

If you only have a minute: Rooted and Unwavering is all about connecting deeply with ourselves, others and our service in the world. Learn how a life-threatening event helped John Rex, a former CFO at Microsoft, connect more deeply with himself and propelled him into the career change he had been dreaming of.

What's Deeply Important to You?

By Esther Groves and Hylke Faber

"I really can't think of any other long-term reason why we're here on this planet, other than to help each other." – John Rex

When John Rex talks about congruence and connection, you quickly sense what makes him such a strong coach and thoughtful mentor. Through a number of personal and professional experiences (including one near-death encounter), John has learned to pay attention to what is most important, and he has made it his mission to help others to do the same. "A good friend taught me," he recalls, "that for any corporate meeting the sequence should be: connection before context before content. I think that's so beautiful to recognize that everything we do...requires us to connect and understand each other as humans...until robots replace us," he adds with a laugh.

When he was 12 years old, John's family lost everything and found themselves living in a motel for a time. As he transitioned to a new career in real estate, John's father listened to many motivational programs on tape while driving with his family. John was a captive audience. Listening to these tapes, John learned an important life orientation: he could be self-authoring. He didn't need to be the victim of circumstance or environment. "We have the power to act," he says, "and not just be acted upon."

Over time, John built a reputation as a people-centric CFO with a successful approach to delivering big business turnarounds. Eventually, he was recruited by Microsoft North America as their new CFO. Things seemed to be going well in his first year, until John's boss had a very serious conversation with him. For the first time in his career, John's job was on the line. He realized that what had worked in his previous roles would not be enough at Microsoft. In addition to his focus on building teams and ensuring processes, Microsoft required John to quickly establish a robust working knowledge of their entire portfolio. Instead of getting frustrated or shifting blame, John got to work.

With great determination, John poured himself into his work. He dug deep into the details and into himself to meet the new requirements to be successful. And he came through it with a new commitment to live his life in a way that closely aligned with his personal values. As John puts it, "I learned the importance of trying to live my life in congruence or in integrity with my core values. For me, a big part of that is honoring my family, honoring my faith, honoring my God, honoring the people that I work with and that I work for."

But throughout his journey, John says, “I had this persistent, nagging feeling that at some point in my life, I should leave the corporate world and dedicate my life's work to helping others become more effective leaders.”

John continued to ponder this transition until six years ago, when he landed in the ICU with a pulmonary embolism, a life-threatening condition marked by a sudden blockage in the arteries between your heart and lungs. After receiving lifesaving care, John felt his perspective shift.

During his recovery, John realized he only had one opportunity to live his life, and he decided it was time to make that transition to helping others become better, more impactful leaders. With his wife and family's support, he was able to navigate the career change from CFO to Executive Coach.

It isn't always easy to take the leap—to determine you're ready. But, John says, a dedicated practice of self-observation can increase our interpersonal, situational, and self-awareness, eventually helping us shift our perspective and grow into new seasons.

How do we deeply connect with ourselves and other humans? It may look different for each of us, but it starts with awareness. Today, as a seasoned coach, one of John's core questions to build awareness is a kind of prayer: “How will I be able to look back on this moment in time and feel like I acted in a way that would produce peace in my heart and pride in my actions?”