

S01 - E51 - Rooted & Unwavering - Hylke Faber & Vignesh Markandan

Presenter 00:08

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 Hylke fauber, 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 00:48

Welcome to rooted and unwavering broadcasting live today from the US, even though that's not where my guest and I met, where we help leaders connect more deeply to their innate potential. I'm your host. Hylka Faber, and I'm here today with vignes. Markandon, vignes, how are you today? I'm doing wonderful. Thank you for the opportunity Good to be here. It's it's a true honor and blessing to sit here with you today. Vignes, I'm going to introduce in a moment, is a vice president at Hitachi, and we'll learn more about him in a second before we do that, I'd like to do as we always do in rooting and wavering to ground us as in this conversation why we're here and what the purpose is of of rooting and wavering. This podcast is called rooted and wavering, because we want to root into something, connect to something that is most important to us and as a human being and as a leader and as a team, it's so easy to get distracted by all the different things that show up on the movie screen of our minds. So it's about connecting more deeply to what's most important so that when we are done with our career or done with chapters of our lives, we can look back and saying, Yes, I was really in that that wasn't a autopilot or copy version of me, that was me, that was me, and I'm proud of it, as one mentor of mine says, How can you be have pride in your actions, pride in your heart, and peace in your heart, and pride in your actions in terms of what you do, and that's what this is about. How do you create that? And I find listening to people's stories very instrumental in reminding me and hopefully the listeners, to come back to who we really want to be, as Lincoln used to say, our better angels. How do we connect to our better angels? So vignes markand. We met in a hotel in Hyderabad, having breakfast, sitting next to each other, and I was immediately struck by vignes presence. And whenever that happens, my ears perk up and I'm thinking, I need to listen to this person. There's something about this person. And of course, I didn't know anything, and I now know a lot more about him. Vignes is a vice president at Hitachi digital services. He's the head of manufacturing and consumer goods industry solutions, and he's been working in this field for 25 years. He's been committed to steering people clients towards successful business outcomes. And he is very knowledgeable about discrete and process manufacturing. He loves unraveling complex business challenges. I asked him before this podcast what his name vignes Vignesh means, and actually simpler, similar to Ganesh, which is mean, which is a



symbol of removing, remover of obstacles. And we'll learn more about that part of him. He achieves this by strategically harnessing the power of cutting edge digital technologies, coupled with profound business and technical acumen, he has done so many things in digital transformation, innovative product development and service delivery that he's also recognized for that in various ways. He, besides this, is a father of two, he married his wife many years ago. Starting getting to know her when he was 18 years old. And one thing they have as a tradition in her, in their family, is that they go visit a new country every year. As Vignesh likes to say to me, there's so much to learn in this life. I want to make sure that we learn as much, and that the footsteps that I walk into may be inspiring for the people that follow. Vignesh, welcome. So glad that you're here today. But yes, first question, what can you tell us about. What you've learned in your life about connectedness.

Vignesh Markandan 05:05

Thank you for the opportunity Great to be here, and first of all, congratulations on the 51st episode of rooted and unwavering. I've looked at some of your previous podcast and I was just blown away by the kind of guests you have, and I'm just humbled to be here, following you know some of the great leaders that you had on the podcast. See, for me, connectedness is simply put, being mindful, being empathetic and being curious, to learn newer things at every stage of life, and that is how I find my connectedness to people around me, to the organization that where I work, to with my family and friends, and with The nature that we all often take for granted, right? So that's just how I would like to think of connectedness in my life. So

Hylke Faber 06:10

being mindful, empathetic and really curious about everything that is around you, your your organization, the people you work with, a nature wherever you find yourself. So vinesh, tell us a little bit about your life and leadership journey. Tell us where did you start, and how have you been learning about connectedness in your life and leadership throughout your life. Maybe you can tell us a few stories about what happened? Sure,

Vignesh Markandan 06:41

yeah. I was born in India, in an ancient city in the southern part of India. The city has a written history of 3000 plus years, dating back, you know, all the way to the Roman Empires and everything. It used to be the capital city of the kingdom that used to be Pandya Kingdom. The city's name is Madurai, and from there on, I had a very entrepreneurial father who tried many ventures in his life, trying to find success. And through him and through the exposure that I got, I could always see that every time he fails, he would come up, and then he'll try something new, and he never gave up, right? So that kind of instilled a sense of persistence and grit, that you can achieve anything. You just don't have to give up, right? You either succeed or learn. Kind of mindset, so kind of grew up in that kind of household with not a lot much, but, you know, we had enough to be happy, and they were able to give me good education, and from there on, I was able to, you know, see the world and learn on my own right, so that that foundation of a good family and good education, and the grit that my father and mother instilled me, instilled in me, has gone a long way, I would say, right so. I've lived in a few cities in India, you



know, and then I came to the US almost 20 plus years back, and I came here for working, and then I just continued staying here with my wife, and we have beautiful boys, two boys who are turning into, you know, one as a teenager, other is becoming a teenager very soon. And, you know, I can't complain. I'm just grateful for everything that's happened in my life so far.

