

## WAYS TO BUILD A RESILIENT FAMILY – JOE DE SENA – #893

Dave:

You're listening to The Human Upgrade, with Dave Asprey. Today is something that I've wanted to do for you guys a long time, and it's get a little bit deeper into families. You know that I'm all about resilience, the whole original tagline back when I started Bulletproof. On the coffee, it said, "Coffee for mission-critical performance," and the underlying thing there has always been resilience.

How do you be hard to kill, but also, how do you be mentally tough so you're unflappable, so that people can make fun of you, whether you're in fifth grade or whether you're 50, and you don't lose sleep over it? And maybe you don't punch them unless they really deserve it, and you chose to punch them instead of you punched them because you lost control. There's a difference there, and I'm not advocating punching people. Well, maybe there's a few people who probably actually do deserve that, but we'll leave that for the sociopaths later.

And I'm like, all right, who am I going to interview? I think, okay, at the last Biohacking Conference, which was the seventh, at that conference, one of the really popular speakers was Joe De Sena, and I asked him back. He's the founder of Spartan, and he joins our show today to talk about exactly that, resilience, specifically based on his latest book, which is about mental toughness for families. God knows if there's any time in history that you wanted mental toughness for families, this might be one of them. Joe, welcome to the show, my friend.

Joe:

Thanks for having me. You're awesome.

Dave:

Thank you. Now, you're the founder of Spartan, which is endurance sports, and just people, I'm going to say beating the crap out of themselves, to show themselves they can do it. And my first big question for you here, how do you know the difference between beating yourself up until you've overdone it? For instance, you can be getting emotionally abused and like, "I'm mentally tough, I'm resilient. People are all over me. I'm just going to sit here and be in my Zen bubble," or you can go in a race and say, "Actually, that's my femur poking out of my thigh. I think I'm done," but you just keep going. So how do you draw the line between resilience and breaking something?

Joe:

Yeah, I thought about this for, God, 30-plus years, Dave, and you have to have a true north, a north star, something we call your why, right? Why Dave wants to be the greatest family man that ever lived, Joe De Sena wants to be the greatest mountain climber that ever lived. You and I are both climbing Mount Everest, we're 100 feet from summiting, terrible storm rolls in, it's going to be risky.

Dave needs to do a quick check on what his why is, and his why is to be the greatest family man that ever lived, he should turn around at that moment. He should not continue to take the beating on top of the mountain. Joe, on the other hand, has to do some quick analysis, and Joe says, I say to myself, "Gee, I want to be the greatest mountain climber that ever lived. That's my mantra, that's my why. This is my chance, this is my window. It's risky. I'm single. I don't have kids. I might go for it." So you have to start, whether it's your family, whether it's your business, whether it's you personally, you have to start with a, why are you doing this? That's number one.

No. 2, are you happy? I've been in lots of races, Dave, all over the world, where it's ... All these things are tough. Climbing Everest, like we just described, running a marathon, working out in the morning, it's hard. But is it a happy hard, or is it your femur sticking out of your leg [inaudible 00:04:31]? You got to do some analysis and be truthful with yourself and say, "How hard is this?"

Now, the litmus test I ... You're going to love this. I'm down in Florida right now, which is the antithesis of Spartan, right? It's softer, there's Disneyland. I shouldn't be here, but I'm down here. We can get into that further in the conversation. But this morning in Florida, I was at a school called Lake Highland Prep, and it's a fancy school, K through 12. And there's a coach there, Mike Palazzo, wrestling coach, who, Dave, you would love. This is Rocky, Rocky's trainer, Drago, Apollo Creed, Gene Hackman, and [inaudible 00:05:23], all mixed together, okay? He's motivated-

Dave:

At a high school? Wow.

Joe:

Yeah, at a high school. This is a one of a kind. And it's 6:00 AM, and it's one of his two practices a day he mandates for his wrestling team, six days a week, they get Sundays off. And holidays, it doesn't matter. There's no holiday. It's two times a day. And he is pushing them, and about three quarters of the way through, and you could see, kids were hurting, including my own kids. He's pushing them and I said to them my mantra, which is, "Guys, it could be a lot worse. You could be in Siberia right now. You could be in some remote part of India with no food."

