Unmuted - Episode 3

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SPEAKERS

Researcher

00:02

Hi, everybody. This is Ian homme and he and you're listening to unmuted podcast that explores deep and intimate conversations, stories and moments that matter with inspirational people on equity, justice, and belonging in their everyday lives and work if you're interested in unearthing unmuted topics, people and ideas than welcome home. In today's episode, we're talking about organizational culture, and how to foster cultural excellence in teams, using power sharing techniques, trust, in microculture, but also in the middle of change fatigue with Hunter. Hunter is a social worker, educator and consultant who helps mission driven organizations and individuals from grantmakers to hospitals to schools, do good better. Through his company signal key consulting, he helps people move from strategy to implementation, building their knowledge and effectiveness at each step so that they're more capable and confident in facing the next step of change. He does this through the design and facilitation of professional learning networks, and also change management initiatives, through shorter strategic planning engagements, through work with Hunter and signal key team clients can get measurable results from the people that they serve, and new knowledge and skills for themselves. Welcome to the unmuted show, Hunter, it's good to have you.

01:32

Thank you, it's really good to see you. Good to be with you. Yeah,

01:35

I'm excited for us to chat about culture about organizational change management about also your story that you've grown throughout the years. And I'd love for us to travel a little bit in time. You started out your career as a social worker in San Francisco. Tell us a little bit more. What was that? Like? What got you interested in that work?

01:56

Yes, thank you. So it was the early 2000s, about 20 years ago now. And I started as a young social worker, and it was me most of my work was in the mental health services world for adults, so adults with serious and persistent mental illness. And another one of my favorite jobs was for adults that have what we now call complex case management. And so it was people who were 90% of them were homeless, 90% of them had a serious mental illness, and some substance abuse problem. They had multiple medical problems, we met them through the medical emergency room at San Francisco General Hospital. So with that job, specifically, it was me and a really small caseload 20 to 30 people, which is incredibly tiny for any social worker, usually they have a caseload in the hundreds. But these were people who had the most needs, and therefore had the most use of all the different systems in San Francisco, housing, health care, mental health, cops, all kinds of stuff. So so it was worth it, it was an investment, we saved money, because we worked with the top, the top users of all these multiple, expensive public services. And so my work was, I was pretty much out around town on my bike every day, and met people at the hospital, if they were there for their cancer or their cancer follow up, or I met them at the shelter, or I met them at the jail, or I met them, you know, in their tent under the overpass if they were homeless and living outside like that. And so it was all about help, my job was to help them navigate the system and get what they needed. And that's how I came to recognize and understand as systems and systems thinking, because in that relatively very rich resource environment, even though you can never line up everything that any one person needs. At the same time. You know, there's always waiting lists for housing, waiting lists, or for good cancer care, whatever. But San Francisco had all those things and had a really hard time putting those together for my clients. So I realized that the struggle in the job was really with the system. Instead of feeling bogged down, or a lot of people assume when you're doing that social work with these people with really complex problems, that a lot, most of the stresses of the job come with sitting with those people. But really, the struggle for me was helping them get what they need. And like fighting with them against all the kind of inertia and systems that don't talk to each other. So that got me interested in systems change and led to the path I took I took from there, but those were really super valuable years for me.

04:33

Oh, absolutely. And that's really important work. And thank you so much for that service that you've done for the public. And it sounded like recognizing that the system has really important infrastructure to shape the experiences of a lot of your clients. And over the years you have moved from social work to quality improvement and process improvement, and now a lot more as a coach as well as facilitator and coach arena for a number of organizations and teams and leaders. And I'm curious, what are the some of the key lessons learned that you have taken from social work that you've brought currently in your work as a, an instructor and an a coach and for organizations?

05:16

That's a really good question. So social work got me into systems improvement to what we call in health care quality improvement, which is process redesign, system redesign, for repeated work, things you do in any primary care visit for a kid to make sure the kid keeps up with their immunizations is something I was talking about on a call earlier today, or how do we, how do we find people who are overdue for cancer screenings, and really aren't that interested in coming into a primary care appointment because they're busy? So those are the process redesign? And then that led me to thinking about the bigger picture of what does it take to be a strong leader who doesn't burn herself out? What does it take to be part of a team and work within a team, to have everybody

not only focus on the same goals, but supporting each other and not competing within the team. So it's kind of a two step, it's been a kind of a two step evolution that you described really well, from social work, to these very detailed, practical tactical process redesign stuff within a care delivery program, a social service organization, or a hospital or whatever it is, and then that, doing that work for so many years, a lot of those projects would lead to these really amazing epiphanies, these teams would say, Okay, we've gotten from 60% to 90%, for breast cancer screening for the women who need that breast cancer screening. And then they would be feel very connected, they feel very smart, because they solve these really important problems. The patients were happier, because they were getting their cancer screenings done. Everything was great. And then when the program ended, the program that I was hired to help with, when I went away, basically, or when the whole program structure fell away, and they were left to their regular work, project over thanks for all your attention, all your effort, the nine times out of 10, half or more of the benefits of that program, the gains they saw in cancer screenings or whatever they were, whatever they were focusing on, integrating behavioral health into primary care visits is another big topic. A lot of that progress would just would just be road, right? It's regression to the mean, in terms of process change. And that got me really curious what caused that? Why can't these really brilliant people who worked really hard, maintain these changes after the intensive project ended? After they had somebody like me coming up and showing up and watching them and paying attention? How do they keep themselves focused? And how do they allow themselves space to move on to the next five urgent projects, because there's, there's always something else to fix. So that led me to think about the characteristics of the leaders who do a good job with that, and leaders and then ultimately, the teams, right, all of the staff, not just us, or not just the self identified leader on the front lines, but how does the whole team function, organize, communicate, support one another, to actually make those really important changes?

08:06

Absolutely. And an engaged and healthy team and leadership is also an engaged and healthy community. We can't support our communities, our constituents without being able to support our workforce and our leaders to be understanding that the core you know, cause causes to some root problems, but internally without being able to, to reflect that externally. And you you're calling right now, where you're at, as, as a coach and an instructor. There are some key key moments in your life where you're able to do a lot of this important work, you've done it for over 200 teams, which is such an amazing feat. And I would love if you can walk me through what a day in your life look like? What helped me visualize that space where you're teaching and guiding and strategizing with, with leaders, but also teams about with these workshops about what does change management looks like what does culture look like for their team? What does that space look like if I was there with you?

