

If you only have a minute: Rooted and Unwavering is all about connecting deeply with ourselves, others and our service in the world. What can we accomplish when we are given the gift of psychological safety and also extend that to others?

The Gifts of Psychological Safety

By Esther Groves and Hylke Faber

Imagine you are a teenager, and your friends are throwing wild drinking parties. Do you join in? If you are Matt Oppenheimer, you might join, though not to participate in the drinking, but to enjoy the company of your friends and support as their designated driver. And then you might organize alcohol-free parties so all could feel welcome and participate in ways of having fun that don't revolve around drinking. Not that Matt's parties were tame. Sometimes a live band got loud and the neighbors called the police. When they came to the door, they were in for a surprise: Matt's grandmother answered and she loved those parties!

It takes a lot of self-knowledge and inner strength to withstand peer pressure. For Matt, that strength came through the gifts his parents gave him: deep psychological safety, unconditional acceptance and the freedom to be himself. To this day, he prioritizes psychological safety, starting by taking care of himself, for example by exercising, sleeping well and praying.

His autonomy and inner freedom help Matt in many ways, including in accepting feedback and feeling his feelings, rather than trying to pretend and be a superhero. He points out that introspection can feel more painful before it gets better. Brightness awaits on the other side of processing the hard stuff. And since Matt has learned to feel safe with himself, he gives himself the space and time to process feedback and receive the growth and learning.

As co-founder and CEO at Remitly, a leading digital remittance provider, Matt was tasked with raising capital. He talked with many investors. Getting to yes would include many no's. After a no, or a set of no's, Matt would not just keep at it. He would take a pause, reflect and take some time to get back to internal balance before approaching the next potential investor.

Matt saw the no's as an integral part of his capital campaign. They were invaluable sources of learning. Out of 50 potential investors that would say no, 5 might provide actionable feedback. To get good feedback, he says, "There has to be this connectedness for them to tell you why [they passed]."

In order to "mine" their candid feedback, Matt intentionally created psychological safety by reassuring them that he simply wanted to learn. A few investors gave him "gold" as feedback. When Matt implemented their suggestions, he kept them updated on their impact. "And then they end up leading our next round," he says, smiling.

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Connectedness is core to Remitly's values today, including: Customer centricity, Be a compassionate partner, Constructively direct and Deliver on promises. "A big part of me building a company is surrounding myself with people who are very good at what they do and can contribute to a vision we've set that's exciting and full of purpose: "Transforming lives with trusted financial services that transcend borders."

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What if you made your own psychological safety a priority and extended this gift to family, friends and colleagues? How much more could you connect with and learn with others?