




CLOUD REALITIES

CR035

Prepare for accelerated change
with Erwin Visser, Microsoft



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[00:00:00] Never ceases to amuse me when you keep bringing up the Long Island iced tea as your cocktail of choice. It is literally the strongest cocktail you can get on any menu, isn't it?

Welcome to Cloud Realities, a conversation show exploring the practical and exciting alternate realities that can be unleashed through cloud driven transformation. I'm David Chapman. I'm Sjoukje Zaal, and I'm Rob Kernahan. And we are back with the first episode of Season 3.

Summer seemed to whiz by in a blur of grey skies here in the UK, but I speak... Somewhere around mid September and it's absolutely overwhelmingly hot. So having sat all summer Just absolutely mental as this all summer It's been like drizzly and borderline [00:01:00] cold and it was when I was in a tent in Cornwall for two weeks Where was this hot weather then?

Rob Kernahan, that's the question I've got. It wasn't following you, that was for sure. Over the summer period, Sjoukje, who missed on some of the live shows that we did as specials over the summer, has been moving house. So Schalk, we've missed you. Welcome back. Thank you, thank you. Tell us a little bit about the house move then.

It was quite a project, yeah. It was only four kilometers away, but it was quite a project. Yeah, yeah, yeah. It doesn't matter how you move house, how far. It's like an incredible thing. If you've lived in a house for more than about five years, the amount of crap you accumulate and then you find random stuff on the way.

It's just horrible. Yeah, it is. It is really horrible. Yeah, I got surprised on each level of the, uh, of the house. What was your favorite thing that you found, like, buried at the back of somewhere that you even forgot you'd had? And you're like, Oh, I remember having, I was excited about this at [00:02:00] one point. Oh, that's a very good question.

There were not very much exciting things. I did find an old crib somewhere. In the corner of the attic. And we actually moved that as well, because it has some emotional, uh, You couldn't get, you couldn't let go of it. Just take everything with, even though, you know, you don't need it or you'd buy a new one or whatever you stay.

Well, just in case. Yeah. It's the just in case in a box. It'll be fine. I'll just take this out of the corner of the attic that we haven't looked at for 20 years and I'll go and put it in another corner of a new corner. And Rob, what was your highlights of the summer? Uh, well, we were But, uh, we went, uh, took the family karting into theme parks and things like that.

Oh, you said that was the thing you were looking at? What was the big ride that you enjoyed most? Uh, so, uh, Smiler, Alton Tower, 16 loops in short succession. The most loopy roller coaster in the world, uh, still officially. And you come off it and you're a bit wibbly wobbly. Is it though, is it smooth? So I like the ones that are doing all of that, but [00:03:00] they're smooth, but the ones that are doing that, maybe they're a bit older and they just throw you around the whole place.

It's pretty smooth, but it's 16 loops in a, in like just a couple of minutes and there's two stages, so it's unrelenting, shall we say. You know you've been on it when you get off, there's no doubt of what you've just been through. And then we went up. So, um, up to see the fjords and a massive storm ripped through Norway at the same time.

So that was a bit bumpy on the way. Yeah, that's it. You don't want to be on a boat in a situation like that. I, uh, I actually went up to, uh, apparently one of the most beautiful places in the world, uh, with the best view. in Norway and all I saw was cloud. Uh, I've seen a picture of you standing in front of that view.

It looks like you could be standing, you know, at the bus stop just down the road from my



house. You wouldn't know I could have been at a bus stop. But anyway, uh, them's the breaks, but, uh, it was relaxing and restful. Well, welcome back, everybody. We are kicking off season three. So we have got a lot of good stuff to come between now and Christmas, but let's get going with [00:04:00] something a little bit new.

So Rob and I talk regularly and there's generally something that's confusing him about the world. He is that type of chap. And sometimes you might even have a point. So what we thought we'd do each week is just have a look at what's confusing Rob. So Rob, what's confusing you this week? This week, David, I'm mainly confused by terms and conditions and why there isn't more outrage in the world about what's going on.

So you've got video platform providers, you've got browsers, you've got social media platforms, and they're releasing terms and conditions that are quite frankly, a massive encroachment on personal data. So it's not the What's in the terms and conditions. I've read them and now I am baffled by them. It's more the, all the stuff that's getting snuck into them that actually is very compromising from a, from a data security point of view, but we just let it go.

Yeah. And I just, people just clicking accept. In fact, browsers are updating themselves and resetting the terms and conditions switches that you switch off, not share your data and [00:05:00] stuff. It's being reported on. The tech press is talking about it, and I can't believe there isn't more outrage in society.

People are just click accept and the bit I don't get is why? Why? It's like we've gone over a hump and nobody cares about the personal data anymore. Back in the day, in the very early days of the internet, people would be outraged by this. There'd be so much. I'm not doing that. And now it's just like, yeah, accept, accept, accept.

People have got bored of the scrolling, just overwhelmed by it. I mean a lot. I think a lot of the downside of. Things like the regulation that came in the, in the, in the EU that meant that you had to accept all cookie use and such like for every single website you pretty much go to. With fatigue. Yeah, it means you, you, you're clicking accept all like 20 times a day, aren't you?

