

## Audio file

[Interview with Phong Saigon Drip Mar 13.m4a](#)

## Transcript

00:00:00 Phong

The AI what's not, but no, that is awesome. I think you guys mission, it might be become my mission as well, right? And I think we're all in this ecosystem together and that's one of the things that well, first of all, yeah, I am the best dishwasher at my restaurant. OK. I run Bunny shop.

00:00:20 Phong

Out in the Pioneer Square named Saigon Drip Cafe, it's only been eight months. But I think what we're doing is definitely it's been fun and.

00:00:31 Phong

It's been exciting. I think the energy with this project for me is different. I feel like more is the purpose now because we can see that we put our heart, our skills, attention to this and we can see the impact coming out of it, right, not just the impact from the quality of food, but the experience of our guests.

00:00:50 Phong

The local community as well, and even as our our fellow business owners.

00:00:59 Phong

We we can see that energy is contagious. We want to see what what kind of impact we can make. And you know, we're very bullish on the Pioneer Square. A lot of people are still kind of shunned away from that. But this last eight months, we would there.

00:01:20 Phong

You know, there's more business coming in. We open up our second shop sign at least two months ago and ready to open in one month, which is 1 block away, right across the street from the Gospel mission, which is.

00:01:34 Phong

You know, supposedly from the visual aspect is very rough, but hey, we're bullish on it and I know there's a lot of development happening and changes and we'll feel like which is in the middle of something. And personally for myself, it's exciting to see more of this, especially within the Vietnamese American community, which you know I'm part of it.

00:01:54 Phong

But it's it's so great to see now, maybe it's become we've been coming of age or we're getting old, but it's that time. It's almost like for me. I see. It's like this transition, right? It's like this changing of the guard.

00:02:06 Phong

That thing, and therefore the opportunity and the possibilities almost like it's it's up to us to create, right? If this \*\*\*\* goes to hell, that there's gonna be.

00:02:18 Phong

It's gonna be all on us. And if it's gonna be going to anywhere, we're wonderful. We can create that as well. So I'm. I'm so looking forward to connect with the business owner and what's not and then, hey, you know, having John and stuff like that, we had a great conversation at a coffee and conversation meet up.

00:02:38 Phong

And.

00:02:39 Phong

It it really will plant a lot of seeds just like, yeah, you know what we we have the skills, we have the passion. Now how do we as a collective to to to move as a unit and be stronger and more effective.

00:02:55 John

That's awesome. Like your your your sense of community in all of this.

00:03:01 John

It's like, really, it's really cool to see. Like, it's not just you, it's you. You are. I like asked about how you got here. And you're like talking about how we all got here. We all transition to changing a guard. That's a really cool perspective to have and one that I think is critical for small businesses to really find success. So much of like what turn talked about.

00:03:21 John

On Monday, like, how does the whole?

00:03:23 John

Group.

00:03:24 John

Lift each other up. And how does the whole group work together? What you said about how you know four places racing to 0 to compete on pricing is just not the right strategy like that really resonated with me.

00:03:37 John

We have a con on the line. Also. Do we con, can you do a quick intro? I don't know if you can hear us.

00:03:43 John

Or you just listening in.

00:03:48 Phong

So kindly do you if you can hear us, just chime in. Kindly is actually one of our partner at Saigon. There you go.

00:03:52 Kahn

Oh, hi guys. Bye.

00:03:56 Kahn

Sorry, I'm just eating some lunch with my son before we take him to holding so.

00:03:59 John

OK. OK. Well, we'll have you just listen in for now. We'll, we'll we're gonna carry on with interview. We have this being recorded. Just that it makes our life easier for transcripts and note taking down the.

00:04:07 Phong

Oh.

00:04:15 Kahn

Sorry guys.

00:04:16 John

And ask a question if you got any.

00:04:18 Kahn

I'm here. You need me. I'm listening in.

00:04:21 John

OK, cool. Let's let's just hop right into some of like what you just talked about. Actually, you talked about, you know, rapidly expanding here, somebody signing a lease and then starting to use the space in a month isn't mind boggling to me, actually like that. You don't hear of that at all. How did, how did you find that new space?

00:04:40 John

I I think you mentioned there was a kitchen space, but like how did you find it? Who how who connects?

00:04:43 Phong

Yeah.

00:04:45 Phong

I think with with I.

00:04:50 Phong

I I would say we're fortunate. I think it's just the timing as well, especially the current shop right now. Current is actually he's a partner in a project, but he's also a real estate agent and he he's he's a killer in that. And you know when we came into the shop, it was everything was there for us. If you if you notice.

00:05:10 Phong

But like everything was there, we didn't we we fortunately didn't have to build out anything like all the decor, the interior. It was out there. So we're fortunate to come in and within like, month or so, we're about to get it rolling. And then our second kitchen because of our first kitchen is.

00:05:29 Phong

It reached capacity right? And then we're like and and plus there's some technical stuff that, uh, which hood and it requires to definitely finding an alternative to that. But yeah kind of went to work and then, you know, we love the neighborhood. That's a short time being there and we love it. So we're lucky.

00:05:48 Phong

This came upon it, and the kitchen was just ready for us. You know, it's this new little TLC. But other than that, they much in the kitchen is there. And we just thought about the concept of walk up, focus mostly on catering, but now also able to do walk up as well.

