

S01 - E30 - Rooted & Unwavering - Hylke Faber & Erwin Visser

Fri, Nov 17, 2023 5:46AM • 1:02:38

Presenter 00:01

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 00:41

Well, hello, welcome to root and wavering, broadcasting live today from Kirkland, Washington and also Tampa, Florida. I'm here today with Erwin Visser, who is a senior leader in Microsoft, and also a recent summer tear. That's a word of mouth every step Irwin. So happy to hear have you here today? How are you today?

Erwin Visser 01:08

Yeah, thanks for having me here. Look, I'm, I'm doing well. Very interested in this conversation, and thanks for having me slightly nervous. But yeah, let's really happy to be here. And looking forward.

Hylke Faber 01:24

I'm delighted when I noticed that you had climbed first Mount Rainier, with your three children. And then I saw your pictures of Mount Everest, I was first thinking that I was dreaming like, No, that can't be true. And then I was looking at it more. It's like, No, this is true. So we're going to hear more about Irwin Misurina. In a moment. Before we do so I'm going to do a little introduction as we always start these podcasts with a root and unwavering podcast to center us in the purpose of this work and root and unwavering. So root unwavering is a series of conversations with senior leaders that basically are designed to help us remind what is important to us. Because it's so easily easy to get distracted, I find two things that are in our minds that are happening in our lives, that may draw our attention that we get attached to you could say, but that pull us away from what's truly important to us, that is truly something that when we look back at it later say yeah, that that's really what life was about that was important to me, to be grounded in. Those were my deepest values. And this is not a static thing that we're talking about here. Like what what is my true self connecting to what's most important to me, this is something that is a dynamic exploration dynamic journey, you could say, and what I find is, I learned from everyone I meet in my life, about what's important, I have ideas of it myself. And then when I meet



people, my sense of the essence of what this life is about, and what leadership is about always expands when I speak to somebody else. And so that's the intent for the conversation for today as well. And so today, we're going to expand or at least, I hope you will, and I will certainly expand my awareness of what's truly important and what Life and Leadership is about by listening to Erwin Fisher's story. And it's funny, I'm just realizing and seeing your name, or when in English, while we're both from the same country, the Netherlands, where you were born, where I would say addEventListener, which is probably more the way your parents and your friends growing up, let's say Aaron was born in the Netherlands. He started his career way back when and has been working with Microsoft for 20 plus years, he started off in the Dutch subsidiary of Microsoft, and was responsible there for marketing and other things as well and then moved to headquarters in Microsoft about 18 years ago, in the in the Redmond area, and quickly rose through the ranks there wasn't charged of marketing again and evolved into a senior leader in partner operations where the operating and activating the partner network for for Microsoft, especially in the Windows world, initially and later also more broadly. And that's also what he's doing today. He's actually a partner and a general manager in Microsoft it's a very senior position that people really want to reach in their in their career. So it's something to celebrate and so I'm very happy to to celebrate that with with him and besides that, Evan is a very rounded individual like almost like a renaissance man he's, he's a father to five children. He has many hobbies including scuba diving, being out in nature, he told me that his mountains are the mountains are his, like preferred habitat, he loves mountain climbing, skiing, cycling and, and travel. And in 2023. This year, he was standing on the summit of the tallest mountain of our planet, Mount Everest. And two years prior, he did a family climb with his three oldest children of Mount Rainier, which I almost can see from my window here in Kirkland, Seattle, Kirkland, Washington. So he says that sharing his passion for travel adventure with his children, is his biggest joy. So please join me in welcoming Irvin fisher to this podcast in this episode of root and unwavering where we help connect leaders, the connect more deeply to their innate potential. So airlin, just again, with like, big question, which is tell me about how you've learned about connectedness in your life connecting to what's truly important to you. You've been around for a couple of decades. So what have you noticed?

Erwin Visser 06:16

Yeah, that's, that's a great question. And we're going to dive immediately in healthcare, is that I think I had to learn that, in during my years I. And if I if I reflect is that it's connectedness was not something that I don't think I really understood there was a concept for me, probably till my early 30s, or something like that, because you and my, my earlier life was a lot about exploring, and I think I trying to understand what was potential and what was possible. And, and not really being any focus of an African real understanding what was important to me. And I think that's certainly over the last years that has significantly improved and has changed for me, and where I think back being connected to yourself, what drives you? What are the goals in life, kind of trying to figure out who you want to be and try to be then the best person in that in a vision. But also connecting with family, with with my team, and my organization, and, and being as authentic as possible. You can be gathered that is that has been a journey for me to be honest.



