

Jerry: So it's really good to meet you, Joe.

Joe: Same here.

Jerry: Yeah. Thank you for coming on the show and, um, why don't you just take a moment to introduce yourself.

Joe: Sure. So I'm Joe Wilding. My current role is, uh, co-founder and CTO at Boom Supersonic, which is a company, uh, here in Colorado working on trying to bring back supersonic air travel.

Jerry: Oh, that's all?

Joe: Yeah.

Jerry: We're just building aircraft. (Laughs).

Joe: Exactly.

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Jerry: Why don't we go back to, um, how we first met, which was via email.

Joe: Sure.

Jerry: And, if you can recall, because it was eons ago-

Joe: Right.

[00:01:00]

Jerry: Right? What was it that, that had you reach out? And, if I remember correctly you had been listening to a couple of podcasts and you had some thoughts, so why don't you tell us that story.

Joe: Sure, yeah. So, um, I first found the Reboot podcast, um, probably a year ago, um, and started listening, and, and, uh, lo-, loved a lot of the, the messages you had for a lot of the, uh, you know, founders and, and, uh CEOs and so forth, the guests you had on the show. And, uh, you know, a lot of it was really resonating with me and I

[00:01:30] would say for the last quite some time, probably decade now, I've been trying to work on a lot of the themes that you talk about on the show, although I would say for quite a long period of that time, um, it was, uh, less focused and less, um, just so-, sort of not making a lot of progress. Just I kind of knew I had things I used to work on and I knew, you know, I was trying to kind of suck up every book or any reference or whatever I could find. But, again, again it was very misguided. And so, when I started listening to the Reboot podcast I initially just kind of decided, wow,

[00:02:00] this is some really good stuff. I'm going to go back and just kind of start at the beginning, which at this point there's I forget how many episodes.

Jerry: Too many.

Joe: Yeah, too many.

Jerry: (Laughs).

Joe: So, so for the last year really I've been slowly getting through those. You know, just a couple a week, uh, for the most part and, and, you know, took, took away a lot of little things from every one of those. And I would say over the summer, and I don't remember exactly when this was, I used it a few months ago or something, um, I was kind of going through some changes in my role at work, and, um, kind of doing, starting to do a lot more of kind of introspection-

Jerry: Yeah.

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Joe: ... kind of radical self inquires, as you like to call. And there was one pivotal day I remember, I was going up to Breck for a wedding listening to one of the podcasts on my drive up-

Jerry: Breck as in Breckenridge.

Joe: Breckenridge, yeah.

Jerry: So, so Joe is a really Coloradan. (Laughs).

Joe: Yep. And, uh, there was an episode, and I don't remember who it was with now but there was quote in the episode that just really resonated with me and it was based on a transition I was kind of starting to go through. I had just taken a new role in the company where I had been chief engineers and, I, all the engineering team had been reporting to me and at that point it was, I don't know, 30 engineers or something like that an-, and indirectly, you know I had a couple of lead below me but, um, I knew from like the very first day I spoke with the, uh, one of the CEO over our company, one of the other co-founders. I remember my very first meeting with him I told I'm excited about this project, I really want to help, but I'll tell you right now I am not the long-term engineering lead of this company, you know, once to hundreds or even thousands of people someday.

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[00:03:30] So, so I've always known that about myself, and, and, and, but what I said was but early on I can do that and I've led small teams and I'm fine with that but at some point he wants to talk about a transition. Well, so this summer we finally kind of got to that point where we started to make the transition and for some reason I was really a little bit struggling with the transition and, and what it ended up being was,

[00:04:00] uh, this, this image that I had in my mind of what my role should have been versus what I actually like to do and what I like to focus my time on and those two not being in sync. So the quote in the episode that really resonated with me was a David Axlerod quote and I'll probably butcher it here but-

Jerry: Yeah.

Joe: ... it essentially was, just about politicians but I think is a pretty universal quote and it's something to the effect of there's politicians who like to do something and there's politicians that want to be someone and I only work with the former. So, so that really resonated with me of I don't need to be someone, I don't need to be, you know, what I've always had in my mind of what a, what a leader, a technical leader in an aircraft company is or, or someone who can take one of these complex projects and really get it to fruition including building the team and all the people management and all those aspects of it. Because of my heart, what I really want to do is build an airplane. I just want to get an airplane done and, and, and see it come to fruition, see it come to the marketplace and, and actually make a difference in the world. So, so what, what kind of that ... listening to that episode and listening to that quote really kind of sunk in with me as like, okay, I just need to throw away this idea of I should be X. Or, you know, I need to fit into some mold. I just need to do what I do in a way that is most effective for the company and, and that gives, you know, myself and the company the most chance of success.

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Jerry: Yeah, and I remember the original emails thread that we had which was just a, you know, the first was just sort of a random, uh, toss in email.

Joe: Yeah, it was actually a thank you for the podcast.

Jerry: Yeah. Yeah.

Joe: That's how it started.

Jerry: And then, and then we just went back and forth a little bit-

Joe: Yep.

[00:05:30]
Jerry: ... and, if I recall correctly, I remember saying that, uh, you might consider just accepting yourself as you are.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: And, and starting from there. And, and, um, I hadn't realized until you were sort of reviewing it now that there was this kind of decade long quest to quote, unquote, "be authentic."

Joe: Right.

Jerry: And I'm putting that in quotes, I'll explain that in a second. It, there's an irony in, in that quest. And the irony, of course, is going to a bookshelf, my book is coming out in June, I'll say that again. So, when my book comes out, you should go to a bookshelf. But the irony is to go to a bookshelf to find out how to be yourself.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Jerry: Does that make sense?

