

E40 - Rooted & Unwavering - Hylke Faber & Jon Antonucci

Presenter 00:00

Too rooted and unwavering a podcast and radio show which features leaders from all walks of life in conversations about courageous connectedness. How do we stay connected to our best selves, especially when we are challenged? What becomes possible when we truly stay committed to our own and others brightness also, when we don't feel it, Join host 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 00:39

Welcome to root and unwavering where we help leaders connect more deeply to their innate potential. I'm your host Hylke. Farber, this is Episode 40, actually, and I'm here so it's a little celebration. I'm here with my friend and esteemed colleague, John Antonucci. John, how are you today?

Jon Antonucci 00:59

I'm doing well, hookah. Thank you so much for having me. It's a pleasure.

Hylke Faber 01:02

Excellent. Well, I am so delighted that you're here. I'm going to share a little bit more about John in just a moment. But before I do this, as we do with every one of those screws and wavering podcasts, and this is number 40. So it's a little celebration. We ground in why are we doing this podcast? What is this for? What is this, about what is rooted and unwavering really about and why is it here. So the symbol of this podcast is a lighthouse. And what I find is that the journey, from confusion to clarity can be a very long one. Depending on how we're going about it. And even when we have lots of skills, it can still feel in the middle of stress, like an immense journey to go back from come back from stress and what we also call crocodilian reptilian behavior, worry anxiety, judgment, obsession, control all these lovely things that get in the way of our true power to get out of that and find home. And that is what these podcasts have been about. And that's what the stories are about. And I'm so delighted to be here today with yet another person to tell their story. What I find is I learned so much more when I listened to people's stories than when I just hear concepts. So I invite you as you're listening to think about what can we learn today from John Antonucci about staying rooted and wavering on finding our way back? Yeah. So I was very struck when I met John, and this is the reason that I started to engage with him by his uncanny combination of clarity, humility and deep self accountability, self accountability, that just radiates and tells you a story that pulls me to sit up more straight in my chair. John comes to us with about 20 years of leadership experience ranging from coaching youth sports, to directing an international organization, he has a passion for developing leaders, and this inspired him to begin SML



consultive in early 2003, where he empowers, and I love this what he calls the quote unquote forgotten leaders, which is frontline and middle management leadership to effectively engaged with our teams via love based servant based leadership in his moments of free time, which he doesn't seem to have a lot of John likes playing sports, including and also the acoustic guitar and enjoying the natural beauty of mountains and other places. And He currently lives recently since recently with his wife in Greer, South Carolina, in the US. So, John, welcome to this podcast. Tell us about what you have learned in your life and leadership about connectedness.

Jon Antonucci 04:17

Well, thank you. connectedness in, in my opinion, anyways is just intrical to the life experience. It took me a long time to recognize that the concept of the ripple effect you know, we talk about that and leadership and how our lives touch other lives. It took me a long time to recognize that. That's more than just a concept that that is a reality. And it was a few different things that happened in my life. I know some of which we will get into during our time together. But one of them was it was a phrase that I read Did and the phrase said you will in five years, you will be the same person you are today, plus the people you meet and the books you read. And when I read that phrase introspectively and trying to apply it, it resonated personally. But then it also hit me that the people that I engage with will also be the same people that they are except for the people they meet, and they've just met me, which means that my energy is going to impact them. And so when I'm talking about leadership, I'm constantly telling leaders that you're going to make an impact. The only question is what kind all connected there is no, you and me there is a we there, we were all connected. And the individualized concepts that are very common, specifically in the US or in the Western world, but are not so common in eastern Eastern culture, where there's a more communal and, and cooperative maybe mentality can be very damaging. I mean, it can be great. There's there's tons of ingenuity that happened in the context of free expression. But it can also be very self serving and selfish, and we forget that we are connected. And so I forgot that and there are parts of my story that demonstrate how much I forgot that the journey brought me to that realization and recognizing that we really are all connected and that our lives are intermingled in a beautiful symphony. Is was a valuable lesson during my journey.

Hylke Faber 06:40

It was, John that the way you're speaking about going from this mentality of it's about little me, too, are no, it's actually about this interconnected whole, the symphony of which I'm a whole part of. To me, it tells me this the way you're speaking about that this is not just book knowledge for you. Yeah, this is something that you have internalized and experienced in the bones. Yeah. So tell us a little bit about your life story. How you get to sit where you're sitting today, in having learned about connectedness.

