

Matt Bowles: My guest today is Stef Solferini. He is an elite business coach and the founder of [Marco Polo Group](#), which helps CEOs maximize revenue, cashflow, profit, and business valuation for an optimal exit. He coaches CEOs from many of the fastest and most exciting Inc 5, 000 companies that want to get to a 1 billion valuation fast with less mistakes and with a proven roadmap. Born in Italy and raised on four continents. Stef has now been to over 120 countries and speaks five languages. He built [Marco Polo Group](#) with a location, independent infrastructure, and he is now a full-time itinerant digital nomad with no permanent base who travels the world with carryon luggage only.

Stef, welcome to the show,

Stef Solferini: Matt, it's great to be here, buddy. Can't wait to have a great chat with you today.

Matt Bowles: Man, I am so excited to have you here. Let's just start off by setting the scene and talking about where we are recording from today. Unfortunately, we are not in person. If we were, we would be having a bottle of wine together, but I am actually on the West coast of Africa. I am in Luanda Angola today, and where are you?

Stef Solferini: I am in Brazil, and I have just spent two months in Rio de Janeiro participating in the carnival and getting to know that and I have just moved to the south of Brazil in a beautiful island called Florianopolis, which is in Santa Catarina to get a well-earned rest after the madness of Rio de Janeiro.

Matt Bowles: Man, I am so excited to hear about your experience. I knew you were going. We haven't talked about it yet. As you know, Brazil is one of my favorite countries in the world. I have been about three times. I have been to Carnival. And I have been talking about it ever since I went and telling people that it is a unique experience, unlike anything that I have ever experienced in my life. So why don't we open with that and share a little bit about your experience for people that have never been to carnival in Brazil, in Rio de Janeiro, what was it like?

Stef Solferini: Well, I had, I think an exceptional experience because a lesson in life is that you must always go somewhere new prepared, right? So don't just wing it, do your homework. And I have an amazing digital nomad friend, just like you are, who is a professor of tourism at a university. And he is Italian. He speaks six languages like me. And he actually is an expert in Brazil, and he's done 15 carnivals in a row, except for the ones in COVID. He knows more about it than the Cariocas.

And so, he coached me for three months before I went to the carnival on what to do. So, I had to one, learn Portuguese with a karaoke person, because otherwise you won't get the full experience. Then he made me learn over 30 songs, because when you go to carnivals, you know, if you don't know the martini, the songs, you're going to miss out on 80 percent of the experience.

And then he taught me all about the history, how to structure it and everything else. So, when I came on, I was like a person who's gone maybe 10 times, which was a huge, huge thing. So, the first thing I'd say is do your homework before you go. Because if you do these things that I've just outlined, your experience would be a thousand times better.

But let me just tell you what some of the highlights, because he said to really get the most out of it, you've got to come a couple of months before, because it's going to take a couple of months to really get in the swing of things. And that's what you told me as well, when I was researching coming to Rio.

And so, I did that. And so, I actually arrived just before Christmas, and I did Christmas in Copacabana beach in a sort of rooftop hotel with my buddy. Looking at this surreal sort of beach that goes Cabana, Ipanema, Leblon, all of that you told me all about, which was surreal. And then you do New Year's Eve, and the Réveillon is unbelievable, right?

So, the Réveillon, which means in French to wake up, is maybe one and a half million people, all dressed in white. And it's unbelievable, right? It's free. You've got some of the top samba bands and singers, of all time alive performing and we're all dressed in white. So, this friend of mine, he said, Stef, there is no place in the world like Rio and he's been all over the world.

And so, I did the new year's, which was unbelievable. And then I got ready for the carnival because I had the inside lane. I actually was in the parade. I was one of the guys dressed up doing the Samba dancing, learned the dances. Rehearsed during the week. I went all in. So, I ended up performing in the San Bodromo in front of 80, 000 people on the Friday with one of the sorts of the second league teams, not the super, because for that you've got to be a professional, but it was unbelievable.

So, I mean, I did that and then I sort of participated full in for the whole carnival. So, let's talk first about Rio and then we'll talk about carnival because there's just too much. So, Rio is one of the most intensities in the entire planet, as you know, and it is. Like a mixture of San Tropez surrounded by Mogadishu all around it.

It's just very bizarre because you've got this sort of sparkly image that they market and then you've got the realities of the poverty. And the favelas and all of that and it's very intense. And you know what's happened Matt, since you last came is the last couple of years have been superbly tough on Brazil because previous president what happened is 60 million people went below the Poverty line, 60 million. That's the whole country of Italy, right?

So, the rich get richer, the poor get poorer. And so, loads of people from the Northeast and the poor countries flocked into Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, looking for a way to survive. So, you've got the intensity of without doubt one of the most visually spectacular cities in the world, because it's got, as you know, the lake, it's got the beaches, it's got the forest, it's got all the ecosystems all around.

So that is amazing. But the people, you need, I mean, there is nothing like the energy of the karaoke's. As you know, these people have a joy of life that is extraordinary. And so, when you get them together and they're dealing with a very difficult situation, because the cost of living is stratospherically high for them in regards, and they just face everything with a smile on their face.

So, it's extremely beautiful and it's extremely intense and you've got to be super careful. So, with that backdrop, then you go into the carnival. And as you know, the carnival is unique. Because you have 12 teams performing over two days of the Sambadromo, which is just unbelievable. And I went to these events, and it starts at 10 and it finishes at 6 in the morning. It's exhausting, but it's spectacular. And then after that, what people do is they go home. It takes you about an hour, one and a half hours to get home with the Metro because there's 80, 000 people. So, what I would do is I'd get home at 7:30 and then my buddy would go, okay, now we've got to hit the blockers. The blockers are the street parties, right? And the street parties, as you know, no joke. So, it's 300, 000 people. In 40 degrees centigrade. And there is music that is so loud and it's full on and there'll be 500 of those going on during a week. So, my friends who has got much more stamina than me, he's younger than me.

So, he did three blockers back-to-back, and then we'd go out at night. And so, you can keep that up for a week. If you're 25, I am sure as heaven, I can't do that. And it just destroys you, but it's super intense and amazing. And it finished with a block of a million people. Can you imagine? I got a street party with a million people. You can't even see where the band is performing a movie because it's so far away, but I've never been to a street party with a million people. And it was a very unique experience. It was amazing.

Matt Bowles: And what was it like to be in the actual parade, in the Sambadromo, in front of 80, 000 people? What was that experience? What did it feel like?

Stef Solferini: It's amazing. So, before that, you go with your Samba school and you are getting ready for the parade. The parade is 45 minutes, so there's a team of maybe 2 to 3, 000 people in your parade, and they've got like maybe 10 different themes. So, the most beautiful thing to do before the parade starts is you're lining up with everyone.

Everyone's putting their costume on, and then you walk the whole length of your team, which could easily a kilometer and you're seeing everybody super dressed up. You see the Pasistas who are the professional Samba dancers looking incredible. They're looking exotic, the men and the women, they look amazing.

You know, they're all dressed up. And then these constructions that they're made of paper mash and stuff, which are just gigantic. I mean, you're touching them and you're talking to people. And I love that just as much as the parade that was like having the inside track you in it and you're with the team and, you know, it's like being in a Superbowl and you're in the changing rooms, you know, with the team, right?