Joe: Oh, that makes so much sense and it's, it's funny you say that because I would say in the last month or two months, whatever it's been now we first connected over email, I've been going through even more transition in a lot of ways. Listening to the podcast, I've actually been reading a lot of the books that you recommend on the podcast, uh, um, Parker Palmer, I've read several of his books. Um, uh, Steve Hollis, um-

Jerry: James Hollis.

Joe: James Hollis, yep. Um, I'm in right in the middle right now of Sharon Salzberg's books.

Jerry: Oh, good.

Joe: All, all, all of those books are, are fantastic.

Jerry: You have drunk the Reboot Kool-Aid.

Joe: I have.

Jerry: (Laughs).

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Joe: I have. And it's so funny because one of the take aways I have in the middle of this journey, if you want to call it that, um, is my ... so the way I am wired, I'm a very logical person, I'm a very, uh, uh, it's jus-, just who I am. And, and I, I tend to ... I love books. I love reading books, I love taking away things from books, I love after I read them make a list, you know, summarize the book, make an outline, and so forth. And it's, I kind of hit a wall probably a month ago kind of the idea of this, this inner and outer self and, and, you know, which comes in all of these books and it's actually everywhere you look in the world.

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Once you kind of understand these concepts, you can't not see it anymore which is fascinating to me. And, uh, anyway so, you know, understanding that process and, and the whole idea of, like, listen to what your, your, your life is telling you and

[00:08:00] listen to what your soul is telling you and pay attention to that. And, and that's a very different topic than the logical side of me saying, "Okay, I'm going to make a list and I'm going to follow it and I'm going to get through this." Because nothing on a list can you write that says, "Okay, just listen to yourself and then the answers are going to come." And, and the analogy I kind of started to get to is I feel like the way my brain works and the way I'm wired is kind of like a computer program in a way.

Jerry: Right.

Joe: Like, I can type in a code and I can say execute and it goes off and runs and then I want to sit there, you know, wait for the computer to catch up and say, "Okay, here's the outcome." And this whole process, like, doesn't work that way.

Jerry: That's right. That's right.

[00:08:30] Joe: It's, it's, it's this okay, I ran it, now what? And I was really struggling with that and so what I've kind of forced myself to do over the couple of weeks is just kind of to be okay with that and just say, "Well, okay."

Jerry: Well maybe that's actually the outcome that you're looking for. But I want to take it back a little bit. You're how old? Uh-

Joe: Forty four.

Jerry: Forty four.

Joe: Yep.

Jerry: So for, let's call it 43 and half years there was a way of being-

Joe: Yep.

[00:09:00]

Jerry: ... that Joe had. What prompted the search say 10 years ago? What prompted the search for the last 10 years and what's fueled that?

Joe: Sure.

Jerry: Wha-, what was going on for you?

Joe: Um, it's, it's really the leadership topic. So I would say roughly 10 years ago I was very much, in all of my jobs I was very much an individual contributor so I was, you know, sitting behind a computer all day long, you know, writing code or doing analysis or whatever.

Jerry: Producing output.

[00:09:30]

Joe:

Exactly. And so, you know, there were certainly some people aspects to that but, but on a pretty light side. You know, maybe 10% of my day. And, then, as I got to a certain part of my career like most people get to you start to get these, these, uh, uh, these requests, I would say but also kind of internally driven. I was like, "Well, I should start, you know, rising above that from a career stand point. I should start taking on more responsibility, start being more of a lead and that sort of thing."

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And I think what happened back then was my personality was not very supportive of that. Like, I was very introverted and still am on a lot of levels. Um, and so I kind of like, I could see other great leaders around me and it's like, "Oh, I want to be more like them" when I really wasn't wired that way. So I kind of started to explore like, well, why is that and, and what can I do about that? And I would say I, it got partially down the path, good, good enough to where I could take on much more leadership roles and I did that, you know, quite a bit for the last 10 year, mostly in smaller groups, smaller projects-

Jerry:

Right.

Joe:

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... that sort of thing. But then, I would say the last couple years it kind of, um, was at point of like, okay, maybe I need to take that to another level now and to continue working on that.

Jerry:

Right.

Joe:

But at the same time in the last couple of years, and, and really intensely over the last year, I've kind of had more of this, like, enlightenment of like, okay, but do I really want to do that? Like, like, do I really want to keep growing in that area or do I not? And should I, like, change what I focus on and change the direction I'm going and, and, um ... so I, I still don't have great answers on any of that but that's, um, that's what I'm exploring at the moment.

[00:11:00]

Jerry:

And, and as I recall from our email exchange you, you had come up with a, a view of yourself, um, around, uh, who you are and how you are wired.

Joe:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Jerry:

What was that view?

Joe:

[00:11:30]

Um, well, I, I'm, um, I, what I want, what I call self diagnosed as, as somewhere on the Asperger's spectrum. I think that's what you're referring to. Um, so, um, you know, I've never been formally diagnosed in that way but, um, you know, everything I read about that is very much points in that direction. And, uh, that is fine. You know, like, honestly, uh, in some ways it's like who cares what label on put on anything, right?

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Joe: Wha-, where I do like the label and, and like knowing that about myself is it gives me insight of to, like, where to point myself for resource and, um, so I've read many books on, on Asperger's, both biographies of people as well as, um, you know, sort of self help book type, type categories on that topic. And some of them have been super helpful as well and have really given me some enlightenment unto, you know, how my brain is works and how to, how to get the most out of that, essentially, but.

