

Avnish Mehta

Anastasia MacLean: Welcome to the Three Selves Podcast. I'm your host Anastasia MacLean. Join us as we chat with fellow Western alumni who've engaged in the often messy, but ultimately rewarding, undertaking of discovering their true self in their life's work.

Today's guest on the Three Selves podcast, Avnish Mehta, was given the following advice: "10 meetings a week. Every week. For life." That's the advice that propelled Avnish Mehta to plant the seeds, and give them the love and stewardship they required, to establish and nurture several thriving businesses. Avnish is a Western Alumni Award of Merit recipient and a Calgary Top 40 under 40 honoree. He shares the value of engaging others you trust to critically evaluate how you show up in your work and his deeply held belief that what you give and what you get are inextricably linked.

Anastasia MacLean: Avnish, it's a real treat to have you here with us today.

Avnish Mehta: Yeah, thanks for having me. I'm really looking forward to this.

Anastasia MacLean: So, let's get right into it. You were born and raised in Calgary, so what brought you all the way out east to Western?

Avnish Mehta: You know, Calgary is an amazing place to grow up in, but you need sort of perspective, right? It was a chance to, to see what else is out there and really experience Canada in a real way. I only applied to two universities and they're both out East. My mum was actually quite panicked and was like, you know, you should probably apply to the University of Calgary. I'm like, no. It was either I'm going here or we're on a bit of a different trajectory. But there is a connection to sort of one whole country and then also the opportunity to be somewhere that was just far enough out of people being able to drop in. They would have to book a plane ticket, they would have to, you know, sort of let you know that they were coming. And so that level of independence, wanting to be my own, sort of chart out on my own journey played an important part in that.

But obviously the school is amazing. And it was in the research of what was going on in, sort of the late 90s in terms of universities, there were some real standout schools, and there was some real programs that stood out within schools, and I felt like Western had them both. And so, I had a choice of where I wanted to go and had the grades to be able to make those, those decisions and, it became a real target of like, wanting to be there and experience both the whole campus, but also just sort of the reputation that the school had.

Anastasia MacLean: And when you and I spoke earlier, we realized that we're both library nerds. So, for me my mom got me reading when I was real little, and it was a daily thing, and we always went to the public library every week, and to this day, I can't go to sleep at night unless I've read. So, I'm curious about what instilled your love of libraries, and in particular your stewardship of the current Calgary Central Library that was completed in 2018.

Avnish Mehta: You know, it's funny, I think everybody has a library story and, for me it was, it was reading. So, the ability to read to myself, and sort of comprehend and explore was one

piece and, and sort of found that at a pretty young age. But I was a terrible reader when I had to read out loud. Very nervous, interchanging words, so the structure of how I read became difficult because I would blend sentences and so reading out loud was actually something I, I used to really shy away from and didn't enjoy engaging in because it was a very difficult exercise. And I had met some folks when I was young at the library that were able really, some librarians that, offered me some resources, but just sort of a hand in walking through structures on how to be able to read out loud better. And that ultimately changed the trajectory for me. That was a complete difference. So, part of that was just like skill building. Right off the bat that changed both the perception of myself, but my ability to read teleprompters, and speeches and, you know, be able to sort of effectively facilitate outward requires visibility of word. And that came from the library, that sort of that shift came from one interaction at the Fish Creek Library.

Anastasia MacLean: I think it's interesting that at such a young age, you were that disciplined and that motivated to recognize that you had an area that you needed some help with, that was a challenge for you, and then you went out and you sought a solution to it, and then you committed yourself to it.

Avnish Mehta: Well, I appreciate that. I think I was just so scared, right? What happens if I don't get this? It was probably the awkward teenage everything, but in addition to that, this is something that I'm not comfortable with, and I'm not confident in, and I'm going to be asked to do more and more of it. But the fact that the resources were there. I think that's the beauty of libraries is that you sort of come with something, you've got a question and the exploration and the access to information to be able to find a solution that is suited for you is infinite.

