

S01-E03 - Rooted & Unwavering - August 12 - Hylke Faber & Rene Yoakum

Hylke Faber 00:12

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 brightness also, when we don't feel it? Join host Elka 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. Welcome everyone welcome everyone to this third episode of rooted and unwavering. We are broadcasting live from Phoenix from the Phoenix Business Radio X studio, in actually Tempe, Arizona, where we help leaders connect more deeply to their innate potential. I'm so grateful to be with you today. And also so grateful to be with my guests for today, Rene Yocum. And, Renee, how are you today?

Rene 01:19

I'm great. How are you? I'm good.

Hylke Faber 01:22

I am really well. And in a moment, I'll introduce you more. And before I'm going to just center us a little bit more into the purpose of of this series of root and unwavering which started really with this question of what is this work of transformation and leadership really about that we've been doing for the last 20 years? And what did we see as really as, as helpful in today's world and, and this little word of connectedness came up? Like okay, what is it like to be truly connected to our best selves, especially when when we don't feel like it. And wherever we find the wherewithal to sometimes claw ourselves back into that better place, that wider place that more heartfelt place, that that place from which we have many more answers, or many more questions. And we are maybe more peaceful, more compassionate, more in this moment. And that is part of what this podcast is for. And I feel very fortunate to be able to speak with you to Rene, today to learn more about your perspectives about connectedness and, and how we are able to connect to our best selves, no matter what happens, or maybe in the face off helping us to even become more connected. If you're listening, welcome, everyone, just take a moment to center yourself if you like and connect to yourself, one way we can do that is just to notice the breathing in the body. That's a very simple way to just to get connected just to notice to the breathing in the body, the breathing is always here. And that's a wonderful way to remind us of what's always here, which is constant. And my intention is to find ways to connect to what is constant within me. And each of us may have something to do with love or peace or stillness. So we'll learn more about this in this episode. So I'm so grateful to introduce you, Renee today. I met you several years ago now in a hotel ballroom. And I still remember, you know, it's early in the morning, and



we had a big group of people it was your organization coming. And we were together with a colleague of mine, Patricia Campioni, who I learned a lot from, and he introduced us and I still remember you standing there in front of that dark, still dark room. And just looking at your eyes, I knew Ah, here as a fellow traveler and somebody that I'm going to learn from and learn with and have very beautiful paths with and that's what happened. I remember still remember you opening that workshop. And I think it took you about 90 seconds and you had tears in your eyes. And that's part of your Hallmark. That is something very beautiful. So on a practical level, you're the executive vice president of customer and culture at Remitly. Remitly is a leading digital financial services provider, enabling users to make person to person money transfers from in over 135 countries around the world and you have a very beautiful vision which are readers to transform the lives of millions of immigrants and their families by providing the most trusted financial services on the planet. Beautiful, beautiful connected purpose. You coming to this work at Remitly Having served in Pearson and for Long part longtime at Microsoft for 25, or maybe even more years in customer service leading customer service functions, I read that you were in charge of about 25,000 people working in customer service centers around the world, you bring to it international experience. Very big heart. And whenever I meet you, Renee, I, I want to say I feel taller. But that's maybe not even true. I feel more human, and more gentle. And that's one of the gifts you give me. So welcome, Renee.

Rene 05:36

Wow, thank you help God, it's lovely to be here. I appreciate the intro. Hi, expectation setting. So if you feel taller, because I'm five feet tall, you can't tell on Zoom. But yeah.

Hylke Faber 05:50

It is true, it is true, deep groundedness that I detected you. So let's talk about connectedness for a moment. And for this next hour. So I'd love to start with a word that I've heard you use from time to time, that's also part of Remitly's values, which is joy. So what brings you joy?

Rene 06:15

Yeah, I mean, I think we added joyful to our values a couple of years ago, at Remitly. And it's been kind of a profound change, it's, as you can imagine, hearing our mission, it's hard work, you know, and heavy work, helping immigrants who are working so hard for their families and to send money back to their families and communities, all around the world. And so, and it's very technical work, it's very brain heavy, it's, you know, we have, it's an engineering culture. So there's both like head heavy and heart heavy. And thus, that is part of the mission. And so when I came in, though, what I what I think was missing in our values was just this lightness like, there is a joy, not pleasure all the time, but deep satisfaction in being able to do mission centered work, and do it for customers who need us every single day to be advocates for them and to be looking out for them and to help serve them and and the, you know, sort of more underdeveloped countries in the world that from which they come in from which, you know, for which the remittance business is a huge part of the GDPs of these nations, so, so being able to just like, relish the joy, like take a moment in the heat of battle, or in the places where we're failing our customers, which we do sometimes, right? More than we want to, and just take a step back and kind of go wow, but I get to do this work every day, every day, I get to get up and do this work with



other people who also want to do this work, and, and solve really hard technical problems and problems that make a difference for people. So So yeah, I think joyful is this like deeper. It's not just fun, it's not surface level it, it really is this deeper, purpose driven. thing that motivates me every day, like I get so much energy when I can just take that moment to think you know,

Hylke Faber 08:14

and I, I love that description of WoW, taking a step back also, when things are not going exactly like we planned, which is quite often I think, place in my life, things don't go often the way I exactly planned my little brain. So what what how do you take time? Or how do you make that happen in the in the midst of what I know is very taxing job like it's it's I see your schedule and the the number of hours that you that you work, and how do you how do you access that joy? How do you connect to that joy?

