

Jerry: Hey Forest. Thanks for coming on the show.

Forest Richter: Thank you for having me. I'm very excited to be here.

Jerry: Well, why don't you take a minute and just introduce yourself and tell us who you are and without an elevator pitch, tell us a little bit about the company?

Forest Richter: Sure. Um, so I'm Forest Richter and I am the Co-founder and CEO of Uncrowd.io. And, um, I built Uncrowd to connect underrepresented founders, women, people of color, LGBTQ plus founders, um, with investors.

Jerry: And, you know, I know that you came to trust, uh, really through just sending a note saying, "Hey, I wish I could talk to Jerry about some things." Let's take us back to that. What would be helpful to talk through today?

Forest Richter: Yeah, the, the thing that I think would be really helpful for me would be talking about imposter syndrome...especially kind of in this interesting VC ecosystem that I know you have experience in, but also for me in the, in the space that I play. I am a straight, white male, um, trying to support founders that I'm not the demographic of. And, and so I'm often trying to kind of represent and care for a community that I don't fit into.

Jerry: So, um, just to reflect back, um, you sort of self, uh, identify, um, the imposter syndrome, which is, which is good. And I'm imagining that it's exacerbated right now because of the work that you're trying to do. Right. So imposter syndrome-

Forest Richter: Yeah.

Jerry: ... oftentimes has a root to it and then all of a sudden it shows up and it's got a particular voice. I cut you off. Is that right?

Forest Richter: No. Yeah. I- it's right on it, it's something that I've, I- I've always been more of a generalist, so I've always sort of carried that with me. Um, and I, I, I have usually been good at a lot of things and not the subject matter expert on any specific thing. And so, um, especially early on in my career, I had a lot of ego tied up with that, that I felt like I had done a good job kind of shedding, but now that I've moved into this space, um, and I'm talking to investors a lot of the time, who frankly, are better informed about what the investment process looks like than I am. Um, and then on the flip side, I'm talking to founders and trying to support founders that are going through an experience that I can't represent. And I get questions a lot about why are you here? And are you the right person to kind of lead this mission?

Jerry: Let's, let's dive in a little bit. What I'm really curious about is to hear what the voice, the imposter syndrome, often times has a voice, what is the voice saying to you?

Forest Richter: It's a great question, um, and I kinda think of it in two different ways and it's the same way I think about my business, is I have kind of two audiences. I have an investor audience and then I have a founder audience. And so that voice kind of changes depending who I'm talking to, but when I'm talking to investors, um, it's a lot about experience. It's a, "You don't have the experience. You haven't been on the investor side. You don't know the challenges we go through. I don't know why you think you can help fix this space." That's a lie. It's a lot more self doubt. Um, and then on the founder side, it's a lot more about, am I trying to help solve this issue, this kind of divide that exists between underrepresented founders and investors in a way that is supportive, um, and not kind of a white savior. Um, should it be, should I be trying to elevate other voices? Should I be trying to, uh, put some, I don't necessarily know the solution, um, to it, frankly, but I, the, the why for me has always just been because I can. I'm somebody that is in a position that feels like there's a solution here, but I'm not sure that's good enough sometimes.

Jerry: So there's two, there's two flavors to the voice. One flavor is, um, you don't know what you're doing.

Forest Richter: Yes.

Jerry: You don't, you don't have any expertise in this other area. And then the other voice is really questioning your motivation. Why are you doing this? What is, what is, is this sort of a white savior kind of thing? And, um, how can you do this? Um, uh, and, and, and the- and they, they come in in a similar way, which is that they undermine your self-confidence. Am I getting that right?

Forest Richter: Uh, absolutely.

Jerry: Now, so before we sort of unpack the imposter syndrome, why don't you tell me a little bit of history? Why, why are you doing this?