00:06:06 Phong

So yeah, I would say it's just maybe timing cause that property been probably vacant for like years, right? And then yeah, it waking for years and then we came in we were.

00:06:18 Phong

Able to just.

00:06:19 Phong

Yeah, within probably another two weeks or so, we're ready to get it active.

00:06:24 John

That's crazy. So like this is like 2 for two for you. You're finding a venue that has everything you need and you just can just jump, right?

00:06:28 Phong

Yeah, and that's.

00:06:31 John

In and use it.

00:06:32 Phong

Yeah. And actually, the landlord was very like they they sent us an LOI. Usually we would send them an LOI, but they sent us an LOI. Give us some TI right and give us some months free as well so that we can get.

00:06:46 Phong

Going.

00:06:47 Phong

So we were able to have some good leverage and I think because of such a good job, we deal with our track.

00:06:53 Phong

From the other store that day and plus the store been vacant for a while, so they're like, you know, they just they get going and then we just happened to be right, right place at the right time.

00:07:03 John

Well, so so you knew the neighborhood you wanted to be in. You had the requirements already set up. You found a very eager land.

00:07:11 John

Bored.

00:07:12 John

And they they were like clear on giving you TI they they made it really easy for you. It sounds like they've been, you know, hungry if this one, you know, least out. So that's that's amazing. This is like again I don't hear.

00:07:26 John

Of this.

00:07:27 John

Situation happening often. It's usually like, yeah, you're, like, trying desperately to get a hold of the landlord.

00:07:33 John

Begging them to look at you know your business plan, begging them to like, hey, look, here's my LOI and several rounds of, you know, negotiations and whatnot. This is like, very Sandip, it is that it's right next to you. It meets all your requirements. It meets your requirements and you can get off the ground so quickly. That's kind of.

00:07:53 John

Crazy and and and this is just cause you have con in your network and cons like helping you you know this is his bread and butter already and he's like let me just help you get into this that's.

00:08:02 Kahn

No, no.

00:08:04 Kahn

We're just helping. We're helping ourselves. So it's not, you know, it's it's all, it's all of us together as a collective and we we we move at.

00:08:07 John

The.

00:08:13 Kahn

It's, you know, we have a lot of moving pieces. We all we have different partners on the ground doing different things. And one of the the partners was locating commissary kitchens. We export that that didn't work out. So we just I think it's just a matter of mobilizing the the correct pieces and we we try to do that as much as we can.

00:08:32 Kahn

Each person does what they're supposed to do, and when, when that happens, man, it's, you know, the results. It's there's nothing short but but thankful. So I think that's where it is. And just being on the side of last is and being very lucky is is also another thing.

00:08:48 Phong

Yes, yes.

00:08:48 Amritha

Good question, Kahn like how exactly did you come across this location? Was it listed somewhere or was it just through your network?

00:09:01 Kahn

Kitchen. Kitchen. Kitchen. Oh, you know what it was? I think that day we were going to.

00:09:02 John

Kitchen.

00:09:08 Kahn

Well.

00:09:09 Kahn

Look.

00:09:10 Kahn

I hate that that whole week Paul and I and our partners had gone to go look at a couple of commentary kitchens and the price was just too high. And I said, you know what, let's just let me go on my commercial MOS and this one just happened to pop up that day. I called Eric Eric with the listing agent. He said I'm in, I'm in the Bainbridge Island this weekend.

00:09:30 Kahn

Let me take it over. Let me take.

00:09:32 Kahn

Over there. And so we walked by and it's like a block over and long and behold, it had the type 1 hood, which is the the key component that we needed to operate moving forward. And like I said, man, just blast, it doesn't work out like that. But in sometimes when you just put your head down to work, you know, God will give you great things. You know, so.

00:09:52 Kahn

I think that's A and like, finally explained earlier, they were excited to have us actually, Roland Ross and Brad was just over here. They're the they're our landlords and they just came to cycle to cafe earlier today to have lunch and it was probably the best damn meal they've had in forever.

00:10:08 John

Wow, that's that's like.

00:10:09 John

Yeah.

00:10:11 John

The date? The fact that it appeared on commercial demos and that day.

00:10:15 Kahn

I know what?

00:10:16 John

And you saw it and you moved on it that day is that's incredible. The timing on that is amazing.

00:10:25 John

What?



00:10:25 Kahn

Just, just very fortunate.

00:10:28 John

Yeah.

00:10:30 John

Yeah, that's amazing. I mean, we'll we'll all take a little bit of luck and a lot.

00:10:32 John

Of good fortune. You know, any day of the week.

00:10:36 John

Let me let me shift this a little bit. It's really cool to hear about this expansion and how it's helped and I love that you have the, you know, Saigon drip cafe to prove that the prove the concept out, show financial records, just make yourselves a really good candidate for kitchen space, right?

00:10:54 John

As you guys have expanded now, I'm very curious and and fun. We talked about a little bit of this in the group session on.

00:11:01 John

Monday, but I'd.

00:11:02 John

Love to hear about kind of the overall like, what are your biggest challenges today with?

00:11:08 John

Just just running the business running, you know, operating the business and then just scaling in general like what have been some of your challenges there?

00:11:18 Phong

I'll I'll. I'll share my point. I think can have he can share it too. I think one thing right now is being able to have that.

00:11:27 Phong

The operator that's consistently able to, to, to oversee oversight, the standard that we want to set.

