

E62 - Rooted & Unwavering – Oct 3 - Hylke Faber & Avantika Akerkar

Presenter 00:00

Announcer, 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 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 i

Hylke Faber 00:43

Well, welcome to root and wavering, where we help leaders to connect more deeply to our innate potential. I'm your host. Hylke Faber, this is episode 62 and I'm here today with a beautiful guest and human being. Avantika. Akrakar, Avantika, how are you today? Good.

Avantika Akerkar 01:03

Morning. I believe halfway around the world, I'm really wonderful. Actually. This is something that I was looking forward to for quite a while. I know we connected a while back, and it really made me sit back and think about this whole idea of being rooted and connected at the same time. So wonderful. I'm looking for a conversation

Hylke Faber 01:30

and welcome. It's amazing to see you again. We met in Mumbai or in India over the over the screen, when I was in India, and you were in India, where you are right now. That's right before we learn more about Avantika, I want to share a little bit more about this podcast, and then we'll learn more about her, and then we'll dive right in. I always like to share our start our conversations with a brief grounding in why we do this podcast, rooted and unwavering when you think about life, and when I think about life and leadership, it can be so confusing on the outside, so confusing. And the times we live in today, I find personally very confusing, sometimes even disturbing. And the question that I ask myself and that I ask my others, what I work with, is so how can we show up in a way that we later say, Yeah, I I'm I'm peaceful, I'm grateful that I showed up this way. How? How do I become? How do I be what I want the world to become? How do I do that? This week, this week, I visited the Martin Luther King Center in Atlanta, and I was so struck by this one man's dedication and his resolve. In the midst of tremendous turbulence back in the 60s, this man gave up words of 250 speeches, sometimes in one year. So that sense of dedication, so that's one clue, and I, over the years, come to realize that it's not one person that gives me the answer. It's being in conversation with many people that give me humility and insight into what it might look like to be a human being and a leader in even the most trying of circumstances.



And of course, then the work always ends up with me sitting with me, or you sitting with you. So Avantika, I met, as I said, online, and I was so struck by her tremendous energy and enthusiasm for for life and for inquiry, she comes to us with tons of experience that I'm not going to be able to capture all. A couple of things that I can tell you is besides the things that I will show in a moment, share in a moment, she's a swimmer. She's also an artist. She's a dedicated daughter. She takes care of people around her, and she is a very accomplished leader in the Learning and Development profession where she's been working for over 15 years. She has ran and runs communication programs that are multiple multifaceted for a diverse portfolio of clients all the way from hospitality to banking to pharmaceuticals to financial, to it. And she does her workshops in a way that I sense she is non traditional, yet integrating lots of different traditions. She has vast experience internationally and locally. And locally means India, and internationally, means literally internationally, in both the corporate and nonprofits fields, in both public relations and also program planning, and she also brings the dramatic arts to life. So if you look for her online, you'll you'll see that she's even featured in a movie. Or maybe a few few movies. She's very committed to transforming participants into Highly Effective People, and she honors deeply the potential that's in each of us. So welcome Avanti Ketsu, it's amazing to sit with you today. The first question I'd like to ask you is tell me about what you've learned in your life and leadership about

Avantika Akerkar 05:26

first of all, thank you, Hylke, I was listening to you describe me, and I'm thinking, Who is he talking about? Because you know, one of the things that I've learned, and actually that has been instilled in me while I was growing up to multicultural household or parents from two different cultural backgrounds, is that you just do, you know, you don't necessarily do it because you're trying to reap some benefit from it. And I think my father's advice has always stuck in the back of my head when he said, sit in the back of the room so you can be called forward, rather than sitting in the front of the room where you'll be asked to go back. And I think that whole idea of humility, which, funnily enough, apparently, is what my name Avantika means, the goddess of humility. So thank you, Father. That's like huge shoes to fill. But you know, it's hard, it's hard to whittle down years and years of years of engagement with people, across socio economic backgrounds, across cultural backgrounds to say what I've learned, but I think if I were to really sort of take a moment and engage with all of the life lessons that I've had the extraordinary honor of being able to imbibe from various people, and that would be to be your authentic self and to recognize that you are in a constant process of learning. If you know, if there is one thing I've learned, literally, it's that is that you can do all the reading, you can have all the conversations. And you know that famous expression, the more you know, the more you realize you don't know. And if you are open enough and and aware that you are just butter drop in this vast, extraordinary, beautiful ocean called life, then I think you are way ahead of the curve.

Hylke Faber 07:52

I love butter drop in this vast ocean. I also resonate with being in the back of the room to be called forward, and the sense of humility and being authentic self. So Avantika, tell us a little bit about your life experience, how you started out, and maybe tell us a little bit about what you learned along the way,



about being your authentic self and how you may be sometimes, no, maybe sometimes you're totally in it, and maybe sometimes, if you're sometimes, like, like me, you're completely out of it. So how do you how? What have you learned in the in the process?

