

S01 - E31 - Rooted & Unwavering - Hylke Faber & Jennifer Byrne

Presenter 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 greatness also when we don't feel it? Join hosts Philco, Faber, transformational coach, facilitator, and award winning author of taming your crocodiles and his guests as they explore leadership greatness in today's episode of rooted and unwavering

Hylke Faber 00:45

Welcome, welcome to rooted and unwavering podcast broadcasting live, this time entirely from Phoenix, Arizona, where we help leaders connect more deeply to their innate potential. I'm your host Hilco Faber. And today, I'm delighted to be here with my friend and former client, Jennifer Byrne. Jennifer, how are you today?

Jennifer Byrne 01:09

I'm good Hilda, I'm very excited for this conversation.

Hylke Faber 01:12

Me too. I always love our conversations. The last one was in a coffee shop in in Phoenix, where we both discovered that we both moved from Seattle, at some point in the last few years, and it was a delight to see you again in person. Jennifer is the currently the chief product and technology officer for life hire. And I'll say a lot more about you in a moment, Jennifer. But before I do that, I always like to start this podcast with a brief reflection on what is Ruth and unwavering for, like, what are these conversations for? And they were born during the pandemic, actually, where I started asking myself like, so what is this life for what I'm here to do. And I worked with teams and leaders for many years, decades. And I found that the sense of being connected to what's true in ourselves, and each other was the guiding principle. So I wanted to share stories, from leaders from all walks of life about what it means to be truly connected to what's truly important to us, especially when things are challenging, because I find that being routed often is a an Art of Letting go of those things that get us out of balance often have to do with judgment and expectations and other kinds of gobbly gook self talk that takes place somewhere in our scholar and elsewhere in our body with emotional after effects. And so it's like that rootedness, one teacher once told me, like this whole path is about really standing in your own two feet, like really standing your own two feet, with deep compassion, deep wisdom. So that's what these conversations are for. So Jennifer, I'm so happy you're here today, Jennifer, as I said, is currently in a row serving as chief product and technology officer for life hire, which is a company that is focused on



enabling the flow of the world's talent, including working with customers, including in the Fortune 500. That's a role that you took Jennifer, when your company was acquired, or your company was called arrived. And this company is where you were the CEO, Jennifer has been mostly in technology. That's also where we met actually at Microsoft to you. You said Jennifer was the chief technology officer there for Microsoft us. And originally joined the company in 2014 as chief security officer in the public sector businesses, which is where Jennifer and I met when we were doing some work with that group on on culture. You've held several positions at the executive level at Intel, McAfee, Symantec, and Ms. Journey journey throughout the startup world. And that's only a summit snippet of Jennifer because she writes that in her formative years, she was spending time in the nonprofit world, serving the needs of vulnerable adults, where she you learned about the value of bring empathy and curiosity to every interaction. I think it's so beautiful, bring empathy and curiosity to every interaction. I think it's a beautiful principle to stay more grounded. And my sense of Jennifer is a person that is so kind has a sense of balance that she shares very generously, is curious about the world and very adventurous in a way which is also demonstrated about with with where she lives currently in in a little north of me in, in nature. Amidst I think in cowboy country, if I'm understanding correctly, but That's maybe for another conversation. So, Jennifer, welcome. So glad you're here, we're going to have a conversation about connectedness, maybe let's dive in with this first question. What have you learned about connectedness in your life and leadership?

Jennifer Byrne 05:20

I think the first lessons are about what it's not, or the feeling of missing it. Yeah, yeah. So connected to this as well, I mean, if you're, if you're lucky enough to have always had it in your life, and there are people who are and then you maybe have a different experience of it, if you had the experience of, of loneliness, or feeling other or outside of whatever is the group or imagined scenario that you'd like to be in, then that's really the beginning of the lesson of what it is. So you know, we all have different experiences that we bring into our work lives. And I had my own experience, you know, sort of, from childhood on that I obviously, like we all do carried into, you know, the professional life that I built. But part of that informs my sense of what is an authentic connection, and very wary of, of connections that weren't authentic. So, you know, I started my career in tech in the early 2000s. And that was really when I was making my way into my first management roles. And I made a transition from engineering into sales. And in big companies, which are, you know, as you know, there they are, it's like the high school on steroids, where you're trying to get to know people and build your network and make your friends and figure out how everything works. And so it can be tough if you come from a place of, you know, default state of a little bit lonely. It happened to be at the time, when companies were getting wise to the idea that you couldn't just say culture, you couldn't just say leadership or management, you actually had to invest in that. And so, and it's gotten very good. And you were, you know, you were life changing for me. And I know, for many of people, I reached out to a few people before this podcast, and they all said, Oh, my God, Hilda, so there were great. There are great companies that do that. But in the beginning, everyone was finding their way. And there was a lot of, I would call it manufactured connection, connectedness and some of the early training that I was got, you know, when I'm 30, didn't know, you know, it didn't have my flooding. And so I think I, I learned a lot about connectedness by



experiencing some manufactured connected this or feeling lonely through the efforts to connect, and you discern, eventually, or I discerned eventually, what I really, for myself thought connectedness was and meant to me. And that is, you know, it's kind of it's a pretty emotionally charged thing. So you take from what you decide for yourself that you need, in the midst of everyone else around you. And then that becomes a very sort of centered, grounding place that you can be in when you're trying to connect with others. So I think that was really a journey of what it's not to what it should be, and then practicing for myself what I think it is,

