

Jerry: Hey, Avni, how are you? It's great-

Avni P. T.: I'm doing well.

Jerry: ... to have you on the show. Good to see you. Thank you for coming on the show.

Avni P. T.: Thank you for having me.

Jerry: Yeah- yeah. So, uh, before we get started, can you just take a moment and introduce yourself?

Avni P. T.: Sure. My name is Avni Patel Thompson. Um, most recently I was the founder and CEO of Poppy, a company that helped parents, um, get access to really great childcare when they needed it. Um, and as of the last year I've been working on the next act, and in the process of starting my new company.

[00:00:30]

Jerry: And, um ... But, of course, there's more to the story, right?

Avni P. T.: Yeah, there's always more.

Jerry: Right. There's always (laughs) more. That's right, that's part of the- the- the experience of running into Jerry.. So, maybe, maybe take a few moments and just ... Um, I'd love to hear your perspective on how we met, 'cause I know that you've written a little bit about that. And I don't know, yet, if it, if you, if you posted the blog post. But, anyway, take a moment, and, uh, share that story.

[00:01:00]

Avni P. T.: Sure, so a part of the Poppy journey ... Um, I've found the space that we are building in, the space of childcare, marketplaces, um, you know, really interesting, uh, the more I've gotten into it.

Um, I connected with one of my former professors at HBS, um, Tom Eisenmann, and he was working on a markets, um, class. And, so, connected with him a couple years ago, and they ended up doing a case on Poppy, um, at a point of which we were facing a really interesting, kind of, um, you know, choice about expansion. Um, expansion in geography versus expansion in products. And, so, a really, kind of, interesting case for students to, kind of, go through.

[00:01:30]

Um, subsequently, of course, where, once- once we made the decision to shut down Poppy, um, Tom actually reached, uh, back out and said, "Hey, I'm teaching a new course on, uh, entrepreneurial failure, uh, would you like to come?" (laughs) And-

[00:02:00]

Jerry: (Laughs)

Avni P. T.: ... I think for me that was an interesting other lens, another way to, kind of, look at it and- and, also bring learning and- and teaching into that. And, so, I, of course, agreed and went, um, went to that class. Um, but, of course, you were speaking the next day at the class and-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Avni P. T.: ... I was ... Um, Tom mentioned that, and I was very excited because, um, I had  
[00:02:30] come across your work, um, obviously as being a founder in the space. And, so, I wanted to have the chance to just meet you. Um, really that was all the, kind of, what it was. I was, uh, due to get on a flight, so I couldn't actually stay for the class, and so I asked if could just, uh, um, interrupt and say hi during the morning, kind of, prep session, and Tom said, um, "Sure."

[00:03:00] So, (laughs) I popped in and I mean, honestly, um, I wasn't, I wasn't expecting more than just a, you know, an introduction of saying hi. And, um, you know, having those, maybe, 15 minutes of interaction was deeply, um, I don't know, deeply profound. Uh, it would, it would, uh, have forced me to, kind of, put down my guard in a way that I don't think I really had, even though I thought I had been, kind of, processing a lot of this, uh, complex-

Jerry: Right.

Avni P. T.: ... emotion.

Jerry: What was it? What happened?

Avni P. T.: You know I've th- thought about that a lot in the subsequent weeks. Um, I think  
[00:03:30] part of it is, you opened with a very powerful question, which on the surface doesn't feel very le-, uh, you know, all that different. You asked, "Are you okay?"

Jerry: Hm.

Avni P. T.: And I've thought about this moment a lot, because I've had family, I've had friends, um, you know, they worry, and they've asked about my well-being and all that kind of stuff. Um, but being asked that question in that way was ... I don't think anybody had ever asked it that way. You know, "Are you-

Jerry: Hm.

Avni P. T.: ... okay?" Um, you know, "How's it going? How," you know, "how you doing?" Like, all of those you can, kind of, "You know, I'm good. Things are good. We're getting, like, you know, doing all the things." And it's easy to, kind of, gloss it over and, kind of, move on, uh, away from the uncomfortableness.

[00:04:30] And, so, when you, who I barely had met, kind of, asked me with quietness, you know, "Are you okay," that, I- I- I found myself very surprised and almost unable to, um, kind of, answer, um, because I wasn't sure. I think when I-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Avni P. T.: ... was ... Uh, when I tried to answer you, um, you know, honestly, I think that's when I didn't, necessarily, have the answer. And I was ... I think I was sur-, uh, surprised about that.

[00:05:00] Jerry: Yeah- yeah. I- I remember the moment, because ... And- and, you know, in a way it, kind of, resurfaced just now as you were introducing yourself. Because, I made a note, when you said it, you were describing some of the backstory to how we met and how you were invited into Tom's class, or to return to HBS if you will. And, um, 'cause I imagined you'd gone to HBS-

Avni P. T.: Yeah.

Jerry: ... and Tom was one of your teachers.