Avantika Akerkar 08:31

Yeah, I think that's just basically, I think that's just basically a process of being human. So, um, so here, here's an interesting thing, because, you know, in reading all kinds of management and leadership books, there are so many obvious ways that people have reached their potential, and I have not followed any of them. So I'm gonna say right off the bat, things have happened to me serendipitously. So maybe it's, you know, if I were to fall back into my Indian part of my life, maybe it's my karma, where this was predestined for me, and I am just gliding on the path, not always easy, but, you know, hoping to constantly do the things that I like to do and that bring me pleasure and, yes, monetary gain. That's not, you know, obfuscate the fact that one has to live and pay bills. But I would say that I am not one of those people who sat down and said, Okay, this is my life plan, and listed out my goals, two years, three years, five years, 10 years, 15 years, and said, Okay, I'm going to get all these kind of various jobs along the way to help me do it. No, I think I have been somebody who has just engaged with life and because. Nicolas, I have had wonderful conversations with people. I have had enormous opportunities that I think generally people may not have if they operate with blinkers and a very specific purpose in mind not to say that the grass is always greener on the other side, because there's so many days when I'm actually sitting at home and I just don't feel like doing anything, and I'm working from home, and maybe I just take some time off and watch a movie, and I think, you know what? What if I had done it differently? What if I had just, you know, been this PR professional, because my background, as you mentioned, is varied, so I studied in college public relations and journalism. I did nothing with journalism, but I did quite a bit with the field of public relations and communications. My father was the grandfather of PR here in India, and he basically got companies to understand the value of publics and engaging with publics, whether they're internal or they're external, and I suppose along the way, through osmosis, I was able to imbibe his learning and incorporate that into the various programs that I run. So my background, officially, is public relations, and that being said falls under the purview of communication. So whatever I have undertaken in terms of my professional life has always something to do with communication. So whether it was working for a big public relations company in New York or whether it was working for a refugee resettlement agency, which was the last job I had. It was always in the area of trying to trying to explain to a public what it is that one can potentially do to improve somebody's life. And that's the other part of it. I've always believed in engaging with a human being or engaging with another person, no matter where they are in the world, and helping them, whether it's just, hey, I have a contact for you, call this person up to let's sit down and create an actual communication program to improve your self awareness and therefore your productivity in the workplace. So from communication, I suppose the natural progression was in the field of the dramatic arts, because, in a way, that is probably one of the highest levels of communication. And talk about being authentic self, right? Yes, we do Don personas and characters, but the first thing they will tell you, and I did not go to drama school, but the first thing I have learned along the way is that if you are not your authentic self, and if you do not come with the right intention to portray a character, your audience



is not going to understand that. So honestly, I don't see a real difference between the dramatic arts and between conducting oneself in business today, because if you're not authentic, people are going to see right through you.

Hylke Faber 13:13

So talk a bit more about that. So this, this, this being in the Dramatic Arts. Can you tell me and tell us a little bit about your experience of learning that, learning that, and maybe also what made it easy and what made it harder for you to learn that, because it seems like very important learning.

Avantika Akerkar 13:33

If you ask my parents, they'll tell you I've been doing this since I was five years old. Okay, okay, yes, I have been acting in school plays, in high school plays, in college, and then I ended up going to university in New York. Now everybody knows that. You know, New York is the sacred ground for most anything in the arts. So although I watched a lot of Broadway, I didn't have any confidence to act so I did no acting school, which was nuts, because I spent over 20 years in New York. So I never went to acting school. I never took any classes, nothing. And after living in in the States for so long, I got a little burnt out from the last job. And I said, Okay, I'm going to move back to India on a furlough. And while I was here, and I happened to go to the theater, I saw a lot of what I would call, not particularly professional productions. And so I said to myself again, you know, real chutzpah, because I'm also Jewish, but just basically saying, Oh, my God, if they can call themselves an actor, I'm an actor. I've always loved acting. And. Literally, I promise you, that's how it started. And I called up the one person here who is a woman who I've known since I was a young woman, because we did a project together in Bombay in 1988 I had never lived in India as a professional, but I found myself back in India, and we ran international conferences for very, very big organizations. And I called her up and I said, Hey, I'm here. I'm here from New York, and I want to act. And she goes, Oh, okay, great. And the next thing I know, a week later, her son calls me up and says, My mother says, you can act. Come and talk to me about a new play. And that's how it started. And I literally, yeah. I mean, when people ask me to talk to their children, which happens so often, to say, can you give them advice as to how to enter the dramatic arts and acting, I always say no, because what happened to me, I think was Right place, right time.

Hylke Faber 16:03

How did you feel when that, when the sun said that? Sun says, Yeah, I hear you can act. Let's talk. How did you feel?

