
Jerry: Hi, Sally. Thank you so much for coming on the show. It's really, it's really wonderful to have you on. It's great to meet you in person.

S SpencerThomas: Likewise, It's an honor to be here.

Jerry: Yeah. Before we get started, why don't you take a few minutes and just introduce yourself. This will allow the listeners to get a sense of your voice as well, not that your voice and my voice sound the same but-

S SpencerThomas: (laughs) Right.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: Uh, so, I'm Sally Spencer-Thomas. I am a psychologist by training, um, but I'm here for a number of reasons today.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: I, uh, um, I lost my brother to suicide in 2004 after I'd been in the field of mental health about 16 years-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... if you count undergraduate.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: And, uh, that was a pretty big life changing event, obviously. Um, and kind of in that moment my, my true calling of getting involved in suicide prevention emerged and I could think of doing nothing else.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: So, over the past 12 years I've been working, uh, in ways to innovate in suicide prevention and, um, have, uh, launched a company- in his honor, called The Carson Jay Spencer Foundation, and a number of initiatives mostly focused on things that were related to his story.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: So working-aged men, um, suicide prevention in the workplace and, um, things that will catch the people that are falling through the cracks-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... and including a social entrepreneurship, uh, program for youth.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: Um, and I myself am, I live with my own struggles with anxiety and depression and so forth.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Welcome to the club.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah, that's right (laughter). That's right. So, all of those threads bring me here today.

Jerry: Yeah, yeah. And there's, uh, there's another attribute, I think, which is that you're in a life transition yourself-

S SpencerThomas: That's right.

Jerry: ... around career.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: So ...

S SpencerThomas: Yeah. Uh, my, um, I had an aha moment, uh, about a month ago-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... that, uh, while I was, uh, on the other side of the world, um, it just became very clear to me that it was time-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... for me to move on from this thing that I created and loved to, uh, do something new.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: And, um, it's been quite a journey for the last month.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: Uh, mostly good but also, like, a big step into the unknown.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: So ...

Jerry: Yeah. So, you know, when we originally started talking about you coming on the show, as I was describing before we started recording, the majority of our guests are folks who come on to talk about, say those, that last piece, the sort of entrepreneurial endeavors that they're under and, and really take advantage of the time together to, to in effect have a coaching session. So, uh, but yours is a multifaceted story.

S SpencerThomas: Right.

Jerry: What I'm thinking might be helpful is to ... Let's start at that, uh, if you don't mind, uh, let's start with your brother's story-

S SpencerThomas: Sure. Yeah.

Jerry:and that experience and how it led to the Foundation.

S SpencerThomas: Yup. Uh, so my brother was a 34-year-old businessman, an entrepreneur himself, uh, here in Denver. Younger, younger brother, he was born Christmas Eve, uh, and he was my first memory, my ... He was, I was told he was my Christmas present, so-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... um, we were really close growing up and, uh-

Jerry: How much younger than you?

S SpencerThomas: Two and a half years younger than me. And, um, and I was kind of the more nerdy, academic scholar type, and he was the charismatic, knock it out of the park type, um, who got himself into a whole bunch of trouble when he got to school, college. Um, got himself kicked out for a year.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: And, um, in that year, uh, he received the diagnosis of bipolar condition.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: And this was late '80s. Nobody was talking about this. And, uh, during that year he said to me, "I don't know what this bipolar thing is-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... but I am fine and I will be fine." And in that year he took a job selling encyclopedias door to door, which no one even knows what encyclopedias are today (laughter) but it's a pretty miserable job. Um, but he had such a gift of, uh, influence in sales, and really it was around building trust with people-

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: ... that by the end of that year he had a three state sales team and took his team to Hawaii and Rome and ... Anyway, he was on the road, uh, to success. And, um, he got a whole bunch of other diagnoses in between, but I really think that original one was the one that was true for him. And he just managed it, um, in many different ways. Sometimes he would go get talk therapy and medication. Uh, a lot of times, uh, we would pass cassettes (laughs) back and forth in the mail. He was living in a [crosstalk 00:05:07]

Jerry: That's another thing that people really-

S SpencerThomas: Right. (laughs)

Jerry: ... won't know what we're talking about.

S SpencerThomas: That's right. (laughs) I was in graduate school out here at the University of Denver, um, learning, you know, the therapy du jour, whatever, cooking strategies and medications and stuff. And he was in Atlanta working for a multinational insurance company. And he would send me rambling, uh, recordings of, um, you know, what he was going through, a lot of anxiety and self-doubt. And I'd send him back, you know, tips and whatever.

Jerry: All via cassette?

S SpencerThomas: Right. (laughs) Right.

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: Um, and he tried a bunch of stuff. He also self-medicated a lot with alcohol and marijuana and stuff, but nobody knew. You know? They just saw this incredibly magical, gifted person. And in his mid-20s at some point he just said, "Why am I working so hard to make money for you guys? I'm gonna go out and create a competing company," and-

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: ... launched his own company at like, 25. Um, and that's how it went, and he

was incredibly successful. Um, and then 2004 hit and for a reason we don't fully understand he had his first full blown episode of mania.

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: So it was not containable-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... at that point and he went through his life like a train wreck in a very short period of time. And, you know, it, it was horrifying. I, um, I remember feeling incredibly helpless even though-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... I had all of this education and all this, all these networks of people to help me. I just, um, I kept saying, "What do I do?"

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: And they all said, "You have ... You say no he's not threatening suicide or that he's gonna hurt anybody else. You just have to wait until the train crashes." Um, and it did, uh, after months and months of reckless spending and really bad business decisions.

Jerry: A really classic-

S SpencerThomas: Total classic.

Jerry: ... mania. Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: Total classic. You know, not sleeping and dangerous behavior. Um, his accountant sat him down and said, "You're done. You're broke. You have no access to anymore money."

