

Ethan:

Hey, everyone and welcome to Startup Savants, a podcast dedicated to helping aspiring entrepreneurs and startup enthusiasts by bringing you news, insights and stories about the startups and founders that are making waves right now. I'm your host, Ethan.

Annaka:

And I'm your other host, Annaka.

Ethan:

Our guest today is Christine de Wendel of sunday. Christine de Wendel is CEO and co-founder of sunday. Previously Christine led two successful startups based in Europe and now has her sights set stateside to operate sunday right here in Atlanta, Georgia. If you could tell us a little bit about the history behind sunday, its mission, and how you got started?

Christine de Wendel:

Thanks, Ethan. I'm delighted to be here and I will tell you a little bit about sunday. So we are building the fastest way in the world to pay in restaurants. And so our company is built around a very simple concept, which is, how can we make the payment experience in hospitality much simpler? So we put QR codes on tables. We link them to the point of sale system and we let diners pay in 10 seconds. So something that used to take 15 minutes now takes 10 seconds and is a perfectly seamless, easy experience, which is making payments in hospitality light years easier than it was before.

Annaka:

I am an industry-vet in food and bev, did about 15 years. So I'm very, very excited. I was reading and researching and I was like, "Oh my God, this is brilliant." But just for curiosity's sake, you identified that pain point and you're solving it. How did you identify it? Was it just sitting around being like, "Man, I hate waiting to pay." And then like the light bulb goes off, or how did y'all even figure that out?

Christine de Wendel:

So my co-founder, Victor, is a successful restaurateur in Europe. He has some of the hottest, sexiest, most Instagrammable restaurants in Paris, Madrid, and London. And so the idea for sunday was born in his restaurants. When the pandemic hit in March 2020, Victor took a look at what was happening and said, "Wait a minute, people are putting QR codes on tables for menus. Why don't I do exactly the same thing with payment?" And so he literally rolled out in two weeks a really quick and dirty solution and the results were phenomenal. So he put QRs on every table, linked them to the POS system, and waiters were loving it because tables were turning faster, they were getting more tips and they had more time to spend with diners to tell them about specials, to check on their drinks so they were getting higher basket size.

Operators were loving it, because they were able to get more turnover and get more people through their restaurant ,and obviously diners loved it because in a COVID context nobody wanted to touch anything. And on top of it we were giving them the freedom again of being able

to control the payment experience. And you know, what Venmo has done for peer-to-peer, what Uber payment has done in Uber rides, what PayPal has done in ecommerce, why hadn't anyone done that in the hospitality space? And so, the idea was really born in Victor's restaurants, and then he pulled me in when he thought this idea is so big that we should turn it into its own company and create its own independent concept around it.

Annaka:

Right. Yeah, it's innovative, because that, I mean the point of sale system, the restaurant system, nothing has changed ever. So it's like, this is kind of a disruption and really welcomed clearly, because y'all are so successful. What's next for this? Are you incorporating, looking at incorporating other pain points in the service process? Are you just looking to scale? I know you've been looking at other industries possibly, are there other kinds of features you're thinking about rolling in here?

Christine de Wendel:

So right now we are laser focused on executing on our core product, which is pay-at-table. We're live now in six countries: the UK, France, Spain, the US, Canada, and Portugal and it's already a lot of work. There's a lot of ground to cover and the potential is already enormous. So we're very much focused on our pay-at-table solution in those six markets. We're working with both enterprise accounts and smaller and medium-size business accounts, but that's really where our focus is. Obviously the potential is immense, and that's when the restaurateurs get excited, that's when investors get excited, that's when everyone gets it. Because if you can start and really build an ecosystem around payments and you've provided something really easy for consumers to use and you've really created a B2C solution, then the potential of adding on other features is enormous. But right now we're very much focused on the restaurant space in those six markets.

Hotels are an obvious next step. You can just imagine the benefit of never having to check out again. And so, if you could put some sort of solution in every hotel room, then from a hospitality perspective it would be huge. And so, we're talking to a lot of hotels already because they have great restaurants on their premises. And most of them are asking us if we can roll out a solution like this in their rooms. Again, I'm very convinced that you have to be focused on your core product first, make sure it works perfectly, make sure you're getting traction. Don't forget we're only a year old and so despite the massive scale and the footprint we're starting to have, it's important to stay focused.