Rene 08:53

Well, it doesn't take long, it's not a time bound thing, right. So I think, I mean, what I tried to do is start each day in a peaceful quiet way. Because there I am in the like Hurricane like we all are probably right in the hurricane of work once you get in. So I do try to start with like an hour of just some peace and do a little bit of meditating, I do some really unique things that don't have anything to do with work that just sort of Cleanse my mind. And let me come in fresh freshly, and that makes a huge difference, how I come in to the day. And then what I try to do is just take honestly, this is the part that doesn't take time. I just tried to take a minute, literally, between meetings because I do a lot of context switching in my in my role to like very different topics and kind of say, Who do I need to be like first breathe, I breathe in and out like eight times, which, remarkably, I'm always surprised every time I do it, how much better I feel when I breathe. And then secondly, I just think who do I need to be in this meeting? Like do I need to make a decision? Do I need to just listen? Do I need to just be present and be absorbing? Do, I need to give some hard feedback in a kind way that's going to help the person grow? I don't know, I'm just very thought like, I know what my purpose is in that meeting. And it really centers my mind. And then I can go in and be thoughtful. You know, if I don't do that, if I rush in between I make all kinds of mistakes. So

Hylke Faber 10:24

I love that deep as breathing. And also, I love I imagine you sitting in the morning, meditating or reading something, think it's a beautiful practice to take some time to almost like infused that energy into the rest of your day, which I, I think, and then also that question, you were saying about, like, Who do I need to be in this moment? And who do I need to be in this moment? It's almost like a prayer in the way I hear that, like, it's like, it's it, and then it comes to you, then it comes to you is what I'm sensing. That is that is very beautiful in terms of how you're describing that. So you've been a leader for a little while, or maybe quite a while, for quite a while now. So can you say a little bit about what you have been learning about connecting to yourself, and it may have evolved what you see as yourself your true self over these years, but what you have noticed about connecting with yourself as a leader, and in this in these years that you've been been leading and giving leadership to so many people? What have you noticed?



Rene 11:33

It's, it's a big question. I mean, there's, there's the, like a 32nd answer. And there's like a 30 year answer, right? So I, but I think, you know, for me, the biggest learnings have been maybe on a couple of dimensions. One is, I'm the oldest of six kids. And yes, so I've been a leader since I was whatever, 11 months old and my first brother came into the world. And, and, but a lot of what I think I learned in my childhood that helped me cope, and were very good coping skills for a lot of the situations I found myself in as a child turned out to not be that constructive for me later as an adult. So I very much thought I was loved for what I did for being the perfect child, maybe this is an oldest child common thing, but for being the perfect child for following the rules for getting great grades for, you know, achieving that that was the source of love of others towards me. And I don't think that I felt intrinsically lovable. And so I have to get like, into my 40s, like, early 40s, probably before I really centered on intrinsic motivation, not extrinsic, not trying to achieve in order to add things to my self aware, you know, self image, much more working on just centering in who I needed to be authentically. So that's, that's kind of one dimension, that took me a while to get to, I think I also thought there was a picture of like, in that intrinsic, I'll just say one more thing about that, or extrinsic motivation, I think I very much thought that was the perfect leader, the perfect manager became a manager like 29. So, but I very much had this image of here's what a manager is, here's what a person is. And I kept those quite separate, I think I was afraid of connecting, and getting too deeply involved with people in case I had to do hard things as a manager, all that was kind of theoretical, but I, I very much kept I had my work persona, and I then I was who I was at home, again, by my late 30s, early 40s, the effort of that, and the dissonance, like was too much. And so I finally realized, like, I just have to be who I am. And I'm gonna have to be the kind of leader I am. Some people are gonna like that some people are not, but I I genuinely have to continue to grow and learn. It's not like, oh, who I am now is who I'm going to stay to be I, I want to, I want to grow all the time. But I definitely had to bring those together. Oh, my gosh, I'll just say, life got so much easier at that point, because I wasn't I was using 20% of my bandwidth to be someone else, right. And so now I could use that 20% to focus on other people and not focus on myself, which also was a key change. And then I think, you know, we'll probably get into this more, but I think all of life. And all of work as well is fear versus love. Right? And how could you and I, you've taught me a lot about this. You and I talk about it all the time. But I think in this dichotomy between fear and love and at work, I think love is purpose. I think love is love. But sometimes it's unacceptable to talk about that in a work context. So love can be purpose. But I think that the more and we're human so every day we fall into some fear you feel fear that do you react to it, or do you really like recenter yourself back on the purpose and the impact packed in that lap breathing, and who do I need to be? And what would Grace do? I'll tell you about grace later. But, you know, I've got a few few mantras that kind of helped me recenter to purpose so that I'm not reacting out of fear, even though I feel it, you know, like we all do.

