



COFFEE WITH
CLOUDWERX
EPISODE 1: **WIL REYNOLDS**



00:05:18

Betsy Reed

Thank you so much for carving out some time. I know it's my morning, and your evening, so not quite Coffee with CloudWerx, but thanks for making time even though you're across the globe from me. From Bend, Oregon, to London! Really thrilled to spend a few minutes learning more about you, your background, and how you got to where you are. Then learn more about Seer to highlight the amazing things you guys are doing for your customers.

A little bit about me – I'm the Co-Founder and CRO of CloudWerx. Nearly three years ago now, Jason Geis and I set out with the mission to be one of the best – if not the best – GCP (Google Cloud Platform) Partners in a resale and service capacity. In the future will be rolling out some products to help those GCP customers better utilize the services and applications GCP has.

It's customers like you guys that make our world go round. And I know you also have a customer-centric approach, so I'm excited to hear about that! Wil, why don't we kick it off? Just tell me a little about yourself – some of your background in your career, life, and anything else. Then we'll dive into the story of Seer.

01:19:04

Wil Reynolds

So I'm a former teacher turned digital agency owner. I went to school to be a teacher, but I was really into technology. When I looked at technology and teaching, they didn't really jive back in 1998. So I started looking for organizations where I could exercise a bit of my competitive spirit and extend my love of technology.

That ended up being digital marketing. Digital marketing is competitive in the sense that there's data every day. Data that tells you if you're good or tells you if you're bad. So it's like my scoreboard every day. I had missed that competitive part – being a former athlete (or a wannabe athlete.) So I combined those two things. After about four years at work in a fantastic setting, I started Seer at 26.

You know what it was for me? It was quite simple. When somebody gives me a dollar, I take that really freaking seriously. It's funny how basic that sounds, but if you gave me a dollar, I was gonna work my tail off for you. You realize that there's just a void of that kind of as this relationship these days. I think everybody's in the trenches with you until they say, "Oh, we're out of hours." And I think, "No! We got to go win the battle! We can think about that later!" They say, "No, no, no, let's stop the battle. Everybody stop. I'm out of hours." So I've always been the kind of person, good or bad, when we're locked in, saying, "let's go, let's go do it!"

02:59:22

Betsy Reed

Yeah.

03:01:14

Wil Reynolds

There are some upsides and downsides to being so client-centric. I think it sounds great on the surface and is why I'm here and why our company was able to grow. But then you've also got to learn how to balance that with your team members burning themselves out.

As an athlete type, I keep looking for the wall to run through. But you can't make your team do that. It's a constant been a constant battle. How do I make my clients feel like I'm in the trenches with them and not have my team members feel like they don't have boundaries? When do you say, "All right, now is time to stop and try a different approach." When do we need to renegotiate or look at our priorities?

03:50:00

Betsy Reed

You clearly have a very strong sense of values and ethos that you founded the company on as it grows. I'm not about the kind of values that you just put on a little document on the wall. How do you embody those values so that your team can embody them each and every day?

04:05:14

Wil Reynolds

So this is an interesting question. Seer has a very different founding than most businesses. I was volunteering with sick kids at a children's hospital at my last company. My boss didn't let me work through my lunch so I could get to my volunteer assignment on time. When she said she could make that happen that quarter, I quit. I was going to start my own thing.

So then I started Seer. When I began (this illegal, so nobody do this), you had to sign on to volunteer for three hours a month for me to accept your offer letter at Seer. If you didn't, I didn't want to work with you. I didn't want you in my company. I could find some great people out there. Some people want to be great at their job but do not step back for a second and look at the world around them. They don't want to dedicate themselves to having a common impact.

There are many places you can work that don't have that impact at the core, but I wanted to build something that did. So when you ask, "how do you keep that and scale that in an organization?" the answer is it's just part of our oxygen. Our founding story set a precedent. If we're not putting stuff out in the community and helping bring up the people around us, then we really don't have a reason to exist. Then we're just another agency that's good at what they do.

