

Speaker 1:

Leadership is more important now than every before. Entrepreneurs are natural leaders. It's time to step up, take control of your business, and decide to do your very best as a leader right now.

Mike Paton:

Hello, everybody. This is Mike Paton with the Lead Now podcast. And man, am I excited about today's guest. Please meet CocoVinny Zaldivar. CocoVinny is the CEO and founder of Coco Taps, the only patented and certified zero waste coconut beverage system in the market. Their coconut drills enable sustainable fresh coconut water consumption and are completely manufactured in the United States. CocoVinny has been featured on ABC's Shark Tank and CNBC's The Profit. He has founded and funded numerous businesses over the last 20 years, educates widely on eco-friendly business practices and today distributes Coco Tap coconuts to most major five-star resorts, juice bars, restaurants, and music festivals in Las Vegas and beyond. CocoVinny, thanks for making time to be with us today.

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Aloha, Mike, I appreciate it. Good morning to you.

Mike Paton:

I should have mentioned you are calling in from Hawaii, thus making the rest of us resent you even more than if you were in Vegas right now. It's nice to have you on the show.

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

And ironically, Vegas is the last one out right now. They're still counting stuff up, so I'm glad I'm ...

Mike Paton:

Right. There's drama there, but not the normal type. Right?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Yeah.

Mike Paton:

Just to make that clear to the listener in case we don't edit this, we are speaking on the Friday of election week, and the results are still undetermined as we speak. CocoVinny, give us a little two minute history of your entrepreneurial journey and what led you to create Coco Taps.

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Well, I tell people necessity's the mother of invention, and I needed an entirely new career, and I needed a way to get into a coconut. It forced me to totally invent my toolkit and the system, and then everything just flowed from there. It's been an adventure. We're still riding a wave. Every day you learn something new,

Mike Paton:

That's great. What was it that made you passionate about getting into a coconut?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Well, it was actually the actual hate for the packaged processed coconut water. I couldn't drink it. I thought I hated coconuts. And then I broke a knife on a coconut and after I had tasted a fresh coconut and it was a night and day difference from the packaged stuff. I just went all in. I looked at the market in Hawaii a couple of times, and just fell in love with the whole thing. Helping people, helping the planet, getting the freshest coconut water is just, it's the truth. I wanted to follow that.

Mike Paton:

Tell us what year was it that you broke the knife, and when did you found the business, and when did you first to market with your product?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

I broke the knife in 2013, probably mid-2013.

Mike Paton:

And this was your father-in-law's really expensive high quality knife, right?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Yeah. Well, my stepdad's. It was unmarked, it was unmarked. This just regular old knife. And I thought it was just a cheapy, but it was something that he ... it was a prized possession of his he bought in Germany 20 years prior. Yeah, I broke my stepdad's knife on a coconut and I really didn't know what to do at that point. I couldn't replace it. I just figured, you know what? I bought him a whole new knife set, but I figured I couldn't be the only guy that almost chopped his fingers off and is breaking equipment on coconuts. That's how it started. It's gone from there. Yeah.

Mike Paton:

That's awesome. Tell us about the size of the organization today, the reach of your company. How many distribution points do you have? That kind of stuff.

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

We decided to go real deep into the one market of Las Vegas. And so over the past four years, we brought it to market in 2016. And well, with the exception of this year, we've been just cranking and growing. We actually are poised to grow the company this year as well with some of the pivots that have come our way. But I'm just excited to have so much traction, and I've been working really hard on getting traction in one market, so setting deep roots. And then now it's starting to really expand through partnerships. We've got Coco Taps Jamaica, Coco Taps Mexico. We're working on Hawaii. It's why I'm not here now. Florida, Miami, Long Beach. It's going to really rapidly grow over the next few years and expand that footprint.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Tell the listener exactly what your product is and how it works and why it is able to be zero waste.