Hylke Faber 08:40

I'm very curious about this, what seems to be a family trait that then was also put in your name, vices, remover, obstacles, the sense of succeed or fail. Tell us about an experience you've had where you may have, quote, unquote failed, and how did you work through that? And I'm asking that because failing in our culture in 2024 almost 25 is still taboo and so hard for us tell us about that. Sure,

Vignesh Markandan 09:13

yeah, you know, it's just more like, you know, succeed or learn, right? There is no failure. It's only failure to give up, right? So, kind of, kind of like that. So I would say, you know, the first set of struggles that I had where, with my I come from a long history of business people, right? In my family, everybody is in business, on their own, small business or bigger, you know, there is very few that have gone out of the business and started working in a corporate world. I was probably among the second or third in the family to do that, and it was mainly because most of our families, you know, they take off after the family business, right? Because of my father's struggle. With business, and he kind of felt that, you know, there wasn't much that I could help him by coming in and stepping in and doing it. So he wanted me to find my own way. Same with my mother, they were saying, you know, you can choose your own way. You know, you could be part of this business, or you could choose to do something. And right around that time is when I first got introduced to computers. Because XT machine, XD machine, XD machine. I was probably in my 10th grade. My school bought a computer, and I had an opportunity to operate it, and that's it. I was fucked.

Hylke Faber 10:39

For those who don't, for us, don't who don't know 10th grade is, how old are you? Then?

Vignesh Markandan 10:43

What? 15 years 15

Hylke Faber 10:44

years old. Okay, yeah, continue.

Vignesh Markandan 10:46

So then I, I was hooked on to computers. I was just curious. It just intrigued me into, you know, learning more and and that's how this whole journey of computer science started for me, and I did my computer science engineering, that the challenge that I'm talking about is figuring out, what do you want, right? Because when all I grew up in a big family like my my father has six siblings, my mother has six siblings, and I grew up with like 20 cousins, and everybody was taking off after the family business, and



the challenge was to figure out what I wanted to do, right. And that revelation happened for me in school, luckily, because of being exposed to computer and being able to operate it, and that clarity that this is what I want to do for rest of my life, for some reason happened at that point in time, right? I want to be associated with anything that is technology, and I want to explore more what this could do for me and everybody around me. And that was the first challenge that I had to overcome and decide. And after that, then the next challenge was I was trying to get into some ivy leagues within what we call as India. I couldn't, because I was in a small town, and there was not enough teachers who could tell me what, how to prepare for it, and I prepared on my own. I did, finally, okay, but then I was offered engineering courses in chemical and others because I didn't have enough score to get computer science. Okay, okay, so that put me in a bad, uh, spot, because I wanted to go to these colleges, but then I couldn't. So then, but then I didn't want to compromise on what I wanted to do in life. So I discussed with my parents, and we decided by go to a private engineering school where I could study computer science engineering, and that's what I decided to what I decided to do, so you

Hylke Faber 12:44

stay true to what you wanted exactly. Yeah.

Vignesh Markandan 12:47

And I told him that if those days, the first year of engineering was generic to everybody, and your discipline was assigned in the second year, right back then, when I was going to engineering school, and I told my father that if they do not assign computer science for me, I'm not going to continue Right, right? But luckily, you know, they saw me fit to take the Computer Science Engineering, and then I was able to finish it, and then the rest is history. So yeah, essentially challenges, in terms of, it's not major failures, but it is more of setbacks that you are learning from and still staying true to what you want to achieve. I

Hylke Faber 13:24

see, I see, technology is so important in this for you, like technology, you were 15, and then this XT machine showed up, and you're like, I want this. Okay, now, 20 odd years later, maybe almost 30 or odd years later, I'm not quite sure you're still doing that. You're still dedicated to it. So what about technology? Floats your boat? What do you like about technology so much?

Vignesh Markandan 13:57

It's the nature of transformation it can bring about, right? Can you can take any field and technology can just change the paradigm of how we do things. And I usually like to watch a lot of nature documentaries and physicist interviews just to understand how the world operates, how what drives everybody, right? It could be from simple Attenborough videos on wildlife, or it could be quantum physics interviews or anything in between, right? I'll tell you an example, and I was watching this Attenborough documentary, and in which he is demonstrating how bees and flowers attract each other. Is demonstrating live flower is emitting a small electrical charge, which, when connected to a speaker, you can hear it an audible frequency. B, and it is negatively charged, and the B, on the other hand, is



