

S01 - E10 - Rooted & Unwavering - Dec 9 - Hylke Faber & John Rex

SPEAKERS

Hylke Faber, John Rex

00:05

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 rightness 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

Well, welcome to root and unwavering broadcasting live from Phoenix, Arizona, where we help people and leaders connect more deeply to their innate potential. I'm your host Hoka Faber. And this is already our 10th episode, and I'm here today with John Rex, former CFO of Microsoft, North America and currently, executive coach. Hi, John, how are you today? I'm doing great hilker Thanks for having me. Happy to be here. It's so good to be with you and an honor to sit with you I, I always am admiring you and thinking of you. Especially when I go through challenge thinking about how can I access a little bit more of the strengths that John demonstrates in everything that he does, that's how you come to mind. So before we go into conversation with you, John, I'm going to say a bit more about this podcast series and also about you. So first about this, this podcast series rooted in wavering, it's called rooted and unwavering because this is a series of conversations with leaders from all walks of life, to think about, what is it like to connect more deeply, to what we're truly made of our best selves are better angels, and try to figure out how we access that, especially when things don't go the way we want them to go, which we could say are learning moments, but they're not always seen that way. And in the last nine episodes, we've been hearing from different people about their perspectives. And today, we'll be hearing from from John Rex. As I said, John, was a former CFO of Microsoft, North America also worked at other blue chip and amazing companies. He is currently an executive coach to senior leaders, which he helps one on one and his coaching style is marked by compassion, courage, curiosity. And I think a lot of expertise and perspective, and helping people to really become interested in the joy of discovering more of what they truly made off. And you're also a husband, and a father of four. Tell us in a second how many grandchildren there are because I have lost count. I know that you enjoyed it tremendously. You worked worldwide, and also in Latin America for 12 years and vault Latin America itself for 12 years, I believe you deeply value, diversity and inclusion. i So read that in the articles that you contribute on Forbes. I highly recommend those articles. They're beautiful pieces of



leadership, I find them very actionable. And besides all of these things, family, spirituality and community are central to the way that John lives. When he's not working one on one with senior executives, he cycles skis and plans the next adventure with his family and friends. So John, I'm so happy you're here. I think of us, a man with such a big heart. such kindness, such intelligence, such curiosity, and such perseverance. Welcome.

John Rex 03:53

Thank you, Hilda. Those are such kind words. I appreciate it. And I Yes, I do love our grandchildren. And we have eight of them. We're now up to eight, at least when I checked this morning, I'm sure there'll be more on the way soon. We're a very prolific family that way. It's great. That's wonderful. And I hear from you that you connect often with your family. Is that right? We do. Yeah, yeah. In fact, this year, we got all 18 of us together twice, once in July. We got together for a week. And then we got together again now and thanksgiving for a week. We feel very blessed because all of our kids and their spouses love each other our grandkids love to play together. So it's always a good time. We really don't tire of one another and it's it's always a sweet, sad parting moment when people have to go back to their different homes, but we're enjoying it while we can and just love those times together. Fantastic. I can just sense it said thanks for sharing that with all of us. I think we get a sense of what that's like.

Hylke Faber 05:00

like to be in the wrecks family gatherings for from the way you're talking about. So tell us a little bit, John, if you like and if you can, about connectedness, about connectedness in your life and leadership. So what have you been learning about? connectedness in your life and leadership?

John Rex 05:23

Yeah, it's such a good question. I love it. You know, when I think about connectedness, there are there are two primary ideas that come to my mind. One is the connectedness at the very deepest human level. And I, I sincerely believe, and I carry this in my heart that all of us humans, we're here on the planet to help each other. I really can't think of any other long term reason why we're here on this planet, other than to help each other. And, you know, when I talk to executives at all levels, and really, throughout my almost 60 years of life, I consistently hear people tell me that what matters most of them, like if you if you really kind of pin someone down and say, like, what is your purpose in life? What is your higher purpose? Or what do you want your higher purpose to be? Virtually everyone will say, I want to help others, and then fill in the blank. I want to help others. And I think that that is an innate desire and innate gift and talent that we have, we sometimes tamp it down with with our own selfishness, I know that I do that. But it's, it's there, and it's alive, if we will just let it flourish. Good friend of mine, taught me that for any corporate meeting, now, this is this is. So this is putting connectedness into practice, and very pragmatic way for any corporate meeting, the sequence should be connection, before context, before content. I think it's so beautiful, to recognize that everything that we do, especially in corporations, but you know, name your institution, and community doesn't really matter. But everything that we do what to one degree or another, requires us to connect and understand each other as humans, I like to joke and say, maybe someday robots will replace us or AI will replace us. But until then, we've got mortals to work with. And, and that's, that's really what matters is connecting with mortals, and recognizing seeing one each other one another for for who you are and what we bring



and, and have to offer. So let me pause there hilchot, because I have another idea I want to add, but I want to be careful not to do excessive riffing.