Hylke Faber 07:43

Yes, yes. Well, thank you for sharing the honesty about your journey I can I can relate to this. This is not something that we're taught, at least, most of us aren't taught in school saying, hey, think about what's truly important to you. Often we're taught you copy me, and this little path that I'm on this path that I'm on, and that will be success. And often there's an awareness that happens that people say, Oh, wait, hold on a sec, hold on a second. Who Who Am I? What? What, what is what is this thing about than I am and what I'm going to do with this life is energy. And when I read about you, when I hear you talk, I hear that? Gradual dawning, you could say, oh, that insight. Yeah, yeah, this could be this could be more of what makes me tick. So, say a bit more about your early years and also about your transition to united through United States. As a fellow immigrant, I'm curious about what made you leave a country that is so well organized, and so comfortable in so many ways? Yeah.

Erwin Visser 08:51

Yeah, I have to say that my trip to the by adventurer, to the US was supposed to be like a two, three year adventure. And then it got extended just because I really, really felt like balanced and really enjoyed living in the US to be honest. So that kind of extended. My, my journey is to start with is that I grew up in an in an in a really loving family, like I had a trade unions, but it was my father, he, he started working when he was 15 years old. So he gave us the best from 35. So he went through the Second World War as a as a child, and was really, I would say, impacted by that, which I cannot imagine to go through an experience like that. So my family was we were not poor. We had foods we had a roof we had, but we we were not absolutely had no financial means like We didn't have a car, we never traveled two hours outside the Netherlands, which is a small country, as you know. And, and so, I, for me, it's, I was, I was lucky in that I was, I had the ability to learn well, with well at school. I was especially good in, like, in math and science. And so I was able to go to college. And I was the first in my family, like, ever to go to college, not just my little family, but also a lot of the family around it. And, and so the, yeah, that for me, that became like my, what I tried to say like a discovery and exploration because the neck, I was trying to understand, like, what is possible, and what and you, your, your growth was, and my personal growth was so accelerated and were doorstep opens that I never knew even existed. And when you start working then with like an academic degree, and you kind of joke with Microsoft, and, and you start to truffle, and so the So yeah, that was for me, like, I would, it's almost like feeling like Alice in Wonderland a little bit you don't you, you've got two worlds that you'd have never seen previously in your life, your parents have never experienced, and your social worlds has never experienced that world before. And so you're kind of like adventuring in, in the in new in new worlds. And that was that's how I think. And why otherwise means mentioned making statements is that connectedness was not really like there, because it was just like, again, Alice in Wonderland, like trying to understand what this new, what my potential was, how I could, how I could explore it, and not so much thinking through, like, what are my personal goals? Or what isn't my authentic self? In that in that exploration?

Hylke Faber 12:19



Yes, I understand that. I want to just come back for a moment to the experience of your dad going into the Second World War. And you hit him being shaped by that. And then the gifts that he gave to you, that helped you to basically build on that. Can you say more about that transition from father to son, because basically, I'm thinking about, like him doing his best growing up in that time, which was a really hard time in the Netherlands. And can imagine like he was, he was grown. He was born in 36 I think you said 35 Yeah. 3535 So he was five years old when the second world's second world war started and and 10 years when it ended. And he's You said he started working in his in his mid teens. So the 50s when you know, the Netherlands was in a rebuilding time. How do you what what gifts have you taken from him? Or what learnings did you take from him? From his his journey? Yeah,

Erwin Visser 13:33

It's my biggest takeaway is, is this kind of carpet Diem. Enjoy every day and enjoy your potential. It's the it's a sad story is that my father started working as a 14 year old. He hated his job. Like the only thing I remember my father was that he hated his work hated his job. He had this this dream, making it 30 to 40 years at the company, because then he could like early retire. And he died a month after he hit that milestone.

Hylke Faber 14:13

Wow, let's pause with that for a second. He died a month after he retired. So after that milestone he worked towards his entire life. So yeah, how do they impact you?