Anastasia MacLean: So, when we think about skill sets, you have a presentation and public speaking consulting practice, kind of cool the teenager who was afraid and had some trouble reading out loud, and you also co-own a beer business, and you founded a real estate development and construction firm that focuses on sustainable urban development, and you sit on all kinds of boards and committees, and you're active in community projects and organizations. So, what do you think are some of the common threads that run through those broadly based interests that speak to how you approach your life's work?

Avnish Mehta: You know, one is the interconnectivity of it all. If you sort of put it into the buckets that they are shaped in, or traditionally associated to, it seems very, you know, oh you're doing all of these things. But in fact, when you're doing one of them, you're impacting others sort of immediately. And so, there's this interconnectivity of the things that I get to do, especially on the volunteer side. That part for me is probably the most interesting in terms of what I get to engage in. But the connection to the things that you want to pursue, or what you find interesting, is going to sort of open up other opportunities to, to form.

So, some of the businesses that we created were based on, a community of individuals that were looking to do something. And so once you identify what that looks like, then you shape the right structure and the right, you know, sort of value set along with it. But we need to be able to explore what is it that we're looking for and then it's amazing how quickly it sort of emerges. And so, you know, implicating yourself in the things that you like. And it may not be about the, you know, necessarily just the activity but what are the structural supports, governance structures,

boards that support that activity so that others can partake. And then once you have that, you immediately sort of build a community around people, like-minded people, and then it sticks, and then it sticks. Everybody's got different skill sets, they've got different perspectives, and as long as the connection and the attitude of those organizations are ones of openness, you know we can, we can really do anything.


Anastasia MacLean: Do you think there are certain personality traits that you have, or certain experiences that you had, that made you more amenable or more ready to pursue all of these different adventures?

Avnish Mehta: That's a great question. I think I say yes to a lot of things. You know, just because I'm curious as to what they're about, or what my perspective would be to them, or why me, you know, like I'm not sure I fit in or, you can name it imposter syndrome. Like, should I really be here? You know, those pieces. But unless I say yes, I don't know how to evaluate that, right. And so, I think that the general openness to want to connect with folks and exchange information and understand where things are. How you can help without necessarily it being the structure of how they're asking you to help. I'll give you a great example.

There's a small nonprofit here in town, run by a young black leader, really interesting fellow, he's figuring it out, and now is developing an organization that is supporting younger, adolescent youth in entrepreneurship. But he asked me, he's like, hey, could you join my board? And I was like, no, I'm not the right person for your board at all. But what we can do is all of these things. So, let's do some leadership development, let's do some presentation training, let's do some other pieces where I know my skill set can have a direct impact on that person. He was looking for my skills at a board level, and I'm like, that doesn't make any sense for either of us. But here are the things that I would like to offer, can you use them? And it's amazing how people will be like, yes, of course we can use that, I hadn't even thought about. And then for me, it's true to who I am and what I can offer and if not valuable, then cool, then we're also okay with it. And Stand & Command is all about making that suggestion of like, well, what about this, right, and so that we can follow a best path forward, whatever that is.

Anastasia MacLean: And it's interesting that you, instead of just saying no, you said, well, here's where I see it can fit. So, I think that willingness to find ways that can support other people and ultimately, I would imagine that not only did it support and is it supporting him in his business, but it's good for you too.

Avnish Mehta: It really is. Because we had a 2-hour session together and where he went in those two hours, he was a different sort of person because we were able to highlight the areas in which they're like, not that complicated, we can do it like this. We can sort of lay out a plan where now he feels supported, I feel that my skills were shared and we could potentially have a joint sort of future going forward, whatever that is. But you're absolutely right, it felt great to be able to say, hey, I can point you forward because I've been there, or I know the dynamics or whatever sort of value you can offer.

Anastasia MacLean: Let me ask you what your earliest memory is around the following fill in the blank statement.  When I grow up, I want to be...

Avnish Mehta: It's actually pretty boring. I think it was like environmental engineer. 6 or 7, right, thinking about being an environmental engineer. But I think we had just done the whales unit and there was a lot of talk about, about saving the planet and I'm like, you know, yeah, environmental lawyer that's where it's at.

