

If you only have a minute: Rooted and Unwavering is all about connecting deeply with ourselves, others and our service in the world. How can we maintain the kinds of connectedness with others that provide a safe space for them to fail so they can truly succeed?

Succeeding by Failing

By Esther Groves and Hylke Faber

Until he was 40 years old, Adam Freed admits, he was connected only to external symbols of structure and safety: attending a top college, working for companies with top name brands, attaching to an “anchor with that gave a false sense of security.”

At 40, he looked up and said, “I’m not connected to myself. I am connected to friends and family I love but I don’t have a family of my own. I have organized things in a way that is not serving me and my humanity. In order to connect to something deeper, I needed to uproot and disconnect.”

To take the risks necessary to connect with his authentic self in new ways, Adam quit everything in California and drove to New York with, “...my dog, a guitar I couldn’t play and a cowboy hat I looked ridiculous in.”

Why choose New York as his destination? Adam recalls, “Connecting only to myself, thinking that I could control all the variables of my life wasn’t the right thing for me. I needed to be with friends who would hold me accountable and be true to me. Fairly soon after getting to New York. I fell in love - I met my husband.”

Fast forward 15 years. Adam is married and a father of two boys, age 11. One day, one of his sons was 18 months old, was trying with all his might to climb onto the couch. He had his hands and one foot on the edge of the couch and was trying to throw himself on. Adam remembers, “I started to reach out to lift him and he looked at me like, “Give me a shot to get this.” And I thought, “I’m going to sit right here and make sure if you fall, I’ll catch you, but, I’m not going to lift that leg for you. Then after many tries, he did it and just beamed with joy.”

“I think about that metaphor a lot in both parenting and leading organizations. We all want to be the one who gets our own leg up onto that couch and propel ourselves where we’re trying to go. And we all want to have somebody nearby that says, we’re going to let you fail but not fall.”

*“We’re going to let
you fail but not fall.”*

Now as Managing Partner of GSV Ventures, Adam invests in companies in the education and workforce space. He spends a lot of time connecting with founders and understanding not just what their vision is for their company, and how they want to change the world, but also explore: what are their needs? He asks himself, “How can I be the investor they can cry to and don’t have to dance for? How can we stay connected so that they have that sense of safety that even though I’m investing in their company, I’m the person they can come to so we can connect with one another around human needs?”

Much like his relationship with himself, his sons and the founders he supports, Adam embraces the value of failing in order to succeed in life and allowing others to do the same. “Ask yourself hard

questions, push yourself. And at the same time, make sure that you're in an environment where you're only going to fall so far.”