So doing that. And then when you go out, I purposely went. On the left-hand side of the parade, so you go in a line of eight and I went purposely on the far left hand side so I could connect eye to eye with the people as I was going and I had a huge costume. I was a gigantic clown. I had a massive head and a huge outfit, right?

And the amazing thing about it is you come in; the spotlights hit you. The energy just lifts you out of your body because it's an out-of-body experience. It is literally like you're going on a Concorde, and the energy just shoots you up. It's like the biggest high you'll ever have in your life. But then the amazing thing about the Brazilians is because you know how electric they are.

When you go along the left or the right-hand side and you're connecting with people and you touch their hands and you look into their eyes, they just inject you with this pure joy of life. Yeah. And there is nothing like it. I mean, in Africa, I experienced that kind of joy, which, you know, all about, but it really was unbelievable.

And then what you do is you walk, and the music is definitely, cause you've got the drums and you've got the percussion things that everybody's singing their song with passion because you're being marked for it, right? So, it's very intense but the most amazing thing is when you walk to the end when you look out at the end of the sun border moment, you'll see this arch and you see this hill with a million lights, which looks like a Christmas tree and it's actually a favela.

It's one of the biggest favelas in Rio de Janeiro. So, you've got this thing, which is spectacular. You've got people, people, you know, you're in the costume, music's pumping, connecting people. And then as you get towards the end, you just see this arch with these Christmas lights of the favela. And buddy, there's nothing like it. It's absurd. And it is highly physical. It will suck all your energy. This is not for unfit people, right?

Matt Bowles: That is incredible, man. I have only seen it as a spectator, but that's what I've been telling people about. Like you buy tickets to go to this event and the Samba Drone, it's 80, 90 thousand people in this thing. So, for Americans, that's like an American football stadium filled. And then you watch these parades go by and these Samba schools, they call them. These are like dance troops with 5, 000 people wearing the most elaborate costumes I've ever seen in my life. What you've just described. And it was just a mind-blowing experience as a spectator to be there. And to your point, it goes until six or seven in the morning.

So, I can remember we were there and there was maybe one more to go. And it was like five 30 in the morning. And I was there at the time with my relationship partner, and you know, the sun's coming up at 5:30. We've seen five of these already. You know, there's only one more. Maybe we should just go and get some sleep. We get up to leave. We look around. Not a single person had left. Everyone's looking at us like, where are you going? Why would you leave? And we're like, okay, I guess we should sit, we literally sat back down and watched the final one and stayed until 7:30, then walked home in the broad daylight.

But that's how it is. And I can only imagine what it must have been like to be the center of that attention and to be performing in that. I mean, what an extraordinary experience.

Stef Solferini: Yeah, it was. And then you take off your costumes altogether. There are thousands of you taking your costume off because my buddy knows it inside out. We just go from that straight to a 300, 000 people party. We are physically exhausted and then it's 40 degrees centigrade. And all the other people maybe have slept. You haven't. I'm 53, for goodness' sake. Brutal. And then he does it again. Let's go to another one. And honestly, it was like my investment banking business.

There was nothing left to me. I was just shattered. And that's why I've got to chill out because I said, hey, I need to time out here. Right. Cause I mean, there is no place like Rio de Janeiro for sucking your energy. It's addictive and people are open, right? They're fully open. They're going to hug you. They're going to take you for a dance. They're going to make you pay a big beach tennis with them. I go dancing with them. They're like, let's go. You know.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing, man. And I appreciated you mentioning the connection with Africa as well of that vibe. I mean, first of all, there's just a massive, obviously African diaspora in Brazil and huge amounts of cultural influence there, which I noticed, which is why those are two of my favorite places in the world, right?

I've just spent the last seven months on this continent. I was in West Africa over December. I went to Ghana for Dettys December where they have. All the Afrobeats festivals and all of the top performers, Burna Boy and everybody else was there performing live. And similar thing, all night parties, beach parties, all this kind of stuff.

And it's just a place where it warms my heart so much to just be in the mix. And I think a lot of the stuff that I like about Brazil is also the reason why I spend so much time in West Africa or not just West Africa. I mean, I was in Kenya and Tanzania as well, which are also incredible places at Johannesburg and a lot of other places on this trip as well.

But you've actually spent more time on this continent than I have. And I would love to transition and get some of your reflections on your time here but maybe let's just start with going all the way back and talking a little bit about your backstory because that has a lot to do with this continent.

Stef Solferini: Yeah, sure. So, I'm half Italian, quarter French, quarter Portuguese, really. And my mother was born in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. And my parents met in Africa cause my father was the son of a diplomat in Africa. And so, my parents met through that. And so, they'd spent 20 years in Africa. I've got very deep links to Africa.

And through that, I got to know Africa very well. And I lived in Mali when I was a small kid in West Africa. And from there, I sort of got to understand the whole of West Africa really well as a child, before sort of going to the U.K. And then, you know, I would regularly come back to Africa and then when I had the time, I actually trekked the whole of East Africa.

You know, I went from like Morocco all the way down to South Africa to Zimbabwe and all of that. And through Zanzibar and all that, that was just unbelievable. I had six months with some mates going in a Range Rover in between one job that I had and starting a new one. There's nothing like it. I think it's very important that we understand that Africa is the starting point for all human beings.

That's where we started. You want to understand about human beings. You've got to start with Africa. If you want to understand our roots, if you understand the heartbeat of life, and now us as human being animals, we relate to nature and everything. You've got to start with Africa. I certainly learned the joy of life from Africa.

In West Africa, I'd be a little boy with, you know, a circle in the desert, dancing in my little boo, my dress, you know. And I learned about happiness and joy and the joy of sharing and singing together. And you can see in Brazil. I mean, Brazil was geographically linked to Africa and they just spun off.

And then you had all the slavery and stuff. And you can see very clearly in the music and their food, and also in this communal joy of life that they have, when you sing together, it transcends your spirits that to me, that was Africa. And this is what Africa teaches you.

Matt Bowles: So, as an adult then, when you grew up and you continued to go back to Africa, what were some of the highlights for you in terms of moments that stood out maybe on that trip you were describing or otherwise?

Stef Solferini: Yeah, so for me, definitely living for a week with the Maasai Mara was an unforgettable experience because, you know, you're living in these huts made of cow dung and you're just living, doing what they do every day, getting to understand the traditions and their customs. And I really loved doing that. That was really great. I really loved the Spice Islands of Zanzibar because at the time it was one of the most beautiful places in the world. It literally had this sort of martini ad sunsets there. And I really, really loved crossing the Sahara Desert and visiting the pygmy villages. Which was an incredible experience because, you know, when you cross the Sahara Desert, it's quite tough, but it's beautiful.

And then pygmy villages, like if you haven't seen them, just unbelievable. I mean, they literally, pygmy villages inside rocks. So, like the village is inside a mountain made of rocks. And, you know, you've got to really bend down. Even as a small kid, I used to have to bend down to get in. That was amazing. So, I mean, those would be three massive highlights, but I mean, you know, you could go on about Ngorongoro, the safari, you've done all that stuff. You know how amazing it is.