positively charged, and opposites attract, and this is something that he's showing live in the video with the speaker on, and the B is attracted to the flower. And when the B sits on the flower, immediately the pole and transfer happens because of charge differentiation, right, positive to negative, and then the noise, the frequency on the plant, just turns off, because now the plant is telling the world that it has no more nectar to offer, right? Just imagine, right. Where will you learn about this without technology. So now take this one step forward if you want to use this in agriculture. How could you use this? The first thing that comes to my mind is, how can you use this to deter pests and only attract pollinators without the use of chemicals, right? We are living in a world with more than 8 billion people. The current way of doing agriculture probably may not sustain the population of 2050 you need newer ways to produce food for more people, but in a very, very sustainable way. Take this concept of how a flower or a plant is using electrical charge to attract pollinator. Can you turn this into something that will deter pests coming onto the plant so your yield is better, and you can still save the pollinators that are in decline, right? And this is the kind of technology I'm talking about. This is not just computer science, but this is application of technology to real life problems that we have, and the ability to do this, this is still a vision, right? It is not reality yet, but now we understand this mechanism of how a pollinator gets attracted to a flower and everything with the help of technology. So how can you now expand this beyond right? So

Hylke Faber 17:10

what I'm hearing is a using a higher intelligence. Technology is a higher intelligence which allows us to make better choices to serve us, to take care of what we need to take care of is what I'm hearing. You see, that's why technology is so great, at least how I relate to what you're saying absolutely,

Vignesh Markandan 17:30

you know, the way I see it is what you're calling us higher intelligence is just how things happen. We are oblivious to it so it looks like higher intelligence, right? The connectedness comes from this just sheer understanding of how things work in nature allows you to design technology for future so you are more one with nature and sustainable in doing whatever you doing, right? Thereby you are elevating your intelligence or to the level of birds. You know, a Robin, bird in England, uses quantum physics to find direction. And this is again, a video that you can see how the bird has a certain properties within its eyes, and it aligns to the magnetic field of Earth, and it uses that as guidance to travel right. It is just sheer understanding, and that is what we need more to elevate our learning and be able to incorporate it in our way of life, right? So that's what

Hylke Faber 18:46

I'm hearing. Is what I'm hearing vinyas is an opening your eyes to the intelligence that's all around us, exactly, and become be really good students of it. Talk about your third pillar of connectedness, mindfulness, empathy and curiosity, this deep sense of being a student to what's happening in life around us, being a really good student, becoming one with it, and then turning it around into a gift that then can be used going forward. So vignes, I know you're working at Hitachi, and I know you're doing a lot of social innovation there. Can you tell us a bit more about how you got there in the first place, and what it is that excites you about working there at the moment?



Vignesh Markandan 19:35

Absolutely. Yeah. So I've spent more than you know, 23 years in my previous organization doing technology transformation, and it gave me immense opportunity to learn, and that was a great organization, one of the only organization where 67% of the stock of that company is owned by a philanthropic organization. It so anytime that organization makes \$1.67 directly goes to, you know, educating underprivileged kids around the world. Right? At that point in time, they were educating almost 3.5 million kids, right? So it instilled the great sense of purpose, right? Even though I was an employee, I'm a salaried employee. I'm not an entrepreneur, I'm not creating jobs. But still, I could do something through the organization, whatever little I could, right? And I was there for 23 years, and then the opportunity at Hitachi came across that through a friend who was at Hitachi. And I had not known Hitachi in the technology space, even though I was familiar with the brand because of many other products. And when it was explained to me the kind of work they do, especially the social innovation aspect of it, it just blew my mind, right? Because here is an organization that was taking something that I'm passionate about, technology and then applying it to solve the problems of the world by observing learning and applying it to the social issues that we are facing. Right? So there is a beautiful saying in Tamil written about 2500 2600 years back, right, learn as much as you can thoroughly right after you learn, apply it as much as you can in your walk of life. It says karka, kasadara, cuttravei, cutrapin, nirka, other people. So it's a true line, you know, saying that goes back, but it just stands true even today, and that is what Hitachi is doing, everything that they have, the scientists and the R and D people that they have every day they wake up to solve some problems that are real life. Solve real life issues that are there, right? Take it the rail business, right? We all need mass transportation like yesterday, so that we are not less reliant on individual transportation, we are be able to take advantage of less polluting means of transportation and so on. And Hitachi has been pioneer for many, many generations in that technology. And for the last few years, you can see the whole electrification of you know, vehicles and lot of other electrifications happening, right? Hitachi is one of the leading companies that manufactures and electrical grid automation equipments, be it for distribution, transmission and all of those things. And how do you, you know, effectively use software and technology to run them at the same time, use them to monitor your carbon footprint, right? And Hitachi, as an organization talking about carbon footprint, has an aggressive goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2030 as an independent organization, as an ecosystem company, which means that our suppliers, vendors and everybody else we work with, we want to be carbon neutral by 2050 and the company that I work for, Hitachi digital services, has gone one step forward, because we do not produce a lot of manufacturing gears and all that. It is more people ideas and coming to bringing them to reality. We want to be net zero, which means that we will invest in carbon capture, and, you know, those kind of things, right? So every Hitachi company is looking at it as a very responsible journey that we are able to give back to the society. I think a simple example 10 years back, Penske Corporation, which is about 30 miles from where I live, came to Hitachi with the problem. I mean, they came to the industry with the problem, saying, Hey, we have all these trucks, 390,000 trucks. They fail on the side of the road hauling produce or goods, and eventually they go waste because you cannot repair the truck on time. And then, you know, everything that they are hauling goes waste, or it is lack of you