Erwin Visser 14:29

Yeah, gigantically. Yeah yeah, I yeah, having I think it's having a barrel die early. I think it was 21 more shot. Or 22. Yeah, it's just a big shock. Yeah, I think that it was super impactful for me. Because it's, it, put this on myself on the bat. That's how important it was to, first of all that is like, really leverage your potential leverage the opportunities you have. And, and I think one of the frustrations of my father was that he wasn't very intelligent man. And he had a very, like, low level job. So a very low level job at an insurance company that he did for four years. But he was I'm, it's, it's a, it's mine, my assessment is that he has significantly higher potential than that, but he never finished high school. So he just started working and try to create a career out of it. And but yeah, for for me, for me, the most important thing was like a two things. One is that it's a clear, clear signal that you don't control life, you don't end like nobody knows, if you live tomorrow. Like To be honest, nobody has 100% agree that you wake up tomorrow. So you really ensure that you enjoy every day in your life, but also, that you try to just the potential that you have, that you create, and this is the idea that like, Hey, don't let fear stand away of your dreams, is that you really, you really need to be brave and take steps to to full three, use the potential you have. And, and that's I don't think I had as a kid that the braveness but that was an at that moment, that was something like hey, I, if you don't do it, now, you don't know if you get a second chance, you know, and so you you have to start jumping into into adventures or career steps or decisions. Because you don't you don't really know if you can check second chance, and maybe the system moment. And you know, also it's like, whatever you can lose. It's your most of the decisions we make in our lives. Doesn't it are not life and death situations. Right? And then and Everest may be a



different different situation. We're going to talk about it, I assume but and that's one of my maybe one of my real passions for mountain climbing. But how do you come to the realization certainly when you start mountain climbing where, like, if you like, bad decisions and mistakes can be a life or death situation, you start to become more comfortable in jumping in in the rest of your life because you start to realize that, like the impact of bad decisions, or it's never, it's never at that level, it's always something you probably can manage. Right? Right. Right.

Hylke Faber 18:22

So this the whole host of learnings that I'm hearing your story about your dad's passing that it spurred in you a sense of I must capture my potential I must capture potential my potential and that was such a gift that your that left you if I hear that from from you now and I think a gift to me and to all of us that are listening we must get your potential. Because we don't know what's going to happen today and, and to sit here waiting for some imagined future that might literally never come because we might be dead. Literally is, is it's a it's a rude awakening, it's good something to know at the same time. It it spurs a sense of adventure, and, and a sense of courage and bravery for you. And NAU to basically face your fears, and I'm sensing a lot of your fears. And our fears are about minutiae. Like things that actually don't really matter. And I love how you put it in perspective. Most of our decisions are not life and death, right? Yeah, you're not life and death. While at the mountain, you get a perspective that some decisions are and that that might be closer than you think. So let's actually dive into this journey into ascending Mount Everest. So I see a smile on your face. Yeah, yeah. When I when you hear this, and you think about it.

Erwin Visser 19:57

Yeah, it's just Have, it was such an amazing adventure. And I'm so grateful that I had the opportunity to do with and that is when that I saw clearly that has went well made it to the summit. I came out of it with, with no like, physical damage. But yeah, it is for me in reflection is that I. So I started mountain climbing approximately at the same time that I think I just told me about the death of my father and I and I really enjoyed it in my in my 20s I did the climbing in love in the in the Alps, like Switzerland, Italy, France. And, and it was I really did a lot of love. It was really for me a passion for a number of summers. And then I in that time, the was the first Dutch climber that ever climbed to the Everest, Ronald Mac, you may recognize the name. And I went through a presentation of him in Amsterdam, I was one of the two formulas people in the audience. And when he like I knew about Everest, and I read about it. And it was always just like, this, this thing that was so far away. And when I saw his presentation, hilker I was when it was for me, it's like flying to the moon. And I was in clearly it was I was fascinated about his story. But I never ever had a second that I thought I will be capable of doing that. Like it was the it was really for me. Like if somebody would come to you and say, Do you want to fly to the moon in five years? It's like, well, yeah, you don't even know where to start. You don't know, your first phone call, you know, you have no idea. But where, where you would start a journey like this. And and so I i still monitor climbing and the family moved over to the US and, and living in Seattle, and you're in Kirkland. Now. You you look outside, you see Mount Rainier, which is a beautiful for Kaino. In in, in the state of Washington, it's around 14,000 feet for 4300 meters. And that kind of wakens for me