Jon Antonucci 07:27

The journey that I have been on, started out, almost a dream. I mean, it was it was charmed, that could be a good word to use. We weren't rich. I certainly was not born with a with a golden spoon in my mouth, or whatever the phrase is. But I was raised in with two loving parents, I was given a good education, I was taught good morals and values. By the time I was seven, I had developed an



entrepreneurial spirit. And so I'd started a business by the time I was 12, I had become interested in martial arts thanks to the Bruce Lee videos that were very popular in the 90s. And I excelled, I just things came naturally. I didn't have to work hard a half the time and I did work hard but didn't really have to the the martial arts specifically I taught my very first class at 12 years old, due to a the instructor getting stuck in traffic. By the time I was 15, I was an assistant instructor. By the time I was 19. I had my own classes in the Phoenix area at that point, with close to 500 students I think. And little old me really thought that it was all about me. I really did. I mean, I was I was 19 years old. I had my own house, I had my own vehicle. I was had a career, I had hundreds of people that I got to tell what to do. And and I really believed that I was making a positive impact. I really believed that I was just great. I remember telling a friend of mine. I said they'll do it because I told them to like that was how consumed I was with who I thought I was.

Hylke Faber 09:17

And I was pause that pause, pause for a second. I paused for a second because sure that little a phrase. I want you to just to know and share with us how that felt to say that in

Jon Antonucci 09:29

the moment or now. In the moment then. Yeah, I mean, it was very, I'm in control. It's all about me it very, very, almost empowering. Very

Hylke Faber 09:44

you know, I don't know if that's a word. I don't know that the word Yeah, yeah. Right. I'm on top of the world kind of Yeah, I'm in control of it. At least that's how I relate to what you're saying, John? Yeah, the sense of I Got it. And there's a sense of almost exuberance about that which can be easily misunderstood. Yeah, as I arrived at the mountain of wisdom, and I'm just going to share with it for the rest from it for the rest of my life. So at night anyway, at 19, which I just love, I love that. Talk about humility. I love that. Oh, man. Yes. Anyway, continuous story continues. Yeah, so

Jon Antonucci 10:26

in that place, not recognizing connectedness. In fact, if anything, it was more of they are connected, and I will decide what they do. But not we're connected, it was it was very much an eye versus they dynamic, very egocentric, very myopic. And in that place, there was a situation that destroyed part of my identity. And there's tons of details that we can go into. And I know we're, you know, hours and hours of conversation that could take place, you and I have sat there for hours, and in fact, but the initial part was just a lack of integrity, right? When you think it's all about you, there are, at least for me, I can't speak for anybody else. But for me, when I thought it was all about me, I made it about me. And so there was a lack of integrity in my engagement with others. And that resulted in me being terminated from the employment that I had with all of those students and being that martial arts instructor. And so at 19 years old, I'm sitting there, and I'm thinking, I don't I don't know anything else to do, this is what I do. So I'll just keep doing it. Can't do it for them. I'll go start my own business. I'm nothing if not resourceful, I'll figure this out. And I did, I went out and signed the contracts and got the insurance and,



and found the locations and did the things and made it happen. But in that place it my mindset was so myopic, that when an idea was presented to me, that encouraged me to participate in something that was just absolutely foolish. I found myself obliging, I found that I wanted to feel important, I wanted to feel like I was a part of something I wanted to feel like I was doing something I guess. And so as I look back on that moment, at 19 years old, I think of different scenarios, and just for the sake of sharing with your audience, what happened did not become real to me, until the consequences hit. I didn't have any notion of exactly what I had done at all, until I had the clicks of handcuffs, tying my hands together behind my back. Even as I was sitting in the police station being questioned, I thought I'm going home. This is no big deal. I got this. Oh, why? I'll tell them what they want to hear. I'll get out of here. And I would love to say that even as the handcuffs came on that all of a sudden I recognized my you know, the connectedness and the impact of my action. That's not true, though. It took me years, you said I feel that I can feel it in my bones. And I can because on the night of June 14, me and three of my friends decided to execute what has only been effectively described as the stupidest idea of our lives. And we decided to light a fire. It was the office building of the company that I had worked for and been disingenuous or lacking integrity with. And while the fire was intentional, my best friend who lit the match, while he was still standing in a room full of gasoline. His death was absolutely not intentional. And there's a lot of details that can go into that. But those handcuffs represented two charges being placed against me. One was arson of unoccupied structure, and the other one was first degree murder. The first degree murder was not because they thought it was intentional, but rather because felony murder laws are treated like first degree murder. So when somebody commits a felony and somebody else dies, that's considered top of the line murder. And I couldn't wrap my mind around that. I mean, I recognized oh boy, I'm in trouble. But in my mind, all I had physically done was helped to break a window. That was what that was what John had done. And so lacking this idea of connectedness and ripple effect and understanding how we're all woven together, it was like Oh, Alright, I'm busted, I'm gonna do a little bit of time pay some restitution for a window because they can't get me for anything else, because that's all I did. And I don't think it was for probably at least another five years before there was an epiphany that happened. And the epiphany came because when I was sentenced, I was not sentenced to a year or some restitution, I was able to get a plea bargain. But I was sentenced to 14 years in the Department of Corrections. Way more than way more than anybody even thought what happened, and more than the others that were participating experience, because I lied, I lied, and I lied, and I lied. And so my, my lack of integrity bid me one more time. And so it was in the process of applying for something that in Arizona is called clemency. And basically, it's after you've been sentenced to serve for your crime, you have the opportunity to basically go before a you can think of it like a parole board, to say, Look, I get it. I'm not saying I didn't do it. I'm just saying that I've learned my lesson. And I'm asking for clemency, which is the literal definition of clemency means mercy. And the first time I apply applied multiple times, the first time, they didn't even give me a second hearing. The second time, I applied, I had an epiphany. And I really thought the epiphany was going to make the difference. I really did. Was that so the the plea bargain I took, said that I could get anywhere between seven and 21 years. And we were really thinking it would be seven first time offense never been in trouble before. You know, whatever, all the all the excuses you want to make for why it should have only been seven. So when they gave us your gave me 14, that that really took all of us. And by us, I