So you do a quick head check. I do it. You do a quick head check, and you say, "Yeah, this is hard, but my femur's not sticking out of my thigh. I'm not pissing blood, I'm not in Siberia freezing to death, it's just uncomfortable. And you know what? I'm still kind of happy. So it's hard to ascertain, but you got to do it.

And now, where most people fall, Dave, and you know this, you know this, most people fall on the light side. "Oh, this [inaudible 00:06:40]." No, no. You're not pissing blood, your femur's not sticking out, it's not that bad. You're not dying. Might feel it because you live in such a comfortable place 99% of your life, that anything outside of that bubble feels like your femur's sticking out of your leg. The trick, I'm sorry to keep interrupting, the magic, Dave, is to live so far outside the bubble that it's not that uncomfortable.

Dave:

So are you a proponent of just regular discomfort?

Joe:

I think you got to take it in micro doses. I think, look, let's go back in time. Let's think about Lewis and Clark. That's a pretty rugged expedition. If you and I-

Dave:

You could say that.

Joe:

If you and I were going cross-country, we'd need a little more than the Bulletproof coffee. Grandma dies along the way, wife gives birth, wooden wheel breaks, stuck in a snowstorm, can't get over the Rockies.

Dave:

But coffee fixes all that, just to be clear.

Joe:

So I'm just saying we're not going to recreate that, and we shouldn't, but a cold shower, 30 burpees, a work out consistently every morning where my litmus test is, do I want to puke? And if I want to puke, I push myself, and unfortunately, you know biology a lot better than I do, Dave, but unfortunately the body requires those kinds of tests to make it more efficient and make it better and healthier. It requires that you go to the zone.

Now, if I puke, I probably pushed too far, so it's like, did it feel like I was ... Like this morning, as I was watching the kids, I was on the Airdyne bike, and you could just sit there for two hours and go easy, and that's in the comfort zone. That's like living in a greenhouse, right? It's just nice and smooth. But then I said, all right, I got to get 10 calories done every minute, or 20 calories done, and it takes you to that zone where it's uncomfortable, but then I know I'm doing some good.

Dave:

And you just mentioned Florida, but you have a farm up in Vermont, or did you just move to Florida permanently?

Joe:

No, so let's go down this road if you're up for it.

Dave:

Yeah, sure.

Joe:

So we have a farm in Vermont. That's where a Spartan was born, that's where all my children were born. We still have it. The farm is epic. It's in a little town called Pittsfield, Vermont. We have a new CNBC television show that gets filmed on the farm. We've got a podcast, like you, that gets filmed on the farm. We brought in investors years ago for Spartan. As it started to grow, it had to move off the farm, and the investors said, "Let's move it to Boston," which was perfect for my wife because she has family involved, and anybody that's married, listening to this, knows that the wife wins, and you always end up migrating to wherever the wife's family is.

Dave:

It depends on how much you really Spartan up. You could wait until she breaks your femur, right?

Joe:

You could wait until she breaks your femur, and it was getting to that point. So we moved to Boston, and we kept the farm, we go back and forth, and the pandemic hit, and we moved back to the farm, and we operated from the farm during the pandemic. And then the pandemic subsided, and we moved back to Boston, and we went back into the office, and the kids went back to school. And what I found over the last eight months, I can't get people back to the office. The young people, the new people I was hiring through natural attrition, we lost people, we have to rehire new people.

Dave:

And they froze to death on one of the death races, so you just have to get new ones.

Joe:

Got to get a new one. Yeah, you kill a few.

Dave:

Redundant array of inexpensive employees. Is this your strategy here?

Joe:

It's so much easier to get rid of somebody if they die in a death race. So we have to get new people, and the new people are coming into the office, but I can't get many of the old folks to come in, and some have legitimate reasons because of COVID, but others just are used to staying home. They don't want to travel in the traffic, and the trains aren't working like they used to, and there's so much friction in Boston and New York, because we have an office in New York, that I did something in bold.