Avni P. T.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:05:30] Jerry: And, um, and you just very off-handedly said, "When we decided to shut down Poppy." And, um, the s- ... What happened for me that morning, when we were sitting in Tom's office ahead of the class, happened again just now, which was you- you said something that I think is really profound, and I'm imagining carries a lot of weight. But you said it in a way that was strong and clear, "We decided to shut down Poppy." And, so, when I asked you, "Are you okay," it was coming from a place of recognizing that the decision to shut down a business is hard and painful. It's a loss, it's a death.

[00:06:00] And, u- um, as I know that ... 'Cause we- we subsequently had a conversation about this. I know you- you share this belief, we don't talk about it enough, is that right?

[00:06:30] Avni P. T.: I agree, um, we don't talk about it. I think ... Uh- uh, well it's interesting. I think we talk about it at a surface level. I don't think we-

Jerry: Hm.

Avni P. T.: ... we talk about what I would call, like, the collateral damage. I don't think we talk about the trauma. I don't think we talk about what remains.

Jerry: Hm.

Avni P. T.: Um, I think we talk about failure, and we somehow put it into, you know, popular, kind of, conversation as a badge of honor maybe? You know-

Jerry: Hm.

[00:07:00]

Avni P. T.: ... I've gone through, uh, you know, failure, but we do it in a superficial way. And, also, I will say we do it in a way that we bring up only in the context of success. So, it's really great to talk about the Pinterest founders. Um, once they've got onto Pinterest, but not really before then did we understand the previous, kind of, things, or Slack, or any of these other ones. It's more that once you have that successful outcome, now it's okay to talk about all the failure, and all the learning that came, um, you know, forth. And that- that, kind of, narrative is embedded within us.

[00:07:30]

Um, but what I find is there isn't a lot of conversation along the journey, in the moment, where it's uncertain whether that, like, you know, uh, that next success, or that success is going to be in front of us. Um, and I think that's the shame. Um, just simply because I think there's some number of people that never venture out again, because it is so traumatic, because it is so hard, and because we don't talk about it. All of that hard thought experience, I think, just gets, then, buried.

[00:08:00]

Um, and I'm not saying it's easy, it's- it's terribly painful. But, I think my point of view is if we talk about it, if we normalize it, um, if we understand it as pain, as grief, as mourning, then, um, we can get past it, hopefully, and then get onto that next thing. Um, and we encourage other people to take a, you know, another shot at it.

[00:08:30]

Um, I think this journey, what's been so interesting, is that because I've been talking about it and writing about it, the number of people that have come out of the woodworks to say, "I've gone through this, I've felt this-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Avni P. T.: ... but I've never felt a place to, kind of, that has felt that it's been recognized. And, so now here I am working at this big company again, just because I needed, I needed to, you know, lick my wounds (laughs) and- and, um, kind of, retrench," and that's totally fine. But I think what isn't fine is how people feel alone.

[00:09:00]

Um, and almost, um ... I don't ... I certainly, n-, uh, not in any way want to characterize this, you know, akin to, um, losing someone, um, close to you. But for founders it's something very close. Like this was a living, breathing thing for me, um, for the past four years. And, so, in some ways it's, that's also hard, because it's certainly not anywhere close to, like, uh, a- a person. But I think the p-, hard part is that when you shut something down, or when it goes away, um, it's as if it never happened.

[00:09:30]

Jerry: Right.

Avni P. T.: People treat it as if it never happened, as if it never had value, as if it wasn't something of value. And that, in some ways, is almost the most painful part, like, you know, here speaking one year out from that. Um, it's like it never existed. And, so, I think that's been one thing that I've been, that I've struggled to, kind of, reconcile. In that, in for me, the more I talk about it, the more matter of fact I am about talking about it, then maybe I can normalize it for other people that might feel uncomfortable about talking about it.

[00:10:00] Um, and then we can talk about all the great parts we did with Poppy. All the things we did well, and that were good, and that we learned, um, and that we can, kind of, carry forward.

Jerry: I- I- I think you're making some really important observations, and, um, I think there's a bravery in your sharing. And, uh, I'm gonna reflect back to you some of the observations that- that I've just been taking note of. One is that, um, uh, the notion of the failed startup...We cannot separate out, um, the experience of starting up companies from failure-

[00:10:30]

Avni P. T.: Absolutely.

[00:11:00]

Jerry: ... because statistically speaking, the vast majority, 80, 90% will fail to live beyond two years or so. Um, and, so, failure is, uh, a foundational part of that startup journey. And, yet, I think your observation that- that it, um ... In our attempts to normalize it, in our attempts to socialize it, um, the, uh- uh, we- we inadvertently exacerbate the isolation by really only giving voice to those who have been on the other side of that-

[00:11:30]

Avni P. T.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: ... and have found success. When statistically speaking, the vast majority of entrepreneurs actually will not have a success-

Avni P. T.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: ... and, what, we need to let that settle in. Oh, or, especially if success is defined as having some, sort of, outside financial return.

Avni P. T.: That's exactly right.