mean my family and loved ones and whatnot by surprise. And so when I had applied the first time I had asked for seven years, one of my co defendants got was was sentenced to seven years, the other one was sentenced to four years. And so I thought, you know, I agreed to seven, I'll just I'm just asking to for the low part. Well, in that second application, I had an epiphany. I recognize this idea of connectedness and I recognize that seven year old me that started a business and 12 year old me that was a martial arts, teaching for the first time and, and 19 year old me that was in charge of 500 people that whether it was my idea or not. My innate leadership capacity inherently resulted in a higher level of culpability or responsibility. And so I did not ask for seven years, that time, I asked for 10. Actually, I might have asked for 10 and a half. I don't remember his 10 or 10 and a half. But either way, the the thought process was one person did on four years, they did about three and a half the other one on seven years did about six. So I will take the brunt. And I will say I will do as much time as they did together. And I really thought that was going to help. I really I thought, how can they how can they deny that? And their response? Was the clemency board's response was, you're lucky we can't give you more time.

Hylke Faber 18:32

Stop there for a second. Why do you feel at that moment?

Jon Antonucci 18:36

Devastation,

Hylke Faber 18:38

devastation,

Jon Antonucci 18:41

primarily because my mother was in the room when they said and the first time she put an incredible amount of work into helping get the documents together and whatnot. And so when we went for a second round, I really wanted to protect her heart. So I asked her to do a lot less work. And then we had some previous conversations of like, are you going to be okay? It was really devastating the first time they said no. And she was like, yes, you know, I'm prepared. Now I know what that's like, and I can do it. And then she she had to hear that. And but it just it made me feel like all the work that I was doing and all the real growth that had transpired. Didn't matter at all. And so yeah, that was that was kind of white. You know, I feel like I recognize that people were hurt. It wasn't just a fire. It wasn't even just the hurt of the family that died. It was it was it was hundreds, not 1000s of people that were impacted by the actions that I participated in, and the connectedness that we all share what became much more real. And I could talk for a lot longer kind of just about that. different stories and anecdotes and things of connectedness. But walking through that, and having to come to initial responsibility going from okay, I'm just gonna lie and pretend like I never did it to. Okay, I did it. But here's exactly what I did to Okay, I did it. And I'll take at least responsibility for the the agreement that I made to. Okay, I did it. And I'll understand that there is inherent responsibility that has nothing to do with what I did, but rather who I am. To. I did it. And because I did it, I've subjected myself via connectedness to the judgment



system, the justice system. And it doesn't matter what I think, doesn't matter how I feel about it. I submitted myself to a scenario that I don't get to make the decision. And that was my choice. No, but nobody did that to me. Nobody, nobody forced me. My choices put me in that position and learning that allowed me to engage connectedness in a better way, because then in the setting of incarceration, I got to be connected in a positive way. I got to say, look, I'm here. can't help that. But I absolutely can help what I do while I'm here. And who I touch while I'm here. And what Mark, I leave, because we are going to leave a mark. The only question is what kind?

