

# S01 - E23 - Rooted & Unwavering - Hylke Faber & Adam Freed

**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 host 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**

Well, welcome to Aruba, unwavering broadcasting live from Phoenix radio x, where we help leaders connect more deeply to their innate potential. This is the 23rd episode, and I'm here today with Adam freed. How're you today, Adam?

**Adam Freed 00:59**

Hey, I'm great.

**Hylke Faber 01:00**

Good. Well, it's so good to see you. I feel honored, we're going to hear a lot more about Adam. Adam is a man of at least three lives as we'll find out in a moment. But before I'm gonna say anything about Adam, I want to say a little bit more about this podcast, as we always do at the beginning, because this podcast is called rooted and unwavering. Because the intention here is to help us to help each other to become a bit more real and anchored in their realness, whatever is happening in our lives. And what I noticed is that there's so many impressions, so many things that are happening every day in our lives, that are pulling us in different directions. And then when we're able to come back, you could say we come home to what is true about us what we really are, you could say the masks come off. There's a power that comes in lining, from your power, able to create things that are you could say more harmonious, more fun, more loving, kinder, creative, the things that I believe this world needs. Now I'm here today with Adam freed and Adam comes with us with tremendous heart. That's how I remember Adam is a person who is Uber talented, has so much heart and pours it out into everything that he does. And I'll give you a little bit of a sense of his background. By the way, he is in Washington DC right now, he'll tell you in a moment, why can I interrupt? Yeah, I

**Adam Freed 02:32**

mean, as we predicted exactly on time, I'm gonna I'm gonna sign a bill. I'm sorry. That's perfect at



**Hylke Faber 02:42**

some point, basic case in point where we're Adam is a husband and a father of two. And besides also being a manager, managing partner at GSB ventures. He comes to us with so much experience besides signing bills for room service, which apparently does very well. He was the CEO and board chair of teachers pay teacher's that was recently sold to AI Excel learning he helped grow the company to an annual reach of more than 75% of all K to 12 teachers in the US, Canada and Australia. Before that, he was the CEO of Etsy. I think we all know that that's the artisanal goods purveyor. And he also let international product management and international sales operations at Google before, during and after the IPO. So there's lots of stories there. Before getting into the technology and education world. He had a completely different career. Maybe it's very related. We'll hear about this. He was a TV reporter and anchor in English and, of course, Japanese. He's the recipient of the night fellowship and local and a local got a local TV Emmy for his work. He also has an undergrad degree from Harvard, in linguistics, and he has a master's degree from Yale Yale Law School and he is a Behera Fellow at the Aspen Institute. He speaks a few languages, actually 11 When I read that said, Did I read that correctly? Am I to jetlag? Is this right? It's 11 languages, including Spanish, Finnish, Turkish and Japanese. He doesn't only speak 11 languages also lived in 11, low costs, and in five countries around the world. He's a Brooklyn Knight. He serves in the Brooklyn children's museum on the board. And he lives with his husband, Ken, Ken, Ken, Ken, and their two children and their dog. Kiki. Kiki. Kiki. I want to hear all about all of this Adam. So before we try to make some sense out of this because I can't at the moment.

**Adam Freed 04:57**

You can't make sense out of my career. You can just have fun with it. Well, that

**Hylke Faber 05:01**

might be dissents, then. So I want to hear more, since we're talking here about connectedness tell us a little bit about connectedness in your life, like, what does that look like? What does Adam or has Adam been connecting to throughout his life?

**Adam Freed 05:19**

Well, that's starting with a small and easy question. I think connectedness is the struggle of every event of all of us every day, I certainly think that I wake up asking that question, and I don't think I ever get to a complete answer. I know that I know what matters to me in terms of connectedness today, it matters to me to stay connected. My husband, and I joke that we have to put our marriage first. Because when you have kids and you have a job, they will all take all your home. So you think about how do we connect to ourselves myself first, then to each other than with the kids to kind of create that unit. And then work is this support that sort of envelops us in all different ways. So I'm very much a workaholic and love my job. But I try to stay connected in that way. And then, you know, my job, and now particularly, is to invest in companies in the education and workforce space. And so I spend a lot of time talking with and trying to connect with founders and to understand not just what their vision is for their



company, and how they want to change the world. But what are their needs? Because I've certainly learned through my career that leadership is wonderful and dynamic. And people write books about it. And it's just hard as hell. It's just hard as hell. And so how I always say, you know, two founders that I'm working with, you know, how can I be the investor who you feel you can cry to, and you don't have to dance for? So how can we stay connected so that you have that sense of safety that even though I'm investing in your company, and or because I'm investing in your company, you feel that I'm the person you can come to and really just let it all hang out? So we can connect to one another around the company and around human needs, which are often the drivers have far more than the, you know, the the numbers alone and accompany. How's that for a long winded thought?

**Hylke Faber** 07:14

It starts starting to make sense to me, Adam, meaning your life, given what you've just said, I want to start with this piece, first piece that you mentioned about your layers, like almost like the Russian dolls that and starting with Adam, and then can add them and then can add oven and the kids and Kiki I'm sure. And then the support of the work. How do you and how have you learned to connect to yourself? I mean, when I was reviewing your resume, right, you've you've been in very hectic, high pressured, highly visible situations all the time. So how does Adam work with this staying connected to him in the midst of all that?