Hylke Faber 08:04

I, I love what you said about it's about helping each other. And then this paraphrasing, calm negativeness before context. And then content. Yeah. And I think that's a powerful sequence. Because I don't know if about you. But my mind doesn't always go in that order when I walk into a meeting. Oh, for sure.

John Rex 08:30

And, and most business people are trained, conditioned, if you will, to like go straight to content. Let's get down to business. Let's go down to brass tacks. And and if we do that, and we just miss the opportunity to connect with each other. And that's where the real synergy happens when we're connected with each other when we understand each other.

Hylke Faber 08:54

Yeah, I get it. I totally get it. Now, how have you learned that you said, you know, you already shared with us? You're almost 60 years? Yeah. So did he come in with that knowledge? Or what? How is that developed? Oh,

John Rex 09:12

no, no, no, no, I did not come in with that knowledge. I mean, you know, I was raised in a family with lots of love, extended family connections and so forth. So I guess, you know, on one level, I understood that. And I grew up in a strong faith tradition where our faith community was important. Nevertheless, when I went into business, it really was through through the experience of working with teams learning how to lead teams. I lead my first team of 60 people when I was 28 years old in Chile. And, you know, I mostly learned by failing, and by observing other greatly leaders, and I just came to realize that none of us can really accomplish very much on our own. You know, we throw around this term scaling all the time. And like, what does scaling mean? And a quick answer might be, well, you know, getting work done through others, but it's much, much more than that. It's like, harnessing the power of a great variety and diversity of talents and perspectives and life experiences, and bringing to bear everyone's brilliance. Everyone's genius. Yes. To problems. And yeah, I let me say one more thing that the danger of of going on too long, you know, this book Sapiens, and I should remember the author's name off the top of my head, but I don't, but he talks about how the great power of of Sapiens Homo sapiens is actually not our intelligence, although that's the first thing that might come to mind. Like, yeah, we're smarter than the rest of the and certainly, that is, that's crucial. But even more powerful than our intelligence is our ability to work together. You know, you think about, you know, ancient man, confronting saber toothed tigers, and like one on one, a human is no match for a saber toothed Tiger, like no match at all. But you get a bunch of humans together and collaborate and plan and strategize and they can actually outwit a saber toothed Tiger and, and is, as you think about, like, what we can accomplish as humans together. It's, it's astounding, like my water bottle here. Oops, there we go. My water bottle. Pretty simple, simple thing, but I could never make this myself. It's full of just splashed. I could never make this myself. I don't know how to mine or I don't know how to make metal. You know, I



don't know how to do any of that stuff. The plastic the design, the manufacturer takes literally 1000s of people just to make an aluminum water ball. It's just astounding. And and that's the beauty of what we humans can do together.

Hylke Faber 12:28

Yeah, step beauty of interdependence. And realizing that the or and everything else, even us sitting here, like the miracle of a sitting here. Oh, yeah, eating in Texas, me sitting here in Phoenix, and all the places we've been to, and somehow even how we met. Yeah. It's, it's all kind of miraculous, and also would not have been possible without probably millions of other people.

John Rex 12:59

Yeah, it's astonishing, isn't it? Absolutely. Astonishing. Yeah,

Hylke Faber 13:05

I think that's, that's a, that's a moment of deep appreciation, when I think about it, connecting to the miracle of it all of how every moment is only possible because of all these endless humans that came before us, or that are also a working on concert to make this happen. Even this conversation between you and I right now. Right for people listening right now. Live or are in the recording? Yes, it's, it's all made possible, because somehow we've supporting each other for greater good.

John Rex 13:40

Exactly. Yeah. And I love that you use the word interdependence that, you know, it's so important. No, one of us you know what I forget who originally said no man is an island. Today, we should say No person is an island, but it's so true. Like we can't, there's almost nothing we can do just by ourselves.