Avantika Akerkar 16:10

You touched a very interesting point, because I've always been told you're an amazing actor, right? Come on, you're a little kid, and of course, your parents are going to tell you, you're amazing. They're not going to say, Oh, don't even bother, right? They're not going to do that. So So I always had this thing that I'm a great actor. And so when he said, Come and talk to me, because I hear you can act, I was like, Who the hell do you think you are? Do you know you're younger than me? Do you know who



you're talking to? And I had no legs to stand on, because, honestly, I had done no acting at that point. But of course, the ego kicks in and I walk into the first sort of audition script read because he was testing me out. And there were four of Bombay's Top Women actors sitting in the room, and then the floor opened up under me. So this huge kind of you know, bravado that I walked into the room and then said, Oh, I can do this suddenly vanished. I was really scared, I was really insecure, I was really nervous, and I had to basically allow the tape recorder to play in my head to say, You know what you get people. You've always understood people. You have a good command of English, you have a decent ability to communicate. You know how to read is, you know, words on a page, just read. And literally, I had to keep reminding myself Hylke That just just read, don't try and be something you're not. And I think that, because I never pretended to be something that I wasn't, I think that probably was the first big lesson.

Hylke Faber 18:16

Andre your dad's voice, stay in the back of the room until you're called forward, so the back of the room was staying in your own what you knew, not what you were going to pretend you were supposed to be.

Avantika Akerkar 18:28

Yeah, and I think, I think now that I think back on that wonderful experience, it was an intuition, and if I may share with your audience that I believe you already know answers, but you have to trust yourself, and you have to listen to that, that voice inside you that says you know what, it's okay if you don't, if you don't know it, it's okay if you don't know how to do something, it's okay if you don't have The answers. But be honest enough to say that I don't. And so when going back to what I shared, when I when I read, and they all read, and I was listening to the other women reading, and I said, wow, they sound like me. You know, they sound really nice, and I think it would be wonderful to have this opportunity to be able to perform with them. And when it was over, they immediately started talking about rehearsal timings. Because, you know, nobody is a full time actor, especially for the stage here, you can't do it. You just can't do it. It just doesn't exist. You can't support yourself financially. And so I got up to leave, and the director turns to me and says, Where are you going? And I said, Well, you're talking about all the stuff that doesn't pertain to me. And he says, Well, considering you're in the play, why would rehearsal schedule not pertain to. You. And that's when, you know, I literally went and I hugged him. I just hugged him, and I said, I don't think you've understood the power of what you've just said to me a simple sentence, but I just, I'm just indebted to you, and I remember opening night, November, 2001 and the play was about four women who try and get together. Was supposed to be best friends. They try and get together just for a date, for lunch, to understand what's happening in their life, and it's been over a year and they haven't been able to find time. And I play a woman where the play opens on me, and he had us sitting on four boxes, and the spotlight opens on me, and I start the play right, and if you don't start the play with the right intention and the right energy, things fall apart very quickly. So I remember sitting there thinking to myself, and this probably is not something you should do as an actor. I thought to myself, before the light came on, I said, Oh my God, you're such a charlatan. What are you doing here? You have no right to be here with all these women, even though we rehearsed for a month and



and my director was happy with the way things were looking. And this thought flashed into my mind, and the light came on, and I said my line,

Speaker 1 21:39
and then what happened?

Avantika Akerkar 21:41

And I didn't forget any lines, and the play was a success. And it success in Indian terms means, you know, you have 10 shows. You don't have a run of, you know, 150 shows for three months of Broadway kind of thing. You're lucky if you get 10 shows in the theater. And I realized after opening night that that probably wasn't the best way to start, but I'll tell you what it did do. It made me hyper conscious of the moment. And I would also offer this to your audience. It's, it's, you know, it's very difficult to be in the moment all the time. I mean, let's be honest, there are 1,000,001 distractions, and you have this constant voice in the back of your head saying, you know, this should happen. That should happen. I have a laundry list. I have to pick up this. I have to pick up the kids, whatever it is. But even if it's for two minutes, if you can just be really focused in the moment. It's bliss. And athletes call that being in the zone, you know, where you can kind of hear your breathing, and it's almost like a meditation.

Hylke Faber 22:58

Beautiful, beautiful. Yeah, so tell us about your you're talking about being in the zone which resonates. I love the distinction between thinking I'm a charlatan and then, well, I have to be and thinking about you reading the script in the beginning, like I gotta be what I am, what I can do. So tell us about maybe another moment in your life where you made that journey from being not in the moment to getting in the moment. Tell us about that, that transition from being distracted, to being in the moment. And how do you make that journey? Because it's one thing is to know that, and it's another thing to actually do it.