Forest Richter: Uh, yeah, so about five or six years ago, I left kind of a traditional corporate marketing and operations job and went and ran operations at, uh, my first startup that was, uh, just passed seed funding. Um, I was one of the first adult hires and I use that loosely because I was 28-years-old and this, but the second oldest employee in the company. And, um, and it was my first exposure to venture funding. I didn't know anything about venture capital before that. And the, the process that we went through was one that just felt inefficient to me, um, especially with an op- coming from an opposite background. And, and so I kind of dove in to try to learn everything I could about the VC world and that's when I discovered this giant kind of equity gap that exists, where, um, women, people of color LGBTQ plus founders combined receive less than all ven-, um, less than 10% of all venture funding. And to me that immediately felt like a problem worth solving, and also seemed like a problem that economically was worth solving as well. It felt like a problem that could solve and p- people could make money off of it as well. And so those two things combined to kind of take me down a road toward, um, making an impact in the space.

Jerry: Um, super helpful. Tell me about, um, seeing things that are ineff- inefficient and wanting to, um, make them more efficient. Tell me about that part of your personality?

Forest Richter: Yeah. Well, I'd also would love to get your thoughts on it, but I- I'm always somebody who kind of, how to do things more efficient has been kind of just a natural, uh, a natural, uh, opportunity for me. It's something I've succeeded at where I can see kind of hiccups and see roadblocks and try to navigate around them. And, and specifically in venture funding, um, what I was seeing was just, uh, an economy of warm introductions, who do you know that can introduce you to somebody [00:10:30] else, and who do you know that can introduce you here? And that just sort of felt misaligned for me in terms of how, what would be kind of the optimal version. And that was, that was kind of the, the beginning there.

Jerry: Okay, so I get that you see the venture process is inefficient. And as somebody who spent a long time in that process, I can attest to the inefficiencies of that and the high degree of dependency on the warm introduction as you put it, who do you know? And, and those kinds of connections, and that by the way, is true, not merely, um, when underrepresented entrepreneurs and founders are seeking funding, it is just a truism in the business as-

Forest Richter: Sure.

Jerry: ... as a whole. It can get exacerbated when, when, um, folks are coming from demographic groups where there aren't those kinds of network connections. In my early days in the business, we used to refer to the old boys network. Um, and there is still a phenomena of that. Many times, that, uh, those relationships can start even in business school. And so if you think about it, there's privilege built into the system in addition to the inefficiencies and those sort of play off of each other and maintain systems, uh, inequality. So I want to acknowledge that, but you know, this is the Reboot podcast, so we're not just gonna stay at the cognitive level and sort of fix problems.

So what I'm hearing is two other aspects of Forest character structure, one, which you've named, which is, uh, as imposter syndrome. And at some point in, in our conversation, you talked about the fact that you, um, don't really, you don't see yourself as having a domain expertise in any one area. You called yourself a generalist and you link the generalist with imposter syndrome. I'm a generalist, meaning I can touch upon a lot of different things. So therefore I'm an imposter, which is an interesting linking. We'll circle back to that in a moment. But here's another aspect of your character structure, which I'm seeing, which is you're a fixer too, aren't you?

Forest Richter: Yeah, I guess so. I- I- I haven't put a name to that before, but I, I do like to make things work. (laughs)

Jerry: Right. So I'm gonna take you out of the realm of work and into the realm of relationships and have you ever dated someone who said, "Just listen to me and stop fixing?"

Forest Richter: Um, very, very, very close to home. I think my wife has said that to me many times.

Jerry: Okay. Okay. So let's, let's roll back and, um, I'm sure you're just making the household more efficient when you're making suggestions. (laughs) You're laughing.

Forest Richter: I am laughing 'cause I, that, that feels spot on.

Jerry: Right, right. What's your wife's first name?

Forest Richter: Uh, Erin.

Jerry: Erin, hi. I want you to know that I hear you and I imagine what your experience with, uh, Forest is like. (laughs) So hopefully we're making her laugh. Okay. So, so the character logical trait of self-identifying is a generalist and that's an imposter coupled with a fixer actually predate anything having to do with work or anything having to do with adulthood. Does that make sense or resonate with you?