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

We created the Coco Taps tool system, and you can buy a kit online at cocotaps.com. But we realized that people didn't want to always do it themselves, especially the resorts who are short on time and labor and all that. We invented a system in our facility that shaves the coconut. We brand their logo on it. And the tap is made out of an ocean biodegradable, fully backyard compostable, maize corn flour. It's not plastic. And that goes into the coconut so you can drink it fresh. And so by chance if that ends up in the ground or in the ocean, it won't hurt the ecosystem like all the plastic package products are.

And then we went through extensive audits of our process, which means to be a zero waste company, you have to upcycle, repurpose, eliminate over 90% of your whole supply chain away from landfill, and we're at 96%. We're certified zero waste by an organization called the True Zero Waste Organization. Yeah, we became a fully zero waste company certified in 2018, and we just pushed it next level. We were able to eliminate all plastic, the tap and it became a full maize corn flour. That took us like three years to innovate. Yeah, we got on to Shark Tank and onto The Profit, so millions of people have seen us and I'm a big animated, kind of a Colonel Sanders of coconuts.

Mike Paton:

For our listeners, I'll give a little color so you can see what I'm seeing on this video call that we're only publishing the sound on. CocoVinny's in Hawaii, wearing a Hawaiian shirt. He's got an unbelievable fedora on his head with a band that matches his shirt, and he's legally changed his name to CocoVinny. And so this man is all in 100% and he's an authentic, genuine article. It's just a great pleasure to be on with you. Tell me about your organization today, how many employees and maybe share a little bit about what you've done to pivot this year as part of the story.

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Yeah, so right about 12 right now, and it's been a challenge. I had to keep everyone on payroll while everything was shut down. That was a huge pivot, and I think that was a good accomplishment to be able to keep everybody on the payroll. We started a home delivery service. We pivoted, we redid our website, so you can order a nine pack or a four pack in our communities where we deliver fresh. We were also able to buy a company that was a robotics beverage business out of San Francisco. And so we actually went from eight people to 12 people in the pandemic and we built, we're almost finished with the first prototype of a fully automated coconut cocktail machine that'll put the rum and rock and everything right into your coconut at every bar. It'll laser your brand on the coconut, your logo.

And so that has been an amazing thing because it's ... Once that launches in the next six months, I mean, we'll be able to scale finally. And it was something on the roadmap that I wanted to do. It was in my head, but who has the time to step back and build a robotic machine, right? The team that we were able to meet, they were at a place where they needed someone like us, and we need some like them. A lot of good stuff is happening-

Mike Paton:

It's awesome.

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

... in the noise. It's been rough though. It's not easy.

Mike Paton:

I don't know if you're selling those machines to homeowners, but I'd be in the market for that. Any robot that can infuse rum or vodka into my coconut is okay by me just to be clear.

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Yeah. We'll get you one, Mike. I'll make sure.

Mike Paton:

All right. Sounds good. I'm on the beta test program.

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

You're on the list.

Mike Paton:

Yeah, that's great. Let's change gears a minute and talk about leadership in general, not just your organization. I want you to go back to the earliest part of your life that you remember seeing someone lead. What were they doing? What did you notice? How did that inform you as a future leader?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Well, I think when I think back to my early, early years, call it 10, 12 years old, I think it would be my dad. My father is an amazingly charismatic entrepreneur. He had his own limousine company. He would take me around to all of his meetings with him when I was young. Throw me in the back of a limo. I had my own driver sometimes. It was a really neat thing to give a kid as a perspective. I think seeing him operate young through all the challenges and things at that time, that's probably my first leadership thing. And then just a number of mentors through my ... since I was 16, 18, 20 years old. I've had some great mentors.

Mike Paton:

What are the qualities that you saw in your dad or you see in these mentors that have helped you become a leader yourself? What are the qualities you see they exude that make them great leaders?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

I think the thing that really really stands out even today is someone who has the emotional intelligence and the compassion to listen and understand their own things aside, be able to read the room, so to speak. I think that's a real key skill to be able to use that compassion, I think. That's very important in, especially in these days. There's a lot of things that are dividing us even. And so I think compassion, and I like to call it coco love. Really is what it comes down to is I've learned how to be different, but also be in alignment.