Avantika Akerkar 23:53

This is true. I think for me, one of the most exciting things that I've undertaken right now is my open water ocean swimming. So I've always been a little fish in water. I love the water. I think, you know, I was born to spend most of my life in water, but that's not happening. So the next best thing is that I try and do it through long distance swimming. Now here's a funny thing, okay, I'm going to be very candid. Many, many years ago, when I was living in New York, I woke up one day with having had a most extraordinary dream, and that dream was me being a little speck, just swimming in the ocean. I didn't know where this place was, I didn't know what boundaries it was bound by. I found myself literally just being one with that body of water, you know. And and I woke up thinking that was a really bizarre dream. And then, of course, having, you know, having spent a little time in therapy before that, I thought, oh, okay, okay, so it's, it's my inner self trying to to, you know, cleanse myself of all the issues that I've been having and I'm swimming because I found the freedom to rise above some of the issues that were weighing me down. Well, actually, many years later, and I'm saying, like, 15 years later, no, I actually think it's me swimming in the ocean. So how did this happen? So I, I used to go swim at a



swimming club next door to me, where I live, and it's beautiful. It's, it's an open water pool, very unusual in Mumbai, you don't have public pools. This is actually a private pool. It's huge, okay. It was started by the British when they came here for them to escape from the heat and the general population, and so it was right next to the sea, and the pool has sea water that's filtered, and you swim in sea water. What's the name of the pool? Breech candy swimming bath. Trust. Bridge candy swimming pool.

Hylke Faber 26:28

Yes. Bridge candy, okay, yes.

Avantika Akerkar 26:31

And, and so I used to swim there all the time, and at one point I said to myself, you know, I should probably do a few lengths and build up stamina, because I enjoy being in the water anyway. Long story short, two years ago, November of 2023 I was 59 years old, right? And I'm swimming, and when I finished, there's a gentleman standing there and starts this most ridiculous, what I thought at the time, ridiculous conversation, but what ends up being sort of my aha moment, because I had read about him in the newsletter of the club, how he and his wife are open water swimmers. And I thought to myself at the time when I read it that, you know, maybe I'd like to do this one day. Everything for me is maybe I'd like to do it one day, and then it gets manifested. So, long story short, he said, Look, I noticed you've been doing lengths. Would you like to try open water swimming? And I said, Are You the people that I read about in the newsletter. And he said, Yes. And I said, so, so how do you do it? How do you train? How do you because I'm not very good at I'm a contradiction. I love schedule because I'm half German. So yes, I love my schedule, but at the same time you put me in a schedule, and I'm like, I don't want to do this, right? So with most sports that I took up after a while, I said, yeah, no, I don't want to train to be some XYZ person, so I would just give up. So he said, Well, you have to practice swimming lengths and whatever. So I said, Okay, when is the next race. He said, How about if you just start swimming? I said, No, no, no, if I don't have a goal to move towards coming, yeah, yeah, I can't do it. So he goes, Okay, February of next year, the open water swimming competition is in Goa, south, India. I said, Okay, great. What is the distance I should do? He said, Well, there are many distances. What do you think you can do? And I said, Okay, what is the easiest, the minimum? And he said, Do you like to sprint, or do you like to do distance? And I said, No, I don't like to sprint. So he said, Okay, try one kilometer. I said, Okay, what do I need to do? To do one kilometer? So he told me, you have to swim this, this from one end of the pool at the diagonal to the other, and that's 51 meters. And if you can do that 20 times, you have your kilometer. And I said, Oh my god, 20 times. Okay, all right. Well, you know, it's November. I have December and January, and I said, You know what, a mantika, just try it. You can't do it, you can't do it, but just try it right. As my grandmother used to say, Just do it, right. Just do it. Not Nike, but my grandmother. So I did, and I found that, you know, I did a couple of lengths, and then I realized, okay, I'm rambling, but I realized eventually this was easy and I could do it. And so I found myself sort of getting excited as we got closer. And then just. Like the play. The day of the race arrives, and it's six o'clock in the morning, and I'm standing by the ocean, and I say to myself, What are you doing? This is a vast ocean. How can you just get in the ocean and swim? You've never done this before. You've played in the ocean, but how on earth you're going to embarrass the hell out of yourself?



Don't do it. And again, that voice came back, and I said, You know what? I've trained. I don't know how well I've trained, but I've put in some effort. I'm not a quitter, so let's just do it, and I came second, beautiful.

Hylke Faber 30:49

I love the story of serendipity. I love the being willing to put yourself into those situations, yes, and being willing to listen. I am also fascinated by the not rushing, not having this a, b, c, d, plan to get to E,

Avantika Akerkar 31:08

I think, Z, Q, D, P, R,

Hylke Faber 31:12

yes. And throughout, what I see you do is you show up, so we're gonna take a little break. Now, after the break, I want to hear more about this voice that you talked about, which seems to show up a lot in the beginning of those moments where you're literally jumping into the pool that says, maybe not, yeah. And how do you work with that voice? Maybe also in less grand moments, maybe not in the theater, maybe not in the ocean, but maybe in your daily life or leadership. How does that show up? You've been listening to root and wavering. We're talking to Avantika arkar about basically serendipity and connecting to the flow of life and plunging right in See you after the break.