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Jerry: So, so, le-, let's hang out with notion that this quote, unquote, "diagnosis" is self generated.

Joe: Sure. Yep.

Jerry: And really what it, what it sounds to me is that the label is only important because it's giving you insi-, it's giving you a structure with which to look at the insights that you've had about the way you process and the way you think about things. Is that right?

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Joe: Absolutely. Yeah.

Jerry: So, so what, given that, how does it impact your leadership? How does it impact who you are? And, and how does it impact your life?

Joe: Um, so that's a great question. Uh, several, I would say several things I've taken away from that and, um, one is, and I think we talked about this a little bit in our email as well how we're both fan of, of biographies.

Jerry: Yeah.

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Joe: You know, this genre and learning about how other successful people, the struggles they've gone through and maybe changes they've made in their life and that sort of thing. And so reading, reading those stories of people that have, that have been successful with, you know, some part of the Asperger's spectrum and obviously there's a wide spectrum there, um, is, is helpful in that it's, it's, in many ways. You know, one, it's just comforting. You know, it's always nice to know, like, oh, I'm not the only person that (laughs) struggles with these things thinks this way or whatever. But, um, you know, some of them have, have, have some sort of strategies in them, um, and, so, so, so a couple of ways. And, honestly, I, I view this part of me, whether that is what it is or not-

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Jerry: Right.

Joe: ... but, but the one part of it that I really resonate is just the way my brain is wired from how it processes both on the logical side but as well as there's, from what I've read, there's actually different kind of versions of Asperger's on, uh, some, some people it affects them more visually, some people more numerically, some people linguistically, and so forth. I'm very much the visual one where I, where everything I do, everything I, I process I can see as an image in my head. I think everybody's like that to some degree but for me it's like really strong, which is what makes me a really good engineer. And so, what some of the insight is helping me is actually helping other engineers, um, mentoring them and getting, you know, explaining tough concepts to people. And it helps me in two ways.

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One is, like, early in my career I used to be able to do some sort of a design problem or something, you know, just would instantly make perfect sense to me and I would show it to somebody else and they were like, "I just don't get it." And my thought was like, "How can you not see this?" And, you know, it turns out in some situations well, they literally can't see it-

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Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Joe: ... you know, in the same way that it's in, in my head. So just sort of understanding that gap has been helpful to, to help cross that bridge. To like, "Okay, let me back up and let me explain this better." Or, "Let me draw it for you so I can, you know, show you what I see in my head or whatever."

Jerry: Yeah.

Joe: So that's been good. And then, you know, I think to other part of it from a leadership standpoint maybe more importantly is just the, just knowing, uh, I have a hard time having empathy, like, instantly for someone where they're going through something hard or something like that. Like, I almost have to at times, like, force myself, like, "Okay. I need to put myself in their shoes for a minute and really think through, you know, I said this or somebody said this and how is that actually making them feel and what are they actually doing?" Whereas I think in some people, that comes much more natural. Like, it's second nature, just like for me seeing an image of a mechanism is second nature. Like, seeing that, that, that, uh, emotional side of a topic is not second nature for me. I have to actively process through it. So I think understanding that about myself and, and taking, you know, a little bit of a pause to get through that sometimes has been helpful.

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Jerry: So, um, I'm curious as to the way in which ... so, so what I've just heard you describe is that you've, you've created this through your insights, through your logic, through your, through the way your brain is wired-

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

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Jerry: ... you have, um, uh, uh, gained enough insight about yourself to be able to then apply those, uh, that thought process to your leadership so that you can adapt your leadership so that you can respond to others.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Jerry: Is that right?

Joe: Yeah, that's a good summary.

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Jerry: Okay. So I just want to pause and point something out. Okay. I am super intuitive and empathic, and I have done the same thing.

Joe: Okay.

Jerry: Now, why am I telling you that?

Joe: Uh, I don't know, I guess just to say that what I've gone through is normal.

Jerry: Yes.

Joe: Yeah.

Jerry: Normal and arguably even necessary in not only our march toward leadership but our march toward adulthood.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

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Jerry: Right? There's something and, and, and we into this a little bit on the email, which was I remember writing something like, so what?

Joe: Right.

Jerry: Literally, so what? So this is how you are wired. I am wired slightly differently.

Joe: Yep.

Jerry: But we both are doing the same thing, which is I am reaching across the table, I am putting myself in this moment, into what it would be like to see things visually and I'm connecting with the fact that there's ... we're in a room that whiteboard on the walls, I would want to jump up and draw this out only the poor listeners wouldn't be able to hear us. They might hear squeak, squeak, squeak, but they wouldn't be able to, right? So I can relate to that.

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Joe: Right.

Jerry: Okay, so that's some aspect of who I am. What I heard you do is take this aspect of you and apply it almost like an engineering problem-

Joe: Right.

[00:18:00]

Jerry: ... and say how can I engineer the solution that I need so that I have the capacity there? And I'm thrilled to speak to you because what I'm hearing is not only is it ... you know, the podcast that we've developed has a reputation, right? You know, at what point does Jerry make the person cry? I'm joking but, right?

Joe: Yep.

Jerry: Um, or at what point every now and then does Jerry cry?

Joe: Right.

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Jerry: Right? It's not necessarily just about that, it's really about connecting at, at the sort of ground level of who's this guy Joe and who's this guy Jerry?

Joe: Right.

Jerry: And how we, how can we relate so we have that connection that's going on here?