Yeah, you don't even have the time to read all those terms and conditions, right? No, right. They're using it for AI algorithms and all sorts of stuff and it's been quite scary so I think going back to the social reset I think there'll be an event around terms and conditions that'll be just the bridge too far for many but [00:06:00] um, still can't believe we've allowed it to go this far.

Well let's keep track on that Rob and we'll hear next week what's confusing you then. So this week on the show, though, we're going to be talking about change management, not just good program management, but how do you lead change when what you have in front of you is exceptionally daunting? And the reason we want to look at this at the opening show is we think that we've gone through a period of.

You know, ever increasing change and ever accelerating change. And when you look ahead from where we are today, and we talked about this a lot last season, we have got, obviously AI is now the big conversation of the moment. You have other technologies like quantum coming along very shortly, and it's going to lead to a series of accelerated transformations on the back of.

Already complex transformations like cloud transformation and digital transformation and many other different types of transformation. So how on earth do you hold yourself together when you're dealing with change that daunting on a week by week [00:07:00] basis.



And I'm delighted to say that joining us this week to talk about that is Erwin Visser, general manager for cloud service provider business in Microsoft Americas, but also someone who's been on a very special adventure recently.

And that adventure might frame for us a little bit. This conversation. So Erwin, thank you so much for joining us. Do you want to just introduce yourself and say hello? Yes. Thank you. Uh, great to have me on this, uh, on this podcast. Uh, as you mentioned, my name is, uh, Erwin Visser and I, uh, I work for Microsoft in Americas and I lead the.

Cloud service provider business for, uh, for the America's region. In my accent, you can hear that I'm not originally American. I'm, uh, I'm from Amsterdam, but, uh, moved 15 years ago to the, the worldwide Microsoft organization. And what was supposed to be a two year, three year experience. Turned out to be a 15 year thing at this moment.

So Erwin, paint a picture for us. So you are approaching the mountain for the first time [00:08:00] and you've walked up to base camp. Just paint for us what that looks like and what was going through your mind as you were approaching such a big challenge. Yeah, Dave, that's a, that's a really good question. And I, it is.

When you, when you see Mount Everest for the first time, you, you feel excited. Cause it's, it's the, it's the first time that you really see the mountain at that size and something you have been visualizing and dreaming of for, uh, for weeks and months and maybe years. But second is that, uh, you also have this feeling of being overwhelmed.

Uh, the, the summit of Everest is like, it's speaking above any other mountain around it. And, and when I saw it for the first time, you could see the jet stream just like hitting that summit. And it's, it's so you, you, you kind of like feel also like, how do I ever get there? And how do [00:09:00] humans ever get there?

And it's the, it's this overwhelming feeling of understanding the challenge that you signed up against. Let's take how you actually then pushed into it in chunks. So clearly the first chunk was to actually get to base camp and get yourself established. I'm sure in, in advance you spent a lot of time planning and thinking about it, but it must've felt different in the You know, in the moment when you're actually there.

So what was that first night at base camp like sorting through your thoughts, the emotional reaction you're having to the, to the new big challenge? What was that first night like? The first night was still, I think a lot of like positive anticipation about, uh, about everything that is coming and, and to, to break down.

A Mount Everest expedition. I think about it in the, in, in three different chapters or parts. And so the first part is the [00:10:00] hike up to base camp. And so you first of all, fly to Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. And then two days later, you, you fly into Lukla, which is the start of the Khumbu Valley. And from the, from Lukla, it's approximately 10, 12 days dependent on your pace up to, uh, up to base camp.

That alone is mad. Like, uh, like a 12 day hike on, in any other circumstances is a fairly substantial undertaking. It's all right, isn't it? Yeah. Yeah. It's, Hey, and you have trained a lot, had to get there. So you, you're Uh, I was not too concerned about my, uh, my, my physical, uh, fitness getting, getting up to base camp.

Although people do get sick and sometimes people need to be helicoptered out. I felt really, really good up to, uh, to base camp and it felt a little bit like a vacation and you, you walk up from a teahouse to teahouse, uh, you don't sleep in tents yet, which, and you, you have still have like a normal restroom.



[00:11:00] One, uh, one out of three tea houses even had a shower. So, uh, you, you feel like you're doing a bit of an, uh, a vacation trip, like an a trek up to base camp and you enjoy the environment and, uh, and the culture when you hit base camp. That's the first time I really felt the altitudes because base camp is, uh, uh, at 17,000 feet or five and half thousand meters, and.

If you look around the world, there is no location on the planet where people live at that altitude. And there is a really good reason for it because you have 50 percent of the oxygen. So you, you don't, you, you don't feel really great mentally and physically when you had in base camp and In Basecamp, you start with the, um, with getting yourself really acclimatized for the, for the Everest Summit.

And that's an, uh, four week process, approximately, where you do, uh, acclimatization hikes. And, [00:12:00] uh, you also do two rotations. In total, there are three rotations, or at least our team did three rotations. And so your first rotation is to Camp 2, the second rotation is to Camp 3, and then that's, and then you, you should be acclimatized and totally prepared for the final summit rotation up to Camp 4, ideally the summit, and then going back to, uh, back to base camp.

