

Shelby Stanger:

The presenting sponsor this season is Subaru. As a group of adventurers, you've probably heard of Subaru but let me tell you a bit more about one of their cars that is a fan favorite — the 2020 Subaru Forester. Here are a couple of reasons to love the Forester — let's start with something we all care about: safety. The 2020 Forester has DriverFocus Distraction Mitigation System, which helps guard against distracted driving — have more than one person driving the car? You can set it up so it recognizes up to five drivers (technology is amazing...) Next on the list is that Subaru is built to last — according to Experian Automotive, 97% of Forester vehicles sold in the last 10 years are still on the road today — it's hard to say goodbye to your Subaru. And last, but not least, is the fact that the 2020 Forester is the only non-luxury SUV that includes standard symmetrical all-wheel drive, which means better handling and a quicker response to road conditions. What's not to love about the 2020 Forester? You can learn more about everything the car has to offer at [Subaru.com](#). Disclaimer: "Driver Focus is a driver recognition system designed to alert the driver if their attention to the road waivers or if the driver's face appears to turn away. Driver is responsible for safe and attentive driving. System effectiveness depends on many factors. See Owner's Manual."

Joe Kudla:

The first part of the breath is through the nose and you breathe through your diaphragm up until it gets to your chest. And then you pause. And then the second part is through the mouth.

Shelby Stanger:

This is Joe Kudla, the founder and CEO of Vuori clothing. Joe practices a Wim Hof style breathing every morning for 20 to 30 minutes before heading off to work. Back in early March, before things shut down, Joe taught me the technique he does in the mornings, and we practiced together for 30 minutes before our interview.

Shelby Stanger:

Thank you for that mind-blowing breath session.

Joe Kudla:

I'm glad you enjoyed it. It's very powerful. I mean, I've been meditating. My mom was a lifelong meditator and so I kind of grew up around it. And I got really intrigued when I was in my late twenties and I started practicing meditation and yoga, but then I found that the Wim Hof experience was just, it would take me so long. And it would be only in certain days where I would feel so settled into my body that I could really kind of go out of the mind in this weird way. And I feel like the breathwork, it just takes you there. And so I became just very fascinated with the experience and I just loved how it made me feel. So that's what kind of drew me to it.

Shelby Stanger:

Breathwork, yoga and mindfulness have been a big part of Joe's life for the past 10 years. They've helped him balance his passion for building business while also growing his own family. It was through practicing yoga though, that Joe and his co-founder, Chris Miller were inspired to create Vuori clothing back in 2015. Since then Vuori has turned into a multimillion dollar apparel and lifestyle brand that supports all types of athletes. I'm Shelby Stanger, and this is Wild Ideas Worth Living.

Shelby Stanger:

Joe's path to starting Vuori is particularly interesting. He grew up in a progressive family where his parents practice what we would now call alternative or natural medicine. But Joe said he didn't always fit into that lifestyle while growing up. Eventually he found a way to merge what he learned from his parents and what he learned on his own and live out his own wild idea of starting a brand.

Shelby Stanger:

So your mom was a meditator? What was she like?

Joe Kudla:

I grew up in a super alternative family. I grew up on a little island called Vashon Island outside of Seattle. And it was, I don't know the best way to describe it. Very alternative, a lot of people that were thinking differently back in the late seventies and eighties. And my mom, she studied Native American spirituality in school. And then she became a psychologist and her work was always deeply rooted into spiritual practices. And so, yeah, I grew up going to solstice parties, and all kinds of, lot of just people that were thinking differently and doing different things. And then I moved when I was in middle school, I moved from Vashon to Bellevue, which was like going to the city, and I was like, "Man, my family is different." And it took some getting used to and some adjusting. But yeah, my parents were just very progressive. My dad was the first licensed acupuncturist in the state of Washington and one of the first naturopaths. He was in the first kind of graduating class. It wasn't even really a class at the time, but of Bastyr, which is a big-

Shelby Stanger:

Yeah. Bastyr University. It's a big naturopathic school.

