

S01 - E21 - Rooted & Unwavering - Hylke Faber & Renee Smith

Presenter 00:04

Welcome to rooted and unwavering a podcast and radio show which features leaders from all walks of life in conversations about courageous connectedness. How do we stay connected to our best selves, especially when we are challenged? What becomes possible when we truly stay committed to our own and others greatness also when we don't feel it? Join host Philco Faber, transformational coach, facilitator, and award winning author of taming your crocodiles and his guests as they explore leadership greatness in today's episode of rooted and unwavering

Hylke Faber 00:45

Welcome, welcome. Welcome to root and unwavering broadcasting live from Phoenix Business Radio x, in Phoenix, Arizona, where we help leaders connect more deeply to their innate potential. I'm your host Hoka Faber, and this is the 21st episode, and I'm here today with Renee Smith, the CEO and founder of a human workplace Renee, how are you today? I am Terrific, thank you, Hylke, it's so good to be with you. Same here, I feel quite moved to be with you, Rene. I'm gonna say a bit more about you in a second. But the things I really enjoy and move by with you is that I see you as a person who's who's put their heart and their feet in the same place. And I'll handle that in a moment. And I have great admiration for that. Before we go and talk a bit more about Rene and hear from Rene, I want to say a bit more about this podcast series just to contextualize and get us all together in a similar intention. So we're do Ruth and unwavering to help us connect more deeply to what is true. And to be aware that as human beings, we get pulled into different directions all the time, all the time. And that we have a choice in that and that there is such beauty and such strength that comes in line as leaders, as teams, as organizations, when we get closer and closer and closer to what is true and be rooted from that place, which is for everyone may be slightly different, maybe also somewhat similar. So that's what this this work is about. This week, I sang in a chorus of performance. And there's this once one little line that says we will rise we will rise. And that little sentence has been in my head all week. And I was thinking about that in preparation for this podcast like we will be rooted. We are rooted. And I know that each of us goes through challenges this week. I went through my own challenges this week. Everybody has challenges and then how do we stay rooted in those moments. So that's a little bit about this podcast. And now about Renee Renee comes to us as the founder and CEO of a human workplace. And before that, she was a part of the governor's office, governor's office in Washington State, where she helped to direct workplace transformation for the state of Washington, with a focus on creating a more loving, respectful, inclusive and compassionate experience for state government teams. It's such a beautiful, beautiful charter. She also led the award winning culture change work as director of organization development for Department of Enterprise Services now didn't just start his organizations He's done a lot a lot a lot of primary research on analyzing stories of hundreds of people and learn from



their experience of love and fear in the workplace. I love the audacity of the calling that out in the workplace. Renee has spoken to hundreds of audiences in 10 countries is a prolific blogger published in several journalists journals has been appearing on numerous podcasts including this one now. See is also has a Master of Science of organization development from Pepperdine University and a Lean Six Sigma belt sigma belt from the University of Washington sees a researcher writer teacher advises people all over and also in the Pacific Northwest where she lives and when you're not traveling when a huge honour sculling, which you have to explain to me what that means in the Puget Sound. You like drawing oil pastels, maybe some of the things behind you if you're if people are looking at you might be might be yours, I'm not sure. concocting craft cocktails for friends, hosting grandma, summer camp and reindeer games for in the winter for her grandchildren. I'm just just at your feet. Renee. What a background so tell me about your journey of connectedness. Tell me about You're nearly what would you like to highlight first?

Renee Smith 05:05

Gosh, so I think, you know, I am an introverted people person. And I think that there are a lot of introverts who are people, people, people. And I'm that is certainly me I, I relish my quiet time that sculling is is rowing and single shells, I love to do that on the Puget Sound and my own my own shell that I love to Roman and spend time on the water. And, and there's a lot of a lot that I gather from, from being alone and in solitude, and walking and being in nature and so on. And I just cherish and thrive so much through being connected in meaningful relationships with family and friends and colleagues. And, and really, also with just people that I meet randomly, you know, those random encounters with, with strangers or, you know, in the past and of daily life that I think we missed so much, during the pandemic, I you know, relish all of that. So, connectedness and being authentic and open and connected to people is part of who I am as a person. And I would say that connectedness has come to have really profound meaning in my life, as I have done this research on fear and on love in the workplace, and interviewed people 75 primary interviews, you know, for kind of formal one on one reach search based interviews, and then it workshops with hundreds and hundreds of people, and have heard and collected, you know, those stories, and have seen and understood from the impacts both of fear and disconnection and indifference. And in contrast, love and safety and connection, how powerful and important it is that we're in the latter circumstance, just how much we need that as people. And it's become really the focus of my life work, to point people away from fear and disconnection and toward love and connection.

Hylke Faber 07:04

Thank you so much for sharing that. I'm imagining you being in the skull. Now I know what that means. Yeah. And I'm on the Puget Sound. Yes. In this space by yourself and, and connecting more deeply

Renee Smith 07:21

means a sea lions, the seal or the sea lions would always follow. So that totally alone. Yeah,

Hylke Faber 07:27



yes. Yes, yes. Yes. So can you say a bit more about your own interview with yourself? about fear and love? I don't know about you, but I have my own daily encounters with both friends. So can you say a bit more about your own conversation, your inner conversation with those two orientations?