Hylke Faber 21:42

I want to go back to this moment where you made that shift, where you were talking about how your sense of responsibility and accountability almost matured, like it could like I went from the well, the denial, to the negotiation, to acceptance of the action, like the observable action to the acceptance of the less observable, but definitely clear sense of leadership that you had. Yeah. And in that still being in the place of resistance to where you were, because trying to negotiate with this, and now you're saying, Okay, I have subjected myself to this system. Did you try to get out earlier, for the remaining years or not? Not

Jon Antonucci 22:53

after the second attempt.

Hylke Faber 22:56

So you serve 14 years.

Jon Antonucci 22:59

In Arizona, you will serve 167 of your sentence behind bars with the last 1/7 being done under what they call community supervision, often referred to as parole. And I did do all 14 years, including the parole, yes.

Hylke Faber 23:16

It was interesting, remarkable as you're not interesting, remarkable as you're talking, John, because I could feel my belly tensing as you were telling the story. And I felt some tears as you were telling the story. And then I felt a sense of relief. When you said I accepted where I was. I sense the sense of surrender in that in that moment. My sense is you connect it to something deeper that allow you to be a servant leader. While incarcerated. Yeah.

Jon Antonucci 23:59

Yeah, I'll never forget. One of the things that I was so blessed to be able to do while incarcerated is I was able to help develop something that's called IPP and mate pair programming. And it's, it's basically by inmates for inmates, rehabilitative classes, programs, events, things like that. And on one unit, in particular, I had incredible influence in this particular sphere of rehabilitation. And so much so that we had special ID cards that were, I guess, given to us, but I created them. So given for us that that



identified the group that worked with me as these leaders and these were inmates these were people that were had represented themselves well enough to make it past a quite the gauntlet in fact, and be identified as those that could be relied upon to provide rehabilitative support. And when I developed the card I, it was kind of cartoonish, honestly. But on the back of the card, it said, how can I serve you? Now, I hope that it's not, it goes without saying, but in case it doesn't, the idea of an inmate walking around with other inmates with a label on them that says, essentially, I'm here to serve you, is countercultural to everything that is the state of being in prison. And I remember facing incredible resistance, even from a team that wanted to serve. It wasn't that their hearts were in the wrong place, per se. It was that the culture of the environment was so anti, that, that there was an uncomfortability with identifying with service. And, of course, I told them, No one's forcing you to display the card, I recommend it. Because I think that's how you create change by being something that nobody else is willing to be. But I said, it is where we stand, and you don't that that is where this department will stand as long as I'm in responsibility of it. Because that has to be our heart, our heart has to be to serve. The minute it's about us the minute it's about getting out early for something or about getting extra access to something or about freedoms or whatever, we've we've completely nullify the impact that we're going to have. And now our motives are questioned. And nobody is we're not going to have the opportunity to make that positive impact. In fact, it'll be negative because now people will view us as a manipulator and one who uses a positive program to get away with things or to get special privileges. And, but that idea of service and surrender, and hey, I'm here. And recognizing that the souls and the lives of those that surrounded me were no less important than the lives that I now get to serve out here. There was there was just growth that happened in that space, and that connectedness became more apparent.

Hylke Faber 27:24

I'm struck by the UTTER DEDICATION and cleanliness of your commitment. So I want to talk more after the break about how you got to this place of this, of being willing to stand up for service in a culture where that was not the way and even resist it or worse. Before we go there. I'm curious about John's inner process. So we are past the second parole hearing. It's been no. And people have said, if we can give you more time, we would give it to you. What was the process like and maybe speak about that for a minute or so before we take a break? But what was that process like to get to that? Surrender? Because that is that is something that I think all of us can learn from? And I'm definitely standing off as I consider that.

Jon Antonucci 28:43

I don't know if well, first off, I don't know if I remember. I think that's the most honest answer. But I don't know that there was there's a couple of times that I can say all right here, epiphany here epiphany. But a lot of it was just like anything else in life where it was this very gradual change that made me ready to accept that second. No, it wasn't so much that the second note occurred. And my process was oh, I just got told no, I must adapt and overcome. It was more of I had been investing. So I would have been told no for the second time, I believe in 2017. And I had been for example working with that inmate pure programming since 2012. Ish. And so working that it was okay. There's tools that I'm giving to other people that I have to actually use things like how to accept realities and things like how to find purpose



in what you're doing, where you are not always looking for the next thing to do, being present, being you know, recognizing the opportunity that exists in the present. And so I don't know that there was that moment where it was like, boom, Oh, I get in. It was more Okay, that's not what I wanted. I guess it's just time to say, we're going to do this until 2021. Instead of, we're going to get out next year, and then we're going to do this. Nope, we're going to be here. And so from 2009 to 2021, there was just a gradual process that occurred during that time of incarceration.