Hylke Faber 08:29

I love that a journey off what it's not to actually learning what it is. So since we're in the beginning of the conversation, maybe let's start a little bit about what you've learned about what it's not. You talked about manufactured connectedness. Like what did you learn about connectedness, connecting to yourself, what's true about you and, and really connecting with others? In your early life? Like what what did you learn? And what did you have to unlearn? Hmm.

Jennifer Byrne 09:01

Well, in my early early life, I, I had an interesting childhood. So I, I had, I was in my parents were in a religious, a quasi religious organization, some people might use the word cult, it's a little bit of an overused word with a lot of connotations. But many of those characteristics were, you know, you're expected to feel and think and be a certain way. And I never felt a part of that. So, you know, a very, I just had an alternative lifestyle, so trying to be in the mainstream, you know, especially for a kid who was pretty ambitious and bright and wanted a lot for myself, but I had this, you know, personal life of being in a very odd environment with people who expected me to show up in a certain way, that kind of cult behaviors a little, you know, if you're in it, you're in it. But if you're not in it, it can be very lonely experience. And so I think I had to learn from a pretty early age to, and it was a survival thing to figure out what I believed what felt right to me. And that's such a gift later, you know, people, I don't tell that story very often because people have a reaction of oh my god, that's terrible, really, it was an amazing opportunity at the age of 15 16 17, to have to really stand up for myself, you know, hands on hips, I'm not going to take this, I don't know who I am. But I know when I'm not. And that was the beginning of it. So I think I've always had a little bit of that hutzpah of being able to know myself and, and find balance in other situations.

Hylke Faber 10:53

hands on the hips. That really resonates with me, I'm sort of I'm feeling that right now is receiving your hands on the hips. And, and being able to stand on basically find find what's true for me. And I also really resonate with this idea of, I knew that wasn't me. And I can only imagine for a child of 15 16, to get to that place being surrounded by what is not her. And then not really knowing what is her. So tell us a little bit about what how you discovered about what is true for Jennifer, how did you discover that? Because you saw what was not that, but how did you get to what was true about you?

Jennifer Byrne 11:48



I mean, that's a long journey. I mean, that has been, you're now talking about the journey I've been on since that time. So it's a pretty long discovery process. I think when you realize that the process never ends, is when you can finally just settle into it. There's my one of my favorite quotes. It's Thomas Merton. And it's an I have it on my desk is like, I finally realized that my greatest ambition in life is to be who I already am, you know, which is the process of just saying, you know, everything inside you, you already complete. And so it's just this really wonderful journey, if you choose to see it, that way of discovering who you are for yourself. And so, you know, for me, it started and maybe some, you know, like, what, it's not negative terms, if you will. And it's been a process of filling it in. But I mean, no, no, why, like, it's who knows what I, you know, you look back with yourself, on yourself with some kindness. Because if you think back to when you were 22, and what you who you thought you were, you know, 30 June who you thought you were, it's, it's like watching a movie, you know, like, oh, that's what I thought I was interesting, you know, a lot of forgiveness there. But it's just been a process of figuring out connecting with your emotions, I think you just life is its own greatest teacher, because you couldn't you find your own, you can reflect on your reaction to the events as they unfold the adventure like this podcast, we have no idea where it's gonna go, you're just like, I'm just gonna figure out who I am, in this moment how I react, and I'll reflect on that later. And that will be more more clues to who I really am. And it's just the process of it.

Hylke Faber 13:32

I hear a lot about kindness kind eyes reflecting back on who we were at 20 3040. And that's behind for me at least. And, and, and, and, you know, looking at it with kind eyes, nothing wrong with it. It's all part of this discovery process. And we our greatest ambition is to be calm, who we already are. Great grounding principle, I might want to put that on my desk as well. That's a great grounding principle. And so as you started to read realize that what more than what you already are is enough, right? How did that inform your work life? That that sort of realization, which wasn't probably from Sunday through Monday to Tuesday, Wednesday, this output I got it, but how did that how did that inform your work life that realization?