I was talking to a friend of mine, who's got a big company, and he was showing me his 80,000-square-foot office in New York that was empty, and it was the day of my peak frustration. And he said, "You know what you have to do," and I said, "What?" He goes, "You got to go to Indianapolis." And I said, "Why Indianapolis?" He goes, "I have a company there with 300 employees. They never stop coming to work. They show up, they get the job done in the office."

And so I flew to Indianapolis the next day because I had to see this with my own eyes, and I was like, this is unbelievable. People are showing up for work. This is like it was before COVID. I told my wife, "We're moving to Indianapolis," and she said, "We're not moving to Indianapolis. I'm going to break your femur if we move to Indianapolis." So I had to find a place in America where people still come to the office, where I could put my kids in a school.

In Florida, it's no surprise, you've all seen the news, has not been as shaken with the pandemic, and folks are still going into offices. Now, it's a whole other argument, you guys might [inaudible 00:12:10] say, "Joe, you're old-fashioned. You do jazzercise, you wear leotards. People don't need to come into an office anymore." That's probably true, but I need to be productive. I want to be around people. It helps me be better. And I'm a bit of a maniac, so [inaudible 00:12:27].

Dave:

I'm with you there, both on Florida being the most attractive state to attract the wealthiest and most entrepreneurial and innovative people from around the world right now, and it's happening. California's draining all of its talent because Florida's like, "Hey, you can innovate and be free here." And that isn't about a red or blue or any of that other made-up nonsense, it's just about, people who like to get stuff done like to not be restrained irrationally, so they naturally go there.

But there's something else in what you were saying there. You have community when you have an office, and when you have remote Zoom community, it's like following a bunch of people on Instagram or Snapping them. It's not the same thing, and part of resilience, I think, is having a strong community. It's one of the reasons that I traveled for New Years. I wanted to see my people because, well, it's hard to travel, as I was just reminded. I'll say that again. As I was just reminded.

But I feel like the office community is a real thing, and it's not just productivity, it's actually about having support to solve a challenge, a mission, something that matters. That's why I just built out my headquarters, "Oh, you guys have to come to work. You don't have to be here every day, but we

need to be together three days a week. By the way, I put a restaurant in here, and there's an Upgrade Labs here. I'm pretty sure that you're going to like that, and my Upgrade Labs headquarters, which is a headquarters where you go to work, is in Tampa. We're building that out.

So I'm all in on this, and if you're sitting here going, "I only want to work from home," no. Work from home a bunch if that's productive for you but spend time breathing pheromones and looking people in the eye. My question for you after that bit of a rant is, how important is your community, your family, your coworkers, for being resilient? Can you be resilient alone, or is it better to be resilient when you have shared suffering?

Joe:

Well, so let's do community, and then let's get back to the office, because I can't [inaudible 00:14:45] myself. So community, 1000%. If you were working out this morning by yourself, Dave, and I was working out by myself, and then after 10 minutes of working out by ourselves, we bumped into each other, getting a Bulletproof coffee, and then we started a workout, we would both work out harder together. We would be nuclear together.

Now, check this one out. You're going to love this. I'm interviewing people down here, and yesterday I had an interview, and a woman came in, and I just was wondering, "Do you want to go to an office?" I had to ask the question, and she said, "Let me tell you something." She's a lawyer. She said, "Two years before the pandemic, I did the work-from-home thing. I left a big law firm, I started my own little law firm, and I did Zooms before it was cool," and she goes, "I can't wait to get back in an office." She says, "I want to see people," and she literally said, "I feel better around other people. I feel stronger around other people," so there's something there.

You and I know, the reason you asked the question, you and I know that, look, people all around the world have said, "Joe, you got to build permanent Spartan and Tough Mudder obstacle courses [inaudible 00:16:02]." I said, "Look, they don't really work. The obstacles are cool, the brand is cool, but the thing that makes it work is the 8,000 people that show up on Saturday to do the race together. If you have just Dave and Joe going through the course alone, it's not the same."

Dave:

It's the same reason that when pro sports teams play in an empty stadium, it kind of sucks.

Joe:

It kind of sucks.