Hylke Faber 14:00

Right? Right. Right. And yet, and yet, we disconnect from that awareness, don't we? We do. So say a bit more about the hard knocks of life you have experienced? That may have been more entries for you to realize this at a deeper level.

John Rex 14:22

Yeah, yeah. Well, you know, the first thing that I should say is, I feel very blessed. I don't know that I've had more than my share of trials and tribulations and adversity. Certainly, there are many, many people who have had much more adversity than than I've had in my life. But I I've come to believe that all experience and you know, in particular, Adversity is just a phenomenal machine to help us Grow, to become stronger to become to become better versions of ourselves. And I think in my life, there are three particular moments that I can think of that really shaped me one, and I might have shared this with you before hilker. But maybe not, I haven't written about it in an article. But when I was 12, we were already humble. And by that I mean financially humble. We definitely were not wealthy. We were poor. To be honest, I didn't know we were poor, but we were poor. But to make matters worse, my dad's business failed. And we lost everything. We lost our house, we lost our cars, we ended up living in a motel for a time. It was a it was a rough period of time. It really was. And, and yet, I look back on that time now, and you know, that ended up being kind of my, my growing up adolescent years that I



really had flourish or blossom within me a recognition that, that I could be self authoring. Not withstanding our interdependence, but I could be self authoring, I didn't need to allow things to happen to me. I could practice self authorship proactivity and respond to circumstances. And so I became like, really focused on trying to do well in school and land a good job and those kinds of things. So that my hope was that my family, the family that I would eventually have someday wouldn't have to endure some of the difficulty that that I had as an adolescent in a way that was like very misguided. You can't deprive people, especially your own children of their growing experiences and the adversity that they might have. Anyhow, that was like a, an experience left a lifelong mark on me, I think, in the final analysis in a good way.

Hylke Faber 17:21

pause on that one for a second. Yeah, I want to hear about the other two. I am very curious, because I'm just imagining John Rex, living in a motel with his family, like in his teens, somewhere, and then somehow finding the wherewithal to discover something about self authorship. So do you recall that time and what happened in you, because that is a challenging transition to make? With everything around you just crumbles? Yeah,

John Rex 17:55

yeah. Yeah, so my answer is very genuine, and slightly cheesy. But you know, it's my experience, while share it. In those days, so this was late 70s, early 80s. My dad was trying to start a new career in real estate. And somehow he got, like, plugged into a bunch of I'll call them motivational programs on cassette, you know, these were like, very common back in those days. And we'd be on road trips, my dad would plug in some of these cassettes he was trying to, like jazz himself up to do well in his in his newfound real estate career. But I was in the backseat listening to this stuff. And I just thought, oh, man, there is a lot here to learn and to understand. And I began to embrace principles. And I'll share one with you right now I remember one of these guys on one of these cassettes, he said, the definition of success. And by the way, I haven't found a better definition of success in this one. He said, the definition of success is the day by day realization of goals that are important to the individual.

Hylke Faber 19:25

Say that again, I think it's so beautiful. Yeah, it

John Rex 19:28

really is beautiful. He said, Success is the day by day realisation of goals that are important to the individual. So as opposed to money, power status, you know, cars, big houses, properties influence. It's like not like what matters to the individual. And what are the goals that they set. And this could lead us on a very beautiful conversation around core values and honoring our core values and living our life in a way that's congruent with core values. But that that statement among many others just helped me to realize, okay, I don't have to be a victim to use kind of a strong word, I don't have to be a victim of circumstance or environment, I can step into my personal leadership, wrecking recognizing my dependence on others recognizing my dependence on God, which, which for me, and I know, for millions of people is an important dependence to recognize, but recognizing that we have the power to



act, and not just be acted upon the power to act and not just be acted upon that. That was just, it was a lightning bolt to me, and set me on fire when I was about 13 or 14 years old

Hylke Faber 20:57

power to act and not to be acted upon. That's as a 13 year old in the back of that car listening to that cassette that your dad was playing as he was trying to get his life together. And a fresh and new in real estate. Yeah, so inspiring. Okay, so you said there were two other experiences. So let's continue with those that that taught you? Yeah,