again, like hey, I love the plan. This seems like a thing. I should adventure. So I started to climb. Rainier kind of essence, I wouldn't say yield. It's almost like a yearly thing. So I climbed during the like 10 summers, 1010 summits, different routes, really enjoyed it. Through my experience of climbing Rainier. And this was really coincidental i i met this female mountain climber and she said, her name is Melissa. I know she climbed Everest six times. I started to help her with her charity, the Juniper fund. And I start to learn from her around Everest. And, and then secondly, I also met this older mountain climber. Medicine who was the I climbed Everest with medicine, mountaineering, and Garrett became a friend of mine. And through these people, I started to realize that that and you, you realize that it's okay now I know my first phone call. I didn't know my and so and so the so I started to realize what it would take for me to ever do it. And, and then it's it kind of started to accelerate this process like two three years ago. A really good friend of mine, Peter, he, what he's trying to do several summers he had Everest in his in his menu. And I really started to talk to him about it. And we decided to start training together for this for this experience. And we did Aconcagua in in 2022. I can count it is the highest mountain in America and it's the highest mountain outside the Himalaya and the end Edwin's a it was was hard because it's been successful. And that's kind of like set me on a path to say okay, I'm, I'm not the youngest anymore on the I if I want to do this, I need to I have bad hips that both needed surgery. So I need to push it through and start planning it for for 23 It's the for me one of the takeaways here is that you you hear about the importance of mentorship and coaching for people that grow up in say, less privileged environments. And this is kind of like a metaphor in the same way. It's like you you can't you cannot be converted can see. And for me add the ability to meet people that have done it and just gave for me Just the practical knowledge and the I would say the Yeah, the confidence and the self confidence and self trust that, hey, if I do A, B, C and a few other things, I have a chance to do this.

Hylke Faber 25:17

You cannot become what you cannot see. And also, knowing what the first phone call is that I get to make. That's, that's really resonating with me. So I want to explore more with you, then. Literally your ascent towards the summit. They'll talk to us about it. And also, talk to us about what you learned about yourself in that experience. Because most of us listening have never been there. I would venture to say most of us will never go there. So you're introducing us to a world that's entirely yours. For most people. perspective. So tell us about what's that experience? Like? What was your experience? And what did you learn? Think is there?

Erwin Visser 26:08

Yeah, there's there's a lot to unpack here. So just to set a little bit like the context here is the the climb itself is approximately 60 days. So seven, eight weeks. You are you 78 weeks. In Nepal. The first two weeks is the is the height to base camp. And that's where acclimatization starts. So Everest base camp is 17,000 feet. And then you're starting to kind of like start training and acclimatization journey for your head for your body to get acclimatized enough that you can, you can make it on the summit. And typically, these are three rotations. So you do you do a rotation to come to sleep a few nights, go back to base camp, you make a rotation again, you try to hit can three, go back to Basecamp then you take a few days rest and then you try to go the other way. So cam, one cam to Cam three cam for



summit and then back to to Basecamp. So it's a lot of like going up and down the mock up and down the mountain and do a lot of acclimatization that hikes the physically to start with physically and then I can talk me and maybe more about the the psychological process or the mental processes, but physically, it really starts to be, you start really feeling the pain of altitudes when you hit Basecamp. And Basecamp has 50% of the oxygen that you have in Kirkland or in Tampa. And there's there's a reason that no humans live at that altitudes on the planet. Like it's no cities and villages, and that altitude and because you your body really started deteriorating. And the lack of oxygen, it is it impacts your ability to to digest foods, you feel your your brains, I always joke that your cognitive power goes down. And I feel you lose like 3040 IQ points, the moment you hit base camp or above you feel lethargic, tired, always out of breath. And so the and also you're on a biological level the your ability to make new cells start changing so your your body starts to prioritize some pivotal organs and but you your index on Basecamp and your body mass your muscle mass starts to slowly decrease. And so that is the fiscal aspect. The mental aspect is more is around at the end. And climbing is interesting because you have a lot of time. And like if you run a marathon, you can have like four hours in the zone and that's what you do or five hours or but hey, if you've planned for six weeks, you have a lot of time by yourself in the tents or talking to other climbers and so there's a lot of opportunity for reflection and thinking things through and the the a couple of for me, key takeaways and one was the importance of positive thinking. And the you like the you really have to be grounded in your in your ability to to have to master the technical difficulties. And you you really have to because there are periods that you're sick. You have bad days you have really bad days. Some days are hard like you are on Your feet going up the mountain for 16 hours, and you're totally dieting dehydrated. And so you're, you have to always believe that you can do it. Because when you start any self doubt is just, it's just a spin, and a negative spin. And, and and also, you know, when you start hesitating or have self doubts, then the more technical parts that could become very dangerous. And there were a lot of letters that you have to cross the word vertical walls that you had to climb. And so it's all not super hard. But the moment you start really thinking about the consequences, if you make a mistake, then things can become more dangerous. So you have to just really stay in the zone, stay positive. The The second thing what was really interesting for me, was the reflection around the journey versus the goal. And because that when I when I started Everest, and this whole adventure, clearly I wanted to go to the summit, and everybody but I, a lot of people, and all my family, my they were all telling me and I also believe that that hey, it's really about the experience. And you go to Nepal, you learn a new culture, you have the ability to be in a total in maybe one of the most beautiful valleys in the world to Khumbu Valley, where you see all those 8000 meter peaks, you see efforts for the first time and you clearly want to use a summer but at the same time, you have to enjoy the dates. Through the periods, I in decline, I became more and more deterministic, that I'm passionate about I want to get through this summer, whatever it takes. I and it's it's the the the adversity you go through during the climb. And you to to be able to take that day off the day. You have to build this this is the passion this may be kind of like dispassion about hitting the summit is really, really important. And I ever read the word climbers around us that I think struggles with that, making this summit important enough. And they stopped, they step out. Because they because then why would you after a few weeks, why would you keep taking this adversity on your body and these long days, if you really don't care enough about the outcome?