Forest Richter: It does make sense. It, yeah, I, I've never explored that. I have never, but I would, I have every reason to believe you, based on what you've said.

Jerry: Right. So, um, I'm going to activate your efficiency brain, your part, which tends to look at processes and root systems and say, "Okay, what's going on here?" And we're gonna take you all the way back to the subroutines as I call them in my book, that really define both points of view. One point of view is you're not a specialist, so therefore you're an imposter. And the other point of view is your job is actually to fix things and make them better. Right.

Forest Richter: Yeah. Both of those align.

Jerry: Right. So how does it make you feel when you fix things?

Forest Richter: Um, honestly, like probably not as good. It feels normal. Like that feels like baseline. Baseline is fixed. So there's no... I don't necessarily get a ton of like satisfaction out of it. I go like, "Great that thing's fixed. Let's move on to the next thing that needs to get fixed."

Jerry: So the dopamine hit is brief and bursty. Done, problem solved next.

Forest Richter: Exactly.

Jerry: And so, uh, it, it must, must be an interesting challenge to, how does it feel when the fact that you've just solved a problem and you still see more problems?

Forest Richter: Um, it feels normal. I, I guess that's just kind of the, my, my worldview. Uh, I- it's how I feel all the time. I think it's why I'm, I really like working with early-stage companies is because there's always problems and I, and there's always new things to do and new things to, to tackle. And so it's pretty easy for me to just kind of transition from, "We did that thing. What's the next thing we're gonna do to do?"

Jerry: Right. So notice, uh, that, uh, that what you're calling normal is a kind of baseline. This is who I am. This is how I identify. This is the thing that makes me feel like I'm productive in the world, that I, that I'm contributing to the world. Right. And that has been a really glorious way for you to navigate the world.

Forest Richter: Yes.

Jerry: Right. W- what might the relationship between that and being a generalist be? And, and it's a quasi leading question, I sort of have a suspicion, but not 100%.

Forest Richter: Okay. Um, well I guess for me, I think it's that I have a diverse set of interests, but it's possible that that is a, not the, that's the antecedent, now that I'm kind of talking to you.

Jerry: Mmm.

Forest Richter: So maybe because I'm looking to fix things, I just kind of go to whatever's broken and then end up fixing that thing and then move to the next thing that's broken and fix it, which I, I certainly open up to the possibility that that's the case.

Jerry: Yeah. And as you were saying that, you were smiling and there was a kind of that, that little smile of, of recognition of like moving through life, seeing problems that need to be fixed. Now-

Forest Richter: Yeah, yeah. That, that is-

Jerry: Yeah.

Forest Richter: ... That's, that's not something I have ever self-identified before, but like even like quickly just scanning back, I'm like, "Yeah, that sounds, sounds pretty spot on."

Jerry: Right. And so one of the challenges of that as a strategy and that's all this is, is this is a strategy for navigating life. One of the challenges for navigating, for that as a strategy is that it doesn't allow your sense of self and your sense of psyche

to just sort of land and say, " I actually am okay even if I don't fix things." You're smiling. You're, you're nodding. You're thinking-

Forest Richter: I'm, I'm processing. Yeah. I know that... Sorry. That's not good for an audio medium. Um, I-

Jerry: No, tha- that's fine. That's fine. No, no, no, no.

Forest Richter: ... Um, I, yeah, I think, I do think there's a lot of truth in what you're saying there, and, and I'm quickly kind of just cycling back through a lot of just how I live my day-to-day life of just kind of bouncing to the next thing without necessarily settling and exhaling.

Jerry: Yeah. Yeah. I love that you just referenced the exhale because before we officially started recording, you suggested that you exhale. And so I actually had us both take a deep breath.

Forest Richter: Yeah. That was, and in, in that moment, I did recognize that I needed that. Like I, like when you kind of went through, you know, "Hey, this is how this works." I was like, "Oh, okay. This is great." Like, I could, I could use, I could use an hour of conversation where I don't have to now using some new wording behind it, be fixing something.