John Rex 21:25

yeah. So here's another one, I'll fast forward a couple of decades, maybe three decades. And, you know, I had had a fairly successful international career in finance, started out with Kodak. Back when Kodak was a fantastic company. Then I went to Novartis, the big Swiss pharmaceutical, and, and then I was recruited by Microsoft, to go up to Seattle, and, and to be CFO of Microsoft, North America. And over the years, I had developed a reputation as a turnaround CFO, someone who would go in and just like totally revamped a finance organization, you know, develop talent, recruit great talent, and so forth. It's kind of like a people centric, CFO, if you will. And honestly, I always felt a little bit like a fish out of water in finance, because what I love more than anything was, was building fantastic teams that would develop and deliver big, big business impact. That's what I cared about. Anyhow, I joined Microsoft, and I was 42 at the time. And the recipe, I'll call it, the recipe of success that I've been using in my career up to that point, had worked very, very well. And it had led me to this to this great opportunity that I was super excited about, I joined Microsoft and I began executing my recipe, my plan, my tried and true plan. And it worked pretty well, for about a year or at least. So I thought, What I didn't fully appreciate, although I had some hints here and there that maybe I should have paid attention to better. But what I didn't fully appreciate was that my past recipe would not succeed in the in the Microsoft culture. It just flat out would not succeed. So my past recipe was very focused on the people agenda, building people in teams and ensuring strong processes and technology and all of that kind of stuff. But Microsoft demanded something of me that my former companies had not demanded, at least not to the same degree. And it was two things really, one, Microsoft demanded that I have a deep deep knowledge and, and really expertise in all of the work that all of my people did for me. That was pretty daunting. The other thing that Microsoft demanded of me was not a cursory but a very strong working knowledge of all of our products and services. Now, Microsoft's portfolio is pretty big. And, and that was also a daunting task. But you know, honestly, my boss called me in at one point, he said, John, you don't nail these two things. We're not going to be able to keep you here. And that was a wake up call to me. I had never in my career, never been told that I was in danger of losing my job. To the contrary, I had been, you know, consistently and frequently promoted and given more responsibility and praise for my good work, blah, blah, blah. Here I was facing a very different situation. And I realized that I had to change. I had to change. And going back to, you know, you can act or be acted upon. I realized, okay, this, it's not going to do any good to blame the circumstances to blame the situation to blame Microsoft for being unreasonable? Well, it's expectations. No, my responsibility is to reach within myself and figure out how to meet those expectations. And so I basically sent myself back to my own university studies, I would do my day job as the CFO, you know, 10, or 11 hours or so maybe more sometimes. And then I'd spend nights and weekends just digging deep into all these arcane details of the work



processes and the work that my people did, and the products and services that Microsoft offered. And it just about wore me out, I gotta be honest, to do that, but I was determined. Some people might say stubborn, but I, I, I was very determined to learn what I had to do to to earn my key, you know,

Hylke Faber 26:18

I love that. I love that. And I'm going to, I'm just curious, because your, your, that phrase is gonna stick with me. I had to dig deep in myself to meet the expectations, not blaming, not victim, not like, Microsoft, is this, like, I'm just paraphrasing, this is mad. Yeah, they expect this of me. I'm thinking you're you and your early to mid 40s. That's a lot of time in Korea already, you know, you've you've earned your keep your aren't your like stripes, you could say, and then you are being told, it's not working. Right. And yet, you are willing to look inside of yourself to dig deep inside of yourself, and spend all that extra time it was not, it doesn't sound like it was a vacation. Sounds like a real, real rigorous exercise. So before we take a break, I would love for you to speak a little bit about what motivates you then to keep going and to do that? Because I know, many people would at some point on that journey. Get off the train.

John Rex 27:33

Yeah, you know, I think it's different for everyone. In my case, something that I've gradually learned and I underscore the word gradually, something that I've gradually learned is the importance of trying to live my life in congruence or in integrity, with my core values. And for me, a big part of that is honoring family honoring my faith honoring my god, honoring the people that I work with and that I work for. And so, Stephen Covey now passed away, of course, but he once said, be sure that the ladder of of success that you're climbing is leaning against the right wall. You don't want to get to the top of that ladder and discover, Oh, dang, this wasn't the right wall, I think climbing the wrong leg. And so I think for me, what has consistently fueled me I'll say it that way fueled me fired me sparked me motivated me inspired me is a vision of not of money, prestige, or, you know, influence or title or whatever. What has consistently fueled me are the values that I hold dear. And trying to make sure that I'm moving in the direction. So in this particular case, it was like, I can't let this company down. They hired me They put their faith in me. I can't let my family down. They're depending on me to provide for them. I can't let myself down. Like doing good work for the sake of good work is important to me. Like I can't let myself down. So there were there was like it never crossed my mind. Oh, I'm gonna hit the eject button and just get out of here. This is like a wrong place for me. These people are ridiculous. This is never crossed my mind. I just felt fueled by okay, how can I don't think I consciously asked myself this question, but the real question was How will I be able to look back 1015 20 years from now on this moment in time, and feel like I acted in a way that would produce peace in my heart and pride in my actions?