Jennifer Byrne 14:36

Well, it's interesting because you can know that about yourself and but still to act within that frame to make decisions about what you'll do next. What job what company is still feels like a leap of faith, you know, because you're always jumping into the unknown so well, you know, one of the reflections that I when you get to the other end of your career, you get to look back, it's such a gift right to look back and learn all these things, right? It's your own history that you can harvest a lot of insights from. And one insight that I, that I love to talk about is that we always think about our careers. You know, if you think about your career as a forward looking path, you're talking to somebody who maybe is early in their own career, and they're trying to figure plot their course, if you will. I think there's this expectation that it's supposed to be logical, and sequential, you know, in every step builds on the last and so there's somehow there's like this plan that you're supposed to be able to follow. But looking back, it doesn't always look like that. And actually, when you talk to people, and I am my own best example, you know, not doing anything that is it all related to the plan I thought I might be executing upon at various stages



in my life. So, you know, I think there's something there about just being able to say, you know, I don't I don't know what I'll need in five years, I can I have a sense for what I need right now. And if I'm true to what I need right now, and I let myself have that, then, you know, the next moment will take care of itself. Like we'll get there when I get there. So that helped me be able to take jobs, or, you know, positions or projects that I felt were good for me at that moment, and not have to make a lifetime commitment to them. You know, but just to think, Well, what do I need right now. And he oftentimes is very practical, right? When we're talking about this on a somewhat esoteric level, because we always all live on that level, too. But down, and it's kind of the practical nuts and bolts of a career, should I take a job that's outside of what I do, gosh, is that going to, you know, you could have the thought of that's going to catapult me in a very different direction. That's not what I thought I wanted, that's not part of my plan. Or you could say, I need to be in a different team, I need something different, right? Now I need to learn a thing I'm so curious about, or I need to not be doing the thing I am and so I just need something different. It's just what I need right now. You know, and so give yourself permission, learning how to give myself permission to do that. So that I could maintain a sense of understeer, you know, kind of a broad understanding of why I'm doing what I'm doing, which is the connectedness to self, I think, is what I ended up learning. And then you then you look back, you're like, Wow, what a wild ride that was. And it all makes sense, I can tell it as a story. And people go, Oh, that's really great. But you know, of course, it wasn't planned out. It was just responding to the things I needed, you know, in whatever place I was in.

Hylke Faber 17:55

That's very illuminating that, because it breaks the mold of almost what we're taught in school. Like, it's linear, in a lot of the self help and things like that, you know, thinking Grow Rich, things like that, basically talk about you set your intention, your purpose, and you go for it. No, you practice it for Malcolm Gladwell. 10,000 hours, and you get to mastery. And there it is. And we're not saying that's wrong. What you're proposing here is that the way you are connecting to self and to working with life, is by asking yourself in every moment, what is it that I need right now and let that inform the choice that I make in what I do. And as I listened to you, Jennifer, I find that very liberating, because I know that I have a very linear mind that always, and then when I get into the linear mind, I get disappointed, like, oh, I should be doing this. But if I don't do that, like my husband always says, I have a flair for the dramatic. It's like big moves. But it's just today, just today, let's do let's do what it is today. That's what it is. today. I have this, especially when I you know, I lead workshops, like this week, I was with a group of 100 people. And I love working with groups, I just love it. And then invariably, on the plane ride home, I almost feel a little sad, because I want to still be with that group. And I want to do it again tomorrow or Monday. And it may be a couple of weeks before it happens again, right? And your principle here is like look at what you need right now. Doesn't get attached to some kind of linear accumulation of your, you know, achievements or peak experiences, which is nice, but that's not doesn't seem to be the way that you are perceiving it. So very helpful. So tell us about that. You're a little bit more about this unlearning, because I'm still very curious about this, there's this little girl in the, let's not call it a cult, but something like that. And, and tell us what that felt like inside of you. And how you work with that. What that felt like, what that what that feels like?



Jennifer Byrne 20:26

Well, it, there was a run up to the call that you might need to, I don't know if I can tell the story without a little bit of a preamble to the story. So we, my mother was in the 70s, very much into Transcendental Meditation TM, which was kind of get making its way back then Maharishi Mahesh Yogi was the founder of it and come over from India in that era, and started teaching it in a really good kind of what we would now call viral adoption. So I was initiated into transcendental meditation when I was seven, there's a certain kind of meditation practice that they teach children, which is different than a seated closed eye meditation that you learn as an adult. So as a child, you learn what they call walking meditation. So you have a mantra that you repeat to yourself as you remember, you know, because you, if you if you as you are aware that you're not repeating, you bring yourself back to it, it's a very centering meditation, but you do it, eyes open, and walking. So So I, that's actually been a really cool thing, I have a lot to say about meditation and groups and group thinking, a lot of some baggage and some good lessons I've learned, but at the very core of it, this idea of learning at a very young age, how to be aware, and in the moment, and how to bring my attention back to certain thing was really, really like cognitively and emotionally a helpful thing. And then to do it with a nature I think, also just grew up, I also grew up in a very rural area. So when I went on a walk, it was through, you know, like fields and trees, so very pretty. So, you know, that was the start of it. And I think the call was a slow build, of, you know, my parents getting progressively more sort of entrenched in this. And eventually, my mother found herself in an offshoot of this with it was led by somebody who was, you know, sort of legitimately running a cult. And so, for me, it was not a sudden, oh, my God, you know, overnight, we moved to a little town in Texas. And now I'm, you know, like, I'm not who I was, it was really, were a progression of something that in many ways had served me. You know, over the years served to isolate me, from, you know, as a kid, you're in junior high, that's when your peer group is really important. What you were, who you are, how you show up, is important. And so is that became more and more necessary for me to kind of fit in and figure out who I was, and I was my parents were my, my mother specifically was getting more off kilter. So it was that growing schism, of feeling pulled in two directions, but I always had, because I had been practicing meditation, I always had an ability to just sit quietly, because I learned it. Right, like, we had to do it, like we had to do, we had to meditate, like, we had to do the dishes, it was the thing we had to do. So I learned to be able to be quiet, and just figure out how I felt. So, yeah, so I think, you know, in there's also just a personality thing, too. I've just always had a little bit of swagger as a kid, so I've never been afraid of having my own opinion, or having my own thoughts. Yeah, so either resist a kind of a nice accumulation of, you know, gifts that came to me along the way. And also kind of who I naturally was that allowed me to, you know, at some point say, This is ridiculous. Like, I am living two lives. It's not okay, that I'm driving to school and acting like trying to act like a normal teenager, and I'm going home and my mom has been meditating for four hours and the house is a mess. And, you know, everything is falling apart around me because she's checked out of normal life like no, this is actually not okay. And I you know, I can't do this double life thing, like it's not fair. And so I got mad and then, you know, I grew up in a really small town on the island, which is really isolating thing when you have to take a ferry boat to get off of it, but for me, I got a car. And that was a major sense of freedom. And, and I drove out of the court one day like I want went up there we it was in it was