[00:12:00]

Jerry:

[00:12:30] Right. And, then ... So we want to acknowledge the truth of what you've just said there, and give voice and credence to that. But then you added something really powerful, and you made an observation that I don't think I've ever made the connection before, which I think is really important to bring out, which is, "It's as if we never existed." And that is so painful. You know, in psychological terms, that's annihilation. It's not just death, it's, we didn't even exist. And the memory gets wiped away, which, then, undermines any capacity to move forward, because there is no closure. If it didn't exist, then you can't close it.

[00:13:00] Um, and this is, perhaps, a stretch of an analogy. But I think of parents who have lost a child in miscarriage.

Avni P. T.: Yup.

Jerry: There's a, that sense of- of the potential, the stillborn potential. Um, and the notion of- of the pain and suffering that comes from those of us around them who lack the words to say anything of comfort.

Avni P. T.: Exactly.

[00:13:30] Jerry: And there was something about my simple question of "Are you okay," that somehow, I don't know, gave space to you. Am I hearing that right?

Avni P. T.: Yes, because I think the thing for me is that I'm also ... I think founders have to be very pragmatic in the sense that you, in many ways, have to put yourself last. Um, you have to think about everything before, rightly so, I think, your users, your employees, everyone. Um, and then, e-, whether it's from the work standpoint, or, you know, emotional needs, or whatever else it is, you have to ... It's your job to make sure that everyone has what they need. Um, and then you, kind of, t-, uh, you know, take stock of, like, what it is that's left.

[00:14:30] I think it's doubly so in a shutdown. Um, I think, you know, that is so painful for so many people. Uh, our users, um, our employees. Like my team, I think that's the hardest part that I had to, kind of, go through, that's the most heartbreaking. Um, but in ... There was always a list of the next thing to do, right? So there was, you know, make sure the users are taken care of. Make sure there's a list of all the things that you could possibly do to make that right. And then make sure your team is taken care of, that they land in the right place and that, you know, all the different things. Then make sure that you have to do the litany of things to shut down an actual company, and that goes on for months.

[00:15:00] And I think in all of that, I think, for me, I took solace in the checking of the boxes, and saying, "I'm giving myself time, I'm doing the things I'm supposed to be doing." But I think what I never, (laughs) you know, out as, as a box, it was that, you know, am I okay?

Jerry: Hm.

Avni P. T.: Do I ... How am I processing my feelings about this? And I think it's just so painful that ... I think for some time I was, like, "Well I don't get to do that yet." Um, and, [00:15:30] so I, kind of, pushed it, and over time it just, sort of, dulls a little bit, or you, kind of, push it down for a long time and it just, kind of, stays down there.

Um, so, kind of, seven or eight months after all of that, when you asked me "Are you okay," I think what it's touched was the fact that I never had gotten around to that to do.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Avni P. T.: Um, and it opened up ... I o- ... It opened up that I'm not sure. Like I'm- I'm- I'm [00:16:00] physically okay, um, you know, all of that stuff, but emotionally I don't know that I had processed all of the feelings. Um, and during that two-, uh, 15 minute interaction, I think, if you'll remember, Tom said, um, you know, "You write a- a- a- a lot of things, but you've worried about this." And, I think that was really telling, because I write to process things.

Jerry: Hm.

Avni P. T.: I write to ... You know, uh, from the very beginning I've always written for myself. [00:16:30] Um, then in time I found that in publishing it, that other people could connect to it. And so I found that was, um, that was helpful, and enjoyable, and so I did.

Um, I've written some about the whole process, but I don't know I wrote about, you know, the personal journey of, like, you know, how it feels and, um the continued feelings, the continued complexity of that. And, so, when you asked that question, um, I think it opened it up. And then, (laughs) the interesting thing was, then I was on a plane for three or four hours. And, so-

Jerry: Hm.

[00:17:00]

Avni P. T.: ... I had nothing but time to write. And, so, that was a very cathartic day I would say, um, to, kind of, ask that question, and then be able to very, um, very organically, I guess, you know, capture the feelings that were, kind of, coming out at that point.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). So how are you doing now?

Avni P. T.: Better. Um-

... I think after that conversation, that showed me that I hadn't, necessarily, done all the work that, um, I needed to, to make sure that was right. Um, I think it's still a process, I think it's going to-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Avni P. T.: ... be a process, I don't think it ever goes away. But in being, um, aware of it, I think I feel a light, like, uh, more of a lightness there. I don't feel like it's, kind of, shoved down as much.

[00:18:00] Um, I know there's a, there is ... Uh, the analogy that I would think about, is, like, I was almost, like, at a h-, like, vibrating at a, like, a high frequency inside. I don't know. There is, uh, you know, touches of anxiety when, um, I deal with that. It almost feels like, if you, like, one more thing could just snap me. And I think, um, in going through this, and dealing with some of these pieces, it's, you know, you- you start to feel a little bit more calmness inside.

[00:18:30] Um, and that's been really important, because I think the most, I think the most important thing for me is I don't want to bring undue baggage into the new thing. I think that's the thing I'm most worried about.

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

Avni P. T.: Um, it's just like any relationship. You don't want to bring, basically, the baggage, um, that unduly affects, um, kind of, the new, the new thing, just simply because you didn't do the work to process-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Avni P. T.: ... uh, what you're going through. So I think that was, that was the biggest part.