Dave:

There's energy that goes into that, and I have run ... at least I started, I'm not involved with Bulletproof anymore, but I started Bulletproof, and until I left, grew it to north of 100 million. And I did all that over Zoom from an island, and I traveled a lot, but I did that because of the happy wife thing and happy family, and I'm also on a farm, and all that kind of stuff. So I was already set up for remote work, but it meant I had to travel 150 days a year to see people, otherwise I'd go nuts. It's lonely to do that. So I feel like we're creating a world of loneliness there if we go down that, everyone works remotely and never sees each other, and we're all going to put on our Metaverse goggles, which by the way, I do have VR goggles, but I'm not putting Mark Zuckerberg that close to my eyes, thank you very much.

Joe:

You just gave me an idea. We should create Spartan-Bulletproof goggles that, they're like 27 pounds, and-

Dave:

And they spray pepper spray in your eyes every now and then just to remind you to be tough?

Joe:

Yeah, exactly. [inaudible 00:17:30].

Dave:

It's just a blindfold. [inaudible 00:17:38], Don from the Upgrade Collective, which, by the way, is one of the communities I've built really actively over the pandemic, because I miss people, not being able to conference. So I've got a lot of people doing the Upgrade Collective, but he has his beer goggles. Would those count? So Don, I think your beer goggles would count. So Don, I think your beer goggles would count, for sure.

Joe:

There you go.

Dave:

So just going back to ... So community matters, and you're saying when you have these 8,000 people doing this shared suffering thing, I can't imagine doing that all by yourself in the morning like, "I'm going to wake up today and go slog through mud and get zapped by electricity," or whatever other bad things you invent to do in there, just to prove you can do it to yourself. It's to do it with others. All right, so if you're sitting here going, "I never want to work from an office again," you might ask yourself the question, what percentage of time when you ... Let me put that again. What percentage of time going into the office makes you most effective?

And if your answer is, "Never going into the office," you probably need to find a very solitary kind of thing like writing, you can probably do, or some kind of research. But otherwise, if it's 20%, 30%, you can probably do it, but if you really don't like people that much, then okay, it limits what you can do. The FaceTime thing, and it's been studied over and over, if you just look at someone face to face for one time, and then you go off and you Zoom with them, the trust is built. But if you never meet them, it doesn't work.

Joe:

You ever ... What was the movie, Papillon? French guy gets arrested, gets banished to a rock in the sea, in the ocean?

Dave:

Wasn't it to Australia or something? It was a rock. Yeah, it was an amazing movie, by the way. Everyone, you have to watch Papillon. What a great reference. I forgot about that. It means it means butterfly in French. It's like the only French word I know besides croissant.

Joe:

Yeah, so for anybody listening to Dave, that believes they don't need to go in an office because they don't want to deal with traffic, or maybe they're very young and this seems ... watch that movie, because you'd probably do really good in prison.

Dave:

Like, "Yes, solitary confinement again, for me?"

Joe:

I know a lot of guys that went to jail. I grew up in a tough neighborhood, Dave, and I know a lot of guys that got 25-year bids.

Dave:

Oh, man.

Joe:

And maybe that's why I want to be in an office, and I want to see people. That doesn't sound exciting to me. I don't know. Maybe I'm strange.

Dave:

You know, people might say, "Well, Dave, I'm at least ... I'm at 28%. That's my age." But they might say, "You don't know what you're talking about. You grew up when things were different," but I really truly believe that when people actually work as teams and they support each other that way, that they create better results. The ideas are better, the creation's better, and I spent God knows how many millions of dollars flying people to be together, which sounds kind of dumb, except that it works.

My very first team offsite, when I first started, I couldn't afford to have a team that was centralized, so didn't have an office, everyone was remote. And after we had our first, I think, million or \$2 million year, I said, "All right, guys. We need to have an all-hands meeting, because we've never actually seen each other, a lot of us. So since everyone has to fly anyway, it's in Maui," and we all just flew to Maui, and it was a really good thing to do. And pretty soon, it was time to get an office, and I went out there every day.