Hylke Faber 32:36

Very beautiful. So we're going to take a short break in a moment. Being really enjoying my conversation with Evan Visser, who is a mountaineer, who recently also summited Mount Everest in 2023. summited Mount Mount Mount Everest many times at Mount Mount Rainier, many times Mount Everest once. And one of the things that I'm going to be curious about is how Arab and managed to stay in this zone in adversity and why the summit is has been so important to him, like what is what is that about? And what does that do in a person when we are very focused on something we want to achieve, while at the same time also enjoying our experience and enjoying the journey and carpet DMS, as Aaron was talking about earlier, so thank you so much, everyone for this conversation already. And for anybody who's listening. We'll be back after the break to explore more about how do we stay in the zone when adversity is with us pretty much all the time.

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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 34:17

Welcome back to router unwavering I'm talking to Aaron Fisher, who is a partner in general manager and Microsoft, also a mountaineer. And one of the things that really struck me Evan was what you just talked about as your body deteriorating, and you're not made to live at this altitude. And then this ongoing quest within yourself to stay in the zone. So tell us a bit more about the kinds of adversities maybe get specific about the kinds of adversities that you experienced, maybe give some examples, and how you relate to those adversities. What happened within you in those moments,

Erwin Visser 35:03

yeah, no I can I can be very. So. A few moments are still very clear to me. And one was that as a the one adversity was the the Khumbu Icefall and if you if you have seen pictures of Mount Everest claims, you often see picture of the Khumbu Icefall because that is it's it's very fishable it's like a glacier that is like falling apart. And they're the the croup of chatbots called to ship on doctors built a route on that on the icefall. They have to update it almost every day they're Khumbu Icefall mousse with like, three feet a day. So it's really like a stream of like, gigantic blocks of ice. And it's, it's objectively the most dangerous part of climbing efforts and you have to cross it six times, or at least six times. And so the, a few weeks before us, and really tragically to shepherds diets in that Khumbu Icefall because across us, or in service fell down. And so, so that was like shocking news for everybody. And because it's just, again, shows that the people that know that icefall, the best the shepherds, doctors even cannot don't have even a guarantee for their own safeties. And then taking like an amateur climber like I am, so yeah, that was one where you, I tried to push, you go through it six hours, six times, you're approximately like going up, it's like 10 hours through the icefall going down, maybe five, six hours. And



so you really have to block yourself out of any danger, like you, you really cannot like look up and think, oh, man, this ice could fall down on me every second. And it's you, the moment you decides to go through it. You may you have to then just trust that you're going to be looking at it, you have a certain level of luck that they that nothing is going to collapse while you're on it. And don't don't question your decision when you're on the ISO because it's your you have no choice at that moment, then going up and down as fast as you can. The second one for me was it was like a weird moment I woke up. And so camp two is it's like 6500 meters. So quickly translating 21,000 feet or so 20,000 feet. I woke up one morning and my right eye was blank. I. So this is a pretty big shock when you're in a dense in the cove, at that altitude. So one of the guides told me that it's sometimes happened because like an artery burst, or it's like altitudes. And so yeah, so I it's I didn't panic. But clearly, it concerns you, you know, you don't want to lose your eyesight on the mountain. And so but lucky enough that the day off, it starts to become blurry. And like two days later, it was gone. And so it's yeah, the assessment of the guides was correct that it was like altitude connected. But again, it shows just the vulnerable your body is at that altitudes, like you're, you're really at an place where anything that immediately escalates. Anything that goes wrong, is can escalate so quickly. And that is being aware of that. So you're not taking like crazy risks, because I really wanted to go home and see my family. But also not making that don't make not making that too big either. So that it stalls you from what you are trying to accomplish there. As you're finding the balance between risk taking and, and staying like mentally, mentally solid. And mentally healthy. Yes,