05:29:01

Betsy Reed

So will tell me a little bit more about the special sauce of Seer. What makes you guys unique aside from the values that you operate under? What makes you guys the best at what you do?

05:52:01

Wil Reynolds

Great question. I never know if I'm the best. I think that's part of what's gotten us here. I don't have a way of measuring whether or not we're the best. So I just try to be better than I was yesterday. And when you've been running a business for 20 years, that's a lot of days better than yesterday.

I'm here in London to speak at a conference. I want to show people here things in our industry that are the status quo and then show them a different version of it. So here's an example of something I'm cooking right now: You know how SEO companies and digital agencies say SEO changes all the time? Maybe it's in my best interest to say that so the client will stay with us. But now I'm going back to search results from five years ago and comparing them to today. I'm starting to pull data at scale to see if they really are changing.

Many people in my industry are telling you they change that often. It's become this common belief. But nobody goes back to data. Yes, Google has made hundreds of updates to its algorithm this year. But fundamentally, how much have the results themselves changed from where they were five years ago?

If they've changed a bunch in your industry, great. You might need to be prudent with keeping things up. But I was looking at the banking sector, and it's the same. Eight to ten sites on the first page of Google for the word "checking account" were the same five years ago as they are today.

07:38:20

Wil Reynolds

I like just looking at things we've just accepted that are bullshit. For instance, there are a bunch of SEO tools out there. There are a bunch of paid tools out there. Our customers that Google stuff see both paid ads and organic ads together. However, there is not a single tool for a digital marketer to show both things together. So how is it that my customers see both, but all the tooling for the entire industry for 20 years is entirely separate? There's no way to see how they interact!

08:20:10

Betsy Reed

I also hate that "fear, uncertainty, doubt" approach some companies use to keep clients. It sounds like you're saying, "I'm going to take some of these commonly held beliefs and narratives out there. I'm going to challenge them using data. And I'm going to look for ways in which the market is not being appropriately served and then innovate."

08:41:14

Wil Reynolds

You said that better than I did. You should be my cheerleader.

08:43:24

Betsy Reed

Well, guess what? This is being recorded. So we can put it in a pull quote!

Our customer base is made up of customers like you; who have a dream and are pushing the envelope. They started as smaller businesses and are growing, impacting the world, and are digital native. It's so exciting! There is a Wil Reynolds story with every one of our customers (now we have almost 200 that we work with). That's part of why I'm making Coffee with CloudWerx. I said, "I got to get on the phone with these execs and founders of these organizations and hear these inception stories."

09:30:19

Wil Reynolds

Sometimes when we do our jobs, we forget who we're doing our jobs for. It's great that your internal team recognizes the value in what your clients are trying to put into the world. When that code is being built, it is being written in service to an organization and a real person who cares about his people. It's a person who is saying "My team members having a tough time getting into this part of the look or whatever tool it is." Our partners are helping us to eliminate steps my team members have to do that I wish they didn't have to do. I want partners who say, "Hey, let's help you get that thing sped up so you can help your team do their jobs well."

It's a little bit of something I did a while back. I brought people into a lab and had my team watch them do things on Google. This was to help them remember that there are people behind these searches. It's not just a ranking to get. It is a person trying to solve a problem at that exact moment.

We can choose to get the ranking and do the bare minimum, or we can choose to write the types of content and things of that nature –get the right type of advertising in front of them. We can truly answer their question and help them at that moment.

10:55:14

Betsy Reed

Absolutely. So we're coming up on time. And I know you have dinners to get to and speaking engagements. But I just want to thank you for sharing more about Seer and your background. Any questions for me or anything else you want to share before we jump off?

11:16:15

Wil Reynolds

You know, it's funny, we use company names, but companies are made up of people. Up until this moment, you've always been CloudWerx to me. Right? It's nameless and faceless. Still a great partner, but I'm not on the day-to-day with you guys. It's just great to jump on a zoom and see the people that comprise the company you know you're working with. So I'm just glad you took the time.