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Jerry: Now, I want to go back to that original search that you had, which was how can I be authentic?

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

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Jerry: I think you're being authentic right now, dude.

Joe: Yes (laughs).

Jerry: And?

Joe: Yes, and. Um, so this is, this is something that I've put a lot of thought into in the last month or so and I think ... so, so I've actually broken this down in my head into two, two avenues on the authentic side. And, um, so, so, you know, this comes back to the idea of you're the inner and outer self and trying to bring those together,

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right? So I actually think there's, there are two sides of it. I mean, obviously there's two sides, there's the inner and the outer. But, uh, you know, a lot of your podcasts talked about the shadows that we cast and, and, and embracing those in some ways because you can't just squash them, you can't just ignore them but how do you recognize them and, and, and use that to, to, to your advantage almost, if, if, if possible.

[00:20:00] Um, so, so that's, to me that's like the, the, the, dark side of that of, of, yes, there's these some things that I don't really like about myself, I'm going to figure out how to manage them or, or, or whatever. To me, there's another side though that's, uh, there's also a lot of good stuff about me that actually gets squashed-

Jerry: Yes.

Joe: ... and how do I bring that to the surface?

Jerry: Yes.

Joe: And, so, so, to me, I agree with you. I'm getting to the point of where I'm being more authentic but I think to get fully there, like, those two need to come together in that the shadow things are not going to go away but I, but I can understand them and have a way of using them to my advantage.

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Jerry: Okay.

Joe: Or, or, or, and I don't mean that in a, in a manipulative way.

Jerry: Yeah.

Joe: But, but-

Jerry: You're doing exactly what we recommend you do.

Joe: Exactly. But then also taking those good things that maybe some part of me is saying, oh, but that's not me. Like, I'm going to be too vulnerable if I bring that out. Um, not that I say that out loud but I think a lot of people do things like that. So, so-

Jerry: What's the struggle that you have there?

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Joe: Um, I think what it is if I'm honest is I think we all tend to build ourselves into a, an image, right? I mean, this is kind of what we started with of, of, and there's lots of versions of that. It's for me early on, it was like, oh, I want to be a chief engineer. Like, in my role, in my field, in, in the airplane design world that's like what someone like me would aspire to be. I want to be the guy who's, who's, who designs an airplane, has this team of people under them, which I, like I started with,

[00:21:30] involves a lot of things. It involves technical side of people management and, and so forth. And so, so that's one version of that. I think there's other versions that we have this image we're trying to live into like, um, like, I want to be a man, I want to be a father, I want to be a husband. And, you know, there, wha-, what does that mean exactly? And, and I think there's, like, the man is a perfect one that I've been thinking about a lot lately. If people say, like, "What is it to be a man?" You know, like, there's connotations that go with that, like, right? You're very strong and you're very, um, you don't have a soft side, you don't have a, a, a, I don't even know how to describe it.

Jerry: You don't have doubts.

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Joe: Yeah, you don't have doubts, you're fearless, right? Like, like, uh, things like that. And, you know, if I'm honest with myself, it's like, no, I have all those things. I have fears, I, I have a soft side, I (laughs), you know, etcetera. And so I think in some ways those society, like, tries to build this image of like, oh no, if you have that stuff, like, you're not fitting this role of a man. And, and, you know, I think media and all kinds of sources, like, instill these ideas. So, so, uh, so I think that's why myself and probably many others tend to squash some of that kind of stuff and I think we do it differently in different audiences. You know, like, we might be more open and more honest with ourselves or, or more, uh, you know, loving or, or tender or whatever words you want to put on it like with our spouses in private or with our kids. Whereas if you're out with the guys in the bar you're not going to share the same stories, you're not going to have the same emotions. And I think there's some aspect of all of this it's like, well, there shouldn't be those divides. [00:22:30] Maybe a little bit but, like, kind of bringing those two sides together the, the shadows and the stuff that gets squashed into. I want to be the same person all the time.

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Jerry: So let me reflect back what I hear you say because I think in violent agreement, which is always a weird phrase. Okay.

Joe: We use that word a lot. We love that term.

Jerry: Oh, yeah. What the very, it's a very masculine thing, right?

Joe: Yep.

Jerry: We're in violent agreement. Okay, we're in agreement.

Joe: (Laughs).

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Jerry:

Um, and jus-, just to clarify terminology, when Carl Jung described, uh, the shadow, he was talking about the qualities of ourselves that are both considered negative and positive.

Joe: Okay.

Jerry: The qualities that are considered both negative and positive. And so, for example, um, you, you touched upon vulnerability as a, as, as perhaps a quality.

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Joe: Mm- hmm (affirmative)

Jerry: Or, let's call it perhaps, uh, in my case it's, uh, and I've mentioned, I've described this before, um, I have come to understand that my ability to cry is in fact a super power.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Jerry: And what I'm doing with that phrase is I'm taking what may have been a negative in a hyper masculine, uh, almost toxic masculine, uh, structure that says, "No, little boy, if you cry, even if you are feeling pain, physical or emotional pain, you are weak. And, if you are weak, you're not going to be one of us."
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Joe: Right.

Jerry: And so the big three that I always focus on, love, safety, and belonging, belonging is threatened, and maybe even safety. Because, as you recall from being a boy-
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Joe: Yep.

Jerry: ... um, if we were vulnerable we might actually have gotten hitten, hit.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: And we might have gotten really beaten up.

Joe: Yeah.