09:06

So if you were if you were here with me at my desk, you would see like a lot of people a lot of zoom meetings? I? I do it's yeah, it's a it's an interest. That's an interesting question. It's every day is different, which is one thing I like about this work. There are so today I had a meeting, I just in the past hour had a meeting with the five operations directors of a large healthcare organization that works across three counties and has 36 primary care and dental sites, right in the middle of the state of California, in three different So there there have a broad geographic range and these five women they're all women manage 36 different sites. And so I'm doing group coaching with them on team development for themselves within one another and then helping them lead their lead the managers and supervisors that they lead that they are in that report to them, helping them build a strong

interesting culture where nobody gets punished for making a mistake, but they look at system improvements that you know that those are the some of the values that they're that they are in charge of implementing, passed down from their executive team. And so we talked about how they, you know, we go, we get into details too, I like to get in, you know me from when we work together, I'm really happy and nitty gritty details, I want to get practical, I want to get tactical. And so we ended up talking today about not just aligning values and some of the bigger strategic or philosophical topics that we cover, we also talked about how they manage their time in meetings together, because they're in meetings together, the five of them multiple times a day, and they're wondering how they Creek can create space for themselves and each other, to actually do the work that they talked about in the meetings, right, that constant struggle, that constant balance. So we talked about that, and wove through the values of transparency and collaboration, and try to find that sweet spot. So that's more detail than you wanted about that particular coaching call. That's some of the stuff we talk about when I do in teaching or group coaching. The practical stuff with the more philosophical strategic and, and culture and safety, inclusion work, I like to work on both ends of that. What else have I been doing today, I had a, I worked with Melinda, who you know, who's also on my team. And we're pushing out pushing out a blog. So I take stories from stories and lessons from my teaching and coaching, turn those into blogs is another way to connect with people. Tell the stories make that available to people I don't work with directly or maybe I do but a way for to spread those ideas. And, you know, honestly, to get my keep my name out there keep getting, making those connections and finding people who, who want to do the kind of work that I do with folks. And then I'm gonna go, I'm gonna go see my chiropractor after working on my bad shoulder. So it's a every everyday is different. But yeah, there's there's writing, there's prepping for meetings, you know, I'm definitely that facilitator person who plans every meeting, and we'll send out the agenda ahead of time confirm goals for the meeting. So there's a lot of agenda planning, that's part of my daily work as well.

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You know, you mentioned something really important, which is, you know, being able to foster an environment where people can, can make mistakes. And as a facilitator, you're entering into people's lives and spaces when they're potentially at their most vulnerable, where they're sharing some intimate, intimate conversations about, you know, conflict, or how to have conversations in difficult conversations with their colleagues and dialogues in a way to bridge culture. And a lot of this, I suspect, you know, you've perhaps, like, experienced that as a social worker going into these spaces, and time where people really entrust you with this information. And I'm curious about how do you help your clients, specifically when they're in group activities to take risk, but not be at risk in these types of environments?

13:05

That's a really good question. The, as a facilitator, and as a coach, I always start with my ground rules, which is just about how we, what we can expect from each other in these conversations, keep it private, those those sorts of basic sorts of basic things, keep it private, take a risk, I say, this is not therapy, a group coaching session, or an individual coaching session. It's not therapy, but personal things do come up. And so we talked about that, how to do that I offer. One thing I do to keep the container safe is to ask people if they are if they're having concerns about the safety in the group, if they don't feel safe, or they something's something's holding them back from sharing, I asked them to contact me. And we can have a chat separately, just a one to one check in. So I can reflect what I you know how I feel the communication is going to sharing the vulnerability and the protection of

each person for each other person, how I feel like that's going and they can tell you what their concern is. And so that's a way that's an Honestly, I've never had to do one of those. But I think just offering that and knowing that people have that chance to circle back helps people take the risk, but it also helps the group understand that I do take it seriously. And not that they should tattletale on each other, but it's just that I can help them figure out what's a ride. There are ways to communicate sensitive things that don't, you know, bear your whole soul if that's not who you are. Because you know, there is such a thing as introverts, right, which, which I am not by by personality, but I work with a lot of people, a lot of really great leaders are introverts, of course. And so I work with a lot of introverts, so I want to make it safe for the introverts and the extroverts and one more thing one more thing I'll say is that I present myself as somebody who is when I teach one of the things I say that always gets a laugh is I describe myself as a recovering No at all. I make sure in coaching and instruction that I tell people that like I did feel like special when I was that hard charging He has social worker that I described earlier. On my bicycle, I knew how everybody should do everything. Not considering that I didn't know, you know, the capacity, capacity and the demands on all these different systems I was trying to get my clients into, but I had one client and she was going to get what she needed, right? So as by declaring myself a recovering No at all, I've uncovered not only a lot of things, I've uncovered a lot of other recovering know it alls. And we laugh about that. But it sets me up as not being the end all be all of all knowledge and all expertise. And it acknowledges what's obvious is that I'm imperfect, just like we're all are imperfect, and we're all doing things to get better.

15:39

Wow, I want to reflect on something because you have given your clients and your participants, kind of like the permission, it's okay to just be and you can also be with me, and another time when you're not feeling feeling safe. But in terms of the second point that you were mentioning, is being able to, to know that I'm also imperfect, I'm human, and to give people the opportunity that, hey, my facilitator is walking through this journey with me, not just for me. And I wonder, from your experience, as you're thinking about that, you know, were there specific stories or moments in these types of facilitation, and in these workshops, where you've noticed that there was psychological safety, and that this group has really worked very well together, as opposed to maybe other scenarios and situations where like, maybe not so much where you thought, Oh, absolutely, this group agreements that we fostered here, and the cohesiveness of our conversation really moved very, very well. Yes, I