That's how I kind of think about the three parts. And the first part was at the, the track, yeah, beautiful environment and a lot of anticipation of what is coming. Right. And in terms of what's coming then, when you're actually looking at the challenge ahead of you and preparing for it in the way you've described, tell us a little bit about your team.

What team did you have around you at the beginning of the journey? What kind of conversation were you having with the team? How aligned were you on the journey? We [00:13:00] started with, uh, eight climbers and, uh, later a few others, uh, came in and, uh, and some people had a different, uh, schedule, but, uh, yeah, you get pretty close to the eight climbers because you spent a lot of time together, uh, as well at night in the tea houses, uh, and dinners, as well as, uh, in the track.

Uh, so you, you, you get to really know each other very well. One of the interesting aspects of climbing in general, uh, but especially Everest is that people lose their, their filters and people can really do the core of their character. There's, uh, if you, if you're exhausted, tired, thirsty, and you're cold, there's not a lot of.

Things that you can filter out of your personality, you become pretty pure. And, and so that, that's, uh, so you really get to know people very well. You also have a naturally aligning North star on mission, don't you? You know, it's [00:14:00] very, very clear what you guys want to achieve together. Yeah, you're, you're very focused.

And I, so two of the climbers that we started with had done Everest before. And they both didn't make it at the end. And so they want to try it for the second time. One tried it for the third time. Um, and so you, you really want to start understanding like what their experience was, but you also want to learn from them in like, what, what make them not succeed.

So, because you, you want to not fall in the same trap, ideally. And that must be really important and almost calming in a way, if you meet somebody who's done it before and they tell you about how they achieved it, I suppose you can check and balance against your preparation and everything. I mean, there's so many factors in such a, an undertaking, but, but was that calming to meet?

People who've done it before, who were going with you again, did that have any, or was it still didn't really dent the nerves of what you're about to undertake? Yeah, I think, I think



[00:15:00] it's, it's, you could say it's calming. I do think when you start an adventure like Everest, you have to build the self trust that you don't, that you, and your positive thinking that you don't get like, uh, influenced by any external factors easily.

Cause you, you go through like very sketchy terrain. Uh, there are a lot of moments where there's, you go to an high risk environment, like the, and like business can be in high risk environment, but the worst thing that can happen is you make a mistake and you could be fired. And in Everest, a mistake would be your death.

And so you, you have to really build some kind of like wall. Uh, around your and positive thinking that you don't get influenced easily by other people. You want to, you want to, you want to understand their learnings so you can adjust your strategy or approach. But you, yeah, you, you have to, you have to have [00:16:00] like an, a high level of self trust to, to start something like this.

So you've set off then on the journey, you're now heading up the mountain, so your base camp, and then you're at camp one, camp two, clearly things. going well. So give us a give us a sense of what those initial journeys like. And where I want to get to really here is what happens when pressure starts to exert itself.

Clearly, you're doing this from a point of view of wanting to enjoy the journey. But actually, you know, you need to submit, you know, you've only got a certain amount of time once you're on the mountain. So you've got a time, you've got a time pressure that's acting on you almost straight away, like right from the outset.

So tell us a little bit about the journey, but also tell us about how you're managing against the time pressure. Yeah, there's so much to share on this point. It was interesting for me, especially in retrospect that I was, I was positive and, uh, and things and you do a few days of training in, uh, in base camp [00:17:00] and I felt really good about it.

But then the first time we went through the, uh, had the famous, uh, Kumbu icefall and to get from base camp to camp one, you have to cross the Kumbu icefall and it's, you have probably seen pictures, but that is where I had the. The Kumba Icefall is, is a, is a river of ice. It's a, it moves around three feet a day.

Uh, there are a special group of Sherpas that, uh, create a route through it, which is probably one of the most dangerous jobs in the world. And so they call them the, the, the icefall doctors. So they create like a route for climbers through the icefall. And they update that on a, on a regular basis because the ice is moving.

It's the Kumbh Aisul is probably one of the most risky parts of climbing Everest. And I had, I had some kind of feeling that I was kind of excited to go through it, but that was a complete wrong assessment because it was hard. It was, uh, the first time I think it took [00:18:00] me 12 to 14 hours. I forget the exact time.

And I was really, when I arrived in camp one, I was totally exhausted. And that was like an, uh, for me was, was like an, uh, a wake up moment that's, Hey, this is going to be really, really hard. And in that pressure situation, what are you doing to self manage? So you, there's a couple of dynamics going on. I suspect the first is how is the team coping in a pressure situation that is frankly, slightly dicier than you expected it to be.

And then how are you self managing in that situation to, I dunno, I guess stay positive and stay focused on the. on the summiting element of it, but what's going on in there? Yeah, I think that so on that first time it wasn't grind and I made mistakes because it's I realized that I had to manage my own hydration better I had to manage my own food situation better.



I was, I think one of the slowest in that day. [00:19:00] Uh, and, and so there, you can, you can imagine that you're in a situation with 10 other climbers. And so, and you know, there's no competition to be the first in camp one, but you're still measuring yourself against all the climbers. And so, uh, seeing myself struggle that day being made, well, maybe one of the slowest, um, Really was like a reset moment for me during, during the day.