Anastasia MacLean: When you and I spoke earlier, you shared that your dad had suggested when you were done school, that you get a job with the government. Do you remember what you told me your reaction was to that suggestion?

Avnish Mehta: It wasn't great, that's for sure. What was most interesting about that was other people's desires, right? So, my father's desire for me, to find stability, structure, a pension, you know. Like the lens at which he was operating had its own value set attached to it. It's just not mine, right. For him, it was I've come to Canada, this was my, sort of, journey, now I'm looking for this for you. And my attitude is like, Dad, stability for me is the exact opposite of this. We'll get there, but they look completely different. I feel like that's part of, for sure, the immigrant story sort of perspective, right. What our parents hold when they first moved to Canada and how they've shaped us.

Anastasia MacLean: Yeah, I think you really understood something about yourself and maybe even what you hoped your career trajectory would be that caused you to have such a visceral reaction to his suggestion.

Avnish Mehta: I think so. For sure. And a very natural like, do you not know who I am? But, um, I think it was a moment of that exactly, sort of knowing and finding yourself. And that happened just sort of right after university, right. Like that was the suggestion. And so, you come off this incredible experience as well, that is expensive and, you know, gives you the opportunity to steward your own learning and confining that it just sort of didn't, didn't feel right. After leaving Western, **you're just inspired like what's next, right? so that's probably why the suggestion also felt just so poorly timed.**

Anastasia MacLean: And yet a lot of people end up pursuing career paths that are about pleasing someone else, or making someone else proud, or happy, or not knowing really what they want to do and thinking they have to figure it out right away, so they just go for what's right in front of them.

Avnish Mehta: For sure, yeah. Or thinking that it's got to be one way. The other part of the advice, and I'll share this with you because you're talking about my dad was, he was like, hey, you know what, start at the end and work to the beginning. So, what is your end result, and then be able to then create the steps backwards to, to say where you need a starting point. I use it within strategic planning all the time, sort of, you know, being able to say, what are we looking for in terms of the end and then how do we build it backwards. But for a career, it didn't really work because it's like what I'm doing now, I couldn't even imagine was an opportunity back then. And I think that's only getting faster and faster, right.

But it was really interesting to think, it's not even about the destination, I think it's about sort of finding what it is at the time that is meeting your requirements, like what is it and is it feeding all parts of you? Your curiosity, your ability to learn, your desire to want to find new things, being

able to get promoted, you know, being an engaged volunteer. Like are the conditions in such that they're, sort of, feeding those components for you. You need to really evaluate that, right, and see how unbalanced you are. But the evaluation of those criteria is difficult.

Anastasia MacLean: Right. And when you talked about not necessarily getting to a particular destination, to a place, that makes me think about your recognition that your life's work really is a journey. And I'm wondering if there was a particular moment or a particular event or episode when you realized that your life's work was going to be that journey.

Avnish Mehta: Let me tell you story I think touches this in a real way. So, our brewery is called the Village Brewery and it's really based on this village principle. On the stairs from our taproom, up into our space upstairs, it says "it takes a village to raise a beer, and then it takes a beer to raise a village", and that's sort of your, your movement and, and really part of the strong cultural fabric of how our brewery was created. It's also got a very interesting ownership structure that allows for us to be equal part owners and very engaged in the operation. So while it's, like, amazing to own a brewery and it's a tremendous amount of work, it's such an interesting relationship that I have to it because it's my village, and the people that I get to bring into it get to interact with other people's villages, and it sort of creates a larger village.