**Adam Freed** 08:04

I mean, I started out when I was younger, by not being connected to me, I think I started out by being the opposite of connected to me. I think that I looked for ways to avoid myself. And to connect to external symbols of structure and safety as a proxy for real connectedness. I, I worked hard to go to a top college, I worked hard to get into companies that had big name brands, you know, NHK, NBC, Google et Cie, I wanted to be associated with things that I could anchor to. And that provided me I think, an incredibly false sense of security. It probably created a lot of anxiety for me. And what I learned really, when I woke up around my 40th birthday, I know it's hard to imagine that I'm 55 but I am I'm kidding, I think 2828 Yes, yeah, listen, as my good friend Cheryl says, often she lost her husband at a young age. And she says, Listen, you, you have two options in life you can get older or not. And so I choose getting older, happily. But at about age 40 I looked up and said, you know, my I am not connected to self. I am connected to friends and family who I love, but I don't have a family of my own. And I think that I have organized things in a way that is not serving me and my humanity well. So I kind of quit everything I got in the car and I lived in California, I drove to New York with my dog and a guitar. I couldn't play in a cowboy hat I looked ridiculous in and I just said, you know, I need to you know if this is rooted and connected, I decided I needed to sort of uproot and disconnect with the intention of connecting to something deeper. And it was sort of in that in that time period that I actually met my my now husband who was a New Yorker, which is why I'm now happily living in Brooklyn, and, and started a journey toward greater connectedness, which has sometimes been things you'd expect, like yoga or meditation. But sometimes I think is really just about having a rubric, a decision making matrix that you can use in life, I learned in running companies that I needed to have a clear understanding of what the strategy was that we were trying to achieve, so that when I had to make the day to day decisions with



the company, I could make the right decisions, I can make ones that we're in service of something greater. And so what I tried to do, and I fail more than I succeed, is to do the same thing in my life. And so the one of those run of those rubrics is, you know, put on your oxygen mask before you put on anyone else's. And what does that require in terms of taking care of your health and your sleep, and you're having moments for self? How do I stay connected to Ken who is the CO anchor of the world that we are building together and that we share and he, he is the sun and the moon and the stars to me, I feel so lucky to have found true love 15 years now into this relationship. And then our kids who are amazing and wonderful and enlivening and I think it's very, very easy to connect to the kids needs without connecting via yourself, and then you're sort of half there for them all the time, instead of being fully there for them when they need you to be. So that's the attempt, and then work, you know, work has an energy of its own, it always finds its way in I never, you know. So that's that's the heuristic. That's the rubric.

**Hylke Faber 11:46**

It's a rubric. That's a rubric. Let's go back for a second to almost cowboy hat, Adam, leave, as you were about to jump into that car. Tell us a little bit about that transition, like, what was going on with Adam? And how did you make these decisions? I'm listening to it, because I'm sensing many of us go through those kinds of life changes. Or maybe we dream about them. And we don't dare to do them, or we're forced into them. Or something else that happens. I'm curious about what happened with you. Yeah,

**Adam Freed 12:25**

I mean, there's something called transformational learning theory, which is this idea that, you know, we really learn things when we have to, not when we want to, and that for all of our attempts to, to find our better selves, what really what really motivates us at some level is life giving us a swift kick in the rear. And in my case, what happened was, I was coming up on this big birthday, and I looked around, and I had been incredibly lucky by many external indicators. I had financial security coming out of Google, I had a house, I had a car, and I don't take any of those things for granted, because there are many people who are struggling day in and day out. So knowing that I had that luxury, I looked around and I said, you know, am I living? The values that I've dreamed, you know, what I've always said was important to me was love and family and feeling respected and deeply engaged. And I was working hard and being externally, you know, successful by some measures. But my cup was kind of feeling empty. And so I didn't sort of Chuck it all out the window, because I felt like I was doing something noble, I did it out of need. I did it out of pain.

**Hylke Faber 13:41**

Hmm. So was it painful? Or was it just a mental realization that said, Hmm, I want these things, love, belonging, my own family, all this stuff, and it's not happening. So decision point, let's go to New Yorkers, was it? Was it a different kind of learning experience for you?

**Adam Freed 14:06**



I think I started saying all the things about you know, I know I need to, I want to be in a relationship, I want it to be different. I want this, I want that I want the other and it was I want want one, I want lot one. And and I had this sort of look, I mean, you do this when you're running a business, too, you sort of look at the pattern. And you have to say like, is the strategy, right? I mean, when you're, when you're running a company, you say if my product isn't selling, is it the product that customers want? Am I Am I in the right market in the right way? And so I kind of applied that to myself, and I said, you know, the truth is, I don't even know who I am right now. I don't even know. I know. You know, there's a wonderful sort of to do lists rubric or two sort of methodology, right? This idea that every day you should have a list of things that are important and a list of things that are urgent, and that you should always He's focused on the important because the urgent will always come up at you. Right, they will pull at you. And I don't think I knew how to connect what was on my important list with anything in my day to day. And so all I could think to do was sort of chuck it out the window. Particularly because I had the ability financially to do that, which I don't think, you know, again, I don't take for granted I think was a good fortune.