in Canada on Vancouver Island, and I lived in an island in Washington. So we had to cross the border, I drove my little 1970, red Volkswagen Bug, you know, to go obligatorily you know, sort of cult to weekend, whatever. And, and I, I just knew it was wrong, like it built up in me Holika I don't know how to say other than like, I couldn't tolerate it anymore. Like the physical, emotional, you know, mental pain of having to be forced to live a life that was weird. And so I remember waking up at like, I plan to like, it wasn't an escape thing, like you'd think in normal cults, but it was a statement, and I woke up at three in the morning. And I remember standing out looking at the water and just say, this is not what I want for myself, this is not what I want for myself. And I got into my little car, and then drove away, never came back. So that was it. So there's the there's the store, I didn't know I was gonna tell this morning. But there you have

Hylke Faber 25:57

it. This is this is not what I want, grounded in this stillness. And it's interesting. My assumption is that in that stillness, it becomes very clear, becomes more and more clear, like, Hey, I am being pulled in different directions. And this is not only in that part of like you just described, but it's something that we may experience any day. Like, we're being pulled in different directions. And that's a telltale, for us to, to stop and ask ourselves, is this what I want? Is this what I want? So tell us how that sense of swagger I love that you said that, that sends a swagger grounded in centeredness like doing the dishes? How is that informed you in very senior leadership positions, you know, you're now the chief product and technology officer for life, how you were CEO, for a company before that you've always had these kind of Chief positions for a while. So how has that informed you? How you lead?

Jennifer Byrne 27:04

I think once I figured out that the privilege of leadership is that you, you don't actually know how to do a lot of the things that are in your span of control. And therefore, the only thing you really can do effectively and are called upon to do is to lead. And leadership is fundamentally a human function. You know, it's not operations, it's not budgets, it's not it, you know, really the core of it, it's people. And making sure everybody who you have in your domain is themselves connected and understands why they're there. And that's, that's the thing you need to learn how to do. And I think you learn a little bit trial and error. When I came to Microsoft, and I had that Chief Security Officer job, it was quite different from any role I'd ever had. I'd been in security, you know, it had, I had some basic qualifications for the job, but it was a new position. And so I think no one at Microsoft didn't know really what they needed. So they're also like, Well, I think it's this loose. So you walk into a job, and I immediately I'm like, Oh, God, I don't know what I'm doing here. I had a global team. You know, at the time, we were trying to convince governments that they should adopt public cloud, it was that era, which meant you had to go talk to governments about public cloud, not US government, you know, everyone else. So it was just you were just by, you know, virtue of the job always in a domain where you knew nothing. And working with people, you know, who had immense amounts of qualifications and specialties that I did not have. So, you know, that Christmas Carol, Little Drummer Boy, I always think about this, where it's the, you know, Jesus is born and there's a little boy and he wants to go, you know, give something, right to, you know, Jesus, baby Jesus, and he has nothing. So he just goes and he plays his little drum. And I felt