Hylke Faber 15:15

Yes, yes. Oh, beautiful. There's so much in what you said there. I love the, the, the transition that you talked about going from like this sense of extrinsic Doer to the intrinsic beer like I am, I am, I am, not I am, who I am, and just take it or leave it. But like I am, this is who I am. And I'm, I'm going to cherish who I am. And I'm going to share that as a leader. That's what I that's what I heard. And I also heard



the sense of fear, being in love and being very grounded. And I see you like choosing again and again and again, to not give in to the fear base seductions and, and ground yourself into in love, which is so powerful. And then I love how you translate it at like, loving the West is such a word, but so much baggage in it has so many connotations. And so, you know, I'd love that you have one translation of that as being purposeful, which I are intentional, which I love, which I love. And then grace, what would Grace do? What would Grace do? So let's talk a little bit about because I can imagine people listening in including myself, thinking like, how did she make that transition? Did that just happen? Or how did that transition happen? late 30s, early 40s, what happened? Well, can you talk about that your sense of?

Rene 16:50

Well, I mean, I've been through some personal challenges in you know, marriages that didn't work out. And I, I very much use that fertilizer. And I'll probably use the word fertilizer, like many times, like, you know, the heart, the hardness of life, like wakes you up. And the discomfort of life wakes you up to things that you need to grow and change. And so I think, in my personal life that was happening, I also had the great privilege of being able to move to London and work there for four years from Microsoft, which was just a, I'm a math major. So I put together this whole, like spreadsheet of reasons to move reasons to not move all very logical, very rational. Ultimately, it's an apples to oranges experience, you just kind of have to jump and I did jump. I think if had I truly known how hard it was going to be the transition, I might not have done it. So I'm really glad I didn't know because it was this huge life changing experience where I landed in a country where everyone I knew was not there. And everyone there I did not know. And so it kind of like almost like you've come from a different planet, right? And so, but it gave me the opportunity to take a step back, learn and listen and really think about how I wanted to show up there and what I wanted to learn. And I think that was a like point of inflection in both myself and becoming more authentic because I had to be grounded in order to live in this world where I have no grounding. I have no, I mean, even when I went grocery shopping, I didn't know the brands I didn't like there's just you know, so many things you even though of course, I spoke English, and that's super privileged, that I could do that. And theoretically, in that country, they speak a different version of English. And they're also what they don't say, is often more important than what they do say. And so learning to read the spaces and, and all of that was like a huge education. But I think they're I became, I don't know, I think of myself more as a global citizen. I am no longer purely American. I'm certainly not British, or European. But I'm not I'm something in between. And I think that was a moment of inflection in my life, right of really happy to find my own grounding inside because it wasn't anywhere external.

Hylke Faber 19:06

Right, right. I love that kind of a fresh start. Like a fresh start. I refreshed it. I relate to it. Actually, when I moved to Seattle from New York City. I think that that experience that you're describing is quite similar, because I remember that my mind had made up certain complaints about New York City why life wasn't quite working the way I wanted it. And I remember the first weeks I was living in Seattle, that sense of Hmm, now it's really up to me. Like how am I going to show up here and then life didn't turn out perfectly. So going going to your story about like moving to London. Those years back? What did you



discover about yourself in the you know, the biggest grocery stores or in the completely different surrounding? What did you discover about Rene

Rene 20:02

Ah, many things. I mean, I think I confronted loneliness in a way like, I, the British people are lovely. And some of my best I mean deep, deep, lifelong friends, you know, there, but the first year was quite hard. I don't know if it's an island mentality, but you're not really let in, like, you know, quickly, like, you kind of, you kind of earn your way into confidence there. And so my first year was quite lonely, like work was a salvation for me, the weekends were hard, because I really was completely on my own. And so I have to come to peace with some loneliness. And I do think that's a human condition. And it that by coming to peace with it, and facing it, and working through it, I no longer fear it. So I think I've made a lot of decisions in my life prior, out of fear of loneliness, right, or fear of being alone. And so I think that's, that's kind of one profound thing. And second, second thing was tapping into my values, like my intrinsic values as a person as a citizen. I was there it was during 911 that I was there was like, my first year. So observing America, from the external perspective was really quite interesting and thinking about, like, what does it mean to me to be American. And, you know, I think for me, it kind of got it and also been able to observe many different cultures, and what it mattered to them to be French to be German to be Russian, we spent a lot of time in Eastern Europe there as well, what it meant to be British. And so I feel like it was a real grounding, and just like, the independence of being American, and the value of pulling yourself up, and all of those things, you know, were good grounds for me to

Hylke Faber 21:53

beautiful, beautiful. This the independence of pulling yourself up, I love that sentence, like pulling yourself up, like, and I'm thinking about what you said about the weekends, like, okay, here I am. So, and you said something about loneliness, and the fear of that. So if you relate to that, to to leadership and connecting to you could say more of your authentic self or love, and facing your maybe fearful self, the sort of delusionary self, the illusionary self. This, that's unpeel there's a little bit because I think it's an important part of being a leader that we face this fear of being alone. So when you before this, you could say, realisation in the UK that you could handle it. What were your thoughts about loneliness? And how might it have informed how you lead as a leader?