Ethan:

So, you mentioned that you're excited about this. You also mentioned that the investors are excited about this. And you can see that when you come to market with a, what was it, \$24 million seed round and a \$100 million in your round A, that's kind of a big deal. Can you walk us through the process of obtaining that funding?

Christine de Wendel:

Absolutely. And I think this is a great story for all people who are thinking about launching startups. We entered the market with a great idea, which had already been tested in my co-founder's restaurants. Victor is a successful restaurateur in Europe. I had 10 years of two great unicorn scale-up stories. And so we were bringing a restaurant and a tech scale-up perspective together. And we went to go see two types of investors. We went to go see the big venture funds, and we went to go see restaurant owners. And we said, "If we can have on our cap table both the best investors you can find in North America who are experts at venture, and also iconic restaurateurs, both in Europe and North America who are going to help us deploy the product, then we're going to be in great shape."

And so, our first discussions went extremely well. Everyone loved our founder story. Everyone loved our track record, and everyone saw the simplicity and the obvious product market fit of our product, especially, this is March 2021 where there's, the pandemic has been around for a year. Everyone understands that QR codes are very relevant in the market right now. And so, that first fundraising round went extremely quickly and there was huge enthusiasm.

So, we hit the ground running in March 2021, started getting traction. Went live in Spain, France, UK. Went live in the US and hired a stellar team. Also, Victor and I had been working for the past 15 years with some awesome restaurant folks and some awesome tech folks, so we hired a pretty sweet leadership team and it started going really quickly. We were getting a lot of interest from restaurants. And so, when we went back to our investors to tell them about the traction we were getting, they said, "Wait a minute, you guys are onto something huge. We should accelerate. We should give you the funds to go faster, to expand much, much more quickly, to increase your product and tech team so that you can build a better product." And so, by the summer we had raised an additional 100 million because of the enthusiasm of the investors.

Ethan:

That's awesome. So, it sounds to me like the answer is, have the right people on the team. And I think we need to cue the hero movie montage where everybody runs around the world and says, "Are you in?" And they're like, "No, I'm not in." And then they come back and they say, "Yes, we're in." All right, enough of that.

Christine de Wendel:

I'll tell you what we did, just on having a great team. We said, and it's easier to do when you have a \$24 million seed round, but we said, "Okay, who are the best people we've worked with in the past 20 years?" And so, we looked at who we'd love working with, who we thought were phenomenal professionals, and who are people that we enjoy working with. And so our CFO is somebody I worked with 20 years ago in investment banking. Our GM for Europe is, was one of my former colleagues in one of the scale-ups I was in, who was much better than I was and was a phenomenal coworker. And we went to go see them. And we said, "Listen, we're onto a huge idea. We've raised a lot of money. We think there's massive potential, come build it with us." And when you have the vision and you have the funds, it is really easy to get awesome people on board, and it makes that journey much more fun from the outset.

Ethan:

That's awesome. It is extremely important to have the right team. And so, it sounds like you've got all the resources and know how to make that happen. It's really great. I want to jump around a little bit. You recently acquired a company, CHK PLZ. Can you walk us through the decision and the strategy behind making a large acquisition so early?

Christine de Wendel:

Yes. So, we started looking at the different players in the space. There were a couple small competitors with less funding than we'd had and not necessarily exactly the same product. But we said, "Are there any opportunities to roll up some great other actors into the business we're building?" And so in that very high-level due diligence process, we came across CHK PLZ. Great company, run by three grads from McGill, based in Montreal, doing something quite similar to what we were doing. And we loved the guys and they already had some of the hottest restaurants in Montreal. They were three years out of undergrad, 26-years-old, super high energy, great fit with our culture. And we said, "These guys are exactly the type of guys we want to build the company with."

And so instead of hiring a team in Canada, we said, "If we acquire these guys, it's going to be a perfect match and it's going to help us accelerate and gain 6 to 12 months versus what we could have done if we'd started from scratch." And that has been very, very much of a great story. We have the whole CHK PLZ team, which is now of course, the Sunday team, who's part of the company. They live and breathe our values, our culture, and they're doing an awesome job in Canada. They started in Quebec, which is where they were, and we just launched Toronto with them and it's going extremely well.