00:11:37 Phong

Right. How do we have a structure in place to know that? Hey, the team is following the process, the system that's in place and it's not fair to them to tell them to follow that and but yet we don't have a manual in place to make sure that.

00:11:53 Phong

Hey.

00:11:54 Phong

This is the guideline right? So I think that's one of the things because over time.

00:11:59 Phong

You know, when we don't have that have in place, don't have a process to audit our self in.

00:12:03 Phong

Place.

00:12:04 Phong

Eventually things the quality will go down, and that's the natural things, right? We get comfortable.

00:12:10 Phong

But now being disciplined, knowing that hey, we have a process of every week that you need to be a check in every month, they got to be a check in, right and then we need to audit itself more frequently than not. I think having that and it's a challenge.

00:12:28 Phong

As part of this growing, I suppose and.

00:12:33 Phong

Well, that's one of the challenge. I think there's so many challenges, but the quality of our operation day-to-day.

00:12:39 John

So you guys are like always internally auditing, always making sure you guys are keeping the quality bar high and creating manuals and processes for these things so that they can be followed. And so that it.

00:12:52 John

Can be really really.

00:12:53 John

Consistent that's that's a really good one that's, you know, I think I've seen like Mac and.

00:12:55 John

OK.

00:12:58 John

Dons they have like.

00:13:00 John

It's so funny. Behind the counter, there's like a CHEAT SHEET for everything. You make tea like this. You make coffee like this, you make. And at any point if you forget one, you just go back. Then you like, look for that specific menu item. You look it up, tells you like dummy proof instructions for how to do something that totally makes make see on your product.

00:13:15 Phong

Yeah, so it's.

00:13:19 Phong

You know it's it's and that's one of the things we're concerned about growing too fast, right. It looks good as well. But if the internal, if we if we have to go just have to deal with the same challenges it almost get annoying. Right. And it's like we're just beating ourselves up and it's like we've been here before. What? What is the difference?

00:13:39 Phong

Now, right. So it is, it's not having that?

00:13:44 Phong

The leadership.

00:13:46 Phong

Need to be almost be accountable to ourselves.

00:13:52 Phong

First of all that that's the first and foremost cause everything happened, good or bad, it lays back on management. I I don't care like I staff didn't do hey because you didn't train them properly.

00:14:04 Phong

Quite the food. Because you didn't have a recipe book to follow to the tea.

00:14:08 Phong

So it's almost we always go back to, it's gotta be us. So what is it that we're lacking? What is it? The information that we're missing or the discipline that we don't have to make sure that we're we're we're on point on top of those kind of things.

00:14:22 John

Yeah.

00:14:24 John

This is a. This is a really good one. Just you you guys are the backstop for everything, right? You at the end of the day, the business's success comes down to your contributions and your efforts.

00:14:38 John

You guys really sounds like you guys really hold yourselves accountable to this and it looks like it's paying off. What, what other challenges do you see? Right now, I'm just curious, you know, this is a really good one. I want to hear some more of the challenges that you face. Yeah, maybe share another one.

00:14:56 Phong

Maybe, maybe, maybe, can want to share.

00:14:58 John

Yes.

00:15:03 Kahn

Give me a second. I'm just finishing up my I'm calling. I'm not. I'm doing quality control right now at work. It's very important. I'll be right back in, like 3 minutes.

00:15:12 Phong

OK.

00:15:15 Phong

Maybe I can add. I think that's the thing I can share. I share with you at a meeting is is this.

00:15:23 Phong

It's our partnership.

00:15:25 Phong

Right. It's it's almost how do we have, how do we have clarity on our expectation.

00:15:26 John

Yeah.

00:15:34 Phong

Because in the beginning there's certain expectation we're going in, but now as the company grow.

00:15:40 Phong

There's different effort and commitment.

00:15:44 Phong

And I guess it comes down we need to have that communication and almost because we're.

00:15:52 Kahn

We don't know what we don't know.

00:15:55 Phong

So we're not gonna be able to have that kind of conversation if we never been there as well. It's almost like trying to trying to bring and trying to fill it out.

00:16:05 Phong

So it's almost where we're we're we're almost seeking for someone that's been there to give.

00:16:05 Kahn

Hmm.

00:16:12 Phong

Players and it'll be more effective rather than us. Try making our own mistake as we go and see how it goes.

00:16:19 Phong

Right.

00:16:20 John

Yeah.

00:16:20 Phong

More like a coach that's been there and I think that's something that.

00:16:25 Phong

That is in place right now, which is gotta make time. I mean, I'm leaving the country tomorrow, so, but we have someone in place that we want to talk to that. Does that seem to have the experience already? And I think that will help us with that conversation with the partnership. And I think it's just it's just have clarity.

00:16:45 Phong

Like, hey, what do we expect now from you? Because we don't want to move forward.

00:16:50 Phong

And then that expectation is our expectation. It's gonna end up. You know, you don't, you're not.

00:16:55 Phong

Gonna put in your.

00:16:56 Phong

Best effort. You're gonna resent your partner and what's not. And if our mission and our goal doesn't align, you know, because some partners, they do have other business as well and some partner are fully.

00:17:10 Phong

And and.

00:17:10 Phong

This.

00:17:11 Phong

Is they're they're going hard there. So it's like, hey, that's fine. But how do we have this conversation so that we have the proper expectation manage it properly?