like a little drummer boy a lot in those early years, Mike, I don't know when I'm going to bring to this scenario. But then you find out in as you talk to people, what do you need, and it just is very obvious, like when you felt your own loneliness so deeply and reflected on it so much, you recognize it in other people. And then you know, like, it's when you're in emotional pain and loneliness, pain, and trying to go to work and be functional. It's hard to do. It's like going to work with uh, you know, a temperature or kidney stone. You know, it's hard. Yeah. And that's a lot of the experience of people. They were showing up and being functional, but maybe themselves not connected. And so I just realized, I think early on, and that's the only thing I have is this ability to understand that the only thing I maybe maybe overemphasize there were a few other skills I did have but you know, like that was a really, that was the biggest difference maker is you know, the ability to create a team, full of people where everyone was listened to, you know, I think the greatest gift you can give anyone in life is the gift of being seen and heard. So if I could give everyone the gift of being seen and heard in one on ones in small group meetings and news for figuring out how to make that happen, how to encourage connection between other people, then you actually do have a really amazing team of people who, you know, will fight and they'll charge the hill and do all the things that business needs them to do. Because, you know, they've, they've felt seen and heard, and they are themselves connected. So yeah, so I think that's how it is it so funny to me to I think I like in my job now. I, I like to be self deprecating, because I think it's helpful as a leader to kind of make sure you're being humble, and not thinking of yourself as better or bigger than anyone else. And so, I do often say I, honestly, I'm a project manager, guys. That's okay. That's what I'm doing you how it you write the code, and all project manage it, you know, and it's just a way of connecting to people. And it's what I have to offer

Hylke Faber 31:08

leadership with humility and with asking, like, what is it that you need? What is it that you need? And again, to help with making the connection thinking that? That is maybe the question that that little girl, Jennifer, one that people ask her as opposed to being spoon fed, or just be force fed, what she was what he was about, you're supposed to need? And what is it that you really, really need? But a powerful question. We're going to take a break in a moment, too. And after the break, we'll explore this more this question of like, how do we actually earn earth? What people really need? Because my sense is, it takes a little while for people to actually even figure out what that is. And, you know, have the swagger to, you know, drive away with the little beetle, Volkswagen or just tell you that this is what I need, and be unapologetic about it. How do we cultivate that as leaders we are speaking with with Jennifer Byrne, who is currently the chief product and technology officer for life hire. And I'm so enjoying this conversation See you after the break.

Presenter 32:22

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 32:48

Welcome back to root and wavering with Jennifer Byrne and telco Faber, we are talking about what it means to be connected. And some of the things I already heard before the break, have really spoken to me this sense of not being on this linear path towards I'm going to go here. But asking ourselves, what do I need in this moment? What do I need in this moment? And honoring that? And making choices based upon that? And then you're talking just now Jennifer about also leading from that place? By asking people? What is it that you need? So how do you help people to actually tell you what they need?

Jennifer Byrne 33:33

A lot of people don't know what they need. It's actually my standard question in all of my one on ones forever. And in this company as well. What do you need? How can I help you? What do you need? How can I help you? And it's interesting how, you know, there's just a wide spectrum of responses, and learning how to decipher them is helpful. Because some people know what they need, and they don't know, whatever they need, they don't need it from you, which is great, right? You find those people lovely. You have on the other side of the spectrum, people who have no idea what they need, and have just not spent the time and it's not a, you know, say that carefully, right. It's not a you know, aren't lesser for that. But, but you may never have asked Ben that, you know, in an environment where that was even an acceptable question or a reasonable question or just any, you know, a question. So, you know, you have to meet people where they are. And so when people don't know what they need, it's okay. I think planting a question like we're such powerful minds, right. And your subconscious mind is doing most of the work most of the time. So, I have had the experience that if you just ask the question in a non urgent way, that over time people will probably at plants somewhere and you'll have a you know person And over time, start to discover that it's okay to have a need, then it's okay to articulate that, and reflect on it and think about it. And so it eventually leads to different conversations. And you know, I now know how can you know exactly what I'm talking about? Because you teach this, but it is an amazing Hi. When somebody is has the epiphany of, Oh, my God, you know, what I actually need is this. It's a level of awareness. And you know, it's a privilege, right to be able to watch that unfold. But yeah, you just have to, I think, make it a practice.

Hylke Faber 35:38

Yeah, you said so much there, let it unfold. Also honor that it's not just happening here in the front of the mind. But also in our subconscious and giving that space to breathe. And I hear what you're saying, almost Jennifer, like, a leader creates a container in which people get to explore or feel more free to explore what they need. And then they can discover, and that helps had that also, that also creates the reflection that's needed to actually get to those insight, as opposed to what do you need? Tell me now? Tell me now. So that unfolding, I resonate with that. I can't help but just wanted to ask you this question. So Jennifer, what is it that you need? Now, as a human being and as a leader, what's coming up for you today?