Speaker 2 32:05

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 32:30

So we're listening to Avanti Kakar communications and transformational facilitator and swimmer and actress and so many other things. So the thing that struck me about what you just talked about was that your life seems to be a big yes to life with small nos. So those big yeses and then those small nos, you're going with life, and yet at some point there's like parties, like No, maybe not. How do you work with those small nose in your regular life? What do you do?

Avantika Akerkar 33:09

That's a that's something actually, that I've been grappling with. It's not easy. There is so much more I want to do, and I just that voice often comes back and says, no, no, you can't do it, right? So those little no's, I will be honest, I'm trying to deal with them right now on over the years, it's not always been successful. I have prevented myself from moving forward in a certain direction, I'll be honest, because I didn't have self belief when I was starting out as a young professional. And I think that there are two ways to look at this. One is those who have complete self belief, right? What happens to them when suddenly, you know, 15 years down the line, they recognize, wait a minute, this is not what I want to do,



right? What happens at that aha moment. I don't know. I know for somebody like myself that is never really had direction and purpose in that sense, right? In a very structured sense, I've always had a purpose, as I shared earlier, but I've meandered to the purpose, and so along the way, these, these, these no's that you talk about at some point, actually, when I was in my early 30s and 40s were very prevalent. Moving back to India from having lived in the States, I left. I left Mumbai when I was growing up at 15 years old, and I came back as. A 36 year old woman who grew up in New York, who worked in New York, whose whole manifested professional life up to that point was New York, unlike any place in the world. And I moved back to Mumbai, yes, which is also like no other place in India, but it was so foreign for me. And there were so many days when I woke up and I said, I can't handle this. I really can't handle it. And then I would do two things. I turned to meditation, right? So another one of those serendipitous encounters where somebody mentioned this kind of meditation, Buddhist meditation technique called Vipassana, silent meditation. And 15 years later, I wake up at four o'clock in the morning and I say, I need to do this meditation. And so I Yeah, so those no days, I find that if I don't sit down for about half an hour and just close my eyes and breathe, I can't function very well.

Hylke Faber 36:15

So what does meditation do? What does it do? And with the no what happens?

Avantika Akerkar 36:22

Well, the no kind of becomes unimportant. It's just two letters in a word. And I think that what ends up happening for a lot of us, and especially if I may say women, I don't necessarily want to go down that road, but it is true that women have always, traditionally, historically, had a harder time with all the different factors that pull us in different directions that you know, we can't say no. We're not allowed to say no, and and what I end up doing with a lot of the young women in my workshops is that I help them to recognize that they have the power to say no, and that they can do so by relying on their inner strength, and whether it's through sports that they choose or whether it's through a hobby that they choose. Mine just happens to be either swimming in the water, if something is bothering me. Hylke, I go for a swim, or I sit down in silent meditation, and then I just think through breathing, you tend to recognize that life is just so much more important than these words

Hylke Faber 37:42

give sink or swim a very different meaning. You know you swim, yeah, sink or swim, or or you let yourself sink down in the the illusion of what the mind tells you. I love it. You said, No, it's just two letters, and you're able.

Avantika Akerkar 38:00

I'll tell you something. Yeah, I have to constantly remind myself about that also, because, you know, like I said, I need to write my mother's life story her book, because it's, it's, it's just a phenomenal life story. She's a Holocaust survivor, but it's a very different story. Again, I think that this whole idea of serendipity came down from my grandparents.



Hylke Faber 38:27

Just tell me more about that. I think I know you just came from a very beautiful trip with your mom to the United States, but tell us a little bit about that and what you've learned from your ancestors that way,

Avantika Akerkar 38:41

resilience.

Hylke Faber 38:43

Okay, so tell us. Tell us a bit about the story. Tell us a bit about

Avantika Akerkar 38:47

the story. So, so my mother was born in Berlin, Germany in 1931 and two Jewish parents, very well established Jewish parents. And over the years, my grandfather, who was a very well respected salesman for a company, started hearing things he didn't like, came back to Berlin and told his family my mother being the only child that they needed to leave Berlin. And my grandmother said in German Over my dead body, and he said, it will be if we don't leave. And so in 1934 they left so way ahead of time, and the idea was that at some point they want to make their way to America, because my grandfather had been sending money to a relative in California who had started a company with the understanding that if ever they had to leave Germany one day because things didn't work out politically for them as Jews, they could go to America and not be refugees. I mean, who thinks like this? Who thinks like this, right? So you can call it German practicality, but I think it's one step beyond so I think, like my grandfather, things happened to us. So things happened to him. So, long story short, they ended up going to Amsterdam. They ended up going to Paris, the tickets on the boat to go to America were in Marseille. My grandparents were thrown in a camp. They were cut. They came out of the camp, they went. My grandfather went back in a camp. And every camp, pretty much he was in. It was amazing. The German Commandant hated his job. I mean, I promise you this, this is just, really, you couldn't make this up, this and