**Hylke Faber** 15:25

Yes, yes, yes. So, so you made space, because you chucked it out of the window, you basically, literally changed places. What was the most was what was the draw to go to New York, from the beautiful west coast?

**Adam Freed** 15:41

Well, isn't that where everyone goes to get connected emotionally and spiritually? Why would you go to a mountain in Montana when you can go and sit in the middle of Soho in Manhattan? Yeah, I mean, I think I had friends there, excuse me. I was living in San Francisco, San Francisco was a foggy summer, I wanted to go someplace where the summer was hot. And I just, I just felt like a fun place to go hang out with friends. So I also knew that I was trying I needed connection to others. And so and I needed as well as connection to myself. So if I connected only to myself, thinking that I could control all the variables of my life, that that at that moment in time wasn't the right thing for me, I needed to be with people with friends who I'd known from college days in high school days, who would hold me accountable and be true to me. And

**Hylke Faber** 16:33

yes, yes. So how did more Adam realness start permeate? Start permeating Adam, because you were, at least as I understand it, very much your attention was grabbed by this external things, which I think for many people is understandable. Definitely something that I've lived. And it's familiar to me. So then you're in this space in between? How did parts of Adam the real Adam start to seep in? Or how did you acquaint yourself with who Adam is? I think it's such a, you know, a quest that so many of us have, like, how do we, how do we do this? How did you do that? Or how are you doing that?

**Adam Freed** 17:16



At this beautiful moment? I'm going to now respond to housekeeping in my room. Hi, Ken, do you mind coming back in about an hour? Thank you. Thank you so much. So I'm just trying to prove to you that I'm really in a hotel. So

**Hylke Faber 17:29**

I do I do want you to share in a moment why you're in this hotel? Surely you get there. I need to know a little bit more. How did? How did Adam get to the foreground? The real one?

**Adam Freed 17:41**

I mean, I think I think as I think as I said at the beginning, I think it's a it's a it's a daily struggle, I think, or daily challenge. If you want to be more American about it, or really American and call it a daily opportunity.

**Hylke Faber 17:55**

How would you say it in Japanese, Japanese culture?

**Adam Freed 18:00**

Oh, no, no, I'm not Japanese. Japanese culture is deep and long and beautiful. And I'm not sure I can get it right. But I just meant sort of that Americans are always trying to find this sort of positive La La spin on everything. Yeah. Yeah. And so I think, I think one of the things that happened was fairly soon after getting to New York, I fell in love. And I met my husband. And I remember after the first or second time we met, I was talking to my best friend, and I said, this is either going to work or I think I'm done. He was like, what, what does that mean? And I said, I just I, I'm not driving the bus for myself emotionally. He's, Ken is, he's engages me differently. He's smarter. He's, and so he's smarter, he's emotionally connected and engaging, he's intense. And he and we were in from the start, it was there was just a magic that I never expected to experience. But I think that could only emerge, probably because I had decided that I was going to embrace some vulnerability. And so he that really rocked my world to be like I'm not, it turns out that the control that I've been trying to manage in my life is just a just nonsense, just crap. And that and that what matters is waking up actually recognizing how little control you have and deciding what you want to do with that. And I think that was the beginning of a, of a deeper journey, of openness and vulnerability and of excitement and fear and pain and all those things.

**Hylke Faber 19:39**

Yeah. When when you start to let go of control and start letting go of control, there's this moment of vulnerability or moments of vulnerability, and that's where some of the realness lives sounds like from what you're saying, allowing that to happen. And it's not something you can script It just happened seems like it's an interesting dance and Candice has been in looks like has been, is continuing to help you with that to be that.

**Adam Freed 20:10**



Yeah, we absolutely. And you know, he also has a very high powered job. He runs Brooks Brothers, the clothing company. And we spend a lot of time sort of coming back to the safety of one another and saying, you know, there's a lot of madness in the world that we live in, and how do we sort of constantly re anchor and I think it's also about recognizing that you've never learned to feel safe or comfortable in that, that every day you wake up wanting to figure out what the work of the day is. And some days you do a good job. And some days you do a really crummy job and you carry it forward. And how do you in our case, then, I mean, you know, anyone who's joining us, virtually, no, who has kids, especially will know that there's very little I think that I could never have imagined the degree of vulnerability and fear and excitement all at once that I would experience by having kids and thinking I am solely responsible for creating safety in their world. And at the exact same time, I can't, if I hold that I have to hold them close enough that they always feel loved and safe and not so close that they can't be the individual and amazing humans that they are trying to become. And how do you find that balance? And that balance challenges me every day mean? Yeah.