Rene 22:52

Well, I think I was a pleaser, you know, so I very much and again, this is probably the oldest child thing but but it that translated into often pleasing up, you know, pleasing my bosses pleasing, pleasing the establishment, whatever, that was finding ways to succeed by pleasing and, and I don't feel that I'm that anymore. You know, I think I'm willing to be controversial, where it matters not for its own sake, I'm not necessarily a rebel. But I'm very, like, grounded in what I think is right and unafraid to say and, you know, I think that's both a beauty of facing loneliness because like loneliness, you don't want isolation at work, you want to be, you know, accepted, you want to be part of the team overall. And so, how to how to, like, earn yourself back into that, while still being true to, to who you are some things that I focused on, but I think Aging has also which I love, by the way, we can talk about that more too, but I love getting older, I'm 63 and just the power of you know, really being grounded in who you are and not



afraid so much of the loneliness or being mothered by what other people may think of you. I just worry about that so little now where I think I used to worry about that quite a bit, you know, up until my midlife probably

Hylke Faber 24:20

the falling in love with the aging I love that the maturing a part of that which is also a way to connect more deeply to yourself because we are all aging we all all aging. So it's part of connecting to what is true what is real about us. So say a bit more about that aging like what have you been learning? Aging like What do you enjoy about that?

Rene 24:46

Yeah, I mean, I I did this I had some coaching him in my mid 40s Around the same time because I think the other challenge in my life has been I was not able to have children and and so So I hit this point, like in my mid 40s, where I very much thought I don't know who I'm going to grow into, when I get older, I kind of got afraid of being older, right, I'm not going to have children, I'm not going to have grandchildren. That was like a big realization that I hadn't really thought of earlier in my life. And so I, I did some exercises and work to just say, like, I didn't have a role model of women, especially, or even older people that I wanted to aspire to be in my 60s, like, at that time, what I thought was old, right? 60s 70s 80s I love my mother very much. But she had six children, she was not her life was not going to be my life. And I couldn't see a life around me. And so anyway, I did some work with the coach that helped me realize just like letting out the inside of me being bigger, and thinking of who I wanted to be 20 years from now. And I named her grace, like, my future self is named Grace and, and she just keeps aging ahead of me even now. She's in her 80s. And I very much think what would Grace do in this situation? What would the bigger version of myself do in this situation, I was able to kind of visualize that. And I think she has been this thread, kind of pulling me forward for the last more than 20 years. And, and it just continues, she continues to grow. And I continue to aspire to grow into her as well.

Hylke Faber 26:24

So glad that you're introducing grace to us today. So Wow. So what is teach? What's Grace teaching you today? Or in these days? About? Well, that's what's that's period. What's teaching grace you today? I don't want to frame it more than that.

Rene 26:46

Yeah, I think I think Grace is a very good listener. And she's very warm and approachable. And she also doesn't judge, right? Like she doesn't judge people. So there's a safe, safe space, but also an honest space, right? Like Pete, she's unafraid to be who she is and say what she's thinking, while first listening to others always and coming from a place of knowing people are good. And how do you help them be even better if that's what they want to be right. And a lot of that is just by showing up and listening and being very attentive and warm, and approachable. But not It's not cup, not soft and cuddly or grandmotherly. Like, I very much have an edge as well. And, and I think I accepted that I can preserve that edge and use it for good. And so how I bring together we have two values remotely. One is empathetic partnership, and the other is constructively direct. And I think living in the space of



bringing those both together being kind and direct, is something that grace does in my mind really well. And she challenges me to do very well. So getting in a place of cleansing my own intentions, so that I can really focus on the other person and listen, but also be unafraid to speak my truth and help hold people accountable to their truths as well.

Hylke Faber 28:10

I love that that empathetically, like really empathetic listening and being constructively direct being an empathetic partner and constructive redirect. That's a beautiful juxtaposition. We're gonna take a break in a moment. I think after the break, what I would love to hear more about is maybe an example where Grace has guided you through a challenge, where you found a way to maybe integrate those two seeming polarities between, you know, being an empathetic partner and being constructively direct and really connecting to something to something deeper. So let's take a break. And we'll be back in a second with the second part is conversation with Rene welcome. Thank you.

28:56

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 29:19

So this conversation about like being constructively direct and empathetic partnership. So so far in this podcast, we are in conversation, Rene, we've been talking about, like what is it like to be connected? You'll be talking about maturing this this shift between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. And then just towards the tail end, we got to really meet Grace a little bit and actually actually have brought tears to my eyes when I heard about it something about you sort of fell into place. It's like ah, like this person that is 20 years ahead of me in terms of Time, mentoring me all the time, and then you exemplifying that and then sharing that with others. That's a very powerful image that, that I'm definitely going to look into and for myself as well, and maybe listeners will do that as well, it's very, very beautiful to find that. So maybe you can share about an example of where you might have felt challenged as a as a leader at remitle. Because that's where you touched on those values, being an empathetic partner and being constructively direct. Maybe think about, like, what was the challenge you're facing without divulging confidential information, but there's something that you might be able to share that we can all learn from? Because I'm sure all of us face that polarity, like, how do we do this?