Hylke Faber 39:09

yes, yes. So I want to go to that moment into that moment that you for a moment, because I'm imagining I'm on 70,000 feet, or 20,000 feet. I can't remember what you just said. I remember being there myself. That's the highest I ever went. I went to the Himalayas once myself twice myself. And that was the highest ever moment that I remember. Can imagine like I remember waking up with heart palpitations and I just couldn't my heart was going boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. And I remember much younger than you then now sort of feeling a sense of panic, like what's going to happen. So tell us about what's that moment like what was that moment like you wake up and your eye doesn't work? Like what was you First stop, and how do you deal with that? Yeah,

Erwin Visser 40:03

you first you just try to assess as it is, because it is really weird to wake up and have you cannot see to one eye. And so you, you try to assess the situation. You you close your eyes again for like a few minutes in the hope of the disappears. And then you kind of like the realization sinks in and then you try to get try to get advice and settle yourself with that situation. And for me, the most important was like, hey, what I what happens if my other eye gets the same thing? Then you have a, you have a nearly like an dangerous situation clearly on the mountain like Everest. And so that was for me the biggest the moment that I start seeing improvement on the first day, I felt much better because I felt like okay, I it's just progression and things. And this is where you have to be positive again, like positive thinking that it's evolved, that you I will recover and your body will recover and that things will be good in two, three



days from that. That's the that's the only thought you can almost keep in your mind. It's like you, they have to you cannot you cannot anticipate risks. You can just deal with them when they're there.

Hylke Faber 41:22

Yes, yes, yes. So where did you find the wherewithal to stay positive? Because I can imagine all kinds of forces pulling at you at that moment?

Erwin Visser 41:34

Yeah, I think it's it's a great question. I, I've always been a person that is I learned it I think maybe part of us in my personality is that I can, I can really stay focused on the things that are in my control. So I think the biggest learning and I learned again, it'll never was but I think it was something that I built early in life, it's just the the fact that I get to you there, you can spend so much time thinking about things you don't control. And so really keeping your focus as a human. And this is like a statement on work family life, and like focus on the things you can control and the decisions you have to make today or the actions you can take today. And anything that is beyond that is not something you should spend too much cycles on. Because, again, it's outside your control. Right. So

Hylke Faber 42:29

you've focused on that. And then the eyesight started to slowly come back. And then you continued, that wasn't as smooth walk up from there. Well, we

Erwin Visser 42:41

have to go down. So I Yeah, two days later, we had to go back from camp to to, if I remember correctly to Basecamp. And yeah, I My eyes were working for my right, I was working like 95% of that time or 90%. So maybe a little bit blurry, but good enough, I Yeah. And then never came back. So it was a one time experience that put you a little bit out of balance. But at the end, it was like another big event for the client.

Hylke Faber 43:11

I see that I see that. I'm I'm reflecting on when we have those moments. Those are really moments of truth. You could say like, what am I really committing to? What am I really committed to? And what I'm hearing you say is I'm really committed to focusing on what I can control. Yeah,

Erwin Visser 43:33

yeah. And I also think this is where the, the, for me it was something that I also started to think about in my personal life and business is like the distinct between, like, I said that I mentioned earlier that when my father died for me corporate V and like, enjoy everyday was such an important thing. But at the same time, you want to set goals in your life, that to that you want to achieve. And these goals sometimes require that not every day is enjoyable. So you really have to, and it can be a personal statement, a mission statement family, like I think we all have to like, have periods in our lives where we just need to push through. And it's not really that we enjoy it that much. But we know it's part of our



accountability of the goal that we want to achieve. And, and I think that while I felt that I had a pretty good balance going into Everest, I saw my balance change. And I think that that is also a reason for why are so many like accidents like deadly accidents on efforts is that people get like overly focused on the goal and lose just the balance of the situation and start taking risks that are like if you if you take a step back you would say it's totally stupid. But yeah, people just and This year was the deadly season on Everest 17 casualties in the in the climbing season. Very unfortunately, one of those casualties was somebody in our team, which was like a traumatic experience to me and my teammates as somebody that you're closely connected with, oh, for seven, eight weeks and then got like I also decreased income for and was not able to make it down. And it's, it just shows the danger. And and again, you can you can translate that maybe in a different way to my personal life is like, sometimes you need to be overly focused. But overly focus can also mean that you lose track of all the things in your life that are more important than in this case, Everest, it's super easy. It's like what's more important than life, like you can never balance climbing a summit versus stay alive. But people start making really bad decision making in a balance because of their, their focus on that on that one single thing.

Hylke Faber 46:06

That that's an over an over focus and over attachment to some goal that literally kills people on the mountain. And of course, there's also factors outside of people's control, like falling piece of ice and rock that can do the same thing. Yes, let's do it. The thing I'm very curious about is the goal. Your goal? So why was summiting the summit? So important to you? What did it mean to you?