Matt Bowles: I mean, I just did it and it was interesting because I did the safari in Masai Mara and hung out with the Masai back in 2018 when I was in Kenya and then I went back this year and I was in Nairobi again

and then I went to Tanzania and I was like, you know, should I do the safari in the Serengeti? I already did one in Masai Mara. It's just kind of right over the border. Would it be similar?

And the folks that were going were like, listen, we're going to go to the Ngorongoro crater. We're going to do a hot air balloon ride over the Serengeti. We're going to do this and that. And sure enough, I went, and it was just an entirely new experience. We saw different animals that we didn't see before, and you just have these totally new experiences. So, you could do all of this stuff and each different place that you do it. It's a completely different experience. And it's just magical, man. I mean, I've been here this year for seven months, the last, you know, pre COVID 2019, I was on the continent for about five months.

I lived in Cairo for about nine months. I mean, I just kind of keep coming back and there's so much diversity on this continent. The difference between living in North Africa in a place like Egypt or Morocco, where I've spent plenty of time versus living in West Africa versus East Africa and Southern parts of Africa.

I mean, it's so diverse and it's so uniquely amazing each region. And I feel like even though I've spent probably at this point about two and a half years on the continent or so, I've seen so little of it. I mean, I've been to only 12 countries here and there's, what, 56 or so of them. And I just want to spend more time and keep exploring more of it because it's just so magical each new place I go.

Stef Solferini: Yeah, and I think, look, Africa, for me, unlocked the key to what joy is about. Very early on in my life, you know, because you will go to very poor countries and you'll see the most happy, smiling people in the world. And then I'd be working like doing Wall Street stuff in New York where everyone was so rich, it was repulsive and you're so miserable.

So, it really will teach you about joy. And you were absolutely right. No two safaris are the same. Parks are the same. It's completely different. You can literally spend your whole life just visiting Africa and you will not do it all. It's just too big, but you've done more than 99.9 percent of Americans and most people on the planet. So, you're doing great.

Matt Bowles: Well, I'm excited to keep doing more, man. Can you share a little bit, expand a little bit on that concept of joy, Stef? Because one of the things that I find really interesting about you, I mean, you and I can have connected on so many different things. Our love of Africa, obviously one of them, love of Brazil and other than, but I think in terms of some of your kind of core values and observations about life was another thing that really stood out to me about you.

You have been in the business high level CEO coaching game. You've worked in wall street and all these other spaces for many, many years. And then that observation that you just made about joy, I think is a really, really important one. Can you extrapolate a little bit on that observation that you made from your years in the business world compared with things like traveling in Africa?

Stef Solferini: Sure. So, it all starts with a deep love for philosophy, which I've had since I was a child. So, I've always, Try to answer the big questions in life. And you know, what is happening, what's the meaning of life and all of that. And I'm quite a studious person. So, what I experienced, and then I test all the theories in the real world. Right.

And so, when you're born in a Western country, typically people think a big paycheck, great job. Looking good, all, you know, power, fame, all that would make you happy, particularly in countries like the United

States. And when I was right in the middle of all that world, most of the people I met who were super rich and super successful in inverted commas were miserable.

And I had a lot of problems, you know, the vast percentage of them were not happy. And so, I looked at this and I said, well, clearly the evidence does not support this hypothesis, right? They ain't happy, right? And then I experienced in Africa, the things that you and I said, where there's people that literally don't know where they're going to get water and there's always joy, right?

So that's not making sense. So, I studied happiness. So, I did a whole bunch of courses. I did a course on happiness at Yale University online. I did one at Harvard. I studied all the readings of the top positive psychology professors in the world in America. And so, I got real empirical study. And there's one study that you should all look at, which is the Harvard study. Look at it on YouTube.

The Harvard studies looked over like 80, 90 years. What are the key drivers of happiness and wellbeing for human beings taken from people over generations. And it's very clear that the number one driver of happiness is the quality of the human relationships followed by your experiences.

It's not income. I mean, after about 60, 70, 000 U.S. dollars, it does not make a massive difference to your happiness. So that's really resonates with me because I said, look, the joy of life is definitely the quality of human relationships and it's in the quality of the life experiences you have. And I know you and I share this belief very deeply. So, in order to do that, I had to turn my back on all the things that I had grown and was brainwashed to assume brought happiness. So, I got rid of all the material stuff. I'm a minimalist. I'm a stoic. I focus on human relationships. I focus on health. I focus on incredible experiences.

I focus on having an open heart. I eliminate all toxic people out of my life. And I focus on being an optimist. And I really work on using it or losing it. So, your body, your mind, the reason why I run this business is because you've got to keep using stuff. And if you pursue that, if you connect with amazing people, the energy that you bring out will attract incredible people. That's how we met. That's how I met Dave Williams, who's another great friend of ours, is like this. I mean, I met Dave when I was in Australia, I messaged him. He was in Portugal, and I said, dude, you and I are going to have a great connection. I just know it. This is me. Bang. He said, great. So I went to Portugal, Australia, met up with him, we hit it off and he passed me on to you. It's just great, right?

So, and this is the joy of life. And ever since I've done that, my health has showed up. My happiness has shown up and I keep attracting beautiful people in my life. And so, I know that works. So, everyone out there, sure, we've all got to make money, we've got to get ahead and all that. But don't neglect your human relationships because that will really bring long term happiness.

Matt Bowles: Well, big shout out to Dave Williams, Maverick Show listeners know Dave because he has been a guest on The Maverick Show. Absolutely incredible guy. And as you mentioned, what are the best connectors that I know in terms of putting me in touch with incredible people like you and other folks as well. Some of whom have been on this podcast also absolutely incredible guy. So big shout out to Dave. Hopefully I'm going to see him in the next month or so here. So, looking forward to that reconnect.

But Stef, can you talk a little bit about some specific steps that people can take towards What you were just describing, right? Because I think a lot of us, especially when we grow up in societies like the United States, right? I mean, where I grew up, we're really inundated with this whole career path and making more money. And it's a very hyper capitalist, materialist, individualistic type of society that we're socialized into.

And so, what you did I think is extraordinary in terms of taking three steps back and starting to study the things that are really important and then testing and implementing and based on your experience and based on what's worked, how would you advise people to start moving in that direction from wherever they are now?

Stef Solferini: Yeah. So, you've got to read the material, first of all. So read about positive psychology. There are some awesome books. Just Google positive psychology. You'll find out, you know, Columbia has some great people. Study about the art of happiness, like Buddhist philosophy encapsulates all of this. So do your homework first.

But what does it basically say? Well, it tells you that true happiness is internal and it's based on, you know, you being content with yourself and not having expectations too high that are going to cause this grief and then not to get caught in what's called the hedonic trap, which is I was working with colleagues when I was in funds management, you know, like they'd make 5 million bucks in a year and they go, it's not enough.

I need 10 and then I need 20 and then it's never enough. And I'm going, are you serious? And you know, I remember once I did an IPO of a business and this guy who was like 20 years older than me at the party after he'd done it, right? He just goes, Stef, why are you always so happy and joyful? What are you so smug about?