Rene 30:51

Yeah, I mean, I think I mean, this is the opposite of confidential. I mean, we've all gone through, you know, COVID, over the last several years, and that, I mean, again, talking about fertilizer for growth. I mean, this has been, you know, in my life, some of the hardest times to both be a person, but also be a leader, especially in it, my, my CEO, who's also my dear friend, Matt Oppenheimer is amazing, absolutely amazing. And I think, you know, having his partnership as I lead, I lead people and I also lead our customer support teams through this time, and our Customer Support Teams are spread all



over the world. And we're suffering disproportionately as well, because they're, they're in Manila. They're in Managua, Nicaragua, they're in Colombia, they're in India. And, you know, definitely suffering disproportionately to how we were suffering in the United States. So thinking of all that kind of fear, surrounded by fear, right, so fear in the environment for your politics, fear at work, fear in people's personal lives, fear of, you know, just the, like basic needs of health, your health, being safe, and your children being safe. And so, like, these were some of the, like, hardest leadership times for me, and I'm sure many of you have felt that way, as well. I think I luckily, again, I had the partnership of Matt, and we spent a lot of time together thinking, we cannot be limited by our containers here, right, like our own personal container. Like, because some days, you would just think I can't take any more, I can't, I can't, I can't take the weight of other people's fear or worries on myself anymore. But you have to, like, you know, I think people were very much our employees were very much looking to our leadership team overall, because we weren't getting great leadership in our political environments, or in every country in the world. Even the political leaders were, were were staggeringly suffering, right and unsure what to do. And so people looked more to work for leadership than maybe they ever have in their lives. And so you had to rise to that occasion, right. And so Matt, and I, you know, did meditation together, we talked a lot, we supported each other. We just knew we had to keep growing our containers every day in order to be bigger, so that we could support our people and ourselves. Right. And so I think, I think that has been a time of, I also think we had to be honest with our people like I people hated the ambiguity and the fear and they wanted answers. And there really weren't any answers except to go through it together with confidence. Another thing maybe about being older, as I know, things get worse, and then things get better. And even the good times don't last forever. So get the juice out of every good time. But don't worry about the bad times as much because they won't last forever either. And I think something about that peaceful confidence was useful and helpful to our teams and grounding to our teams. So that was good, but I think being both empathetic, but not ruinously empathetic, right, like being being constructively direct about, hey, there's no answers here. Like we're all in this together, there's ambivalence and fear in the situation. And we're going to have to like get through it together. That's so not so naming it and not not trying to paper over it. And not trying to just wallow in the feelings either trying to be constructive, to move the business forward. And we have the joy and good fortune and purpose to be able to focus on our customers who again, were suffering just disproportionately to us. And I think that focus, let us take ourselves out of our own fear and give back and that gave us strength, right, all of us at the company. So. So anyway, I think it's a place where both empathy and being constructively direct together made a big difference on a macro level at the company.

Hylke Faber 34:49

I love that I that you are able to be constructively direct by saying we don't have the answer. And this is really hard. And then supporting each other, you and Matt, and I'm sure others on your leadership team and your colleagues supporting each other and then not caving into this oh, what's happening with me, but actually being a container for for, for all of all of you all of you. Can I am I am curious about like how practically that showed up? Like, can you give an example of how practically that show showed up? Because, you know, people might not be aware as much of what might have been a situation for people in Managua, or in other places, you know, the Philippines? What were some of the challenges people were facing there? That we I mean, we meaning I, I'm in the West, you know, I'm calling you from



Phoenix today that we might not be aware of, and then how did you, as remotely, as you as Renee, you as leadership team interact with that stain? How do you need to interact? And what do you learn from that?

Rene 36:04

Yeah, I think there was a real, there was a real balance, especially in the customer service and customer support world. And this was not unique to remotely, of having to balance taking care of your people, you know, in lockdown situations where they couldn't get into the office safely, anymore, and perhaps didn't have the infrastructure or support to be able to work from home and some of the countries that we operate our contact centers in. So that was kind of one thing, how do you balance taking care of your people and making sure they're safe, was still serving your customers who actually needed to send money back home, even more than before they were, they were continuing to work and their families needed medical help and support back home as well. So the it felt like the consequences of the remittance business were even higher in those days, right. And so, you know, there were times when we just couldn't serve our customers, we had to put a lot of work into our self help engines into, you know, other ways to serve our customers, while we could still protect our customers, our employees, so I think showing empathy to our employees, and then finding ways to get them back to work as soon because they wanted work at purpose as well. I think the world was quite different in Manila, like it's such a densely populated place, people living in very multi generational family situations. And so there was a lot of fear of even young people who work in our contact centers infecting their grandparents and parents and right so and their children, nobody yet understood, and we still don't know what the impactful impact on children is. So that was fear. I think in Managua was quite interesting. And I'm not an expert in the politics there. But they basically pretended like it wasn't happening. They, they, you know, denied that COVID was in their country at all. And that created this immense fear in our employees, because they knew it was but didn't have any place to go in their government wasn't helping them or giving them any guidance at all. And so we became even more of an anchor for people there and helping them with safety measures, and, you know, taking care of them as well, making sure we help them get vaccinated as soon as we could, like just all kinds of things that, you know, we leaned in to really help our employees more so. And then I think that that drove some very, you know, constructive conversations with our teams in the United States and other in London, and we're in Krakow, and we're at Cork, Ireland, as well, where, you know, we had the privilege of being more protected and safe and being able to work from home. And again, just, you know, being able to bring that privilege to support other people, both our own employees in other places, but especially our customers too.