16:39

so what always comes to mind, because that because the this moment with another group, I was coaching last fall, this moment taught me a lot. So of course, I remember it, but it was a group coaching call. And it was an African American woman, manager, she manages a big team. And we were talking about this, we were actually talking about this topic of imperfection. So it's a story about story about imperfection. But she said, she said that's really interesting, because I was always taught by my grandmother and my mother who kind of they both raised, they both were very involved in raising her. And both of them taught me that when I went to work, I had to have my clothes, correct my face, correct my hair Correct. I had to look really good. And I had to know exactly what I was talking about. Or else I would get run over, taken advantage of these aren't the words she used. But that's what she was saying, in the work environment. So that helped me and we got into that. And I said, Well, of course it's so as a white man. It's easier for me to talk about being a recovering No at all talking about my imperfection. Because I'm showing up when I'm at work. I'm gay, but I am a middle

aged white man, very average looking brown eyes. five foot nine, I mean, I'm your average on your average white man. In the way I the way I show up. And for me, it was it's a lot easier to say I'm imperfect. And so we, we walked through that. And we talked about because she had, she had had an experience recently with somebody she supervised, who she shared something this person was going through a loss in their family. I think their mother had died. And she was expressing something, she just lost an uncle. And she was sharing something personal. So she was being vulnerable. This isn't about imperfection, but it's just about the fact that we're all humans, and we all surprise have a lot of stuff going on in our lives outside of work. And so when she shared that with a staff member, the staff member said, Oh, so you're human. Wow. And absolutely broke her heart, a client that when I was coaching, broke her heart to hear somebody say, Oh, so you're human. So she had she had shared that in a prior session. And so I refer for like, get back to that when she said, she was always trained by her family for good reasons to protect herself to be successful, she needed to always be on point always have her hair done, you know, in the dominant white world, that top down white dominant culture that we that most unexamined workplaces have. So we connected those two things. And that was a big, a big learning moment for her big learning moment for me again, in terms of being careful what I say and what I how I help people navigate vulnerability and being imperfect, when they are not white males, basically.

19:22

Yeah, thank you for sharing that because I was I was about to actually go a little bit deeper into that, which is, I wonder if if that vulnerability in these types of workshops in public spaces, it's a privilege for for some, not for many, especially for black and brown bodies, where they have to edit themselves in order to fit the the needs and the environments that they're put in, typically on a pedestal and judged a lot more harshly than you know, potentially their white counterparts. And so I wonder you know, as you're thinking about your your experiences and your and your work collaborations with your clients, you What are some of the ways where you can share power in these scenarios where the quietest or most reflective participants, or potentially those who come from cultures that historically don't speak up in these types of environments where they feel that they can step up, while others can step back? In? What does it mean for us to share power in this type of space, from your work experience?

20:24

Yeah, I like that. I appreciate that framing of the sharing power is what a lot of opportunity and leadership is about. And it's definitely what needs to happen. So on a, let's say, at a micro level in a instruction session, and one of my courses are in a coaching, scenario, group coaching, like the one I was just talking about, one way to share power is to make sure everyone's heard, right, that's what you were part of what you were alluding to. And one way to make sure everybody's heard it just as a facilitator, this is real simple, is have everybody sit and write, sit and think and write for five minutes, before, instead of just going with whoever stands up, or raises their hand or you know, is really good at interrupting or, you know, getting into the flow of conversation, because they're used to people listening to them, and they're, they're more extroverted probably. So just having that pause to say, Come up with your ideas, and then we're going to share them, and you can share them in writing with the person next to you, there's lots of ways to build that out until it's shared in the whole group. So that's one way to help people who is to set that expectation and set and set again, it's, we're not just gonna start talking, we're gonna have everybody write something down. So then everyone has something to contribute, if they choose to, in a team, and so if I'm, if I'm leading a team, over, you

know, months and years, if it's if it's if I'm in a role of a supervisor or manager, and I'm trying to share power within my team, I can always extend the deadline for ideas. Okay, we need to do that we got this new priority, we're going to do this thing. I want the best ideas here in the meeting, and anybody who has another idea, this list will stay open, I'm not gonna we're not gonna make any decisions, I'm not gonna circle back or talk to my boss about this. Until next week, so send me an email, drop by and chat with me schedule a meeting. That's just part of getting the best ideas, period. Because some people again, people process information differently. I tend to think as I talk and as I write, but some people need to stop and sit by themselves, and sleep on it, or talk to their buddy, talk to their friend or you know, whatever it is. So just giving that extra time. So that it's not just go go go, the person who talks the loudest says the most gets the most attention and the most appreciation. So that's that's kind of the maybe the Mizo, the Mizo answer, there's micro, everybody, everybody right before they start talking Mizo is give me ideas over the next whole week, not just in this moment. And then the macro would be this culture change work that I'm addressing in my course, in my coaching. And then you're talking about how to, you're talking about how to reorganize the way we communicate the way we make decisions, how we set priorities, who gets a seat at the table, the big the bigger, the bigger goals are sharing power, talking about in public health, health care, social services, which is where a lot of my work is done, it's the goes back to community organizing, and the cliche that's so good about nothing about me without me. So how do you bring those people you're serving to the table and have them tell you how good your ideas are, because they're gonna have very different usually have different ideas than the people who are on you know, behind the desk on the professional side of things, because they don't live where these people live, or they don't, they don't actually use the services they're providing. I'd love that

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adopted nothing about me without me, and how you've used these multiple channels of engagement in various forms, according to the needs of people. And I'd love how you just met people where they're at. And that's really crucial. And you know, the work that I do also on human centered design of being able to meet people at the current experience, and to show them the kinds of tools and methods that they need. And speaking of different methods. One thing that I've appreciated from working together is that you've leveraged some unique visual communication tools to be able to connect with people. You've guided people through their work, from performance improvement methods to management skills to personal leadership. And people have even cited, how much they've appreciated working with your flexibility, your pragmatism, but also democratic approach to change management. And I'm curious about some of the tools that you've used, including interactive teaching methods, which you've replaced completely from probably not completely well, at least majority from like static slide presentation, using tactical exercises with graphic facilitation. And you've used a lot of sketches and doodles, and I've seen you in action when we've done work with opioid and substance use disorder in Southern California as part of your process, which really improves literacy but also accessibility for key concepts that you teach. And I'm curious, you know, What got you started with that? And how was that part of your process today?