Mike Paton:

Let's talk more about that. What are the things you do to show coco love to your people?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

My direct people in-house, I don't ever try and pull rank. I don't flex the CEO muscle or any of that. No job is too beyond me. I'm in the trenches every day. I'm out selling coconuts with the team and I'm

kicking down doors or helping them. I got their back at all times, so we're equals. In fact, I'd rather them get through and come up first and then I'll go in, so even in the roughest times.

Mike Paton:

Is that something that comes naturally to you or have you had to work at that?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

No. I think by making mistakes in previous companies and learning what makes me feel good. I mean, it makes me feel better to have an alignment with my team and to really ... We're all firing on all cylinders, and even if we're struggling, we're struggling together. And so that's the thing that I think makes a great leader, is somebody who can just feel, feel everything and not just totally blow everything over and try and just force a number of like, "We got to make these numbers." It's tough. It's tough when you have the pressures of business and sales and everything. But what it comes down to is keeping everyone in alignment I think and that common problem solving together. I think that's what [crosstalk 00:11:43].

Mike Paton:

What I hear you say is you're working hard to balance your humanness with the desire to run a great business, and results are important, but not at the expense of humanness. Is that a fair way of saying what you're sharing?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Exactly. Yeah. I'd rather miss a quarterly number. Honestly, I hate to say it, but I'll miss a quarterly number if it's going to cause two or three of my people to get burned out and quit. We'll hit the quarter next quarter or next year, but we're going to figure it out together. I want to make sure everybody's in line. And people are going to self-select out. We had a great co-founder, my cousin, CocoJoe. He gave five years to all in on the biz, and then he moved on. And so I was shocked when he gave me the news, but I think the pandemic was able to shake out some of that stuff too, family and business and different things. There's dynamics always, and you just got to work.

Mike Paton:

If nothing, the difficulties we've been living through in 2020 have forced all of us to spend more time examining what's truly important.

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Yeah, for sure.

Mike Paton:

And I think whenever a large segment of the population does that, good stuff comes of it, even though it's painful. Who's the best leader you've ever worked for or with?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

One of my early mentors, his name is George [Mafus 00:13:03], and he helped me learn and grow as a businessman all around me through example. He led by example, and George was more than just a boss or associate. He shared books with me. He shared life experience. I've learned very visually. I'm a visual learner, so I watched things that he did. I studied. And so unintentionally, I think he helped me grow as a

businessman and as a compassionate entrepreneur that I'm working on daily. George was a solid cat. I mean, and he still is. In fact, he's taken a company public, and I'm going to be a large shareholder investor in his company, and just a great man. He's been a great friend and mentor.

Mike Paton:

If I asked you to describe the three qualities he possesses that you think make him better than the average leader, what are the things that come to mind?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Extremely disciplined, compassionate and I would say calculated. He does his research. He doesn't just wing it, and that's something that I've had to work on consistently because I like to jump and fly and get after it even without a plan. And that's something that I respect about him.

Mike Paton:

Well, it sounds like you and I may be trend to the ready, fire, aim side and he's more of a ready, aim, fire guy-

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Yeah, for sure.

Mike Paton:

... which is always helpful, always helpful. But every once in a while, you're surrounded by enemies and you just got to start firing and hope you hit something. Right?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

For sure, man. Let me tell you, it's helped me to jump before I know how to fly sometimes. It has helped me. By the way, you got to learn.

Mike Paton:

Oh, well, when you're not sure what you should be afraid of, it's a real courage builder. There's no question about it. Let's flip the table on you. You ever worked with her for a lousy leader and if so, what did that feel like?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Yeah. He was a customer of ours and in a media company that I had, and he was my boss because he was our client. Right? But the experience was anything but enjoyable. His name was [Hormel 00:15:11]. He's up in Canada and I'm going to name names because it's real authenticity here. He was just a very toxic person. You meet these people that can just drain you. They suck the life out of, energy center, vampire person and demanding, toxic, doesn't care. And then we ended up just going our separate ways and pulling the contract because it was just not an enjoyable experience.