[00:19:00] Jerry: I think your, um, connection and associations make a lot of sense, and there's a lot of wisdom in that. And it's tough, right? It's tough to completely process, especially if one of our survival tactics has been to move to the checklist in order to move our way through the painful piece. Um, and there's a lot of value in those checklists, right? Whether it's, uh, the checklist that we draw upon when a loved one passes away.

[00:19:30] I think of being a child of parents who have passed, and there's so much processing.

Avni P. T.: Yeah.

Jerry: There's getting rid of the home, and taking care of things. And the same thing that can happen when, um, when we're a founder in the company, that the- the embodiment of our wishes and dreams-

Avni P. T.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: ... ends. Uh- uh, there's making sure that the state taxes are paid. There's making sure-

Avni P. T.: Right.

Jerry: ... that, uh, you know, the leased equipment goes back to the places, right?

Avni P. T.: Yeah.

Jerry: That, you know ... There are all these little tasks that, in some ways, can be  
[00:20:00] comforting, because we- we- we t-, we ... they take our energy. But in another way,  
they, um, they distract from the grieving. And, um, you know, I think you wisely are  
[00:20:30] making the association that, um, uh, when- when the feelings are not grieved,  
when the grieving process is, itself, interrupted and incomplete, the danger is that  
we will then carry forward, um- um, into the next relationship, into the ... You  
know, we- we carry forward the unprocessed stuff from our parents into our  
relationship with our children. We carry forward the unprocessed grief from the  
loss of our company into the next experience, whether it's a new company, or  
whether it's a new job.

[00:21:00] And, so, your in that place, where you're thinking about ... Uh, have you actually  
launched the next business? I think, if I remember-

Avni P. T.: Yeah.

Jerry: ... correctly, you have.

Avni P. T.: Yeah.

Jerry: What is that next business?

Avni P. T.: So, it's still in the space, s- similar space. So it's called the Modern Village, and it's  
still on that same mission. Um, I- I think the ultimate thing, uh- uh, I- I come away  
with this, is that [inaudible 00:21:20]. Um, the thing that we set up to do with  
Poppy, um, is still just as important, just as relevant. Um, and just because that  
[00:21:30] attempts didn't work, doesn't mean that it's still not worthy of working on and  
trying something else.

[00:22:00] And, so, um, I think for me, I take what I learn from that first, and try to figure out  
how to, kind of, go at it again. Um, and so there's a lot of connections. And I think in  
some ways, what's been comforting is that I get to honor ... Um, I- I'd like ... I- I get  
to let Poppy live on in some ways, um, because I get to think about it in a way that  
it's a continuation of the mission, um, and it's not a cleaving.

Jerry: I love that image of it being a continuation of the mission. Um, I'll relate it back to my own life.

[00:22:30] Um, I take such comfort in meaning from the notion of my relationship with The Work, capital T, capital W. In that, my relationship to The Work, exists beyond any particular manifestation. So one manifestation is Reboot the company.

Avni P. T.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: Another manifestation is *Reboot* the book. Another manifestation is this podcast. Another manifestation is the coaching relationships that I have with clients. They're all part of a continuum of a relationship to The Work. And people will often ask me, um, "Well what will you do when you retire?"

[00:23:00]

Avni P. T.: Hm.

Jerry: And I cannot conceive of not doing The Work-

Avni P. T.: Right.

Jerry: ... but I can conceive of doing The Work differently. Does that-

Avni P. T.: Exactly.

Jerry: ... does that resonate with you?

Avni P. T.: It resonates deeply. I think, I think at some point I had to make the choice where I am embarking on this journey to do this work that is deeply- deeply important to me. I don't know how, financially, um, you know, lucrative (laughs) it is. Um, and I think that's not the point for me. I think I've picked a space that, uh, you know, touches me, um, to- to a level that I do feel it's, like, my calling to work on this space. And that now in having spent four or five years in it, I'm in a unique position to be able to work on it.

[00:23:30]

[00:24:00] And, so, um, if the work means writing, if the work means soft, building software, if the work means advocating for, you know, w- w- working women and mothers, you know, that, for me, it- it's, again, it's fluidity, it's a spectrum. That's not the point.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Avni P. T.: It can look like a lot of different things. But for me, what I hold at- at the highest, kind of, level, is the mission, um, what's the point? And for me, the point is I've found purpose in working mothers, working parents, and just, kind of, trying to dig into what is it that can make their lives easier, that helps families, helps communities.

[00:24:30]

Um, I think, you know, how ... Uh, while I've been reading your book, um, there's touches of that, which is, like, what in your childhood, (laughs) kind of-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Avni P. T.: ... makes you want to do these things into your adulthood and beyond. Uh, um, I think that's where, um ... It's also been, kind of, uh, comforting understanding and making those connections, because it isn't just happenstance. I think, for me, uh, [00:25:00] there was a little bit of, like, that's a little bit random that you're working on childcare after a whole, uh, career, basically, in retail and consumer goods.