I, one of the things I learned through climbing is that you, you really have to set short goals for yourself. And, uh, and it's not just for the whole expedition, but it's even on an, on a one day thing, like going through the Kumba Icefall. Yeah. You cannot, if you just realize where you have to go to that day.

It, it is overwhelming. It feels like it's, it's far. And so what you have to do is think about like, I'm going to take a, I'm going to take a quick rest and a sip of drink in 45 minutes from now. And I'm just going to go keep going to, uh, [00:20:00] in the next 45 minutes. And you don't try to think too much about what's going to happen after that 45 minutes and that sip of drink and that quick rest, you really focus on getting to that rest point.

And then you, you get through your rest point and you, you create like another quick goal in your mind that is more reachable, like maybe an hour away or an hour and a half away. Could be like a hill could be a point in the, in the, in the distance, or maybe it's against a time slot, but you want to set for yourself these smaller goals because these smaller goals give you a hand.

It gives you like a shot of dopamine. So you feel really good about yourself when you hit that, uh, that destination and it gets your mind out of what you have to do that whole day. And so is that how you are managing your mental resilience throughout all of this, which is you think about it very explicitly, you create a framework for yourself and even, even through the more difficult and testing periods, you're constantly [00:21:00] checking yourself against various different things.

So rather than. I'm laboriously crawling through this ice field with a vertical chasm of ice on either side of me and trying to look right to the top of the mountain and think, God, that looks like a long way. Yeah. And clearly there's a lot of like, uh, connection points here with, uh, with real life or not climbing life, uh, is that, uh, in a lot of situations you can feel overwhelmed as a person.

And, and breaking down this, this big goal in smaller chunks that just show progress and celebrate progress is a real good process to get through it. And how did you find your emotions changing on the way? Did they cycle quickly on the path about this exertion, small goals moving on, or were they large?

You know, large changes in emotions that took days to, to cycle. What, what, what was, you know, you're going through this really hard pace, the realizations kicking in, you know, what was it like from, um, a mental health perspective and the ability to cope? [00:22:00] You, you, you stay super focused. I created, I was able to create like an, a very intentional focus in myself for, uh, especially I would say the last three, four weeks of the expedition and that focus and intention, uh, or that was.

So much that when I was off the mountain, I could not sleep for a week, weirdly enough, because it was very hard for me to get rid of it. You really put yourself in a, in a, in a, in a mindset where you, you really want to like get very intentional about everything you do and really focus and, and really. Uh, don't get distracted.

Um, the, the, the two things that I feel were really important for helping me in, in keeping



head, keeping this, uh, mental resilience and is, is one I mentioned already is positive thinking and you really cannot create any self doubt. It's a self doubt. It's just not helpful. Uh, [00:23:00] you, you have to trust your training, your experience, and even if it's, if you're overestimated, it's better to overestimate it in an, in an intentional way.

Then having any self doubts, there are these, these moments where it's, it's really sketchy and like we've, we had to cross like, uh, uh, some of the, uh, the, uh, the glacier, uh, Gossam's that were like three, four letters, like taped against each other and you have to walk over them. And it's, it's technically not hard.

Uh, it's really not super hard to do, but if you are on a ladder that is like bouncing and shaking and you look down and there is like, but this it's a 500 meters of nothing or 400 meters of nothing, then, uh, you have to really not get it into your head. And you have to trust that you can just keep going and, and, and stay in that, uh, in the, uh, and keep your, your focus walking over it.

The, the second that helped me is, um, visualization. I've, [00:24:00] in my job at Microsoft, I've done a lot of like large presentations and, uh, large scale presentation announcements. And I, I always use visualization in those moments because it just helps you to prepare for what's coming. I, it felt that like visualization was also a great technique.

For climbing Mount Everest, because visualizing the night before when you're in your sleeping bag, like, Hey, I'm going to cross those ladders. Like how I'm going to approach this. There will be this, this vertical wall that I have to climb through. Like, what is the, how will I do it? What will be my first steps?

Uh, that really helps you to be more confident in the moment that you reached the, at the, the, the blocker or the, or the objective. Very good. So we'll come on to what it's like to actually reach the summit in a second. But I think as we've gone on that journey and just had a sense of what it was like for you, I think you've covered five or six pretty important self management and change management pieces of advice.

[00:25:00] So it seems to me that knowing your team around you, the importance of teamwork and the importance of aligned purpose. Really struck me on that saying calm and focused under pressure, which, you know, we all have on a day to day basis. I think it's put into sharp focus when you're on a bouncing ladder, you know, 500 meters above a plunging chasm.

We're in the third element of staying calm and focused under pressure and actually understanding. What pressure means to you, how you're managing that and how you're staying positive in those sorts of situations and what you need to do to prepare. You know, the act of climbing Everest itself provides a great analogy for the sorts of things that we do because it's naturally breaks up into sort of day long chunks and taking each day as you go along.

And then finally, being very, very conscious of mental health and resilience, trusting your training. Not letting self doubt creep in as you're going along. Seems to me there's many lessons in life that can be applied to the sort of [00:26:00] challenges we deal with on a daily basis, Erwin. Yeah, and the one thing I want to add on the, uh, and the great points that you make here, Dave, is that, I mentioned it, but I think it's such an important point, is the focus on what you control.

