second-in-commands and COOs and integrators to know that I see you, you know, I see that struggle and it's not an either or, it's not black and white. We can ace it while we're struggling. It all fits in.

[00:39:42] **Matt Sonnen:** Fantastic. Well, that is a wrap on a very important episode 68. We will talk to all of you soon.