**Hylke Faber** 21:24

That's so beautiful. Can you say a bit more about that? Like, how does that

**Adam Freed** 21:29

poor woman when I was one of my sons. So I'll tell you a couple of stories. So one was, again, I had always been a very kind of controlled person, I think partly because being gay. I learned to compartmentalize my life at a very young age, I felt different, I acted different, my desires clearly were different than what society wanted of me and I came out in 1993 1992 93. So it wasn't a foregone conclusion that I would have an easy life by any stretch of the imagination, it was a scary time, AIDS was still very scary. We didn't have as nearly as many rights as we do today, we still, by the way, have a lot of work to do. It's pride month right now, and a lot of work to do. But um, so I, we, I met my husband, we we got married, we had to have two wonderful kids. And after the kids were born, I think for the first month or so, after we got back to our apartment, I would go up on the roof every night at about three o'clock in the morning and cry. And I think I wasn't prepared for how much I had always wanted to be a parent, and how much pressure that created to to, to want to be up the parent that they needed me to be. And I and it was a it was a worried of, of of all the things that could happen in their world. And what was I going to do about the reality that I could only do everything I could to make them safe, but that there was this balance and, and the story I was then going to tell was that when one of our sons was about, I would say 18 months, 20 months old, something like that they're 11 years old today. One of them was trying to get a foot up on the couch. And he was like sort of doing this, you know, he's had his hands on the edge of the couch and his foot was trying to throw himself onto the couch. And I, I started to reach out to lift him over. And he he looked at me, like, and I interpreted this with an 18 month old who knows what he really meant. But he looked like you know, give me a shot to get this. And I thought right, I'm going to sit right here and make sure that if you fall, I'll catch you. But I'm not going to lift that leg or touch it for you do that. And then he did it took him however many tries and he curled himself under the couch and just beamed with joy and just joy just exploded out of his pores for that. And I think about that metaphor a lot in parenting and leading organizations. Well, that,



you know, we all want to be the one who gets our own leg up over onto that couch and propels ourselves where we're trying to go. And we all want to have somebody nearby that says Listen, we're gonna let you fail but not fall.

**Hylke Faber 24:27**

Thank you for sharing that. And I'm quite mesmerized actually. And just imagine what it felt like for your son. To have that moment of trying and trying and trying and have his dad watching being supported by that watchful eye and then being able to move from that place and find his balance that gorgeous is gorgeous to watch that and

**Adam Freed 24:56**

how do you counterpoint story by the way on the opposite side and also with my kids, one of our kids was also he, you know, that's those square. There's the there's a sort of pegboard things where there's like star, the star and the sun and the moon in the circle and I get them in the right. Yes, on the right way. Yes. So one of our kids would would take this circle and he would jam it into this, try to jam it into this square shaped hole. And he would do it once or twice, and then instead of stop stepping back, he would, he would bang it on the wrong place again, and clap for himself. And we were like, Yeah, that's the opposite. Like, we're not going to clap back until you find the right hole, because that's going to teach you a different lesson, too. So there's just all this stuff. I mean, kids are this magical way of learning and understanding the human condition and thinking about how to relate to one another.

**Hylke Faber 25:52**

Yeah, I totally get that. I totally get that. What was coming up for me was, so how do you provide that safe, yet challenging context? For the people that now are your investees, you know, as your ad GSV partners is that as DSP ventures, and you said, I want to be the person that you don't dance for, but you cry with, but at the same time, you're not a therapy group, you're investing. So how does that work? How do you bring that energy, maybe give an example if there's something that comes to mind

**Adam Freed 26:37**

about, I think what I say to CEOs again, and again, and again, is I've done this role, there are no easy days, there are exciting days, there are frustrating days, but there are no easy days. And let's just acknowledge that. And and we we are aligned in our goals and in our purpose, right our alignment is we want this company to achieve its mission. And we invest in for profit enterprises, obviously. So that part of that mission is to achieve value to create value. But we're also investing in a space where it's not just selling widgets, I mean, educational company, education companies are, they're hard. And you you're always holding a double bottom line. So and you're always weighing trade offs, if I should I hold true or to coerce. To achieve what I think will be a better outcome for the student. Should I succumb to pressure if I feel like it to sort of cut corners in places, those are rarely conversations that haven't happened overtly. But I want the entrepreneurs to know a couple of things all the time. One of them is if you're building something that is of quality, if you are delivering on the promise that you are making to your customers, your students, that is always going to be the better financial outcome with almost no





right where short term you can always you can always cut a corner and cheat something in it, but long term that will blow up on you again and again. And again. I want them to know that I know that I want them to know that every day is I know that every day is a i The other thing I'll say is, you know Cessna 172 is those like little airplanes that play in like the fixed wing over. So I say you know, I feel like running a company running a startup is like flying in a Cessna 172 Every day, right, there is no IFR. You don't know what the terrain is going to be like, you don't know what the weather is going to be like, you know, you're like, and so every day, you just have to be ready for anything. And and I want them to know that I'm there and that the grid, there are no great companies that have been built without hard times. There are no great learning experiences. Human beings have never learned anything important without going through some painful journey along the way. And we are in the space where we invest in people building companies that help people learn and grow. So there's going to be a lot of tension and all that. And I just want them to know that I know that. And let's talk about it.