Hm. There's a lot... When you, like, first of all, I will be like to get to the summit, uh, of Everest. Uh, it's, uh, clearly it requires training and preparation, but you also have to be lucky.



You really, you know, like you have to have luck on your side. There are elements that you don't control and you have to be lucky that they, they're not going south, uh, in, in, at the wrong moment, uh, during the climb.

Everyone, of course, is better. And we were really lucky with the, with the weather, especially on the, our summer day. But secondly, is that when, when you go through the icefall, there is a lot of like objective dangers and variables that you don't control. Like, uh, ice towers can collapse. [00:27:00] Um, the avalanches, you walk in a very high danger, high, uh, risk.

Uh, point for, uh, for avalanches, because you kind of like walk in a valley between on one side, uh, on the other side, uh, Everest. And so if you start getting too like, uh, focused on the things around you that you don't control, you can really get distracted and you lose your energy. Maybe you lose your focus.

Um, and so. Staying focused on the things you control and what you can do to, to be safe and, and just ignore everything around you. And it's, it's probably nothing, uh, and thing I would say normally too much, but it's, it's the, it's kind of a self defense mechanism, but it's also, and by focusing on your control, you, um, and I read some, uh, some books about this and studies is that people that focus on their control are also coming.

faster into action, have a higher impact and also [00:28:00] an higher ability to set priorities. You're almost wasting energy thinking about things that will have no tangible outcome for you as the individual whilst you're doing this trip. So you've got to use all the capacity you've got at the task at hand, because the task at hand is so incredible that what you're undertaking, you can't waste any time thinking about things that you just can't.

In fact, I think a lot of people get consumed by that in, in life generally, don't they? And it's a bit more about the fortitude to focus on the here and now and do what you need to do to get to the next step than it is about worrying about what might be around the corner or things you can't control, like you say, the weather.

If the weather goes wrong, there's nothing you can do about it. That's just the way it is. Yeah, there's, there's a, there's a Dutch expression about it, which I never found a real great English translation, but it says that people suffer more from their fears than from the things that happened in their lives.

It says you're suffering by your fears, uh, versus what, what really the consequences could be. It's not helpful. Clearly it's not helpful. It's not, uh, uh, [00:29:00] it's wasted energy, as you said, uh, Rob. And maybe just to bring our conversation about what it's like tackling big challenges and going through the process or the emotional process, the physical rigor, as well as all of the associated practical and professional rigor that comes with that.

Maybe just tell us what it was like the morning of actually achieving the goal Erwin. So what happened on that day? I know you have to, don't you leave the last base camp at 3am or something along those lines? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. You, so on the summer day. So you, we spent two nights just to paint a little bit the picture here.

Have we spent two nights in camp four and camp four is at 8, 000 meters and, or for Americans is like, what is it? 26, 000 feet. I think so. Yeah. Um, and so the being in camp four feels like being on the moon. I, if you see the pictures, it looks like a beautiful spots with great views, but that is not how you experience as a climber.

It [00:30:00] is windy. It's cold. And one of the things that was totally new for me is like climbing with supplemental oxygen. And although we were pretty well acclimatized, when you hit camp four, you have an, um, dependency to supplemental oxygen and you, you will



take your mask off for like for eating and drinking.

Uh, but you typically will not do it then more than five, six, seven minutes. And then you're very happy to get your oxygen mask on because you, you feel, you start to feel a little bit lightheaded. Uh, and so the, this is. There's this thing that you kind of live with an, uh, with an oxygen bottle and you sleep with an oxygen bottle, you hike with an oxygen bottle, you go to the restroom with an oxygen bottle.

So you have this dependency on this, on this oxygen. And it really felt like a weird environment came for almost nobody comes out of their tent and it's a, yeah, you really are sleeping in a tent in a very hostile environment with your, uh, with your buddy. And, uh, yeah, we were almost [00:31:00] like lying in a sleeping bag for two days before the, the climb started.

I'm sure anybody who's done a big release of any system wouldn't recognize that kind of analogy for the night before Go Live, Erwin. Yes. And so you, you wake up in the morning, uh, on, I think we woke up at 11 AM, uh, PM, if I remember correctly, we left camp at 1 AM. And it's, um, getting out of the tent and getting ready was like, I felt.

I was, I wouldn't say pretty close, but it's, it's, it became very tempting to go back into my tent in camp on the morning of our summer climb because it was windy. It was snowing. I couldn't find my crampons because I left them outside the tent and it was, uh, it was some fresh snow was falling. So I had to start digging in to find my crampons, uh, as well as my ice axe.

And then, um, I, I was, I had my big gloves on and I wasn't able to get my crampons on with my big cloths. So at one moment I was like, okay. I need to get them on. So I [00:32:00] pulled them off. I had like thin liners under it, but immediately you feel your fingers starting to freeze. And then everybody around you is moving and shouting and making noises.

And you, I felt that I was totally blowing it at that moment. And when I finally was on my, on my route to, uh, to the summit. You're aligned with the Sherpa on your summit climb. So you have a dedicated Sherpa who was amazing, by the way. And I would, and his name is Mingmar. I would never have made it to the summit without Mingmar, but he is kind of like, you're the person that stays with you.