00:17:22 John

Yeah, that's really great. Yeah, I think you mentioned this on Monday and like you know, every group, every new team that gets together has this. We go through this too about how do we align and how do we make sure we're all chipping away at the same problem, contributing and setting the right expectations with one another. And this is kind of cool because, you know, in the beginning I think the.

00:17:43 John

The discussion that you guys had like about how you guys got to finding the kitchen?

00:17:49 John

I think that's a superpower having many people, many ownerships or many partners trying to solve the same problem. I think that's really, really powerful. But this is the flip.

00:17:59 John

Side of that.

00:18:01 John

It also comes complexities with having many cooks in the kitchen and how do you all align? So it's it's really, it's really cool that like both.

00:18:09 John

Also, the thing that helped you grow also is one of your top challenge.

00:18:10 Phong

Yeah, yeah.

00:18:13 John

Yes.

00:18:15 Phong

They'll for sure. I mean, that's one of the things that I appreciate as a team because, you know, I came from managing a small, you know, family restaurant and I sent. But now that I have all this partner, Khan, Dahl and my brother and even with us, there's still a lot of work. Right. And and now though I.

00:18:36 Phong

I feel.

00:18:37 Phong

I feel for the small business, I empathize for them, you know, by themselves, had to run operation. How the hell they're gonna have time to think about marketing, how the hell they gonna have time to think about business? How the hell they have time to to go out there and look for funding available. So it's like man, no wonder they can't scale. No wonder they can't grow.

00:18:58 Phong

Like.

00:19:00 Phong

What does it take? Right. And I'm like, OK, and and you're right. And then the other side, how your partner is now, hey, you got.

00:19:08 Phong

You can't just execute, right? You got to run by the team on certain things and sometimes ideas sometimes or many times. I did class and now how do you have that conversation when it's class? How it's more? What's the conversation looking like, what works, what doesn't work and then what's the plan to move us the?

00:19:13 John

Yeah, yeah.

00:19:28 Phong

Use the needle, right?

00:19:34 John

I think you were trying to say something earlier.



00:19:35 John

Please.

00:19:38 Kahn

Oh no. I just think you can't have the good with the bad and then or the good without the bad. And then vice versa.

00:19:43 Kahn

You know, I mean, yeah.

00:19:47 John

Rita. Rita. Rita, did you have something to say? Actually, I saw you saying something. That's why.

00:19:51 Amritha

Yeah, I was going to ask like about when you spoke about, like, setting expectations, right? Is it with a potential partner or is it like when you're looking to find a person to like, you know, mentor you?

00:20:09 Kahn

I'll. I'll walk out. I'll be right back.

00:20:15 Amritha

I've found your on mute.

00:20:20 Phong

Oh, I would say with our current partners right now. And and again I think that's something that eventually like we know that.

00:20:31 Phong

We want to grow.

00:20:33 Phong

Right. We believe this could be.

00:20:36 Phong

A billion dollar company.

00:20:38 Phong

And we're not gonna.

00:20:39 Phong

Be able to do it alone.

00:20:41 Phong

Right, so eventually.

00:20:43 John

Yeah.

00:20:45 Phong

As a current staff stepping up, what is that going to look like? Is there a profit share? Is that equity share? What does that look like and we'll lack of certain things we're gonna need want to bring in partner that can add value. What's gonna? We have no idea.

00:21:03 John

Yeah, that makes sense with with just any type of partnership. You know, all that alignment is really, really pretty cool. These are really great ones to highlight for challenges. You know, operational excellence and the just the alignment with leadership and even alignment with staff.

00:21:19 John

All really key and and some good problems that we've heard repeated from other businesses too. Let me pivot a little bit and ask you some more kind of questions about your operations. So today when you like acquire supplies or services, when I say supplies, I mean like where do you like acquire your bread from or you know where do you acquire your flower?

00:21:40 John

And when I say services something like I need an electrician or I need a plumber or I need a painter. Where are you going to find these resources today?

00:21:52 Kahn

I I think for that you know, even when we first initially got together at the at the team we've we've agreed that we're going to keep this as you know within our sphere of influence at

first. So you know we need an electrician. Hey, do you have a friend that needs work or hey like and Even so like?

00:22:11 Kahn

With our coffee.

00:22:13 Kahn

You know, phone has the connection. Well, hello with him, you said. Hey, let's keep this local here in Seattle. We, you know, we could get elsewhere, we get cheaper. But let's let's let's support these guys. Mackinnons, we got some of those too. Now I just tried one for quality control. It's pretty good. Yeah. No, we just try to keep everything.

00:22:33 Kahn

That as locally localized as possible, and we just try to.

00:22:39 Kahn

You know, even if something that's just like our dispensers for our, for our, we get those. Sorry, it's crazy. We just try to support our local guys as much as we can and even though we could get somewhere farther that cheaper, we still try to stick it local and that's I think just growing together. That's community.

00:23:00 Kahn

That's that's the first thing. So our brands we get as we have every day our supplies, we get our how how we got connection with them Quan and took off with him when he makes time, you know, just doing the connections through the through the community.

00:23:03 Phong

Yeah.

00:23:15 Phong

And and and that's one thing that we we are really want to be an impact for the Community because you know we're small guy and we want to support the small guy. You know, there's there's guys like what's that Charlie produce that approach us. But we're like, you know what that they have delivery and what's not. Yeah we could it might be easier but man.