Hylke Faber 30:16

That's a beautiful place to pause today. How can I act right now in in a way that will provide peace in my heart, and pride in my actions. When I look back, the sense of, as I relate to that John is wanting to give my best being committed to give my best, I hear a deep commitment in you. So let's explore that commitment more as you continue the conversation just after a break in a moment, we will explore more about what is it like to discover more and more of your core values and to use the Stephen Covey



metaphor to discover more and more of the wall that the ladder actually is placed against? Yeah, let's take a little break now. And we'll be back in a moment.

31:10

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 31:36

Welcome back, we've been talking to John Rex, currently executive coach, former CFO of Microsoft, North America and also other blue chip companies, we've been talking about self authorship, about connectedness, connecting to our core values and a deep dedication, as we just talked about, before the break, to do what we need to do that produces peace in my heart, and pride in my actions. I love that phrase, so many one liners here, John, that I'm going to take with me in the next few weeks. Thank you. So say a bit more about your journey of connecting with your core values, because you mentioned three experiences. And we've talked about two so far. Yeah, about the third one.

John Rex 32:25

Yeah, the third experience was very unexpected, super unexpected. But I think vital to my life's journey, absolutely vital to my life's journey. So I was working as a CFO. And I'd been doing that for years. And as I mentioned, I was I was a people centric CFO, and just loved building teams, coaching, mentoring people, and so forth. And, in a way, I cared far more about that than income statements and balance sheets, although I was never confused about my fiduciary responsibility. And I had this persistent, nagging feeling that at some point in my life, I should, I should leave the corporate world and dedicate my my work my life's work, to helping others become more effective leaders. And I would hire, you know, executive coaches and leadership consultants, to work with me and my teams. In fact, that's how you and I got to know each other Hill counting in those days and, and I would sit across the table from an executive coach, or, or I'd sit across the table from you, Hilda? And I would think that's, that's what I want to do when I grow up. I want to do that kind of work. And you'll recall the conversation you and I had in a taxi cab in New York City

Hylke Faber 34:03

to JFK, if I'm not mistaken. That's Yes.

John Rex 34:08

We were on our way to JFK. And anyhow, I remember telling you and I'll never forget your response. But I said, you know, I was just telling you about this nagging feeling that I needed to leave the corporate world and, and dedicate my my work to leadership and, and you said something to me like John, just do it. Just do it. And I looked at you and I thought, That's easier said than done. And, and I didn't fully appreciate at that time. The competing values, competing priorities that I was carrying around in my heart and soul and in my brain to because like, on the one hand, was important to me to provide secure You're ready and a nice lifestyle to my family. And I knew I could do that as a CFO. On