Hylke Faber 40:49

we're talking about concentration camps. Well, no, they

Avantika Akerkar 40:53

were called. They were called Holding camps. It wasn't concentration it was in Auschwitz, Bergen, Belsen, none of those. So it was first for being German when they went to Paris because of the Vichy government, and then when they sided with Germany. Then, then it was being in a camp for being Jewish. But it wasn't a cat. It was like what you called, well, I don't know, like a confinement camp, yes, yeah, yeah, yeah, right, right. And so anyway, ultimately they make it to Marseille, and they're about to get on the boat, and my mother falls down and breaks her hip. And then America enters the wall, so that avenue is closed. So then they're like, where do we go now? Because we can't stay in France. So OPA opened the Atlas, and he said, which are the places closest to America? Oh, Mexico. Mexico entered the war. They couldn't go to Mexico. He said, aha, Jamaica. Jamaica is another country. But he



said, I don't know too many Jews who have gone to Jamaica, you know? And then he went, ah, Cuba, because I like cigars, so we're going to go to Cuba. So they ended up going to Cuba for six years. And and, you know, when, when Jinx tells her story. Jinx is my mother. She was born Jean Hannah, but when she got to India, my father nicknamed her Jinx. She's not jinxed, but she's a jinx and and when she tells the story, you know, I get goosebumps, because it's one of those things where it was intuition, it was serendipity, it was luck. I think they had angels sitting on their shoulders. And I somehow can't help but believe that that has sort of filtered its way down into my life. I consider myself extraordinarily blessed. And here's the funny thing, Hylke mom, never, the entire time that my brother and I were growing up, never, ever, ever brought about an awareness of us and them, as in, never said anything bad about the Germans, never said anything about Nazi Germany. Never talked about how horrible her life had been as a child, growing up, America was her. Let me see German Amsterdam, Paris, Cuba, her fifth country, right? And eventually met my father in university, and then he brought her back to India, where she's been for the last 17 years. Never once did I get the sense that this is a bitter woman, that this is a woman who needed to demonstrate to her children why it was important to hold on to the faith at all costs. Never I would say this is probably one of the most egoless women I have ever met, or egoless people I have ever met, you know, and again, quite by accident, we found out about mom's whole life story I didn't even know until I was, like, five years old. I didn't even know now people will say, who does that right and who does that somebody like my mother, who felt that it was important not to instill this idea of the other in another human being, unless I've experienced it myself,

Hylke Faber 44:47

so to say, a bit more. So she instilled in you the the mindset, the the atmosphere of not other, yes, and instead of not other, what did she. Still in you

Avantika Akerkar 45:02

just community, just community, just community. And I think that over the years, because I had such a fantastic childhood, I mean, thank God. I grew up at a time when there was no technology. We didn't have television. You know, we had to, we had to place an order for a telephone. I'm really dating myself now, but India didn't have television until, you know, the 1970s so I grew up with an imagination. I grew up with friends, I grew up with being outdoors, and I grew up with community and and, you know, I think that today, globally, we've lost the ability to build community. And I think whether it's business or whether it's your family unit, or whether it's you know, you within yourself, you need to build community, because that's the only way you know. Hillary Clinton said, it takes a village, right? It's very true. It takes a village.

Hylke Faber 46:10

Very true. So here, here, your ancestors, in this very few years, went all across from Berlin through these European countries to Cuba.

Avantika Akerkar 46:26

Such a foreign country.



Hylke Faber 46:28

Totally different part. Yeah. So I hear lots of leaps of

Avantika Akerkar 46:34

faith, faith

Hylke Faber 46:36

to be able to do that. I'm thinking about how most humans work that I know, including myself, I kind of want to know what's in Cuba before I go to Cuba, so to speak, right? And yet, she jumped in, just like you did, like you did with the acting and the swimming and so on. So you just literally

Avantika Akerkar 46:56

you are, so right? You keep

Hylke Faber 46:58

jumping in. So you keep jumping in and and so it's almost like you and your family are unconsciously skilled in just jumping in, just doing it.