And he was really hurrying me. He was like, uh, and so I had the feeling that I was the last one coming out of camp. And then you get, Hey, you're, you're. Your voice in your head is like, Oh man, if I'm not hitting certain milestones, a certain time slots, maybe the guides will call me back. And, and then I went to like seven weeks of suffering for nothing, because you're getting so close at that moment.

And so I was trying [00:33:00] to really push myself. And then finally, when the, the, had the, in the, on the day of the summit, and it's approximately eight hours from camp four to the summit, but halfway is one of the. It's one of the moments that you can take a rest and you can take your backpack off. And the rest of the summit climb is kind of too steep to really take your backpack off.

And so the point is called the balcony. It's in a famous moment where everybody takes a break. And so, uh, and I hit the balcony almost at the same time when, uh, it became light. And then I realized that. There was only like one climber in front of me. The rest was all behind me. And I was like pushing myself and really trying to race.

And it was stressed without, uh, without any reason because everybody, even all the guides were behind me. And so I took a very long break on the balcony and that was kind of the first



moment I started to really internalize what I was doing because the first four hours I was. Yeah. Totally in myself, uh, and [00:34:00] trying to push myself as hard as possible.

And then the light comes through and it's, it's, it's a, it's a, it is weird emotion that you, you, you really get the feeling that you do something very special at that moment. Yeah. Because you look around you and you see all their 8,000 meter peaks, like Lhotse and Makalu black, you know, you kind of are getting above of them.

And you have an amazing view, but then you also in front of you, see the, the, the South Ridge go to the South summit and then where it really gets steep and sketchy. And so you also feel this like thing in your stomach is that, okay, now it's, it's, it's, it becomes real. And also I really understood because I read books and talk to a lot of people that this is the part where any accident can be fatal.

Uh, this is where they, this area, they call it the, the, the dead zone. And unfortunately, and one of the traumatic experiences of Everest is that you see dead [00:35:00] bodies. I was about to say, isn't, isn't there frozen bodies of, of previous climbers that have tried to go on this route and not made it? Yes, exactly.

And so you, this is the area where you're very conscious. About like, Hey, even a small accident, like, uh, like and small accident would be like, you're, you make us a full, your fixed rope. And so when you fall, you will not fall into the, into the Valley and you will. You fall maybe a few feet or a few meters, but you will, you will be hold by the rope hopefully, but you can still injure yourself significantly.

But this is an area where even breaking an ankle is like a life threatening injury. Because the one thing that I didn't realize Uh, is that at that altitude, like everybody is at his max, there is no slack with share pass, not really with yourself or Western guides. And so there is this, I think climbers could get [00:36:00] the normalcy bias where, because you are around other people.

is that it feels maybe less risky as it is. The other aspect from what I've seen on documentaries of Everest in particular, that there's like a line of people that are waiting to summit. And I think normalcy bias is a great phrase for that particular situation, because actually, almost at its most dangerous, you get a sense that you're in a queue of people, uh, waiting, and you have to keep your wits about you, presumably.

Yeah, a hundred percent. And so the, I saw some of the climbers in my team that were Like, it just felt that they didn't realize how dangerous it was, what we were doing and how the, how risky it is just to be on that altitude. And that if something happens to you, there's no cavalry. Like if you are not able to get yourself down, yourself, and so you, you're not able to walk yourself down.

And certainly if you're like a larger or heavier person, yeah, it's, [00:37:00] it takes like four to eight people to get one person down at that altitude. How much contingency have you got on the oxygen when you, when you're up? So you saw, you get to this, uh, camp four, you say the oxygen timer starts. Yeah. You can't do without it, like a real resource is burning down in the background as you're going up.

What's the leeway on the amount of oxygen you've got? Yeah, you, you have a little bit leeway, but it's, um, you're not a, this is the something that they also didn't understand. I would, I learned a lot from that is that you also have to plan where you put your bottles. So it's not possible. And so you have technically, uh, four oxygen bottles for our client.

We had four bottles, um, but you cannot bring four bottles to the summit. So they get



stashed at certain points. So you really have to plan just to be back at one of those milestone points in time to refresh your oxygen. And it's a great point, uh, uh, uh, because that's, I was, uh, so we, we [00:38:00] hit the summit and I, it was like, we had such a luck with our, our day.

It was a beautiful day. There was almost no wind. So we were sitting on the summit for almost an hour and a half. And then, and I didn't realize it, but, uh, Mingmar, my Sherpa, was, became very nervous and he was hurrying me and I had some, I had in my head like, Hey, I'm only on my second bottle of oxygen. I'm on the summit.

Uh, we have, we have, uh, this beautiful weather. There's no rush. Like we, we can take the whole day to get down in camp four. And for still, I would say late morning at that moment. And then I realized that my next oxygen bottle was stashed on the balcony. So I, uh, although I had technically enough bottles, I had not any balls close by.

So it meant at the end that I had to rush myself down to the balcony and I was there in time. But it's, it's, it's a, it was more stress than I was hoping for at that moment. Just before we finished. that tell us a little bit about before you got onto realizing you nearly ran out of oxygen on the top, [00:39:00] which doesn't sound great, but what was that feeling of accomplishment like?

