



THE ASCENT: A TENZING PODCAST - ROB PIERRE

Title:

Rob Pierre talks goals, resilience and self-determination

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Episode Overview:

In this episode, Guy talks to [Rob Pierre](#), co-founder and CEO of [Jellyfish](#), a global digital marketing and transformation partner to some of the world's leading brands, including Google, Samsung, Netflix and Nike. Jellyfish has had a seriously rocket-boasted few years - French investment giant, Fimalac, bought 50% of the company for just over \$700 million in late 2019, which led to a buying spree, and then the pandemic saw revenue grow exponentially, in part because any business that hadn't already made the migration to digital woke up to the fact that they had to do it, and do it immediately. Now employing over 2,000 people across 40 offices globally, Jellyfish has featured in The Sunday Times Top Track 250, and Rob has been crowned [Media Leader of the Year at the Media Week Awards](#) and featured on the Powerlist 2022, as one of the 100 most influential black Britons. He's a man brimming with thoughts and ideas and insights, and there's lots to learn from his determination to do things differently.

Quick-fire Round:

- **Favourite book?** [The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable](#) by Patrick Lencioni is fantastic, and [Outliers: The Story of Success](#) by Malcolm Gladwell. The ecosystem often takes care of itself, but the "when" is often underestimated and I really learned that from *Outliers*.
- **Most inspiring or inspirational person?** Nelson Mandela - to motivate and to lead a nation who had been so oppressed for such a period of time - his words of wisdom, his character, his leadership, he is always going to be a huge inspiration for me.
- **Advice for entrepreneurs?** Believe in the picture that you paint in your head. It's not about goals, but the outcome - if you do not have a clear picture and you

cannot persuade a group of people to go on that journey and to get everyone excited about the outcome, then don't do it.

GUY

I'm actually gonna start off with your earliest entrepreneurial memory. Can you remember what that might've been?

ROB

I've got a couple. I was born here in the UK, but I actually grew up in Trinidad, and a couple of these memories were when I was about nine or 10 in Trinidad. The first one was, my mum was called into the headmaster's office because I was actually selling fish at my primary school. One of my neighbours was breeding goldfish in big concrete tanks and selling them, and I was hanging around with him, learnt how to breed goldfish; I bred them in my garden and took them in little bags into school. My parents were told that I can't really do that. Apparently I can't sell live animals at school!

The second one was the carnival. Trinidad has one of the largest carnivals. My grandpa in Trinidad had an office, and I knew the route was going past the front of his office. So I actually asked my parents to borrow some money. I bought some ice. I got these large white buckets from a friend who had a grocery store, and I bought, upfront, a whole bunch of soft drinks, and I knew that it would be baking hot and people would be desperate, and I could sell these drinks for whatever I wanted, and I set up a stall in front of his office. So apparently, I always had this motivation to go out and earn money and make money, but I was always looking for opportunities and trying to match the sort of the challenge or the opportunity with a solution, and it's just always been the way I've thought, right from a young age.

GUY

Do you think entrepreneurs are born, or can they be made?

ROB

I think the core traits required, you're born with, and I think if your default state is problem-solving, if you are naturally positive and passionate and therefore contagiously so, I think that's what makes a successful entrepreneur. So I don't think you're born as an entrepreneur, but I think you're born with the traits that will very much lead to success as an entrepreneur.

GUY

Yeah. I totally agree, and the other thing that I'll say, I think it comes up is like this irrational drive, so you do stuff that people think is illogical or, you know, a risky move or you carry on running through a brick wall, even though everyone's advising you to give up. Is that something that you've got in yourself?

ROB

Yeah, and in some cases, it's just this passion to pave your own path. You know, they say Mozart could see music in colours, and the way I look at it is, I can see the outcome I'm looking for so clearly that I believe it's real. So whatever barriers and whatever challenges and how much opposition that I come against, it doesn't change the fact that I could see this outcome so clearly, and I know it's possible, and so I do everything that I can to get there. To pioneer things is such a challenge, and I think part of being a really successful entrepreneur is possibly going into uncharted waters and to go to places people may not have the risk appetite to do, but if you do have that core belief and that view of what the outcome looks like, I think you're more inclined to pursue it relentlessly.