Avantika Akerkar 47:10

It does get us into trouble, though, I will say it can get us into trouble. I found myself in situations where I'm like, maybe I maybe I shouldn't have done that. But the best part is that then you really, and I'm not going to get into those details a little too personal, but it's, it's where you really, then have to dig deep, and you have to, first of all, be very kind to yourself and say, Okay, you made a mistake. Big deal. Yeah, learn from that mistake and then just say, All right, well, I'm in this sticky or tricky situation. How do I get out of it? And that's where community is important, because there's always somebody that can help you.

Hylke Faber 47:57

So even though I don't want you to talk about the most sticky of those situations. I would love to hear a little bit more about how you have worked to get out of situations, because my sense of, like, also with the listeners, is, I mean, we all have these challenges in life that we say, well, I can go this way, I can go the safe way, or I can go like the road less traveled, old thing, right? We all know that. And what I'm hearing from you is The Road Less Traveled or the jumping your Cuba isn't always paradise. It's not always working out very well. And sometimes you meet you, you realize in the middle, like maybe not so much. Maybe I need to get out of here. Maybe this is time for me to find another way. So how do you make that transition? You talked about community, you talked about with yourself. Can you tell us a little bit about that experience?

Avantika Akerkar 48:54



You know, it's not a very conscious thing that I do, but I think if I can be very honest, I think it's self belief at the end of the day, knowing that ultimately, what is the worst thing that can happen, right? So if it's a personal situation, the worst thing that can happen is you lose a friend, because if you've tried to explain why the situation is not what you thought the situation was, and the other person says, Sorry. You know this is it can't handle big mistake. Well, then maybe that person has outlived their functionality, right? So it takes two to tango. It takes two hands to clap. So you then have to recognize that, okay, I put myself in a situation. It's not the best situation. Let us try and talk ourselves. Ourselves through the situation, and if the other person doesn't want to follow through and give you the benefit of the doubt, or themselves the benefit of the doubt, walk away. There is nothing you can do about it. You can't control another person. Professionally, it's a little trickier, right? Professionally, you're actually affecting people's lives that maybe you don't have a direct connect with, right? So? So for example, when I was first starting out in my whole communications sort of workshop experience, honestly, I didn't know what I was doing. I really did.

Hylke Faber 50:44

This is a theme here about,

Avantika Akerkar 50:48

oh, my God, you can't, you can't distill my life.

Hylke Faber 50:52

She doesn't know what she's doing, but she's doing it. And, yeah, great things happen.

Avantika Akerkar 50:56

I mean, tell I'm seriously telling you so. So this is how that happened, which is, I'm I'm producing a play. I'd never done that before, either, but I said, You know what? There's a lot of rabbit I'm just going to produce an act in a play. And I got a friend of mine to come from Israel, and we produced this play. And while we were producing this play, one of the actors said, you know, I've been watching you, and you really you have such a lovely way of handling people and handling situations that people don't feel disconnected or stressed or or unheard. And have you ever considered running workshops and being a coach. And I went, What's that? No, what is that? And they went, Well, you know, I've been working with this young woman who was moved from America, and she's run her own company. Here's her number. Go talk to her. And that's how it started. And my first job that I ever had. And she said, and we went through, you know, a month of intensive like I used to run FICO, I mean, you know, simulate workshops and so on, so forth. Anyway, she said, Are you ready for your first challenge? It's five days, nine to five for a big financial multinational, and I'm like, let's do it, and I'm on the train going to the company, and guess what? Ready? I don't know what I'm doing, so I decided to do what you've been taught when you do public speaking, if you don't know the answer to something, you basically dump it on your audience, right? So I go into, I kind of march into this room, and there are these kids sitting there, and they're looking at me, and I went, hello. My name is so and so. I'm not going to be training you. Let's get rid of that word. I think we're going to basically have a conversation. So I made them



move all their desks aside, and we sat down in a circle, and I basically said, Tell me who you are. What are you doing here? And for me, it was really kind of buying time so I could feel comfortable. And I think halfway, by the time we got through, halfway through the day, I said, You know what, I can do this.

Hylke Faber 53:32

And how did you get that? But it's interesting, because, you know, I facilitate workshops for my livelihood that I've done that for 20 years, and what you just described is a very beautiful way to create the forming energy of a group. So in a way, it was perfect that you did that, and also very brave to say, I'm not here to train and all that.

Avantika Akerkar 53:55

Yeah. How did you, by the way, believe very, very ferociously

Hylke Faber 53:59

beautiful, right? Yeah, how did you find the confidence and what happened in yourself? What, what was the dialog inside of yourself that day with that group?

Avantika Akerkar 54:10

You know, I have to put myself in that situation, and that's why I'm kind of looking up. But I think what, and as they also tell you in the theater, is just look at your audience as fellow human beings who are fallible.