But I'm right in the middle of the pandemic, building out an office in Victoria, B.C., and I just think it's how everyone's going to perform better and be happiest, and if that doesn't work for someone, hey, there are places you can go.

Joe:

Papillon.

Dave:

Yeah, Papillon. Talk to me about resilience with families, because family resilience means staying married, it means not yelling at your kids, it means being present, frankly, when really boring and stupid stuff ... like one of our Upgrade Collective members was like, "Oh my God, I ended up wiping poop off my kid, and my camera was still on," and I'm like, that's a form of resilience called parenting, which is probably much worse than the average Tough Mudder if you just look at all the crap you have to do, not counting all the good stuff. So where does it come from in families? How does resilience apply there, versus in work or individually?

Joe:

Funny enough, so I co-wrote the book with a psychologist, a wonderful woman. Dr. L, I call her, Lara Pence, and I did that because I needed some expertise. Who the hell am I to say that I know how to parent? My oldest is 16. I haven't proven that I could be successful at it, but my instinct ... well, you know what happened? I saw the movie with Uma Thurman, Kill Bill, when I was-

Dave:

I watched it on the airplane yesterday. Are you serious?

Joe:

Yeah, and-

Dave:

Winning.

Joe:

And so I'm watching the movie and I'm seeing Uma Thurman carry these buckets of water up and down the stairs, and I said, "Oh my God, my dream growing up would've been to have a Kung Fu master." So I said to my wife, this is when the kids were young, I said, "How do you feel about ... could we get a Kung Fu master to live with us and train the kids every day, like Uma Thurman was trained, and toughen them up?" And she went for it.

So we imported a Kung Fu master from China, and he lived on the farm, and every morning the kids got up at 5:30, and those people that are listening might be saying, because I hear it all the time. "Oh my God, Joe, you got to let them sleep." And Dave, you tell me if I'm wrong or not, but sleep can occur by going to bed earlier, not ... You don't just have to stay in bed longer, you can go to bed earlier. Is that right?

Dave:

All right, here's the reality for that. Kids, when they're teenagers, biologically shift their circadian rhythm, so they really, really should wake up later. But biologically, if they go to bed when the sun goes down, they can wake up early and it's okay. The problem is that they're not wired to go to bed at that time like normal people are. They're wired to, and this is so they'll reproduce, to be perfectly straightforward, that's how mother nature did it, they're wired to stay up until 10 or 11 or 12, because that's when you would make sure we got some new humans coming out here. So you are fighting against biology, but I will tell you that for most kids, because they stay up late, if you make, them start at 5:30, they break. So if you have disciplined bedtimes, you'll have very healthy circadian biology kids who never reproduce, but that's okay, man.

Joe:

I didn't consider the reproduction component to it.

Dave:

They shouldn't be reproducing at that age, but mother nature wants them to. She's a mean mistress, that mother nature.



Joe:

I didn't consider that part, but what I did find in my little study was exactly what you said, which is if they were sleeping by 8:00, 8:30, which is hard to get done now, as my oldest is 16, they had no problem getting up at 5:30. It's still a little bit of a battle, but if I let them sleep on their own, 6:15, they're up [inaudible 00:24:52]. So it's that extra 45 minutes they're looking for if they go to bed early.

Dave:

How many years or months of Kung Fu master living on your property, or was this actually in your home, or ...

Joe:

Yeah, living in our home, on our property, on the farm, and we did about five years with the Kung Fu master, and we stuck to that program of in bed by 8:00, 8:30, up at 5:30 in the morning. Didn't matter if we were traveling, whatever. A Kung Fu master came along, he taught only in Mandarin, no English, so the kids speak fluent Mandarin now thanks to him, and as well as some other things we did.

Dave:

Wow.

Joe:

And what I found was that they're better athletes now, they're happier, they're stronger, they're more confident, their chest is out, their shoulders are back, because it was basically gymnastics. They basically did gymnastics twice a day with this guy who, by the way, took no prisoners because of the way he was trained in China. It wasn't like delicate American, "Are you feeling okay? It was like [crosstalk 00:25:57]-"

Dave:

They're not nice.