He goes, I've got all this and I'm not as happy. I said, well, the difference between you and me, my friend, is that I've got enough. And I know I've got enough. And by the way, I'm out of here. See you later. Enjoy your jet and all that stuff alone. And then these people are miserable. So, what you've got to do is think for yourself, get rid of a lot of this materialistic stuff that drags you down.

And you know what I'm talking about? The big mortgage, the expensive car, I got rid of all of it. I started doing this only after my daughter was past the university and all that, because like in America and Australia, it's very expensive. So, I had to keep paying for all of that. But once that was done and she's got a stellar career.

Yeah. I was free. And then so I got rid of all of that and I live very frugally. I live a very simple life. And then I choose the relationship. And then I've chosen to have a digital business so that like yourself, I have the freedom of choice of moving around, which is not an easy decision to make, but you make it, but the steps are given up the material stuff. Think for yourself, think of doing something like a digital business to give you freedom or build passive income. Like your amazing business does, you know. Teaching people how to invest passively in real estate so that they can build income streams. Aim of the game is to get free time. If you got free time, you're free and it doesn't matter whether you're on 10, 000 a year or 10 million.

Freedom of time is the most important thing. You know, I studied Warren Buffett and everything for years and the most important thing he said is that my timetable is clear. That's actually my biggest wealth, not the billions of dollars I've got. So do that and then clearly, I think building a digital business is the way to go and real estate assets

And then take the leap and the younger you are taking the leap, the better because technology is so easy. Now it's way easier when I was a kid. There's no excuse. You can do it. And then there's a huge demand with this global outsourcing of people. I mean, I'm not staying here with a wonderful person. She's a web developer and she's Italian. Well, she's been doing this for years. Web developer. Great.

So do that and then really focus on human relationships and your self-development. I think you do a great job. And then just be bold. Make the jump. You should be very scared about being in a rat race. And doing the same old thing and being the same old cubicle more than the fear of the unknown of having freedom. Like we were all enjoying.

Matt Bowles: Well, one of the things that you and I have spent a lot of time talking about over the last few months is the process of downsizing to carry-on luggage only. And sort of this concept of stylish minimalism. And I would love to hear some of your reflections on how that process went for you and then any lessons learned or tips that you have for folks on that.

Stef Solferini: Yeah, so I have to thank you for this, Matt, because you are actually way ahead of me in this department, and you've been my mentor on this. So, I went from a lot of physical trappings to two bags when I left Australia six years ago. And that was tough because that was an office and all my stuff, but it's difficult when you move around. That's still too much. I found out after a couple of years, I was just, you know, too hard, right? And I just could not work out how I'm going to get this thing decluttered.

And then when I came across your stuff and Dave Williams told me about you and how you actually managed to reduce it to, uh, one bag, I was going, wow, this is the next level. It's very confronting. This whole thing about, I mean, I am not a materialistic person. I'm really not. But for me to go down to one bag when you've got your office, I mean, it's easy if you just backpack, but we ain't backpacking. We're running a business. That is next level complicated. And it was actually really tough.

So, the best tips are one, look at all the math stuff. Two, I went online. There was packhacker.com or something like that. They're great. They've got a community to teach you all the hacks. So, I got one bag, one carry on, I'd compress everything. I got rid of more and more stuff. And you know, this is a metaphor for your life. Get rid of it. Are you going to use it? No. Do I really, really need it? No.

And then what you told me about merino wool was a total game changer. Changed my life. Merino wool, you don't need a third of the clothes. You're an absolute game changer. Thank you. And yes, it is more expensive, but yes, you will not need to do your washing and stuff.

So, Marina wall, total game changer. And then you just don't need half that stuff that you think you need. You really don't need it, but it was not easy. It's not easy. And I'm still refining it, but I'm free. And when I saw all the people queuing up, I left Rio. It was just mayhem to check out. If you don't carry on, you just cruise past. See you later. It's amazing.

Matt Bowles: Totally agree, man. I'm still refining as well, and I've been doing this nomad life for 10 years now. But just like you, I didn't start off with carrying on luggage, I started off lugging enormous suitcases, checking multiple bags, trying to move these giant suitcases around the world. And then eventually I was like, there's got to be another way.

So, I started studying it and refining it and studying it and refining it. And I appreciate that feedback, man. That's very kind of you. We'll link up my video training in the show notes on stylish minimalism and how to travel the world with carryon luggage only without sacrificing fashion and style.

That's really the clincher there. Of course, you could just wear a swim trunks and a tank top and flip flops every day and just travel around to beach locations. It's not hard to travel with carryon luggage only. The

difficult part is how do you do it? And dress well and also be able to bring, for example, a professional podcasting studio as I do, right.

Or things like a portable espresso maker. Like I do all of these other things that also fit in my carry-on luggage and have all this stuff to run a digital business and all of this kind of stuff. So, we'll link that up in the show notes Stef, as well as the other resources that you mentioned in that.

But yeah, I mean, it's an ongoing process. I mean, I am continuing to refine. And there's new companies that are continuing to make new stuff. That's very conducive to this. Once they realize, oh, there's demand for this, they start making new stuff and more stuff and better stuff. And so, I'm continuing to refine my wardrobe and the things that I bring in all that.

Stef Solferini: Yeah, it really does get, but I mean, what you taught me very well is that you can do this one carry-on luggage and still have a jacket and a smart quick and smart shirt. Still have a black pair of very high-end leather shoes. When I want, I can look at a million bucks. Yeah. I'm a middle-aged man, I ain't going to go around on a tank top doing that.

That shit has so sailed, it's not funny, right? And you're the same, you know, we like the finer things in life, and you just don't have to compromise. But you need to be very smart, and it's very confronting. But you can do it. You can be stylish. And I think the other big thing that you taught me, Matt, is don't compromise on the things that really mean a lot to you.

So, I know how much your espresso machine means to you. I'm Italian, I'm the same. So, we don't compromise on that. We like dressing up with a suit and stuff. We go out. So, we ain't going to compromise on that. We bring the thing.

Matt Bowles: Yeah.

Stef Solferini: You've got your podcast stuff. You ain't compromise on that. I mean, that's a big shout out, right? But you've done it. So, you can do it.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, that's what I tell people, because I do workshops on this at nomad conferences and all this stuff all the time and somebody will always raise their hand and say, I need to fill in the blank item, right? I have this specialty hairdryer thing for my hair, and I need to bring it with me.

And I'm like, great. Do you need a professional podcasting studio? And they're like, no. And I was like, oh, great, put the hairdryer where the podcasting studio goes. Figure out what you need, that's important for you. That's totally fine. And then just figure out what you don't need. So, I travel the world with a three-piece suit and Ferragamo shoes. And I want to be able to rock that in the places where I want to rock that. A lot of people don't ever wear a suit. And so don't take it if you don't wear it, take whatever you want to wear the way that you want to roll. And you can take things out, put things in, and figure out what their priorities are for you.

And so, you and I have done that stuff. We've optimized our life. We just travel the world with carry-on luggage, which means we don't ever have to stand online to check in for a flight. We don't ever have to wait 45 minutes for a bag to come off the plane when we get out of the airport. I mean, I'm at the Airbnb drinking wine while people are still waiting for their luggage at the airport.