Hylke Faber 54:31

Fellow fallibles

Avantika Akerkar 54:33

make mistakes. And I told them. I told them right away. I said, people, I'm not always going to have the answers when you have questions, and I will be very honest, I will look it up for you, and I will come back the next day and share what I think is an appropriate answer. But I am not here because I know everything, and I think it's really again. As we started this whole conversation, it's just being human. You know, it's not pretending something. You're not honest,

Hylke Faber 55:08

back to the back of the room,

Avantika Akerkar 55:10

yeah, I mean seriously, it's just recognizing that you have limits. I mean, this little brain and how many books can you read? How many articles, how many you know, symposia, whatever forum, or whatever it is that you want to do to build your knowledge base, at some point you're going to recognize, you know what? I don't know. I just, I still do that.



Hylke Faber 55:40

So the final, final question for you, one of the final questions, because this hour has flown by, because we're almost in an hour already. Yes. So it's the question I have for you, is, what would you say to a person that somewhere inside themselves knows it's time to go to Cuba or it's time to do this plunge and do this ocean thing, or go and become this trainer or facilitator or whatever. But the no is so strong that it's like the desire is overshadowed. It's almost invisible. Yeah. What would

Avantika Akerkar 56:21

you say that's really, that's really such a good question, because, I mean, I can tell you the kind of things I do, but it doesn't necessarily work with you, because your nature will be different, your experience, your exposure, will be different. I think if you were to sit down and have an honest conversation with yourself, like if you were talking to your your younger self, kindly with respect, generously and openly, and you say, Okay, What is the worst that can happen? You you fail, and if you fail, what is the worst that can happen? Okay, you make a fool of yourself, and if you make a fool of yourself, what is the worst that can happen? People have short attention spans. They'll move on, as long as you're not hurting anybody and yourself, I would say, just take the plunge seriously. Just just, you know, I

Hylke Faber 57:33

love that. What's worse, what's the worst thing that can happen? Contemplation and yeah, and I love the, I love the the suggestion and nudge to not to not do harm, even though sometimes we may still do harm, and we don't know it, because being human is a all tall order.

Avantika Akerkar 57:51

Well, that's the other thing is, you know, I just, I just finished recording a really interesting book. Actually, I've been doing a lot of audio recordings in the gaps that I have before various projects. And the book was on how to be an anti procrastinator. And one of the things that really resonated, I mean, she has this, you know, incredible focus, step by step process, which I when I was reading, is like, yeah, not me, not me, not me, not me. But one thing that she did say, which really resonated, and I think it's really important, is to surround yourself with people who support you no matter

Hylke Faber 58:33

what, back to community, going back to

Avantika Akerkar 58:35

community, back

Hylke Faber 58:36

to community. Yeah, we're at the end. We're at the end. So I'm going to summarize, because I'm going to stick stick to the hour to honor audience time as well. Such highlights I want to take is, is go to the back of the room and ask to be called forward, or wait to be called forward, which doesn't mean being a



wallflower, because it's also listening and being able to swim and plunge in, allowing ourselves to listen to life. And maybe it's not all linear. Avantika shared with us a call 15 years earlier, a dream. And then there's this thing that happens, is staying open and then allowing ourselves this, this deeply honest conversation. What's the worst that can happen if I do and maybe I just do it? So thank you for that. Maybe move to Cuba in your life, whatever that looks like. Avantika, any final words from you?

Avantika Akerkar 59:38

Yes, absolutely. First of all to say, thank you. What an incredible conversation this has been. I mean, you've made me think. You've really made me root within myself and and to actually be as honest as I possibly can. And I love that. I really, really love that as one gets older. You recognize that it's so important to be as honest and open with yourself and with others as you can be, because the nourishment you get from that is, you know, multi fold. Multi generational, multi fold. So thank you for this opportunity. One little conversation that we had has led to this beautiful conversation.

Hylke Faber 1:00:24

Thank you Avantika, which means that word means, I think Goddess of humility. And part of humble, humbleness is to be really, really, really honest. Thank you so much. Thank you for listening. Thank you for being here. Avantika, Avantika, akakar, you can find her online. Just look at her on LinkedIn, otherwise, as a leader, leadership, facilitator, coach, actress, swimmer and many other things. If you human being, look at human being that's very important, a person that that shepherds honesty and humility you've been listening to root and wavering, if you like this kind of thing, you can find us on Spotify Apple, other places where you find your podcast and this was rude and wavering, where we help leaders connect more deeply to our native potential. I'm your host. Hylke Faber, see you next time

Presenter 1:01:22

you thank you for joining us in today's episode of rooted and unwavering leadership conversations about courageous connectedness presented by the leadership development company. Growth Leaders Network to learn more. Subscribe to this podcast. Connect with growth Leaders Network and Hylke Faber on LinkedIn, or read hylkes award winning book, taming your crocodiles. Now, take a moment and appreciate something that is great about you. Celebrate the gift that you are and enjoy connecting more deeply to your best self today, see you next time on rooted and unwavering you