Joe Kudla:

Yeah. Yeah. And so, I had this dad who was doing acupuncture and naturopathic medicine back before that was really a thing. And then I had my mom who was leading drum circles and vision quests and doing all this crazy stuff. And then there was me who was interested in sports and pretty mainstream stuff. I graduated college with an accounting degree. I was supposed to go work for a big CPA firm. And I got this random opportunity to go to Europe and travel and work as a model. And I did that for two years. I moved, I graduated, got my diploma and that night, got on a red eye and flew to Milan and I didn't come home for two years, and...

Shelby Stanger:

So you modeled in Milan?

Joe Kudla:

Yeah. Yeah. Milan and Barcelona and Germany and New York. And we just kind of bounced around from market to market.

Shelby Stanger:

So you would just wear cool clothes and take pictures? What's that like? Real quick.

Joe Kudla:

Yeah. It's pretty funny. Every joke about male modeling that you've ever heard is true. It's a very funny industry and...

Shelby Stanger:

That's lucky and awesome that you did it though.

Joe Kudla:

Oh my gosh. All my friends got to go travel in college and do a semester abroad. I never got to do that. So I looked at it as a summer job. I was like, "I'm going to go to Europe for the summer and come back and start my job in October." And it didn't take long after I landed in Milan to realize that there was no way I was coming home from my fall start date.

Shelby Stanger:

Wow. Because it was just amazing, and...

Joe Kudla:

Yeah, I was being exposed to people from all around the world and working with fashion designers, and that was really when I got a peek behind the curtain and got exposed to the industry of apparel and fashion. And I just fell in love with the whole watching creatives bring products to life and build brands and tell stories. It was very inspiring to me.

Shelby Stanger:

So from Milan, you did two years of modeling and you came back.

Joe Kudla:

Yeah. I came back and I begged for my job back, that financial CPA firm, and they were gracious enough to have me back. And so I started there and that was really where I kind of got, I call it my MBA program. It was a really great experience. I got my CPA license. So passed the test and did all that. And then I think it was, yeah, it was during that time that I started my first apparel brand out of the garage with my girlfriend. We used to go to Los Angeles on the weekends and we'd buy fabric and we'd come home. And she was graduating from design school and we would come up with designs and then we would take them to a pattern maker and get patterns made. And then on my lunch at Ernst & Young, I would go drive down to the sample maker and give them fabric or pick up a sample.

Joe Kudla:

And then at night we would try things on and we would cut fabric until 2:00 in the morning. And then, we built this little mini contemporary women's brand called Sammy Jo, which was sold in, I don't know, maybe 20 boutiques in Southern California. And it was super fun, never really went anywhere. And it was never set up to scale, but I learned a ton during that experience. And then I left and I started my first company called Vaco, San Diego. It was a financial, an IT recruiting consulting company. And I was really fortunate. I was in partnership with two people and we built a really wonderful company and it afforded me the time and a little bit of disposable income to continue investing. And I guess you could say my passion project.

Joe Kudla:

So I started another apparel brand that was out of the garage with a philanthropic mission. Every piece we made was a CoLab with a different environmentalist or humanitarian or musician or somebody who had a cool story that we just wanted to tell. That business was actually doing really well. But then we kind of fell on hard times in 2008 when the market kind of collapsed and everything we did was sustainable. So it was certified organic cottons. Low-impact dyeing, all that kind of stuff. And Walmart started selling organic cotton tees for 25 bucks and the premium t-shirt market kind of unfolded. And we decided to close that business.

Shelby Stanger:

So you had some chops and trying out apparel before you started Vuori, it wasn't just like, "Oh, I'm going to start an apparel brand tomorrow. Wild idea." It had been brewing.

Joe Kudla:

Yeah. Yeah, definitely. I'd always loved brands. I didn't grow up with a lot of money. And so we didn't get to buy a lot of clothes as a kid, but I would go to the mall and I'd see brands. And I was always, I loved skiing and surfing as a kid. And so I just was really tuned into what brands were doing. And so, yeah, I'd always had another job that paid the bills, and then I would have a little garage passion project that I would do on the side.

Shelby Stanger:

Joe loved his partners at the staffing company, but he felt like something was missing in his life. Deep down, he knew his real passion was making apparel and bringing people together. This might sound funny, but at a party one night, Joe met a psychic and the experience changed his perspective on what he should do next.