And what was your view like on that day? I was not really able to internalize it at that moment. I think I was, um, that internalization probably came later. And again, I was, I was, I was very focused, very tense is maybe a different way to say it, but I, I had, I was not confused that being on the summit is being, it's like you're, it's a final achievement.

I was concerned about getting myself down to camp four and then getting back to base camp. Uh, I knew that this was literally halfway and I had that pretty clearly painted in my mind. In hindsight, to be honest, I wish that I was a little bit more. More in the moment on the summit as well as the summit climb was one of the things that I realized later is that I almost made no pictures.

I, I was so focused on going up and down that I didn't [00:40:00] even stop to, uh, to make pictures. And I was very lucky that again, Mingmar had a camera. And he made a number of pictures of me. That's kind of the memories that I have of that day. Cause I, for myself, I didn't even, even didn't stop or come into my, uh, yeah, I didn't really realize that this was a one time moment and a one time experience.

So Erwin, I suppose when you're young, you don't think, I'm off to climb Everest. It's not the sort of thing that occurs to you, but over your life, it sounds like you got to a position where it became something that you want to do through shared experience, growing through talking and working with others in the mountaineering arena.

Can you just track your journey to getting to the decision to say, I'm going to do this because it's something you have to train so hard for, and it takes so much effort. You know, what led you to that decision that said, I'm going to do this? So the, the thing is that. For me Although I always was fascinated by Everest as a child, I read books, I watched movies, this was never [00:41:00] really something that was in my, in my to do list till maybe two, three years ago.

And the way I really start to consider it. And, and then I think. Uh, two, two things were important here at one is that I would even say that if you would have asked me 10 years ago, do you want to climb Everest? I would have probably left in your face. And I, I was lucky that I met people in the last years, uh, in the, around in the Seattle area where I live, that one is an experienced mountain guy, a guide who has climbed Everest now 13 times who became a friend and a few other people that.



Really helped me to understand what it takes to do an adventure like this or an expedition, but also the steps in preparation that you needed to get there. And, and I think this is such an important point because you, you, you can't achieve in life, but you can see, and I think we, [00:42:00] it's, it's, it's very true for people that grow up in, uh, it may be less privileged environments is that if you don't have a role model.

That shows you the path or shows you the way it's, it's very hard to get there because you don't even know the first step to take. And I think that I was, I was really lucky with, uh, getting people in my life that, that showed how I could get there. And that gave me the confidence that this is an adventure I could, I could take on because climbing efforts was not like the, had the most, uh, evident thing for me to do in life.

Like I, I, I had cancer twice. My hips are of. Completely wear and tear. It's I, I, I've done now one hip operation. I'm waiting for the second hip operation. I have some ingestions issues that I need, uh, prescriptions for every single day. So I, it's, it's clearly another, like, and I'm, I'm also like an older person.

So it's not like the most typical thing I would think about. Uh, and I, I, the fact that I had these examples, it's, it [00:43:00] really gave me this, it helped me ask this question. Like, why not me? And why? Could I not do something like this and gave me this, this energy, like, Hey, I can do something that I never thought I was, would be able to do before.

And now I'm gonna, I'm gonna focus. I'm gonna train. I'm gonna, I really prepare myself to, uh, to get there and, uh, and, and make this like a goal for a certain time of my life. Um, and I, it's probably one of the things I'm, I'm trying to also teach my children is that if you use mentors and coaches in your life, and don't try to do everything by yourself, but there is such a value of mentors, coaches, and other people that can help you understand the steps and, or maybe it can help open doors for you that would be closed if you don't leverage people around you. [00:44:00]

What have you been looking at this week? So each week I do some research on related ideas and transformation and tech. And this week I thought we should take a look at why you should organize your change initiatives around purpose and benefits. So if there's one thing that's certain about the future.

It's that change is here to stay. The ability to constantly transform has become a top priority for many organizations. And this makes change management an essential business priority now. However, the failure rates of change products remain high, with only 31 percent considered successful. So to address this, Change management needs to be approached in a different way with a focus on purpose and benefits.

So projects that are linked to a higher purpose have a higher chance of success and the benefits should be identified and mapped out for each key stakeholder early in the transformation. And by adopting new concepts like purpose and [00:45:00] benefits, organizations can create value much faster and more easily develop change and project management competencies.

So a question, Do you think aligning change management to purpose and benefits will increase success? I'll have a first go at that. Certainly benefit, I mean, benefits, I think speak for themselves and they should be tracked. They should be rigorous and you should be able to account for the money and time spent in terms of deliverable, whether that be return on investment or whether that be delivered product or, or function point or whatever, whatever it might be.



So benefits I think to me is, uh, is an obvious one. Purpose, however, I think, Matt, very clearly to that conversation and that analogy, because in my mind, a lot of people forget that in a rush to create business case, which is a benefit. They forget the important aspect of, well, why we're doing this thing in the first place.

I mean, Erwin, as we discussed in the conversation, it [00:46:00] seemed like, you know, the purpose for what you guys were doing was maybe blindingly obvious because you were trying to get to the top. But what was the other elements of purpose going on in that adventure for you? I think the climbing Everest isn't a pretty egoistic thing to do.