GUY

So was it a linear entrepreneurial journey from selling chilled drinks at carnivals to founding Jellyfish, or what did the intermediate steps look like? Did they have the twists and turns to get there?

ROB

There were lots of twists and turns. I came back to the UK when I was 14 years old and was doing very well at school, but then I was going to go to IBM to do a computer studies degree - paid for (we didn't have a lot of money, my parents split up, and I came over here with my mum) so I went after this computer studies degree but did not get the required grades and therefore had to take a year out. I had no plan B, and in that year out, I just went into retail, and that's where it started, and in actual fact, I ended up in Sunglass Hut in Gatwick Airport and just literally went through the ranks. But what I would say, is that, that was an opportunity for me to continue this sort of entrepreneurial passion.

And I don't really call myself an entrepreneur because I stick to leadership within a business, and I really see it through, so I'm not like one of those serial entrepreneurs that like an idea and starting a business and moving on - you know, I commit to it. So I was at Sunglass Hut for seven years in the end, because I had all this autonomy, I was constantly trying to figure out: how do we get the stores to maximise the inventory, make

the most of everybody that crosses the lease line, get more people crossing the lease line, how do we sell more expensive items to everybody, how do we sell more units per transaction? It was like gamification. Everything was cause and effect. We were trying to figure out how we could get the most out of these units, and I just really built this passion for business. It's amazing, in retail, the autonomy given to young people.

GUY

I was going to say, on the prejudicial glance, you know, working in Sunglass Hut is like a weekend job or, you know, something to make ends meet, but because you're effectively on your own a lot, and you were curious, you basically had that opportunity almost to - sort of - A/B test experiences.

ROB

Correct, and exactly to your point, it's normally a stopgap for people. You go to retail whilst you're looking for your real job and so persuading people to be passionate and to be committed and want to have the desired outcomes, if they're considering it a stopgap, that also, I suppose I was sharpening the axe. I was learning how to take people on the journey and to get them to feel that they have responsibilities and accountability, so it was definitely a good stepping stone for where we are today.

GUY

And so, before you moved back to the UK, did you know what you wanted to be when you were older? Did you have a vision for yourself?

ROB

No idea, I enjoyed creativity and art, but I also really enjoyed computing and problem solving and mathematical challenges. So I never knew what I would end up doing to exploit that trait.

GUY

And were you a leader within your family?

ROB

That's interesting. I'm a clinical extrovert, so, I think one of the things is, I would go in the middle of the room, and I would get energy off other people. I get inspired by everybody and everything, but it's normally through conversing with people, and I think that leads

you to engage, to build relationships, to ask questions, to be curious, and to really get people to warm to you, and when you're interested in people - and what they're doing and what motivates them and why they're doing things - if you show an interest in somebody, they instantly give you so much more, and you learn so much. Again, it's just traits - I wouldn't say I was a leader, but I was exhibiting the traits that would lead me on the path that I'm on today.

GUY

I often think there are things that happened to you as a child that form your inner drive. You've got an element of embedded skill set that you're born with, but compounded with some life experiences that push you through to certain drives. So I wondered if there was anything in there?

ROB

Well, I think it was a pivotal moment when I didn't get the grade, because when I spoke about that IBM opportunity, I went down to Portsmouth to the HQ, and it was a two-day full-on assessment with aptitude tests, lateral thinking, role-playing interviews, and it was really intense, and I got through - I actually made it through the assessment and then didn't get the required grades. So I really had to dust myself off and think, *oh, okay, it wasn't meant to be yeah, what next?* and I think that was a pivotal moment. We've had a few intense and tragic experiences within our family as well, which I think makes you realise - I'm very philosophical, in some ways. I really believe in the formula "happiness is reality minus expectation" and my expectation is that life is random. Life is going to throw things. It's not your fault. It's not karma. I'm not very religious, I'm very pragmatic. Things happen. It's how do you deal with it, and if you expect it to be perfect, you're going to be permanently disappointed.

GUY

Events have given you this life outlook, which actually builds resilience because you're going to expect the unexpected.