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: And he, uh, flipped from this real agitated state to the worst depression we had ever seen.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: I was so filled with regret and remorse. Um, he came back to the family. We had been estranged for a couple of months, um, and I really believe in hindsight he came back to say goodbye, uh, 'cause we only s- he was only with

us for like, two and a half weeks. And, um, he ... Last time I saw him was a Thursday night. Um, all of us had read the book *The Unquiet Mind* by Dr. Kay Redfield Jamison, who's a beautiful-

Jerry: Beautiful book.

S SpencerThomas: Right.

Jerry: And, and she's an amazing writer.

S SpencerThomas: She is. There's very few people who have that level of intelligence who can write so, such like a novelist that engages you fully, and just being with her in that experience. And so, and I was like, "There's this other incredibly accomplished person who, um, like you, who's been through something similar, and here's the good news. Like, she's figured some stuff out and we will too." And he just said to me, "Sally, it's madness."

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: And four days later he died of suicide, and, um, I don't know, of course I can't ask him what he was trying to tell me, but I have a pretty good idea. He was a very determined, self-made man who had been through other emotional struggles in his life and found his way through. But I believe because his episode of mania was so public, um, that he lost h- hope, not that he couldn't get better, but that he couldn't get his life back again.

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: That his business partners wouldn't trust him again and his friends would look at him funny and, um-

Jerry: So the shame.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: The, the-

S SpencerThomas: And he just felt so alone.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: Like this was 2004, there's, there are the Brad Felds or, you know, other people who, you know, he would have vicarious respect for who were out with their stories. There was nobody.

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: And he just felt so alone and so ashamed. So, um, on the night that he died my brother's really good friend and business partner from Atlanta called up my brother's wife and said, "Oh, my God. What can I do?" And he said, "No matter what you do," she said, "Don't let him be forgotten." So it was literally on that night that the ideas for forming The Carson Jay Spencer Foundation were born. And by January this man had convened all my brother's closest friends from across his lifespan and my family, which my parents are only children, my brother was my only sibling, so we're small. And we just got on conference calls and made a resolve-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... to do bold, gap filling work to prevent what happened to Carson from happening to other people, and when possible to celebrate his life.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: And find ways to do this work in an entrepreneurial way using innovation, and when we could a smidge of humor.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: Um, and so that's where we started and it was starting with nothing. And people hear the word foundation and they think we're, we were a wealthy family and that just, you know-

Jerry: Yeah, yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... started with all this money, but we started with zero. Um, and we were able to build some really cool, um, projects that I-

Jerry: So, I, I-

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: I really want to hear about the foundation.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: But can we go back-

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: ... a little bit? And I just want to honor that story.

S SpencerThomas: Thank you.

Jerry: You know? Um, you said it at one point and I started to feel it before you said it, because I can relate to it in my own life, that, um, as, as listeners know that I've struggled with my own, uh, suicidal impulses and my own depression and, um ... But there's another side to this which I think you touched upon, which is, "So here we are. Look at us. We got trained. Look at how good we are." And the helplessness that we feel when someone we love is struggling.

S SpencerThomas: Yes. I-

Jerry: There's a, there's an old Buddhist tale of a mother who's watching her child, uh, uh, lost in a river, a raging river, and she's stuck on the shore, armless.

S SpencerThomas: Yes.

Jerry: And that, that image always strikes me. Um, here we are trained. Here you were, um, passing cassette tapes-

S SpencerThomas: Yeah, with all my expertise.

Jerry: ... with all your expertise.

S SpencerThomas: Right.

Jerry: And, uh, you know, I'm gonna imagine that as a psychologist you know the self-care that you needed to do around this. Um, but for those listening just a reminder that they have a journey too, and we have a journey. And there's only that which we can do.

S SpencerThomas: Right.

Jerry: And, and we have a responsibility to be informed. We have a responsibility to help overcome, for example, what Carson had to contend with, which was on top of his own self-described madness, the shame and the isolation. And for God's sake, if we do nothing else in my lifetime-

S SpencerThomas: That's right.

Jerry: ... but it, but undermine the isolating shame so that we clear the way for professionals to get in and help-

S SpencerThomas: Or peers.

Jerry: Or peers.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah. Yeah. I'd say it was the, you know, the shame that killed him more than-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... the psychological and emotional pain that he was experiencing, which was tremendous.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: It was the shame.

Jerry: It was the shame that killed him.

S SpencerThomas: You brought, you brought up a good point that I don't want to forget to comment on, and that is about the, you know, the professionals piece.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: Uh, because that was, that was definitely part of the early journey. He was, uh ... And still so humbling to say.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: You know, we were so trained, right, to have your professional boundaries up and you're the expert and-

Jerry: Yeah, yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... you know, you have this ... And honestly, I had a great graduate education, but the training for mental health professionals around this topic in particular is totally-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... horrible. I mean, if we get any training at all it's about how not to get sued, you know, how to protect yourself and that you should be very fearful-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... of clients who are suicidal. So I had-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... no knowledge and, but the more profound level was, um, it's not us and them. You know? It's us.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: You know, that they're, they, they all, we all have a story and that at some point all the professionals, all the experts will be brought to their knees by something that they didn't expect or something that was overwhelming, and it's very humbling.

Jerry: Yeah. Well, you know, one of, one of the mantras that, of the work that I do, whether it's, um, on this podcast or, or in a coaching session or in a workshop, um, you know, I made reference to the CNN story that I did a f-, um, you know ... There, there's this moment where sometimes with my Brooklyn aggressiveness I'll say, "Well, that's bullshit."

S SpencerThomas: (laughs)

Jerry: Or sometimes with my Buddhist compassion I will sort of lovingly reach out. But there is this moment where I realize that we are allowing or, or in effect hiding from the emotional experience and the pain of what these sorts of topics do, and allow us to create a kind of intellectual disassociation from what is happening. And, um, sometimes I get angry about that because in my heart I feel like it feeds the shameful, unintentionally feeds the shameful isolation. And, and yet I am cognizant that, um, those of us who are in relationship with people who struggle, either as a helping professional or as a colleague ... Um, you know, here you are at work and your co-founder is going through something, and you don't know what to do. Right?