Annaka:

Yeah, the global aspect is really great. I mean, you said six countries, that's impressive. And one of the traditional locations in the US for startups is Silicon Valley. Can you tell us a little bit about the choice for Atlanta, which shout-out Atlanta, love the city, but why? Why?

Christine de Wendel:

So, the choice of Atlanta, I can give you a lot of reasons, but the real answer is, I'm from Atlanta. I was born and raised here. And so, I had been living in Europe for 15 years, working in European tech companies and I made a very personal family decision. I wanted my three very Parisian kids to live in the US. And so, my husband and I opened up a map and said, "Do we move back to New York where we lived in our 20s, which was fabulous. Do we move to California, because it's the natural place to get a job in tech, or do we move home?"

And as we explored a little bit, it became obvious that three young kids, starting a new company. I knew I wanted to start a company, that Atlanta was a great place to do it. And I had absolutely underestimated how awesome Atlanta was going to be for that, because besides the phenomenal weather, besides the booming economy, there is a ton of tech talent here, and there's an appetite to get tech companies off the ground, which is huge. And so, I mean, I've

only been back home for a year and a half after leaving for 20 years, but I can just do a shout-out for Atlanta, because if I had to start again, I would definitely set up a tech company in Atlanta, just because of the resources you have. And frankly, when you're working as hard as I am as a young entrepreneur, being in a city that's as easy, as friendly, as welcoming as Atlanta is phenomenal.

Annaka:

Yeah, yeah. All right, so Atlanta may be the next startup scene. I would love-

Christine de Wendel:

I'm working on it. I've become a total Atlanta ambassador.

Annaka:

Yeah. I mean, and Atlanta is, it has a great food scene as well. So, I'm coming to Atlanta now. So, heads up!

Ethan:

Take that Austin.

Annaka:

You'll get a call from me like-

Christine de Wendel:

Well, we will take you out to the coolest Atlanta restaurants that are using sunday and you get to see Atlanta at its best.

Annaka:

Yes. And then we'll do Paris. Cool?

Christine de Wendel:

It is totally fair.

Ethan:

So, you're in Atlanta and you said that you have had lots of success over in Europe and you're operating sunday in not only the US, but Europe as well. Can you tell us what the advantages are of operating multi-nationally and using a global strategy?

Christine de Wendel:

Yes. So, the way we've set it up with my co-founder is, he's based in London, he's running our European business. I'm based in the US and I'm running our North American business. And so the important thing for our success is that we have synergies across the markets and most of our tech teams are based in Europe. A lot of our central functions are in the US, in Canada, and in Europe. And so, we make sure that there's a lot of dialogue between the two continents. So, I think that's the first thing is we've clearly given ourselves geographic responsibilities so that we

don't go nuts. It's very important. We've also made sure that we have leadership team members who are in North America and in Europe and that they're working really closely together.

So, I'm not going to lie to you, it is complex. To launch a company the first 12 months to be in six markets, across two continents, across five different languages, it does create, or four different languages. It does create a lot of complexity, but there's a ton of great things to come out of it. So first of all, a lot of our partners are cross-borders. So, we work with the biggest point of sales systems in the world. A lot of them are headquartered in the US, but they obviously have European activities and it helps to have a presence on both markets because we help them grow and they help us grow. So, that's been extremely positive, the relationships with the point of sale systems.

The other things that we found [that] are great is we can test things in certain markets. We can see them in action and then roll them out however they're adapted to the other local markets. So there's a testing ground, which allows us to be riskier in certain markets and try best practices from other markets in the fourth or the fifth or the sixth market. And that's been a ton of fun. It comes with complexity, it comes with noise, but in the end it gives us a much larger footprint. And it lets us have a much bigger view on what the different competitive developments are. What are the things happening in each market and what are the best things we can use from each one of them?

So, so far, if I had to do it again, I would definitely launch cross-continent. Not to mention from an investor perspective it means we are more versatile, less risky, we're covering a different footprint, and so we're less threatened by competitors. We're just in a better spot because we're more resilient to market cycles, each one of the markets. So definitely, definitely a strong point.

Ethan:

Those are all pretty good reasons. I accept the answer. I want to jump in on one thing that maybe you are working with, maybe you're not, this is a personal vendetta of mine and maybe everyone else's, tipping. Are you trying to stop tipping in the United States? Are you trying to bring tipping to Europe? Are you just leaving it as is, or are we just not solving that problem right now?