Jerry: Or someone.

Forest Richter: Or someone.

Jerry: Right. Right. So I wanna bring your attention to the fact that there's actually a tight correlation in the, in, in the states, the states of mind that you began identifying as disparate, they're actually a system and they work together, which is, I move from thing to thing, fixing people and processes. That is my norm. And it reinforces the fact that I am "generalist" so I move. My, uh, my partner, um, my colleague likes to redefine himself as a snail darter. He moves in and he moves out. He fixes things and he moves in and he moves out. He moves in and he moves out. Right. And the challenge, um, is that it can exacerbate the sense of there is no center. There is no ground.

Now for holding that point of view, excuse me, and we all have a tendency of that imposter syndrome. I'm going to speak about that now. We all have that tendency, that set of voices. Many of us do. Some narcissists, especially those in power don't. We all have these sort of governors on our ego that, that are designed to keep us from being, feeling shame and feeling humiliation for being found out as the incompetent that we suspect we are.

Forest Richter: Sure.

Jerry: Right. And so that shows up in that voice. And what I often advise people is to actually see that voice for what it's really intending to do, which is to actually keep you safe from shame. But in this case, in addition to that phenomena that's [crosstalk] yeah, in addition to that phenomena that's going on, part of what's going on is because you don't have a sense of groundedness in your own self, that voice is louder. Now let me, let me ask a, a separate question. So you're a generalist, um, and, uh, we've got this, this fixer thing going on. Um, how, how did you do in school?

Forest Richter: Um, good. I, well, I would say until probably all through high school, like grade school through high school, I didn't find school particularly challenging. Um, and then I got destroyed my freshman year of college because I didn't know actually how to be a good student.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Forest Richter: Um, and then so dug myself a nice big GPA hole that I was able to dig out of. And I would say by the end of college, maybe my junior year, I finally learned how to study. And then I had As through junior and senior year of college.

Jerry: All right. So, so notice that you, you had the reckoning that a lot of high achievers fear, which is we're, we're going along and we're doing well enough in school that we never have to develop the resilience that comes from actually being tested and really growing and, and, and, and, and learning how to learn. And then you had the reckoning in freshman year, where is this-

Forest Richter: Yeah.

Jerry: ... "Holy shit, this coasting thing that I've been doing it got me A's, but this actually doesn't serve me anymore 'cause now I'm in an environment where I'm actually really being tested." What, what college did you go to?

Forest Richter: Uh, University of Minnesota.

Jerry: Okay. So it was a good school that actually took you to a higher level of learning. Am I seeing that right?

Forest Richter: Yes. Oh yeah, absolutely.

Jerry: Right. And so throughout middle school and high school, that imposter voice was sitting there going, "Forest, you're not really studying. Forest, you're actually just coasting. Forest, you're answering about the novel in English class that you actually did not read."

Forest Richter: Yes. Spot on.

Jerry: (laughs) Right.

Forest Richter: Spot on.

Jerry: Right. And so all that's going on, all that going on forward. All right. So this is the complex. So the whole syndrome is designed to keep you from re-experiencing that reckoning. "Holy shit. I don't know what's... They've discovered that I don't know what I'm doing." Does this make any sense?

Forest Richter: I mean, it makes perfect sense. 'Cause I, I really did get kicked in the teeth that first semester of freshman year for like I had never had, I never had Cs, let alone reckoning with an F, which is what happened.

Jerry: Right, right, right. Okay. So let's just take a deep breath because now we're in the shame zone, and let's just acknowledge that. So breathe with me.

Forest Richter: Okay.

Jerry: And I'm going to say something that, that some mentors may have said to you in the past that F may have been the best thing you ever got 'cause it caused you to sort of re-examine the way you experienced things.

Forest Richter: Definitely.

Jerry: And so when we're in a fix it mode, one of the things to hold on to is that we're very often trying to fix our own feelings by showing that we can add value in some way that we can be productive or in the parlance of my book, that we're worthy of love. We're worthy of safety. We're worthy of belonging because I may not know everything. I may not be an expert, but at least I can fix things.