ROB

Correct. Things change, you know, in a second, and it's all about making sure that you believe that it's not fate, it's not meant to be, it's happened. It's not going to be a smooth ride, it's going to be a bumpy path, and sometimes you've got to go down into uncharted waters and try something new. But this cliché, that you've got to learn fast and keep pivoting, it is true. It is. It's absolutely true. You've got to keep taking the data,

understanding the information, exploiting all of the people and the technology and the innovations and the experience all around you, and use that to constantly make as many informed decisions as you can. And I also say to everybody, please afford me the ability to make current decisions. The other thing that I think is the ball and chain that most business people have or businesses in general, is that you feel that once you've made a commitment, or you've said you're going to go in a certain direction, that if you change your mind, that you're perceived to be weak or inconsistent or unpredictable, but ultimately you are just using the information you have at any one time to make the best-informed decision, and if that's your default state, then people accept that and understand it, and are more likely to go on that journey with you.

GUY

Did you have a mentor when you were growing up?

ROB

Like I said, it's everybody, and how we've set up our business is that no one has a line manager, but we do have mentors. We have a support network. So every individual owns their career like a hobby. Like, when I play golf, for example, who's responsible for me getting better at golf? No-one. How can I measure it? I've got my handicap, I can play lower rounds, better shots, but ultimately I read books, I watch YouTube videos, I've got a PGA coach, I practice, I play with people better than me. It's all down to me. This notion that, within the work environment, your career is in somebody else's hands, I don't agree with. So yeah, it's all about taking full ownership yourself, and I think it makes a big difference.

GUY

It's like when people, as they move up a career and they become head of department suddenly, overnight, they're expected to become like a parental figure, right, to everyone within that department.

ROB

And you hit the nail on the head because parental, I mean, we've all been there - at what point did you suddenly ask your parent - who's been your guardian, your guide, your mentor, given you advice on everything in life - suddenly you get to a certain age and you ask them a question and they give you an answer and you go, *oh, you don't know what you're talking about, do you?! You've just blagged your way through that answer!* And it's the whole Dunning-Kruger thing, where the more confident you are about a

subject, the less you know, and I think that happens a lot in business and in organisations, so why not distribute that accountability to make sure everybody in the organisation gets support for the things they need to do, but it's not this one parenting figure.

GUY

Yeah, I certainly remember three or four times in my career when I really aspired to be my boss, for want of a better phrase, and then you actually close the gap and you sort of peer over the fence, and realise he's not that special.

ROB

And also, I think in that scenario sometimes, you know, that's where the hierarchy system doesn't work, because you do have to displace your boss to progress. Whereas again, the way we're set up, there are no heads of, we work in steering groups, so we've got that distributed accountability, and it gives exposure to underrepresented groups as well. You know, one of the big things out there is this tokenism that, you know, you've got to employ either females or underrepresented ethnic groups, et cetera, and when you do employ these people or put them in these positions, and they've never had exposure in the past, then you're setting up for failure. So what we're doing is distributing the accountability, giving everybody the opportunity to take accountability for certain initiatives, then they've got the exposure, they're involved, and they're progressing at a rate which sets everyone up for success.

What we say to everybody is, "You've just got to add more value or be better than yourself yesterday. Not anyone else, you're not fighting for one position at the top of the hierarchy, you're just improving yourself and you will be remunerated fairly as you add more value." And so if there's somebody really good, you're no longer competing with them, you think *you're my ticket to making me better than myself*. So it's an environment of sharing and helping and nurturing, and I think that's been a big success factor.

GUY

I love listening to that because it's something every organisation is wrestling with, but it's really pure of thought. Now, go back and fill the gaps - how do you go from Oakley or RayBan, point of sale, end of line, special offer, to that?

ROB

So there was a European MD who was previously the finance director, but I ended up being the sort of sales and operations director for Europe. So I was basically the second to the MD who was very finance-driven, so I pretty much went right through the ranks.

GUY

And you would've been what, late twenties by then? So at Sunglass Hut, what did you love most, and what was, equally, most frustrating about your time there?

ROB

There was no frustration in actual fact, I look back, and I think, wow, you know, when your passion levels are that high, Sunglass Hut was my world! And, you know, *everybody should be wearing sunglasses and think about the UV protection, and you should all have two or three pairs!* And you know what, those little 300 square foot stores were all that mattered to me, and I realise how much I was in that world. Only when you're out of it, you realise that there's so much more, and a lot of what I learned and what I did was applicable and transferable to so many other scenarios. I look back at that entire time extremely fondly because I was fulfilling a passion. You know, it's nurturing a passion, not climbing a ladder.