Christine de Wendel:

So, we are absolutely solving that problem. We are a company built by restaurateurs for restaurants. We are very conscious of the importance of tips. We are very conscious that in order for us, our product to work, waiters have to love us, right? It starts with a waiter. And so how do you do that? Well, you have to adapt to your different markets. Tipping policies are very different in North America than they are in Europe. In both markets our solution helps waiters get more tips and that's one of the huge advantages. So, what concretely happens when you use Sunday, you pull up your bill, you get a prompt. What kind of tip would you like to put? Well, in the US, we're putting 18%, 20% and 23%, that's standard, restaurants can adapt that and then they can customize it. In Canada, it's a little bit lower. And in Europe, we're not in

percentages, we're in absolute amounts. And it'll be one, three and five euros, or it'll depend on what the table size and the check size is.

So, very different dynamics. On average in Europe, you're talking about 2% tips. On average in North America or in the US, you're talking about 20% tips. So very, very different dynamic and our product is adapted to that. The bottom line though is the whole point of sunday is to increase tips for wait staff, because that gets them excited about it. That increases adoption, that gets diners excited about using it so we're definitely pushing the tip agenda because it's key for our success.

Annaka:

Yeah, as long as tipping exists, tip your servers. Please and thank you.

Christine de Wendel:

Yes, especially in this post-pandemic world where the restaurant industry has suffered so much and wait staff has been hit very, very hard. We're very conscious that whatever we can give back to waiters is super valuable.

Annaka:

Yeah and they're all great people. Never met a bad server so thank you. Let's shift a little bit. Let's talk about branding and marketing. I'm your resident branding and marketing nerd. And you mentioned over-investing in your brand before. Can you explain what that means?

Christine de Wendel:

Absolutely. So when we launched the company, you have to think, I was coming from tech and Victor is coming from these extremely attractive, very visual, very experiential restaurants. And, although we're building a FinTech, from the outset we said, "First of all, we have to have fun branding. We're building a B2C brand so people have to love what we're doing from a visual identity and from a tone perspective." Secondly, it's important that even though we're a FinTech, we make sure that our outward communication has, fits our culture, our dynamic, and that we do a good job at it. And so, what you'll see is we have this pink branding, we have a very playful tone of voice. We did pictures right away.

I teased Victor when we did our series A, I was based in Atlanta, he was in London. We agreed that we would meet in Paris for some meetings. He said, "We have to have photos." And I said, "Why do we have to have photos, we're launching a seed series company? We don't need to do photos." And it's like, "No, no, no. We need to have great photos because that's going to be part of our visual identity and we're going to do them in some of our cool restaurants and people are going to live and breathe sunday through an awesome visual identity." And so, I laughed a little bit, but I've seen the impact of doing it. And just the way the two of you were excited about the pink sunday banner that's behind me, and the pink lights, we are not building just another FinTech. One of our playful little words is, "We're building a fun tech, but let's have fun with this." Let's build an extremely professional game changing company, but let's enjoy it and part of that comes from the visual branding.

Annaka:

It's great branding. And I want to talk more about what you just said: game changing. Because that seems to be kind of thematic throughout your sites throughout kind of your marketing, this industry disruption, is that kind of core to your culture?

Christine de Wendel:

So, in our culture we said we want to do something that is again, game changing. We want to disrupt this market. We want to change the way people pay in hospitality. And part of that is because I had already had two incredible startup stories where I had seen how we disrupted the fashion space and the home improvement space. Victor has built up this successful restaurant company. And so when we got together, decided to build this, we said, "First of all, let's have fun. Second of all, let's really have an impact." And obviously it's exciting to be building a high-growth company, but how can we change the way people behave for the better, and how can we give people their time back?

And I think one of the important things I'd love to get across and share with everyone is, when we built this company, we said, "What's the purpose of this?" Well, very simply the purpose is to give people their time back. We want to give waiters their time back, but we want to give diners their time back. And if we can take something that traditionally takes 15 minutes, turn it into something that takes 10 seconds. Well, that's actually a ton of time that we're giving people back. And we're empowering people, we're putting control back into their hands on the payment process, and that is disruptive. And so when I shared the example of Venmo or PayPal or Uber rides, think about how they've changed the usage, and now it seems so obvious. Or, an even better example is digital ticketing for flights. 10 years ago everyone felt reassured to have a flight ticket. Now, it would seem absurd not to have that flight ticket on your phone and that's exactly the type of disruption we're building.