00:23:36 Phong

Like who? Then who. The Hell's gonna work with this small guy? We are going to the big guy, right? So I don't know how long that will work and last, but yeah, we, we, we Community fans.

00:23:51 Kahn

Yes.

00:23:51 John

Wow, that's that's that's really cool. So it's it's really great that we go to the community first. Like, were you always connected to this community or how did you like kind of build these relationships cuz you you weren't always small business owners and suddenly you're like you now have all these connections. How did that happen?

00:24:10 Kahn

Well, I think always fun.

00:24:12 Kahn

All can.

00:24:13 Kahn

Long has, you know, always had connections to in some capacity to most of to a lot of these folks here that we that we worked with. But you know at the same time, you know we're all, you know, 7° of separation. We're all connected somehow I think from there.

00:24:29 John

I'm not coming back. I'm sorry.

00:24:31 Kahn

Ohh what what happened?

00:24:33 Phong

Yeah.

00:24:34 Kahn

Hey, I'll be right back.

00:24:36 John

Listen, you listen to what's playing.

00:24:42 Phong

I hope everything here but uh, but I I was saying, you know, I I.

00:24:50 Phong

Yes, I'm selfish in a way. I just like to. Nice. Rewarding for me to be a part of the community and value in any way. Right. So do that. Do in and out. I'm able to have all this connection and then with Khan and then our other partner they they're professional traders real estate.

00:25:07 Phong

And loan. So being in that trade, you're always around meeting people. So there's always a big network of people that were part of, I would say, like, yeah, yeah, with the seven degree of separation. I mean it's it's the world is actually not that big, you know like.

00:25:08 John

Mm-hmm.

00:25:25 John

Yes.

00:25:27 John

I think in Seattle in particular, I I was just joke in college. I was like, it's like a 2° separation.

00:25:33 John

For Asian people, it's like, yeah.

00:25:35 John

It's 2° and you literally know every single Asian person in Seattle.

00:25:40 John

That, that's that's really great. We we we hear this pattern a lot about people leveraging their networks and somehow just being connected to surprisingly more people than they realize. And when they get there they slowly grow and grow their network and then they support each other.

00:25:56 John

And and I I like that you're kind of admitting to like, hey, like we're supporting the small guy now and we're gonna work with the small.

00:26:02 John

Guy as long.

00:26:02 John

As we can and there is a non zero chance that you know part of these produce may end up winning in the long run. Maybe maybe in the future.

00:26:09 Phong

Yeah. Yeah. Well.

00:26:12 Phong

And then I think that's one of the things that I really hope.

00:26:17 Phong

That as a collective, you know, the group that coffee and conversation group can can come to. I mean, I think we know now. It's just how do we coordinate and execute on that? Right. Like the buying power aspect, but as a collective, I mean we're buying the basically the same \*\*\*\*. So how was it collective?

00:26:30 John

Hmm.

00:26:37 Phong

We have more power when we go out there and talk to vendor like, hey we all.

00:26:40 Phong

Need.

00:26:40 Phong

This we have 10 restaurants right here.

00:26:44 Phong

What can you do? What's the lowest price? So with that leverage that that's gonna help us from a business standpoint.

00:26:50 John

Yeah.

00:26:53 John

Has that actually happened though? I'm curious like say.

00:26:56 John

Yeah. And you and every Saigon. Sorry, every every Bunny shop in the area. Like, there's probably 8 in the idea alone.

00:27:08 John

Do you guys get together and say can we both buy?

00:27:08 Phong

Yeah.

00:27:13 John

No, no.

00:27:13 Phong

It's it's almost, you know, before this everybody seems to be individual I think.

00:27:21 Phong

I think for me it's this recently that I've seen this group that now the sea planet, but as far as like how do we cut costs and all that it's like I can think of, OK, we gotta maybe go straight to, you know to Asia.

00:27:37 Phong

If we can have that capacity, but other than that you know how, how else right? And usually every business is just all for themselves, you know, and then with this group, I'm starting to see more of this willing to unite, willing to collapse.

00:27:56 John

I guess that that's that's really cool. I wonder if you, you know, you did mention that you know the the race to zero with like prices on for.

00:28:04 John

Have you had that similar conversation with the other groups like, hey, do you guys?

00:28:09 John

Want to like?

00:28:10 John

I don't know. You know, in New York, I don't know. Even in New York before in New York, all the hot dog carts have agreed on a fixed price and nobody, nobody violates it.

00:28:23 Phong

See, that's powerful.

00:28:24 John

Have you have you?

00:28:26 Phong

No, I don't know. I don't know how to mobilize that kind of thing. Yeah.

00:28:30 John

OK, so that's.

00:28:31 Phong

Cause man, that's what I'm talking about. That's.

00:28:35 John

They they have.

00:28:36 John

One fixed price where everybody is sustainable.

00:28:40 Phong

Because, you know, like, see, that's man. That's awesome. I I I that's the thing I'm seeing too, right? A lot of small businesses have no skills of being in business. It's almost like, oh, they've seen someone they have some.

00:28:53 Phong

Me and you know everybody want to chase for their dream. And yet behind there's a lack of skill. That doesn't mean I got. I got so much so to learn, right? But I feel like, man, that's a.

00:29:06 Phong

And that's one of the things that I would like to almost be.