Joe:

We are training, motherfuckers, and thank God my wife was in the house next door to the barn, so she didn't see it or hear it because she would've definitely shut it down. Her instinct, you tell me, the biology of a female, was be to protect the kids, so it wasn't the same as the male, me, the husband, trying to make them stronger so they can go survive on their own.

Dave:

And that's, you say 16-year-old, and how many other kids, just for the listener?

Joe:

I got a 16, a 14, a 12, and a nine. The two boys are older, two girls are younger.

Dave:

Okay, got it, and so the girls were doing the Kung Fu as well?

Joe:

Yeah, everybody did.

Dave:

Awesome.

Joe:

And then you'll like this, then we moved around the world. We moved to Singapore, we moved, because I wanted to build Spartan overseas, and I thought being disruptive to their lives, they say that moving is a very difficult thing for a family, so I wanted to build resilience, so we're just going to move to a foreign place. And Singapore is kind of Asia-lite. It's pretty easy, it's pretty affluent. So we flew into Singapore, we put the kids in Mandarin-English-speaking school. They fought their way through that. Then we went to Tokyo, we did a year in Japan, and then, I think you know, we lived in Vancouver for year.

And while we were in Vancouver, we found this thing right up the street from our house that everybody listening to this must go visit, in addition to visiting Dave, called the Grouse Grind, which is a two-mile hike up this mountain, Grouse Mountain, all stones. I think a half a million people a year hike this thing. It was awesome, we would go there every day, and my little one, who was probably three or four at the time, she would do this hike. She would go up there and she'd be complaining, but everybody on that mountain got to know little Alex, and she built resilience [inaudible 00:27:58] mountain.

Dave:

Wow. I agree, making the kids go hiking, even if they're a little cold, and you don't want to get your kids cold all the time, they actually get colds from that, that's real. But [inaudible 00:28:10] notice, "Are you a little uncomfortable? You didn't need to bring a pizza, a washing machine, and a gallon of water to walk four miles. No, actually, you didn't. So we're just going to walk, and you'll be thirsty when you get back, and that's okay." I do my best to do stuff like that, but probably not as much as you would have, or I would've liked to.

Joe:

Well, we always had, in every culture, a rite of passage, and so we have to create ... We don't have one in Canada, we don't have one in the US, and so we have to create one as parents. And so maybe that was the rite of passage for [inaudible 00:28:45] right? Maybe mine was in Squamish with the kids, but you got to push them to a place where they do melt down. You don't put them in danger, but they should find out what they're made of and that they're capable of so much more.

The greatest analogy I think I came up with, tell me if you like it, if our little kids were plants, little baby plants, and you could have those baby plants grow up in a greenhouse where the environment is perfect and there's no disruptions, or you could have those baby plants grow up on the side of a mountain with roots, wrapped around rocks, and dealing with hail storms every day. Fast forward 20 years, which baby plant is going to be able to handle the world without its parents better?

Dave:

And which one's going to taste better if it's one of the few edible plants that isn't trying to kill you when you eat it? I can tell you, herbs and spices that don't get stressed don't make a lot of the polyphenols, so there's a toughness and a resilience thing there. So here's the thing. We talked about in adults, you push yourself, but you don't push yourself to the point you break a femur or beyond. And with kids, there's

pretty good evidence that if kids move around too much, at least some kids, they get abandonment issues and attachment issues, and it's traumatic.

And if you push a kid to a certain extent, whether it's from a Kung Fu master or anything else, beyond the breaking point emotionally for their age, that it creates psychological trauma. And then when you're older, yeah, you can walk it off and you can be tough, but it actually comes at a great cost because it's basically done out of anger, and hurt, and abandonment, and all that stuff. How do you, as a parent, who's done a good job, it sounds like, of teaching kids to be tough and to do this, how do you know when it's too much?

Joe:

Well, when we broke the news, we gave the kids one week's notice on Florida. We held out because there was stuff going on in their lives and we didn't want them to know. I'm going to answer the question realtime, you tell me. We told them, and everybody everybody's answer was the same, except for my 12 ... I don't know if she's 12 or 13 right now. 13-year-old daughter. She melted down a bit for about an hour, because she has friends that she didn't want to leave.