Forest Richter: That is spot on. Like that is I, I, I like, I, I didn't want to, like, I don't wanna just be, you know, a guest who comes out and says yes to everything. I was not expecting kind of, you to hit the nail on the head with something I hadn't figured out before (laughs)-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Forest Richter: ... on such like a simple way that is...I'm, I'm kinda blown away, honestly.

Jerry: All right. So we just take a, take a breath and understand that the reason I'm able to zero in and see things like this is not because I'm special or magical, I am, but that's a different issue. (laughs) It's just because it's very, very common. And the truth is I have very, very similar aspects of my personality, very, very similar aspects of my personality. So we just recognize that this is sort of the way complex systems work. And one of the problems that I often see is that when we look at systemic problems, complexes that have multiple pieces to them, when we look at them and we only want to say, "Well, I wanna fix this piece right here," without an understanding of the complexity. It's kind of like, yeah, I'm gonna change one part of a car engine without really addressing or, or



dealing with the others. And then we don't understand why it doesn't work. Okay.

Forest Richter: It makes sense.

Jerry: Right. So the reason we took this sort of detour into your past was to sort of circle back into where you are right now and what you're trying to do right now, which is take the complex of super powers that you have, your ability to see a problem, your ability to analyze and propose solutions to those problems married to your values. Right. So I wanna talk a little bit about values right now.

Forest Richter: Sure.

Jerry: You're a white, cisgender, male. Why do you care about underrepresented people? That is not an open, honest question. It's a leading question. (laughs)

Forest Richter: Yeah. That, no, I mean, the answer is I, because I, the short, I mean the short answer is because I can and I should, I, I believe it in my heart, but I also am in a position where I feel like I can make a difference. It's like I am in a position where I feel like I can make an impact and, and I've been, I understand fundraising and I feel like I can help people navigate that 'cause it is a complex process.

Jerry: Why is it so important?

Forest Richter: Um, it's important because we need more equity, um, not in the financial sense, in the social sense, we need, we need more diversity in our startup ecosystem. We need more, we need to create more generational wealth for communities that haven't had it in the past. And, and this is a space where that could happen.

Jerry: So, you know, I'll cut to the chase and say, I agree with you. Um, as another white, cisgender, male of power and privilege, I think it is my moral and ethical responsibility to do what I can to see the world that I believe needs to exist. And one of the things that I think is incredibly important for folks who are in meat bags like mine, is to understand the ways I have benefited without any effort on my part, in an unconscious way, and live a life of safety and privilege simply because of the racial constructs of this society. Concomitant with that responsibility, is an equally important responsibility, which is to recognize that the underlying ego structures of my childhood, the survival strategies I developed to grow into the adult that I am, throw off issues that sometimes benefit those around me and sometimes hurt those around me. And so I have an equally important responsibility to look at the structures of my life, to understand the ways in which I, uh, hurt people. Okay. So you wanna solve the problem of access to capital by underrepresented entrepreneurs, is that correct?

Forest Richter: Exactly.

Jerry: What if I told you that the problem of access to capital is actually one part of a system, a complex?

Forest Richter: I would completely agree. I'd be curious where, where, what, what, what you would say to that, because I can tell you openly, like, especially since I've been on quarantine, as we all sort of have, um, and I've seen systemic inequity, um, at a national, at least at a national level, but certainly there's been examples of at a global level since we've been here, I've wondered about, and, and I really am genuinely curious to get your thoughts about specifically, um, whether venture capital is saveable? Like whether the, the system that exists is fixable or whether we need to be exploring just other funding models, other, other funding opportunities? Like is, is this even a worthy endeavor? Has been a question I have asked myself.