**Hylke Faber 29:24**

We're getting almost to a break. I'm struck in this conversation with you, Adam about how clear you are even when you are not clear about listening to what's important, because you will let that guy you know, I'm imagining coming out as a gay person in the early 90s. You listened you could have not done that. At least some people do that. I know that some people do that. I did that for a while. And then you listened and you took the cowboy hat and the car to New York. You listened. And when I hear you talk about your kid It's and your husband, and how you work with investors. It strikes me you're very clear about what's important. Your rubric, your inner rubrics, that's already something I'm taking away from our conversation today. And then we're going to take a break in a moment, we're going to arrange a conversation with with Adam freed. He's the currently managing partner after many lives and concurrently living many lives. He's managing partner DSP ventures, you've been listening to root and unwavering I'm gonna come back in about 30 seconds.

**Presenter 30:32**

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 30:58**

So Adam, and listeners, welcome back, I'm struck by how you're choosing your fields of attention, what you give attention to. And just before we gotten to show you explain to me why you're in this hotel room in Washington, DC, so maybe say a little bit about that, and maybe relate a little bit of the conversation we just had before this podcast, about hope, and also challenge. And I'm curious to hear from you what you do with that, giving you a rubrics,

**Adam Freed 31:34**



putting the pedal to the metal. So I'm in DC, and we were invited to come down for a pride celebration at the White House, and we have a couple of friends who are still in the hotel that housekeeping seems to want to bring more times and so I'm going to just ignore that doorbell if you hear in the background. Let me just tell, excuse me, can you give us about an hour, please? Thank you. I promised them a late checkout.

**Hylke Faber 32:00**

Anyway, this makes it more real Adam, we now really know that you're not making this up, even though you ever

**Adam Freed 32:06**

before. It's very elaborate. It's a very elaborate ruse. So yeah, I am in DC, because we came to this pride celebration, there's a smoke condition in the area right now. So they postpone that. But we had a chance with my husband and kids to meet up with some representatives. And to get a bit of a tour of the Capitol, we got to go into the White House. So that was really exciting. And it was wonderful to reconnect to the sort of the hope and the possibility of democracy here. And also recognize that we have a lot of work to do as a society to get ourselves back in some kind of some kind of alignment, even in all the ways that we can disagree.

**Hylke Faber 32:47**

Yes, yes. And this struck by the smoke, which to me, my personal opinion, has something to do with us being out of alignment in society. Maybe wrong with that. So you're 55? How do you choose education? As one area that you seem to focus on? How do you choose to not get engaged with other things? I mean, you're such a down to man, Adam, I could see, you know, becoming president of the United States, if you wanted to my sense, looking at your life, you know, if you've had three, four or five lines, you could have probably another seven or eight. Before the time, your diet, your body set the size by by, you know, so So tell us about how you choose what you serve, or you put your attention on.

**Adam Freed 33:43**

I don't think that I'm great at leaning forward into those kinds of choices. I don't think that I'm a person who has ever chosen careers. I think that good. Can I say a funny the joke is, so we have adjoining rooms because we're with our kids, now they're doing the same thing in the next room. So I don't think that I'm a person who's really ever had a sense that I wanted to be x or y. But there's I think at my age now in stage of career, I can look back and realize that there are some things that have always been really important to me whether I knew it or not. And then the nice thing about getting older is you kind of can look backwards and say like, Can I make a pattern out of this set of choices that I've made along the way? And I think in my case, what's really been important is helping people lead more empowered lives. I started out as a reporter, I believed in the idea that journalism was meant to you know, afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted and felt like we were actually Afflicting the Afflicted and Comforting the Comfortable more than anything, and I really want to be part of that anymore. And I went back to grad school and tried to figure out What was next and got lucky and landed at Google,



and realized that information was going to flow differently in our society. And that that was exciting and created new possibilities. And then I, similarly at Etsy and joining Etsy thought, you know, here's here's your artisans who are making things and need a platform to sort of remove the middleman or meet the markets and, and it was good for people buying and good for people selling and, and then even teachers pay teacher's similarly is a marketplace where teachers who create the most incredible content, and if you remember, your best ever teacher, was always the one who pulled out that in my case, Mimeo sheet right now it's just a digital activity that they created themselves. And it didn't come out of some sort of textbook, usually, it was something that brought the learning to life, and to Teachers Pay Teachers was a place where all those great activities could be created from teacher to teacher, they can sell to one another, they can create curriculum for one another. Which is why 75 I think it's actually now something like 85% of American teachers use TPT every year also, because we said that if you want to sell on the platform, you have to make something available for free, too. We wanted to make sure that there was always this ability for everyone to get access, and that any any dollar spent was \$1. Well Spent, that that was the goal. So and I think similarly, just even even in venture capital, I mean, we're we're investing in companies that are trying to help people lead more empowered lives. And if you sort of thread together, this moment that we're in, I think, a huge amount of the societal anxiety that we're seeing everywhere. I mean, and I think it is pretty much everywhere. I mean, it's in the US, certainly. But I used to live in Turkey, I mean, Turkey has gone through its continues to go, there's another election, a lot of complexity. Most societies are going through some complexity right now, AI is suddenly simultaneously wonderful and scary and terrifying and possible. And so I think in this moment, we need we need people to feel like they can lean on education. And I don't buy that mean, necessarily the traditional systems of education that were designed to help, you know, farmers become literate, and become members of the Industrial Revolution 130 years ago, but rather, on demand, reasonably priced, highly effective, personalized approaches to learning and growing your skill set to keep evolving with this very fast changing world. And so I think that's the through line is, you know, people sort of leading more, or a lot.