Hylke Faber 38:48

Beautiful, beautiful, the word care just jumps off at me like that's one of the words that I associate with you like a deep care for the people that you work with. That transcends your personal interest, big time, that and that may have something to do with grace that coaches you too, to be that big, that that vast, so I'd like to switch the the conversation a little bit and talk a little bit about disconnectedness, this connectedness because, at least for me, it is quite easy to feel disconnected from myself from people around me from what is true. It's like something that I'm quite well trained in, you could say. And so I'm



curious about your experiences, or with with being disconnected. What is it like when you don't feel connected, when you feel disconnected? And how are you working with that? You've already said some things about that. Maybe you can expand a little bit.

Rene 39:55

Yeah, I think I mean, I think for me, it happens when I give in to fear are, you know, when I, it happens that happens all the time, right? You can give in to fear but for how long do you let yourself stay in, in a fearful state. That's, that's when I feel most disconnected. Or maybe when my container just isn't big enough, like I need a break, right? Like I'm not, I need to take care of myself as a part of, of being able to help be effective in my job and in my life. And so I think the combination of fear and fatigue, maybe, right, make me pull aside a bit. And so, and I, I always have to kind of get back to this joyful, I mean, the thing that helps me reconnect is just, well, a little bit of exercise is useful. I haven't been doing that as much as I need to. So I bought this aura ring. Now hopefully, it will help remind me where I'm not, I'm not getting enough movement, because movement helps me a lot like recenter, myself, breathing and just re centering on joyful purpose, like I, you know, I think another beautiful thing about aging, is, you just become like profoundly aware of how much time is left, like, I don't know how many more years, I'm going to, you know, be working at the pace that I work today. I don't know how many, hopefully many more years, I can keep my brain and my body active and alive, where it can continue to have impact and even more impact in the, in the world around me and and continue to grow. But you don't know, right? Like, I don't know, how much longer and so that gives me a sense of urgency to kind of get back, get back focused on, on my impact and being centered in joyful work that both makes me happy and brings impact and purpose more broadly. So

Hylke Faber 41:58

I just I don't know how many how many more years. And that's, of course true for all of us. Depend No, no matter on like what age we have. I think of a friend of ours who's in the in the current state of passing. And that really puts things in perspective. And what I love about what you're saying is that it helps you to feel more immediately connected to your purpose. Like let's make an impact. Now, let's not wait. Let's let's connect to what is really purposeful and joyful is what I'm hearing you saying is true for you. There's one practice you introduced me to in a meeting we had recently where we did this check in about gratitude. So talk a little bit about how gratitude is helping you to be connected. And what's the impact of that?

Rene 42:57

Yeah, I mean, I do think gratitude brings joy and recentering. Right. And so we we actually close all of our leadership team meetings weekly, with gratitude in a circle, either gratitude for the person, to your right, like what it is you're grateful for them or what you appreciate about them, gratitude about the team in general, like we'll have different kind of elements of gratitude, but it just makes you leave the meeting with such a different sense of peace and focus and an appreciation, feeling appreciated. And also, the beauty of appreciating others put you in a certain mindset, right? So I think that is really good practice that's helped us bond as a team, but also helps us leave our meetings able to give more to others, because we've been re energized by that appreciation and gratitude.



Hylke Faber 43:51

It's beautiful. So what happens when the meeting doesn't go well, and the person sitting through what you're right, that you're expressing gratitude for that said something or did something you're like, ah,

Rene 44:04

even more, even more so. Right? So in this in this period of are in this like balance of partnership and constructively direct and for us like it's, you know, customer centric. customer centricity is our most important value at the center of everything that we do. And a lot of what we spend our time on as a leadership team are the places where we're not serving our customers well enough, and how do we need to improve and grow and facing that head on which is hard and humbling, and difficult and difficult conversations happen all the time in our leadership team meetings, but again, with with empathy with appreciation for the other person and constructive out of truly trying to bring the truth to the forefront to help each other grow, and help us grow the business and help us serve our customers more. So every meeting has some hard topics it always does. And but we have come together. I mean, this is one of the best you've ended up with these super teams. And it doesn't happen very often in your life. But I mean, maybe four or five times in my life now I've been had the privilege of being a member of a super team. And I'm definitely, in that stage, that lucky lucky stage right now, where we're focusing very much on being a first team, which means we we, we don't necessarily we come together for the good of the company. And we put our own needs aside, and even the own needs of our own teams to advocate for them aside so that we're making decisions collectively to that best for the whole company. And that trust that you build that vulnerability and trust that you build with a leadership team, I think is helping us bring much better products and services and growth for our customers, and better employee experiences for our people, as well.

Hylke Faber 45:50

So connecting as a team basically, on in an energy of appreciation, and truthfulness is what I set heard you say and listening. Is is part of it. What else would you say has contributed to this team being a super team being a very deeply connected team, maybe an extension from the connectedness practices you've been doing for yourself?