Jerry: So, um, if we take the view, so, so think back to what we just did in, in packing both the relationships- the relationship between fixing and the imposter syndrome that, that exists. And we look at both of those together and we saw that they're in fact a complex, we think of them as gears that mesh to create the machine. The problem of the lack of access to capital is actually symptomatic of the complex. It is not the problem. It is the problem in the degree for individuals who are seeking capital, but it is not the systemic problem. The systemic problem is racism.

Forest Richter: Right.

Jerry: The systemic problem is in the way I think about things is that there are three interlocking gears. One is, uh, racial prejudice or prejudice generally against the other, because, uh, it, it, this may show itself as racism and it may show itself as, uh, uh, misogyny. It may show itself as homophobia. It may show itself as transphobia, but it is under the rubric of othering, of causing the other to be less than human. And seeing that person as unworthy, that is an inextricably linked to economic inequality, which itself is inextricably linked to power differentials. And one of the problems with any complex is that when you seek to change one component, I'm gonna swap out this gear, you don't actually make the system work. You don't fix the system if you don't look at the entire systemic system. So to put it another way, systemic problems require systemic solutions.

Forest Richter: Completely agree with you.

Jerry: So I'm gonna challenge you on your intellectualized question, which is, is venture capital saveable? Venture capital is a gear in a very complex system. And the complex system is capitalism, right? Um, and so the question really is, is how do we approach the entirety in order to make a difference in particular areas, right? You want to, you, ironically, as some of the identifies as a generalist, you're focused on a very specialized problem area-

Forest Richter: True.

Jerry: ... access to capital. That's great. So you want to sort of look at the entire system here and approach it with the awareness that if you step into this process of I'm gonna fix it, you are living into a white savior model. You are. If you approach the system, this, the systemic problem, uh, trying to fix venture capital and on-without an overarching awareness that, um, the profit motive, is suspect, then the, the proc- the, the, the progress that you make is gonna be marginal and small in effect and, and likely not be sustainable. Right? And so you have to actually look at the entire breadth of the problem, just the way we looked at the entire breadth of the problem with the imposter syndrome as wait a minute, this is actually, there's some positive aspects of this. There's some negative aspects. It's actually linked to the feelings I have about myself. It's about linked to the fact that... right? So we see it systemically. Does this make sense?

Forest Richter: Perfect. Perfect sense.

Jerry: Okay. So a lot of times when we bring our attention to the larger systemic problem, we can be overwhelmed and we sort of shrug ourselves and say, "Well, fuck that. How the fuck do I fix capitalism?"

Forest Richter: It does.

Jerry: It does. It feels that way?

Forest Richter: It feels so big. It feels so big.

Jerry: And it feels so big. I know that. I know that. There are two responses I have to the, it feels so big, and I wanna bring your attention to the tenderness that just came into you as you spoke about that. Tell me about feeling it's so big?

Forest Richter: Um, I just think what you're talking about, and I completely agree, like fundamentally racism is at the core here or whatever ism you wanna insert. But-

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Forest Richter: ... um, and, and that certainly isn't black and white, like it's, it's sys- it's systemic. It is something that shapes way, shapes everything we do in a way that we don't necessarily even understand. And, and certainly from my perspective, something that I haven't always been conscious of. And so trying to tackle a problem like that feels like something, it- it feels insurmountable in, in the way that like, when I look at kind of what I feel like I can, where I can make an impact, that's where I feel like, um, funding is a place I can actually make a, make a difference. And that's, I guess why I lean into that.

Jerry: Yeah. So, so, um, I want you to stay in that place right now, just for a few minutes. I promise you I'll release you from that place-

Forest Richter: Okay.

Jerry: ... but I want you to stay in the place of it feeling completely insurmountable and overwhelming. And there's a tenderness that's in your, in your face right now, and I'm going to project into it. I could be wrong, which is, "Jerry, I want so desperately to make a difference in the world. And when you make me see the enormity of the problem, I feel like I can't make a difference in the world." Am I naming something?

Forest Richter: Exactly.