Annaka:

I still remember using my phone as a boarding pass and being like, "Is this actually going to, are they going to allow me on a plane with this? Are you kidding?"

Christine de Wendel:

And that was a couple years ago. I mean, think about what we were doing 10 years ago, right?

Annaka:

So now we're going to be like, "Man, I used to bring cash to restaurants. What?"

Christine de Wendel:

I used to give my credit card to someone, they would take it back of house. It would disappear for five minutes. It would come back. I don't know who touched it. I would get a dirty pen in a sticky plastic envelope and then I'd have to sign, do the math myself. If I was splitting the bill, figure out how much tip I had to give, give it back. I mean just absurd. And there would be two paper tickets, and I'd be trying to read which one's the merchant copy, which one is my copy.

That disappears. And I am so convinced that two to three years from now, every restaurant in the Western world is going to be using some sort of technology and I'm pretty confident it's going to be sunday.

Annaka:

Yes, yes. Pulling for it. Well, and I think every server, bartender, barista has had that panic moment where you think you've thrown a guest card away and it's like, "Oh my God." So even taking that out of the game is huge. I'm pretty sure I still have nightmares about that. Can we talk specifically about your logo, because I'm in love and I just want to know if there's a story behind there, or what?

Ethan:

For the listeners who can't see the logo, first off, go Google it and find it. But, would you also describe it as a pink squiggle?

Christine de Wendel:

It's definitely a pink squiggle.

Ethan:

Fantastic.

Annaka:

I love it.

Christine de Wendel:

This goes back to our branding. And as I mentioned earlier, when we decided to build a company, we said, "Let's do something that's going to make the world a better place at our small scale. And let's also have fun with it." And so we were very clear that we were building a B2C brand. And so in order to build a viral, exciting, B2C brand that sticks, you want to have good visuals.

So, the pink is because we love pink. I'm, as you can see, for those of you who can see me on screen, I'm wearing pink. We have the pink neon sign behind us. But it was a fun, visual color and the squiggle, frankly, was coming from that playful spirit. And our visual identity is, everything we do is black font on white, but we squiggle and pink any sort of comments, any humor, any additional thoughts we get and so it really is a pink squiggle. It's also to show that we're not taking ourselves too seriously. Yes, we're building an extremely professional brand. We're going fast, but we're also having fun doing it.

Ethan:

That's awesome. When I first saw that logo, I was like, "What is?" And then it grew on me instantly. And I'm like, "Yes, this is fantastic." And of course, the website has been mentioned a couple times, but it matches the feel and the look of the website. And for the folks listening,

when you get out of your car, go safely to a computer, go to Sunday's website and just look around for a little while.

Annaka:

Just have fun.

Ethan:

Yeah, you will notice in yourself that your creativity is coming out because you're experiencing the creativity that's coming from this brand.

Christine de Wendel:

I love the enthusiasm and I'm going to make a shout-out. Then if you're on the website, go and take a look at our manifesto, which is a ton of fun, talks about our values and really incarnates what we're trying to do and you'll enjoy every minute of that read.

Annaka:

I also particularly liked the, I believe it's the jobs or careers page where it was like, "Don't scroll down." I'm like, "You know what? I think I'm going to scroll down. Thanks for trying to talk me out of that though." So yeah, I definitely appreciate the humor and kind of tongue and cheek-ness, and y'all just knocked your branding and voice out of the park. So thank you, very well done.

Christine de Wendel:

Thanks. And again, we had fun doing it, which is super critical when it's so intense to be building a company.

Ethan:

It is hugely intense. I want to make another jump back to the adoption of this technology. It sounds like it's a pretty easy sale, but I would be remiss if I didn't ask, how did you convince restaurants that you didn't have a personal relationship to adopt this technology? And what were their concerns about trusting the patrons to pay without the traditional checkout process?