Rene 46:19

Yeah, I mean, I think the biggest thing and maybe the biggest differentiator from any other teams I've been on and that we have consciously worked on, this is leading with vulnerability. So we don't come in touting the great things that we're doing in our own businesses, or the you know, selling the new program or something that we want to drive, we really come in with each other, treating the leadership team as a wisdom Council, we've been using some practices around the thinking environment, which is based on some work by Nancy Klein, that I highly recommend. It's really, really great work that has helped transform us over the last almost two years, we've been doing this work together. But we come in with, you know, treating this our leadership team as a wisdom council to say, here's the biggest problem, or I'm facing or problems I'm facing I this is what's keeping me up at night in my business, I don't think it's going very well. I don't entirely know how to solve it. It's my accountability to solve it. So I



I still am you still need to hold me accountable to fix problem x with our customer service are problem why with our employee experience, but these are big grappling problems that I would like your feedback on? I'd like to hear from each of you about what would you do in my shoes? or what have you seen done? In these kinds of situations? What advice would you give me, then it's my job to take that advice or not take it, you know, I've that's all interesting advice. And I don't have to follow it, I still am accountable to make the decisions. But I feel very much like I'm not hiding my problems. You know, as a leader, I'm coming in with what the problems are. And we collectively gather around each other to help solve big problems for the company together. And then we have equity and each other solutions, and support. It's very supportive, but also very challenging environment, right, in order for each of us to raise our game to be better. We all openly, you know, say what we think is going well in the other person's business or area of focus, and how we think it could be even better. And that that information and directness is so clumsy, right and hard, hard sometimes to hear. But very bonding, because when you lead with vulnerability, you know, you can rely on that team, right?

Hylke Faber 48:38

I could talk with you about this for an hour. This is just beautiful. So going a little deeper in this being in those leadership team meetings. How did you and your team develop that confidence to be vulnerable? I can imagine people holding back and saying, Well, I'll be on a scale from one to 10, about a two or three today with how my sense is your way up the scale in terms of vulnerability like, and then the wisdom Council being like the grace council for each other like, wow, this is this is very powerful. So say more about that.

Rene 49:16

Well, we we had a coach Jonathan Bowman perks who has been helping us through the thinking environments, I think the thinking environment gives you some elements for listening diversity, we there's an equality and there's 10 components of the thinking environment, I encourage you to just Google the thinking environment, you'll see the 10 of 10 components, but one is attention. The belief is by listening and giving people your full attention. The group will come up with ideas better, and building on each other. The group will come up with ideas better than any one individual can. And then by giving people an equal amount of time, so we often do these rounds that are what's going well. How could it be even better and in two minutes Everybody gets two minutes to kind of give their perspective. That way, you don't have a few people dominating or what we used to call ping pong, like, we'd have conversations that were just a couple of people going back and forth and having a discussion and everyone else sort of observing. And instead, now everyone participates in it brings our voice of diversity quality, you know, to the table, which has helped us come to much better, because the people who are quieter, often had the very best things to say, right? And that that whole listening, we do across the whole company and is not hierarchical, and is really good. But I do think what you said is right, I think you have to lead with someone has to start setting the level set of vulnerability. And I think Matt is really good at this. He's quite vulnerable and open, and he shares his development plan with the whole company. Like he shares his 360 feedback with the whole company, who does that. I mean, that is the ultimate vulnerability, right? And so he leads with that, and that gives us all the courage and I, I feel like I play a role there as well and making sure I'm leading with vulnerability, and then that starts providing



safety for other people to do it. And then the more we know, and trust each other, the deeper we can get in that. So yeah, it's conscious. It's conscious vulnerability. It's not an accident, right?

Hylke Faber 51:16

It's very conscious. It's like fierce. And I see it as a practice you've been doing with a team and with Jonathan for a while. And so it's really starting to bear fruit. You mentioned the word cleansing, cleansing to be that vulnerable, even it's hard, it can imagine like, like, Oh, I'm going to connect with others and with myself by sharing my problems. What I haven't figured out, can you can you say a bit more about how that is cleansing?

Rene 51:47

Well, I think you feel a shared burden, right? Like it doesn't Oh, feel like it's all on you. I also think you don't feel like you have to be performative. I think our culture so performative today, but maybe it always has been. And I just noticed that a bit more as I tried to move away from being performative and try to be authentic. I mean, I remember at Microsoft, and oh, my gosh, I mean, my time at Microsoft was amazing. And I'm so lucky for the time that I had there and grateful, and I gave a lot, and I got a lot, it was a good deal on both sides, I would say, I think the company got a lot from me, and I certainly grew tons there. But you know, we, we have things we hadn't we had, we had training sessions there around managing up, like how to manage that your perception to people above you like that is the opposite of what we're trying to do here where we don't want to manage up right there. And so there's something so freeing and cleansing about just being able to be yourself and not, not try to be performative, and truly get help, and then let the outcomes and results speak for themselves. Right. And maybe part of that is where I'm in my career, too. I know, I have a lot of privilege in my career, both where I am, you know, on the senior leadership team, but also just where I am being an older person than I just don't care about some of the extrinsic things as much as maybe I did when I was in my 30s. Right. And that has given me cleansing freedom, to be able to be more vulnerable and authentic and more outcome focused in my work, too.