Renee Smith 07:55

Yeah, that, whether it's whether it's walking, just walking, you know, and being sort of in silence with my thoughts, or the I really love the rhythm of rowing. And this, there's a certain kind of get in the physical space that will take me into the question that, you know, when you're rowing, there's a sliding seat, and there's a rhythm of the oars and, you know, a movement to it that is very distinct. And, and very sad, I would say, I think of it as elegance and grace and power kind of all at the same time. And it helps me to connect and be present in that rhythm, to really what's going on and to be able to hear and notice the voices of fear that are chattering away, and, you know, that get are giving me the litany of things that I need to worry about or that that voice thinks I need to worry about. And you know, some of those are real concerns. This journey is not without like, a lot of oh my gosh, moments. And also though, the, you know, in that rhythm of being on the water and and that movement and and the silence is the chance to remember and to sort of have those two parts converse and so listening to the voice of love and have confidence and peace and assurance that can come just reminding myself of what is also true of what I feel like is my joyful assignment. And, and letting those to kind of come into conversation and and into a sort of harmony, the issues that might come up that might create fear that might feel threatening, you know, those don't necessarily just go away because I think about them and you know, I'm out there rolling that mean that things are still the things the challenges are still there. But but the clarity and peace that can come from that recentering and remembering is really keeps me going and it's important

Hylke Faber 10:02

time just imagine you sitting in the, with the rhythm, as you mentioned Zen. Yeah. And, and getting into that rhythm and having those thoughts pop up. And I love that you talked about the litany of, of worries and things, which I think is so recognizable for many of us. And then you talked about finding that place of love. And interestingly, you mentioned conference, can you say more about the relationship between love and confidence from your own experience, and maybe also from what you've been hearing, because that, to me is such a powerful connection?

Renee Smith 10:46

Yeah. So. So when I, for, for me, the clarity that I've found myself in over one thing since 2015, really, and even more so in 2017. So I sort of had this epiphany about love and fear, in 2015, and then explored and explored and finally did the research and, and got super clear and convicted. And some of that came from looking people in the eye again, and again, and hearing their stories, and realizing, you know, both the stories of harm from fear, and toxic fear and the stories of benefit and joy and expansion, and confidence and flow. And, you know, goodness coming when people are in conditions of love and safety, and just like being so clear about that, and setting out on a path just to like to continue to say yes to these opportunities that would open up, it was like, I would say yes to a thing. And then and step into that, and then a next opportunity and next connection and next open door. And



with HDS, things just continue to expand. And so in that has been a sense of real confidence that this is like I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing. There is like the next provision each and every time. And I'm not really a religious person, but more of a spiritual person, and having a sense of just connectedness to what the universe wants me to do, what I am here to do, what, what is what's my part to contribute. And so in that, that sense of being in the flow of love has given me a lot of confidence that even when things are, you know, uncertain, and maybe you know, at times, you know, heartbreaking, or you know, challenging, like all of the different varieties of challenge that can come and they have, that there is still this, like deep confidence, that it's all going to be fine. And I can continue to step forward. And I see similarly when you know, there's something neuro physiologically that happens to us, and I've definitely heard this, you know, and, and have studied this in the research that I do that, that as, as people are in conditions of love and safety and as to have a sense of care and acceptance and belonging, that that they can relax, their shoulders drop in, and they can kind of you know, get comfortable in their seat and not be on guard and can you know, engage the frontal lobe of their brain and you know, and then their whole self, not just their thinking, but they're feeling their physiology, and can tap into their whole wisdom as whole people and have competence to bring that forward into whatever the opportunity is that they have. And it is a beautiful thing for individuals, and for groups of people to for teams, or whole organizations or systems when we are in that condition. Incredibly powerful, incredibly productive. Incredibly beautiful.

Hylke Faber 13:52

Beautifully said beautifully said. I am very curious about the epiphany in I think you said 2017 or so 15 Yeah, 1550 of love and fear. Sure. So this, this discernment that presented itself and then, in some way became related to what I heard you say was your is your joyful assignment? Yes. And so it's a bit more about that, because I think that's such a beautiful thing for us to hear about. Also, as we all reflect on our own lives, and the epiphanies that we all have ourselves and how we listen or maybe sometimes don't listen to those.