So, I got married in 2012, and my wife and I, we had a really beautiful celebration in Mexico with a small group of, you know, 165 of our family members. It was absolutely amazing. But when we returned, my uncle, who is from Kenya, he had a mission of planting trees all across the world. And when he was in Calgary, he was about at that 2.5 million tree mark. Like we're talking about massive impact through sub-Saharan Africa, mainly in Kenya and Uganda, but like real impact. And so he said, hey, let's plant a tree here in Calgary. I was like, absolutely. So, I call up Jim who is, really I would say, the heart and soul of our village in a number of ways and one of the original owners and said, hey we got to plant this tree. And Jim's like, okay, I'll meet you at the brewery tomorrow morning, we got to do this early, we're not pulling permits, we're not telling the owner, right. And so, we dug this little hole the next morning, came in, my uncle's very much the same way, break the rules, bend them, do what you need to do to make beautiful things happen. Had this ceremony, planted the tree and then we had to disperse because, like, we didn't want to raise any other suspicion. And as if that tree had been there forever, that's exactly how we treated it.

And so, every time I was at the brewery, I get to interact with this tree and connect with my uncle. And he passed the next year and so there's been this, you know, this spiritual relationship of every time I'm at the brewery, I get to go and hang out with this tree and then I come inside and we chat. And it's a sour cherry tree. And over the years, the yield of sour cherries have grown but it's never been enough for us to be able to harvest and put into one of our beers and do something really small.

This year we had sour cherries to, to harvest. And so, we harvested them and made a little beer and one of the team members from Village said, hey, I'll let you know when it's on tap. So, I got a text saying, hey, we're on tap, here it is, it's beautiful, everybody's going to love it. By the end of that day, he's like, we're on our second keg, right there's four kegs, this is moving really fast, come on down. I went with a friend of mine, to update her on our real estate investment project and I said, well, let's go and have our beer at Village, my uncle's beer is on there, she knew him

as well, we'll have our investment update there. So, we go there, have this beer that is really beautiful, like and wonderful both tasting beer and the cherry finish is just amazing. And we go in to order another one and she comes out to with one glass and was like, Avnish, this is the last glass. And there was just this moment where it's like, some things require 12 years sort of to show up. Right? And that's the beautiful part about this whole journey, is that when you seed it and let it happen, the things that happen throughout, to remind you why you're doing it in the first place, was just sort of this magical moment that couldn't have been written any better than it showed up to be. And so, I think it's just like, just go out plant those seeds, and see where they come from, and check in on them, and send them love, and make sure that they're, sort of, given the right stewardship that they require. But the yield sometimes comes at a time where you need it the most, and it's your sort of deepest connection to that whole piece. That village is all there and now I have this deeply personal moment in my own village. It was it was like the safest thing that could have happened. It was it was so beautiful.

Anastasia MacLean: That is a beautiful story and it's a, it's a great way to remind people about how you're not always going to know where something is going to end up at, and have the courage and faith to invest in it and then just let it, let it go, let it do its thing. And you have enough else going on in your life that you have other things that engage you and keep you busy, and, and then when that moment, like your moment with the last glass of that beer happened, it'll be profound.

Avnish Mehta: And without expectation. It was like, if this tree can yield enough, then let's make a beer out of it, perfect. And we're patient, and we didn't push it, you know like there's so many, sort of, relationships. It required rooting, it needed its own time to settle in. So, when you think about, you know, young leaders, folks that, you know, could potentially use your attention or, have got something to offer - I'm talking about volunteering - all the stages of, you know, where we are as alumni, we're all in totally, completely different stages, you know. But the offering of the value that you have, bringing that out and sharing it out there without the purpose of expectation, allows for beautiful things to happen. And that is far more valuable than keeping that value for yourself.

With my team, you know, we say value first, discount later. So, determine what your value is, transact at the highest value what you're going to be able to bring, and then determine what level of discount you would like to offer that person because they are who they are.

Anastasia MacLean: So, you mentioned Kenya, and I know that your mother is from Kenya, and you visited there, and you've said previously that when you were there, you really felt like you were at home. Is there something about the feeling of being at home in another place that, you think can help us get in touch with what it is we feel we were meant to do with our lives and in terms of our own work.