Jerry: Yeah. So just stay right there. One of the ways that we as humans are socialized is we run away from that spot and there's tears and there's sadness and there's a sense of the enormity of the problem. I'm gonna make it even bigger. The root of climate change problems is racism, the root of racism is climate denial, is our disassociation from the earth. Income inequality is racism made large, writ large. It is all interconnected. And we have to see that fully. And we are socialized to not see it because when we see it, our hearts break, just the way your heart is breaking right now.

Forest Richter: Yeah.

Jerry: 'Cause I don't know what the fuck to do. And if we go back to the early, early programming, the only way I can feel love, safety and belonging is if I can do something.

Forest Richter: Yeah.

Jerry: Let's just take a deep breath on that. Three things I would say in response to this, the first is to quote James Baldwin, who said, "Not everything that is faced can be transformed, but nothing can be transformed until it is faced." And the tears, the heartbreak that you're feeling right now, stem from the fact that you didn't count on this, you didn't plan on this, but your friend, Jerry just made you look at something much larger that was really hard.

Forest Richter: Yeah.

Jerry: And part of the problem I see in our society is we have trained ourselves to look away. To- to not look at the fact, for example, that as a society, we don't like poor people because they remind us that they're but for the grace of God go I, which by the way, is the opposite mindset of Jesus's sermon on the Mount.

Forest Richter: Sure.

Jerry: We don't like looking at people who are differently abled. We don't like experiencing otherness. It challenges us, but not everything... but nothing can be transformed unless we're willing to look at and to face it within ourselves and within the larger world. The second thing I would say is so, so, "Okay, Jerry, you've got me facing at this. What the fuck do I do?" I go back to something that

I learned in college. One of my, uh, professors was an activist named, um, John Gerassi. He was a professor, a tenured professor at, uh, Queens College. And, uh, uh, Tito used to say to us a very, very popular phrase for community organizers at the time, which was, think global and act local. Think global and act local. And what that means is your work to do is the work that your mind has taken you to. Is to stand shoulder and, shoulder to shoulder with underrepresented entrepreneurs, to lean into the problem of the access to capital. Your karma, your mindset has brought you to that, that facet of the systemic problem. Good. I'm proud of you for doing that. That's good work.

Forest Richter: Thank you.

Jerry: The act local, the piece that may be missing here maybe is the involvement of the people that you seek to help. Think for a moment back to Erin, your wife, when you wanna fix her problem, what is it that she really wants?

Forest Richter: She wants to talk. She wants me to listen. Tha- that's a better way to say that's what she wants.

Jerry: Yes. She needs to be heard.

Forest Richter: Yeah.

Jerry: Right? Our impulse is to come in and with a solu- suggested solution. Your impulse, Jerry, here's a question you asked me. "What would you tell a woman of color trying to fundraise for her startup?" The problem I have with your question is the word tell. If you had asked me, "Jerry, how do I listen better?" (laughs)

Forest Richter: Sure.

Jerry: Okay. The, the, I don't have the answer. That woman of color you seek to help has the answer. What she needs, I suspect, is someone to stand shoulder to shoulder and say, "This is a fucking fucked up world and I see it in its entire complexity. And I can't even begin to stand in your shoes, but I'll stand with you and I will listen. And then when I watch white people do that fucking thing that white people do, I will call it out and I will stand up to it. And I'll place myself as a body to protect if that's what it calls for." The last piece of, of, of, I even hesitate to call it advice, the last piece of comfort that I myself take comes from my teacher, Parker Palmer. Parker is 81. He's been an activist longer than I've been alive. He is one of the wisest people I know. He is reared in the Quaker tradition, um, who, by the way, um, elevate silence so that they can elevate listening both to their hearts and to the hearts of others.

And Parker has a construct that I find incredibly helpful and the construct is what he refers to as the tragic gap. And the gap is between the world that we would like to see and the world as it is. And what he says is that we are called to

stand in between those two worlds. The world, as it is, is fucked, the world, as it is, you know, one of, uh, one of my, um, uh, podcast guests last week in a conversation referred to the conversations around race right now as the reckoning. One of the things that's happening as a consequence of this reckoning is that it is, uh, for many of us, no longer, we're no longer able to look away. Thank goodness.