Christine de Wendel:

So, today we've signed up about 5,000 restaurants, so it's going very quickly. We have sales teams who are trained and enthusiastic about making the sale. And so, how does that sale work? I spend a lot of my time selling. I was in Chicago yesterday, selling, I will be selling in Atlanta tomorrow. What do we do? Well, first of all we have a super simple product that most restaurateurs understand. And so, we have field sales who literally go, reach out to what we call our dreamless restaurants, which are restaurants that are going to help us generate buzz that are going to be really iconic restaurants in each market and we go explain the product to them. So we show them a demo, we bring some sample QR codes, and almost instantly restaurateurs understand. They get it. Every restaurateur knows that the last 15 minutes of the dining experience that are around payment are not the most pleasant, from a customer experience, but also from a restaurant experience.

And so, the idea is so simple that when you explain it to a restaurateur they get it. Now, because COVID has introduced digital menus, has introduced the QR code, that has made the sale much, much more easy. If we'd done this three years ago, it probably would have been more challenging, because frankly, most consumers didn't know how to scan a QR code three years ago. And most restaurants would have said, "I don't want to put a QR code on the table." Now that's become much more commonplace. And frankly, our QR codes are pretty attractive. So we have a ton of different formats, we have standard formats, which look great or easy to use, but then we can customize depending on the type of restaurant. And so that first hurdle, which was, "Do I actually want to put a QR code on my table," we've been able to overcome pretty simply with some great design.

The second hurdle is, do restaurants actually want to have that payment experience be digital and not with a human interaction? And there was a little bit of pushback at the beginning around, "Wait a minute, am I not going to get as big of a tip if I have someone who's not bringing the check?" What we've seen overwhelmingly with the millions of transactions we've had, is that being able to expedite the payment process is a delightful thing. And people generally, because the way the solution works, end up giving more tips. I was mentioning the fact that tips are really important and so that really goes a long way in convincing the restaurants. When we show them data and the restaurant, we show them case studies, they say, "Okay, it's obvious."

When they use the demo and they see that they can control what the different tip percentages are, it's very impactful. So, the sale process is actually going very well and the more restaurants we have on board, the easier it gets because then we're not selling a new product, but we're selling a product that a restaurateur has seen and another restaurant is excited about. As a matter of fact, the easiest way to make a sale is when we have a restaurant that's live and that's enthusiastic about the product, which is most restaurateurs. They generally recommend other restaurants that we should go talk to, and that's super powerful.

Annaka:

Oh yeah and the restaurant industry loves to talk. So, I think the word of mouth is really great in the industry. Just for my own curiosity. What was it like trying to work in with these point of sale systems? Because some of them, I mean, they're not particularly flashy or sleek tech, they're kind of push a button and get something out of it. A lot of them haven't changed in a while. Were there any hiccups there with integrating with that?

Christine de Wendel:

So, today we're working with about 30 point of sales systems. It's the super fragmented market across the US, Canada and Europe. So there's a ton of different players, and frankly, we've been happily surprised by the reception from the point of sale systems.

Annaka:

Perfect.

Christine de Wendel:

Most of them understood immediately what we were trying to do. Many POS systems developed a similar solution, but the truth is, because we're so focused on one product and really making sure it's working seamlessly with restaurants, our product quality, our design, our QR codes, our training programs are generally working better than what the point of sales can do. And they saw with the data that we are getting much higher usage out of our solution than what they were. And so what we found over the past year is that basically every major point of sale in the Western world has agreed to work with us, just because they understand that it's going to be tough for them to do as good of a job as we are and that's been super powerful.

But yes, the short answer is, the first couple months were challenging. Because we showed up, nobody had ever heard of us and we said, "Listen, we want to build something that's quite similar to what you're doing." But they mostly all understood that we are POS agnostic and the fact that we want to work with every POS, because we're really building a B2C brand, that was super powerful.

Annaka:

Good.

Ethan:

You may have already answered this question in the answer to that last question, but did you ever have any concerns or did anyone ever voice any concerns that your product may be a feature, that you may be building a company around a feature instead of a product?

Christine de Wendel:

I've heard that a couple times, but to come back to one of the initial questions you answered, the potential of building a whole ecosystem for restaurateurs around this type of technology is huge. And so we talk about loyalty, we talk about ordering, we talk about CRM. I mean, one of the features we have today, which starts turning our product really into a product, is that we have reviews at the end of every payment experience. And once you scan, once you've paid, you get to add reviews. And if you give a five or a four star review, you have a pop up, which can redirect you to Facebook, to Google, to Yelp ad that is extremely powerful for restaurants and they get it. And so, as we continue to grow and as we continue to add features, our solution is becoming much more comprehensive than just a pay-at-table feature.