Hylke Faber 30:32

You make it sound, almost like, effortless. And I'm also hearing that it wasn't no. So after the break, I want to hear more about how you met the tools. Maybe in before 2012, or in 2012, as you start this program, and how you internalize this tools to help you to work keep walking through that moment in 2017. And then that helped you to stand up in the face of a culture that probably had some other ideas about how to be Yeah, so let's take a short break. We've been in conversation with John Antonucci a leadership coach, leader, and magnificent human being who's been sharing with us about the power from my perspective, of being real and accepting reality, and connecting to purpose and presence in the midst of that reality, even if that's within the prison walls of the Department of Justice. See you after the break.

31:57

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Hylke Faber 32:22

Welcome back to Wharton. unwaivering. Are we talking to John Antone today? I have skipped having trouble seeing the last name. John onto Nucci. I'll try it again. John Antonucci, I think I have to say it five times. There you go. And we've been talking about the power of letting reality in and not shying away from it. Taking full accountability. So John, tell us more about how you internalized that wisdom, those tools of acceptance of purposefulness of presence. How did that happen?

Jon Antonucci 33:07

I think of so many people that I had the privilege of experiencing some of which I was able to pull great lessons and, and wonderful things on Yes, this is a good trajectory and others that I was able to say, Okay, those are not the consequences I want. And I think I'm gonna go a direction that's differently than the way they did. There are two two things as I was reflecting on your question during the break that came immediately, immediately to mind one is a guy that I met about three months after I was sent to prison. So there was a jail time that to pretrial. And then prison was after that. And about three months into that time, I met a guy that had accomplished many of the things that I thought I would sure like to redeem this time, I'd really like to make the most of this time, whatever it is. And so I met him and and he had accomplished many of those things. And so I kind of latched on a little bit, it's okay, what can I



learn from this individual. And he was somebody that I learned both a whole lot of what to do, and a whole lot of what not to do from all at the same exact time. But in my engagement with him on one of the units that I was on, he introduced me to somebody, Vince and Vince had read a book that was written written by Stephen Covey Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. And he was passionate about getting this class started. He was trying to work with the Associate Deputy Warden to get a class started. This was before really we had a full Peer Program and he was trying but it was the foundation was there people had started to ask for this type of stuff and and so he wanted to make it happen. And so I was a part of his very first I want to test this theory out and then we're going to, you know, be certified to go give it to everybody else. And he did a good job. But he was he was very limited because at that time, DL C did not have a lot of trust in such things. And so they had required him to administer the class in a way that was systematically ineffective that the content would have been good, but it was being required to being delivered or administered in a way that would have made it tough. forced me to read the book. And there were a lot of things that happen, but but Covey's principles, and I'm just going to focus on that first one, which is be proactive. There's an idea of be proactive that Covey doesn't actually flush out that dynamically, but it became my mantra. And that was the idea that being proactive means that we take responsibility for our actions and their consequences. And this became something that I personally became very passionate about, because I recognize something that was both common in myself, as well as in many of those that are around me. And that was the tendency to say, It's not my fault. You and I spoke recently, during a time together with another individual and, and we were talking about when we're late for a meeting, and what's our go to the traffic, the the family, whatever it is anything, anything except to say I didn't plan well, anything will come with anything. And so I began to, as I would begin to have an opportunity to teach these classes, I would begin to say, Guys, even if it's 99%, the other person's fault. Until I've addressed my 1%, I can't go talk to them about their 99. And as I'm addressing my 1%, that chances are really good, I'm going to recognize that that number probably isn't legitimate, and it needs to be a lot higher. And I think growth like that can only happen in two ways. You made it safe, or you said that it I made it sound effortless. And in a sense, it was because there wasn't effort in the sense of like working out, right, most of the people that you and I work with, if they want to develop these attributes, there's an effort that has to be made, there's an intentionality that has to be exhibited. But there is a second way that these things come to be. And that is through the same type of metaphysical transformation that produces a diamond. Incredible pressure, it doesn't necessarily result in effort, per se. But the pressure results in the administration, I guess, are the Conference of principles that you said feel in my bones, right? How does a person feel in their bones unless they've been it's been beat into their bones? In a way and I know you have a story as well, where it just just beat up before. Okay,

Hylke Faber 38:08

okay. And

Jon Antonucci 38:10

so my efforts per se, there had, you know, there was a lot of intentionality, there was a lot of I'm gonna learn through this, I've read hundreds and hundreds of books, Seven Habits of Highly Effective People



is, you know, one of eight boxes of books that I have upstairs. But being placed in a position, and I think being placed that makes it like somebody else did it, my actions placing me in a position of just incredible hardship, you talk about the ability to stand firm, well, that standing firm actually came in the context of my faith. There's incredible racism in the prison system. Something that I don't I don't believe in. And I remember somebody coming up to me because there was a discrepancy of some sort on the unit and, and I was told that we were not allowed as as Caucasians to talk to the blacks. And I remember sitting there and contemplating and evaluating my values, and you can only evaluate your values in that context. When you are in that context. It's always easy to talk about what I would do. But when you're told and I'll just be I'll be very transparent with with you hookah. I was told not You're not allowed. I was told if anyone talks to the blacks, they're leaving in a body bag. That was the that was what I was told. Okay.