Jerry: Right? And, and certainly if we were isolated, we might have gotten hit. Um, and then we, those boys become men who don't know what to do with their feelings and as Parker, our mutual friend Parker Palmer will say, in violence is what we do when we don't know what to do with our suffering. And then we're surprised that, um, these little boys who are taught to squelch a natural human reaction, owe, it hurts, I'm going to cry, thus denying the inside of ourselves, the true nature of who we are, our true feelings.
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Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

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Jerry: So is crying a negative? Sure. Perhaps. It gets tossed as the black bag behind us, it becomes part of our shadow. But so might be joy. So might be, so might exuberance. So might, um, be an artistic expression. So might be a desire to move or live in our bodies. Or as a boy, um, I wanted to dance.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

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Jerry: I wanted to dance like there was no tomorrow. I would go to sleep at night and to comfort myself before falling asleep, I would imagine myself dancing. But it wasn't until I was in my 30s that I actually allowed myself to dance.

Joe: Give yourself permission.

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Jerry: And gave myself permission to feel my body, to be in my body, right? So we toss all of that into the background.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: Then, we assign ourselves a task because we've evolved, you and I as men, to be authentic.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: Right? And yet there's a whole half of us, if not more of us, that denied.

Joe: Yeah, it's been repressed.

Jerry: It's been completely repressed to the point where it's even, it's, it's, we pretend it doesn't even exist. Who me? I don't want to dance.

[00:27:30]

Joe: Right.

Jerry: Who me? I don't need to cry. Who me? I don't have doubts. Who me? And it shows up in leadership all the time, I don't have any question about what we should be doing. I will plunger ahead leading our team even if I don't actually have the

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answers. I will not admit that I don't even have the answers. It's all part of the same process. And then there's a consequence that happens, which is not only that our

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leadership and our acts of leadership, um, are out of touch with those parts of ourselves that could be of service to ourselves, but we suffer because there's a part of us that's being told constantly by another part of us that we are unacceptable.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: Does that have any resonance?

Joe: It totally does. And for me, I think that, that, internal signal or message is somewhat subconscious but somewhat conscious too. Like, there's aspects to both of it and, and it's hard because it's like, you know, in, in life you don't want people telling you can't do that or you shouldn't do that or whatever. And then, when it happens internally, it's like the ultimate pain of-

[00:29:00]

Jerry: And it's relentless.

Joe: Yeah, yeah.

Jerry: Because you can turn off other people-

Joe: Right.

Jerry: ... but you can't turn off that voice in your head.

Joe: Yeah.

Jerry: Right? What was it like for you hearing that voice and what were some of the things that that voice would say to you?

Joe: You know, I don't know that I'm fully in touch yet with that answer. I might say this is a relatively new path I've gone down. Um, I, I, so I don't know, I don't have many specifics yet but, um-

[00:29:30]

Jerry: Well, when you do, when you were describing before, because one of the ways to give voice to it, when you were describing all of the attributes of what you thought a man should be-

Joe: Sure.

Jerry: ... or a leader should be-

Joe: Right.

Jerry: ... what was some of those attributes? Just give me two or three of them.

[00:30:00]

Joe: Um, you know, I don't know. It's like on the man side, it's, none of this is absolute of course, there's, there's-

Jerry: Sure.

Joe: ... there's versions of it or whatever. But on the man side, it's, it's the stuff like, well, you know, you shouldn't be soft. You shouldn't be, you shouldn't care about certain things. You know, if somebody makes a, a crude joke you should respond with a cruder joke. You know, that, that kind of use of the word masculine. That sort of masculine culture kind of stuff. And-

Jerry: So, so, so let's play it out because I've been in those situations and let's see if this, [00:30:30] this has resonance. You're hanging out with a bunch of guys, somebody says something really, I don't know, sexist.

Joe: Sure.

Jerry: Um, uh, really antagonistic, toxic even, which is popular phrase right now, and we are either the silent.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: Right? That one just landed.

Joe: Yeah.

Jerry: Or we go along with it.

[00:31:00]

Joe: Yeah, yeah. The silent one really resonates with me, um.

Jerry: Say more.

Joe: Well, so, like, and it ca-, maybe it's not even to the point of being sexist or something like that, but it's, maybe it's, uh, and maybe a less, less masculine environment than what I'm proposing. I mean, it could be a couple of people going to lunch or something, but it can be a case of, like, you know, somebody, the people, and I'm probably guilty of this myself so I'm not pointing fingers, but somebody starts talking about a coworker and, like, "Oh, man. Can you believe that person is dressing like that today" or whatever, you know. And, and, and part of you wants to like, say, "Heck yeah, no kidding" or whatever. Part of you also wants to say, "Oh, come on, guys. Like, be nice. Like, like-" [00:31:30]

Jerry: So it's almost like an internal value conflict.

Joe: Yeah, exactly.

Jerry: Right. And, and you have a value, you have, you have this sort of internal barometer of the way people should behave and the way people should treat one another.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: And then you silence that barometer-

Joe: Right.

Jerry: ... to get along.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Jerry: To not stick out because the threat to belonging is long.

[00:32:00]

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Jerry: And so, what does the, the voice that's telling you, what does it, that you need to ... What is that voice telling you that you need to be in order to belong in that moment? Is it telling you to be silent?