00:29:11 Phong



Be.

00:29:12 Phong

How do I be a role? I don't know. I don't meet that standard.

00:29:20 Phong

That would be an example of a better standard.

00:29:24 Phong

Right cause cause we have example everywhere you know you walk into a Starbucks.

00:29:30 Phong

You can see.

00:29:31 Phong

The the structure, the atmosphere, the way they set up the flow, it's all.

00:29:37 Phong

Organize.

00:29:38 John

Yeah, they figured it out.

00:29:39 Phong

Yeah. What is it that. Yeah, they figure it out. Right. And we have that example. So how come like?

00:29:45 Phong

It's. I guess it's easier not to easy to easier not to, right when you're comfortable. When again, it goes back to capacity. You already day in and day out. You don't. You don't even have the mind to consider all that stuff. So perhaps it's easy for me to say because I have partners and whatnot.

00:30:05 Phong

So I feel like this this again, it's probably easy to, it's just easier not to.

00:30:12 John

Hmm

00:30:15 John

Just dropping knowledge here, that's such a good way to think about it. This is.

00:30:21 Phong

And then is that hard, right?

00:30:23 John

Yeah, it's really simple to think.

00:30:25 Kahn

How you doing?

00:30:28 John

Let me ask you one more question on just just very, very simply like.

00:30:34 John

What are all the pieces of technology you use today to run your business?

00:30:39 John

UM, for example, like what do you use for bookkeeping? What do you use for POS? Etcetera. Just list all these off. We've heard of most of them. I just want to kind of hear these out. And then as we as we gather more feedback, we'll start to see some patterns in this space. So, yeah, just list them off. Don't have to describe what they do or.

00:30:59 John

How they support you?

00:31:00 Phong

Uh.

00:31:02 Phong

Quick book.

00:31:04 Phong

Just forward.

00:31:07 Phong

Posts as POS Instagram.

00:31:12 John

What did you say?

00:31:12 Phong

Face uh messenger.

00:31:15 John

I'll tell you. Uh.

00:31:19 Phong

What else?

00:31:19 Kahn

Tick.

00:31:21 Kahn

Tick tock, tick tock.

00:31:23 Kahn

Uh.

00:31:26 Phong

Or the day-to-day right e-mail.

00:31:32 Kahn

Calendar, Google Calendar.

00:31:35 John

Mm-hmm.

00:31:36 Phong

Google Calendar, OK? Yeah.

00:31:40 John

OK. Yeah, this is, uh, pretty good bunch of technology there. If since we work in technology, you know it's we always like to ask like hey, of of all that suite of technology like what's what's something that they could do better like in that all that technology what is some gap.

00:32:00 John

Or space that is just ineffective or inefficient and that you would like to actually see do better.

00:32:09 Kahn

Man, I would like to see like even like and I've seen it done just like today. Like, just even like just one thing that synchronizes throughout the whole, like all all the platforms that we use, let's say if I was going to say in our group text a meeting at at their.

00:32:29 Kahn

Meeting with the architect tomorrow at 2:00 PM in Capitol Hill.

00:32:34 Kahn

Then I could just click something from that message that just sends the link. I don't know something like something that would just automate or just at least streamline the whole everything. So I'm not because I'm that's the thing about me. I'm severely unorganized, but if we just have something that's that makes it easier for someone like myself who could organize it.

00:32:54 Kahn

Uh, I think that would be for me, that'd be great.

00:32:59 Kahn

Yeah.

00:33:02 John

How about you, Fang?

00:33:04 Phong

Well, you know, I I I am. I'm I don't shine away from technology. I'm open to every platform. Some people are, you know, prefer this. I'm like, you know what? I'll be on all of it.

00:33:20 Phong

Right. And I'm willing to work with all of it. I'm on the, you know, even out the group. There's Facebook chat, there's slack. There's telegram.

00:33:29 Phong

Uh, you know, I'm on discord with my team here. I'm on Instagram group chat, so I'm like all of this. I'm like, you know what? I'm gonna do my best, but definitely streamline, right? Because I can't expect everyone's willing to do what I do and like, like, like, that's something that I see.

00:33:49 Phong

Too, right, because that's that's that's that's endless work for him. Right. And when when things just get too busy, it's almost how do we help him organize all this stuff and have clarity and make sure that, hey, when things happen need to happen with the deadline on the calendar and all that.

00:34:08 Phong

So I I don't know what the answer is but and then even our inventory, right, how do we?

00:34:16 Phong

Cut down step.

00:34:18 Phong

Right, this cook doesn't need to send it to me. How do they have an iPad that click and then it just says automatically to our vendor and then we have an alert to ahead next day. This is what you need to pick up like that.

00:34:31 John

In.

00:34:31 Phong

Uh, yeah, so.

00:34:36 Phong

But yeah, no, I I don't know. I don't know, but definitely the communication aspect, how do you streamline from different platform to different platform, right? How does AI pick up this conversation and then just drop in your calendar?

00:34:51 Phong

Right. It's just about like dropped.

00:34:51 John

Yeah.

00:34:52 Kahn

Right.

00:34:53 John

I think for you guys, the openness to use many.

00:34:58 John

Slash all technology platforms is both good and bad. Good in that it gives you exposure to see how they all work and allows you to.