Avnish Mehta: What a beautiful question. You know, I think safety creates a lot of conditions for that work to happen. And for some people, home is not safe. But I think the conditions that we're sort of talking about here are finding a place where, you belong, that you, sort of, connect with. It's part of the reason I left Calgary is this, you know, there's a deep connection to nature, to feeling rooted here, to having a different part of who I am connected to the, you know, the city that I'm in now. But Kenya as a place has really profound memories for me growing up. The

relationship to wilderness and, like, seeing animals that I've only seen on TV, like the idea of the expanse of being able to be a part of that is one piece. But the feeling of sort of being on land that has been lived on, you know, for tens and tens and tens of thousands of years. But there's really feelings of insignificance there that I really appreciated and that's probably why I felt home, is because I understood, sort of, what people expected of me and when that happens, you can just be yourself.

Anastasia MacLean: Yeah, I think it's really important that where we are, when we're thinking about a change we want to make, or something different that we want to do, where physically we are is super vital.

Avnish Mehta: Absolutely. The connection to that physical space, understanding that how it's changing and how it impacts you, you know, there's so much nuance in that. But I think being able to go to different places to find that inspiration and find how physical spaces change your vibrational energy ultimately, right, and how you, sort of, connect with things. I love to hear why people have moved to Calgary and it's amazing that people will show up here and just like, be wildly successful because they've got the right type of style for Calgary.

And Calgary is a very non-judgmental place so, it's kind of quirky and everybody is able to make it work in a different way here, because nobody is, sort of, holding anybody else to account. So, it's a really fascinating space that people can quickly feel at home here because they're like, oh, I can be myself as well, because that's the conditions that this city had created. And so it, it's got that feeling and you see it, you see sort of people be successful because they can just come to Calgary and be themselves.

Anastasia MacLean: So, if you think about your career to date, has pursuing your true self in the sense of going after the kinds of work and opportunities that you find most fulfilling and on purpose for you, has that cost you anything?

Avnish Mehta: I think it's been more costly when I've pursued the things that are not in alignment. And I think those are the parts where, you know, when you get into it, you're like, oh, no, this is bad, I knew it, I had a feeling, and then those are the pieces in which now you've got to grind through the work. Without that emotional connection I think it becomes really difficult to be able to actually work. And so, I think that that would be more of the cost is those moments where, oh, I can make this work or, you know, cash is tight, let's just take what we've got, right? Like that's all part of the reality. But now we're at a stage where we're really quite choosy, we get to sort of focus on the people that we want to work with, we're getting brought into a lot of great conversations. So yeah, it changes the perspective. But pursuing what you believe and the value set that you hold and connecting it to opportunity will allow for, sort of, immediate results, even if it's not financially compensated.

Anastasia MacLean: Sometimes we can feel a lot of pressure to do something that, we don't know how to articulate that it's not really right for us, and so, because we can't articulate it, we just say yes and then we have the experience you had. I know that for me, I was in a situation with a very, very dear friend who was starting a business and put me into a mock situation where he was selling me something with someone who was helping to train him. And I said, sure, I'm happy to do that, but this is your business, it's not mine. And, he said, no, no, I

understand. And then what actually happened, the trainer was trying to get me involved in the business and trying to, you know, recruit me. And fortunately, I was able to say, I really do want him to succeed, and I'll do everything I can to support him, but this is not on purpose for me. And that shut the trainer down, they didn't know what to say to that. You know, it's those simple few words.

Avnish Mehta: And for you, you're also like, there's no more negotiating, right? Like you've also sort of set up that barrier to be like, hey, I've done the analysis, I'm saying this is not in alignment with me, all the best. Now we can go our separate ways without anybody having to hold, you know, any malcontent or any misinformation. It's just like, hey, this is not on purpose for me. And that purpose changes. That's the other part, right? Like, it's only at a point in time. And so, it goes back to some of those other pieces that were talking about it's like, say no to the things that aren't the right fit, but how else can you add value or be supportive or, shape somebody's experience.

I do a lot of board work, so you know whether it's nonprofit boards, both as a volunteer and as a, as a facilitator. And, you know, oftentimes we think things have to be a certain way. We have to have a monthly meeting and it's got to be two hours you know, and just these open discussions around like what is actually representative of the needs of the organization when we're talking about volunteering for these positions. Like, what do they want to get out of it, how do we ensure that the administrative burden is not only to the organization, which often it is.