Annaka:

Yeah. And you have a lot of tech experience previously to coming into starting Sunday. How did that impact what you brought to Sunday, and how did that impact your journey overall in the entrepreneurial space specifically?

Christine de Wendel:

So, I spent 10 years scaling ecommerce unicorns in Europe as a senior leadership member. So, I had seen what massive scale means, what it means to go from 0 to 10,000 employees in five years, what it means to really hit the hockey stick, what it means to make very quick decisions, what it means to spend a lot of money, raise a lot of money to go quickly and to gain market

share. So I came into the Sunday story with an appetite for speed and thinking big. And Victor, my co-founder has exactly that same mindset and so that's been very helpful. So the guts and the boldness to say, "I can do something big, very quickly." I think that to have seen it before has been very helpful.

And then to have already gone through the scale-up phase, not just the startup phase has been super helpful. So, how do you set up good objectives for your team members? How do you set up good bonus and incentive structures? How do you structure hierarchies, feedback, reporting, all those things you need when you're more than 50 people in a company? You certainly don't need 0 to 50, but then you need as you grow. As a matter of fact, one of the things I was missing, which has been really fun to discover, is how you really do the zero to one phase, right? Victor and I started the company a year ago. There were three of us, and how do you grow into being a 400-person company in that small timeframe?

I think the scale-up experience has been great and another thing has just been my tech network. And so those first tech hires that we made came from people I had worked with in the past and that has been super powerful, because if there's one thing that's challenging when you're starting an early stage company is, how do you go get good engineers? Especially if you don't have your own tech background and that went very quickly just because I already had a network. So, I would say experience and network are probably the two biggest factors.

Annaka:

Yeah, we hear routinely that people without a tech background, one of the biggest struggles is finding quality tech people. Not quality, I shouldn't say that. But people that they trust and that they work well together, it can be a real challenge. So that network comes through huge.

Christine de Wendel:

Absolutely.

Annaka:

Really glad it was helpful. Were there any particular growing pains that you want to share with our listeners about such a fast scale? Because like you said, you're a year old and you've gotten quite large and very successful so were there any particular growing pains, and how did you get over those?

Christine de Wendel:

So one of our biggest growing pains, given the speed at which we scale is, how do you recruit great talent, right? And especially when you're entering new markets, you don't necessarily have a network. So, in Paris where I had spent 15 years where Victor's from, we had a great network, it was easy to get a great team in place. When we started in the US, I'd been living in Europe for almost 20 years and so the question was, "How do you access great talent when you don't have a name brand, where you don't have a network? And the only thing going for you is that you've raised a lot of money?"

And so that comes back to Atlanta. Atlanta was fantastic because it's an easy town to meet people and things go pretty quickly. And so the networking in Atlanta went really quickly, but I found that was quite challenging. And how do we overcome that? Well, we invested in search agencies and we said, "Okay, we're not going to know how to find the right people." And so, unlike a lot of early stage startups, we said, "We're going to take some stellar head hunters and they're going to help us out."

Another thing is, how do you set up the ideal org when you're going this quickly? How do you find the balance between local and central functions? And so, does our product need to be 90% the same across all markets? Or, to what extent do we need to customize it? What do you build locally? The QR code production, the training materials. Do you do those on a global level or do you need to reproduce what you're doing in certain countries on a local level? And so, that's been quite challenging is, when you're scaling this quickly, how do you map out the right footprint? Should you have a regional model? Should you have a very local model? Should you have a central model? What are the functions that you centralize? What are the functions that you localize? And we're still working that out, obviously just a year in, but that's been more challenging than I expected.

Annaka:

I imagine that some decision making in this, when you're going that quickly is, I don't know if people are familiar with the story of the princess and the pea. There's a pea under her mattress and she doesn't notice it until 50 mattresses later and it's this giant mole hill. I'm assuming that if something goes wrong, it's not so much of an issue maybe initially, but once you're big, you're like, "Oh, well now I got a problem to solve. Cool."