know, loss of productivity from their 10 years back, Hitachi worked with Penske in devising predictive maintenance for their vehicles. So today, several hours before a problem happens on the truck, we are able to predict using AI. This is even before, you know, 2014 the even before AI was a buzzword, Hitachi was working with Penske in creating an AI model that would predict failures. And now these trucks have enough head. Up before they fail, and they are able to read out it, get it fixed, and put them back on the road, so you're not losing, you know, the produce or anything that you're carrying, and that, in turn, reduces the carbon footprint of the company that is hauling those goods, right? So that's the simple kind of thing, where can technology apply to, you know, issues that matter most and are able to solve, right? Other example, I would say, is UK Government, UK Parliament commissioned a study of electrification. So these are all social impact issues that I'm talking about. How will electrification impact the grids of UK, right? This is a program called as optimize prime and Hitachi, along with Uber and a few other companies, has worked on the phase one and has come up with certain outcomes of what a country needs to do to become truly electrified and be able to, you know, embark on the journey, or accelerate the journey right towards less carbon emission from cars and everything. So these are public use cases. Anybody can go on YouTube function Penske and Hitachi, and they will get the Penske words to listen to how Hitachi helped them. Same thing with optimized prime. There is a public video. You can see the entire study, the outcomes and everything. So that is what I mean when I talk about social innovation. I

Hylke Faber 26:27

think you're becoming the atom bureau of technology. You know, the way you're speaking about this. So, and I love what you're saying. There's two things that that want to dive into a little bit more. Is this the saying that you said in Tamil, which I will not try to replicate in Tamil, because I not able to do that today. Learn as much as you can in your life and apply as much as you can apply of that, as much as you can

Vignesh Markandan 26:51

live by it and apply that,

Hylke Faber 26:52

apply it Yeah, and apply it right, and apply it Yes. And then the second thing is that this commitment of of of your company, Hitachi, and then Hitachi services to truly be social innovator, innovators, and truly commit to, in case of Hitachi services, a net zero goal by 20. You said, 2030

Vignesh Markandan 27:17

sorry, neutral by 2030 the individual company, and then carbon neutral by 2050 as a collective organization. Yes,

Hylke Faber 27:25

yes, yes. First on this, learn as much as you can now. You are a busy man, I presume, the father of two. You're married. You have a lot of people that you work with that you're responsible for, your vice



president and head of an important part of the business. How do you keep yourself in a learning frame and not fall back in well, we'll get through this day. You know, do what I need to do. How do you do that?

Vignesh Markandan 28:02

I surround myself with smarter people. I always learn from them, right? I'm not a know it all, so I'm always, I have my opinions, but then I'm always willing to listen to others, right? Because others have done it, others have lived by it, and there is this other way to look at it, right? If you have to commit all the mistakes yourself to learn, we will, we will only learn so much, right? So I have a very good team of very smart people who are very good at what they do, and they instill a lot of knowledge in me, right? And I'm always like I said, the curiosity of part of me is always there, and I'm always talking to people who are very highly qualified. These are PhDs in their field, and that is another amazing thing. The amount of PhDs that I run into at Hitachi is my mind blowing. I went into a Detroit office and I ran into the guy who does you know, who designed fuel injection for Indy car racing engines, and he holds 53 patents, and then he is just like any other average Joe, and he talks to you like a normal person, and that is what humbles you. And people who have achieved so much more are so humble and are willing to engage you and impart their knowledge to you. It's very easy to learn, right? The environment that Hitachi creates is amazing, and the people that work for me and I work for are much smarter than I am, and I learn from them every single day. It's just keeping the mind open and curious. That's all I would say.

Hylke Faber 29:38

I love that you're saying it's just like that, because I think you're probably one of those people that is unconsciously competent in staying as a student throughout your life. That I see this in your travels. I see this in what you said about your dad, saying, you know, you need to learn from obstacles. I see this in this. Saying this time of time you'll saying you just said from 25 years, 500 years, 25 2500 years ago. I need to learn how to speak again. And the other question that I want to get into after the break with you is, how, then, does social innovation work, and how does that work in a corporate environment, I love that the previous company was 67% going to a non profit philanthropic, philanthropic organization. How does that social innovation work in reality? How does the company, and how do you stay connected to that in a in a corporate setting? How do you do that? We're going to look at that question after the break. We're going to take a short break in a moment, I'm talking to vignes markand, who is a vice president in Hitachi, and as we're discovering, a masterful student of life, observing learning and applying as much of his learning every day. Thank you for listening. I'll see you after the break.