GUY :

What was the trigger to you leaving there?

ROB

I worked for an entrepreneur down in Southampton, and he had a chain of mobile phone accessory stores, and it was the third biggest motorcycle accessory distributor, and he also manufactured and distributed mobile phone accessories. So I worked with him for three years and really learned the sort of cutting edge of business. He always said to me that he was a self-confessed market trader at heart, you know, and he was always doing things on the sharp end, but he was a multimillionaire and very successful business person, and so I kind of learned the corporate Sunglass Hut way, and then I learned the edgy, wheeler-dealer entrepreneur's style of doing business. I had both sides of the spectrum. Now I'm about 30 years old, you're going on stag do's and weddings, and, you know, you start to hang out for weekends with people that aren't in your core group of friends, and I keep bumping into this guy, he's got an IT consultancy called Avondale IT, his name's Paul Walsh, and we're chatting away and constantly talking, and he's talking about this opportunity in digital marketing (he's very technical, but very commercial and he again has a sort of unique combination), and we're chatting, chatting, and in the end

on one of those trips, I'm sitting, going, *okay, I'm going to quit, and I'm going to come and join you in and let's pursue this opportunity.*

He knew I had this sort of account management, sales, marketing, people, business management side, he had the technical knowledge, and he already had this sort of established boutique IT consultancy, and we got together in 2005.

GUY

And what was the attraction to working with Paul? Clearly he's a super impressive individual, but did you just have a burning desire to strike out on your own?

ROB

It was an opportunity and I had a chance of applying everything I've learned, and setting up something where you had full autonomy and the ability to do it and take ownership of it. It was starting with a base. I mean, I think we consolidated it down to about six people when I joined him, but it was more than enough of a foundation to do what we were aspiring to do. He knew that he would like a partner on the journey, to really exploit this opportunity, so that was the attraction, and we hit the ground running. It didn't take long to start gaining that traction and making way with Jellyfish.

GUY

That co-founder journey is really interesting. So were you compatible in terms of skill sets, and how did you divide up the responsibility?

ROB

Yeah, so in the end, because he was the MD - obviously he owned the consultancy at the time - but it became pretty apparent that I would be taking that sort of front lead role as the MD, but also he was really driving the technological innovation, et cetera.

The Venn diagram crossed over quite a bit, and when you've got two very strong personalities running a business... but they were clear, distinguishable skill sets. How we worked it is we made a promise to each other that we would compromise. We'd have "compromise tokens". The best way to describe it is that if we were thinking of a direction to go, and didn't agree on that direction, you had to really feel passionate about it because there might come another time where you really have a very strong view and a passion for the direction of travel, and you would want the other person to compromise. So we kind of said, "Okay, I'm going to take a compromise token. We'll do it your way."

That was the easy bit. The hard bit was that, when you did take a compromise token, you can never say, “I told you so”, right. So whatever, at that point, you wholeheartedly support that direction of travel, and you go for it, and if it doesn't work, it doesn't work - you can't live in a parallel universe and say, “If we did it my way, it would have been better”, you just move on. And so we ended up doing that, and we're best of friends today. He hasn't been involved in Jellyfish for maybe 12 or 13 years now because we spun out another technology business, which he ran, and I ran Jellyfish. We've both got a shareholding in both of these businesses, and so it's been a very long-term and very fruitful partnership ever since that beginning.

GUY

And did you have something written down back, you know, when there were six of you, was there even a fag packet, or was it just, *this is a really exciting journey, let's just discover as we go?*

ROB

Correct. I use the analogy (because my daughter, when we started early 2005, my daughter, my first child was born in October 2005) - it's a bit like, I didn't have a plan for my 16-year-old daughter now (I mean, she's incredible and she could be anything) and every day you reimagine what she's capable of doing. So it's a similar thing with the business: no way did I know what we were going to be, but I did think every single day you assess where you are and re-imagine what's possible, and every time, every day that goes by, you're one person more, or you've got a new skill set, you've won one client, or you've opened up a new office in a new region, and it's just that momentum just kept going.