[00:25:30] Um, I don't see it that way anymore. I think it was almost this inevitability that other things were leading me to this place, and that I was always meant to be doing this work. The other, the other work was just, simply, helping me build to this place. Um, and so that's been really ... I think that's, also, comforting, because I think, um, in North America we have this tendency to be very focused on not just the short-term, but in general just, you know, we're in- in ... It's about our lives, and about our life spans.

[00:26:00] You go to Asia, you go to Europe, and there's this very overarching feeling that, you know, we've been here before you, we will be here after you. And it's about generations, and it's about, you know, what is your impact for the time that you're here, and I love that. And part of the healing journey for me has been traveling, frankly.

Jerry: Hm.

Avni P. T.: Getting myself out of this, kind of, um, you know, place in mind state. Um, but it's this idea that it is a continuum. That Poppy was just this little small piece of it, an important piece, just as every other chapter has been, but it's a continuational journey on the path of, you know, this overall. Um, and so that ... The way that you think about your work is very much how, um, I think about mine.

[00:26:30]

Jerry: Yeah. And I, and- and I can feel it. And, you know, one of the things that occurs to me as we, as we're talking is I- I think of writers that I admire, right? Um, I, you know, um, uh, he's been a guest on this show and he, and many people know that I consider him a deep and profound teacher. But I think about Parker Palmer's books. And in one way or another, each book, while different, is an expiration of the same questions. Who are we meant to be? How are we to be in the world? [00:27:00]

I think of the poetry of Mary Oliver, for example. And Mary Oliver is very much telling the same stories again and again. Or great works of art are, in a sense, telling the same story. They're, uh, they're exploring the same question, which then ... And, so, when I think about that, and I think about my own life, I think that my

[00:27:30] relationship to work, when- when- when- when- when the work I choose to do is a manifestation of that continuum. And I loved, uh, the context in which you added, in which that continuum is, in fact, continues long for ... It stretches from long before I was born to long after this meatbag is exhausted, and leaves this earth. All of a sudden it puts failure in a, to a different light doesn't it?

[00:28:00] Avni P. T.: Absolutely. And, it's, it's- it's funny, 'cause it shouldn't, but it gives me peace. Like it gives me ... I don't know, somehow I can breathe a little bit easier knowing that my part is just simply a small part. That it isn't ... I don't have to worry about the whole sum, I just have to do my bit. And if this bit doesn't work, I can come at it again, and that's, um, it's not gonna, um, stop me.

[00:28:30] Um, I love that you quoted, or, uh, that you mentioned Mary Oliver, because, um, there's a line in one of her poems that is, kind of, a guiding piece for me. But, um, and I'm gonna, you know, butcher it horribly. But it's, you know, "How will you spend your one wild and precious life?"

Jerry: Hm.

[00:29:00] Avni P. T.: Um, and that is ... I ... It's actually a question we're asked to- to answer with an essay during, um, H, at HBS. And that has always stuck to me, well stuck with me, because that's what we're about. We're, we've got this one wild and precious life, and how are we going to spend it? And I think for me, it's been reframing what success is. I mean, honestly, uh, I think that's, you know, something that we, m- m- maybe is trite, and we talk about a lot, and, maybe, ironic coming from places of going to, like, you know, Harvard Business School and things like that.

[00:29:30] But I think on the contrary, I think going to that school pushed me to think about myself and my responsibility in a different way. Um, and how are you going to spend your privilege, your time, um, in a way that does more? Um, and I think that's the question I'm always chasing. But if I think about it in a continuum, then I'm not so frantic about it.

[00:30:00] Um, one of my, um ... When ... Right after I announced about Poppy, um, a fellow founder, who is a dear friend in Seattle, he sent me ... Um, he just asked me for my, um, address. And he's, like, "I just need to send you something." And, so, I gave it to him, and a couple weeks later, uh, got this beautifully framed quote, that actually sits right in front of me in my office. Um, and it's a Thomas Edison- Edison quote. And it says, "I have not failed, I've just found 10,000 ways that don't, that won't work."

Jerry: Hm.

Avni P. T.: And I have that right in my, um, line of sight, because that's exactly right, that's exactly what we're about. And especially as founders, that's what our work is. Um,

that's what we were put on, you know, I think, on the earth (laughs) to do, is, uh, it's- it's for us to try. And when we try, we're going to fail, and we need to understand what that failure looks like and feels like, but that's all part of this continuum, and it's all part of the journey.

[00:30:30]

Jerry:

Can- can I expand upon that? When we take a, take a step back, and we look at the work that is ours to do within the, this larger context. In your case, and I really want to explore this in a moment. In your case it's this- this ... The experience of working parents, and what does that mean?

[00:31:00]

When we see that, um, a- and I know what Thomas Edison is doing, he's reframing the notion of success and failure, and elevating the notion of trying. Um, but I'm gonna go beyond that, a little bit, and say that, um, there is no success or failure,

[00:31:30]

because, um, uh, because as long as you're committed to how are you doing your work, then there is, I'm doing my work, um, a lot right now, or a little right now, but it's not the same as succeeding or failing.