Presenter 31:11

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 31:36

And thank you. Welcome back to rooted and unwavering episodes. 51 I'm talking to vignesh markandan about being a student of life and learning as much as we can and then applying as much as we can in the short little time that we're here on this earth. And vignesh is currently spending that with Hitachi, and we talked about what it's like to socially innovate. One of the things that already struck me from this conversation how how learning is really second nature for you, and I find inspiring, because I know it inspires in me, is like, Oh yeah, what am I not opening my my eyes to? What is there for me to learn today? So thank you for that. So social innovation in a corporate setting. How do you stay true to that? And I'm saying that because today, there's so much happening where being socially conscious and green is almost becoming like a brand or something that people market more than they actually do. How do you make sure, in your work, that, in a corporate setting, that you actually work on that and stay true to that?

Vignesh Markandan 32:49

So, you know, Hitachi is vision, and vision are very simple, right? They want to be harmony, and we want to bring harmony. We want to be, you know, leading with pioneering spirit. But then the vision is to create original technology that has impact on society. It has been for the 110 years existence of Hitachi, right? And that fascinates me, because when you are actually dedicating all the resources of a large organization like Hitachi into solving social issues, to bring harmony, harmony to life everywhere, right? It's just inspires anybody. I would say there's nothing more the moment I saw you know what their mission statement was. It is not a lot of corporate mumbo jumbo. It was very simple,

Hylke Faber 33:47

repeat admission statement. I think it's so powerful repeat it so,

Vignesh Markandan 33:51

you know, it's basically, you know, live, what we call as WA, which is harmony, and then they call it as Makoto, which is sincerity, and then we say, kaitako, SHA I'm sorry, I'm butchering Japanese, but which is basically a pioneering spirit, right? So you're working towards harmony with all the sincerity, and you're tapping into your pioneer, pioneering spirit, to come up with new technologies, original technologies, that are going to solve, you know, society problems. So

Hylke Faber 34:28

harmony, sincerity and pioneering spirit. That's a very unusual mission statement. So that's

Vignesh Markandan 34:37

a social mission statement, right, right? You know you want to have a living. You want to be sincere, and then you want to be approaching these, you know, achieve these two through your pioneering spirit. That is where the obstacles, whatever obstacle is thrown, you are removing through your pioneering spirit. So I understand



Hylke Faber 34:55

that now, many of those corporate mission statements sound great, and. Then we go back to the day to day. So how does that maybe give us an example of how harmony, sincerity and pioneering spirit infuse what you do day to day, or what people do day to day. So

Vignesh Markandan 35:14

very, very you know, simply put, whatever we do, Hitachi says we have to take customer centricity at the core of it, right? Like Gandhi said, we live the customer is the most important person in your life if you are a business. So here we are. We take that as the core. We try to create harmony in customer satisfaction, which means that we are sincerely working towards achieving the customer satisfaction and the pioneering spirit is the technology and all the other tools that we bring to bear to solve that problem. Nothing is going to be without issues. There will be issues. But how do you maintain the harmony when there are issues? How do you sincerely approach it to solve those issues with all the tools and technologies that are at your disposal. It could be people process technology, anything that you can use, right? So that is how we look at it, right. So, for example, there is a deforestation and a lot of deforestation happening, right? So you want to be aware of when deforestation, illegal deforestation is happening. It's not easy, if you are, if you think about Amazon forest or any rainforest, it's not easy to have Patrol Unit going through and figuring out if there is illegal, you know, that is where it actually devised, in, you know, ingenious technology, using satellites, and then they deployed mics that would pick up sound logging sounds from those deep forests. And you're able to, now, you know, correlate those sensor technologies from sound and other, you know, motion sensors and everything from the forest. It really relate using satellites. And then you're now knowing where actually legal deforestation is happening. But I think that one step further right, this was a problem that was solved for deforestation right now apply it in the context of a corporate world, a paper company that is growing lumber for logging so they can make paper, right? So what usually happens is that the fertilizer is usually applied equally across the field for all the lumber that they're growing, whether it has good growth, bad growth or mediocre growth, a measure is not done. So now use this kind of satellite technology, and now you can apply it to a lumber company that is making lumber for paper industry or construction industry or whatever. So now you can monitor the growth, and you only apply fertilizer where it is needed. That again reduces your consumption of chemicals that you're using as fertilizer, and that again results back into your sustainable carbon reduction overall, right? So this is just a simple way of looking at, you know, how do you create harmony? Which is basically, if harmony is not DeForest, illegal deforestation, how do you apply, apply it sincerely, and how are you using all the other technologies, using your pioneering spirit ingenuity to come up with something that you are able to solve this problem.