GUY

And it's that innate curiosity. It's funny, some founders and entrepreneurs are very goal-oriented, they want to get to this or get to that, and others are just permanently opening the Pandora's box.

ROB

Yeah, exactly, and I think one of the problems I find with specific goals (and you should always have plans and outcomes), the irony is you've failed until you've hit that goal. So you could be doing much better every day, but until you hit the goal, you're failing, theoretically. So I love that concept of “marginal gains” and measuring everything and watching the trends and constantly trying to trend in the right direction, across everything

you do. That, to me, is much more exciting - to track trends than it is to have these, what could often be arbitrary goals, that you set yourself.

GUY

And so in 05, what was the offering?

ROB

In 2005... Well, we triple-niched ourselves! We made sure that we concentrated and wanted to be the best, somehow. So we were literally the number one paid search, performance-based agency in the publishing sector. We were so niche that we could be the best, and then we started with the law of niche and then started to diversify, whether that was regions, verticals, products, and services. We slowly diversified after we could legitimately say, we were the number one at what we're doing.

So everybody was going to internet world and ad tech. We were going to the Periodical Publishers Association with a big stand saying, *we'll build you a website. We'll do all the marketing. You just tell us what you want to pay for a subscriber, and we will generate subscribers for you.* That's how we started.

I always say to people, "You've got to be in it for opportunities to present yourself. Don't spend all your time creating an elaborate plan, get on and do something, and only when you're in it, opportunity presents itself." Funnily enough, one of our biggest clients was *Which?* and so we were generating all the keywords around reviews for different products, et cetera, and then the person who was the maternity cover for *Which?* moved to Skype, and he loved the work that we did for *Which?*, and just because it wasn't publishing anymore, he invited us to come and pitch. We came in and pitched and we won Skype, and it was huge... I mean, we had a team of like 20 people, all speaking different languages, running the campaign globally. It was an amazing next step for us, and a whole new vertical and, and that's how we started to expand.

GUY

And was that when Skype was privately owned?

ROB

It was. It was pre-eBay and pre and then pre Microsoft.

GUY

So, Niklas Zenntrom - wow. And then your relationship with Google - that's something some people have really struggled with, but you seem to have thrived. How did that evolve?

ROB

Well, this is, again, advice that I would give to anyone - if you're trying to build your own brand's equity, particularly in the B2B service industry, it is very difficult. You know, there are so many established players. What worked for us is we treated Google like our best customer, and that was the secret, because we knew where we fitted in the ecosystem - it was the advertisers and Google that was really where the relationship was... where we fit, is that we're in that ecosystem, but we've got to provide value and sort of mediate between those two relationships, and actually provide the best service and get the best return on investment for our clients. But, by understanding the stakeholders, strategically what Google were trying to achieve, what markets were important to them, which certifications we should get, how to become brilliant at facilitating work on Google platforms and using their technologies - that's what we did. So we just found out all that's important to them, made sure we delivered an exemplary level of service and quality of delivery and then we became synonymous with delivering great results using Google. And the more Google heard about that and got positive reviews and feedback from the engagements with Jellyfish, the more they wanted us to be involved, and we were walking hand in hand with Google to large brands because we were, by proxy, leveraging their brand equity. Most people were treating Google like a vendor, and we were sending them Christmas hampers and literally treated them like our best client.

GUY

That's really interesting. And that would have happened over a period of time, wouldn't it? Or when did you go, *yeah, we've got this?*

ROB

It did happen over a period of time, but it was the pivotal moment where we established that partnership, because, now, obviously there's the big, walled garden environments: there's Amazon, there's Facebook, et cetera, and emulating that partnership, but we learned a lot, and there were some real pivotal people. I mean, I established a relationship with a guy called Matt Bush, and he's progressed really well within Jellyfish, and we kind of did it together. So we were proving what partnerships could achieve, and he was progressing, and as he had more responsibility and influence, we were growing

with that, and then the network became wider and then globally, I was speaking to more and more senior people and because we had all of the different certifications and accreditations from Google, we were really on the radar.

GUY

And then building up a second tier of management team behind yourself, and the people that are now your most key senior management people that have been with you a long time - how have you groomed them through?