[00:32:00]

Um, uh, you know, if- if one of the things that comes to mind is s- something, uh, a dear friend and one of the Reboot coaches, Ray Foote, once said to me, uh, as I wrote about in the book, I've had, um challenges. Uh, I have, I have the early, uh, stages of heart disease. And, uh, the diagnosis came to the front, came to the fore, uh, while I was writing the book.

[00:32:30]

And it just means that, you know, uh, I have to be very conscientious about, uh, diet and exercise, and, um, that's just where I am genetically. And, um, recently over the summer there was some more concern about that. And, so, Ray and I went for a walk, and he shared with me something a, uh, a doctor friend of his once said to him, which was, "How will you spend your minutes?" And I think that if we are spending our minutes doing our work, there is no success or failure.

Avni P. T.:

[00:33:00]

I think that's- that so right. I think that's exactly how I see it. I think, I think it's hard when we think about there are, um, kind of, financial pressures, right? So there- there are-

Jerry:

Okay.

Avni P. T.:

[00:33:30]

... aspects of there that we do need to think about, and I think has been, um, a pressure point for me, um, certainly for our family, for these years as I've done this. And that's been, uh, a- a deep source of, um, conflict I will say. Um, but setting that aside, that's exactly how I think about it. I think about it if I, you know, God forbid, was hit by a bus (laughs) tomorrow. What would people have said? Not that, uh, that's what I'm holding the measure to. But, you know, for on one part, I know that I have spent my days doing the work that I otherwise just al-, have always wanted to do and meant, been meant to do.

[00:34:00] Um, but separate to that, I think people would say, "She's someone that" ... Well I would hope they'd say, "She's someone that just, kind of, lived life full out," right? You know, "She did the work that she felt was important to work on, um, probably at the cost of, you know, financial, or some of those other, kind of, material, um, aspects of it."

[00:34:30] But I think that's what's important to me and well, 'cause ... Uh, especially over this last year where I do have the choices to go on in this path, um, to choose a different path. And I might still choose a different path in the future. I think that's the other good part of this, is that no choice is, um, is, you know, um, complete or, um, irrevocable. And, so, I think that speaks to me, because as- as long as we're doing the work, that is enough.

[00:35:00] Um, and I think, um, that also speaks to me because ... I- I think of this, like, almost, like, as an academic if you will. Um, I come from the sciences, actually. My undergrad's in chemistry for the first part of my ... Um, for all of my academic life, and then even the early years, I always thought about this as an academic. Um, I always thought I was gonna go into medicine, or research, or something like that.

[00:35:30] And, so, um, even the way I ran Poppy, and I r- run my companies, is like a scientist. I make hypothesis. Uh, we test them, we look for data. If they, you know, hold true, than great, and if they don't, then we- we revise, and we move on. It also helps to give important objectivity. When you're running a company, and you're tryin' to figure out ... Like you're- you're so t- t- tied to the subject matter, but you're trying to figure out do we have something, do we not?

[00:35:30] But I think that's important, because when we shut down Poppy, um, again, I don't see it through the lens of failure. I see it through the lens of, like, academia, and, uh, in advancing knowledge. Did we learn things? We did. And did the ultimate hypothesis, you know, prove out the way that we thought? No, but that is not failure. But science, also, does not apeak in terms of failure or success. Um-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:36:00] Avni P. T.: ... they ter-, they speak in terms of, you know, was the hypothesis proven or disproven, right? And I think that's, also, part of the reason why I've been able to process all this is be-, simply just because I come from, um, a world where, uh, pushing the bounds of knowledge is what's the point. And, then, taking those, that new knowledge, sharing it to everyone that you could possibly can, like, you know, to the broader academic community. So that, it might not be you that makes that final, kind of, aha conclusion, but you had your piece in it.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:36:30] Avni P. T.: That's something that, I think, we could use a lot more of in the, um, in the entrepreneurial space frankly. Especially in spaces like childcare, in spaces that are

gonna touch policy, um, and public good, and things like that. Where, um, I had to go edit, I learned a lot of things. Here they are. Um, and, so, if you want to take a go, awesome. Don't go and learn these things again. Um, (laughs) go, you know, build on that.

[00:37:00] Um, those are pieces that I think about, because I don't ... I think that's exactly right. We need to stop framing it with these words called success and failure, and we need to use, especially in this space of, um, startups, uh, different nomenclature if we're going to, kind of, move beyond it.

Jerry: I- I- I- I really admire the way you're, um, you're applying the scientific inquiry process to this process. Um, I think it ... that's it ... As applicable as the artist proj-, uh- uh, process that I was describing before, they're both very- very similar. Mary Oliver may not have liked every poem that she wrote to the same degree, but they were each iterations, and built upon, and so that became a body of work over her life. And I think that that's one of the ways in which you are processing, if you will, the quote, unquote, "failure of Poppy," right? And creating this space for the new to be born.