25:04

I thank you for all those compliments. It makes it sound all very strategic and planful from my perspective, so but there's there's a, the glib way to answer that question as I just got really sick of PowerPoint. A more sophisticated also true way to answer that is, I realize that I like watching, I had been to some meetings where there was people who do who are actual artists to do what they call

visual recording. And so, you know, if, if you're working for a large grant maker, and they have a lot of money, they will something you know, you have these big meetings, and they will hire somebody and, and discussion will have the whole wall will be full of paperwork, and they will just, they'll just, they'll illustrate, it's really, it's magic, you've seen it that they'll illustrate the meeting content as it's happening. And so I thought that was really cool. And I wanted to learn about that, and figure out how to work that into my facilitation, my teaching, like my coaching to some extent, and, and I found this organization called the grove in San Francisco that, that they do training their son still buddies with him, and I did some trainings with those, those folks. And sketchnoting is the best term to describe what I do, because that's your drawing and doing you know, it's all it's not very sophisticated. It's my drawing, as you know, it's mainly stick figures and what the internet calls icons, really simple line drawings of, you know, I do have a story about a wolf and I do, you know, you always need your light bulb, or you need your, your journey, you need a path up the mountain, all those kinds of things. So it's very, it's just so everyone knows, it's very simple doodle type drawing, but people it's more engaging, because it's so much more organic. And because it's with me, it's purposefully casual and purposefully imperfect, the way I do it, and if I'm doing it live, before the pandemic, I'm now I'm starting to do in person sessions, again, sort of, like before the pandemic, this was me with a big piece of paper, a big flip chart, and my markers and drawing and writing. And people could contribute, they would say something that they would, I would fill in with what they with a drawing or with a word. So they would help populate the drawing based on whatever the topic was we were talking about. So that was something that I really enjoyed with a with a bigger group. And online, I do some live drawing on just a simple. I'm a simple user of an I pad drawing app that I do. And then I do as you know, I do simple illustrations, the recent one was a jellyfish for which are pretty easy to draw, as it turns out, for when I blog, so it's just a simple a simple image, which of course helps with memory, it helps with engagement, like you said, it helps with access. And it helps me I just think it helps make what I'm saying what I'm doing and how people are experiencing it more, just more human, it adds a little human element to it. And it's just it's just eye catching,

28:00

you know, a picture's worth 1000 words. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And, and I think it just gives people an open to talk about do you know, sketches are messy, they're not perfect, specially for not trained artists, to, to draw that. And I bet like that has opened up some avenues for conversations that otherwise, you know, just static text within. And it's also evident in the course that you have launched a while ago, which is called the six culture builders for team leaders. And this course that you've you've offered. It's a short eight week course leadership program for people who want to lead in the middle of their organization. And it's stems from, from a lot of your work experience as a social worker, but also coaching change management for a number of teams. And I'm curious if you can walk me through, you know, what this course is about? And what inspired you to create something like that?

28:53

Yes, thank you. I realized that back to earlier, the earlier part of our conversation coming out of the work on quality improvement, and these wonderful specific, usually year long projects to improve diabetes care or opioids, addiction treatment, all these different topical things within public health, social services, health care, that the people who were expected to not only lead that initiative in that year when they had a grant, or they had me coming to help coach them on this specific, you know, tactical operations processes, that the people who were managing not only the project when it was

happening, but were responsible for maintaining, you know, keeping track of the learning, keeping track of the Progress continuing to improve, they're measurable. They're measurable goals after the project, were the people who were in the middle. So it's the middle managers, the operations managers, the supervisors, directors, and those also and those were the people that have the hardest time getting any support for doing any formal leadership training. They're much more likely in the whole world anywhere in work. They're much more likely to get that position because they were good at their job, right. They were good at their job as a leader. As a physician, as a nurse, as a social worker, you know, as a programmer or whatever, you know, whatever industry they're in, and, and it was hard to get them any formal leadership development, because most leadership programs, there's a lot of really good ones out there and nothing against them. But most of them are for people at the very top of the organization are just below that executive team. And, and they are long programs, which is part of it, right, you can't send a lot of people if the program super expensive, you just don't, most organizations do not have that budget. And so the top people get it, they need it, that's great. But most of those programs are very intensive, and lasts at least a year. And so I wanted to do something part of the my hypothesis was that we could do something really quick, eight weeks, it's I call it the shortest leadership program out there, make it really quick, and really targeted to people who don't get the opportunity, which are the people who, like you said, lead from the middle. So it supervisors, its project managers, they may not even be the supervising boss of anyone, but they are in charge of complex work that takes effort from lots of different people in different departments. And they need that to be successful as a project manager, they need some support as well. And what a good team looks like, a lot of the mindset, what is a good team look like? What is why does trust matter? What can we do to be trustworthy? How do we how do we talk about goals? How do we talk about KPIs and metrics, that kind of thing, while keeping the team together and not not getting on peoples nerves. So that's what we do in the course of eight short weeks. There's an online platform where people chat and get to know each other. With all the homework assignments, there's the the action steps, they're actually practice homework that we prepare for, and rehearse a little bit in the live sessions. Because we expect that I expect them to go and do these things like asset mapping their team, there's the specific activities they do between the live sessions.

31:53

I love that. And I have to echo from my past life work as a project manager. This is the kind of course I needed. Back in the day when I used to work with large scale enterprises and startups where there are times where I felt unsupported. While there'll be support vertically on the top or on the bottom, not so much for me, and I have to attest, like, I've looked for these types of leadership courses, and they cost 1000s of dollars. And sometimes they're not accessible for people at you know, my career stage back in the day. And I'd love to, I love the focus that you have on culture, which is six main principles. They're super straightforward and so simple, yet, it's so difficult to master and I'll be naming them. One is, be humble and curious, create trust and safety, lead for purpose and goals, promote health and fun, navigate conflict. And lastly is to develop others for growth and learning. And I love your focus on culture, because it really fits the old adages of culture eats strategy for breakfast, which is, you know, no matter how good you have a strategic plan, or whatever plan that you have, you will always need culture first. And my thought was unique about your your builders is that as you focus on cultural Excellence, which is transformation, and that attracts people respect in their, in their support. And I wonder, you know, when you're thinking about some of the participants of your course, you know, walk me through examples, like, where do they come from? Where what kind of struggles do they think about when they sign up for this kind, of course, what stage they are at, in their work and career to say, this is something that I need right now.