the other hand, I didn't feel like I was really doing the work that I was called to do. And so I carried around this. Sometimes it's called polarities, right, you got something on one pole, something on the other pole. And there's this dynamic tension going on. And I carried that around for a long time. And in many ways, it was painful for me in other ways. It was preparing me and readying me to make the leap that I eventually made. I have this picture behind me, let's see if I can get my finger to point in the right direction here. There it is. The leaping man. Yes. And I still I got that picture years ago, it's from this artist in Italy. And I was able to get him to ship me a cheap copy of his original. But it reminds me that sometimes we have to take a leap of faith. And I could never quite get myself like, every couple of years, I muster up all this energy, okay, I'm really gonna leave the corporate world, I'm really gonna, like resign from my CFO job, and I'm gonna go be an executive coach, and I just just couldn't do it. I couldn't do it. And then about six years ago, I ended up in the ICU with massive bilateral pulmonary embolism I didn't even know that was, maybe I've since learned a lot of people do, I guess I was ignorant. But, you know, it's when you're when the arteries between your heart and lungs, clogged up with blood clots. And, and the mortality rate is actually very, very high. In fact, when I checked into the emergency room at the hospital, because I was feeling short of breath, I didn't know what was going on with me. And the doctor did an x ray on my lungs, and he came back and he was just white as a ghost. And he said, John, if we don't take emergency action, you're going to be dead this time tomorrow. That was stunning. Because I honestly, I didn't feel that bad. I mean, yeah, I fell short of breath and had been going on for a couple of weeks. But I didn't feel like I was on the verge of death. And he's, look, it's bad. I don't know how you walked in here. I don't, I don't even know how you're talking to me right now you shouldn't be able to talk to me. So I can't quite explain how all of that was. But anyway, it was a serious situation. And they scrambled a team of doctors to save my life. And I don't say that lightly at all. I say it with sincerity and with gratitude. They saved my life. And they pumped a drug called TPA. Up through catheters through my groin, they threaded him up through my arteries up into my heart and lungs. pretty sensitive, even dangerous procedure. But they did that they broke up the blood clots and saved my life. I was in the ICU for almost a week, recovering from and somewhat stereotypically, or cliché, I suppose, perhaps to anybody who's listening to this story, but but at the same time, very real life to me. That was a wake up call. And I ended it, I had that classic moment of realization. Life is short. Life is fragile. And you have I have, I have one opportunity to live this one life and to live it the way that I think and I believe in my heart is the right thing to do. And you mentioned courage earlier, Hilda, and I've done a lot of thinking about courage and I, I've devised my own definition of courage that I want to share and it's this courage is doing what you believe is right. Even at your own peril. Doing what you believe is right even at your own peril. And peril might be physical peril. It could be financial peril. It could be emotional peril, it could be relationship peril, but all kinds of peril. And I had not been able to muster the courage until I got smacked in the face with the clarity of this near death experience. And, and came face to face with my mortality and came face to face With a more clear eyed perspective of my values. And so I turned to my wife and my hospital head and I said, you know, this thing I've been talking about for years going up doing leadership development, executive coaching. She's like, Yeah. I said, I got to do this. And she said, I know and the time is right, I support you. And, and that was a huge turning point for me.

Hylke Faber 40:33



Wow, the leaping men who jumped out of the emergency room with clarity. And that is just amazing to me to hear you describe that story and, and the clarity and also the honesty about the competing priorities, and not quite knowing how to align them. Right. And then your your, your definition of courage is to to take the leap to do what you know, is right, at the expense of at peril, of losing what you value, like whatever it might be, right. But you also value. Yes. So I find myself listening. And I'm imagining people listening to the story. You know, and it seems to be in the human life and leadership life, we all walk into those challenges, those invitations, were somehow we know what's right. But we're not quite ready. We're not quite ready, and we stay on the side of not ready. And we can stay on the side of not ready for our entire lives. And as you said, a life can be over like tomorrow, your life could have been over that day.

John Rex 41:48

Yeah, yeah.

Hylke Faber 41:51

So what would you say? To those of us who err on the side of not ready?

John Rex 42:01

Yeah, it is. It's such a deep and important question, I think, when you're on the side of not ready. And I have two thoughts to offer. There's actually a fair amount of research behind this. And, and some good science and. And we could drop in the show notes, some of that if it's important. But when you look at the arc of adult learning and adult development, most humans will have, of course, a steep slope in their growth and development, through adolescence, through their 20s. And then it begins to taper in their 30s. And then it for most people that continues to taper and perhaps even flatten as they progress through their 40s 50s 60s 70s, and so forth. That's a fairly typical curve of adult development. But what's curious is that the research shows that it does not have to be that way. And there are two catalysts. So I said there were two things I want to mention. There are two catalysts that can reshape that curve and cause pattern interruption. One of them is trauma. One of them is trauma, like my near death event. loss of a loved one, a divorce, bankruptcy, serious illness, natural disaster. You know, the list goes on and on. You get the idea. It's like serious trauma that shakes you up to such a degree or religious conversion might be another one shakes you up to such a degree that certain of your paradigms are shaken or even shattered. And so you realize, okay, some of the stories I've been telling myself are not actually true. They're not actually true, and they're not actually helpful. So that's, and you know, obviously I don't wish trauma on anyone surviving cancer. I don't wish trauma on anyone and yet I know many, many, many people, and I'm sure our listeners do too. And you do too many people who would, who will say, I would never give up my surviving cancer, or I would never give up XYZ trauma in my life, because of how it caused me to grow. And so that's, that's kind of catalyst. Number one. It's not the most pleasant one, but it seems to be very effective.