Renee Smith 14:32

Sure. So in 2000, well, in the sort of mid 2000s, I was working at the Department of Enterprise Services, I was directing organization development and continuous improvement for that state agency and guiding culture change in our agency and partnering across state government for that. And it was it was having a conversation with the director of our agency was Lou, and talking to him about the leadership required in that circle? You know, in that work that we were doing? And I asked him, Chris, what do you think is the most important job of a leader? And it's one of those moments I'll never forget, like, it's just riveted in my mind, he immediately replied, to eliminate fear from the workplace. And that was just music to my ears. That was a beautiful answer, I'd love that is someone trained in organization development and, you know, aligned with my values, it just was terrific to hear him frame it that way, it was so crystallizing. And it made sense that it was something that I had seen him work to do in his own way, and that he had encouraged us as his executive team to do. And as I started to think about that, though, it was kind of clear that it was only part of the story, it was only, like half of the equation, that if we have, you know, for dialing fear down, if we're trying to shrink fear, something else is growing,



something else is taking fierce place. And I really had to think about what that was, and, you know, interrogated that for myself and, and, and talk to people. And essentially, it came to the conclusion that when we shrink fear, the thing that takes first place is love, that the opposite of fear is love, that the two primary human experiences that we have in life are either fearful, or loving. All of the negative can be traced back essentially, to fear all of the positive, essentially, to love. And, you know, with that clarity, for myself, and kind of leaning into exploring that a little bit more, and I got, I got pretty sure about that for myself, if you will. And when I said that out loud in a really public place, I was in a huge conference, a state government conference, and we were in a breakout session with about 400 people in the room. That's how big the conference was. A breakout session had 400 people out session. Yeah, one breakout session. Yeah, it was a conference of about 2500 people. And so we were leading a breakout session of about 400. And Chris was talking about that it's a leaders job to eliminate fear. And I just sort of took the moment to say, as he finished to say, and when we eliminate fear, the thing that takes first place is love. And, you know, you can imagine that anything, listeners will probably imagine what happened in that moment, which is silence, uncomfortable silence, like, Did she really just say The L Word. And, and there was just like, this tension in the room, and I made a joke and named it like, got kind of quiet. And but then, you know, went on to explain that. We love our work. And we love the people we serve, and we we want to be loved, we love our you know, we love what we do and who we do it with, we'd like there is love there. And when we know that we belong, and that we matter and that we can contribute, when we essentially have an experience of feeling loved we can do and be and give our very best. And you know he'll could there was spontaneous applause in the room that day. And for weeks later, people were stopping me across state government and saying, I was there when you said that, keep saying that. And so I, you know, not only discovered that, like, I had this clarity for myself about this truth. But I discovered that I had tapped something that other people weren't repelled by or weren't, like, you know, shocked and, and, and didn't shut down but actually said, we need more of that. And that was really catalyzing, that let me know that I needed to lean in to understand this better, and not only to read other research that's out there, and other writing, and so on, and listen to what others were saying. But that I could as a social scientist, I could do my own research. And so created a research project, as you alluded to, and began to interview people collecting stories of you know, and I would ask people tell me a story about a time when you felt afraid at work? What happened? What did you do? What did others do? What were the impacts and so on? And what did that experience mean to you? And then tell me a story about a time when you felt loved at work? What did you do? What did others do? What happened? What were the impacts and and impacts on you and on your work and on your team and on your customer and on your personal life and on your physical well being on both fearful and loving circumstances? And then what did that mean to you? And those stories, like I say were really compelling and have been the foundation of everything that we do now.

Hylke Faber 19:31

Beautiful, beautiful. So say a bit more about then how do you practice in your own life and then maybe also how you help others to reduce fear and to cultivate if i That's my word, but maybe not your word like to allow for love and love that you that it came from that letting go of fear and then that was love. I love to hear how you work with that yourself. And also how you help others with that, because I can



imagine that each of us, like your interviewees have associations with fear and with love. And then in the moment when life happens, yeah, that's a different story. So how, tell us a bit about about that experience, you have yourself with those transitions and how you, you work with that.

Renee Smith 20:33

So, you know, the, the way that I think about, what we're here to do, essentially on this planet, is, is that we're here to learn to love again, or to rediscover how to love, or maybe, I mean, it depends on how you think about it, I think, I think that it's, it's always been in us and it gets buried over and we have to kind of just uncover it. And that is not just in our personal lives that is meant to be in every facet of our life. And so that is really our primary work as humans, and oh, by the way, we do a whole lot of other things, but in the course of doing all those other things, is the opportunity to learn to love. For me personally, you know, there's nothing like, you know, putting, putting, putting it all in, like, I have thrown it all in everything, my all my worldly goods, all of my future, my career, it is all about this now. And there's nothing like that to like, make one clear every day about sort of, to be self reflective, and, and aware. And so, you know, on our team, we and you know, Rick Gage, as part of our team, as you know, and listeners may be familiar with Rick and he has so beautifully put it this way that first we have to be it before we can share it or do it. And so we're quite focused on how do we practice love in our team in our own, you know, interactions in those moments that are really tough. When we you know, when we blow it when we let someone down, when we say something that unintentionally harm someone and our impact is, is off. So for me, love comes in, you know, needing to face and like to be self aware and face those times when I'm, you know, both when I'm proud and doing well and feel, you know, in the flow and feeling it and when I realized I've you know, done harm or missteps and I need to repair. And so there's like a being with the you know, it's not really the weight of it, it's just the I don't I don't know quite what where to put to it. But being with the truth of it continually. And, and owning that like having to just be with whatever that means. And sometimes, like I say, sometimes it's wonderful and flowy and feels great. And you know, it's all the sort of warm, warm, good things that people might feel. And sometimes it's really hard. Sometimes we have to, you know, share hard things with people or receive hard things ourselves and learning continually to do that, with love at the center is what I think what my work is all about. And I think what we're essentially all here to do is people that as we work with organizations, you know, there's lots of different entry points. So, you know, organizations come you know, hear about this and and everyone has their own lens that they're bringing to that their own maybe longing or need. And so we meet people where they're at and understand what that entry point is, and then help to, you know, everyone we work with always knows that this is what's at the foundation, and that any the way that we work with them is going to be with love at the center. And we want to help them move to put love at the center and some people are ready to just like embrace that. And others want to know that that's there and need to slowly move into that. So always with gentleness and with mindfulness of where people are at in their journey.