Jennifer Byrne 36:47



Well, I'm in an interesting place in my own career, which mirrors what I see around me a lot, you know, I think there are times when you are on a path, and you do have practical goals, or, you know, internal goals that will take time to achieve, you know, their points in your career might be at add a thing for a certain period of time, and then you arrive at the next juncture. And then you've heard a little bit of a crossroads. And I feel like that is generally the pattern that many of us follow myself, for sure. And so I would say to you that I am, at that bit of a juncture, I'm working for live hire, and I will continue to be here for as long as the company needs me, but also thinking among the back half of my career, the back nine, if you will, and, and I, it's an interesting place, it's like an you know, in the beginning of your career, you have all these possibilities, right, and that's hard. And then you kind of settle into a track or whatever. And, you know, maybe you're highly opportunistic, maybe it floats around, maybe it doesn't, but you know, it's that time in one's life, where you are really prioritizing very practical needs, if you will, and then you get to the other end of your career where you don't have to do that anymore. You have the benefit of everything, you've learned a level of wisdom, understanding, and you know, if you're lucky, a little bit more freedom, to be able to do a lot of different things, and then it becomes overwhelming again. And I think that's where I am. And so, you know, what I need is, what I need is just these things that we've been talking about, I don't need to have a practical thing, I don't need to have a lot of sort of external accomplishments anymore. But I do need to feel that I matter. I do need to feel that I'm, you know, ending the day, having had an impact on a person, maybe more than one person, that's the most deeply fulfilling thing I do in my job, it's not making sure we're going to hit a budget number or deliver a product in time, it's knowing I had an impact on on the team on the people on my team. So I want that still. And I'm also pretty concerned about legacy. At this point, I want to make the world better have a positive impact there. I think it's just you know, it's getting to the other side of things. So I don't know what that means in more detail. And it could take a lot of forms. But, but those are the requirements for me going forward. Also space like I have learned the value of taking space for myself. You know, not everybody has that privilege, or throughout their life, but I do now and I love it. So you know, whatever it is I have to have my first hour in the morning. You know what I mean? Like I have some requirements for or my next thing

Hylke Faber 39:55

to me this conversation is really about being skillfully at the crossroads. You know, I see you from the the 1516 year old and you skillfully weaving, you know, of course, with ups and downs, all these different crossroads and junctures and asking yourself, what do I need? So what would you say to a person that finds themselves maybe just before crossroads, but feels that something's up? Like, you know, that place in life where you're like, Yeah, I think I might. I was on this track, but I feel like oh, I something in me is pulling me there's something in me pulling. What would you say to a person like that? How do you navigate? How do you be with that time in that process?

Jennifer Byrne 40:50

And I just, you know, we had a little internet glitch, and I missed about 10 seconds. I'm so sorry of the beginning, I heard the end of the question, but not that preamble.



Hylke Faber 40:59

Great. So then I get to say that again. So this, this podcast being about, like this conversation very much being about being at the crossroads. And what would you say to a person that is maybe in a track right now, but feels that the Crossroads is close, close, that sort of uncomfortable space? Just or I don't know what to call for me uncomfortable spaces like, ooh, something I'm getting to a junction, or I'm getting to a junction? How do we be and navigate with that part of the process of the journey?

Jennifer Byrne 41:37

Yeah, this is hard. And I actually think this is where a lot of people are. So this is the conversation many of us are having with ourselves, or friends or colleagues or whomever, there's a couple things that I think are actually practical. And, you know, one of them is simply to address the notions of fear and risk. Because, you know, you talk about getting your own way, I think rooted and unwavering, as you have said many times, you know, to me and into your audience, you know, a lot of it is just being rooted as to be able to push away all of the things or pull back on your ego enough to be in the moment and to be clear, and I think so addressing fear and risk is important. I like the idea of risk, understanding truly what that means. Because that's we make practical decisions like we do, you know, at the end of the day, we also have, you know, rent and mortgage and bills to pay, and there is that part of life, right. And so being at a crossroads, can be on one level about your purpose and all that but many times is also primarily about a paycheck, right? And, and job security, and health insurance, and all those things. And so, you know, when you overlay risk onto that conversation, the idea of risk of something new, always seems to outweigh any other version of risk. And that's where in my experience in my own life, and in talking to others where that conversation goes, it's the classic, I have a job opportunity, I want to go do something different, but there's, it seems so risky. And I think you you know, that's fair and true. Also, what is the risk of staying where you are. And that's a more balanced view of it. So I think when you're at the crossroads, being able to understand that there's risk is just the risk really is just the articulation of the fundamental uncertainty of life. That's all it really is, is, so we always swim in it, regardless, and it's not usually more and when you're talking about future risk, because we don't know the future, it's hard to manage it. So just trying to neutralize that feeling. I don't think you can make it go away, but you can maybe neutralize it, you know, take it down a couple degrees. And then you know, also just getting very clear on what you're afraid of, I think we think fear is bad. That's just kind of the it's maybe the unintended message of a lot of the conversation around fear which is a popular topic, especially in the business world. And I feel like that's kind of part of it, but also a little bit of a near miss fears. Also, you know, a reflection of the fundamental uncertainty of life like it always exists. And I think it's super helpful to dive into your own fears not as foreign entities you know that you know, or unwanted entities rather just a part of yourself and have a lot of lessons you know, they they offer up your fear offers up a lot of lessons. You know, why why do you feel a certain way and I think getting getting there is state of readiness. And obviously, there's practical things to do around getting closer to the juncture. But you know, this is about controlling your emotional state and trying to remain clear, as you consider what might be in front of you,

Hylke Faber 45:14



controlling your emotional state. And intending to be clear, its intention for clarity, I often find for myself, that I make the quote unquote, wrong decisions. When I move from not clear, I need to be, I can only move from clear move from clear I don't move at all. And it doesn't mean I know what's where I'm going to go next. But at least I'm grounded in this clarity. And then usually, the moment will tell me which way to go. Now, my sense, as you talked about this, is that you've had several experiences of being at this crossroads in these last decades as you make these choices. You've had multiple roles in your life already. So can you share with us a little bit about maybe how you apply this yourself? That this working with your fear and risk neutralizing getting to a place of clarity, and then making a decision to do what's next?