[00:32:30]

Joe: Um, I, I guess so. I'm struggling with that a little bit because like in this scenario, I'm ju-, I'm just trying to play my own, like, predictor of, like, what will I do in that moment? And I'm not just thinking of a specific moment that's happened. But, um, because, so, so what I'm struggling with here a little bit is my natural MO like in groups like that is just to be silent. Like, I'm, I'm somewhat introverted and, and I'm not like the one who's responding on every comment and, you know, sort of leading the conversation. But, but I think, yes, in that moment I even more feel like that. Like, oh, if I, if I come out with a counter comment to this, like, that isolates me even further and I'm already feeling somewhat isolated just due to, you know, my personality or, or whatever and so I tend to be, yeah, even more silent in those type situations.

[00:33:00]

Jerry: Right. So we, so for you in that moment, part of what's happening is that there's a, um, a kind of complicit ness in your own silencing. No one is actually externally saying to you, "Joe, don't say anything."

Joe: No, no, of course not.

[00:33:30]

Jerry: But you've internalized that ruled enough that it's created a structure with this, the result of which is a dissonance where the outer behavior of who you are is out of alignment with the inner belief system that you have.

Joe: Yeah.

Jerry: [00:34:00] And the irony here is that one of the rules that you seem to have carried and internalized, and by the way you're far from alone, is that to be a man is to allow the inner and outer to be out of alignment.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: [00:34:30] Now, I want to hold that thought for a moment because I can speak just from my own experience that perhaps the most important understanding that I came to in my late 30s when I went through my second major bout of depression was that when the outer behavior no longer matched the inner sense of me, I would get depressed, and it would go like this, I would feel anxious, I would get depressed, and then I would disassociate. I would almost, literally, feel like I was leaving my body and so the body became nothing more than a meat bag carrying around my own sense of self, whereas my soul, if you will, was off to the side.

Joe: Yeah.

[00:35:00]

Jerry: And then I would wake up wondering why I felt like shit.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: Does thi-, does this resonate?

Joe: [00:35:30] It does. Um, it, it definitely does and I think for me, like, and probably for you as well, like there was, like, there's lots of different stages of this, right? Like, I, I've never in my life, thankfully, never been in a deep state of depression, um, like a lot of people experience. I would say I've had milder of cases when, when these things tend to build up and I get really bogged down, like in a work situation where the, the mountain in front of me seemed insurmountable and then you throw in some personal conflict and some, some aspects of my inability to deal with it. Uh, and then, you know, I get in, in these spirals where it, it occasionally, you know, every couple of years I'll seem to go through one of these where it's just, it gets really hard and it certainly is. It's anxiety, like you just described. It's anxiety and I think, I think this is a common response from what I understand.

[00:36:00] People deal with anxiety, they tend to squash it, they tend, you know, come up with coping mechanisms, whatever. At some point that's exhausting. Like, they can't maintain that anymore and then that's when it kind of slips into depression because it's like the anxiety is still there, there's nothing that preventing but yet your coping mechanisms are, are at their limits and then it's like, okay, now everything just sucks (laughs). And you kind of get to that attitude. So, um, so yeah, [00:36:30] and I think that the way you just described it of in that mode I would say what my

outer self, my physical body, wha-, what people can visibly see me doing or hear me saying is very disconnected from what's inside of me. And it's funny, I've had, uh, two people in the last couple of years when I tend to get in that mode tell me after the fact, like, I can tell when you're in that mode. Like, I can see it on your face. I can walk into to the room-

Jerry: Because you've actually existed your body.

[00:37:00]

Joe: Yes. Without even, you saying a word or even moving your body I can tell, oh, Joe is-

Jerry: You're not here anymore.

Joe: Yep.

Jerry: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So you used a phrase when you were describing this and reflecting it back to me as a coping mechanism.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Jerry: That is, in fact, exactly what it is. In fact, I would extend it and say it's actually a survival strategy.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Jerry: And this is an important concept to take in because when we're looking at these kinds of issues, the tendency that I've noticed is for myself and others to then see this pattern and then to criticize myself for having this pattern.

[00:37:30]

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative) Yeah, that resonates. Yeah.

Jerry: Like, what's wrong with me that I abandon my body, to use our visual metaphor. So to, to, to imagine as the soul stands off to the side, exists the body, the body continues doing its thing, it's empty, it's an empty shell.

[00:38:00]

Joe: Yep.

Jerry: Again, this is a consequence, it's a consequential feeling of the dissonance and the out of alignment between outer behavior and inner state of being. In our case, we're using it as the jumping off point. People saying things that are fundamentally against our values and we stay silent.

Joe: Right.

[00:38:30]

Jerry: Right? That's an outer behavior, silence, and then we're doing it. But it's a survival strategy. And we linked this back before into belonging.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: What happens, I believe, is that as children we learn to get along. We learn that if we were actually, truly, fully live in alignment, which is probably the state where we were born, with the outer and the inner in complete alignment, I'm hungry, I'm going to cry. I'm three months old, I want to be fed. This is the way we are programmed. We learn to silence that. We learn, if you will, to disconnect the outer from the inner. The voice, and there's oftentimes a voice that lives within us that tells us to do this, "Joe, shut up. Joe, don't you dare say that thing that you're thinking of saying." It's a nanosecond, it happens very quickly, but the voice is there. That voice is trying to protect you. Does that make sense?

Joe: It does. Yeah.

Jerry: What's it protecting you from?

[00:40:00]

Joe: Oh, I think it, to me this, this idea of belonging really resonates. It's, it's a if, if I screw this up, I'm not going to be included in this group anymore.

Jerry: That's right.

Joe: I mean that's very instate, literal way of interpreting that-

Jerry: But from the limbic system of the brain's perspective, from a five year old's interpretation of the world's perspective, it's perfectly logical. Right?

Joe: Yep.