Hylke Faber 24:05

Thank you for that. Thank you for that. So I am going to take the seat of the skeptic for a second because I know that those voices and we sometimes meet them maybe also when we work with people



or work with colleagues and I can imagine a voice that says yeah, love but what's that? What is that? Because isn't love that sort of goey emotion and when I just realized that I failed, quote unquote, or I did something that wasn't um, I heard somebody or I just messed something up. What's the place of love in those situations? And what does that even mean? Does that mean just glad? Seeing over and it's like all good and we don't have to. What does that mean? It's about that.

Renee Smith 25:07

Yeah, far from it. So Moshe engelberg wrote a book called the Amari wave, which is also about love. And he, I love his definition of love, he defines love as the energy that uplifts and connects. And so in those moments when we, you know, that you've just described, and that whole variety of human experience, is the need to uplift and connect. And sometimes, you know, that uplifting is from a place of, you know, someone who's, you know, being downcast or demoralized. And you know, they need that kind of uplift. Sometimes the uplift is from someone who has, you know, wandered offers not contributing their part, for example, and needs to be brought back and uplifted to a higher standard for themselves. Sometimes that uplift is the need for more courage. Sometimes that uplift is a challenge, so that the uplift that can take many different forms, but it's the connection, that connected care for each other that allows us to be in bring that uplift the all the varieties of the uplift that we need for each other in those moments. Yep, I'll pause there.

Hylke Faber 26:20

I love that definition, that that love is about uplifting, uplifting, and really connected care for each other. That's really powerful.

Renee Smith 26:34

You know, I might add, if I could, that. The other thing that I think about is, so when I, when I asked people to tell me a story about a time when they felt loved at work, some people would answer and use the word love and tell the story. And other people would say, you know, I never thought about this as love before. But now that you mentioned it, you know, and they would tell me a story. And those would take the variety of examples of respect of trust, of kindness, or compassion, of appreciation and gratitude, of equity and justice sometimes or of courage, that kind of thing of challenge, as I said, so there was this whole, you know, variety of ways that people had experiences. And when I would name law, they would say, Oh, it was this, or it was this or was this. And basically, they provided the operating definition of love at work. And, and so it takes a lot of different forms. I think that the, one of the important things, especially in terms of leadership that I've come to appreciate is just that, you know, we can't do that the higher up you go in an organization, the greater your capacity for love, has to be. So it can't be just loving the one person you know, and sort of that that idea of, oh, this person, you know, I'll just let this happen that permissiveness or lenience is not love, it's likely not love for that individual. But it's also not love for the whole. And we really have to, as we are, you know, in leadership have to love the whole the breadth and breadth and width and depth of love for our whole organization and the entire system really, that we're responsible for. And so that means, you know, hard questions,



hard conversations sometimes. But, you know, done with compassion done with dignity and respect. Those are all, you know, ways that we lead with love.

Hylke Faber 28:33

I want to explore a bit more about the crucible that we find ourselves in, and we're almost going to go into a break. But before we go into this break, maybe talk a bit more about how do people access within themselves, that sense of uplifting and not fall back into the fearful state?

Renee Smith 29:01

Yeah. You know, it's an I think it's a journey of there's so much and our world that conditions us toward fear toward leading with fear and toward trying to motivate with fear, there's a lot of unlearning, we have to do about that. And so and healing, frankly. And so I think it takes time and it's a journey. And it has to just begin with that grace and compassion continually to ourselves. Beautiful,

Hylke Faber 29:31

let's well let's take a short break. And then afterwards, I'd love to explore more about how we unlearn what we seem to have learned as a society about fear and maybe go into that a little bit more so that we can be with that. And then also talk more about the power of grace and compassion which you to me also exude Rene so can see how that's so important. We've been in this podcast asked with unwavering talking with Renee Smith. He's the founder and CEO of a human workplace. And she has taken a stance, given her whole life to this joyful assignment of helping to uplift through moving from fear to love, not only for herself, but also for the organization's she leads, and for the organizations, teams and leaders that she guides from fear to love. We'll take a break now. And we'll see you back after

Presenter 30:31

you are listening to rooted and unwavering presented by growth Leaders Network, the leadership team and culture development company. If you would like to learn more about working on connectedness for yourself, your team or organization, please contact growth leaders network on LinkedIn. And now back to the show.