[00:37:30]

[00:38:00] Um, what I'm also hearing i-, though, is- is an additional source of resilience, an additional source of capacity that I want to bring to your attention and reflect back to you that I think you're experiencing. And that reminds me of Viktor Frankl and his work in Logotherapy. Viktor Frankl was a very- very interesting man, and he wrote ... His- his famous book is Man's Search for Meaning. And he survived the holocaust, he survived concentration camps. And he said about asking, trying to answer a simple, but profound question. Why did some folks survive and others die? And not just because of the whims of cruel prison guards. But some folks were able to withstand, and some folks weren't. And what he concluded was that those folks who were able to stay connected to meaning and purpose, had a better capacity to withstand.

[00:38:30]

[00:39:00] And I would argue that your business is a, uh, profound degree of self-awareness, that I see in you, that connects back to purpose and meaning. And, um, what I've witnessed you doing, even in this conversation, even in the brief interactions that we've had over the, our short but profound relationship, is, uh, your ability to touch back into that purpose and meaning, not merely as uh- uh, a- a- a salve to heal the wound, but as a resource to move forward.

[00:39:30]

The work is part of a larger legacy, the work is part of a larger continuum. And for you, there's something in this experience of providing. Well, how would you describe it? Providing something, resources to working parents. What is that for you?

[00:40:00] Avni P. T.: I don't ... Hey, it's- it's something that touches on so many different levels for me. I mean, at- at a, kind of, cerebral, an academic level, there is ... I think, obviously, the

[00:40:30] roots are, in my experience, becoming a parent, right? And, um, becoming a parent and not, you know, being surrounded by friends, but still feeling that isolation, that loneliness, that bewilderment that (laughs) it wasn't s- ... You know, uh, that a lo-, so many people, too many people, kind of, feelin' this in, kind of, modern day and age.

[00:41:00] And I think, for me, um ... I think the part for me is that inefficiency, or things that happened because they don't, but they don't need to happen that way. I think for me there's some injustice in that for me, and that I always want to try to write, um, because I'm- I'm fully aware that some parts of life, like, that's just, kind of, how it is, right? Like, that's just the human experience. This is one that it's almost the contrary, that this is not the human experience. It is not the human experience to parent alone, to parent in isolation, to raise the next generation, um, you know, with one, maybe, two, if you're lucky, people.

[00:41:30] It's, um ... I say burden, just simply in the, uh, you know, measure of weight, not in, kind of, a value judgment of- of being bad. That burden can be, you know, can be, kind of, um, carried by a number of different people, and that is not happening today, um, for a number of different reasons.

[00:42:00] But I know both living it in both ways, both having my village and, like, you know, a- a broad set of people, and how liberating it is. Um, for me to do the work that I do today, it, uh, it's so trite, but it does take my parents, our incredible nanny, who is now family, um, a very, um, active and participant, um, husband. And, like, it takes all of these people. And, so, for me, part of this work has become how do we not, um, prescribe how this should happen with any family, but how do we give everyone the options, the- the safety net, the resources that they deserve and, kind of, need.

[00:42:30] And, so, that's where all of this is has, kind of, come together for me. Um, but it's, also, in the sense that if that's too big for me and my company to, kind of, tackle, then let's also share this knowledge and- and collaboratively, you know, build that with other folks. Um, I think that's what's, also, im- important, because when you're talking about heavy things, like childcare, um, and, uh, education, and community, and all these different things, I mean, gosh, that's, like, that's a lot of things.

[00:43:00] Um, and, so, I don't want to be unrealistic in saying, "Oh, we are gonna solve all of this," that's not the point. The point is, I want to raise up these issues as a space to be solved for equally as FINTECH, and Bitcoin, and, you know, and- and all of these other-

Jerry: Hm.

Avni P. T.: ... pieces that people have a lot of interest in. Um, I want to shed light on how interesting, and how valuable, and important it is for us to be, also, putting our best minds into this space, very human problems.

[00:43:30] Um, so, yeah, I think it- it, there's- there's just so much in there that I want to bring to, um, the next generation of parents so that, you know, hopefully, they never have to have those experiences, um, that we've been navigating.

Jerry: So what I'm hearing in- in- in that, uh, is the value, the belief, is community, it's in the shared experience of we're in this together. It's in the village, it's in ... It's take, [00:44:00] it takes a village. But the medium, the specific work to be done has to do with parenting and childcare. Um, whereas the- the work to be done could be in caring for aging parents, or the work to be done could be in healthcare or ... But- but there's, uh, there's even a broader stretch towards, uh, which I now, I now find [00:44:30] really gorgeous to be able to say.

The- the scientist in you, reaching for the humanist in you, and bridging a gap between those two, bridging the, bridging those two worlds, which, um, I think our society tends to falsely asunder, and make, uh, into this- this contradict of left brain, right brain-

Avni P. T.: Exactly.

Jerry: ... when- when the wholeness of us-

Avni P. T.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:45:00] Jerry: ... involves bringing together all of that. Um, and- and, you know, it, if we were, if we had a coach client relationships, I might encourage that part of you to be even more fully pronounced as you go forward with business planning, as you go forward with building a team, as you go forward with fundraising, as you go forward ... It's [00:45:30] to bring that not only to light to help with your grieving process, but to take that part which is, which is helping you with the pain of Poppy, and elevate that part to, uh, uh- uh- uh, a- a, kind of, beacon for what is the purpose of this business? So [00:46:00] that, uh, others, investors, employees, future employees, clients, customers, can rally to that beacon.