I mean, it is an incredibly liberating experience. It not only saves you time, but also just the psychological mindset that all of your material items in your life can fit into carry-on luggage. It's just an incredibly liberating thing that, as you said, allows you to focus your life on relationships with people and incredible experiences instead of material items.

Stef Solferini: It really is a metaphor for your life. It's actually putting it in practice. And it's very difficult to do at the start. Very difficult. Even for a non-materialistic person like me. But if you practice it and then you extend it to your whole life. You will find out because, you know, you go, and hand luggage and stress levels drop by 90%.

And it's the same thing with, well, you don't have to load yourself. I mean, I used to be a CEO of global infrastructure, real estate funds. I know a lot about real estate. They're going, why don't you have this, that, the other? Why don't you manage this? I'm going, well, I don't want the hassle. I don't want the hassle. I want to be free. I don't want headaches. That's why, for example, what you do.

With Maverick, it's so great because it's much more passive. It's much more stress free, all that stuff. You know, you've got to find a way either to make me physical, stress free, or you reduce massively. And I say less is more. Less is always more for happiness.

Matt Bowles: Well, I want to talk to you a little bit about some of your other travels as well. You have been to a lot more countries than I have. I think you're up to 120 or so now. And let me ask you about your experience in one of the countries that is super high on my list that I've never been to, which is mainland China. I have been only to Hong Kong and Macau, and I feel really crazy that I call myself a digital nomad. I've been traveling the world for 10 years.

I've never been to mainland China. This is almost 20 percent of the population of earth that lives there. It's the most spoken first language in the world, Mandarin more than English. And yet I've literally never been outside the airport in Beijing for a layover.

Stef Solferini: Yeah.

Matt Bowles: You, I know, have spent a bunch of time there, and I would love to get just some feedback on your experiences there.

Stef Solferini: So, I've been going to China for 25 years, and I've lived in China. I've lived in Beijing for a year, and I lived in Shanghai for a year. So, my business is called *Marco Polo* because Marco Polo was obviously an explorer that went from Italy to China and brought the East to the West and the West to the East.

And I see myself as having been somebody who followed that path. So, I worked out in my mid-twenties that Asia was going to be the big economic driver and in the ascension in the next 20, 30 years. And I was correct. And so, I pushed myself to understand that part of the world for two and a half decades, and China was at the heart of that dynamic growth.

So, if you don't understand China, it's like trying to understand Western economic development, understanding America. Right. But what was so shocking about China was the rate at which it caught up with America because it caught up a hundred years in 15. So first of all, we used to know about China is that it's like America. It's massive. It's very different in every different parts. And secondly, if you go to Shanghai, Shanghai is the most. Capitalistic, intensive, high impact place in the planet, way more than

New York. So, you've got to get ready for it. So, when I used to take my teams to China for work, I used to go, gentlemen, ladies, we are now on China time.

And he goes, you're going to have to operate three times faster than three times. I'm like, what are you talking about? We would be landing in a place like in Shanghai at three in the morning. I said, let me show you what I mean. I'd send an email out at two in the morning, and I'd get a reply. Within half an hour. I said, these guys never sleep. And he goes, this is business, business, business.

And the reason why they've caught up a hundred years in 15 is because they just working three times faster, three times longer. China is fascinating. There are over 30 cities that have over 10 million people and the speed at which things are operating is mind blowing.

So, I would go to Beijing. And I would go in the taxi and see developments because I was in real estate as well. And I would go somewhere and then I'd go for another trip. I come back two months later. I couldn't recognize the square because they built three more skyscrapers. You literally think you're having a hallucination. And then of course, somebody like me, there's the beautiful history that you need to go. So, Beijing is incredible. All these places, the wall of China, that is amazing.

Matt Bowles: So, when I go for my first time to mainland China, what would you recommend?

Stef Solferini: You must go to Shanghai, because Shanghai is like New York on steroids, and you need to see this cosmopolitan, amazing place, because it's incredible. So, Shanghai is a must. Beijing is a must, because it's got the mixture of the old traditional and the modern, and you really get to feel where the power is in China. It's very, very important. It's a pretty serious place. Right. But you get to understand what that's like. And then you've got to do things like seeing the Xi'an soldiers, all of that. It's like saying where'd you go in America. It's just so big.

Matt Bowles: I also want to ask you about one of your loves, which is scuba diving. I know you have done something like 2000 dives all over the world. Can you share a little bit, just about what you love about scuba diving in general and then maybe some of your top dive experiences around the world.

Stef Solferini: I have always loved diving because it's like going into another universe and it's like going in space. You either go in space or you can go down diving and then the marine life is something that you need to experience. It's like being in this world and not knowing about terrestrial life. You've got to go and check it out. And then it's super quiet when you're down there and it's super relaxing. And when I had stressful jobs, I found that incredibly comforting and incredibly relaxing for my state of mind.

So, some of the places that I really loved are the Micronesian islands. Around Fiji, where it's probably the soft coral capitals of the world. Places like Palau are amazing, right? I love the Seychelles, and my grandfather used to live there. So, I used to go there and start diving from a very young age. I absolutely adore the Seychelles because it's got incredible manta rays, all sorts of fish, amazing coral. I loved the Galapagos. The Galapagos has got incredible diving things, you know, turtles and marine life that is just beyond description.

Those are some of the best diving experiences I've had. But I mean, if you ask me what I say, the top three sort of best scuba locations that I would say to any person that you must do, you must go to the Blue Hole in Belize because it's massive. And when you go underneath the stalagmites and stalactites that make you think like you're in Jules Verne's 80, 000 Leagues Under the Sea. Definitely the Galapagos and French

Polynesia, I think would be an amazing place to go, places like Rancho Yora. You'll never have any regrets staying there.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. When you think back about all of the travel that you've done and all of these experiences that you've had over the years, what impact do you think all of that has had on you and why are you continuing to travel after 120 countries? What does travel mean to you today?

Stef Solferini: Well, to me, it's a philosophy of life. I mean, I really think for me that I was put on this earth to understand the humans on this planet, understand what this planet is about. Well, I have the privilege of being alive to understand all of its nuances and then to get the main themes about that, about what is important in life and what makes you happy.

And for me, traveling has always uncovered blind spots in my personality, and it's made me learn. So, I learned about happiness in places like here in Brazil and in Africa, you know. I've learned about work ethics and execution in the Anglo-Saxon countries, you know, like in Scotland and in America. I've learned about thinking big and not being scared of the unknown in America. I've learned about appreciating nature in Australia, all these amazing things. I've learned about the joy of life and eating with people and celebrating family in Italy.

I take the best from every country, and I integrate it in my personality and then I look at the worst of human conditions. And I make sure I get rid of that and say, right, that's not for me, but I have this mission in my life that I want to understand the world people. And after all these years, and it's been half a century running around. It's very clear to me, human beings on the whole are all the same. We all want to be loved. We all want to feel a sense of belonging. We want to feel, we want a roof over our head. Most of us want our children to do better than what we did. We want to connect and in general, the nature of human beings is a good one.