[00:40:30]

Jerry: Okay, so, when that part of our, our, our ... we were talking before about accepting in the positive and negative traits that have disowned, well this voice is a survival strategy. This voice is trying to protect you from not belonging. This voice is trying to protect you from things like shame, and humiliation. And, if we welcome in that voice, and more important say thanks a lot and mean it, but I don't need you to protect me anymore because I'm looking across the room at a man who is 44 and at least presents as fully capable of taking care of himself. He may not be able to quiet his doubts, he may not be able to think clearly all the time, he may even make mistakes, but he can put food on the table, clothes on his back, take care of those he loves, right?

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Jerry: Notice the feelings as I name those things.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: What are you feeling as I name those things?

Joe: Um-

Jerry: You are a man who can take care.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: How does that feel?

Joe: It feels good. Yeah.

[00:42:00]

Jerry: So this is what a good man does.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: Yeah, that just landed.

Joe: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Jerry: Okay. So, when you can feel what you're feeling right now, and I wish that our listeners could see your face because it just got soft and red, you're fully occupying your body my friend.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

[00:42:30]

Jerry: When you understand that you are a good man even if you make mistakes, the need for that survival strategy, that five year old's view of the world, gets lessened and you can thank you but I got this. I can take care of myself and the people that I love. I may have to take two jobs, I may have to work, but I can do this.

Joe: Right.

[00:43:00]

Jerry: Right?

Joe: Yep.

Jerry: What I often say is what we want to do, the answer to that voice is love. The answer to that voice is to say thank you-

Joe: Right.

Jerry: ... I really appreciate what you're trying to do for me but I'm not five anymore and we got this.

[00:43:30]

Joe: Yeah. So, so what's going through my head right now is a parallel example that I'm trying to say, like, okay, is this the same thing or is this something different and so, um, if it's all right if I share that?

Jerry: Please. Yeah.

Joe: So, uh, uh, again, this is analogist but it's very different circumstances. So, um, imagine I'm in a, a design review meeting with a couple of my engineers and they're presenting a problem that they've solved, and, which happens all the time, this is my day-to-day.

[00:44:00]

Jerry: This is my life.

Joe: Yeah, exactly. Sometimes there will be something that's presented and I, like, some things I don't think that's right, and I tend to squash that sometimes too. And, if I'm honest with myself ... not always, sometimes, like, okay, this is wrong, let's fix this and then let's come back and try again or whatever. Sometimes I'll squash it and if I'm, or I'll squash the feeling inside of me and, and like, okay, I'm not going to say anything here. And, if I'm honest with myself as coming from a couple different places maybe at the same time, maybe in different circumstances, and it's A, it's insecurity of my own part, of like-

[00:44:30]

Jerry: So there you are in position of power, pinning on their design.

Joe: Yeah, and so, but, but am I sure about myself? Like, I actually want to go off and, and run this calculation myself and then come back when I'm sure. And, and a lot of times I'll do that and I'll come like, "Oh, yeah, I should have just trusted my gut because that was right." Sometimes I'm wrong so either way. But there's another of me sometimes that, I'm glad you used the word power because as leaders we are in a role of power, I think I sometimes er on the side of I don't want to abuse my power. I could tell this person you're wrong, go back and try again. But, like, I, like that doesn't feel good to me. Like, even if I feel like that's probably right I want to deal with that in some other way. I don't want ... like, I have this feeling of like, oh, I'm going to humiliate this person in front of all their peers.

[00:45:00]

[00:45:30]

Jerry: Okay.

Joe: Like, I want to-

Jerry: So what you're struggling with is there's ... what it seems like you're struggling with is there's only two ways of being.

Joe: Yeah.

Jerry: I can either be that guy who humiliates people-

Joe: Yep.

Jerry: ... which I do not want to be that kind of leader.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: Or I can silence myself.

Joe: Yeah and I think this comes back to the idea of a mold that I'm trying to live into and I don't want that mold but that's the way I've been trained and that's leaders I've worked under, that's what they do.

[00:46:00]

Jerry: And you did something else really, really important, Joe. You saw the connection to your own internal insecurity or your own internal caregiving voice that says, "Joe, double check your statement before you say anything because you don't want to humiliate them and you don't want to be humiliated yourself."

Joe: Myself. Exactly.

Jerry: Right? And that's that five year old's point of view. But what does the man, the good man, the good adult, what does the good adult say, which is different than the five year old?

[00:46:30]

Joe: Yeah, yeah, um, I think, I mean this is all so situational but I wo-, if I was going to generalize it I would say there's, from an efficiency standpoint there's a time to make that statement in that room, right?

Jerry: Yes.

Joe: To trust my gut, do it in a way that's polite where it's not humiliating, right?

Jerry: So say it in a way in which your gut is being trusted?

Joe: Yes.

Jerry: Say it right now. Practice it.

[00:47:00]

Joe:

Um, I would say, you know, I think there's a mistake in your formula here or a wrong assumption or something like. And, you know, I could be wrong but we should, we should dig into that a little bit more and, and get to the bottom of that before we off and make a decision based on this number.

Jerry: Right. So that doesn't feel humiliating-

Joe: Right.

Jerry: ... nor does it feel squelched.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: Right? So it's this middle ground, um, uh, uh, in which what you just said was really powerful because what you did was you gave, you gave voice to your instinct, which is based not on some airy, fairy bull shit. It's like, you actually went to school, dude.

Joe: Yeah, exactly.

Jerry: And you've been doing this for a long time.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: And you're internalized somethings even without having to do the calculations.