33:36

All right, thank you for thank you for all that. I think you described the course really well. Those are the six culture builders. One note is that in terms because because we have been talking about access, and who gets to do this and sharing power, it was important to me, not really good for marketing. But it was important to me, that I not that I not introduce any fancy language or come up with a new, a new, clever metaphor even or some new lexicon that just applies to this course. So the fact that the words like you said, they are simple words, everybody's heard this before. But as you said, the devils in the details, it's the implementation, it's how to make this actually happen when we're all busy, and it's hard to know how to manage other people how to how to work with other people's attitudes and experience levels and all that and personalities and all that. So. So yeah, it's intentional that the words are very simple. And the culture builders are very simple people. So to get to your question, people come into the course well, first of all, I've done I've offered the course five times, the eight week course and it's and it started the first session was in the fall of 2020. So we've only done it during the pandemic. And that's been good because for the first couple rounds, I was like, Okay, I'll focus more on resilience and not becoming a middle management martyr, and not burning out and how do you support your team in kind of these interpersonal ways, and every now After the first couple versions of the first couple cohorts, I thought, well, next time, I'll do less on that next time I can revert back to or, you know, pull in more content on hard charging goal directed, you know, expedited people. And know the pandemic's, he keeps going on and, you know, and times continue to be hard. And then so that's really stayed in so finally getting to your question, people come in feeling burned out on the edge of burnout, helping manage their staff teams burnout, now they're dealing with the great job shuffle. I don't call it the great resignation, because it's not like people are just quitting, it's people are changing jobs right now a lot. So there's that turnover. So everybody's coming in feeling. They they need, they need hope. They need something specific that's going to help them now. They don't, you know, they're not trying, they don't, they don't have time to wait, they can't wait even till the end of the eight weeks, they need something they can use right now. They all have trouble carving out time for the course everybody has that struggle. And, and then But then when they happily when they come in, they realize oh, yeah, this really is a good use of two or three hours of my time every week for the live session, plus the homework plus the quick readings, we got to do keep the readings really short, three, three minute blog, three minute videos we watch. So they come in just very, very needing stuff themselves. And the other thing is, they really need they need, they come in feeling very pressed to help their team, they really care about their team, their team really needs them. And so they come in very clear on those two things. I need help. And my team needs my help. And then if there's a third thing, it's the obvious question of but how do I balance that right and get the work done? So it's the it's just the the dilemma of the pandemic, really,

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does this memory stick out in terms of where you've noticed there was a transformation and one of the participants from after taking the course, or just like some of these aha moments that some of the participants had really understand these cultural builders, which we're going to probe a little bit more deeply in a few minutes. But I'm just curious in terms of the stories that you've heard from your participants.

37:05

Good question. Thank you, though. So well, the woman who I was talking about earlier, the story about the black woman who was thinking about, like, you know, what's, how much of this wall do I

need? How much of my perfect face and perfect hair do I need? And how can I be more human because she wanted to be more human and her feelings when that staff member said that to her. So she has we keep in touch mainly through email now, because it's been a while since that coaching series ended. But we do keep in touch, and we chat every now and then she's continuing to work with that. So that was a real revelation. For her. It's a challenge. But it definitely was one of those things that one of those moments that helped her realize that she could drop her shoulders, she could relax a little bit, she didn't have to feel so lonely and isolated from her team members, she could still be a boss, a good a good boss for them, while not keeping herself quiet. So separate from I don't know, all their lunchroom conversations, you know, or all these other other things that we need as humans in the workplace, those kinds of social connections. So she she made a change, there's there have been a few people who've been really worried about while they're trying to support their team, asking more from their team in terms of ideas. So one of the one of the main one of the foundational principles in the course, the first culture builder is Be humble, Be humble and curious. A lot of people we've mostly heard about humble leadership, it's my version of it's my version of that. And there have been quite a few people in the course who come in thinking that it's not okay for them to say, I don't know that that either makes them look weak, or that allows the or that creates doubt and fear in their in their team. Well, if the boss doesn't know the answer, what are we even you know, why is she the boss? Yeah, is where you feel it as a personal attack? Or what are we doing here? You know, if it's like a generalized anxiety about sets on the team, not just something finger pointing at the boss. And so there have been a few people, quite a few people who've said, Okay, I did I did. We talked about, you know, I did the homework assignment of saying, I don't know, what do you think, or I'll make the decision, but I need you. I want your ideas first. And had it go really well, that the team didn't feel burdened? Or you know, oh, no, it's another thing I have to deal with, right to add to give the input. We all like, we all appreciate someone asking for our ideas, right? So they were able to do that say, I don't know, say what do you think, say let's talk about it as a team. And then I'll decide and found that to be very useful, and also to, in a lot of cases, bring them closer to their team. So to kind of practicing that vulnerability, practicing being imperfect, is something that I remember because it's so important to me, because what I want to see as people's shoulders drop, I want to see them feel more confident, and more comfortable in their role. So they can have more fun in their life so they don't get burned out. We do talk about measure, right? I'm a quality improvement person. We could all we could spend all day being nice being kind to each other and taking care of each other, which is great, but we actually have work to do that. And so one, I've seen some people who didn't like talking about numbers, they always ignored. They felt burdened by their executive team member, when she passed down quarterly metrics, or whatever it is, whatever the data habits are, in terms of measuring progress in the organization, they went from feeling annoyed to feeling like they could sit down with their team with data and have a good conversation, and not trigger people's defensiveness or not, you know, get that get the louder the loud eye rolls. So that's something else that I'm that makes me happy as a as a QI person.

40:33

Wow, these these are such heartwarming stories, I wanted to reflect on, you know, these three stories, they're born out of basic universal needs, the the first black leader that you talked about, she just wanted to feel safe, that she can just be without having to put an edit herself and bring that perfect self to work to her team. And then the second team member, what I heard is, you know, fear of judgment, and not being not being thought of as confident and competent, rather that, but the fact that role modeling vulnerability is actually bringing people closer. And for the third example that you shared is just being able to, to just feel the sense of, of trust and safety that I know what I'm talking about. And I can have these conversations in the field that I might not know much about, especially if it's quantitative, related. So that's one thing I wanted to reflect on. Because I think a lot of these

times about cultural transformation, these are just basic, universal needs, that people want to communicate that's tends to mask in these in these masks that he mentioned, perfectionism, shame, vulnerability that you've seen as a social worker. And I wonder if I'm your culture course, but just like in general, in your career, is that within an organization culture, there are also sometimes micro cultures. So you will probably see that there will be one department, for example, in marketing has its own culture versus data analytics has another one. Or maybe you work in an international office, where you work in Los Angeles, and then you have teammates in London. And so I wonder, you know, have you seen that variation of, of how do you reconcile organization culture, while you still have to maintain and adapt to these micro cultures that you kind of see everyday as part of your work?