Jennifer Byrne 46:27

Well, you know, I'm talking from the best version of myself right now, that I think if I really go back into those moments, they're probably way messier than I might be making them sound. But let's, let's

Hylke Faber 46:42

talk about one, let's talk about love this year, because that would be a really interesting thing to know, because I think we can recognize that in ourselves when we hear you talk about that.

Jennifer Byrne 46:51

Yeah. Part of it is, like, if I think about a move, you know, like, there was the move from, there was the move from Intel to a startup, you know, strombolis security startup, there was a move from that company into Microsoft. And within Microsoft, a couple of physician moves. So there was actually a, you know, pretty quick clip of every two to three years, I mean, many of those years with the same company, and you know, of some of it's opportunistic, I think I have been able to understand the fear risk thing, I've always, you know, it goes back to the swagger comments of, well, there could be something great out there. I think I can do it, you know, I have always had a little bit of that as my default state. But it's also been kind of knowing you sort of clear on the higher level objectives, less so then, you know, I want this kind of job more. So I want a job that feels like this. I remember when I went from sales, Symantec. I was a director of sales, and I just woke up one day and thought, this has got to be the, this isn't working for me, what do I need? And, you know, I thought through that, and thought, I just actually really love tech. That was when I realized, you know, you can either there's kind of two general career tracks, you can either, you know, have a profession, and practice that profession, you know, but a different industries, or you could love an industry, and then wander around that and do different things. And this is about the practical level of job choices. But I decided I wanted to just be in cybersecurity, and tech, but learn a lot of different things. And so, from Symantec, I just kind of had that, oh, well, what's the other thing? You know, what's the other thing and found a job and business development and you know, started. So there's that, but it came from a place of, I don't like what I'm doing, what do I not like about what I'm doing. And I don't want any more of and what would make me feel better. And at the time, I was like, I just wanted to be creative. I didn't want to wait for a product to be packaged in, you know, skewed up and all the marketing around it. And then I just had to talk track that I had to stick to in order to deliver to market, I really want it to be a few steps further back in that



process of really ideating. You know, what does the world need? Or I've got this capability, but how do I tune it so that it can be relevant to the market. And so that was more creative, but it came not because I wanted to be a business development person is because I wanted to be more creative and have a little bit more control over my domain. I think in Microsoft, it was very much the same where I wanted to have a bigger stage, if you will, I wanted to have a bigger impact. I wanted to connect with people I wanted to solve a problem that mattered. I wanted to be able to, you know have something of value for Have something of value to the company, I had a mentor that at McAfee Intel, who said, you know, if you really want to continue on in this path of cybersecurity, and stop working at companies where everyone has exactly the same skills, go work at a company where you're a little unique. And at the time, Microsoft didn't have a lot of cybersecurity expertise, they had, you know, underlying capabilities, but they were just the beginning of their own journey of becoming a leader in that space. So fun time to join, but I joined, it had a unique perspective that I was able to bring. And so that gave me you know, fill the need that I had at the time to sort of exercise my own agency, if you will, and be valuable and, and so again, it was a broader requirement, not a specific job requirement. I think that's always been kind of the altitude for my decision making. Along the way. You know, I think, from CSO to CTO, that was Tony Townes Whitley, who I know is one of our favorite people that we share. And she remember, you know, interviewing for that job with her coming out of that CSO role. And I and she forced me to think that way, you know, like, what do you really want out of the show? What do you bring, you know, you don't I didn't know the Microsoft portfolio, but wasn't a deep technologist in that space had really only ever done cybersecurity. But, but, you know, she kind of forced me in that long interview period to think about what do I have to offer? What do I want. And I realized that that kind of very, there's something very creative about being highly strategic, you know, it's like writing a, it's like writing a haiku poem, you have a bunch of constraints around what you can write, and then ultimate creativity within it. Same thing with a lot of strategic planning and execution in a corporate environment, where you're highly constrained in many ways around what you've got to offer the market, how you need to offer, what your outcomes need to be the size of your teams, your resources, all of that the regulatory environment, that you're in that those the constraints, but the job demands ultimate creativity within that, and that was the kind of the higher order bit that really fed my soul, you know, with respect to what I what I wanted, and what the world needed from me, like the intersection of those two things, was at that level, not at the details of understanding cloud computing to the nth degree. So it was that decision was made at that level, again, kind of a higher level,