Joe Kudla:

I was just your average guy in his twenties, partying a lot and having a lot of fun and nothing careless, but just always knew that this way that I was raised and my parents and their philosophies and just my values were going to come back to me at some point in my life, but there wasn't anything specific calling me back. And then I was at this party, I met this lady. She started telling me everything about my life. I started crying. My friends thought I was crazy, but I was like, "How do you know so much about me?" She told me that I was working on a passion project. This is the philanthropic clothing company I told you about. She's like, "You're working on something that you love." And she's like, "I'm here to tell you, this is going to be one of the biggest things that you could ever imagine."

Joe Kudla:

She's like, "You're going to lead so many people. This business is going to be huge." And she's like, "But here's the thing. It's not in its current form, and it's not with your current business partner." And I was like, "What?" I was so confused, but it was things that I just knew. I was like, "I know this deep, deep down inside me in my soul. She's speaking truth to me. And it just rings, truth rings." So she's like, "You need to step into alignment." She started telling me, she's like, "You were raised this way." She's like, "You've kind of veered off." And she's like, "There's a path for you that's going to help you achieve all this."

Joe Kudla:

And for whatever reason, I was already feeling this in my gut. I was feeling like I couldn't meet the right girl. I couldn't figure out the right career. I couldn't figure all this stuff out. I went home and I took my first yoga class a day after that party, went to my first class. I'd always wanted to try yoga and I was dealing with back pain. So I went to yoga and I fell in love with the practice. I was going every day. And for me, yoga was this gateway into a world of new ways of thinking and exploring different curiosity. So it started with an Asana practice and yoga teachers are always talking about different things while you're on your mat. And then from there it led to meditation and then meditation kind of led to Wim Hof and breath work. And just by nature, I developed an awesome group of friends here in Encinitas and we were all just practicing yoga and surfing and hanging out.

Joe Kudla:

And my friend, Chris Miller and I became really close. And Chris and I just started talking about this idea for a brand, because we were just, I think very inspired at that time of our lives. And if you looked around at the market, you had the mainstream active wear brands that as an athlete, I grew up wearing, but weren't super relatable as I've gotten older, the big guys. They moved really away from a focus on quality and innovation to really competing on cost. Once we started doing research and diving into it, we were like, "Wow, man. There's over 30 million people that do yoga. And 30% of them were men." So I just started putting the pieces together. I'm like, "This is a really large underserved market. I mean, it sounds so cliché, but we really just wanted to build product for our friends and product that we couldn't find in the market.

Shelby Stanger:

Love it. I've never known why the name Vuori. Does it mean anything?

Joe Kudla:

Yeah, it actually means "mountain" in Finnish. It also is randomly the liner of a jacket or a coat, but we just love the word. We love the way it looked and felt. And obviously the meaning of mountain, that's very dear to my heart.

Shelby Stanger:

How does this brand fit your lifestyle?

Joe Kudla:

Well, it's really an extension of everything I love. Originally Vuori was going to be a yoga brand. And then we just really started paying attention into what was truly authentic to us. And while I love the practice of yoga and I love all its teachings, I also am into skiing and mountain biking and surfing and working out and training and learning more about my body and exploring things like the breathwork that we just did. And so it's almost like we're an activewear brand with a conscious personality or something like that.

Joe Kudla:

We're all about supporting people on their path of living an incredible life. And that living a physical, outdoor, active life is a part of that. And we also think that it's important to go inside and go internal and spend time with yourself. And we think that that's a really important part. We have this tagline that we call our investment in happiness and it's really our mantra for our value system at Vuori, because we believe that you do have to, it's an active pursuit. Happiness is not something that just comes

effortlessly. It requires investments of time and energy. And so we're just all about that. We want to inspire people to follow their dreams and live the best life they can, because it's pretty finite. We're not here very long.

Shelby Stanger:

How do you guys approach, obviously, climate change is a huge thing for everybody right now. What's your approach to sustainability for Vuori?

Joe Kudla:

There's only so many things, and that's another thing for any entrepreneurs listening. Don't try to over-complicate things. Pick two to three things that are your messages, and anytime anybody asks you about the brand, "Tell me about your brand," you say those two things. That is powerful. Getting diluted with too many messages is confusing. So when we launched, sustainability was always really important to us as people, but it wasn't one of our chief primary communications as a brand. When you're starting out sourcing, we were more concerned with quality and finding the right fabrications that felt the right way, over was it recycled or was it organic? But now we're at an incredible place with the business where we've got a full sustainability initiative that I'm super excited about.