And, and, um, I'm often reminded in those moments of a story that my dear friend and someone I admire deeply, Parker Palmer, tells about his own experience with depression. And he, I first read about this story in his book *Let Your Life Speak*, in which he talks openly about his own struggles with depression. And he, he tells a story of his friend and neighbor, Bill. And Bill would come over every afternoon as, as Parker would sit, you know, in a kind of darkened room in the chair. And Bill would just take Parker's shoes off and rub his feet. And as Parker tells the story, because that was where he felt he could be touched.

S SpencerThomas: Hmm.

Jerry: And Bill wasn't a psychol- psychologist, didn't have any training, but Bill would just say things like, "I see that it's hard today. I see you look a little brighter today. Would you like a cup of tea?" And I'm reminded of the value of

community. You know, you, you said something almost under your breath about how peers help each other.

S SpencerThomas: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I remember, uh, just a couple of days after he died I would, I was working at Regis University at the time. And we were right about break, and I'd been on maternity leave, so I was really disconnected. Um, but my supervisor, she said w-, she called me up and she said, "Where are you?" And I said, "I'm at my mom's house," which is in Westminster, just you know, a couple miles up the road from Regis. And she said, "Just stay right there. I'm coming right over."

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: And she said, "I'll meet you in the driveway. You don't have to do anything." And I came out and she walks up the driveway and she's got this big vat of chicken soup.

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: And she said, "I know you're not eating. So, uh, this has all the food groups in it-

Jerry: (laughs)

S SpencerThomas: ... and it can, you can get it down." And, and I swear, we were sustained by that vat of soup for the better part of that week, and it was that, you know, little touches of loving kindness.

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: Because there also, there was also quite a bit of judgment that went, you know, like, "You're a psychologist. You know, couldn't you see this coming?" Kind of, you know, small pits of that-

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: ... were bothersome. (laughs)

Jerry: To say the least. Yeah. (laughter)

S SpencerThomas: Um, but the angels, I call them the angels, they came forward. Some I knew and some were strangers, you know-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... um, were really quite powerful.

Jerry: Yeah, yeah. I think, you know, it's, um, I'll be kind to the people who are judgmental in those moments and say that in a similar fashion perhaps out of their own fear of helplessness, right, and you know, I'm imagining they would say something like, "Well, if she can't see the signs, then I don't have to feel responsible for not seeing the signs myself." And yet it comes across as an aggression. Um, and, and, uh, the ... It's just painful because it, it, it breaks down the one thing that I think is, every wisdom tradition has taught us, which is that community helps. Community doesn't stop depression, bipolarity, uh, mental illness, um, but community helps.

S SpencerThomas: It sure does. You know, I think about whenever you're in an overwhelming life situation-

Jerry: That's right.

S SpencerThomas: ... there's the people who surround you-

Jerry: That's right.

S SpencerThomas: ... and just hold your hand or whatever, put their arms around you, that get you through.

Jerry: That's right.

S SpencerThomas: The other things may help-

Jerry: That's right.

S SpencerThomas: ... coping to some degree, but it's the people who love you that ca- carry you through.

Jerry: That's right.

S SpencerThomas: Um, and when I think about my brother's kind of last months, um, because he had such pride about his business success and like, he couldn't let anyone really in-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... even when they wanted to-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... you know, about what was going on with him. So he was so alone-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... during that, those last few months. And he was beloved. Like, he just had a million ...

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: He was the kind of guy that would, like, light up the room.

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: Everybody ... We called him the Pied Piper. Everybody would just follow him everywhere, but he couldn't let people know.

Jerry: And that's, that's the irony of, uh, a lot of folks with bipolar disorder, is that they are the Pied Pipers.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: (laughs)

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: You know, we, we, we are drawn in by the seductive quality of their, uh, creativity, their energy, um, their, their, their ... At times, and many times their absolute radiant confidence in their ability to, "Sure. I'll take on Walmart."

S SpencerThomas: Right. (laughter) Right. [crosstalk 00:21:25] national insurance company.

Jerry: Right. (laughs)

S SpencerThomas: I'll create a competing business at 25. Um, but the other thing that he had that I think was such a gift, and I mentioned this a little bit earlier, was that within a very short period of time, you know, on a golf course or whatever with cocktails, my brother would be able to k- kind of see into the soul of a person-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... and assess what was most important to them, and also what they were struggling with. Like, he was real, he was the real psychologist. (laughter) Um, and, and he would never forget that.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: He had, like he would tuck it away-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... and then he would see that person maybe five years in the future and he's like, "Hey, how's your kid doing in school these days?"

Jerry: Aw.

S SpencerThomas: You know? And that's what made him so trustworthy. And he wasn't doing it manipulatively. He was genuinely like-

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: ... caring about people.

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: But it also worked to his benefit for, on the business side.

Jerry: Sure.

S SpencerThomas: Because it made people trust him.

Jerry: Yeah. Well, and he might-

S SpencerThomas: And I miss that so much. I miss that part of our relationship.

Jerry: In, in language that we often use on the podcast is, I, I refer to that capacity as a superpower.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: And as Marvel has done such a great job of teaching us, every superpower has a negative side to it. (laughter)

S SpencerThomas: Right, right.

Jerry: And so you have to sort of ... So, so you took this experience and you turned it into the foundation. And the foundation, it's, it's been how long now? So 10 years?

S SpencerThomas: 12 years.

Jerry: 12 years-

S SpencerThomas: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: ... with the foundation. And you've learned a few things, I imagine.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah. Uh, so in the beginning days I was, um, running the leadership program out of Regis. And so, well my, my paid job was to teach leadership.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: Like, my heart was like, two separate [inaudible 00:23:03] and so I blended the two things-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... which kind of was the theme that carried through in the evolution of the foundation, is that, um, it was pretty clear to me in the early part of my career that I was not meant to be a counselor or a therapist.

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: I'm an agitator and I don't like to sit around very long. So the idea of having eight hours of client time was ...

Jerry: (laughter)

S SpencerThomas: I just couldn't do it.

Jerry: Not that we don't love our clients.