Hylke Faber 30:56

Back to route unwaivering, we've had a conversation with Rene Smits, he is the founder and CEO of a human workplace. And the thing that I already will take away is this one little pesky phrase. This sense of clarity, this sense of clarity, and that you went for it, and it didn't seem to me like a Las Vegas kind of bet. But something that came from a much deeper place. So thank you for sharing that. That's very inspiring. So say to us a bit more about how we, as humans, have become acculturated to fear.

Renee Smith 31:41

So, yeah, if we think about all of the different places where we learn and are influenced in life, you know, from our earliest, you know, days, and whether it's in our family from, you know, from parents,



from teachers, from coaches, from, you know, within society, and, you know, different places in society, authorities and society, there's, there's a kind of a fear based structure, a fear based approach that is sort of rooted in, you know, in our, in those interactions. And, you know, it's not that there's some complexity to this. So I don't want to say that those are all wrong, or that it's, I mean, I think that there's a lot to take apart there. And I don't claim to be an expert in, you know, early childhood raising rates for kids, but for grown folk grown, adults, now I for offspring would be a way to put it, and nine grandchildren. You know, it's, it's complicated, right? And, and so I don't want to, how do I put this, I guess, what I just want to acknowledge is that in our early examples, fear is often there in the early examples that we have of leaders in our lives, often are guided by or, you know, motivate us with fear. And, and we like, rarely are the examples that we might take into adulthood, into the workplace or into for those who end up being supervisors or managers or leaders. We have fewer examples to draw from that are love based. And I think we just have to acknowledge that it's, I think there's a bigger conversation about why that's so and what that should be. And you know, whether that should shift or not, like, all of that is a different thing. But if we just acknowledge that, if that is, then there is some relearning that needs to happen, or some expanding of our model of how we interact with each other. I think it's also true that like, in the last, you know, 10 years or so, it's become more commonly appreciated, and certainly during COVID, and the pandemic, how we function as people in terms of fear and threat responses in terms of stress, in terms of trauma. So we know so much more in recent years, and it's more commonly known, you know, throughout society, how, how we respond when we are threatened, when we have stressed when we experienced a traumatic incident and how we shut down how we pull back how we withdraw how we don't function as our best selves. And so, you know, I think part of part of what we need to come to grips with is just what's true about how human beings function and are motivated and and can bring themselves at their best to any circumstance. So that's cognitive, right? That is that is coming to know and appreciate that doesn't necessarily change our behavior, especially in the moment and I think it is a it's a continual process of like re learning of committing to of having You know, mentors and coaches and like mutual commitment together to, you know, a different way of being, and being able to hold the mirror up to each other, I certainly have that in my own organization. And I'm grateful for that, you know, people who can tell you the truth, who you know, love you who you know, care who you know, have your best interests in the best interests of everyone else at heart and, and that, you know, that context, that communal support toward a different way of being creates an environment where we can live into being different. And not only just sort of learning and thinking differently, but actually then being different together, being more loving together.

Hylke Faber 35:44

Yeah, I love the compassion in what you're describing, like, we don't even need to understand or maybe we don't understand fully why things are not. They are not have many examples, as supervisors, managers, or leaders of leading with love, and that we have more examples of leading from a place of contraction, fear and all that. And so just you saying that already, as I listened to you, Rene, I'm like, okay, of course, of course. And that, as you're saying, already starts to elicit this sense of grace, compassion, expansion and more possibilities. So I love that you are bringing that to the fore



in the way and the humility that you bring to that. Now, I'm, I'm just curious, because because we talked about skull, we talked about for grant for children, and nine, nine.

Renee Smith 36:49

Yeah, Yours, Mine and Ours, grandchildren, and we love them all.

Hylke Faber 36:54

Beautiful, it's beautiful. So tell me a little bit about your own life journey, as you've been traveling through all these different stages, right, and I don't want to call you an elder, but maybe I will call you an elder simply because of what you just said to me, like, person in school with nine grandchildren. Okay, could be seen as an elder, like, from that perspective, can you share with us a little bit about the stages, because I know our listeners are all stages of life. And it's not about the metric now you should be here should be there. But tell us a little bit more about your journey. Because my sense is that this insight, and your ability to speak in that moment in that 400 person breakout group didn't just happen. It was grounded in work in life. So tell us about this. Yeah.