Hylke Faber 45:35

trauma that yeah,

John Rex 45:36



no. trauma. Yeah. Catalyst number two, is equally powerful. And requires much of us as humans. And catalysts, number two, is a it's a dedicated practice of self observation as a means of increasing our awareness, interpersonal awareness, self awareness, situational awareness, such that we arrive at a place of seeing greater perspective. Like, or you could say, is like elevating your consciousness. I know that sounds a little bit woowoo. But it's really true. Like when you can elevate your awareness or your consciousness to a point where you move beyond the robotic. So you know, we tend to live our lives and these habits and patterns, right? When you can elevate your awareness to a place where you're kind of snapped out of that you're kind of waking up, and you can see some additional perspective that leads to choices. Yeah. So trauma can do that to you like trauma foists upon you the realisation of perspective, but you don't have to arrive at that place through trauma. Yeah, you can get there through focused, determined. I was about to say determined, but I'll choose a different one focused practice and effort and like a genuine desire to grow,

Hylke Faber 47:35

genuine desire to grow. I'm reminded of the Zendo Where does two catalysts happen all at the same time when you're sitting for meditation, and the master comes in when you're not alert will whip you with a stick? As to trauma? Yeah, wake up. And the other side is a dedicated practice of sitting off of meditation of sitting with yourself. And I know there's many ways in which we can practice awareness, and self awareness, interpersonal awareness, communal awareness, that is something that happens, in many ways. And what I hear from you is, there is a choice and a daily choice to practice that. That's right. I want to rewind the tape, you could say, by a few seconds, or by a few minutes, where you mentioned something about our old stories get foisted upon by this trauma or whatever it is, in your case, the near death experience, was that right? Yeah. So what was the old story? That before you went into hospital was still holding you in its grip, that you no longer held you when you left?

John Rex 49:02

Yeah. So my old story was that the only way I could. And I'll use a dramatic word, the only way that I could survive. I had my own definition of survival, right. But the only way that I could survive, was by earning a living doing what I had always done. That was the old story. I can only survive now. My definition of survival included providing for my family and this and that and in the attachments that I had to a particular lifestyle, and yada yada yada yada. But the only way that I could survive the only way that I can continue in a very It felt very excellent existential to me. The only way that I could exist survive continue was by staying on that path. Ah, and part of that story was an I just have to do it with Laurie.

Hylke Faber 50:07

And I love how you're saying. Only way. Yes. Because that's often is a telltale, right when our mind says this is the only way fill in the blank, happy to be love to be fulfilled to find resources to find shelter to be healthy. Whatever it is, yeah. Is a telltale sign. Yeah, it's a wall that's talking. It's not necessarily with reality. Let's take a look. What's beyond that wall?

John Rex 50:41



Exactly. hilker. Exactly. You nailed it. And that idea that there's only one way is a symptom to pay attention to. Because it, what it's telling you, if you'll pay attention to it is that you're caught in habit and pattern. You're in a reactive, robotic, reflexive state. You can't see your choices. Because you're not awake. To the perspectives and choices that are out there. They've been there all the time. You're just not awake enough to see them. Right?

Hylke Faber 51:22

You're not awake that alert enough? Bam. Yeah, alert. Yes. aware they're here. You just we're not seeing them? Seeing them? Yeah. So then you left the emergency room, you talk to your wife? And what was the new insight? And what did that feel like? When the old belief had gone, or had it gone,

John Rex 51:53

you know, it didn't disappear, like instantly. But it was I would say it was overwhelmed or overshadowed by a new belief. And the new belief was, I'll kind of funnel it down first, John. There is a universe of options out there for you. John, you've been given gifts and talents, you can employ them in many different ways. John, you are not alone in the universe. You don't have to rely on your own genius. Your own wit, your own intellect. You can call upon and I'm a religious man. So I will say you can call upon God, if you're not religious. Maybe you believe in a higher power or something like that. If you're completely atheists, well, maybe you still believe in some energy in the universe. And, and we humans can draw upon that. And I just realized, man, there's so much that is possible. And it's my responsibility. I'll underscore that word responsibility. It's my responsibility. To look at those options, and choose the path, make the choice that is most aligned with what I feel in my heart is right, what I believe is right, and trust. And trust that it will all work out. That might be the hardest part of all right? Like, that's what the leaping man is doing. In my picture is like, trusting that it will all work out and that every experience we have moves us closer to the divine.