You run into people who are wealthy, who have big businesses, but they're toxic and they'll throw it ... The way they speak to you or to people, even the waiter. They'll throw a phone at you. They'll hang up on you. These kinds of things you see in the world. And I would say that's exactly the person that I don't ever want to become. And that I work on keeping grounded and rooted to my own

source of, you know what? If you got to get that, it ain't worth it. That was probably one of the worst guys that I've worked with.

Mike Paton:

Well, I think there's a lot of people in business who believe they don't win unless the other man or woman loses.

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Loses, right, right.

Mike Paton:

And I find that toxic as well. For the listener, there was a nugget in there. If you want to be a great leader, avoid throwing phones at people. That would be just a quick little reminder there. When have you felt most stuck or most troubled as a leader in your career?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

It was with my last company. I had an internet gaming company that I started from scratch. Raised millions of dollars, got the whole thing built. It was an internet gaming company. We built it from scratch. We got patents on poker games approved through the gaming commission. I mean, we went all the way. I gave that thing my all, probably five years of just blood, sweat, tears, 18-hour days. Okay? And at the end of all that, we had some huge wins. I mean, talking about we had a million people on the network. I was making good money, but everything else around me was in shambles. I woke up one day and that was the most difficult thing for me to do was to go get a CEO and the ball, leave three quarters of a million of my own capital on the table, take a small severance and just burn it all to the ground.

And that's what I had to do, broke up with my girlfriend. I moved out of my big house. All the things that I should have, all the things that everybody told me I should have, I had. Extra cars and everything else. And I said, "I don't want any of it now." And so that was the most difficult thing was to literally break everything down from the ground up, rebuild, and that's how I became CocoVinny. I went from poker Vinny to CocoVinny, and I literally just shifted everything. And I wanted to sell a product that actually meant something to the world where I wasn't just wasting people's time, that I could take pride in and go for the rest of my days and just do something that I truly, truly loved. And it had to revolve around more than just myself. It had to be people and planet instead of me. I flipped the entire script from ...

Mike Paton:

Yeah, amazing. Tell us about the difference of the way you feel going to bed every night and waking up every morning, leading a company that you believe is making a positive difference.

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

There's no feeling better than selling a product that you love. And actually it's not even a product. It's a passion. You're not even not even selling it. You just want to tell people about it and just. There's no force, there's no force thing there. And so I do sleep very well, and every day is a new day for me. I wake up and I reset no matter what. I absolutely, I don't know why, but I think this is my calling. I love this thing so much. This coco love is just great.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. One of the things we talked to newer implementers about is you got to want to do this even if you weren't getting paid because with authentic entrepreneurs, they can sniff out the desire for the income trumping the desire for the mission, because we've been there ourselves. Right? Little wrinkled question here for you. What did you learn about leadership from your experiences on Shark Tank and The Profit?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Oh my goodness. Well, first of all, it takes tremendous, tremendous courage to jump into that whole reality TV set. And then God, I mean, they actually gave me everything that I needed to write my own script. And they said, "Okay, here's what's going to happen." I wrote my own script. And then right when they are going to turn the cameras on, they flip the script on me. They said, "All right, we're not going to do that now. You're going to go over here and do that." They shake you, man. They shake you. They put you through the meat grinder and just to get any kind of stuff. I learned a lot about myself when all the sharks went out. They didn't even make me an offer. They all just gave me a bunch of excuses. And I had come in with pure unadulterated coco love. I sang the ukulele. I showed them out to tap a coco. They all loved the coconuts, and I thought we had a deal, right? I was going to get a deal.

I went there, no Plan B. I was going to go to get deal. I had a quarter million in sales my first year. I was rocking. And then they all went out and I think I learned everything I needed to know about myself in that moment, was when I grabbed my ukulele. And instead of walking out of the room, tail between legs, I sang backwards out of the room ad lib and throwing my own lyrics into it, and I just ... I don't know where that came from because it was just, I wasn't going to let him see me cry. Know what I mean?