S SpencerThomas: No, no, no, no, no.

Jerry: (laughs)

S SpencerThomas: No, no, no, no. I realized that there were great people who had that level of patience-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... and it wasn't me.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: But it, um, but I could do things-

Jerry: Yup.

S SpencerThomas: ... with the knowledge I had from my degrees or whatever, to shift culture-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... to do that kind of stuff. So this learning period in the early days was really about how to connect the things we know about effective leadership-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... with this issue that is so swept-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... under the carpet.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: And how to put those things together and really look at cultural change and systems change, and what, what were some of the big levers we could pull to make a difference. Uh, so, um, the first most obvious one was my brother, I had no idea this was one of the gaps in, in my learning, I had no idea my brother was the prototypical person-

Jerry: Yes.

S SpencerThomas: ... that was going to die of suicide. And if you ask the general public, even if you ask most mental health professionals, they'll be like, "No, no, no it's, you know, at risk kids."

Jerry: Yeah, right, right.

S SpencerThomas: No. It's white working aged men with a diagnosable mental health condition.

Jerry: Between age 30 and 55.

S SpencerThomas: That's right. That's right.

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: Um, and so I thought, well there's a gap that needs to be filled.

Jerry: Yup.

S SpencerThomas: Because nobody's trying to reach these guys. Now this is 2004 and the military was starting to make some moves at that point, but for the most part nobody was addressing it. So we thought, "Well, we reach kids in school. We're gonna reach the adults in the work place." So we launched the first work place suicide prevention program, um, pulling from things that we knew, uh, from other countries actually-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... where they had been successful in kind of adapting them, an Air Force model and an Australian model and so forth, to kind of the every day work place. And that kind of chugged along. Again, we're all volunteered, no money, no resources, you know, at a very slow pace.

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: Um, and then we realized that we needed to go industry specific-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... so we went first responders, construction, and then the latest foray has been into the startup space-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... which has been really exciting to me. I mean, I look back in my rear view mirror going, "Why did it take me so long to get here? Like, this is so [crosstalk 00:25:27]

Jerry: Gee, why did you avoid the ... No. (laughter) Was there any resistance there, doctor? (laughs)

S SpencerThomas: I know. I don't if it was resistance as much as readiness.

Jerry: Ah.

S SpencerThomas: So the, the-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... first responder community-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... has data that says-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... our guys are dying, and now construction also has data. The entrepreneurship we don't, there's not like a one place to-

Jerry: Well, and I, I think that there's a collective understand that say, returning vets-

S SpencerThomas: Yes.

Jerry: ... uh, with PTSD-

S SpencerThomas: Right.

Jerry: ... first responders, again with PTSD-

S SpencerThomas: Right.

Jerry: ... um, I'm curious about construction, but-

S SpencerThomas: Mostly veterans. There are a lot of veterans-

Jerry: Ah.

S SpencerThomas: ... in construction.

Jerry: Veterans.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: Got you.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: Got you. And so what we have is this, this correlation between past trauma, whether it's full blown PTSD or now, past trauma unprocessed and the, the, um, let's call it a, a, uh, a cultural milieu where the already social acculturation of not talking about things-

S SpencerThomas: Right.

Jerry: Right? Terrence Real's beautiful book, I Just Don't Want to Talk About It, about men and depression, um, speaks to this really well. So you've got these milieus where this is happening and in the first responder community, um, you know, our heart goes out to them immediately. We can immediately see how a, an

EMT who's dealing with life and death situations all day long might in fact be struggling.

S SpencerThomas: Yup.

Jerry: But we don't necessarily think of entrepreneurs in the same light.

S SpencerThomas: Right, right, right, right.

Jerry: Right, right.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah. And with the construction guys, I said mostly, but there's quite a few veterans in there. But the, um, the thing that over rides the cultures is kind of this stoic, uh, risk taking persona.

Jerry: Ah.

S SpencerThomas: Um, that's-

Jerry: So it's the stoicism-

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: ... plus risk taking.

S SpencerThomas: Right.

Jerry: Got you.

S SpencerThomas: Yes, because I, I, I stand on my own.

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: I'm brave and-

Jerry: Self-reliant.

S SpencerThomas: ... fearless and I'm self-reliant. Right.

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: That's all through the three of them. And they, and that, all three populations fear to tread where nobody else wants to go, like into burning buildings, on top of, you know, high-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... high rises and, you know, risking (laughs) their life savings to make something. You know.

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: Very few people have that level of risk, and so, um, we call it an acquired capacity for suicide because most people that's, um, a daunting thing. Like-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... I might entertain thoughts of not being here, but the idea of actually going through with it is way too scary.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: But for these risk taking populations it's just another thing-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... that they're not as scared about as-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... most other people.

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: So [crosstalk 00:28:00] at risk.

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: So anyway, work place stuff, um, has been, uh, very rewarding. Um, but there was a larger cultural piece around how men had been conditioned to think about emotional challenges and, uh, mental health conditions in particular, which is, "Yeah, not me." Um-

Jerry: Or as something-

S SpencerThomas: Right.

Jerry: ... to be overcome.

S SpencerThomas: Yes, if they get that far.

Jerry: If they get that-

S SpencerThomas: But it's mostly like, "Yeah, I'm not, I'm not sick. I'm not broken, and I'm certainly not crazy."

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: Um, so-

Jerry: It's just a few drinks.

S SpencerThomas: Right, right.

Jerry: It's just a ... Right.

S SpencerThomas: Or it's, "I'm just under a lot of stress."

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: Right? So they interpret all of these, "I haven't slept for a week," (laughs) you know, "I can't eat anymore," um, as just-

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: ... a stress reaction. It certainly can be triggered by stress, but at some point it's more than just stress.

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: When a lot of kind of cognitive abilities and just daily functions just starting to fall apart. But because they're like, "It's stress and I can manage it-

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: ... they are least likely to reach out to anybody to-

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: ... let them know that they need some help.

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: Um, so, uh, kind of another area that, um, we were working is was how do we change that conversation?