Renee Smith 37:47

You know, I was as a young woman, as a high school student, you know, straight A student and student body president and a whole bunch of other things off to college, you know, confident happy and, and kind of lost my way after your college or epic actually was after a couple of years, quit college, got married, and went off and followed my husband in his dreams to Alaska. And sort of gave up my dreams started having a family had a couple children and, and I was a homeschooling bread baking mom, and you know, and kind of a probably a type A mom did all the things like whatever I'm doing, I'm doing it wholeheartedly and, and, and but that, you know, I sort of left a part of myself behind, and my dreams behind and followed his dreams and but it was a good life. Like that was my choice. And, and I love my kids and love my family and we had a good community and and that was what was you know, that's what what I was doing. I lived in the Aleutian Islands in Dutch Harbor, Alaska for four years and then lived in Homer, Alaska, on the Kenai Peninsula for four years. And after the first year of living in Homer, my husband was flying an airplane flying his private plane and was in a plane crash crashed his plane in the hills, kind of behind her home and sustained those traumatic brain injury, and was never the same. And he, you know, he lived he was in a coma for three weeks in the hospital for a couple of months. And then eventually I got to bring him home with he and our two kids. And, and at that point, you know, my, I felt like this is this was this is my you know, this is what I've said yes to this is this is part of for better for worse, and this is my husband and and my family and I need to you know, live into this with the most love that I can and make the very best of the circumstance. And so we did and continued on in that relationship for eight years. and had two more children and I just tried to make life work. But eventually it became damaging, it became harmful, and just wasn't sustainable anymore. And I felt released, finally, to step away. And at that point of stepping away, you know, I didn't have hadn't completed college, and I just, like, didn't know what I was going to do. But I'm so grateful that my parents said, you know, we were going to help pay for college originally will, will help you finish these two years. So I was so fortunate and privileged to have that support to finish those last two years of



college and, and so, you know, earn my undergrad so I'm, I was single working mom with four kids at home and completing college through those years. And in others the saying that we have and that I kind of adopted, you know, there's this idea, we can do hard things, and I have this saying that I can do anything for two years. So that was like two years to finish college, and then I decided I was gonna go to grad school, and it was, you know, two years to go through grad school, and then it took another two years to kind of find my way in to the work that I wanted to do. So that's, that's been a little bit of my path of, kind of, you know, of love taking different forms. So there was what love looked like, you know, in that crisis moment, during the plane crash and the aftermath of that, and then putting love at the Center for my family and my husband. And then there was putting love at the center and the decision to leave the marriage and move forward and kind of reclaim my life and my voice and my place in the world. And, and that was really about putting love at the Center for my children for sure, but of my own life, and valuing my own life and loving myself. And so, you know, all of that, then, you know, kind of learning to be in the world in this new way. And, and and overcoming this sense of regret that had I missed out like had I missed it. Had I, you know, when I went to grad school I was surrounded by it was executive style program, we, you know, we're in residence once a quarter for two years. And I was surrounded by all of these accomplished people who'd been in industry and in government, and I, you know, I had not. And so I had to kind of come to terms with that, and eventually come to see that all the experiences that I've just described, gave me a deeper, like a deeper, but a deep conviction and an ability to speak when the moment came in ways that I know, I probably wouldn't have or maybe wouldn't have been able to, had I not been through those experiences. So it's all preparation. Right? And and so now, you know, my work is all about helping people put love at the center of their work. Yes. And so I feel like all of that prepared me for this, you know, for this experience, and for what I'm doing now.

Hylke Faber 42:59

Yes, yes. such clarity, such clarity with which you speak and with which you share that experience. I want to play back the tape a little bit, roll back the tape a little bit. Because it's like, we're now sort of my sense talking with you right now is standing a little bit like, like standing, not on top of the mountain, maybe but up on the mountain and looking back into the valley and all the ups and downs. And it's like, sort of there's a sense of like, oh, yeah, right. That makes sense. That was putting love at the center. Yeah.

Renee Smith 43:35

necessarily at the time. Right.

Hylke Faber 43:37

Right. So tell us a little bit about how this orientation that is so deeply rooted in you of having love in the center. And it's like crystal clear. It's like, clearly Renee is being love at the center. It's very obvious, right? It's very obvious. So how did you how did that get cultivated? What was some of the moments of not that this is my language awareness? It may you may have in a completely different language. But what happened along the way that you met, you're able to make these choices, because I heard you



say, for example, with the plane crash, that this is what I chose. Yeah. So say a bit more about how on earth as a human being, do you do this?