Hylke Faber 52:34

what the what feeds my soul and what the world needs. It reminds me of saying by Dr. Howard Thurman that we both know, don't worry about what the world needs, ask what makes you come alive and do that, because what the world needs is people who are alive and to me a lot of the conversation today Jennifer has been about that. What do I need? What feeds my aliveness? What feeds my soul? This question that Tony Danza literally asked, What do you want? And what do you offer it to tell me about you? Now, the thing that you think I should know about you, meaning the the thing that you want me to know that you think will comply with this image that I think that you should have, but what you want, right, that deep authenticity. So what do you would you say? And we're getting towards the



closing minutes of this conversation, which flies by it's funny how that goes. What would you say to a person who finds it challenging to connect with what they need? What they want, they might not like, that might not be something that's natural for them, or may think there's no place for that where I'm at? What would you say?

Jennifer Byrne 53:59

I think if it's a person who doesn't know how to connect with themselves, I think the first thing is to practice giving yourself permission to connect with yourself just in your own mind, in your own heart. Because a lot of times what that is, is a lot of voices that you've internalized that are not your own, that are telling you it's not okay. It's not my culture. You know, it's not, not who I'm supposed to be. It's not who my parents taught me to be. It's not definitely not something everyone will think I'm weird. If I go there is a bit that's not how you do it. And I think practicing giving yourself permission to be a human, just in the privacy of your own mind is probably the very first step. To connect yourself.

Hylke Faber 54:52

Give yourself the permission to practice being human the privacy of your own mind. Yes. I love that keep going interrupted sorry. No, well, I

Jennifer Byrne 55:03

think that's just a precursor to it all, you know, the what ends up happening, you know, we get negative feedback loops too. And so and that kind of the way bias works is that you get one negative feedback around being too personal. And then you're like, I knew it, told you, this is not the right way to do it. But if you I think more often than not, when you can connect with connected with yourself as a precursor connecting with anyone else, because you have to connect with somebody else from yourself. So you have to be there first. And then you connect. And those moments are surprisingly human when they happen. So you can turn a negative feedback loop into a positive feedback loop, if that makes sense. So and then once you've had, it's a little bit like an adrenaline rush, when you feel like you actually created a connection, and obviously like, this is business, we, you know, it these are all in business appropriate ways. They're small conversations, you know, over indexing on it, is probably not the right thing to do. But just knowing that when you when you kind of know how you feel, how do we feel right now? You know, who am I right? Now, what do I want this day to be like for me? How do I remember that I'm in this body, and in this mind, and in this moment, then the connections become effortless, and they then you can walk away from a meeting or action that was a connected meaning or a connected interaction, you had a cool conversation, you know, you found out how somebody else really felt you were able to connect with them. And those things, you know, it's an adrenaline rush, it's a dopamine hit, if you will. So there's a lot of positive feedback that you can get. So it can be a virtuous cycle, this practice of giving yourself the permission to connect with yourself first, as the foundation for creating a lot of beautiful and emotionally fulfilling connections with others. It's its own reward.

Hylke Faber 57:06



So how do I remember to connect with my body mind, spirit moment, in and and then bring that in, then I am able to connect with others from that place. And it's interesting in the whole other topic, but when I mentioned anyway, it you've talked a lot about ni today. And to me being in that place makes us less needy, and more clear about our needs without being driven by them or overwhelmed by them, because we already know what they are. And we don't need somebody else to tell us what that has to beat at interesting paradox. Jennifer, it's been such a pleasure speaking with you today, I've had so many takeaways, I'm going to give you a moment to maybe say one last thing you want to say as we're leaving today, what I can say is, I've learned so much today from you about what it means to be in the crossroads of this moment. And to give ourselves the permission, to be ourselves to practice being human, and to listen to what's going on within us our needs, our fears, the depth of our being and then allow ourselves to show up from that place, which can be addictive, especially when we also connect with others in like that situation. So what would you like to say by way of closing today, Jennifer?

Jennifer Byrne 58:33

Well, I think you just said it all, I think this is the most important thing we can do for ourselves is to know ourselves.

Hylke Faber 58:42

Thank you so much. Thank you so much. Well, I will take that with me. And if you've been listening that might be a practice to think about today. Like, what does it like to remember this a little bit more? It's not a static thing. Just a little bit more? Who I am in my body, in my mind in my spirit in this moment? What would happen if I brought that to this moment? This doesn't experiment. So we've been listening to root and unwavering next week, the 32nd episode, we'll be talking to my friend and colleague, Rick Gates, who is a tremendously big hearted leader and coach and facilitator and I look forward to conversation with him then that will be in a couple of couple of weeks. And, of course, you can always read listen to these podcasts, anywhere where you'd find podcasts where you listen to your podcasts on Spotify, Apple, etc. And you can also find him on LinkedIn. And I'm sure Jennifer's okay, if you connect with her on LinkedIn as well if you have more questions, and I would welcome the same. So you have been listening to root and unwavering where we connect more deeply to our innate potential. See you next time. I'm your host Yoko Faber. Thank you

Presenter 1:00:05

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