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: And so together with, uh, a full service advertising agency in Denver called Cactus and the public health arm of the Office of Suicide Prevention, um, we created a campaign called Man Therapy-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... that uses humor, uh, to engage men on the front end-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... of thinking about this differently in the privacy of their own-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... you know, computer or home and stuff. They can explore these things in a way-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... that seems congruent with how they think about stuff rather than, you know, some doctor in a white coat saying, "You need to take this medication."

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: (laughs)

Jerry: Right, right, right.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah. And they can self-assess and explore all kinds of resources that we've vetted to be more or less man friendly, um, and, uh, and it's been quite powerful to find that humor was the way in.

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah. 'Cause then they pass it on to each other and-

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: ... um, it's really engaging. Uh, and then the last thing that we did that was probably, um, as true to the founder's vision as we could, and it was also my brother's expressed legacy before he died, um, he wanted to, um, create a scholarship to help high school entrepreneurs get to college 'cause he really

valued-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... education. Um, the last, um, effort that we did was to create social entrepreneur program for high school teens-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... to create a business that was for profit that also did something fundamental around mental health promotion or suicide prevention. Um, that's been a r- a real joy to watch.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: And I'm like, "Hey, Carson. Check it out." (laughter) You know, these, these youth are amazing and, so-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... it's been, it's been nice.

Jerry: It's, um, what I'm connecting to in this moment is this, this notion of taking our personal pain and turning it into something that is, uh, of service to the world. And, um, you know, um, part of, part of the way that I heal on a continuing basis is to allow the expression of what my own journey has been out, has been about, and to, and to be open about it, thus overcoming my own internalized mechanisms for shame, but also to create, um, a model for language around it so that, um, uh, there can be this sort of shared experience. And if I may, perhaps I'm projecting a little bit, but, but I, what I see you doing is something similar.

S SpencerThomas: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: Or I see what you've done is something similar, which is to take your experience and to take that pain and not quote, try to fix the problem, but create a platform for the community to come together around the problem. 'Cause, and you're nodding and smiling.

S SpencerThomas: Yes.

Jerry: Does that language work-

S SpencerThomas: Oh, absolutely.

Jerry: ... for you?

S SpencerThomas: Uh, it's definitely been kind of this meaning making journey of, uh, pulling in other people with shared experiences, um, just right out together.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: Um, so you get the community part.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: And then you also get the purpose.

Jerry: Yeah, yeah.

S SpencerThomas: Like, okay, I think, I think this is why I'm here-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... um, is to try to figure out what happened.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: And shape it in a different direction.

Jerry: Yeah. I'm reminded something someone said to me at one of our boot camps. Um, you know, I owned up to, uh, uh, what can feel like a self-indulgent piece, which was the, the notion of going back in time to being 38 and really struggling with my own, uh, resurgence of depression, 'cause depression and I had g- have a long relationship. Um, and the, you know, as Churchill called it, the, the, the black dog. You know, the black dog and I had been good friends. And, uh, you know, in my late 30s feeling on top of the world, right, it came back, or at least perceptually on top of the world it came back in a, in a very profound and life altering way.

And, uh, when I shared that at the camp someone at the very end made me break down and cry by saying, "You know, Jerry, I know that you keep talking about going back in time and trying to save that 38-year-old version of me, of you. But I want you to understand that this weekend you saved a few lives." And, um, that's probably overly generous. What I think we do, what we try to do, is give people the language to talk about these struggles in addition to and within the context of their struggles as an entrepreneur, their normal day to day psychopathology, up and down, up and down, up and down, right, and not isolate those two but understand that those experiences go together. And very often that's the, where the superpower lays.

S SpencerThomas: Right. That's right.

Jerry: ... is in that, is in that space. You know? Um-

S SpencerThomas: And that eventually-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... it passes, and we don't have necessarily control over when-

Jerry: When it passes.

S SpencerThomas: ... the struggle-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... gets alleviated.

Jerry: Oh, God. You said it so well.

S SpencerThomas: But when you live through it a couple of times-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... you're like, "Okay. This sucks (laughter)-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... but some day I'm going to be on the other side of it-

Jerry: Yeah, yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... and I'm going to be like okay, what did I learn?"

Jerry: Yeah, yeah. My 87-year-old psychoanalyst with whom I've now worked for 25 years-

S SpencerThomas: Wow. (laughs) That's amazing.

Jerry: 25 years with her, right? And, and it's a funny relationship now because I'll go in and she's like, "Oh, you. You know, you're, you're a pain in the ass." I was like, "Well, you're a pain in the ass, too."

S SpencerThomas: (laughs)

Jerry: You know? It's really loving. It's beautiful. She would often say ... I would come in and I would say, "Ah, it's a b- bad day," and she'd say, "Don't worry. It'll pass." And then I'll come in and I'll say, "Ah, it's a good day," and she'll say, "Don't worry. It'll pass." (laughter) And it's actually beautiful from a Buddhist perspective bodhisattva wisdom in that, in the realization that good times will pass, bad times will pass, time passes. Time passes. When you're mired in these struggles it's really, really hard, right, to recognize that. And conversely, when you're having a great time it's really hard to not recognize the passing of that without anxiety. Right? You may have this like, "Uh-oh, be careful," but to realize that the passing of a good times does not indicate that you're a screw up or a fuck up as a human being.

S SpencerThomas: And the trick is for me anyway-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... is to be as present as possible in the good times, knowing that they're not going to last, and have, and, and again it was just to have gratitude and presence-

Jerry: That's it.

S SpencerThomas: ... you know, and say, "Okay. This moment is good." (laughs)

Jerry: That's right. And, and the laughter.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: Like, think about where we've just gotten to.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: Right? We're, we're talking about a difficult subject, but we're talking about it with love and compassion and humor, and it's like, "Oh," and community. Right? These are the tools.

S SpencerThomas: Right.

Jerry: These are the tools to get by, what did Freud call it, psychopathology of every day life. Oh.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: Love, community, friendship, humor.