00:35:06 John

Access different audiences, but at the same time bad in that. How do you aggregate? How do you get all those things together in one place so then you can actually digest it? Same thing, same thing with. It sounds like the complexity of like the day-to-day operations is really just about.

00:35:23 John

How do we optimize and minimize the gaps or the potential risk of like missing something? And I think there are some pools out there that will help you with that type of integration, but it's usually like good money or a lot of money that you know, I think small businesses can't necessarily shell out big companies. I think they have that figured out you know like.

00:35:43 John

Starbucks.

00:35:44 John

They every time they like, sell something every time they like, toss something out. They're like counting it. They're measuring every metric. What they what went to waste, what went to what got sold, what is selling well, what is not selling well then that creates like projections and trends. And they now know like on Thursday you can take like 6 protein egg bites, but on Friday.

00:36:05 John

You can take 20.

00:36:08 John

Do you know those? Probably not and and it takes a lot more tracking and a lot more data analysis to get through those things.

00:36:08 Phong

Yeah, exactly.

00:36:18 John

This is really this is insightful. Aretha, do you have any more questions?

00:36:22 Amritha

Yeah, I wanted to ask like when you started off, you know and?

00:36:29 Amritha

Doing the restaurant, what were the challenges that you were facing? I mean, say when you were scaling up, it's a different challenge when you begin, it's a different challenge. Like do you recollect, can you recollect some of those challenges that you felt somebody could have helped you with?

00:36:49 Phong

For me, I would say this organization.

00:36:53 Phong

Right to to to me, to more precise on.

00:36:59 Phong

The planning aspect, you know, having a timeline, designate responsibility and task.

00:37:07 Phong

I think because having partners before, I would have almost have to do a lot of things. Everything. But now having partner and how?

00:37:14 Phong

Do we keep?

00:37:16 Phong

Each other accountable right to make sure that they make sure we show up to the meeting, we make sure we're we're moving along, we're moving.

00:37:28 Phong

The needle, right it would.

00:37:29 Phong

Not.

00:37:31 Phong

But then yeah, I'm but that's far.

00:37:38 Phong

Any any challenge coin? I mean inclusion, there's plenty.

00:37:43 Amritha

One more thing.

00:37:43 Kahn

Oh yeah, sorry. I just had a go ahead.

00:37:46 Amritha

No, I was going to ask Fang when you say like somebody to help you with the planning and all the you kind of talking about somebody to manage all of those things like a managers. Were you like thinking of getting somebody maybe it was it like who has that?

00:38:05 Amritha

Experience.

00:38:06 Kahn

No.

00:38:07 Phong

I think it's perhaps the lack of our experience as well and skills that make us that a little bit more challenging, right?

00:38:22 Phong

Yeah.

00:38:23 John

Did you have mentorship to guide you through this during this phase when you're first starting up? I mean, you sound you were in the family business prior. Did you seek out mentorship? Did somebody help you through this?



00:38:23 Kahn

Thank.

00:38:37 Phong

The.

00:38:37 Phong

No, and I think that's the thing.

00:38:39 Phong

I I guess we are, we, we.

00:38:43 Phong

We think with our experience though, it's enough and then I guess we just wing it and then we'll learn as we go kind of thing and we don't even consider that mentorship. Yeah, it wasn't even part of what, what, what what we consider so no, no, we I mean.

00:38:51 John

Yeah.

00:39:02 John

OK.

00:39:02 John

Yeah.

00:39:04 Phong

First of all, it's not even enough that.

00:39:07 Kahn

I think yeah, that would be great.

00:39:10 Phong

Yeah. Have you met this year?

00:39:10 John

You.

00:39:12 John

You know.

00:39:12 Phong

That would help.

00:39:13 Phong

A lot, but like then it goes back to like.

00:39:16 Phong

I guess it's and I was like, does it cause? And who would it be? Does it does? Are they even in the same, you know this type of business as us?

00:39:27 John

Yeah. You know, the outside of mentorship, there are like a bunch of community, you know, business associations like I think Pioneer Square has their own little Business Association. The ID has a Business Association also. Did you engage with them for kind of guidance or support either?

00:39:47 John

OK, perfect. So maybe the follow up question is if you didn't look and you didn't really feel the need for it at that point and now you're like hey, looking back, I probably would.

00:39:48 Phong

Not at all.

00:39:57 John

Give you know.

00:39:58 John

Young me some better advice to go seek mentorship and or guidance from these community business associations. Where do you even go find those?

00:40:07 John

How do you find them?

00:40:09 Phong

What?

00:40:12 John

Have you tried to fight?

00:40:13 John

Right.

00:40:14 John

OK, OK. So you, you you don't you don't know where to even look for this type of thing. OK. Yeah. This is one of the hypothesis we have like, just finding the right people is.

00:40:14 Phong

No.

00:40:24 John

Quite hard.

00:40:29 John

I think that covers most of my questions and Rita do.

00:40:32 Amritha

You have more? Yeah. I just have, like, just two more. I wanted to ask about, like pop ups. Right. Like, have you thought of hosting pop ups in your space or like, you know, collaborate with other small businesses?

00:40:48 Amritha

That might fit your brand.

00:40:51 Amritha

You know, as a as a strategy for marketing.

00:40:52 Phong

Yes.

00:40:55 Phong

Yeah. We recently started to doing a lot of sweet pop up.

00:41:01 Phong

A dessert and what's not, and this has been great. You know, we got a chance to have content. We're not charging any fee for them to come in.