Renee Smith 44:31

Gosh, that's a really good question. I don't know. I will reflect a little I mean, there's just snapshots that I remember. So a couple of things occur to me and one is that I am a pretty positive person. And and have I, you know, I have positive energy and I had a strong foundation in my early years to draw from, and I think that that is not a small thing. For me, it you know, it means that I can live I've lived through these experiences with some sense of sort of groundedness and confidence, and, and healthy, you know, attachments to draw from healthy relationships. And that's been significant. I'm grateful for that. I think there's also, there's, it's kind of a strange thing. I think there's also a good healthy amnesia, of like, my ability, and I think I'll call it an ability to sometimes just forget, and like, let go and keep going. That serves me well, you know, it's funny, yeah, I've got four children, and, and they will sometimes remote, you know, recollect Oh, remember when this happened, mom, or that happened. And they're kind of remembering when they might have been going off the rails a little bit or, you know, there were those, you know, challenges and growing up, or silly things that happened, you know, where they got in trouble or something. And oftentimes, I don't remember what they're talking about. Because there is a, I mean, maybe vaguely, but like, there's a certain sense of like, okay, I just need to let that go and keep looking forward. Because I can't do anything about that. And I don't know if that's healthy or not, but but for me, it's been effective. To just sort of be able to read, there's, you know, remembering certain things, but also just letting go and not like dwelling in the struggle or the pain or the frustration, but just continue with positivity, looking forward. And assuming that the next, you know, the next right thing is going to happen. So, you know, I think it connected to my my work about love, it's also true that I've, I've had this sense and have seen again, and again, where like the next I said this a little earlier that look differently, that the next door opens, or the next person shows up, or the next provision is made. So, you know, this is especially you know, having I left the governor's office just before the pandemic, yet I actually had this sense that I was supposed to leave and go into private work and take this message out into the world, not just for the state of Washington. And I gave notice in December of 2019. And I said, so, you know, I was director of workplace transformation for the state left my job said, march 2 2020, is going to be my last day of work. And by March 6, it was clear, I was not going to New Zealand, or to Europe, or to any of the places that were planned. And I was staying in my living room. And by March 16, we were live with a program called working alone together, and we're supporting the community, a global community with gatherings, virtual gatherings to help process the pandemic. And, and so that was like, you know, that, that that sense of we're, the next right thing is going to happen and that I don't, you know, I couldn't plan for that I didn't know there was going to be a pandemic, and it was, you know, setting my house in motion to sell my house and sold property. Because now my income is gone. And the income I thought I was going to have was gone, but sold a piece of property that I you know, had bought a couple years previously, that I lived on for the next year and a half and sold that in March of 2020. And, and so just like the next provision, and then I would also share because like as leaders, you know, just it's not easy. I then ended up like gathering a team, a team of people, you know, we have 30 affiliates in the US and the UK now. And that team was gathering and



growing. And we were like a team without a business model. Because the business model I thought I was going to do is gone. You know, it was it was it was shelved at least. And I had to kind of figure out what next but we had this team and so I'm cultivating and nurturing this team and pouring resources into maintaining this organization and growing and learning and building our business and got to the point where I expended all my friends it was in December. Gosh What was it December of 21 that I had I had a little sticky on my computer that said tap into the forum get your 401k like during the 401k was the sticky and that day that day someone called and said Renee I believe in this work we need to bring this into our organization. I want to do it in the first half of next year. Here's \$25,000 toward that work out and that was the bridge and into 2022 Everything took off and but it was like you know holding the space holding on holding on because I'm you know watching it all drain and you know paying the bills and like holding on holding on and closer and closer to the edge right. And but yet believing like trusting that on I'm supposed to be doing this this is like this is it. I've thrown it all in and and the provision has been there

Hylke Faber 50:00

such courage, such courage or

Renee Smith 50:05

kind of crazy boldness, maybe, I don't know. But here we are. And I'm, I am so grateful and so thankful that I get to do this. That one of the things that's true is that you know, when when, when you say my work is about love, people send you stuff about love. Love just pours in. That's it. That's a beautiful, it's a beautiful, you know, side channel to all of this is that I just know the love course in in all kinds of different forms.

Hylke Faber 50:35

Yes, yes. Yes. Fantastic. So tell us a little bit about, and this hour is almost over, which is hard to believe, because I can realize that I realized I can talk to you for hours. I help Well, tell us tell us about 2020 and 2021. So because you talked about making, like the provisions will be made, will come like you, you know, the next right thing. And you also felt a sense of at least you talked about and senses felt of like this is my this is mine to do. Okay, this is mine to do. Yeah. How do you stay in your seat? Those in the seat have that purpose over those two years, when the bridge was not there yet? financially?

Renee Smith 51:23

Yeah. So. So part of it was just that I've made that commitment. And, and I feel like at this point, I cannot imagine doing anything else, even in those days, when I wasn't quite clear, you know, what, how it was going to, like what form it would take, it was trying to find the form. And, you know, frankly, to just trying to find my way into, through some basic business, things coming from government, I didn't have a lot of experience with marketing and sales, like that's just not something, we've done a different kind of thing and the work that I've done. So there was some learning to do. And, and so, you know, what occurs to me as part of this journey, during that time, was sort of, you know, focusing in on one