Hylke Faber 53:30

So I'm, I'm sensing this a, as a, as a, as a, as a, as a theme in your journey, that you found this vulnerability going from extrinsic to intrinsic. And now also in the team that you're working on practicing that together. That cleansing of Lecrae. Well, here it is. Here it is. And, and let's sit with that together. As we're getting towards the final minutes of our time together. Rene, what would you like to say to people who are listening that may be thinking about? How do I develop more connectedness with myself or with my team and especially those people that might be in a situation where that might feel very, very daunting right

Rene 54:16

now? Yeah, I think I'm a we've been talking about, you know, the deeper the deeper connection, I think it can be, it can sound kind of woowoo like, what are you really doing right? You're just sitting around being vulnerable. But I do think it's this in the finding a way to integrate like, I would say in the early part of my career, the first 20 years of my career, I was 15 I was very head heavy, very, very head heavy,



right. I edited myself I fought a lot. I used a lot of my bandwidth on just being in my head and being in my own head. And I feel like I've found a way now to connect to my heart and my gut my instincts as my instincts get better or better, maybe, maybe my brain gets a little worse, but my instincts are getting better and better. And based on pattern recognition and, and just life experience, and so great being able to bring together my math brain and my, you know, science side of me with my heart, which is getting richer and fuller with through life with my gut, which is also getting much more tuned up. And those like finding ways to integrate those three things. So it's one package, and you, you learn to trust yourself a lot more not overthink. So I don't know if that's really advice, I think some of it is just like going through, you know, honestly, there not a lot of shortcuts. In my experience, like you have to just go through hard things and what the beauty of what's on the other side is remarkable. And once you do that a few times, you're a little less afraid to go through, it's still scary, but you're a little less afraid to go through because you know, there's some richness and learning that's on the other side of whatever challenge you're facing. Right.

Hylke Faber 56:06

My sense, Renee, is you've been going through quite a few times in your life. How does one go through maybe as a last question for conversation?

Rene 56:15

Yeah, I mean, I think you actually helped me, you, you taught me a lot about this in, in many situations where looking at problems and challenges as fertilizer, like true, and being able to say, take a step back from what's hard in a moment. And instead of getting all wrapped up in the motions of what's hard, just pull back and go, Okay, there's gonna be some learning here. Like, there's gonna be yes, this is hard. And yes, I'm privileged in a lot of ways to face whatever this thing is, that's hard. And how do I just I force myself to not go around it, there's all kinds of coping mechanisms that you can use that help you go around it, whether that's, you know, denial, distraction, drugs, like, there's just all kinds of things you can use to, to not have to go through. But when you do just go calf got to, like, look this thing in the eye and go through it. You there's a purity of walking through that fire, and it's very hard the first time and then it gets easier, because again, you know, it's not interminable it will, you will get through it. And on the other side is some learning some growth, some deeper connection with people who've also gone through that, that builds empathy. That's like real empathy, you know, genuine empathy. So the beauty of what's on site on the other side makes it almost impossible to start going around anymore. Like I kind of can't go around anymore. Right?

Hylke Faber 57:52

Thank you, the beauty of of going through, to connect to what's truly meaningful, purposeful, joyful, beautiful, there's something worthwhile on the other side, thank you for sharing that with us today, Renee, I really appreciate it your heart for sharing. As always, in our conversation today, I very much enjoyed it. There was so much and what you said a few highlights for me were getting to know grace, not only in you, but maybe in myself and all of us thinking about that person. That's a few years ahead. Wisdom, the power of vulnerability, the power of moving through and the power of this choice over and over off, like what am I coming from today said, coming from more fearful or more purposeful, loving



thoughts and trusting that and also I love that you said constructively direct and my mind went is now she's going to share about answers. And you said saying I don't know. And that being so powerful. So thank you for sharing that I can't thank you enough everybody for listening. Thank you so much for joining us and Ruth and unwavering. If you enjoyed this conversation and you'd like to go a little deeper. We have monthly zoom gatherings on LinkedIn, or just look for rooted and wavering community calls. Also, we have our next podcast you can subscribe to Rutan wavering podcast. The next podcast is on September 12. I believe I may have the date wrong. And we'll be speaking with Erica scarper the Chairman of the Board of NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. Thank you, everyone. Thank you, Renee, for listening. Thank you, everyone for listening. Thank you, Renee for sharing. And I appreciate so much everyone being here today. You've been listening to root and wavering where we help leaders to connect more deeply to their innate potential. I'm your host token Faber. See you next time. Thank you Thank you for joining us in today's episode of rooted and unwavering leadership conversations about courageous connectedness presented by the leadership development company, growth Leaders Network. To learn more, subscribe to this podcast, connect with growth Leaders Network and Hilco Faber on LinkedIn or read Hillcrest award winning book taming your crocodiles. Now take a moment and appreciate something that is great about you. Celebrate the gift that you are and enjoy connecting more deeply to your best self today. See you next time on rooted and unwavering