Christine de Wendel:

So, that's the challenge that my co-founder and I have. And to go back to your initial question about, does it help to have had scale-up experience before? You can see some of those mistakes and hiring people who are better than us, because frankly that's our biggest challenge is, how do we get people who are better than us on board, because they're going to help us identify those challenges early on so that we don't make such big mistakes. So, hiring a great leadership team and then also knowing how to fail fast. So, if we set up an org that doesn't work, well listen, after two or three months, if it means we need to reorg, we'll do it. And we'll change things up again. We'll shake things up. That's working quite well, but yes, it's definitely a challenge.

Ethan:

All right, we are coming up too close to time here. So I'm going to ask you one of our more standard questions-

Annaka:

But favorite.

Ethan:

What is, yeah, it's one of the best. What is your advice for aspiring entrepreneurs?

Christine de Wendel:

My number one advice is, in order to do this, you need to be passionate about the product you're building, the company you're building. And I had been a senior leader for 10 years in scale ups that became unicorns and I absolutely underestimated the strenuous intensity of being a founder. Because it's almost an existential stress. If you don't love what you're doing, if you don't love the product, if you don't believe it, no matter what, believe in it, no matter what, it's going to be really hard to manage that intensity. And so, the expression, entrepreneurial fire and really believing in what you're doing, didn't resonate with me until I started Sunday and I realized, for this to work and for us to carry the vision as far as we'd like it to go, even if it's an awesome product, even if we have a stellar team, even if we've raised a ton of money, you need to have that passion and that fire. And so, make sure when you start that journey, you do have the passion and the fire.

The second piece is, you need to find people to build a company, be it your team or your co-founder that you love working with. Because if you're going to spend this much time, and put this much effort, it needs to be pleasurable. I am lucky to be working with Victor, who I enjoy every minute of working with. We're very different. We're very complimentary and it is a ton of fun. And so, we've got a five-hour time difference. We are, we both have three kids. We both have spouses. We have intense lives. It is a ton of fun to be working with and it's a huge support. I can call at any time and say, "This is going so well, I'm delighted, or this is not going well. It feels like it's eating gravel. Please help me out. Please give me a pep talk." And I mean, that's why we're here for each other and even with the time distance and the Atlantic ocean between us, that works quite nicely. So again, passion and great people that you're working with.

Ethan:

Back to superheroes. It sounds like you've got a whole team of them. This is awesome. One last question, and then we will let you get back to your day. How can our readers support your startup?

Christine de Wendel:

The best thing you can do is go to Sunday restaurants, use Sunday, get excited about it. Tell the wait staff, tell the restaurant that you love it. And even more importantly, if you know of restaurants, or you run a restaurant and you're looking for a stellar payment method that's going to change the way your operations work and that's going to delight your customers, then go on to [sundayapp.com](http://sundayapp.com), sign up, and we will call you back within three minutes and we'll get you started.

Ethan:

How do we find Sunday restaurants?

Christine de Wendel:

You can go onto our website and you should be able to get a map of our Sunday restaurants, or some of them and you can also go onto our Instagram account. We have most of our hot, fun restaurants listed there and as we grow and we continue to sign up restaurants, you should be seeing us pop up in every city in the US, in every city in Canada and most European cities.

Ethan:

Awesome. Christine, this has been a really great time. Thank you very much for coming on the show. And listeners, we will put all of those links and everything else that you heard in today's show notes.

Annaka:

To me, to me. All right. Well, I'm going to be, any of my restaurant buddies, be prepared, you're going to hear from me about this. So-

Christine de Wendel:

That would be fantastic. Thank you.

Annaka:

It's, well, and I got to have a reason to talk to them, you know, and sit down and have a drink with them anyway. Anyway, so yeah, pleasure speaking with you. And listeners, that is a wrap for us for today for the Startup Savants' podcast. We want to thank you for hanging out with us today and hearing what Christine has to share with us.

Do you want to chime in, if you think we're doing a good job, let us know in the comments over at [startupsavants.com/podcast](http://startupsavants.com/podcast). If you think we're awful, let us know in the comments over at [startupsavant.com/podcast](http://startupsavant.com/podcast). If you really loved the show, head over to Apple Podcasts, or wherever you get your podcasts, and leave us a five star review. For tools, guides, videos, startup stories, and so more, head over to [truic.com](http://truic.com). That's [truic.com](http://truic.com), T-R-U-I-C.com. See you, folks.

Ethan:

Bye-bye.

Christine de Wendel:

Thank you, bye-bye.