And then what you have is within that, you've got these amazing different cultural differences. And so, what it is, is that every place is like a door with a different key. And when you get to understand the key and it takes a lot of work and you need to be very open minded, but once you get the key, this whole universe opens up and I've learned to open hundreds of doors, which has taken a lot of work, but it's given me amazing insights about human nature and it's like a mirror that stares you in the face and say well you thought about this you thought about that.

Maybe you should improve this about yourself. Maybe you should be less of that Maybe you were just a bit of an ass doing this. What's it done to me as a whole? Well, it's put me in a much more Zen zone and it's made me very compassionate, and it's made me very non-judgmental. And all I can tell you is that it's brought beautiful people into my life, and I highly recommend it and I'm going to keep doing it until my body just says you can't handle this anymore and then I'll go off to pasture.

So long as I've got strength in my heart and my body and by the way this stuff keeps you young. I hang out with a lot of people who are half my age. I've been DJing with 5, 000 people with them on the podium, doing all this stuff. And I fit completely in, and they love me just like one of their own. Cause this stuff keeps you young.

You get middle age and it diverges. You, you start atrophying and talking about the good old days, which I think is like living death or you accelerate upwards into more growth, more learn, more joy, more intensity. And I've chosen the latter. I just done the carnival full on with the most intense people in the world. And no

regrets, rather than sit around in the sports bar talking about the good old days. Not for me. Keep looking forward, keep growing, keep learning. So, that sort of summarizes it. I think life is all a journey about keeping learning, keeping growing, keep connecting with people until the final dance.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing. All right, Stef, I want to now go into some of your business expertise, and I think maybe a good way just to start and frame this conversation would be if you could just give an overview of your professional trajectory and business background and what ultimately then led you to create the [Marco Polo Group](#).

Stef Solferini: I've been interested in business all my life because my family had a business, and my father was a businessman. And so, I started from age five, six, just seeing business and then I've got two business degrees. I've got scholarships, but I did my MBA at Manchester Business School and Kellogg and Northwestern University.

I did all the professional training just like a surgeon would do medical training. And then I took the sort of professional route, and I tried to get into the best of the best of everything. So, I worked for a top strategy consulting firm after my MBA. That gave me work, the opportunity to work all over the world, because you go work with CEOs to help them with the strategy of their business.

And these are big, big businesses, right? It's very exciting stuff. So, my first project was restructuring a bank in Russia. You 26-year-old with my bosses and stuff. I was the junior analyst, but it was there. And then the next project was I was helping Virgin to launch a financial services business 25 years ago, which is now massive entity, right? It's just great.

So, I did all of that work with some really cool people. And then I sort of moved into investment banking and started working. I was one of those super analysts that does all the reports for stocks, moved into investment banking, which is where you get to the deal center. By the time I was 30, I was managing a billion bucks with five other guys at UBS. Became a fund manager because I love that side of finance way more. They learned about the art of investment because that is actually for me much more holistic. I love that. And I sort of got into funds management really heavily and did well there until I actually got a group in the States to back me and give me 50 billion bucks in assets and money to build a business from scratch.

I went from zero to building a business in 12. Offices worldwide. It was pretty full on. It was, and I was the founder and CEO. So, I did that. And from that, I then moved into real estate, private equity. I learned investing in distressed assets. And then I moved after that into working for Accenture, which is the big tech consulting company.

Cause I started my career there and I headed up all their mergers and acquisitions, all their acquisitions for the growth market. So, they spend about 4 billion cash every year buying businesses that give them growth and cloud digital. Artificial intelligence. So, it led to all of that. So, it was an amazing job. I was, it was kidding. I was just traveling like a maniac, really bad on health and stuff.

And then I got to the stage of around 47 where I had enough of all of that. And my daughter was old enough to sort of get on with her thing. And so, I injected all in and I was ready because by then I'd been an entrepreneur, I'd been an investment banker, I'd been a management consultant.

So, I really knew how to help businesses to go from small or medium to large. When I was an entrepreneur, I wished I had someone that showed me how to do this, or even if you're a smaller business, how to get to my first million-dollar bucks.

So, I decided to focus on the CEOs initially, because I thought that they would really value my work, and they do. And so, I started from scratch, and I built this digital business, helping CEOs and its really business owners to build, A really great business as fast as possible by getting the strategy right, then getting stronger and getting scaled and then getting sold.

If you need to get sold, it's like how do you learn that whole map? And how do you do without making mistakes? Rookie mistakes? Because You only get one shot to do this properly if, if you've got your baby for 10 years. And I help CEOs do that. So, it's like helping them like a private equity guy, only that I don't put big bucks into their businesses, and they keep all the equity, which they love, right?

It's been wonderful. They got lots and lots of value out of it. I've got a really great practice. I love it because it keeps me on edge with some of the smartest people in the world. Keep working. And it's a proven roadmap. That's, you know, you can see I've got like 50 testimonials from CEOs of the great exits we've done with them, and it really works.

And so, I've done that. And now I'm doing it for smaller businesses as well. They want to get to that first million-dollar profits because in America, believe it or not, 99% of small businesses never get to a million-dollar profits. So, they can't afford to do the big CEO thing, right? So, what I've done is start group courses now for smaller business. People say, right, how'd you build a world class business? Get your first million dollars. And then once you do that, we can talk about taking it to the next level.

Matt Bowles: What are some of the themes that you have noticed when CEOs come to you? What have been some of the biggest obstacles or friction points that they've been facing?

Stef Solferini: Yeah. One is the strategy is not actually focused enough. They all say, oh, I've got my strategy done. But then when we do it, we realize how weak it is, and it's not ultra focus. And again, it goes back to like the minimalism thing. You've got to really decide what is essential. What is the pain point? Who exactly is our need? Who exactly is our segment? We're not going to go for all these other ones. We're going to go for that segment. We're going to go deep. We're going to offer something that is exactly the pain points, and we're going to do something different from everyone else, which is easy to say. It's very hard to do.

And then once you go deep and you make that clear, the second big mistake that people don't make, especially self-made entrepreneurs, is they haven't built 18 senior executives underneath them to pull the weight so that they can pull themselves out of the business much more. Most of them are working 18-hour days. They're absolutely exhausted.

So, I teach them how to build a scalable team so that they can go from, let's just say you're at 10 million bucks and you want to get to 50 million bucks. Well, you ain't going to do it by working five times harder because you're already at 18 hours. So, what you've got to do is you've got to build a team and how to recruit those people, how to screen them, how to train them, how to get them cost effectively. So that's a huge thing, like getting an 18.

Then the other big thing that they don't know how to do is they don't understand how to manage their finances. Well, they don't really have visibility of their finances on a daily, monthly cashflow basis. They say they do, but when I look under the bonnet, most of them don't.

So, I teach them how to do that and how to change their operating cashflow cycles so that you never risk going bankrupt because profit is not cashflow, that's a really big thing. And then I teach them about setting up an engine that can be sold. And so that requires a little sprinkling in their structure, the way that they configure the business, the business model, how to make it attractive for investors, starting from the beginning and to talk the talk and to walk the walk so that when VCs are coming to them, they've got those works and that's when it's going to pay higher amount of money to them to be partners with them.