Hylke Faber 38:27

I can understand why you joined this company. It starts to become very clear to me that this it's so beautiful, harmony, sincerity, pioneering spirit. Can you tell us about how this works at work within, like how you operate in connected, as we often talk about, the I, the we, and the it, the self, our relationships and the outcomes, the it. And, you know, we talk a lot about, we've talked a lot about the outcomes, which are fantastic, being able to work with, you know, detecting deforestation, or being



more intelligent, how we grow for for paper forest, how we do this, right? All that. It's wonderful on a day to day thinking about team interactions. You know, humans, we have conflicts with each others. We We have priorities that conflict. We sometimes don't know what the solution is. We face budget pressures. How do you apply those principles? How does How do you stay connected to them, to them of harmony, sincerity and pioneering spirit? How do you do that at work?

Vignesh Markandan 39:36

Wonderful. So my job is very easy when it comes to that, right? Because I'm choosing the smart people to solve a problem, right? I'm telling them here is the common objective that we want to achieve, right? And everybody comes with a certain skill set. That is why they are at Hitachi, right? Because that is a vetting process. We onboard people. They are coming with certain skill sets the way we want to. Cut it is, how do we enable them? What can I do to make them better from where they are, right? That's the simpler problem. I do not need to micromanage their activities, but I can tell them, because these are smart people, I can tell them, here is the objective. Here is the means by which we need to achieve this objective. Once you have that clarity in common purpose or goal, it could be between teams, between one team or multiple team members that solves a lot of problem communication, right? That's the core to this. And when conflicts arise, right, we need to objectively help the team to resolve it. There is no emotion, there is no personal favors to call, because if you stay sincere to the common purpose that you have all agreed upon, right? So then it becomes easier to solve as a team, because everybody on the team, if they agree that this is the common purpose we are working towards, then when a problem arises, and if the question is put forward, is your action, is this team's action going to help achieve that, or are we going to go one step backward

Hylke Faber 41:16

so you stay sincerely committed To the purpose, yes, yeah, okay, I got it. And

Vignesh Markandan 41:23

then enabling the team, or, you know, somebody may have certain skill sets, but then they may be asked to do something that is not easy for them to do as part of the project, because you cannot have experts all the time identified for specific task, right? Yeah. So that is where the enablement of the team comes into picture, supporting them, especially when you are going through a lot of trouble,

Hylke Faber 41:49

right? And how do you support them? How do you do that? Can you give an

Vignesh Markandan 41:52

example resources they are needing, right? Even it means depleted profitability because you are trying to meet a common goal, which could be customer satisfaction through delivering a certain technology project at that time, even if it means depleted profitability, enabling them with certain resources to achieve that goal. And that is how customers want to work with you, again, not because you did a clean



project start to end, but because you are going above and beyond when it was in trouble, to help them, help your team support it.

Hylke Faber 42:32

This is you give an example of that vignette. Give an example. Yeah, we were

Vignesh Markandan 42:36

doing a project for a large chemical company. This is several years back, almost 10 years back, and we could not deliver what was promised. Right? The pressure was on the team that was on the ground doing the simplest thing would have been to remove the team, bring in a new team to redo everything. But instead, my previous organization and the leaders there enabled me to help the team to supplement the skill gap that they had to be able to successfully deliver what it was right. We finished it, and then later we were having a Christmas dinner, and the director of that company walks up to me and he says, I thought you were going to fire these X, Y, Z individuals because the project failed. And if you had done that, we would have basically canceled our partnership, because they saw how hard these people were working. But when you actually came around and added more people. We thought, maybe you know, you're trying to replace these people. But then when I realized that these guys are coming in to support them, and then they delivered it. My respect for you as a leader and your team and the organization that supports you went multi fold higher, right? So that is where I think it's easy to say, because when you are in trouble, standing up and saying the you know, the problem is with me. That's the leader's job. Rather than pointing fingers that this is your problem, your problem. You can talk to them one on one, you know, maybe you could have done it better this way. Or you can ask them, what could you What do you think you could have done better,

Hylke Faber 44:20

yeah, yeah, yeah. I it's always, as you said, always easy to think, you know, 2020 hindsight, that worked out well, Christmas party. That was great to hear that. I'm sure that in the moment of the project failing, in the moment it wasn't a Christmas party for you. So tell us the process that you went through, because you make it sound so simple. I added some new resources, and we took, I infer, took a little hit on profitability, and the client was happy, and off we go. But that's not an easy set of decisions there. So how what? Tell us about what you went through, the trade offs. You had to make, and how you came to that decision. Because that doesn't seem like an easy decision to me. It wasn't.