ROB

Yeah, I mean, I call them my “global advisory group”. I mean, literally we've been going for 16, 17 years. Most of them have been with us somewhere between 10 and 15 years. We haven't lost any of the core senior people, but again, because we don't have this sort of hierarchy, they're not like our “management”, they're basically in support networks, they're in my support network, and they've all been going on the full journey with us. Digital is like dog years - a year in digital is like seven years in any other business, so like after 50 years, you get your gold Rolex in some companies, we said after ten years at Jellyfish, we'll get you a Rolex. I mean, it's a line item on our P&L now! It's like, *whose, whose idea was that?!* Yeah, we've got incredibly good retention and everybody's very excited and motivated to go on this journey.

GUY

And so, in 2019, Fimalac came along. What was the shape of Jellyfish in 2019?

ROB

So we had about 780 people, probably about 80 million in revenue and 26 global offices, all organically grown. So, no investment, maybe a little bit of an overdraft from Barclays to help us on our way, but it was constantly pumping back in, making no profit, just about staying in a situation where the balance sheet can sustain the growth, and then, the whole opportunity came to us. We still weren't ready for sale, but the stakes were getting so high and, you know, any gap between payment terms of these large companies, I mean, it's really tricky to run an organisation of that scale without having the right backing and investment. So yeah, the Fimalac opportunity came to us. He's a French billionaire with real success and track record, and they came in and basically bought half of Jellyfish at that point. We put in some more entities that he had within his portfolio and created the new Jellyfish at that point, and we haven't looked back since!

GUY

So it was an unsolicited approach - you hadn't formally gone out looking for a trade investor or private equity?

ROB

No. I mean, in some ways, the market tells you, or the ecosystem tells you when you're ready, you know, and you're in the strongest position when you've got your head down, and you're building something worth buying, instead of looking out, you know... because there are these pivotal moments: we broke through two or three of the glass ceilings when you would normally be looking for investment, you know, it's that point when you need a finance team of five people, an HR team, you know, most businesses sell at exactly that point where the entrepreneur or the owner's doing most of the roles, and then they have to invest in this new layer, and it wipes out all your profits. So what you do is you look at the profit, you sell, and then it's somebody else's problem to do the investment to get to the next stage. We did all of that. So them coming to us from a negotiation standpoint, from a fit, choosing the right partners, et cetera, it just puts you in a really strong position.

GUY

Other than the financial firepower that they brought, they had some other assets that were complimentary, correct?

ROB

Correct.

GUY

And so then everything got wrapped into that?

ROB

Correct, and I think that's what they were looking for. They were looking for the wrapper, they were looking for a global company that has the reputation and a solution that can house them, because they'd bought these really great assets, but never really brought them together, and now we genuinely run one organisation, one P&L, the clients are our profit centres, our products, portfolios on one axis, clients on another, and we run a global organisation that's fully integrated. There are no separate entities with earnouts

and different agendas - every single person is just delivering a portfolio of solutions and products to a portfolio of global clients. That's it.

GUY

And so the trade off between keeping independence, being part of a larger conglomerate, how's that gone?

ROB

It's challenging because you've got to remind yourself that you're no longer on that journey where you're fully accountable and possibly your ambition and risk appetite is slightly different as an entrepreneur owner, as it is to an investor. So even me, now, (trust me, I haven't promoted myself to an investor yet) I have got a few opportunities that I look at and I suddenly realise that if you're not fully in control, I go back to that: *if you aren't the one with the very clear picture on the outcome and the unequivocal belief you're going to get there*, it's very scary. And I think it's scary to our investors, even though Marc Ladreit de Lacharrière took Fitch Ratings from a million to 8 billion, you know, he's a multi-billionaire, but he's 80 years old, he's a multi-billionaire and an incredible track record, but when you're not fully in control, I think you want these measures, and you want to make sure that your money is looked after in the best way.

GUY

No one drives it off the edge of a cliff..

ROB

Exactly. So that's probably the only thing that is a compromise. Other than that, it's fantastic to have a billionaire big brother that's helping you on your way! It's fantastic to have the ability to exploit opportunities when they present themselves, and probably, we're slightly off the throttle a little bit, but that's probably not a bad thing.

GUY

Yeah. Catching your breath.

GUY

Two and a half years later from their investment, what does the group look like now?