Joe Kudla:

Currently about 50% of the raw materials we buy are recycled or organic. We're going to grow that to 80% by 2022. And then we're eliminating all single use plastics from our supply chain and packaging, which is also something I'm super excited about. So we're in that process right now of evaluating our carbon footprint and taking the steps to become carbon neutral with our business, which isn't a big investment, but something we're really excited about. And then the last thing is managing end of life with our products and trying to extend that in partnership with the renewal workshop and giving our garments that have been damaged, instead of going into landfills, giving them a second home and a second life. So all in all, there are a lot of different strategies, but we're super excited about it, and it's something that everybody at Vuori is banding behind.

Shelby Stanger:

Joe values a healthy earth and a healthy human spirit, and Vuori is built on that same philosophy. He started in Vuori in his garage in 2015. And since then, Vuori has opened five retail locations in the US. They sell their products online, at their own brick and mortar stores, as well as at better retailers like REI. Joe integrates his holistic values into every aspect of the business, which has helped Vuori thrive. When we come back, Joe talks about how he continues to prioritize his mindful lifestyle as the CEO of a fast growing company.

Shelby Stanger:

Surfing is my number one favorite activity. And even though I'm surrounded by water, staying hydrated is key to staying out there. That's why I love the trail series water bottle from Hydroflask. It's the same look and feel you know and love from Hydroflask, but it's 25% lighter. And lighter doesn't mean your ice will melt or your coffee will get lukewarm. The double wall vacuum insulation protects the temperature for hours. Add in the lightweight, leak-proof cap, and you've found yourself the dream water bottle. You can find Hydroflask at REI, and you can find out more about Hydroflask and their trail series water bottle at Hydroflask.com/WildIdeas. That's H-Y-D-R-O-F-L-A-S-K.com/WildIdeas. Stay hydrated and stay happy.

Shelby Stanger:

Joe isn't just the CEO of Vuori clothing. He's also a dad and a husband. On top of that, he still makes time to practice movement and meditation and climb mountains with his friends. He seems like one of those people who has 36 hours in a day. He wears a lot of hats, but he makes it work. So you're dad to two little girls?

Joe Kudla:

Yeah, two little girls.

Shelby Stanger:

Wow. How do you find balance and have family time, but you're really present at work? You're really present for them, and then when you work out, you're present, what are some of your tactics?

Joe Kudla:

Oh man. It's definitely a balancing act and it took us a while to kind of figure it out. But I guess my advice would just be, you got to love your children. And that sounds stupid, but you got to have fun with them and play with them and don't take it too seriously. Kids love to play and get tickled and wrestle. My daughter, every time I get home and she's like, "Wrestle!" And she just jumps on me and tackles me. And that's the way that we connect, is she's also really physical. I think my youngest daughter is going to be a little more like my wife, but my oldest is just a little charger and she just wants to wrestle. And she's also really in her body. So, just finding fun ways to connect with them. And it's hard. I'm not perfect at any of this. But I've kind of released myself of that expectation of being a perfect parent and I just do what feels right. And I just try to have fun with my kids.

Shelby Stanger:

That's cool. And your wife sounds pretty supportive.

Joe Kudla:

Yeah. I'm really lucky in that way.

Shelby Stanger:

So you have a three year old and a six month old, you are busy. So while you were having a baby business, you were actually having babies.

Joe Kudla:

Yeah.

Shelby Stanger:

Do you have any mantras you say to yourself when things get hard or you need to give yourself a pep talk?

Joe Kudla:

No, not necessarily. I mean, I really loved Eckhart Tolle's books. And so, "this too shall pass" was a big one because I feel like there's always these peaks and valleys and sometimes things get really hard.

Around the holidays, both my kids got whooping cough. They were incredibly sick. Then I went down with the flu, my wife got super sick. It was all this stuff on top of Vuori had trade shows and people weren't feeling good. And it was this peak. And you just have to tell yourself, "This too shall pass." And surely it does. And then you forget about it. So yeah. I try not to get too stressed out. I'm not free from it. I have my moments, but yeah, I feel like you just keep marching forward and you have a super clear intention.