And then when the doors shut and cameras went off and I was out back yet, then I started crying and then I was pissed. But that for me was my own looking in the mirror. Like, you know what? You took that ass whooping like a champion. And really, I feel like that's what you got to learn how to do. You got to learn how to get kicked in the coconuts and keep on keeping on.

Mike Paton:

I've made a career of it.

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

This is not nice out here. Yeah. Ain't nothing nice out here, man. This is rough seas here.

Mike Paton:

Well, it is. And that's what makes you are, right? What's Mike Tyson's quotation? [crosstalk 00:21:33] Is, "Everybody's got a plan until they get punched in the face." In hindsight, are you glad you didn't get a deal?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Absolutely, absolutely. [crosstalk 00:21:42].

Mike Paton:

And why?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

What I learned from the producers and from all the other entrepreneurs that were on Shark Tank, either got a deal or didn't get a deal is that they don't really want to do deals. They want to create great content. They don't have the bandwidth to go in and be a real partner that takes time, blood, sweat and tears. They want to write a check. They want to get in and get out, quick flip. They're not really engaged in any of the deals. And then what I learned was all the deals you see happen on TV, when the lights go out, they send in the lawyers and the real diligence team, they call it. But what they do is they re-trade you. If you agreed on a 10% equity stake for 250, you get in the back with those guys and it's 60% for the same amount, and it's rough, and you can't do deals like that. They basically [inaudible 00:22:29]. If you ain't ready to bend over and give up your company, you probably shouldn't be doing deals in there.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Well, I think it's one thing to make a television show and shake hands in front of a national audience, and another thing when the lawyers are in the room, dotting all the I's and crossing all the T's, for sure. Talk about what's going on in 2020 and the disruption we're all facing, not just the pandemic, but social unrest and what appears to be divisive, disharmonious rhetoric and so forth. As a leader of an entrepreneurial venture trying to make the world a better place, what do you think about that, and how does it affect you, and what are your hopes for the future?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Well, it affects me deeply that anybody can discriminate or harm or just outright not care about another person. And a lot of this stuff affects me deeply because I'm actually, I'm a minority myself. I'm a Mexican Jew, and we're a certified minority owned and operated enterprise. I'd say a 70 to 80% of our entire workforce are either native American, black, Hispanic. We're all from all over, from all different walks of life. When you talk about all this stuff, it's hard not to want to fight with somebody who believes that they're better, or that they deserve more than other people or that other people deserve to be discriminated against. That's a tough one for anybody. I even have ... It's hard for me to stay that Switzerland or within that coco love when you witness something like that happen. And so it affects all of us.

And even if people say they don't care, it does affect people. We all just have to be in tune. Like I said, that emotional intelligence is a practice, and you have to really read why you're doing things and what happens around that. We pushed heavily to just express our views and we didn't stay quiet. We expressed our views as a company, what we stand for. We stand for everybody. The environment is key to everyone. Food, air, and water.

We talk about climate. We talk about the political climate, everything. Nothing's off limits around them. And we disagree too. There was some people in our company like CocoJoe. He wanted to stay real, real, real Switzerland and neutral. And I said, "No, man, we got to speak up. I mean, we have people that are affected by this within our organization, so we got to speak up." That's tough in leadership, trying to do the right thing and also not piss off your potential customers or whatever, right?

Mike Paton:

Yeah. If you can avoid taking a stand, it always feels like the safest way to do it, but it isn't ever the rightest way to do it in my humble opinion. I applaud you and your team for, for taking a stand, and it's not easy.

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

No.

Mike Paton:

There's risk. And people do get offended easily these days.

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

For sure.

Mike Paton:

Skins are thin, but man, you got to take a stand.

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Yeah. And I think people will remember, and the right customers will stay with you too. You don't want someone that's not going to, we don't need everybody. We don't need every customer. We can still make it with a small percentage.