Hylke Faber 39:37

And I remember before you go on, sure, because it's so easy for those of people that have not been incarcerated to think about that as kind of theoretical, something you would say in an office like a way of figurative speech. Tell us about what actually happens in prison for

Jon Antonucci 40:01

That was not a figure of speech. That was I mean, I, there are people on units that I was on that were literally murdered. I think of one individual that was a part I don't know what gang they were a part of, but they decided they didn't want to be a part of that gang anymore. And murdered in gruesome fashion. Individual that was chased across the rec yard by eight people sounded like a herd of elephants. As they chased him down. That type of a saying, you know, you're leaving, and you'll you'll leave in a body bag. By that time, I'd seen enough to know that that wasn't read that wasn't rhetorical. And so I remember sitting in that moment, evaluating my own values, recognizing that, at that point, I was not only doing the programming, but I was also actively involved as a leader in the church there on the unit. And for anybody that thinks that people go to prison and find Jesus, because it makes things easier on them, sometimes that's true, in this case, not so much. And I remember going over to the individual that that gave me that directive, and said, Hey, I need to I need to talk to you. And I said to him, I said, Listen, I, I understand that there's probably more at play here than I understand. And I recognize that if some sort of a riot happens, it's very easy for the battle lines to be drawn, because race will be the factor and it won't matter how friendly I've been, they will attack me, and they will attack those around me. And that is, I said, but I don't believe in racial separation. I said, and I'm going to be teaching the Bible study tonight, like I always do. And there is no way that I'm going to tell a black person that they can't come. It's, it's just not going to happen. So I just want to make you aware of that. You do what you need to do. But that's what I need to do. And I'll be honest, I think it was probably the most courageous thing I ever had to do in my entire entire 12 years that I was actively behind bars. There were other times that were 10. There were other moments that maybe I didn't even know the danger I was in I did find out at one point, I had a price on my head. I didn't but I didn't know about it till after the price had been lifted. So I don't know if that counts. But apparently it was there. That was probably the most courageous thing to do. And those moments again, you can't you can't develop that



mode. It's easy. People say, Oh, I would die for this cause that's really easy to say when no one's put you in that position.

Hylke Faber 43:02

So tell us, John, you had that rule imposed on you. Don't talk to the blacks. Yeah. You did introspection, you reflected on what your values are. Tell us about that journey. And how you felt basing this person who had issued you with that rule.

Jon Antonucci 43:39

I felt determined. It wasn't something where they came and said you can't do it. And I said, Screw you. I'll do it. Anyways, it was something where I had to do that reflection, I had to know my own values. I had to ask myself going back to your original question of connectedness. What happens if I succumb? This doesn't just impact me, this devalues other human life. This sets an example for those that are looking to me for an example. And that inherent leadership, you could say, well, you know, John, you could have just said, Hey, guys, sorry, tonight's not a good night. You could have I could have there was there was another option, I could have just cancelled Bible study for everybody. And that removes the situation but things were tense on the unit, I felt like people needed an opportunity to get together and practice their faith and hear about the love of God and, and so that there was implications that impacted so much more than me. And so as I went to speak with that individual, thankfully, I wasn't, I was one of those people that people tend to either love or hate. I don't really have a lot of people in the middle. People either really liked me or they they really, really don't. And this particular industry You'll I knew, like, I knew that he had been told to give me this order. I knew it wasn't coming from him. And so I was able to meet him where he was. And I was able to say, Look, I know this isn't your decision. But you need to know because I know you're gonna get approached, when when this happens, it's not going to be an F, it's going to be a win. And that's why you may have heard me say a minute ago, I told him, You do what you've got to do. And I'm going to do what I'm gonna do. Yeah, yes. And so pay, follow your values, you do what you feel is right. But I'm gonna, I'm going to do the same thing. And in that particular case, thankfully, the courage was not met. I mean, I'm here, I'm here, thankfully, and without any broken teeth, let alone no longer with us. But it wasn't, it was a moment that obviously still sticks with me. I remember sitting on my bed. And just staring at the ground and praying, seeking guidance, seeking wisdom, trying to figure out was this a hill worth dying on? Quite literally? And making the decision? And again, I don't think it was a moment, I think it was that moment that decision was made, I think it was a series of decisions. It was decisions that when people would ask me to pass things, because I had a lot of freedom. And I would say I'm sorry, I don't I don't I don't do that. That's that's a line I've created in the sand. And it was, it was other things, it was a series of smaller decisions that led to the ability to a bigger decision. And so then when it comes to how can I serve you? Guys, these are established values, you've know, at this point, I mean, that would have been in 2018, or 19. I think by that time, and, you know, you guys have known me for 10 years, you know what I'm about you can take it or leave it, you know, it is what it is at this point. But right. But yeah, I mean, it's those little things, and it's the lack of compromise in the little things that I believe allows us to make the most dynamic impact when it comes time for a big thing.