**Hylke Faber 37:46**

Yes, I also hear that Adam, there's such a joy in finding your place of where to contribute. And education, at least in my experience has given me that, like all that, ah, that's, that's what I can do. That's how I fell into this work of, of coaching. And I was became a monk at some point. And I was looking at, the monk was sitting in the front and saying all these things like, yeah, I want that. I was distinct, like, oh, I want that. And then the rest of the world becomes very quiet around me. Again, it can be like raining, hailing bombs, not whatever. And of course, these things have an impact, but they make less of an impact. Because there's something in me that knows, I've got to sing this song, this is what I'm going to do and what I hear you and what you do with, with did with Teachers Pay Teachers and we do with GSV is that that education can help people find hope, because they find more about themselves and find the wherewithal to do it, and not be stuck in this. I mean, in the Netherlands, so I'm using a Dutch word bratwurst machine, like the sausage maker, becoming something that in our heart of hearts, we don't want to make become anyway. So it doesn't serve anymore. And many people know



that. So that's what I heard when I, I, I see you sort of leading into this this question. So you're thinking something, please share?

**Adam Freed** 39:24

No, I'm always thinking something. I think in some ways I was thinking. It's really I've watched so many of those inspirational graduation speeches and interviews with people talking about their careers in their lives and and I find them to be very energizing and terrifying at the same time. And what I was thinking was actually just when you're at a career, pivot moment or a moment of fear or worry or whatever. And I think we're all in many ways in those moments, you know, how can you just lean into something, just start doing something. And I, what I was thinking about was that the one thing I have felt very lucky about is that, you know, I, I easily fall into a pattern of, you know, construct all the variables in my mind and you know, like build a little world that makes sense to myself. You know, I when I was a little kid I would I invented little governments for myself and you know, Mike Squeezy koala bears like I had a million Bahraini, I was the country and we, you know, had very just justice system and everything worked. But that, in truth, that's not what life's about, and that it doesn't, you don't, you probably can't think your way into figuring out what your passion is going to be. Do your way into it? And and I think they talked to so many people who are just graduating college now and they're looking at what is the economy going to be what what you know, for 15 years, we told everybody go to go into computer science and be an engineer, and now suddenly, GPT may do the engineering for us. So what can you really lean into? And I think what you have to always lean into is I will always if I always feel a little bit scared and a little uncomfortable and a little excited and a lot curious. And I keep just trying stuff it will be okay.

**Hylke Faber** 41:32

Little bit scared. Scared. A little bit curious. A lot. A lot curious. You said a little bit scared. A lot of areas a lot curious. That's what I hear from your story also a lot curious, that sense of like, Yeah, I'm going to, I'm going to lean into this in this very ambivalent, I'm, in a sense, I'm thinking about your your car ride to New York, which was, in many ways, very uncertain. I think many people are feeling psychologically in that space right now. Like, or wanting to get into the car and not quite sure what I'm willing to do it because I'm not sure what's on the other side, or opening ourselves up to that. Now, what would you say to a person that is feeling the inner rumblings? Yeah, I'm doing something. They may be like, Adam, just before 40. And part of their voices are like, yeah, not I. I'm not ready. It's, it's too hard. It's too scary. I can I know this, but I don't know. I don't trust the unknown. I just don't trust it. And, and granted, Adam, you did have a huge benefit was, which was financial security, which many people don't have, right? That's right. So what would you say to especially those people? And this is a hard question, that don't have that financial security, and yet they have this inner rumblings of something has to change, what do you say to them?

**Adam Freed** 43:03

Well, first, you have to honor the feeling. You can't put it away, it's not going to go away, you're not going to talk yourself out of it. I think some of this is about understanding who you are as a person. So



some people are I call it hyper biased to action, or bias to hyper action or something. Yeah. Where, you know, as soon as they have a feeling that they have to do something with it. Yeah. That may not be the right answer, because and by the way, as an as an employer, you know, I'll see these resumes that are like, eight months, 12 months, 18 months, eight months, two years. And I think that person is they're dealing with difficulty or complexity or pain or fear, by popping and running. And that's not that's what the old saying, no matter where you go, there you are, they're just gonna keep finding themselves in the same conundrum again, and again and again. At the same time, there are people who are terrified of action, and will sit for an unnaturally long time in discomfort. So I think some of this is who you are just being really frank and honest, and figuring out also, what's possible. And, you know, because most people will not find themselves in a position where they've just come through an IPO or whatever else. Those decisions are hard and come with costs. And if you have kids at home, and if you have people relying on you, there are real costs to making changes. So one thing I encourage people to do is the other sort of thing, if two or three things at the same time, one thing I encourage people to do is because you need to do something with that feeling you have, you can't just have to put it into something. And so what I say to people is go through your calendar for the last month and notate every activity and your personal and your professional account. To notate every activity that brought energy to you notate every activity that drained energy from you. And see if you can figure out from that, what you can distill about where your leanings are. And, and people often will report back that that's a very helpful activity that you know, and then sit with someone you trust and say, here's what I'm discovering. Here's what I'm seeing. How do you how do you how do you see me? And then take the energy from the first the feeling and then an out, you know, doing a little bit of this kind of disassembling work thinking it through work? And then ask yourself what one variable in my life could I change right now? It's often not the right in, in my case, I chucked it all but but when you look at but when you look at it, there was very little at risk for me. Right? You know, I had financial security. I wasn't leaving kids in the lurch. I wasn't leaving his spouse in the lurch. I was. I was running into open space hoping to find things not not. Yeah. Not really giving anything up.