Matt Bowles: And then what have been some of the biggest leverage points, would you say that when people start working with you and they make some of these changes that have really helped them to accelerate the fastest?

Stef Solferini: Yeah, so what I do is do a mixture in the first three months of short-term wins and strategy resetting. So usually, we do a thing where I make them redo the whole strategy in a one-page plan that I've got structured, which is very demanding and forces them to get focused. And once they do that and they start communicating that to their senior team and they've got buy in from their team, and then the senior team communicates it to the rest of the business with the CEO, you get a massive change.

But then what I do is because I've been. A surgeon who knows how to find cancer and cut it out. I usually help them with very quick short wins where, you know, like with one client we just restructured some of their finance leases and I got rid of some people that were toxic and all that and we saved like five million bucks in four months.

So, he's very happy about the fees he pays me, let me tell you. You can do that. And the smaller businesses, you know, can save 300, 000, 500, 000 within the first month if they just do the right things that I tell them to. And usually, the quick wins are that there's a whole bunch of people that are toxic that they should have fired ages ago. And they didn't have it for whatever reason.

So, we just get rid of them. And then I look at their costs and usually they've got way too many fixed costs and you and I understand the benefits of having a variable cost business very well because of what we do most people don't. So, they've got excessive rents, excessive fixed costs, excessive things. And I just carve out. So, I just sort of teach them how to have a flexible business model so that if you get a downturn, you don't get crippled by the fixed costs. Those are the very quick wins.

Matt Bowles: So, for smaller business owners, let's say we've got remote business owners listening to this podcast. They have a business, which maybe they've got up to say seven figures in gross revenue. And they're looking to really scale that up and multiply that as quickly as possible. What would be sort of the first concrete steps in terms of how would you approach assessing that business and figuring out how they can double or triple their revenue?

Stef Solferini: Yeah, well, to do that, you've got to be super clear on what your niche is going to be and how to go very deep in getting all of the wallet or a large part of the wallet. So that is actually crystallizing. exercise of really understanding at a very, very granular level what the pain point is and to articulate it so that it exactly hits the sweet spot. And actually, it's very hard to do because you really need to know exactly what's in their mind and know exactly what the pain point is.

And it might not even be the one that you think is the most beneficial. It's what's most beneficial to them. So, I start with that. And then secondly, is you've got to scale your team up for scale. Otherwise, you're not going to triple or quintuple. So, it's how to do that in a measured way, because you can't just go away. I'm going to hire full people, right? So, you're going to do it. You're going to look at your cashflow and then you bring one person in. And then as you know, for, well, hiring people in a remote environment is tricky because you don't see them. I've got my teams. They're all over the world in the Philippines and in India and all over the world, but I've curated them.

I've trained them for years. It's not been a walk in the park. And so, what you've got to do is you've got to find an A team of people that will start driving the things that you're sort of trying to do, being the chief of everything, not the CEO, right? So, you're trying to be the head of delivery. Then you're going to be the head of marketing and the head of accounts and the head of production. You know, at the start, you're thinking, well, you've got to take that whole horse. You've got to bring, you know, an operations person, you've got to bring a head of marketing. You've got to bring; you've got to get appointment centers and the sales team to really drive things right. And that needs to be systematic.

And for me, it's always revenue first. So, get the appointment centers first and then make sure the message is right. And then make sure in tandem that you've got a scalable. Delivery. So, if you've got an online program and all that, you're fine. If you don't have that, you're doing one on one. There's only so many you can do. So maybe do a group thing as well. Those are the key priorities, but you've got to match that against cashflow because I've seen lots of people blow up trying to scale up too fast with the personnel thing, or the revenue will come with it. In my experience, revenue always takes twice as long to come and it's twice as expensive to get.

Matt Bowles: What tips do you have for managing a distributed team for location, independent business owners and CEOs that are doing this digital nomad life and they're building and scaling teams around the world and trying to manage them effectively?

Stef Solferini: Yeah, so one, hire slow, fire fast. I repeat, hire slow, fire fast. You know, you really have to hire slowly, and you have to train people. It's no getting away around it too. I've used Upwork initially. I used to use Upwork and all these platforms to get it. And then you build a network around the world. So now I have a network in the Philippines where I've got local recruiters that will find a thing. But Upwork was great to find people, but you've got to start in small steps and give them a little trial piece of work, just a little project. Then if they do well more and more and more and more until they become full-time people. Then use Slack. Slack is absolutely essential. There is no way I could operate without having Slack to manage people in the time zones.

Put aside time for training, especially in the first six months to a year. Use tools. All project management tools are great, right? So, any of the software is really great as well. But with people, they're like plants. They need to water them. You need to take care of them. You need to be very human. So, I had one of my staff members just had problems with one of the children. And so, I've had to be very flexible and I've paid her even when she's not been working because there's no social security and stuff in Philippines, for example, so you give and take and then. They're so loyal that they'll give you that. They become part of your family. I've become part of their family.

And I, you know, their husbands, their children, I know everything that's going down and that creates loyalty. If you just do the typical Anglo-Saxon thing, where it's a contract, you come and go, they will walk away. You will not build a sustainable business.

Matt Bowles: How important is company culture? And what tips do you have for building company culture in a fully remote business?

Stef Solferini: So, culture is the entire game as far as I'm concerned. Culture eats strategy for breakfast. So, I've seen some amazing potential teams with stars in it that didn't work because the culture was, we had too many individual stars that didn't work as a team, you know. So, culture is everything. And what you have to do as a leader, as a CEO, you have to build a culture that is entrepreneurial, results orientated but feels like a family as well without being cheesy and it's all led by the founder.

So, you've got to walk your talk and. If you have a big heart and you genuinely have a big heart and you're not doing it because of agendas and all of that, people will feel it. People are not silly. People will feel it and they will be very loyal to you. As many of my staff could earn way more money working for other companies, but they stay with me because I give them an amazing lifestyle. I treat them with kid gloves, and I say, well, I actually work for you. You're the master. I'm the sort of guy that whipped around and I chose to do that, but I've chosen to create a jewel of happiness and productivity. And I said, well, how would I have liked to be treated? And it was very easy because on Wall Street and all that, I learned how not to be treated. I learned exactly what you should not have. And then I worked with some great tech companies, which showed you how you should be treated. And so, you do that.

And in a remote setting, because it's even more tricky, what you've got to do is you've got to have a lot of FaceTime, you know, with the zooms and all of that. If you've got enough money, you can have the odd. You know, half year they get together in a location like in the Philippines. I do it or in Europe sometimes. And then I led the teams. They have their own daily huddles and weekly huddles where they all bond together. I do that a lot and it works. So, I don't think that the physical barrier is a problem at all. It's not.

Matt Bowles: You have worked with a lot of CEOs over the years, based on your reflections on all the people that you've worked with, as well as your own experience as a CEO, what in your opinion makes a great CEO? What are the executive leadership attributes that you have seen amongst the best CEOs.