Joe Kudla:

Compared to how stressed I was when we started the business and we didn't know if we could keep the lights on, this is stress on a different level, but it's not like, "Are we going to go out of business?" Stress. It's like, "Yeah, we may not hit our reach goal one month," but when you think about a 10 year horizon, are we living in accordance to our values? Are we building the brand that we want to build? Are we proud of the product that we're making? And if the answer to that is all yes, then you're going to see ebbs and flows that you can't control and you just got to let that go.

Shelby Stanger:

What do you do to de-stress?

Joe Kudla:

Well, we did it this morning. I mean, Wim Hof breathing is incredible. Meditation is incredibly powerful and it doesn't take a lot, if you can just meditate five, 10 minutes a day. And I like to move my body. I need to get it out physically.

Shelby Stanger:

How do you work? Do you have to do lists or do you use Evernote or what are some of your tactics on staying productive? Because you have a lot of things going on at one time.

Joe Kudla:

Yeah. I think I've been blessed and cursed with the same disease and that's I'm pretty ADD, I have a million things going on in my mind and I have to get up and get going. So motivation for me just comes, I have to slow myself down. So I usually have just a lot of things that I want to get done. And I've learned how to organize that. It used to be, there was just so much to do, so yeah, I'd create a long list and I would just literally have a notepad, create a list, and I would just check them off. I like the physical list in my hands. Now, I have to be much more strategic with my time because there's just way too much. There's too much to do, not enough time. And so I have to really be intentional with how I want to prioritize my time.

Joe Kudla:

And we have three values at Vuori. Number one is make great product. Number two is be in great relationships. And number three is live extraordinary lives. And I take those really seriously and I really want to make great products. I spend a lot of time with the product team. I spend a lot of time sourcing materials and then being in great relationship's all about the culture we're creating and setting that tone. And we spend a lot of time on our culture and just making sure we're hiring the right people and everybody's swimming in the same direction energetically and aligned by a common vision and our goals for the year, all that kind of stuff.

Shelby Stanger:

I know you had your own company, so you have had to manage people, but there's this part of having a company where now you're big and you're managing a lot of people. I mean, did you ever imagine you'd be in that position and how do you handle that? Because that's not an easy skill to have.

Joe Kudla:

Yeah. I used to think a lot about this and worry, because I'm not a really social person. I was like, "How am I going to be as a manager?" And then I realized through the process of just being observant and talking to other people who've led large companies, it really just comes down to being authentic and being a regular human being, and just treating people the way you want to be treated. And being really intentional with goals and having a clear vision. But when you do that, I feel like you're able to enlist other great people. And really, my role is about enlisting great people, and we've been so fortunate from day one, just great people attracted more great people. And I look at the team we have now, and I just cannot believe how many amazing talented people we have at Vuori.

Shelby Stanger:

You also offer your employees classes and access to breathing and all sorts of things. What sort of things do you do?

Joe Kudla:

Yeah, I mean, it kind of started in service to our community with our first retail store. When Vuori was really nothing, we had this opportunity to move into this old consignment shop and we started hosting events and art shows and we'd have these parties and we just started doing classes for the community that we would pay for. And we'd just invite people through our doors. And then we're like, "We got to do this for our own employees." So we moved into a new office and we built out a yoga studio and we have three days a week, we have a different teacher. Sometimes it's yoga. Sometimes it's pilates, sometimes it's a boot camp, and other times it's breath work, and we'll have people come in and it's just available for our team to jump in and whatever they feel compelled to take part in.

Shelby Stanger:

I love that Joe consistently ties his personal values into his brand. Yoga and breath work have made a huge impact on Joe's life. And he offers those same practices to his staff. Last year, Vuori received \$45 million in funding, which is huge, especially for a brand that's just five years old. Joe might not have had success with his first few clothing brands, but through Vuori, he found a way to make his dream into a rewarding reality. So what are some of the tactics you used that has allowed you to succeed?