Avni P. T.: I love that. I love that.

Jerry: I think that- that- that- that would be an expression of taking the pain that you experienced, the wounding, and making it sacred. And- and to- to lead and build a [00:46:30] company from a sacred wound place is a, uh, is a real honor and privilege.

Avni P. T.: I love that.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

What do you hope to happen for the ... Tell me again the name of the new company?

Avni P. T.: Modern Village.

[00:47:00]

Jerry: What do you hope Modern Village will look like? How- how will it be?

Avni P. T.: I think that's the interesting part of being back at the beginning, where there's so many different, there's so much potential.

Jerry: Hm, mm-hmm (affirmative).

Avni P. T.: I think the analogies to children are [inaudible 00:47:12]. Um, startups are, sort of, um, inevitable to, kind of, make. But there's so much potential, there's so many directions this could go. Um, but the parts that I can absolutely see are the ones that we've been talking about. It's community, um, it's empowerment. I want people, I want parents to feel in control. Um, I want ... There's too many people that I've talked to where this ... I don't know, all the words, kind of, feel trite. But this profound experience, this responsibility of raising these little humans into their own little, kind of, lives.

[00:47:30]

Um, you know, there's- there's so much that's, um, wonderful about it, but there's so much that gets covered in the checklist. You know your-

Jerry: Hm.

[00:48:00]

Avni P. T.: ... so ... You're just running after the checklist every single week. The number of people that I talk to that say, "I never get to stop and catch my breath and saying, like, 'Are we doing the things that we feel are, like, the right things? The things that are amounting to the family that we want to raise? The values, all that stuff?'"

And I think for me, what I want this to be is that if we took care of ... I almost see it like Mozel's hierarchy. Um-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Avni P. T.: ... you know, and speaking again from, like, bringing in other-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Avni P. T.: ... um, kind of, constructs and frameworks. But, when you're so worried about the bottom parts, you know, the- the piece that ... You can never get to the higher attainment, kind of, pieces of it. Well I, kind of, think about, then, parenting. We're

[00:48:30]

so focused on, you know, what's happening this week, who's going to which class, what's pick ups-

Jerry: Hm.

Avni P. T.: ... what's for dinner, all of those pieces. That we're never really able to focus on why have the relationship I have, I want with my partner. Um, are we raising our kids with the traditions, the values? Um, are, you know, are we doing the things that are, kind of, that higher level.

[00:49:00] So my hope is that, um, there certainly is a community piece, but there certainly is that ... It's- it's so funny that you say that. But it is, absolutely, that science and art dichotomy, that right and left dichotomy. I see technology living in service of people, making people's lives more efficient and better, so that they can go off into the real world (laughs) and live, uh, you know, a- a- a better, more full life, and use their time however they want to.

[00:49:30] So, ultimately, what I want to do is give parents back time. If we can take off your plate, you know, all of those hours spent on logistics, and all the inefficient parts, and then we can give you back time. So whether that's time reinvested in your work, in your relationships, into your kids, that doesn't matter, that's up to you.

[00:50:00] Um, but I see how do we bring together community, and how do we bring together technology? Um, to be able to unlock that, and that's, um ... The how is not entirely clear to me, um, but I know that there's something there. And, so, while I can see that, um, there's work to be done.

Jerry: May I respond from a place that's almost like your older brother?

Avni P. T.: Absolutely.

Jerry: (Laughs) As a parent of humans who are now in their 20s, um, and my oldest will turn 30 in about six months. What occurs to me is that, uh, the gift that you're trying to give to parents is to make it easier for them to ask of their children, "Are you okay?" And just like that question had a profound impact for you ... When a parent is able to quiet their anxieties, and quiet the checklist, and to be able to look into their child and say "Are you okay," they're giving them a gift of being seen, which, maybe, is, you know, the most profound gift that we can give our children.

[00:51:00] We think that the most important thing to do is to make sure that the lunch is well packed, and that it's really nutritious. And did I, did I put the baby carrots in the lunchbox or not? When what we really need is to give them the space to be human, so that they experience being seen, and fully accepted for who they are.

[00:51:30] Avni P. T.: That's beautiful. Yeah, I hadn't seen, I hadn't connected it, but that's exactly it.

Jerry:  
[00:52:00] You know, just like it moves you, it would move them. I am so thrilled for your journey. I know it's, uh, it's been a process. And, hm, I'm really moved by your awareness and, um, and I have no doubt in your ability to process all of this. And I- I don't know if Modern Village will be the financial success you deserve, I don't know. But I think that you're moving the needle along and, right, that in- in- in the right ways it needs to be. And you're spending your minutes doing the work, and that's a gift you're giving your children as well.

Avni P. T.: Thank you.

Jerry: So, thank you for coming on the show.

Avni P. T.: Thank you for having me.