S SpencerThomas: And I think, well my experience is that when you are going down the toilet-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... you lose that ability to experience the connection. I mean, I remember, um, my, my first episode of depression wasn't until 2012. I was, you know, in my 40s.

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: And, uh, I, you know, I knew that the chances of my having something was pretty high.

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: You know, and I knew-

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: ... my family history and, you know, just 'cause it happens to about everybody (laughter) at some point. Um, but, uh, you know, it didn't happen after my brother's death. I mean, I had trauma.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: I had tremendous amounts of grief.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: But what, I didn't-

Jerry: But it wasn't depression.

S SpencerThomas: It wasn't depression. That was the-

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: It was a different deal, and it happened, you know, I the convergence of, you know, many, many life stressors. I had a health issue and I couldn't eat, so I had to-

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: ... for like, six weeks sip all my meals including like, lasagna, through a straw. So

I was physically compromised. Then a bunch of work challenges that were really, really difficult, um, and, uh, and my dog had a stroke and ... But the biggest thing at ... So all of these things were converging, but the biggest thing for me was, um, I had to make this matching grant.

Jerry: Mm.

S SpencerThomas: Um, a, somebody had made a massive investment-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... in the foundation. We were nothing and the all the sudden half a million and we were something.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: But it was a matching challenge and they-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... when they gave it to me they're like, "We're investing in you, Sally Spencer-Thomas."

Jerry: Oh, geez. That sounds great.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: Except ... (laughter)

S SpencerThomas: I was like, "Whoa." And here we were marching up on the deadline of that matching challenge. I'm like, "We're not gonna make it."

Jerry: Oh.

S SpencerThomas: And I thought, "That's it. I'm done." And, and I went into this ... I just watched myself like, outside of myself, go into the dark tunnel. And I couldn't, I couldn't cope. Like-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... you know, all my usual coping strategies of-

Jerry: ===

S SpencerThomas: ... things that I do when I'm stressed, nothing was working. I couldn't feel

pleasure at all, which meant I couldn't eat. I had lots of anxiety, um, uh, and I really felt like I was, like my ability to generate solutions was ... My brain just couldn't come up with any-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... at all.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: And I isolated and, and in my compromised thinking I thought, "Well, I'll just work harder."

Jerry: (laughs)

S SpencerThomas: Because that's what solves problems for me if I just work harder.

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: Um ...

Jerry: Right. And, and can I point out-

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: ... that the other side of that thinking is, "I'm not working hard enough."

S SpencerThomas: Right. Right. It was the most ... When I look back at it it was the m- again, one of these humbling things. I knew what ... You know.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: On some level I knew what I was going through and it was nothing like I'd-

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: ... ever gone through before.

Jerry: Right, right.

S SpencerThomas: I knew in my head what would have been helpful.

Jerry: Yup.

S SpencerThomas: And I couldn't do it.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: And I could barely ... I mean, I was just filled with fear and just all of these really debilitating things. And then two things happened. Uh, one, my father of all people, very loving, responsible man, but not necessarily always the touchy feely-

Jerry: Right, right.

S SpencerThomas: ... emotional person, reached out to me. He said, "Sweetheart, um, perhaps you should take some of your own advice and, uh, go get some help."

Jerry: (laughs)

S SpencerThomas: Right. (laughter)

Jerry: Schmuck.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah, schmuck. Um, so you know, I did. I went and I got some medication so I could sleep.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: And once my sleep got re-regulated that-

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: ... then all, then everything started to fall in place. But probably the bigger thing was I went to, you know, my, my community's professional conference.

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: And I was very compromised, uh, and I'm supposed to lead all these committees and do all these presentations, and I let a couple people in. I'm like, "I'm not doing so well."

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: And what I got back was unconditional love.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: They're like, "Sally, you don't, you don't have to do this work. You don't have to be in this leadership role. You don't have to do ... We love you-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... and you're so much more than this role."

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: And, and like, the world just put up a mirror and I was like, "Okay."

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: And those two things together kind of put me back on a, on a new trajectory.

Jerry: I, I, I love that story. Um, it, it, it reminds me of an experience that I have often and, and I, and I hope I give it to my partners as well. You know, a lot of people, uh, admire the work we do with this company and we have a lot of sayings internally, one of which is good work done well for the right reasons, which we've stolen from David White, the poet.

S SpencerThomas: Oh, okay.

Jerry: But we also talk about using the work to do our work. And, uh, the, the, the months, the time period from Thanksgiving through New Year's is often times a very difficult time period. I'm one of those folks. Some of it is seasonal affective disorder. Some of it are just past memories and the, you know, of, of difficult times. And this past period in, you know, 2016, was difficult 'cause my mother had passed away in September and I was feeling the passing of time.

S SpencerThomas: Hmm.

Jerry: Siblings aging and, you know, my children becoming adults, how dare they? You know, all of that. And in you telling your story of your colleagues at the conference, or even your father, I'm reminded of Dan, Ali and Khalid, um, reaching in, and Jim Marsden reaching in and taking care of me as well. Um, and saying things to me like, "You don't have to do that piece. You don't have to do that piece of work, Jerry." You know, um, uh, and as CEO of my little company, uh, our little company, I often falsely internalize a sense of responsibility for everybody else. So I will say, "Well, how's Dan doing," and, "How's Allie doing?" You know, "She's got that struggle with this going on," and, "Khalid's been silent for a while. I better reach out for him." But I don't necessarily, um ... We were actually having dinner last night talking about this. I don't necessarily even, uh, allow myself to think of myself as needing their help.

S SpencerThomas: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. That's exactly where I was 'cause it's like, not

only do I have these mouths to feed that, and, and this funder that I promised I would succeed on and-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... my own little family, and oh my gosh, we're gonna be homeless, um, I missed my brother.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: Like, he's the, this is the legacy that-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: And like, all that-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... was getting so hard that, you know, the conclusion was just to buckle in and-

Jerry: Work harder.

S SpencerThomas: ... dig in. Right, right, right.

Jerry: Work harder.

S SpencerThomas: And, and what I probably really needed to do is take a little bit of leave (laughs)-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... and get grounded again.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: And, um, kind of some things forced that to happen.