You know are we being effective with the way that we operate because we've always met the same Tuesday of every week and that's the way we've always done it. And it's amazing how insightful people are as it relates to different systems that could make things better and reduce sort of the burden for, for everyone. But we're just not having those conversations yet.

Anastasia MacLean: I've heard that with your own employees and the businesses that you run, that you've helped some of them develop and then go off and run their own business ventures. How is that approach to employee engagement good for your business?

Avnish Mehta: Um, there's some really, really talented people that are doing amazing things but, who am I to hold these people back, right? The idea of identifying good talent that could support our organization at a time and also if I can inspire, and I'm not saying me, but the situation can inspire them to find something that they're going to do, they are all doing things that are more wildly successful than they would have seen contained in our organization, even with the work of our clients. So, it's like, no, these structures are not to hold you back. And, the beautiful part is that communication was so open that we knew what was coming. We can plan for this is, you know, it's not like a deficit sort of philosophy, it's an absolute abundant space.

At the brewery specifically, there's a card table that used to get passed around, and when a new brewery was getting fired up, we'd pass this card table almost ceremoniously. But it's actually a functional card table where we were drafting up recipes and having discussions and each of the breweries, we do a collaboration on the beer with them so that they can get some seed funding or some equipment or whatever that might look like. But they all signed the bottom of the table. And so there's this table up in Village right now, because we're about to pass it on again, that has 41 different breweries that have sort of signed it in different places. So

not only capacity in our own space, but in our industry of like, you know, making some of the best beer in the world to come out of Alberta, we're thinking of those spaces where it's like the village is broader than what we sell, the village is, sort of all the people that are supporting our industry as well.

Anastasia MacLean: You've talked a lot about connection and community connection, and I think that is really in your blood. When we chatted earlier and I thanked you for agreeing to come on the podcast, and I asked you if there was some way we could support you, you immediately said, well, if anyone moves out to Calgary, have them get in touch with me so they at least have one connection. And I said, yes, that's very gracious, but that's another way you're supporting us. And because that was so genuine and automatic from you, I'm wondering, do you consciously cultivate that spirit of connection with others? Was there something that happened at some point in your life that made you really cognizant of the value of that? How did it become such an integral part of who you are?

Avnish Mehta: I think my parents did a really great job of not imposing a framework on us. I also grew up in, like, a really, I think, an interesting time in Canada where bilingualism was taking off, right? So early 80s, we were in French school, we're sort of fully immersive up until high school. It's, sort of a different experience when a community is building itself and it's being influenced by outside factors. And whether it may not have been like super multicultural in certain places, it became a place where everybody was trying to figure it out at the same time. And so, you could just sort of be open and when you were open, you could collide with a bunch of different folks and let it sort of be there without it needing to be more complicated. And so, I think that's been a big part of it is just the conditions that we grew up in were really just like, be open. And I think about how sort of mixed our friends groups were or in different celebrations, there's always a mixture of folks trying to figure it out together. And I think that's just it. It's like, just bring people in and, and see where they're at and allow for at least the opportunity for people to engage.

Anastasia MacLean: And speaking of opportunities to engage, and ways to make that happen, tell us about your commitment to ten meetings per week. How that started and how it can be applied for those of us who are sort of at a crossroads in our work lives.

Avnish Mehta: That's all a friend of mine, Chuck Dean. He was a mentor when I was building my first business and that was really the instructions. Ten meetings a week, this is what it's going to take for you to be successful. And I was like, oh, I got this. Ten meetings a week for sure. By like week five, you're like, oh my God, I don't know anybody, like that's it, now what? Uh, and he's like, yeah, exactly, now what. And so, it just really became a rhythm. And what was amazing was one, the number of folks that you get that you get to connect and being also very comfortable with rejection because it wasn't necessarily a pitch, but you go into these meetings and think about this idea of hey, like what's possible, right? Like, let's meet and think about it because you're, you're really want to obviously get your services out there. But more and more and more it became about connecting with people objectively, understanding where people are at and then figuring out what their systems were like, what was it about them, what were some of the challenges they were facing.