42:30

That is a really wise question. And it is something that I see, because I do this, this course is for the middle managers. And the risk that they run and participating, the risk I run and doing these courses, is that I'm setting up people to be at cross purposes or just have basically have a different mindset, perhaps than their than their senior level executives, or whoever they feel, you know, down to whoever they report to, if they're a manager reporting to a director, they could be creating new expectations for culture, creating new habits, new ways of connecting and being a better team, with their team where it doesn't really make any sense to the rest of the organization. And so I think about that, as I think about my overly simplistic view on culture, in organizations, I think I think it works is that you've you've there's two basic cultural shifts, you either have the top down, kind of which is I know now is historically kind of white dominant culture at work. And that's, it's kind of the default culture, sadly, in an unexamined organization, if they're not talking about values and collaboration and, and actually what kind of culture they want, then usually the default is that top down, which is the boss has the answers. And if everybody listens to the boss, and does what the boss says, then everything will be fine and will succeed, right? So it doesn't, it doesn't. So that's, that's fine. If you are working on an assembly line, and somebody else has figured out the assembly line, like if you're making if you're working in a very unchanging environment, where all the rules are very strict, and nothing is complex, right? But we know that all work, most work now work where people's jobs are secure, at least, and not being turned into AI. Is what we're doing is we're working with complex problems in complex situations. So the top down we that doesn't work. So, so that's why that's why I do what I do. That's why you do what you do. Human Centered Design acknowledges that assumes that and addresses that, of course. So I talk about it as the tale of two cultures. And I talk about how so one way that I help people in my courses. Diagnose is a fancy word, but how recognize when they're when they're developing a culture that isn't supportive? Maybe just because it's not understood. It's never been attended to. It's never been paid attention to at the larger organization level or at the exact level. I think I talked to the people about how to just be aware of that boundary. And don't make any assumptions. Don't get mad. Don't resent Don't think you're smarter than the execs don't get resistant or combative or competitive about the culture scenario, the two different cultures that are that are now operating because of the changes you've made. But instead, safely, respectfully interrogate that. Do things like, you know, I've had managers say to me, Well, I always check with, I want to check with my team and get their ideas, because I'm humble and curious, because I know, I don't know everything I know, I don't see everything that's going on. So of course, I do that with my team, the other directors that I meet with every week, they expect me to have the answer to everything they could possibly ask. They're in the meeting. So when I say in that meeting, I'm in that meeting culture with the other directors, they'll say, what's the answer to this? And I'll say, I need to talk to my team. And then they will they will say, or either think, well, aren't you the boss? Can't you decide why do you need to talk to your team? Don't you know what you're doing? So So that's one example of specifically how this how, how this comes up. And so I said, Well, we'll work on talking points, well, here's what you can say, you know, we'll start with I trust my team. They're

smart. We're trying to use our whole brains at work. You know, I've got my idea. But I'm not going to, you know, I want to, I could answer you. But it would be a better answer if I checked with him. So little talking points. And then also experimentation, like you do with human centered design, prototyping or with quality improvement running small tests. You could work with that director team and say, I have for this for this question. What if Can we maybe give up on our urgency problem? A lot of people have urgency problems, like I do the answer. Now. It's like, well, maybe we do. But maybe you don't. So can we can we think about maybe making this less urgent? And can I get you an answer next week? And I promise you, it'll be a better answer. So slowly start to change the way people think based on evidence, because you built in a small test of doing things the way you want to do it.

46:48

Wow, I love this reframing, but also asking more questions, instead of saying definitive answers, as if this is the end of the line where like, hey, maybe we need to think about this differently, and continue to interrogate and ask questions, like you said, as a way to continue the conversations open. But I also loved how you said, you know, I trust my team. And it's a really nice way to use these talking points as to advocate for the culture that you are currently at in your own team. And that's pretty amazing. And I wonder from when you're thinking about these micro cultures, but also just the organization culture as a whole, you know, how, how should we take into account these six culture builders, as we were trying to embed elements of of equity and justice for the entire organization culture, and I'm thinking about it from the perspective where it's, it's part of the equation of how we do work every day. And it's not that one thing that we leave, at the end of the door, it's the last thing we think about, it's not about fit anymore. And I wonder, have you thought about that, you know, long term process of weaving equity into part of your work and what the conversation would look like then with your participants?

48:02

Yes, so we do we do talk about equity as it relates to culture builder. Number two is create trust and safety. So safety means safety for everybody, current future team members, and making it a welcoming culture, where, you know, the new person with a with an unusual first name, doesn't have people making comments about that, or, you know, everybody doesn't feel like they have to touch the test African American woman's hair, you know, those kinds of those kinds of simple behaviors. We, you know, when we acknowledge and appreciate everybody's uniqueness, and really understand that even if everybody looks the same they are, they all do have some differences. So whether they look different on the surface, or whether they don't, they feel have different backgrounds. So when we create trust and safety, we are allowing people to trust us. So I talked about culture being trustworthy. One of the important things to think about when we think about, about equity and inclusion, which hinges on trust, when we think about trust, we want to think about the fact that nobody can make us trust them. Trust is a decision that everyone makes for themselves, based on evidence based on their comfort level based on their experience based on, you know, different people they've trusted successfully or, you know, been, you know, unsuccessfully people they trusted in which they hadn't in the past. We all come with our own history in our own stories and what we actually been through. And then, in any case, trust is up to each of us to decide so we're trying to create a trustworthy culture, but we can't make people trust us. The same way we can't be responsible for anybody's emotions or decisions, right? I can't, I can't make anybody think a certain thing or feel a certain thing. So that's, that sets the stage for I think, real moves towards real equity and inclusion. I do I am careful. As a consultant as a trainer, to talk about this as connected to the

work of equity, but I'm really what I'm really careful about is not putting myself forth as a, as an expert on equity, inclusion and diversity. And this is a separate soapbox for another time, but working on equity and inclusion has become a real cottage industry. For for good reasons, like you said, everybody's already any conscientious organization is trying to address this right now. There are, there are a lot of people out there in the world of training, nobody I'm thinking of, personally, nobody I know personally, happily. But there are people who have jumped on that bandwagon and don't really have the haven't developed the level of expertise that I think is important to do that work well, because it's really, it's even more complicated, and complex and personal than, than most of what we talk about my course, right? Because it's about, it's about families of origin, it's about it's about all it's about the history of, you know, this country, if not the history of the world, politics, colonialism, there's just so much stuff that goes into it. And so I, I'm just careful not to present myself as an expert in that. But I do feel like the culture builders course. And the longer course, we get into it more, I do a six month what I call an in house course called Perfect Fit leadership. And so we definitely get into it more there. And talk about that, and, and I've worked with people, conservative people in conservative small states in my course, and they've who are conservative politically, and they've accepted the way that we talk about it in the course, I feel good about it being useful to everyone, again, without me jumping in and saying I'm the expert, listen to me on equity and inclusion. So anyway, that's I make that connection without without, without trying to fix it for people.