Mike Paton:

Well, and it's like you said, you want to do business with people that appreciate you for who you are and not people who are going to attack and-

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Flip flop or whatever.

Mike Paton:

Minimize. I hear you. Let's talk about Coco Taps before EOS and Coco Taps after EOS. What's different now from your leadership perspective?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

I mean, there's a saying that if you don't measure it, you can't manage it. And for me, EOS has just brought everything to the light as far as all my strengths and all my weaknesses are all right there on the paper. And so where are we going? When we run through our level tens, it's a nut check. Are you on? Are you off? sometimes I'm so off that I haven't hit one of them or sometimes I'm hitting all of them. It's really good to just keep everyone in tune and in alignment with where we're going, why we're going there and, and track it. Are we on track or off track period?

Mike Paton:

I want to spend a minute on that because you're ... the listener who understands EOS terminology is going to come to this conclusion as quickly as I have. You're as visionary as visionaries get. And yet here you are as a leader saying how you appreciate that you are being held accountable every week. And I want that to settle in for the listener, because that is the magic of EOS. Where you still feel free to be CocoVinny and to do your thing, but you're also comfortable with accountability. And because you're comfortable with accountability, my guess is it makes it easier for everybody else in the organization to be comfortable with their own kind of accountability. Is that fair?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Oh, for sure. Yeah. I mean, we all know the seat on the bus that we're sitting in and how important it is, you know?

Mike Paton:

Really powerful stuff. Thank you for sharing that. I have not used the term nut check before, but I'm going to do that frequently from here on out. That's a good way of putting it. It feels awful when you say not done or off track. It feels awful. Even if you own the company and your picture is on the package, [crosstalk 00:27:56] you feel awful.

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

It's been rough. It's been rough to. We had to change some things with this whole pandemic, and there's no way we could hit what we had [inaudible 00:28:04].

Mike Paton:

That's great. That's great. Last question here. My hope is that the Lead Now podcast will help other people at various stages in their careers as leaders or aspiring leaders become better themselves. If you were to advise a young leader how to do that work, what are the pieces of advice you'd give them? How can they be better leaders themselves?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Well, for me, it was learning how to be a terrible leader. You got to make a move. You got to start somewhere. That that thing Zig Ziglar says, "You don't have to be great to start, but you got to start to be great." My thing is make a move, set a target and start firing, even if you don't have all the answers. You're never going to have all the answers, and everything is going to change always, so each plan is not going to look like it was when you started it.

And then for me, if you're going to go out and lead any team, even a team of one, lead yourself into the fire, you got to be prepared with thick skin, positive attitude and short-term memory. And you can put those in any way you want. I say thick skin, short-term memory, and positive attitude. But if you need that positive attitude upfront and the short-term memory, and then the thick skin, but interchange them at any time. Also learn how to listen. Two ears, one mouth. That rule should apply in everything you do. And so that's all I can say. And there ain't no secret sauce. You got to just get in that kitchen and start cooking, baby.

Mike Paton:

I love it. Two ears, one mouth is gold. I've also found a roll of duct tape can help when you forget that. So if you can't remember to use the duct tape yourself, give a role to your teammates and invite them to tell you when to use it. CocoVinny, this has been a great pleasure. The listener that wants to learn more about the great work you're doing, or you personally, where should they go to learn more?

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

We have our corporate Instagram, Facebook, Coco Taps for you. That's F-O-R-Y-O-U. As well as just CocoVinny C-O-C-O-V-I-N-N-Y at Twitter, Instagram, cocotaps.com. We're real easy to find. Yeah, look forward to meeting all of these great young leaders that you're speaking to and helping them stay tapped in.

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Mike Paton:

Well, you've done a fabulous job at helping us all become better leaders. That's the purpose of the Lead Now podcast. I can't thank you enough for taking time to meet with me today. Thanks again.

CocoVinny Zaldivar:

Appreciate you, Mike. I appreciate you, man.

Mike Paton:

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