And so, it flipped for me, and it became so much more interesting because then you're just hanging out with people, having interviews on like what's been going on or what's something that's in your way right now or, what's exciting for you, right? And so those ten meetings now became not just about business, it became about everything. And it's such a wonderful way of actually getting yourself out there, getting a better idea of what you think about situations, theming the pieces that you're hearing from different places and different people, different industries. And so, yeah, it was actually key to, to that. And both things that Chuck said, he said: ten meetings a week and it's going to take you three years to build this business were both spot on. And in my third year, that's really when this thing sort of took off. But those two things were sort of key to any success.

Anastasia MacLean: And are there other concrete steps that people can take to get from where they are to where they want to be?

Avnish Mehta: Uhh, really implicate yourself. What is the want to be, and what does that look like, how do I unlock what that means? You probably know it, you just haven't been able to put it into a structure or find the right words for it. But once you know that, then ultimately like it's easy to apply with a clear value set because then you can quickly say no. You know, now we don't hold on to one thing anymore, we're just sort of applying to multiple pieces. And then the conditions sort of create the opportunity. And I think that that's really it is just like, hey, looking at yourself, what do you have to give? What would you like to get? And how do you tie those two pieces together? That is really, I think, the simplest formula. But if you're looking to get which many of us are, hey, I need to get a new job, and there's a functional piece here that is absolutely, very important, then what do you give is essential because you need to understand what are your skill sets, what are your offering, you know, what are you bringing to the table, how are you showing up, what are they going to expect from you, all of those things are exactly the same in terms of what are you going to give and that will actually support the what are you going to get.

Anastasia MacLean: Is there a risk that you've taken somewhere along the way in your career that has had a significant payoff?

Avnish Mehta: I think starting my first business did. It wasn't a success, you know, in many ways but I think that was probably it. We started that in 2002, and like the payoff is, is now only because it, it set into motion this idea of entrepreneurial sort of venture, connections with banks, relationships with funders, you know, understanding how to use, grant money. Like, pieces of it were all there for me to continue to explore and how to apply those relationships, those concepts, into other things. And so, yeah, the payoff is absolutely here now because I have clarity on how to set up business structures and what they should look like and what are essential components for success and, you know, etc. But at the time, I thought I knew so much, and it was a colossal failure.

Anastasia MacLean: In your consulting practice, you help people to really critically evaluate and analyze how they show up in their work. How can understanding how we show up in our work help us to make the decisions, and maybe the changes that we need to make to have the career that we want rather than the career we happen to have.

Avnish Mehta: You know, consider this right, 55% of how we communicate feelings and attitudes is through body language. The components of that is actually so body language, tone and words. And body language and tone, between the two of them, are 93%, but 55% is just your body. So, the idea of like, how are you showing up, is it in line with how you believe you're showing up? And that physical nature is one component and then the quality of the evaluation of your thinking and delivery is sort of the next piece, that's sort of the finishing on top. But yeah, the concept of like how do you show up needs to be evaluated. But the difficulty with that concept is that it can really only be evaluated externally, unless you're sort of filming yourself or constantly looking at your posture and body language, which, you know, none of us are, but it requires an external evaluation.

You have to develop the criteria for that evaluation to happen in order for it to be effective, otherwise everybody's going to be like, oh, you did a great job, right, because they don't want to be the ones presenting. So, nobody really gives you objective feedback around what it is. So, find people that you trust that you can sort of seed them with this task to say, hey, this is how I'm intending to show up, do I show up as engaged, ready to go, prepared, enthusiastic? Like, you know, here are the criteria in terms of both my tone and my body language and then do they actually line up. And it's amazing because you'll bring those people with you, now they are invested in your success. So, I've asked clients to do that for me, I've asked bosses to do that for me. And so, it's like, hey, this is how I'm intending to show up, let me know whether or not it's actually there and then the real feedback happens, and you can have a totally different connection.