Erwin Visser 46:41

Yeah. Yeah, it's such an it's the, it's the most obvious question and the hardest question to answer. It's, I, it's, I think it's an I've tried to insert in my, in my head, I think I've come down to a few things for me. And one is that and let me let me start with maybe the, maybe the less powerful one, or whatever you want to call it is that there was probably a part of me that felt the need to prove myself and, and maybe move some uncertainty out of my system. Yeah, it's the like, feeling. And I think like everybody, I struggled with uncertainty, I think a lot of people and so there was part of me that just wanted to prove to myself that I could do something like this and get myself in the, in the mindset for a challenge. I think part of it is that I really enjoy this feeling of dedicating yourself to a challenging goal. And there is like beauty in the fact that you spent like, because it's not just the six weeks or eight weeks on Everest, but it's also the nine months in advance that you have this, this, this this goal in your head around, I am training, I'm training like 12 to 16 hours every week, to be ready in March to do this thing. And there is there's like a little like, there's beauty in having that focus. And that single minded focus because it's it just gives you purpose, like so feeling of purpose in that period. That's the other thing is that I, I have and I I don't know it's economics, I've explained it but I always had the feeling in my life that I needed to do hard things that wants to show I wanted to push myself and I I think that's part of it. Maybe it's because I it's a really a pet peeve against entitlement. And I sometimes I hear myself talk and I hate myself you know, you handle the ceiling in the restaurant and you get like a great steak and then you think it's it's you asked for medium and it's kind of medium, well done. And you're it kind of that you have this moment that you kind of get disappointed and then really push yourself back and say Hey, I



like I'm probably zero point 00 1% of the world population that's eating a steak tonight. And so this should not change my this should not change my moods for this night or even though for like 30 seconds. And so I think there's a mountain climbing is such a great thing to keep that entitlement that like it's you you're sleeping in a tent sleeping the same clothes for eight weeks. You eat bad foods. Well, it's not too bad but it was it's not great either. You You have no showers or very limited showers. You there's no TV. There's no you're cold. There. sleeping with a down jacket every night, you know. So you you, it was funny because I, when I came from the mountain, we were looking for a hotel in Kathmandu. And then one or two people texted me about what is the best hotel. And it's so interesting is that like, yeah, I couldn't care less. And I know these people texted me in love. But, you know, it really doesn't matter if it's like a four star or five star hotel or a three star hotel, when you spent eight weeks of the month, you know, you, you don't even care about it. And so the the, it really helps me doing these things are fueled to keep my my myself and my personality in control. And make sure that I focus myself and I enjoy, like what I have, and don't get overly focused on like details that I'm not really important in life.

Hylke Faber 50:52

So in a way summiting, Mount Everest, it was also reaching a summit in yourself, that you learn to basically let go of a lot of pieces of you that no longer are serving, you actually no longer need and no longer want. And you gained a sense of confidence. And a sense of dignity is what I'm sensing it within yourself. Like yes, and what's important to me and, and it's helped to create some distance between you. And the things that the conventional mind might think are important. Like, you know, the steak or the five star hotel or whatever it is, but like, let's just like a mountain like that pulls us into debate to the essentials like what is life really about? stripped down to its bare bones?

Erwin Visser 51:49

You Yeah, it helped. I think I'm totally honest. Now, it's, I think it's helped me fill the gaps between who I am and who I want to be.

Hylke Faber 52:03

And what you discover,

Erwin Visser 52:06

as you filled that gap. Yeah. So it makes it puts me closer to the person I'm aspiring to be versus the person I feel I'm sometimes am.

Hylke Faber 52:21

And how did that happen? Tell us more about that. How did that gap get closed? in you?

Erwin Visser 52:28

And it's by proving to myself, I'm capable of doing this. And, and get myself through this process. And yeah, and, and, and I, by the way, I don't want to take away that climbing Mount Everest is also a



beautiful experience. Like it's I don't want to get it's everything in life is balanced, this is also balanced. So it is it's a unique experience. So it's not just trying to take away. It's not just trying to fill a gap. It's also a unique experience that I'm grateful for and will always carry with me. But I think part of that was like Hey, I, I I aspire to be somebody, and I aspire to be a person that that embraces values, and lifts based on values, and one of those values is courage. And, and so I want to make sure and, and, and stay on that, like hit the threshold for me, for myself. Like what does it mean to have to add what is my personal meaning behind Kirche? And how do I stay on that path? Yes.