Hylke Faber 54:05

Trusting that it will all work out and trusting that every experience will move us closer to the divine right now. Let me be very frank with you. Yeah, as I've always am. I am I'm with you the entire way. And I can imagine and so that the awareness, the choices, the responsibility for taking the choices, the opening up to bigger possibilities stuff of you could say opening the kimono to actually life right, all that right. And then we get to trusting man that I find challenging.

John Rex 54:53

Oh, yeah. So

Hylke Faber 54:55

tell us tell us a little bit in these last few minutes here. This is a whole Another hour that we need to talk, but tell us a little bit more about the trusting because that is such a powerful antidote to everything that keeps us imprisoned in these old survival stories.

John Rex 55:13



Yes. Well, you're right, this could absolutely be a conversation for another hour. Definitely. And and I want to keep my response, as the best word I can come up with is agnostic, I want to keep my response as agnostic as I can. So that it is, I hope received by people of all persuasions. But my experience has taught me that life is its own journey with its own rewards. And that we humans tend to try too hard to define what those rewards should be. And we don't trust enough that the journey itself is its own reward. So we fixate on a destination or a particular achievement, or, you know, whatever it is. And we forget that the value of life is in living the journey. Like this present moment that we're all in right now has its own merit, and value, just just by being here. And every experience that we have, has value in that it offers us an opportunity to respond, offers us an opportunity to be conscious, to make a choice. And a choice that, you know, again, brings us peace in our heart, and allows us pride in our actions to feel pride in our actions. And so trusting that whatever happens is good. Which is hard, right? It's like, Wait, you're saying like, if I lose my job, that's good. If I go bankrupt, that's good. If I get a disease, and they have to amputate a limb, that's good. Well, not to sound flip. But the short answer is yes, it is good. Every experience is good for what we can make of it. What we can do with it, what we can learn from it and how we can grow. That's my belief.

Hylke Faber 58:01

Thank you, John. Helping to reframe what good really is, what reward really is, and how it may be. Right in plain sight hidden in the present moment. Right. And thank you for sharing yourself so beautifully. We've, we've actually come to the end of this conversation, always too soon. The things that I'm taking with me from today is thinking about John as a teenager, learning about self authorship listening, kudos, tapes, the beautiful focus on pride in actions and peace in heart, and the real dedication to our core values to dig deeper. And then this whole conversation about the ability to respond. And seeing that as the reward in itself, the joy of responding to what's happening. Don is anything else that you'd like to say by way of closing today

John Rex 59:07

Hilda, I guess what I would like to say is just thank you for the opportunity to be with you in what I consider to be an important and reverence base and participate with you and sharing ideas, concepts, philosophies, practices, that may benefit others. Thank you for that, that opportunity that that means the world to me. You're a dear friend, and I love spending time with you and feeling your energy and your love. I know love is not a word we throw around in the business world much but you know it's an appropriate word totally is appropriate. So I appreciate that. And, and thank you. Thanks for Thanks for having me here with you today.

Hylke Faber 59:58

wouldn't want it any other way. HBr deep love to you and deep reverence to what you share today on behalf of myself and everyone who's listening now and later. So we've come to the end of this episode of rude and unwavering with John Rex, former CFO of Microsoft, North America, currently executive coach who does amazing work with executives in different organizations. So look him up. We'll be here again next week. Same studio, working and listening with Pradeep Yuen, who is the inventor of the online platform truths and insights, which is about bringing connectedness at scale. He's a senior director at Microsoft and look forward to the conversation with him and amazing, another inspiring



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person that we can learn from. And if you want to engage more actively in conversation, we can also find us on LinkedIn, we have monthly Zillow and community dialogues. And we'll continue this conversation and of course, also look for John Rex on LinkedIn and see how you can want to can connect with him if you'd like to. So this was it for today. I was wonderful to be with you. This was the 10th episode of rooted and unwavering where we help leaders, which is you and me and everyone here, connect more deeply to their innate potential. Thank you see you next time.

1:01:41

Thank you for joining us in today's episode of rooted and unwavering leadership conversations about courageous connectedness presented by the leadership development company, growth Leaders Network. To learn more, subscribe to this podcast, connect with growth Leaders Network and Hilco Faber on LinkedIn or read help us award winning book taming your crocodiles. Now take a moment and appreciate something that is great about you. Celebrate the gift that you are and enjoy connecting more deeply to your best self today. See you next time on rooted and unwavering.