**Hylke Faber 46:18**

Yeah, yes, I hear you, I hear you. That little exercise, you suggest that have a look at your calendar and look at what gives you energy and what takes away and then do an assessment at the end that that really appeals to me. And I know this conversation is giving me energy so that I would put that on my calendars like Yeah, I like doing this this is this is good. And I also like that you are pulling us off the cliff of grandiosity, right, because we all want this big story. And that is going to be the next next Netflix series like Adam goes to New York. Now that's going to be my next series that I'm going to make no, just kidding, right? We always want we want these big things. And what you're saying is, look at one variable, look at one variable. So let me put this question to you. Right, since you gave us gave us the question, thinking about since we've been talking about connectedness, and if you were just doing in the back of your mind, this assessment, which I don't think is a static assessment, that dynamic assessment that we're always in, right, I think live is always tuning us to become more and more and more aligned to what's true about us. And I see this with some old people that like so radiant, like, you just want to just be in awe with them. This I just sometimes into tears when I see it all person is so



deeply aligned, so deeply carved by life into alignment, you know, so I think that sort of continuous, gentle or sometimes fierce assessment of like, huh, this way, this way, my love this way, this way, this way, this way. So what would be something in your life? That you say, Yeah, that might be a variable that I could adjust if I want to create even more alignment in my life, because good from what you've told me, Adam, like I say, Can because it seems like this, it's much so much unity between you guys. There's already so much there. But if there was something what would it be?

**Adam Freed 48:34**

Now, there's always something there's there's always something I mean, I spend most of my day trying, trying to figure out how to do better at everything. I mean, I think I mean, I feel it's a good question. I mean, there are many moments in my life where I think I could have told you, here's what I need to change, right. And my career is one of making those changes. Right now, I guess I asked the question in a slightly different way, because in the moment, I feel quite comfortable in my life. I asked myself how to make sure that that comfort doesn't become complacency. And I don't think I'm very predisposed to complacency. So it's probably not a really big worry. But you know, maybe I should get your advice on this. I mean, one of the things I've been thinking about is I love I'm not sure giving advice is the right thing I but I love listening to founders and friends and people on their journeys and trying to see if I can hear something that I can reflect back to them in a helpful way. And then I've started to see patterns over time. And I'm trying to figure out through my seat as an investor. And in this important space, how I can share more of the things that I've learned from these people I've gotten to work with. And so you know, maybe You can give me advice. But that's a place that I feel very uncomfortable doing social media stuff. And I never want to be pushy, I kind of want to be helpful. And so. So that's a place where I that's, that's a variable I've been thinking about a lot in my life. And I know, I know that I am a little too comfortable, I have more that I feel like I can and should offer back and I need to figure out how to do it.

**Hylke Faber 50:27**

It's a beautiful question. Well, the first thing that comes to mind is, to me sharing wisdom has a lot to do with asking questions. Because there's, like, in this age, you can Google basically, anything, everything, right? Even like, what is enlightenment, Google asked AI to tell you about how to get alignment in your, you know, write it, I don't think it's we're getting to an age or a season in humanity, where words are still very important. They carry energy, they help us do it, they help us uplift us. But the more subtle form of helping each other, which you point to when you talked about being vulnerable with your kids. And being in the space in between, it's being very intentional about creating a space of in between us where you can be in the question with the people that you are intending to help. Where there's no, not so much of an agenda? No, because, you know, yeah, that's, that's what I sense when you're, when when I hit listen to you, and I, I may be totally, I may be totally off I, for me, I have a personal desire. I would love leaders in the world, that we're talking a lot less. And that would be saying a lot more. I don't know yet. The challenge we are facing right now is so unknown. I have some ideas. Do you need to tell me about this? Well, let's let's let's go into a conversation about it. And then we'll, we'll figure it out. So



**Adam Freed 52:15**

how does, it feels like it's happening in our society that I think about a lot is, you know, we were talking about rubrics and heuristics at the beginning of this conversation. And I don't feel like I'm hearing voices say, here's our North Star. Yeah. You know, here's the North Star that that's not a fear based North Star. And it's not a excluding North Star. But it's one that says, you know, this is this is what a vision of the future could look like. And maybe there are just so many variables changing so quickly, nobody can really paint that picture in a way that feels credible. But I certainly yarn, yarn for some of that.

**Hylke Faber 52:56**

Yeah. That sounds like maybe part of the next variable that you can work with. Because if you have that yearning, you're absolutely going to be connected to other people that have that yearning as well. Thinking about that. And, and give voice to it, give voice to it. Towards the last few minutes of this conversation that flew by, in in Washington, DC for you in the north of the Netherlands, where I was born for, for me. What might be a closing reflection, as you think about this conversation, something you may want to say, or share or deep behind? Or question you want to ask? What is it that you would like to say?