Vignesh Markandan 45:04

It wasn't because, you know what, what we had to do was we had to take stock of where we had to be, where we are. That was just based on the paperwork that we had right. But then the client had a different view. The English in the paper did not mean much to the client, because now they are saying, No, this is what I meant when I said this. You know, I was expecting you to be here, whereas you are here. So there is a huge gap here, right? So we basically sat down with the client and our team saying, why did we end up here? We first understood what the problem was, because the common purpose, or the common goal, was misunderstood between us and the client, and we were going in, you know, it's



like a railroad not meeting each other, right? First thing to solve was, yeah, how do I bring it parallel again, right? So that it can connect from multiple directions. And that is the first thing we had, you know, is the client willing to listen to what you have as a problem and are willing to give you another opportunity, right? And why do you believe that you can do this better this time, right? So step is finding the differences that cause the issue, and then if there are skill gaps or resource gaps, identifying them and laying it all out to the client, saying, okay, here is the problem, here is how we can solve it, and here is what it impact it has on your timeline or your budget. And here is the impact that we can consume from a budget standpoint. But this timeline is something that we need your concurrence, because we I cannot determine when they want to go, you know, live or go take them product to market. So all of those things, listing it out, and then identifying individuals who are leading those gap areas, and what do they lack? How do I help them? It's a process that went on for, you know, two to three weeks, and then we had a plan laid out, saying, here is how we are going to help. Here is the objective mismatch. Here is how we are going to bring it back on track. Here are the people that will help you bring it back on track. Here are the resources that they will have this time around that they did not have last time, that will help them bring it back on track. And here is the overall impact for you and your organization. Would you allow us to do this? Because in the end, it's the clients who are going to do the final decision? Right?

Hylke Faber 47:24

I hear a lot of sincerity in that, and dedication to the goal in terms of how you went about that you were able to call out and get into the nitty gritty uncomfot of discomfort of naming, this is working, this is not working. What's not working? What's not working? Let's figure out what that is, then taking responsibility for it, and then coming up with a plan to support the people or the areas that needed support. What I'm curious about is, in your mind, what trade offs did you make between making sure that it was going to be client successful. As Gandhi said, the most important focus for a business is a client, right? That's your most important focus, as you said, with n saying, Well, I also have profitability goals. How did you make that trade off?

Vignesh Markandan 48:19

So in that, in that instance, we traded off profitability, yes, because the purpose, or the ultimate purpose, was customer satisfaction, right? So the trade off was profitability, but what we ended up doing is that we won the goodwill of the client so that we could say that we can come back as a team from a troubled situation and still be successful, right? Right? So that is a long term, you know, goal that you want to do with any client, right? They want to instill your trust in you and your team. And I'm still working with some of those clients. They've all moved to different organizations, and you know that is that connectedness that you create between the client and, you know, organization, the client and the individual, be it customer or your employee. And I have some of those teammates still working for me, I see it's that trust and that, you know, that confidence, that I will not get blamed if I do something wrong, right, but I will rather be held to succeed. Yes, right? So you need clear communication. You need clear you know, vision or plan to achieve the goal, and you need trust in the team and with customer that you



are capable of delivering it, and that lacks when you are able to not communicate, or you do not have a plan or a vision how you will achieve it, or you do not, you know, trust your team. You.

Hylke Faber 49:59

I see those three principles of the company, the mission, the big mission, the sincerity, and then the mission of harmony, the sincerity and the pioneering spirit come through that over and over again, as you say in this example, like I want to make sure I'm clear about client success, I want to make sure I stay sincere about what's missing and what needs to happen differently, and I'm using a pioneering spirit to figure out what we can do differently and stay focused on that we are coming already towards the end of this conversation. So what would you say to somebody who is a leader, right? And feels they are quite disconnected, like they're in a let's say they're in a troubled spot, right? Let's say where your project was before you made those decisions that put it back on the rails. And they are confused. They're you're speaking with such clarity about this is my mission. Many people don't have that they're torn, as I can see, in different directions. We know we get torn to profitability, client satisfaction, or boss things, or my colleagues things, what the division needs, what shareholder wants, etc. Right? What would you say to a person that finds themselves in that confusion of priorities.