thing, and kind of forgetting everything else in it was as if I had, you know, come I moved, I like moved house and, and move all my boxes into this new place, if you will, metaphorically, and put all of the stuff of my life and my career away in closets and under the bed and in the attic, and in the garage, and like hidden all these things away. And only, like kept out one box. And we were just doing the one thing, and I kind of forgot about everything else if and I think you know that those early days of the pandemic were a really strange time and you know, to just sort of art for me, it was very focused and, and a little surreal. And so I actually during at the end of August, physically moved from I sold my house and moved to a little place down by the water that I rented for a while. And in that move the physical move came some an earthing and remembering, and I and I started thinking, Wait a second, like, I used to do some other things, right? I used to have some other things that were important to me and that some other things that were like part of this what were those things? Oh, yeah. And I started remembering, remembering, in a sense, it was remembering who I was, and remembering what this work was, was about. And I kind of metaphorically assembled all that stuff on a big table and then had to look at it for a while, and had to figure out how does this fit together now and in you know, in conversation with others and and you know, on my team and and just being and exploring and listening to clients and what was needed and and frankly, as that fear subsided, you know that how am I going to pay my bills? How am I going to feed myself fear, you know, that moves surreal and so had to like work to a swage that you know, and to trust and to be in that space of peace and as I could be in that space of peace could then see what those next possibilities were and, and reef claim my voice again the reef claiming a voice is a theme throughout my life. And so this has been a time and that season was a time of sort of forgetting and then rediscovering and reclaiming and finding how to bring it forward again.

Hylke Faber 54:33

Thank you for sharing, I'm imagining you being in this connectedness to peace and purpose and staying with and then allowing for that singular focus to be for a while, but then one box, right and then so at some point, there's this openness that happens. Ah, you could say that's all was like a provision from the mind that says all that, that there's all this and then allowing for it to come together. Yes. And staying with. And also I really appreciate your honesty that fear of not being able to provide it was certainly there. Absolutely. It was just that you didn't let yourself be guided by it right, and made a different choice. And that made all the difference is the beautiful poem said somewhere. So, as we're getting towards the end of this conversation, Rene, I'd like you to think about what would you like to say to people or to a person that's finding themselves kind of in this in between liminal space between fear and love, you know, they may be consumed or pulled by this fear of, not enough, not enough money, not enough approval, not enough job security, which is a big thing these days, and, or fear of something else losing a relationship, whatever it might be, and, and then this glimmering of the confidence of love that you've so clearly articulate in this conversation? What would you like to say to them, those people in liminal spaces?

Renee Smith 56:18

Hmm. Well, their experience is real, like, I would want to acknowledge that, that, that those, those experiences that are washing over, people are moving through people are real, and not to be



dismissed. And that, to hold on to lean in to find and invite that love to come in to find its way and because it's there, for each of us. And the choices that get us there are as you know, as varied and different as our, you know, our life circumstances. So there's no, like magic wand or formula about that, except the, the invitation to open to it, to ask it to come and to, to be looking for it. And I think to understand and appreciate the power that it can have, and that sometimes it shows up and really unexpected ways. You know, I, I think back to when my husband was in the plane crash, and we had bought a home. And it had an unfinished mother in law's apartment in the basement, that some folks, you know, helped us to finish. And in during that time, there were, you know, a lot of people who, you know, if you've suffered that kind of a trauma or that kind of crisis, what I've discovered is that the people that you think that will be, there are not always the people who will be there for you, the sources of love, that you would anticipate are not always the ones that are actually the sources of love. And that can be for a whole variety of reasons. But, you know, if we're only looking for that, from one channel, it might not be from that channel. And, and you know, in this case, the the source of love to help finish that apartment so that we could rent that and have a source of income. That was a, that was a unexpected source of love. And so those are there, those are there. And I think part of you know, this is learning to invite an open to it.

Hylke Faber 58:25

Thank you so much for nice, we've been speaking to Renee Smith, he's the founder and CEO of a human way workplace helps people to create lives, workplaces, teams that are more human, more loving. Many things I took away from this conversation, one thing that just happened that you just said, which was I'm just open to it, just open to it. And let go of the attachment of what you think it should look like or what the where the provision should come from, you never know, with you, you're just open to it, you're just open to it. Which is such a radically different orientation than the fearful contraction, which is tunnel focused on what we think should happen. So thank you so much. Any closing thing you want to say at the last few seconds that we've had today?

Renee Smith 59:23

You know, oftentimes people ask, Is it really possible to get results and care for people? Right, let me know if we think organizationally and if is it really possible to do that? And I just always want to remind people that it's the wrong question. And the question we should be asking ourselves is, how on earth are we going to get results if we don't care for each other?

Hylke Faber 59:48

How on earth are we gonna get results if we don't care for each other? Thank you so much, Renee. This was heart opening and so beautiful. You've been listening Rudan wavering, we have these conversations every two weeks. You were with us today with Renee Smith. He's the CEO and founder of human workplace. In two weeks, we'll be here again, with Robert Washington. He is a leader in Microsoft, also a martial arts master and also a US Navy veteran. And we're going to hear from him about how do we access strength in pretty extreme circumstances. And Renee also taught us about that today. Also, if you'd like to stay more involved in these conversations, you can subscribe to this



podcast, anywhere where you find podcasts like LinkedIn, Spotify, Apple, and of course, there's replays on LinkedIn, you can find Renee Smith and the human workplace, on LinkedIn, and on the worldwide web in other places. And I look forward to seeing you again, live if you choose to join us. And until then, please, maybe sit with this practice of opening up to what love might look like today. For you, for you and for all of us. Thank you so much for listening. You've been listening to ruidu unwavering. I'm your host hilker Fabrice, you next time

Presenter 1:01:23

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