Hylke Faber 47:09

Amazing. I'm sitting with this, John, I'm, I'm wondering. First of all, I'm appreciating before I wonder how you communicate with this person, right? I appreciate the beauty of the communication. I understand where you're, what you're saying and where you're coming from. And this is where I'm coming from. And I will stay with my principles, and you can do whatever you need to do. I have an image of Judas flight flying through my head, like you must do what you have to do. And I will face the consequences. After that happened, did you look over your back? Did you feel nervous at all?

Jon Antonucci 48:01

Yes, and no. 100% I mean, there was there was a lingering I know what I've just done, I've just thrown the gauntlet down. You know, there's there's no doubt about it. The the individual responded Well, I went and spoke with him. And he said, I understood because one of the things that I told him as I said, I can't just not practice everything I preach like that's just it's not it's this, if I were to oblige this, it would it would be a slap in the face to everything I've been telling everybody. For the last many years, this would have been I think 20 Oh, I want to say 2012 or 2013, something like that by this point. And so I knew I had just thrown the gauntlet down, I knew that I just drawn a line in the sand. But I also knew that he said, I understand. I will talk to the Powers That B or whatever words he used. And I'm sure it won't be too much of a problem. Just Just make sure that if anything, they call it pops off. That means that if any if any riot happens or any sort of conflict occurs, he said, Just Just make sure you're in a safe place. That was that was what he came to with. You know, you don't want to be in the middle of a Bible study with three people that may turn and attack you on in a moment. And so there was still though because he didn't have the power to say you're good to go. I knew he didn't he didn't he wasn't the one that made the call. But I did have a wee bit of confidence that for his own sake, he would go and try to represent the situation well, so that he was not held accountable for actions that he had been told not to allow to occur. So one of two things is going to happen either he was going to leave and he was going to come back saying this isn't good. Or he was going to come back saying we understand you know, stay safe kind of thing. But, and I never actually saw the comeback part. I don't know where I was when he came back but um there was still that that that Bible study, there was definitely I just as an example, I made sure that I sat on the seat where my back was to a wall. I could see what was going to happen, and I was going to be I was going to do what I knew I was supposed to do. And I wasn't meant to be stupid while I did it.

Hylke Faber 50:23

Yes. Okay. Very clear. Very clear. So there you are, having had that experience? And now 2018, you are shepherding this effort of service? Yeah. And you're introducing this into a culture that is not about service, but what was it about? What was the resistance about what was the resistance to service?

Jon Antonucci 50:54

I don't know that there was only one, I would say at least one part was the idea of being taken advantage of, nobody wants to feel taken advantage of and in the prison environment, if you are an



individual that is perceived as weak or easily taken advantage of that will be exploited. And so I think that there was a bit of self preservation that was that was desired. I think they also thought that it was a little kooky, maybe, you know, just Why are you saying that John, like, come on, people know that we're here to help them? Why do we got to have How can I serve you? What about how can I help you? You know, what, why do you. And so I think that there was some of that. And then I also think, again, it just is uncommon. I mean, as human beings, we are all deeply uncomfortable with that, which is new or new or different to us, unless we think we're in control of it. And then sometimes we like it a little bit more. But in general, we are not a fan of new things, and so is new, and maybe it was a kooky and it went against their self preservation. And I think there may have even been a subliminal thought that was never expressed. But quite, quite possibly, there was a thought of some sort of potential sexual connotation in an environment where there can be sexual predators.

Hylke Faber 52:08

Understand, I understand. And so that was the cultural resistance, in part that you were up against, yeah. And then somehow, you're able to bring this service orientation force. And then what happened next?