If you think about like, it's, it's not, it's, it's, it's you, you, it's a, it's a self fulfilling thing. Yeah. Uh, and clearly they say you could make the argument that you help the local economy and you help the local people. And it's absolutely true because, uh, the, there's a lot of people in Nepal that live from Everest climbs.

And so there's a lot of contribution that you make, but at the end it's the, the, the purpose for me was, I think, and this, by the way, this is one of the hardest questions to answer. And the hardest question for me to answer is like, why did you do it? Right. It seems like one of the obvious ones to ask, but one of the hardest ones to ask.

It's one of the obvious ones to ask, but it's very hard because it's really a combination of one is [00:47:00] like, it's a, it's a beautiful adventure and there are a lot of aspects around it. That's a beautiful adventure that you just want to experience. I, I also think there is an element of. Like proving yourself to yourself about creating like an, an, a relatively absurd goal and seeing if you can make it and getting yourself in that, in that situation and there, and probably the underlying reason that you want to do that for yourself is probably, uh, like maybe.

partly uncertainties, maybe partly imposter syndrome, uh, I think there's all kind of like complexity of elements as a human that you wanna prove to yourself that you would be capable of doing something. Did you find, though, that those thoughts sustained you in the difficult moments of, for example, in terms of Schalke's question around You know, is purpose something viable that's going to accelerate or drive your change more [00:48:00] successfully?

You know, in that case, it like unifies a team, shows a direction, actually gives you a higher reason for do something than just purely the underlying financial, which some people find very motivating, but other people sort of more struggle with from a motivational perspective. Did you find that some of those elements that you just described sustained you on the journey and kept you focused?

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And, and, and I think one of the elements of, of purpose for me was that also showing my, and, and, and maybe most important for me was my children. Uh, but I think I got feedback from a lot of people around me saying that it was demonstrating that with focus and efforts, human beings can reach a lot.

And, and so I, I wanted to, the purpose for me was like, I, and that was one of my motivations to be honest, to keep going and make it to the summit, because I really wanted to show my children also is that, Hey, your, your old man can with the right [00:49:00] investment in time and it was resilience can do something special.

So never. Never hold yourself back in life. Never think that there are things that you cannot do or cannot achieve. Rob, didn't you say that, um, that's what you said to your kids just before you started Red Dead Redemption 2? Yes, yes, David. Set the goals appropriately.



However, what you have just said, uh, reminds me of the famous JFK...

quote, we choose to go to the moon, not because it is easy, but because it is hard. And it's about that right stuff, isn't it? You've got the right stuff to do it, but you also need the preparation to be able to be ready to be able to do it as well. So resonates a lot with me, what you just said. Well, look, Erwin, thank you so much for spending some time with us this afternoon.

I mean, a massively inspirational story, not only in terms of what you achieved, but also in terms of some of those underlying. Uh, reasons for doing it. And hopefully everyone's taken away from it. [00:50:00] Not only a great story, but actually there's just so much about human resilience and taking on large tasks and working your way through something and having a clear direction that can be applied to business life and the sort of challenges that we have in the ever changing world in which we practice.

Awesome. Thank you again for your time. It's been brilliant talking to you. A real privilege. Awesome. Hey, it was, uh, very happy to, uh, to be here and thank you for having me. So we end every episode of this podcast by asking our guests what they're excited about doing next. And that could be climbing Everest again, another mountain, bigger one.

K2 maybe next time. Yeah. Or it could be something you're doing in your professional life. So Erwin, what are you excited about doing next? Yeah. I'm a, uh, I'm a positive person that always finds, uh, exciting, uh, things to do in my life. There's two things I'm excited now to, uh, uh, so we're moving to, uh, we're in the process of moving to Tampa.

So I'm excited to, uh, start a life here with my, uh, with my family. And so. Total new [00:51:00] environment. So we'll absolutely things that we need to figure out here, but it will be a great, great opportunity and a lot of fun. And secondly, I also started a new role in, uh, in Microsoft recently, uh, that also has like a significant amount of challenges and opportunities.

So. two things that I'm, I'm really excited about and looking forward to. Fantastic. Well, look, we wish you all the very best with both of those upcoming new challenges. And Sjoukje has also just moved house recently and that felt like Everest, didn't it, Sjoukje? Yeah, it did. Yeah. It was not Tampa, but Lisse, but it did.

Yeah. So, well, let's hope it goes more straightforwardly for you, Erwin. Yeah. Well, by the way, Dave, if you would have asked me this question yesterday, I would have said I'm also very excited about the new football season, but the Seahawks lost terribly last night. So I'm... You've got dimmed enthusiasm now.

Yes. It's not top of my mind at this moment. Things to be excited about. [00:52:00] So a huge thanks to our guests this week. Erwin, thank you so much for being on the show. Thanks also to our sound and editing wizards, Ben and Louis. Our distracted producer, Marcel, and of course, to all of our listeners. We're on LinkedIn and X, Dave Chapman, Rob Kernahan, and Sjoukje Zaal.

Feel free to follow or connect with us and please get in touch if you have any comments or ideas for the show. And of course, if you haven't already done that, rate and subscribe to our podcast. See you in another reality next week.

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