Hylke Faber 53:45

So the Everest taught you a lot about courage, and the courage that you have, that you have that courage that you are that courage, and you help to connect the to the courage that you that you are, you could say and tying it back to the way we start this conversation. There's a certain level of grit that I also heard in your dad's story, being you know, being willing to dedicate himself to something, even though that might not have been an easy experience for him. Sounds like Everest was a really beautiful experience for you. At the same time, a really challenging one that has taught you and it's keeps teaching you a lot but I'm sensing is an experience, even though you were you've you're off the summit now and now in Tampa, Florida. They're always with you. So maybe as we start wrapping up this conversation, what are some of the lessons from Everest that you're taking with you probably for the rest of your life that you might might want to maybe want to share with us, for those of us who have not been there but I now find interesting.

Erwin Visser 55:03

Yeah, I, I think the maybe the most important one and potentially also the obvious is that it's going back to growth mindset is that you are capable of doing things that you never dreamed of being capable forth. And if if somebody would have asked me even 10 years ago, like, do you want to climb Mount Everest, I would probably have left them in their face. Because I would have never thought that I would be able that I have I was capable of doing it. And, and hey, I'm not the other. And this is this was maybe the fourth part of the motivation. I think I shared three is that I also wanted to be I also wanted to

Hylke Faber 56:00

Okay.

Erwin Visser 56:06

Okay, here we go. Hey. I also want to be a role model for like it.

Hylke Faber 56:17

Yes. Thank you for sharing that. Yes.

Erwin Visser 56:25

Well, yes. We can get it out. But now the thing is that I'm not the most evidence person to climb Everest, like I have climbing experience, and I'm relatively healthy. But I also had, I had cancer twice. I



have like intestines, issues that are incurable. And I need prescription medicines for that. I my hips now need surgery in both sides, because they were completely were in fear. And I need injections for that. And I went through a lot of pain, new training for that. So it's not that it's like, hey, it was super, super evident that this will be a successful adventure. And with with the some of the baggage I took at the start of this, and but yeah, again, I also think that like I said, it's showing my kids that this is possible, so that they take the same hopefully, growth mindset view in their life.

Hylke Faber 57:44

What a beautiful, beautiful legacy to leave. And that you can live to do it, you get to live to see the impact and to, to be that and thank you for sharing all of you, including your tears. To me sounds like a can feel it touches something very deeply in you and probably in all of us. Considering what we're capable of as a human being is a deeply deeply moving experience. And what I'm relating to this there is the, the tears of joy, of the possibility and the tears of grief of maybe the times that we are not living up to that. And giving into that. And so there's a sense of feeling really moved for many, many different areas. It's almost like when we are beholding something very, very beautiful. And we're just in awe, and everything explodes. So thank you for, for sharing that with us. Erevan anything else you'd like to say by way of closing this conversation is ready to an end? I could spend 60 days with you. I know that takes many days I'm sorry. Okay. Go ahead. Anything else you want to say?

Erwin Visser 59:19

No, I I really enjoyed this. I what I what I loved about this conversation because it makes things also more clear to me. So I learned a lot myself. While I learned from you. I learned from the from the conversation. So thank you for this opportunity really appreciated.

Hylke Faber 59:37

Your. You're very welcome. It's been a deep honor to sit with you Erevan as a fellow human being as a mountaineer, as a role model for all of us for courage of what's possible when we truly are digging into our potential and taking a stand for the summit of the Henschel within ourselves, which to me, Mount Everest is a visual reminder for that we get the climb to teach us about what we're capable of. And that is my closing thinking about today is like, what are we capable of? And what would happen if we took a stand for it in a very deliberate ways in in good days and bad days? What's that, like when we take a stand for what we're truly capable of? And that to me is that is a question that invites us into a journey, and not necessarily a aesthetic answer that we write in a post it note, it's something that that can guide us. So thank you so much, Erevan. And thank you. For everyone who's been listening, we'd be talking with urban Visser, partner and leader, senior leader in Microsoft, and also a mountaineer, who recently was on the top of Mount Everest. We've been doing this podcast routing and wavering today, if you liked this podcast and want to hear more of these conversations, you can subscribe to this podcast everywhere wherever you download your podcast, or subscribe to podcasts at Apple and Spotify and all these other names that I don't even remember all the time. And you also can follow us on LinkedIn and find a replace that for for growth leaders, network and other places. We'll be here again and middle of October with an other senior leader from Microsoft, actually their former leader and she is now a



CEO who recently sold her company and I'm looking forward to that conversation as well talking about what it's like to be truly committed to our potential. You'd be listening to Ruth and unwavering and where we help connect leaders more deeply to their innate potential. I'm your host Hilco Faber. See you next time.

Presenter 1:01:54

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