And the world that we'd like today, a world of harmony, a world where, where every entrepreneur is, uh, access to capital, uh, stems from the quality of their ideas. Not whether or not they are connected to somebody through some business school relationship or their community, or they have been reared where, where people of privilege just simply automatically help each other. 'Cause this is what we do.

Forest Richter: Yeah.

Jerry: This is what we do. And our job is to stand right in the middle because the world that we'd like to be probably will never be and we have to take in that heartbreaking reality. The world that we'd like to be probably will never be, certainly not in my lifetime and I'm 57 and probably not in your lifetime and you're in your thirties, but we cannot give up on that world. We cannot give over to the world just as it is because otherwise we give over to what he refers to as corrosive cynicism. So we have to stand in this place between what he refers to as irrelevant idealism and corrosive cynicism. Recognizing that those two worlds exist, we roll up our sleeves [00:49:00] and we get to work. We will do our local work. We help where we can every single day, every single interaction.

Now I don't know if Uncrowd.io is the solution to this problem. I know that my friend, Bryce Roberts at Indie.vc is trying to create a solution as well. I know that part of the solution is not just underrepresented entrepreneurs getting more access to capital, but underrepresented people showing up more in positions of power and equity and economic equality to start to change the dynamic.

Forest Richter: Absolutely.

Jerry: I know that that is true, right? But the, the fact that there is a complex system means that every single day we pick up our tools and we go to work. You have work to do, I have work to do every single day. And for the rest of my life, I will dedicate myself to my part of the problem or my part of the solution, which is listening, making observations, feeling my way to see more clearly when necessary and using whatever platform I have to advance and amplify voices that might otherwise not be heard. Because it is hubris for me to think that I have the answer to the question, but it is not hubris for me to think that I have a broken open heart so that I can actually listen to people. You take the pain of what you're feeling right now, and you go forth and you listen and you stand shoulder to shoulder.

Forest Richter: Yeah. You're, I mean, you're spot on.

Jerry: How are you feeling?

Forest Richter: Um, motivated. I mean, I- I'll be honest. I know that sometimes you make your guests cry or, I shouldn't say you make your guests cry, your guests cry when they're talking to you.

Jerry: I invite them to cry. (laughs)

Forest Richter: I never thought it would be me. I never expected that to happen. Um, but I, I have a new, a new North Star, uh, a new way to look at this and a new way to kind of guide things forward that I didn't have an hour ago.

Jerry: Well, uh, if I, if I can be so bold as to name that North Star, it's right there in your chest.

Forest Richter: Yeah.

Jerry: One of the consequences of the imposter syndrome, fix it, three-legged stool, the third leg is an over reliance on your brain, your prefrontal cortex to intellectually figure things out. By you feeling the enormity of the thing that you're trying to do, you opened up access the most powerful source of energy the world needs right now, your broken heart and love. Do this out of love and you'll be okay.

Forest Richter: Yeah. I, I'm in a, I have a lot to think about on this, but I will tell you, I feel a sense of confidence in the mission and in the project that I didn't have before.

Jerry: That's the best possible answer to the voice in your head that tells you you're an imposter.

Forest Richter: Yeah, it is.

Jerry: I'm gonna do this anyway and it's okay if I stumble and miss because now what you're connected to is what in Buddhism we'd say is, right intention. That's what those tears are right intention. We hold that place. This is Bodhicitta, open heart. This is the soul of the Bodhisattva. The one who, who, who in Buddhism we say forestalls enlightenment until all beings are free from suffering. That's the true wish.

Forest Richter: It's beautiful.

Jerry: And those, those tears tell me you have the heart of a lion. You go, you go fight the good fight.

Forest Richter: Thank you. I will.

Jerry: All right. Thank you for coming on the show. It was an honor to be with you right now.

Forest Richter: Thank you so much.