Jon Antonucci 52:36

We really I mean, I, when I whenever I share my story in a presentation for churches and things, I always say, you know, everybody thinks that because they learned these lessons and did these great things. Everyone assumes there's like this happy ending of like, and then a miracle happened. And, and I've already told you today that that didn't happen, I served every day of that time. It was used to refine my character, and I got out of prison having invested into so many people, and the seeds that I had sown, were rewarded, in a sense, with an opportunity where I was, within about a month of getting out, I was given the opportunity to start creating training material for an organization. And within two months of that, it was it was a contract position at first. And within two months of that they offered me the full time job of training manager. And so then I was able to bring this idea of serving to the company, and really trying to say, hey, you know, my job as the Training Manager isn't to check a box. I remember when the company was going through a certification process and me as the training manager was held as hey, how do you train them? How do you make sure they stay in compliance? What are your yearly records while well, and I said, I don't train for the sake of training, I trained to empower my people for success. There are some government trainings that are required, and if they're required once a year, then we'll do them once a year. But as far as my training goes, it's designed to empower not to check a box not to say someone trained not to hold accountability. It's designed to provide the tools they need for success, and we were able to create a culture and transform a company really, that to into feeling the training wasn't punishment anymore. The training was empowerment, and that was something that we changed. And now the people that took over that that job as trainer, you know, they have that heart, and I know them and they they they still reach out to me sometimes for advice and and they'll say, you know, hey, what do we do here and but they've got that heart to help and to serve and to be a blessing in that same organization and, and so opportunities to serve their their, the world does not have enough servants. That's just the bottom line. There's too many people



that want to be served. I see that a lot. You know, even just the idea of GrubHub and Uber Eats and things like that. It's we all want to feel like someone else can do that. I have more and more important, or enough time to do the menial stuff. And so the world needs people that care and needs people that are willing to serve. And I have yet to find a place where nobody wants a servant. And so whether that's in the church that I was a part of before moving, whether that's in the companies that I've been able to work with that mentality of servant service, and servant mindedness, it made an impact, I think, in the prison system. And it's been humbling and gratifying to see it seemed to make a difference in a variety of other settings.

Hylke Faber 55:43

Power of service, we are getting towards the very final minutes of our conversation. What would you say to somebody who might feel afraid to serve or resistance to serving for whatever reason? What would you say to them?

Jon Antonucci 56:07

I think I would repeat something that I said earlier in a different context. And I would say that you are going to make a difference in the world. And the only question is, whether it's a good one or a bad one. Service gives us the opportunity to be a positive part of the collective, it gives us the opportunity to recognize that our life has much more meaning in the context of connectedness to others. And I've had leaders I can't serve, my team will take advantage of me, okay. It's possible 100%, that might happen. But in the meantime, they get to experience love. They get to experience a higher sense of purpose and being. And I can't guarantee you that that's going to go well every single time. But I can guarantee you that at the end of the day, it will be much more rewarding. And much more purposeful than the alternative.

Hylke Faber 57:11

So much there, how can I be of service? How can I always make an impact on others, whether it's good or bad? I'm struck by so much what you said today, John, couple of things that will stay with me probably for the rest of my life, which is you facing the potential consequences and facing the basically the demon right there and saying, Well, this is what I stand for, I have to be of service. I have to be of service in that moment when you chose not to fall into the black and white madness. And then continuing that in the in the service orientation that you embody. So clearly. Yeah, you've made it a little bit more clear to me, John, why your words resonate from the bone. Because what you've helped me understand today is that the molding of this deep connectedness and commitment to service happens all the time. And it happens also with what I hear from you with this intentionality and deep commitment, this decision to be of service to be here. It's been such an honor John to sit with you today. I'm sure that your story touches people uplifts people has uplifted people and will uplift people on thank you for being of service today. I really appreciate that.

Jon Antonucci 58:48

It's been my pleasure. Thank you for having me.



Hylke Faber 58:51

absolute delight. So we talking today with with John Antonucci a, sir, a true servant leader forged by the fire. We are let's let's learn lots of things today. One of the things that I want to highlight is this sense of we always make an impact. It's up to us to decide what that is. And it does not depend on the stage. It can happen in a prison cell. Absolutely. Or whether we standing in line or wherever that is, yes. Thank you, John. I'm deeply moved. You've been listening to root and unwavering you can listen to more of these episodes and recordings on Apple, Spotify and all these places also on YouTube. You can find John Antonucci on LinkedIn. Look for SMC consultive or John Antonucci servant leadership, you'll find him person to get to know be inspired by I'm sure he'd be willing to talk to you about that. And next time we'll be here again for episode 41 off Route and unwavering where we help leaders connect more deeply to their innate potential. I'm your host Hilco Faber and I'll see you next time. Thank you.

Presenter 1:00:23

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