Joe: Yeah, exactly, yep.

Jerry: Right? So you've given voice to that.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

[00:48:00]

Jerry: Right? And you've also created this space where the potential for you to be wrong can live.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: Okay.

Joe: Yep.

Jerry: Now, I'm going to drop a mic here for you, okay? Hopefully it's a drop mic. In that instance you're actually doing two things. You're being both chief designer and the leader.

Joe: Right.

[00:48:30]

Jerry: Now, in doing what we just described, you're being chief designer. You're allowing other designers to be able to show you that you're wrong, Joe.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: You're also, um, relying upon that chief part of where you are because you got that title because of your experience and you're honoring that experience. Here's the leadership part of it, you're modeling something. What, you ju-, you just heard it.

Joe: Yep.

Jerry: What are you modeling for the people who are sitting in the room?

[00:49:00]

Joe: You're ... I'm modeling the behavior that I would love to see them exhibit someday.

Jerry: With each other.

Joe: With each other in the moment and as a leader when they get to that stage.

Jerry: That's right.

Joe: Yeah.

Jerry: That's right. So when, when, when a leader allows themselves to quiet those internal voices, and you did a beautiful job of connecting something that feel, that can feel very disconnected. It's like, "What do mean I've got this like view of what does it mean to be a man and how does it join?" You made the connection right away. By quieting in a loving and caring kind of way what I was calling the five year old's view of the world, and acknowledging that you had a wish to not be that kind of a leader, you know, that kind of leader, the leader we've always had, the ones that make us feel like we're stupid, you've charted a course for where the good man is or ... we keep focusing on a gender, let's, let's make it less gender specific, where the good adult is.

[00:49:30]

[00:50:00]

Joe: Yep.

Jerry: Right? My book is called Reboot, Leadership and the Art of Growing Up.

Joe: That's awesome.

Jerry: Okay, because what it's really about is using this journey of leadership to grow into the fullness of who we are meant to be.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Jerry: [00:50:30] Because that's what the brilliant opportunity is. And that's what I just saw you do right here was give honor and recognition and a little love and a thank to th-, to an older way of viewing yourself while naturally allowing a sort of values driven way to lead. And the consequence of that was I'm going to model a certain kind of leadership.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Jerry: Did I lay that out-

Joe: Yeah.

Jerry: ... well?

[00:51:00]
Joe: Yeah. Yeah, that's really helpful.

Jerry: You know, um, and all of this stems from the first step which was, so I'm wired a little differently than Jerry. Not better, not worse.

Joe: Yep.

Jerry: What's nice about that kind of a posture is my brain style can sit right next to your brain style-

Joe: Absolutely.

[00:51:30]
Jerry: ... and we can work together on a team to solve problems, to create solutions, to build the kind of company that we all want to work for.

Joe: Right. No, I think that's super powerful because it seems like a lot of people get in a state like that and have a label like that and it's like, "Oh, well, because of this I'm now limited." Like, "I, I can never do X or I, you know this is going affect my by ability to do Y or whatever." And to me, it's not like that at all. That's why I started with a ... to me the only use of that label is as a, as a way of exploring it, right?

[00:52:00]

Jerry: That's right.

Joe: And, and then, like, you know, acknowledge it and, and focus on the aspects of it but then use those to your advantage.

Jerry: That's right.

Joe: Like, I, I firmly believe I am the engineer I am because of the way my brain is wired (laughs). Like, and, and I am appreciative of that every day. Now, does it also mean I struggle with some things? Absolutely. But that's okay. I just need to focus on those areas and see what comes of that.

[00:52:30]

Jerry: And that, Joe, to me is the definition of not just resiliency, which is something that we strive for, but something which I've increasingly begun speaking about which is equanimity. I am who I am and that's okay, foibles and all.

Joe: Yep.

Jerry: And that is also something that we can model not just for our colleagues, and the people who have different positional power than we do-

Joe: Right.

[00:53:00]

Jerry: ... but also our children and, again, the people that we love.

Joe: Yeah.

Jerry: I'm okay, foibles and all, and I'm still going to keep growing.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: Yeah. Joe, I want to thank you for this conversation.

Joe: Thank you. I appreciate it.

Jerry: You know, you took a vulnerable step in writing to me.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

[00:53:30]

Jerry: And, um, it's just been delightful, both the emails that we, that we exchanged and this conversation. And, you know, the truth is sometimes I-, I'll share with you part of the view I sometimes have. I know that I have and we have developed a

[00:54:00] reputation for a kind of a softer style of leadership. And I also know that there are a wide variety of ways to lead.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: And there are a wide variety of ways to be as people. And the core message I think that we're all trying to get to, the, the core message that I'm, I'm really working with is that the question isn't how do we turn Joe into Jerry or Jerry into Joe-

Joe: Right.

[00:54:30]

Jerry: ... but how do we allow Joe to be Joe in the fullness of who he was born to be.

Joe: Right.

Jerry: Because I think you're not just the engineer that you are because of the way your brain is wired, I think you're adult you are.

Joe: Oh, absolutely. Yeah.

Jerry: Yeah, yeah. That resonated.

Joe: And that's true of everyone.

Jerry: That's right. That's right.

Joe: Yeah. And as much as anyone may want to change that about them, it's not going to happen.

Jerry: That's right.

Joe: You're wired the way you're wired-

Jerry: That's right.

Joe: ... and you can only work on how do I, how do we become more whole in that situation.

[00:55:00]

Jerry: That's right. You just said it better than I could have. Thank you so much.

Joe: Thank you.