Jerry: Yeah, yeah.

S SpencerThomas: And then as things do, things fell back into place.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: You know, but in the moment I had no clarity that that was even a possibility. It just felt the weight was so heavy.

Jerry: Yeah. So I'm, I'm reminded of something you said earlier, which was that a f- a month ago I think you said, uh-huh (affirmative), you h- you'd come to this conclusion that it was time. Am I remembering the words right?

S SpencerThomas: That's right. Uh, when you talked about your growing children, um, this was an insight I had maybe a year ago, where I have, um, teenage boys now and, uh, watching them emancipate.

Jerry: Mm.

S SpencerThomas: As a mama-

Jerry: Yeah. (laughs)

S SpencerThomas: As a parent, you know-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... you're like, "Whoa. I guess that was what I was intending for to happen." (laughter) But at the same time I'm not ready. You know? I just want to go back to like, play and ... But it's, you know, this-

Jerry: It's the definition of bittersweet.

S SpencerThomas: It is so bittersweet.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: And so, about a year ago a started, I started to see that happen with the company.

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: That we were moving ... You know, we had moved from kind of this startup thing-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... where kind of as the founder my energy and ideas were kind of driving things, to the place where we had to pull some infrastructure in and some team members who could have their own leadership.

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: And I started to say, "Oh, my gosh. My company and my kiddos (laughs)-

Jerry: Ah.

S SpencerThomas: ... at the same, like, life transition thing. Like, nobody needs me anymore."

Jerry: Oh.

S SpencerThomas: You know? (laughs) I went through this ... So I started going through this grieving thing on both, at the both, at the same time of, um ... And then, who am I if I'm not their mama and I'm not at the heart and soul of this company anymore?

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: So that, that started happening and then, um, I, because of the nature of my role, um, we, we shifted my role to kind of upward and outward facing CEO, which is what I'm good at. Right? I'm, they call me The Evangelist. I was out there-

Jerry: Right, right.

S SpencerThomas: ... championing, uh, attention around this issue and all of the management was back-

Jerry: Right.

S SpencerThomas: ... um, backup on the ground with the COO. Um, I, I started to feel like an outsider.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: Uh, which was very disconcerting-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... wanting to be part of that family but kind of being that absent parent. You know?

Jerry: Yeah, yeah.

S SpencerThomas: Um, and, uh, so this, this sadness, this grieving, probably had been manifesting itself, whatever, coming to, for two years.

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: Um, and then a number of things started to implode (laughs)-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... uh, right there towards the tail end and I thought, "I, I need to go." And unlike the first time when I thought the company was having a challenge and it was, you know, so much of the weight of everybody on me, I felt more of a release this last time-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... that, um, that I, I'm able to do, I'm able to bring my brother along with me (laughs) in whatever I do and, um, and I can do, go back to being the entrepreneur.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: That is really where I feel like my gifts lie.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: Um, and maybe even do things that I wasn't able to do because they weren't mission-centric in a bigger, bolder way.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: Um, so I can't, I can tell you it's not been without anxiety. (laughs) You know, this little transition here.

Jerry: But that feels appropriate.

S SpencerThomas: It is. And I, and, and while I labeled my other own experiences as depression and that I was immobilized by it, the anxiety here feels, um, it, at the level it needs to be-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... for, you know, a big life decision like this.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: And, and much more manageable. And also I have the hindsight of, "And this will pass." (laughs)

Jerry: Yeah, yeah.

S SpencerThomas: You know, in a couple of days or weeks I'm gonna look back and say, "Okay-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... now what?" You know?

Jerry: Yeah. And if I may-

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: ... I totally relate to the, to the experience. I, I feel myself stepping into a new threshold right now.

S SpencerThomas: Hmm.

Jerry: Um, uh, today is a day where we're doing a quarterly off site with the partners and, um, uh, and, and there are all these ... What I'm relating to is the seasonality of our lives-

S SpencerThomas: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: ... and how there's a seasonality associated with our careers, and that there are these, there are these movements. Um, there was a beautiful book I read last year called, uh, My Father Before Me. And, uh, there are two books by that title, so, and I'm forgetting the, the author's name on this one. But this one is a, is a non-fiction book about, um, the parallel paths of separation and individuation that men and younger men go through, men in their 50s as I am and younger men in their 20s as two of my children are, um, go through. (clears throat) And there is this, what I'm sensing in you is this, um, fear producing potentially joyful, poten- potentially challenging time period of existential transition that maps what's happening in your personal life to what's happening in your professional life. Because guess what? The dichotomy between the two of those things is false.

S SpencerThomas: Right.

Jerry: Right? (laughs) It's actually a construct, I would argue, of the post-industrial era, where we go to work-

S SpencerThomas: Yup.

Jerry: ... and we have our life, and we have to have our balance between those two, so let's do yoga once a week.

S SpencerThomas: (laughs) Right.

Jerry: Right?

S SpencerThomas: Yes.

Jerry: And, and, you know, that's the bullshit piece of it. The, the, reality is that to embrace the, the alignment that is possible in these movements ... It's gonna happen anyway. You're going to experience the seasonality of it. You're going to experience the existential challenges. And you said the question before. Who am I? Right? The, the ultimate existential question. Who am I if I am no longer my children's parent? Who am I if I'm no longer defined by my relationship with my brother? Who am I if my professional career is no longer defined in opposition to or in accordance with? Who am I?

S SpencerThomas: Right.

Jerry: And, and, you know, there's a, a formulation we use here at, at the company which is that, that, uh, uh, uh, it goes like this. Practical skills plus what we refer to as radical self-inquiry, plus shared experiences equals enhanced leadership and greater resiliency. And as I often joke, I don't give a shit about your leadership. I care about your resiliency. Because if you're more resilient you will be a better leader.