51:48

Yeah, and I love that awareness, which I think builds on one of your cultural builder, which is to remain curious, and still to be hungry. And I think that's very aligned with that mission. And that, it also means maybe potentially bringing other other key partners who are expert in this work, to complement this. And to acknowledge, you know, coming into the space, you know, functionally white male, you might not have all the expertise, but I think that's the beauty about it is to learn that and to continue to grow through it. And to to continue to expand your knowledge on it. And I wonder, along those lines, you know, one of the things that I've wrestled with in my career, and just also the work that I do with my clients and governments, is how do we foster organization healing, when we're at points in our organization where people don't trust themselves, they don't trust each other. And it's borne out, of course, like structural barriers, and I'm thinking from an example with one government agency that I currently work for they, they were, you know, a lot of their staff frontline staff for positions as policing behaviors for masks for a lot of their communities. And so the community has now seen them as a policing of behaviors, but also, staff themselves just don't feel that they can trust other staff member. And I wonder, have you seen this this type of fostering of successful fostering of organizational healing as part of, you know, successful cultural excellence in your work? And what does that look like?

53:26

That's yeah, really good, really important point. I one thing I should say back to the other topic, I do have an expert that we call on for the for the DI or the Jedi work. She's Yeah, she's great. She's in Maryland, and I'll offer that offer to bring in an expert speaker that can happen, you know, within the mix of our of a six month course at least, she can help them make those connections. So yeah, exactly. Recognizing and recognizing other people's expertise and pulling them in where where we need them instead of trying to do it, instead of trying to just handle it myself as definitely part of humility, something, something that people appreciate hearing. So yeah, about so this organizational healing question. So I have worked on that some when I do group coaching with managers from a

man has mentioned a couple of groups, managers for different organizations. And part of it has to do with I think it starts with setting the hope and expectations for what you want to come next. Where are we going? What do we need to be? Who do we need to be as an organization? What are we trying to do as an organization in our next phase, and then figuring out how what's happened in the past roles that people get put into that are uncomfortable, like you mentioned, with the mask enforcement? That's not that's that's very, very important very thankless. Or, you know, whatever whatever, whatever has happened in the past or whatever rules people had in the past. Reflecting on that from the perspective of who we want to be now, setting our culture what are what are our core values? So, as individuals, what are our what are our core values as an organization? Where are we going? And then you can say, Okay, well, what did we learn from the past? How do we address that, to people deserve apologies? Does some does is there one person who continually blows up trust and need some special attention? And maybe needs, you know, maybe eventually, if they get, I think everybody needs to get a lot of support, before, they're encouraged to seek their success elsewhere. But some people do need to seek their success elsewhere. Right? If they're not, they don't fit. And they're not coming around to different ways of working different ways of relating to people at work. They're just not a good fit. And so that's, that's one. It's like, what what are we? Where are we going? What can we learn from the past? How do we address it? Again, apologies, switching, maybe switching who supervises whom some people, personalities just aren't good fits. But there's still good people working towards the same goals doing good work. So there can be some of that seeing some of that a little bit of reorganizing, to help people work, work well together. And then at some point, we need to turn the page, which is really hard. It can be really hard when something wasn't fair, when we were mistreated. It can be hard to turn the page again, I'm not saying that there's no accountability. But there's a phase for there's a time to talk about accountability. What does accountability ability look like? What do we need to change. And then after that comes, letting go turning the page, telehealth on an individual on an individual relationship basis. If I really don't trust my boss, and I can't, and I can't forgive her, then maybe it's time for me to go. After we've done something to try to try to fix it, or at least acknowledge what happened. One thing that stood

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out to me when you're when you're talking is, you know, being able to look forward to the future. Because, you know, one thing I've learned in my life is that predictability leads to reliability. When people feel that they can rely more on concrete information, then then they know there's consistency, and they can trust. And I've, and I think that's something that, you know, was an aha moment when you were saying that is that when people can disagree a little bit more what's happening in the future, and they can control these some form of conditions, then they can have reliability and trust in the process. And with that, there are a lot of unreliability that's happening right now. There's just so many changes that's happening in the world. And I feel sometimes pretty exhausted from them from the unprecedented Supreme Court of reduction of abortion rights to the point where we have gun violence in school climate change, and just so many different changes that are happening, where it's shaking my own assumptions and traditions of normalcy and predictability from what's happening in the world. And I wonder, you know, how do you manage change fatigue in a busy team environment, but also a changing political, environmental, and social climate? And how have you seen that happen with the participants, but also in your, in your work on average?

58:14

That's a big one, lots of different ways to talk about that. One is I've the advice, some advice I've seen, that relates to this, that I think is really good advice is when it comes to an organization