Vignesh Markandan 51:24

So I would say, you know, look at what is that you want to do. It's personal growth at every single step of the way. We are not in comparison with anybody else, but rather, we are in competition with ourselves to better ourselves. Right? Confusion stems from lack of clarity, right? When I am not clear what I want to do, then I cannot communicate that to my team. And when that lack of clarity comes in my mind, I like to take a step back, take time off, and then think it through as to what you know, what is causing this confusion? Why am I lacking that, you know, clarity that I need to come out of this problem, right? And I always say, have a hobby that is challenging you, right? Learn something that challenges you in such a way that it aids you in bringing that clarity. For example, me and my younger son, we are trying to learn Indian classical music, and it's one of the hardest things that I am doing in my 40s. We've been doing it for almost four years now, and it something happens when you are trying to train your brain at a later stage in life, or putting it through that tough exercise of you have to learn this right and keep it consistent and sincere. It allows you to step back easily when you are confused, anybody who is not sure what is the priority, I would always say, take a step back. Put your brain through something else, right, something that needs it to be challenged. And then when you take a shower or you're going to bed, clarity comes on its way. I have found my clarity most of the time in shower, or right when I wake up from bed, I wake up with, ah, voila. Yeah, I should try this. You know, there it is, because my brain is rested now, right? It is not constantly, you know, thinking about, why, why, why. But rather, when I give it focus somewhere else, it subconsciously works out the problem, and it tells you, yeah, why don't you try this? It may or may not work, but then it gives you something new to try. And then from there on, you know, you are, you are you are, yeah, yeah, I can. I can do this, you know, I can come up with something new, right? So I always say, take a step back, relax, focus on something else, and then come back to this, or rather, the problem, will come back to you with a solution that's at least how, what, how I have done it, and it has worked for me throughout I



Hylke Faber 54:04

see you practicing those three words you You start off with today, mindfulness, empathy and curiosity. Have the mindfulness to step back and realize that when you're confused, that means you are not clear. You are not clear, right? And so your job as a leader, or my job as a leader, is to become clear. Take a step back, put your give your mind something else to focus on. Be curious like figure out another way. Figure out how you can train yourself, your mind, and then actually trust that the answer will come in some way, in some way. So last question you said before. Podcast to me that you thought that was very important to make very good use, the best use of this life that we have. What counsel would you give to people who are looking at that question, how to best use their life.

Vignesh Markandan 55:22

I'll tell you this right. Where it comes from is understanding the nature of the world or the universe, however you see it, right? And I was watching this interview by a physicist, and he was saying there is a mathematical formula that they are able to now, clearly see this whole quantum on which this universe is built is like a fabric. And when you cut the fabric, the whole thing ceases to exist. Mathematically, they haven't been able to come up with a physics explanation or an engineering explanation to see how it all works. But mathematically, when you are able to see this, and if I extrapolate it, right, we are all connected by quantum and we are just here to experience things as as time passes through, right? So the miniscule nature of us and being able to experience lot of things, good, bad, ugly, and being able to, you know, process them and leave the bad behind and the ugly, forget the ugly, and take the good and move forward, right? Is how I think we can all become better, knowing that I'm just a tiny speck in the whole cosmos, and being mindful and curious and always learning is how I would say, you know, you become better at anything and everything. And like I said, it's a finite footsteps that your heart only pumps so many times in your lifetime, right? And every breathing minute you are one less and one footstep less in that journey, because this moment never comes back. So just experience life as it is and try to do better than what you were a moment ago. That's all we need to do. And that is why, you know, one of the funny things that I noticed, and I loved it, was when FIFA World Cup was going on, and this was in the news, wherever Japan fans followed their team, they would clean that entire segment of this stadium. And one person said why they were doing it is because they wanted to leave that place they found better than in a better situation than what they found it right. And that explained life to me, right, wherever you are, if you are able to leave one step forward being better yourself, and if you are able to lift somebody else up at that time, then that is life

Hylke Faber 58:03

experience. It fully. Learn, leave it better and and lift up. Thank you so much. Vignes, we are finishing this conversation. I've learned so much today. Learn as much as you can and apply it. Have the humility to stay open every day, and as we were just speaking about daring to experience this moment, realizing it's never going to come again, and having the intention to learn from it, that this moment, this experience, may be better than the one that came before it, and that to lift up all the others, also the



people that I'm inferring, come after us, when we when you and I are no longer on this planet, when our hearts have stopped pumping. If you're listening to this, think about that. Think about how can I experience this moment even more fully? What am I learning in this moment doesn't have to be grandiose. You can be sitting in the car. You can be having a coffee. You can have a conversation with a friend. You can be listening to this podcast. You can be doing your work. You can be falling the laundry, whatever it is. What am I learning? And how can I leave just like the Japanese football supporters this place that I'm in right now, better than when I just entered. Thank you so much, vignes, what an incredible honor to speak with you today. We've been talking to vignes markandon, who is currently a vice president at Itachi, and also a masterful student, and I would say, teacher of life. It's been a it's been an honor. You've been listening to rooted and wavering, if you like this kind of conversations. You can subscribe to rooted and wavering wherever you get your podcasts. And this was a. Episode 51 of rooted and wavering, where we help leaders connect more deeply to their innate potential. I'm your host, Hylke Farber, and see you next time. Thank you, Hylke,

Presenter 1:00:18

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