Joe Kudla:

Well, number one is surround yourself with great people, but for people that maybe are even before they've started the business, so it's not about hiring people at this stage, and you've got an idea and you want to know how to bring that idea to life. I would just say talk to people. You've got to get your idea out there and you've got to verbalize it. Don't be afraid to share your idea. I think a lot of people, especially earlier in life, they think that if they talk to somebody about their idea, it's going to get stolen. Nobody's going to steal your idea. Your idea is, you need to talk to as many people as possible about your idea and flush it out and get people enlisted. And when you do that, I believe the universe starts picking up on what you're putting down and starts.

Joe Kudla:

Somebody will come across your path that can help you, but you need to be walking through those doors when those opportunities present themselves. And if you're guarded with your information, I mean, of course if it's some proprietary tech or something like that, sure. Be guarded and protective of that. But if it's a brand or a clothing company, or an idea for a product, likely nobody's going to steal your idea. And if you don't know where to go and you don't know how to start, you've got to be talking to people and typically people will show up in your life or somebody will know somebody they can put you in touch with that can help.

Shelby Stanger:

I find that true, if you believe in the idea.

Joe Kudla:

Yeah. And I think the universe is like that. If it's not the right idea, it's not your path, the universe will kind of show you that, or it'll fizzle out and it won't end up happening. But I also am just a really firm believer in taking action. You got to get out there, you've got to put one foot in front of the other and sometimes put yourself in uncomfortable situations to get out there and get things moving.

Shelby Stanger:

So on your first retail store, you had this saying, "the rise, the shine," and it's become a big part of your brand today. The rise, the shine. I love it. It's a good tagline, but what's the rise? What's the shine?

Joe Kudla:

Yeah. I mean, the rise is all about overcoming whatever obstacles come your way and just continuing to maintain momentum in your life. And so it's a play off rise and shine, this idea of "seize the day," but it's "the rise, the shine." So the rise represents, yeah, getting out of bed, or it could be something bigger, right? Like overcoming an obstacle, a death in the family, something that could set you back, but keeping that momentum. Or it could be related to physical activity, like climbing a mountain. Anybody who's climbed a mountain knows how arduous and painful it can be. And at times, you want to give up and you want to quit. And it's that thing inside you that's like, "I'm going to get through this." And the shine is the view from the summit. It's when you get to the top, it's the feeling of, "Wow, I just proved to myself that I'm capable of doing this." Or it's that moment of elation.

Shelby Stanger:

I think what's cool about the shine to me, and how I interpreted it is, you're getting to take a moment to celebrate what you've accomplished because a lot of people don't do it.

Joe Kudla:

100%.

Shelby Stanger:

I love that. Any advice to people listening to this podcast who have a wild idea, but maybe they're afraid or they feel stuck?

Joe Kudla:

Yeah. Just if you're scared of something, that means you need to go through that door. And when you use fear as your beacon, and when you're really afraid of something, that means you need to do that. And then you're not going to be afraid next time and you're going to grow. And so I would just say, get out there, talk to a lot of people, take action, make it happen, and don't forget to have a lot of fun along the way.

Shelby Stanger:

Joe's an example of how anyone can change the course of their life by applying their values to their business and their personal life. His mission is to not only help people overcome obstacles, but also to savor the moments of success, pursue the rise and the shine. Thank you so much to Joe Kudla for coming on the show and for teaching me your version of breath work thanks also to your teacher, Reese Paluso, who's also my teacher, for teaching Joe and I this technique. I honestly felt so zenned out after we did this, it was incredible.

Shelby Stanger:

So a lot has changed since I interviewed Joe in early March, and I wanted to share some of the amazing things Vuori has been doing since then. First, they launched a free virtual active club on Instagram and Instagram TV, which you can do. It consists of free daily at-home training classes from yoga to boxing and even breath work that will keep you both mentally and physically inspired during these challenging times. They've also launched The Rise, The Shine conversations on Instagram live, and it features conversations with like minded individuals, people like NBA hall of famer Steve Nash, singer songwriter Jason Mraz, pro surfer Rob Machado, and Olympic gold medalist Elena Hight. You can learn more about Joe Kudla and Vuori and check out their workouts conversations and more at vuoriclothing.com or @VuoriClothing on social media. And it's spelled V-U-O-R-I. You can also shop Vuori at REI.

Shelby Stanger:

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