So, just prior to the pandemic, my team and I were sort of talking about this, and one of the members on my team had talked about finding me sort of intimidating when they first connected with me. She's like, I saw you facilitate this other session, I found it somewhat intimidating. And so, I took that to heart, sort of thinking about what does that mean? And they came up with a really brilliant idea, which was like, let's stop shaking hands. So, the group started really workshopping this concept. If we're running a facilitation session, can we assert ourselves just in our physical presence without having to have a handshake. And she's like, you know, ultimately Av, let's see how people respond to you differently because if people find you intimidating just in the way that you are, you wouldn't know any different, let's see if we remove this out of the equation if anything happens. And so, we started testing it. And what was really interesting was the number of folks that didn't reach out to shake my hand. And so, if they did, I'd meet them, no problem, right you can meet them there. But with me holding back, the number of people that did not reach out their hand was almost close to like 42-43%. So, half of those individuals are now moving into engaging in physical contact because I'm the one initiating it but that may not be what they necessarily require.

And so, all of a sudden we just said, okay, cool, let's stop it. We don't need to assert that presence as a facilitator to create sort of safe conditions. If I can remove that out, now I'm able to operate even more effectively, true to my values, but not imposing on the values of somebody else. And I was like, what a fun way of being able to do this. And now it's great because then we moved into pandemic and they're like, don't touch anybody here. It's like we were already prepared for that. But it was interesting to think about, for me, what was I imposing, taking that facilitator role, showing up, shaking hands. You know, what I thought may

be enthusiastic could have been sort of off-putting for others because they're like, well, I don't know you, we haven't even established connection yet and you're sort of moving in to let me know that you're the one running the show. And I'm like, huh, totally fair. And so that level of awareness now is like, great, I can bring that to multiple situations and I'm seeing that the benefits from, you know, the people that I'm working with or people that I'm operating with because I'm just trying to be more aware of what they are. By not thinking hey what do you need, I'm just sort of slowing down and waiting for them to show me cues.

Anastasia MacLean: And another thing that I think is great about that is, that's something people can do, have the courage to reach out to people that they trust and know, to say this is how I want to show up am I actually showing up that way and get that honest feedback. And that's something they can do right now without having to make a big change in their lives. They can stay where they are, but take these kinds of steps, which I'm not going to call it a baby step because that's a big deal, to be saying, I think I show up this way and I want to, and someone says, actually you're really not. So, you're really putting yourself on the line, but you can do that where you are and that will likewise inform what you do next and where you go from there. As opposed to just trying to make a wholesale change, you're more purposeful and conscious about how you're going to proceed.

Avnish Mehta: Yeah and I think you've also got a level of confidence in yourself now because, you know, sort of what it looks like. You know sort of what the offering is. And so that's exactly it, it's like if I'm showing up in a way where my resume doesn't highlight the person that I am then I've got a tool, which is the resume, that's not operating as well as it should be. Right. Like, I need somebody to give me that perspective. I might be, sort of, operating in a way where I think that I am doing something that I'm not, right. I haven't created those conditions yet. So, I think these are really important pieces of saying, this is how I think I show up, and the more that I show up this way, the more authentic and true to who I am, my communication style is going to be more effective. Am I showing up, well-researched, well-read, thoughtful, and engaged and curious. Are those the ways that you're showing up? Now those can be evaluated.

Anastasia MacLean: And even for people who are very satisfied with their life's work and where they're at and where they're going, it's the kind of exercise that works for everybody, and that can only benefit everyone.

Avnish Mehta: I suspect this is exactly what you should be doing, is reevaluating it, right? You have achieved this, perfect. What are now some of the finishing changes that you want to make? And that's where you get to sort of be true to who you are and you know, those real moments of like, am I being truthful in "I think I'm this" you know, like, is that what I want to be or what I'm aspiring to be, or am I actually that?

Anastasia MacLean: Avnish, thank you so much for joining us today.

Avnish Mehta: Thank you. Really appreciate it.

Anastasia MacLean: It's been great.