S SpencerThomas: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: Right? And what I'm experiencing and you're skilled, you're so skilled and aware of this because of your journey, you know, the radical self-inquiry part, the, the, the practice of asking yourself, "Who am I in this moment?" 'Cause that's the thing that, that we often don't hold with that question. Not, "Who am I now and forever," but, "Who am I in this moment, in this season of my life, in this time of my life, and who am I tomorrow? And how does my work and my life lay in alignment with the answer to that question in the moment?" Right? When we start from that place and are open and sharing then we have that community we were talking about before. And then the practical questions of, "Well, what do I do," become a lot easier to answer. 'Cause now you have a posse of people around you to say, "You know what, Sally? You're really good at this, but you're not good at this."

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: Does this resonate?

S SpencerThomas: Totally. It actually, um, brought a little story back. So, um, (sighs) for 16 years I

worked at Regis University Jesuit-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S SpencerThomas: ... Catholic School.

Jerry: I just spoke there a few weeks ago.

S SpencerThomas: And-

Jerry: They're gorgeous kids.

S SpencerThomas: ... I'm not, I'm not Catholic, but I learned so much, uh-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... from the Jesuits. And one of the practices that, um, was very important to me during an earlier transition when I left Regis was, uh, discernment-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... and just s- sitting-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... listening to that small inner voice-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... of who am I and where would I, where do I need to go? You know that?

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: Um, and when I did that then it gave me clarity-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... um, of what I should and shouldn't be doing and, and a sense of confidence that I didn't have before, like, "Yeah, I'm leaping off the cliff here, (laughter) but I'm pretty sure I'm staying true to me."

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: And, and that'll guide me in the decisions.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: And I feel that sense again now. Um, and then, uh, the other part that you brought up was, um, you know, people have this idea that if they're vulnerable they're weak.

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: Right? If we share our vulnerabilities people will judge us. Uh, and what actually ends up happening is the opposite.

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: When we, when we have space where we can be our true selves and all the warts, you know, and all the self-doubts, um, people actually love us more.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: You know, they respect, they respect that courage. They respect that openness and then they also feel permission to do it themselves. And that bond that's developed is so much stronger.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: Um, and that's, that's what we have sacrificed in our so busy, must be productive, accelerated lives-

Jerry: That's right.

S SpencerThomas: ... is that we even more so than not working out and not eating well, we have sacrificed our true social relationships with one another. And if we are going to live fully engaged lives ... There's a David White quote to about the ... I'm gonna get it a little messed up, but the anecdote to exhaustion isn't rest. It's fully engaged living.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: It's close to that. (laughs)

Jerry: See, you've given me, um, a beautiful response to the whole question of work-life balance. You know, years ago I wrote a blog post called Work-Life

Balance is Bullshit, and, um, I, you know, I told the story about how a reporter had called me to, to do a, you know, what I often refer to as a kind of hit job, a quick job on work-life balance. Okay? Talk to the coach. All right. Anyway. And I spat out in the phone, "Work-life balance is bullshit." And now I understand what it was that I was really trying to say. 'Cause at the time I talked about the fact that the true balance is, is where the outer expression of who we are matches the inner expression of who we truly are. The, the outer expression of what we do matches the inner expression of who we are. But I've never quite been able to reconcile what are obvious things like, "Well, sure. Self-care is really important." And we often throw self-care, uh, into the bucket of work-life balance. But I think the insight that you just gave me was that when we are living in that David White expression of a full engagement, self-care becomes a natural organic expression of who we are.

S SpencerThomas: Not something scheduled in like a yoga class. (laughs)

Jerry: Not something scheduled in like a yoga class. Exactly.

S SpencerThomas: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: It's just how we live. And so in the midst ... So, so for example, in the midst of a off site with my partners, which I will be doing today, there will be self-care. Right? And so that's what, that's what I mean was like, can we create work environments where we have, where, where the ability to be our, our authentic self is not something that's scheduled in, or a mandated program coming from the HR department.

S SpencerThomas: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: For the next hour you will be real. But in fact, an interwoven expression of how we work, such that we are, whether we choose that self-care to be a beautiful real conversation that we have with a colleague, or a yoga class at mid-afternoon, it doesn't really matter. That's not the issue.

S SpencerThomas: Right.

Jerry: Does this have resonance with you?

S SpencerThomas: Yes. So it's not something we're forcing upon ourselves, but something that just comes naturally. So when you were talking about that I thought in the last couple years where I've been out and about-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... uh, I felt fully alive. I'm an adventurer. I love to travel. I love to meet new

people, and I got up and did the thing I'm really good at and was vulnerable with strangers-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... and made new friends, and like, all of that felt really good. And then I'd come home-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... and I didn't have a role in my own-

Jerry: Hmm.

S SpencerThomas: ... you know, in my own office. And I c-, I had, I had no ability to, to do things that made me feel good.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: And, and, and after that went on for several, so long, I thought, uh, it wasn't hard to step away.

Jerry: Yeah. Well, that became, that became the, the, the signal to you-

S SpencerThomas: Right.

Jerry: ... that's it's quote, time.

S SpencerThomas: It's time.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: Yeah.

Jerry: Well, I want to thank you for this. This has been an extraordinary conversation, and really a gift to me.

S SpencerThomas: Thank you for the work that you do one of my spiritual practices, I'll just close with this, is, uh, marathoning, which is, I know Brad's-

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: ... also.

Jerry: Yes.

S SpencerThomas: Which is a little point of connection that we have there. But it's been ... You know, obviously I do it for physical fitness and helping regulate sleep and mood and everything, but honestly each one is its own spiritual journey. And it's that mile 17 where you're so far in and you're so exhausted.

Jerry: Ah.

S SpencerThomas: And, and you've got a really long time to go to get your little medal.

Jerry: Yeah. (laughter)

S SpencerThomas: You know? Um, you know, that's, that's what I want to remind myself and the listeners, is that you know, mile 17 passes.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: And you just keep going and pull from the energy of the other runners around you.

Jerry: Yeah.

S SpencerThomas: And you'll get there.

Jerry: Well, it is, it's been a delight. And just think of me as handing you a cup of water at mile 18.

S SpencerThomas: (laughter) Thank you.

Jerry: Thank you.