Stef Solferini: Clarity of vision, because really when you're a CEO, you're really the captain of the ship, you're looking out into the ocean, you're checking out the choppy waters, you know where you've got to get to, but you've got to also navigate through the different sea and all of that. And some people are made to be captains, and some people are just made to follow orders because the fear of the unknown is just too much. They just don't have the skillsets either. They're great rowers or whatever, but they don't have clarity of vision and strength of your conviction backed up by skill, because strength of conviction without skill is useless. So, you really need to have that. That's what they have.

Second, they have incredible people skills, incredible people skills. Richard Branson was an amazing entrepreneur. He's dyslexic, not numerate, build however many 10 billion plus. Businesses, amazing people person. I mean, basically business of understanding people. And if you can be tough, but fair, if you can have a heart, basically it's like being in the Navy Seals and you're with your platoon and you lead by example, and you sacrifice first and you, you give people inspiration because you're always willing to take

the extra step and people see that you're taking more pain than them that I always sort worked harder than my team.

And I always took more pain, and they knew it. And because of that, they just followed me. But I said, you know, this is my privilege as the leader, because I need to look at myself in the mirror and say, have I been the best I can be? You know, I don't care about what other people think. Can I be the best that I can be? Have I been a good leader? And that means, you know, sometimes, you know, you're working all night and then you're having to deal with two in the morning with. One of your employees is in tears because her husband just been diagnosed with cancer and they need some more money. What are you going to do now?

You're not going to learn to do that in a sort of HR department of a multinational. When you're running a digital business, these are the reality. And you know what I'm talking about, man, this is a reality. This is the real world and it's coming out of your pocket. It's not coming out of an anonymous business. This is my children's inheritance I'm giving to you. And it's very real. And I love that. So, you've got to be really good with people. You have to be an amazing listener, and you've got to talk less. Do more and you've got to be an action person, and you cannot be a BS person. If you're a BS person, it'll get you so far.

It can get you far. If you work for a public company, because these people are animals in politics and all that, but in a small business, it is not going to last. And people now go too much power employees. They can, they can leave. It's a full job market. It's not going to work. So, I think that clarity of vision, being great with people and then being financially able. And I mean, even if they don't have the skills to hire somebody who has them so that their cashflow cycle is seen, if you've got those three things down to pad, you'll do really well.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk about how you personally balance or optimize your lifestyle so that you are able to be very productive in your work and also enjoy all of the things in the places that you're traveling and optimize that happiness and joy dynamic that we were discussing about? What do your days look like? How do you structure your workflow? How do you optimize your lifestyle at this point?

Stef Solferini: Well, I did exactly all the things that I advised my clients to do. So, I did it first, right? So, I focused on exactly a high premium segment, right? Where it was about the value ad, not hours, because, you know, I can make a tough decision with a client that will make them 20 million bucks.

If I just do that in one year, I've more than justified everything I charge. So, it's all about value. It's a high-quality thing. Then I built an A team over six years. So, I've got a team that does marketing. I've got an inside sales team. I've got the operations, I still do a lot of the finance and stuff because I'm probably quicker at it than most people, right?

But I built a team and then I focused on the two things that really count, which is one, solving my clients' problems. Two, I still do the interviews for the CEOs to admit them in the program or not, because it's a very personal thing and if I don't like what they're about, so I can't outsource that. I'm very focused on marketing. I just do a burst of one hour, two hours of content and stuff like that, and then I've got my team that chops it up and lets it go. And that frees me up to spend the rest of my time being in charge of my life. And have fun and be healthy and come to podcasts.

Matt Bowles: I love it, man. So, if folks were interested in potentially working with you, maybe there's some business owners listening that think that you might be a good fit. You might be able to add some value to

them in particular. What are sort of the options for working with you. You mentioned you now have a course for smaller businesses. Obviously, a lot of CEOs work with you directly. How do you work with businesses and what are the opportunities for entrepreneurs and business owners to work with you?

Stef Solferini: So, if you're a small business that says, say under a million dollars of profit, while you're a startup, you come and do my group coaching [program](#), right? Which is great because. It's like a post doctorate practical, super advanced thing of going from zero to hero in business, getting your first million dollars by really under, you know, building a great business.

So, we make sure that's a foundation. It's a group coach. It's for the role. It's really great. People have loved it. So that's great because the online plus it's got. Group meetings that will work for all small entrepreneurs and aspiring businesspeople. Then if you're a million dollars plus in profit, right up to a billion-dollar businesses, you do the one-on-one stuff with me and it's very easy. You just go to my website. And it's www.marcopologroup.net. You click a link, which just goes, talk to Stef, you book a time. It'll ask you some questions about the nature of your business so that we can prepare ourselves when we talk. And it says, okay, you're ready to take this seriously? Are you ready to go? So, we don't waste our time with people who are just faffing around. And then they just have a call with me and then we proceed. Super easy.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. We are going to link all of that up in [the show notes](#), so folks can just go to one place at themaverickshow.com and you can see the links for how to learn more about Stef and work with him if that is a good fit for you.

And at this point, Stef, are you ready to move in to the lightning round?

Stef Solferini: Yes, sure.

Matt Bowles: Let's do it.

All right. What is one book that has significantly impacted you over the years you would most recommend people check out?

Stef Solferini: [Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill](#).

Matt Bowles: Who is one person, currently alive today, that you've never met, that you would most love to have an evening of dinner and conversation with?

Stef Solferini: Barack Obama.

Matt Bowles: What is one travel hack that you use that you can recommend?

Stef Solferini: Minimalism and safety bank for your insurance.

Matt Bowles: All right. If you could go back in time and give one piece of advice to your 18-year-old self, what would you say to 18-year-old Stef?

Stef Solferini: Be strong, look up and keep moving forward fast.

Matt Bowles: All right. Stef, of all the places that you have now been, what are your top three Favorite Travel Destinations you would most recommend other people should definitely check out?

Stef Solferini: Italy, Australia, and Japan.

Matt Bowles: And the final question, what are your top three bucket list destinations, places you've not yet been, highest on your list, you'd most like to see?

Stef Solferini: The rest of Brazil, Argentina, and Colombia, which is the trip that I'm doing at the moment.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. Those are incredible countries. You and I obviously have been in touch about them, and I'm super excited to keep in touch with you and hear more about your travels. For folks that want to follow you, connect with you, learn more about what you're up to, how can people get in touch with you and give us the website one more time if they want to learn how to work with you?

Stef Solferini: Yeah, the website is www.marcopologroup.net. You'll also see me on LinkedIn, CEO coaching Stef Soni, and then I've got a YouTube channel, which is Stef, so Farini that you can connect to as well.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. We are going to link all of that up in the show notes, so just go to one place at themaverickshow.com. Go to the show notes for this episode. You'll find all the ways to connect with Stef, learn more about what he's up to, learn more about his business coaching services, if that might be a good fit for you. Stef, this was amazing, brother. Thank you for coming to the show.

Stef Solferini: Matthew. It's always a pleasure. You're a great friend and you're a fellow digital nomad that I really look up to. And you've taught me lots as well. And that's part of the joy of this. We just keep learning together. We have fun and we bring some value to the world and that's it. That's the show.

Matt Bowles: I appreciate your brother. Thanks so much. And good night, everybody.