planning, maybe don't try to plan for a year out plan for six months, or even three months. If things are changing at that at a at a rapid pace, and you predict I'll keep changing, then. And because we're also burdened with work, and everybody's always busy, even if there's not all this change to manage, maybe do a three month planning process for what you want to achieve in the next three months. And do that. And then maybe next time, maybe hopefully, in three months from now, you'll be able to pick your head up and look six months out. But doing a traditional three year strategic plan, or even a one year strategic plan. We might be more more hassle and stress than it's worth. And just acknowledging that things are changing, and therefore we're going to shorten our horizon. I think that's probably healthy and smart right now. That's one thing just from a again, tactical, strategic, literally strategic perspective, I think for for somebody leading a team where everybody's burned out and up, you know, people, they want to work, but they don't want to work and they don't really know what to do and they're just tired all the time. There's there's ways to manage burnout, if it's real if it's reached the level of actual, actual burnout, where people just don't have any energy for anything. Are there different ways to define burnout, that there are ways for people to take breaks take care of themselves and for bosses to help coach people to, to figure that out? One thing just personally, one thing that works for me is silence. I'm a big here we are on a podcast. I'm a big podcast fan, but I've started walking my dog in the morning without playing a podcast. Just a little Silence is like that's, you know, it's not that big a deal, but it is a big deal for me. So creating some accountability for me to create some headspace for myself, helps me be creative in my work. But it also helps me navigate my own kind of fatigue and confusion and anxiety. And I think in terms of the wider world, I think doing something, whatever it is picking an issue, we can't solve all the really crucial issues that you mentioned ourselves. But we can do something, something we can do something once a week, once a month, or is a one time offer for one of those four or five huge issues that are happening, or we can pick one. And the joy of that the benefit of that is that we connect to other people who are doing that thing. So not to try to sound not to try to sound too special. But we are my husband and I are currently hosting a young family of three from Ukraine, in our house through probably about six weeks, probably through the end of August. And that was easy for us to do. We've got our night, you know, got our cute little three bedroom house here. It wasn't that people it seems it sounds like a big deal. And it is a big deal, because they really needed. But it wasn't that hard for us to do. But the point is not to make myself sound cool. But the point is that all of the offers and all of the donations, we did a GoFundMe, you know, people bringing over baby clothes, just the the amazing outpouring has really raised our spirits as well. It's really helping this family. But it's made me feel like, okay, there's so much good in the world. Still, it feels good to do something. And again, doing something about something you care about, helps you scope it out. And now feel responsible for everything helps you make a decision and prioritize and then you can spend other of your time relaxing, walking around doing whatever you've exercising, sleeping, whatever. Watching watching dumb stuff on TV, you kind of parse and pick something. But it also again, connects you to everything else that people are doing. That's really important and really moving things in the right direction.

1:01:51

It's such important next steps to take action to be able to control what you can within your realm of control. And to go back to the foundation of what it is important to you. How do you practice care that brings joy to you. And it brings you farther away from apathy and mistrust that tends to infect the work culture, but just your even family culture in general. And speaking on burnout, you have a new monthly free series called recharging station, which allows people to rest for 45 minutes to pause and slow down. And you've partnered with Republica Bromberg to offer the station to people to care of themselves. Walk me through what that is. And you mentioned a little bit that how people define burnout is different. What's your definition of burnout?

1:02:45

I saw the recharging station. Yeah, it's once a month, it's 45 minutes. It's on zoom cameras optional. Some people feel like they need you know, if you want your camera off. That's that's a way for people to take care of themselves. And we do Yeah, it's Rebecca leads a guided meditation on written loosely related to one leadership idea that I provide. So it's for anyone who identifies as a leader in their teams, which I'm sure is anybody who would listen to this podcast. And just create some space for those two things, plus some discussion. And it's just a way for people to breathe, pause, think about what they need, maybe get a hopefully they'll get some idea for something they can use from from the leadership idea I share from my my course content. And Rebecca does a good i Good job with mostly people in our first we've only had one session it started in July, most people had never meditated before. And she made it really easy to do with her with her instructions and her guidance on the on the theme and everybody. It was it was fun. It was a lot of fun. So we do that once a month as a way to acknowledge and just as a free offering to the world of these really cool networks that were a part of defining burnout. I do not have a pat answer honestly. And I think it's but it has to do with has to do with a lot not having the energy to garner not being able to pull your energy together to do your work. And I would identify burnout in myself or in somebody else with some loss of loss of motivation, hope, inspiration, loss of connection when we're burned out we we a lot of people tend not to reach out, which is a problem. And so it's a maybe withdrawing a little bit from from connections or from people that can that can help us with burnout, which is something I see in my courses. Part of the what happens in the courses people can they have excuses. They have these homework assignments that help them reconnect with their team and help their team. So that's kind of an unintentional burnout treatment of the course. The course is provided. But burnout, it's something where it's something where a good night's sleep and a good meal isn't gonna fix. There's there's some level of duration there, that it's not simply a week and not even a week's vacation. We'll fix it right it's something that you want to be build how Abbott's to address like any other sort of thing you would do for your physical health or mental mental health.

1:05:08

Yeah, it's a siloed fractured experience that takes a long time to heal. Where can people connect with you and learn more about recharging station and your cultural builders course.

1:05:21

Thank you. So yes, my website is signal key.com signal like a traffic signal key, like a door key. So all is one word signal key.com. And there's a courses and community page there that has the link to register for the free, it's free monthly recharging station. It's a great group. And it's growing, it'd be fun to have some more more people join us there once a month, it's once a month on a Monday, start your week off, right. And then on that same page, the courses and community page at signal few.com is the more information a PDF download, especially if you want to go talk to your boss, about the eight week course it's starting in September is the next cohort. So that's on the website as well. I do a lot on LinkedIn is the main social media I use dropped off Facebook a few years ago, for my own mental health. So I'm not on there, but I am on I am on LinkedIn, that's a great place to connect with me. That's where my doodles with my blogs get posted there. And I have an email list as well if you want it straight to your inbox, or if you know or you can also go like I said to find find all the articles on LinkedIn or on my website.

1:06:30

Wow. And when you're thinking for me at for as an individual, what can I do to nurture a healthy culture at my organization? What's one takeaway that I can do right now?

1:06:42

I think it's approaching every day with generous questions, like you said, as you talked about before asking more questions. So it's when somebody does something, I don't know, somebody misses an important deadline. Instead of having the very human reaction, oh, she doesn't care about me thinking, Oh, well, maybe she doesn't understand or maybe she's just really busy. So asking before we make assumptions of other people, that's just a good, a good way to relate to other people. But take that to work where things are where we're, I think somehow more likely to make negative assumptions about other people. And then they're going to ask people ask for help when you need it. Ask for ideas. And practice that imperfection. Practice not trying to have all the answers, but to help guide yourself and everybody to the solutions.

1:07:30

Super important. Thank you so much Hunter for this really heartwarming episode that we have together. I really appreciate it. I'm pretty sure folks will really appreciate some of the key takeaways and pointers and enjoy recharging station and the cultural builders. Thank you for your time together today.

1:07:47

Yeah, thank you for the opportunity. And it was really good to really good to reconnect with you after a few months. We haven't haven't haven't seen each other in a little while. So this has been really special just for that reason. But yeah, really happy to connect with you and your listeners. And yeah, let's all keep in touch.

1:08:02

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