00:41:13 Phong

Not yet, at least, right. But it's been fun. I mean, we're we're able to have have something new for our guests to come in to look forward to. We have some material for our contents that we can use.

00:41:30 Phong

Right. But other than that, I think you know now that we've, you know, we actually just finished with the faster business consulting program.

00:41:43 Phong

And they actually give us a lot of ideas, a lot of practical ideas as well and and.

00:41:53 Phong

Right now is.

00:41:56 Phong

Probably when I come back from the country that we can have more planning on that execute that. But definitely with the pop up but also we're thinking of doing collaboration where it's like.

00:42:09 Phong

And I really love this idea. Being able to any business we can do feature one me of the month just lay like a Korean BBQ one me of the month Korean barbecue, and then we'll highlight that business and then we'll serve that month and that kind of partnership. We'll send money with the Korean.

00:42:31 Kahn

OK, Bob.

00:42:31 Phong

Right. So there's a lot of ideas and there's a lot of ideas.

00:42:35 John

Or for those potential collaborations, how do you find them?

00:42:35 John

Sure.

00:42:43 Phong

We have friends network reach out to us like hey, we're like and we're always down, right. And yeah, and.

00:42:51 Phong

And that's the thing, right? There's so much work to do. We we actually don't don't have someone that well, I guess that comes down to biz Dev, right? But this def have so much. We actually took on an assistant for for count with Biz Dev. So that's actually one of biz tap biz dev tasks as well. So I can actually have two assistants.

00:43:12 Phong

Actually.

00:43:15 Phong

Because he's so unorganized and so much \*\*\*\* to.

00:43:17 Phong

Do.

00:43:19 Kahn

I know I'm feeling.

00:43:21 Kahn

Organize my work with a for Trinity to organize the unorganized. Did that makes any sense? Yeah, but.

00:43:28 Phong

But you know, having time, man, is such a crucial key, you know, because operation is maintaining, make sure our current.

00:43:36 Phong

Guests coming back. But him? He moved the needle. Right? He's out there shaking.

00:43:41 Phong

And introducing people to our products and whatnot. But yeah, having having that, that, that, that part it give us ease with operation when we have this that taken care of.

00:43:52 John

Yeah.

00:43:55 John

Hmm.

00:43:57 John

That's that's really cool. I mean I I think your brain just talking to you, I think your brand is very collaborative, sorry not not not like Saigon DRIP, but like your personal brands as owners and operators and the space is very collaborative. So it's almost like anybody you meet, you will find a way to work with and support.

00:44:17 Phong

Hell yeah, I say. I say I say yes to everything just at what capacity.

00:44:17 John

I think.

00:44:23 John

Hmm, I see I.

00:44:24 John

See.

00:44:25 John

OK, So what would you do if like?

00:44:29 John

You saw some brand that you were like, damn, I really want to work with them. Like I'll I'll like name something like coffee holic. I love coffee holic because they landed in Bellevue recently and they have this coconut drink that is like at their original location. What you're like, man, I really wanna work with coffee. Holic. How do you how do.

00:44:45 John

You go do that.

00:44:46 Phong

I think can't can't know how to do that.

00:44:48 Phong

The best.

00:44:50 Kahn

Just go buy some coffee holic and just just smile. What's up, guys?

00:44:55 Kahn

Plant seeds, right?

00:44:57 Kahn

That's what. That's what we do, Paul. And I would do that, you know, we'll and that's we'll just go in and and eat something, you know, or just even and just just smile and just and then eventually something will come of it, you know.

00:45:09 Kahn

I mean if.

00:45:11 Kahn

And I think just supporting each other first is the most important thing. You know, you want to collaborate.

00:45:15 Phong

You know.

00:45:17 Kahn

Yeah, go ahead.

00:45:17 Phong

This this one one thing I I really I love from kindness. Not only he go there to support, but he will make a an Instagram highlight of the business right. And and. And I think as as easy as that.

00:45:27 John

Yeah, that's cool.

00:45:33 Phong

That's something we can do on a small scale.

00:45:36 Phong

And how do you?

00:45:38 Phong

How to have our own narrative promote each other?

00:45:39 John

Yes.

00:45:41 Kahn

Yeah, you know what? And I'll give you an example just now, just earlier when I was in the shop, some a gal came in, she said, hey, you just started following me. I said I said, oh, yeah, yeah, I did. I had no idea what the hell she's talking about. And her, her husband came in with a hat. I said ohh. OK drift. Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

00:46:01 Kahn

I love. I love you. I love it. What are you guys open, you know? And this is something that's that's that, you know? I mean, John, just just liking and. And Fong taught us that. Fong taught always that.

00:46:11 Kahn

Because he really emphasizes us to go out, and even if we're on the phone, there just go like some photos online or even just drop a comment, like a heart emoji or something. And it goes a long way. You know, you don't think much of it because I I like a million ship a day, you know? So I don't know what I'd be liking, but, you know, for that person for that brand, you know?

00:46:31 Kahn

It might mean something to them so.

00:46:33 John

Yeah.

00:46:35 John

That's really cool. I I don't have anymore questions. And Rita, if you don't have any more questions, we can stop the recording and I'll have, like, kind of two off the record questions and then nothing scary. It's just that we don't need to record it for our own sake. You know one.



00:46:48 John

It.