ROB

So we're approximately 2,300 people. We're going to be approaching a couple of hundred million in revenue, 40 global offices.

GUY

You've been going for 17 years. If you look back, what do you wish you'd known earlier?

ROB

You know what's weird about that question is that you're never in the situation to utilise it anyway, because what you're learning is based on the environment and the circumstances. The one thing that I've said, and I've said this historically, is that one thing I would always tell my former self is don't listen to criticism from people you wouldn't seek advice from.

GUY

That's very interesting.

ROB

Yeah. That is the one thing, because often, I've fallen into the trap of running the business to the negative minority anomalies. So you've got, for example, 2,150 people who are making the organisation thrive, but then the loudest ones are the 150 people that are disengaged, who are critical about what you're doing, and then you start changing things to accommodate 150 people when you've got 2,150 people who are actually the reason why you're successful and what you're doing.

It's not for everyone, we're doing things in a particular way, and you've got to have the passion and want to be on that journey. You need to be aligned. It's not a jail sentence, you know, when you join Jellyfish, like you're free to go, but don't stick around and be disruptive. Either add value and help us pivot in the right direction and give tangible evidence for what you're asking for, and help us, but certainly, don't stick around and then be a detractor. It would be the same with investors.

GUY

And what about your personal ambitions now? Where are they?

ROB

To make a difference to the way organisations can be run. My motivation is to use the foundation that we've got with Jellyfish to ensure that there's an enormous number of people that can be very proud and fulfilled on the business that they helped create and run, which was going to create opportunities for families all over the world and for individuals to unlock their potential, and to try and run an organisation that you could still be nice, you could be transparent, you can be honest, you can be compassionate and still be commercial, and try and demonstrate that there is still a balance that could be had.

GUY

That's a super-interesting way to articulate it. So is there a favourite book that you'd recommend? And anything that's really helped inform this way of thinking?

ROB

I think because of the people approach and the distributed accountability and the fact that I love the people that I work with, and I feel there's so much trust and camaraderie and it's all of us against the problem, that type of attitude, I think **The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable** by Patrick Lencioni is fantastic, and then possibly **Outliers: The Story of Success** by Malcolm Gladwell. It's often the "what" and the "how" that you could button down, but the "when"!! The ecosystem often takes care of itself, but the "when" is often underestimated. When you look at all those outliers and you look at the circumstances and just, it was their moment, things matched - they either had access to a computer that other people didn't, they were in the right school, they spoke to the right person - but it's often the "when", and I really learned that from *Outliers*... But to be honest, I'm terrible, I can't read, you know, I have real problems getting through a book. I get halfway through a page and my mind has drifted. Low attention span. It's debilitating! So I actually use Blinkist, you know, the app that consolidates books into 10 minutes or 15 minutes, so you get the key points. So I would say that's normally how I get my wisdom.

GUY

I'm certainly good at *buying* books!

And is there somebody that's the most standout, inspiring person to you?

ROB

Nelson Mandela, and after him, it's everybody I talk to and meet... but Nelson Mandela - from a man and a leader, and to not let the pendulum swing the complete opposite way,

to motivate and to lead a nation who have been so oppressed for such a period of time, to get them to do the right thing - his words of wisdom, his character, his leadership, he is always going to be a huge inspiration for me.

GUY

And your favourite aspects about being an entrepreneur?

ROB

Problem-solving. I go back to that “gamification”. It's like cause and effect, it's about looking at an opportunity or looking at a problem that needs solving or exploiting and finding, test, analyse, refine, and just cause and effect. It's just like gamification and that's the best thing about it.

GUY

And your advice to a budding entrepreneur?

ROB

Believe in the picture that you paint in your head. If you don't have a clear picture on the outcome that you're looking for, you're not going to be successful. So you can see it slightly conflicts with “goals”, but it's not about goals, but the outcome, what you're trying to do, if you do not have a clear picture and you cannot persuade a group of people to go on that journey and to paint that picture and to get everyone excited about the outcome, then don't do it. Don't go out on your own and try and do it if you haven't got that clear picture.

GUY

Rob, you've been an absolute pleasure to speak to you. Really love your energy - it's super infectious.

ROB

Thank you very much. I've very much enjoyed it.