**Adam Freed 53:44**

Well, I think the first thing I just want to say is thank you. I mean, this has been a wonderful time talking to you. It's always great talking to you. And it's it's felt like a bit of a talking meditation. I think if I'm walking away from this thinking, that you've pushed me in subtle and impressive ways, and I appreciate that, even as you were ostensibly letting me talk about what I might share about myself. So I want to think about that. I want to think about a bunch of things that came up here. I'm not sure that I have any to your point. The best advice is kind of the question you hear sent, you need to ask someone as opposed to the thing that you tell them. And so maybe I can throw it back to you and say what, what, what what have you found to be most help for people who are joining you in this in this podcast and video world. People look looking to apply things for their own life.

**Hylke Faber 54:40**

To me, the reason I show up every two weeks is because there's one question guides everything for me and that's what's most important to you. Right not what you think is most important, but being told is most important, like your emotion say is most important but deep down And gradually in your bones is most important. And we all know that and we're all carving ourselves there. So sitting with you today and am, I really got a lot about being clear about your inner rubric. And that being a dynamic and vulnerable place, it's very interesting for me to have that image of your son and the leg and the couch. And I learned something quite important today that from my fear, no, I want I want to know that the person is getting the leg up the couch, in the time that I have in mind. And the hardest lesson for me is to, to stay and honor the moment and honor where that person is. And that might be my goal, my greatest service, you know, when I think about investors crying on your shoulder, metaphorically or literally, you know, providing that space. And that's such a rare thing to come by, because my ego is always in a rush, or some kind of image I'm going to try to pursue and make happen.



**Adam Freed 56:10**

Yeah. So I think you're pushing me to think, you know, one of the things that I've been thinking about, and maybe you can give me advice, or if others who are listening and have had the patience to suffer me for an hour, or are willing to share it advice I would love to hear from is, you know, how can we I'm at a stage in my career where I get to be the one sitting on the couch a bit. I see young people around me in the companies that we invest in and in and not just young people, like lots of people I've, you know, 80 year old relatives who are forging new paths all the time. But how how? The question I asked myself, and what's important to me is, how can I create? How can I take the comfort and the safety that I've been so blessed to have in this moment? Acknowledge that it's probably fleeting, it's sad and bad things will certainly happen around any corner and I have to be ready for those. But, but But how can I keep building around myself? Community support and love that will help me in those moment? How can I much more importantly than that, in this moment, keep helping to create community for others and create that sense that, hey, there are those of us who have now made it far enough that we can sit on the couch, and we can look at you and say, feel free to fail, but I won't let you fall too far. Get in there trying to get that leg on the couch. If you take that if you take that metaphor out of context, it's just a terrible metaphor. But so I hope people listen to the whole story.

**Hylke Faber 57:36**

The image that came to me as I was thinking, what you're saying is being a very confident grandfather.

**Adam Freed 57:44**

No, you're really made me older.

**Hylke Faber 57:47**

I'm sorry, Adam, but there's gonna be a

**Adam Freed 57:51**

grandfather. Yeah, my kids are only 11. But metaphorically, I'm happy to be one.

**Hylke Faber 57:54**

So this, this, this, this sort of energy of, I'm going to be here. It's not about me. I've seen things that you've been through. I'm here to support you. I'll be here and push you. And yes, yes. Yes. Like,

**Adam Freed 58:13**

go ahead. Don't walk, you know, some kids will walk away from the knot and try to you know, not follow through. So get in there, try things change one variable at a time, ask yourself hard questions, push yourself. And at the same time, you know, make sure that you're in an environment where you're only going to fall so far.

**Hylke Faber 58:31**





It's great. Thank you, Adam. I could easily talk hours with you. So thank you so much for for being with us today. Adam. It was a true honor. And blessing. I feel I'm going to go into the weekend with this question about what is my rubric? And how do I dare to be vulnerable in leading into it, and letting some new insights emerge, and an act on them not knowing what's going to happen next. That was, that was something I'm gonna take away. So you'll be listening to a conversation with Adam freed, who is the managing partner of DSV ventures, which is a venture capital firm, has lived many lives, speaks 11 languages and has so much wisdom to share today about really leaning in. I hope that you if you listen to you, you heard something that has you become more grounded and more vulnerable in being grounded and sharing that and creating people creating a space around you. Next time we'll be here with a Dutch leader. Case boss monk who is the professor at University of bargaining and in the Netherlands, and he's also the leader, one of the leaders of vets, which is a water technology master's degree program in the north of the Netherlands. He also is a minister and his motto is being integral and radiate. So I'm looking forward to that conversation as well. If you liked this podcast, please subscribe to them at Apple or Spotify or wherever you find your podcasts or listen to us on LinkedIn. And of course, you can always connect to Adam on LinkedIn, and I'm free to LinkedIn or myself. And I think that's it for now. So let's close it for today. I hope you have a beautiful, beautiful rest of the day, wherever you are. And you've been listening to root and wavering, where we help leaders connect more deeply to their innate potential on your host local farmers. See you next time.

**Presenter 1:00:44**

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