The other three children just asked what the food was like in Florida, like, "Do they have good food?" That's all they cared about. And the other interesting thing, you're going to love this, was my 16-year-old, I said to them, "Look, you're on a wrestling team in Boston. You should probably stay behind and finish your season. It's not the right thing to do to leave. You live with friends, you finish it out, and then you come meet us in Florida." He said, "Okay, no problem."

Dave:

What an adventure for that age, yeah.

Joe:

Right? And then, you're going to love this, and then during the holidays while you were braving your trips, I got a call from the coach in Boston, and he said, "Look, there may be an eligibility issue with your son because you guys are moving to Florida. You're no longer living in Massachusetts. I don't know if he could technically wrestle for the team in Boston." So on a moment's notice, I then said, "Jack, we're pivoting. You're moving to Florida."

Dave:

You should have the other family adopt him. It's not that hard.

Joe:

And it was no problem. Whatever. We're going to Florida. "Is the food okay?" So-

Dave:

Wow, that that's a resilient kid.

Joe:

Right? He just rolled with it, and that's happening realtime right now as I speak to you. So I think we're doing okay, and based on the sentences you just used, I'm taking them to the edge. Here's a saying we use, we have a death camp for kids on the farm. I've been doing it the last three years. You got to see

some of the videos. It's insane, Dave, and I push the kids to ridiculous limits, carrying rocks up and down mountain, they're being screamed out by a mountain warfare specialist early in the morning.

Dave:

There might be some trauma there, man.

Joe:

They're in early-

Dave:

I want to talk to their therapists in 20 years and hear what they think.

Joe:

5:30 AM's, ice cold water. They're doing it with a community. There's always 40, 50 kids, not just my kids. They're-

Dave:

That's cool. Actually, that's really cool, showing them what they can do, I like that, with other kids.

Joe:

And they're being completely transformed. We've got evidence. We don't have 10 years of evidence, but what we've seen so far ... And we have this saying we use during the kids' death camp, which is ... I'm going to screw this up, but, "Take me to the edge," he said. "No, I don't want to go." "Take me to the edge," he said. "No, I don't want to go." He took him to the edge, he pushed him, and they flew. So the point was we're going to take the kids to the edge, we're going to take them to a place where then they can fly. I screwed up the poem, but you get the point, right? So-

Dave:

That was a poem?

Joe:

It was a poem, but I didn't say ... I screwed it up.

Dave:

I'm just messing with you.

Joe:

Yeah, I screwed it up. So I think the magic for those listening, you might think I'm crazy, is you got to just take them ... You got to get them out of the greenhouse, you got to get them out the greenhouse.

Dave:

There you go.

Joe:

Because the data, and Dave could speak to the data better than I can, but the data shows, and Dr. L, my co-author in this book, she's got a practice, she sees families every single day, the data shows that the families and the kids are a mess. They're a fucking mess, so ...

Dave:

The data for people who don't experience some sort of adversity that they overcome.

Joe:

They [inaudible 00:34:51], yeah.

Dave:

All right. Yeah, I agree with that, and that's why we always had that tough rite of passage. It's different for men and women around 13, 14, and it's just missing from society, and it's built a generation of participation trophy wusses. And by the way, do I get a participation trophy if I do a Spartan race?

Joe:

If you do all your burpees, if you do all your obstacles, if you make it to the finish line, you earn that frigging medal. You earned it.

Dave:

So you actually support participation trophies?

Joe:

No, I don't support participation trophies. No, no.

Dave:

But everyone gets one. What's going on here?

Joe:

[crosstalk 00:35:32] finishes gets one. If you finish the thing, you got one.

Dave:

There you go. It's finishing versus just showing up. All right, that is not a participation trophy.

Joe:

I was in Scotland, we had a race, probably 8,000 or 9,000 participants. It was pouring rain, it was exactly like you'd envision Scotland with Mel Gibson in Braveheart. And I get to the finish line, and I notice some people were cheating on their burpees. So I got a scissor, and I went to the parking lot, and as people were coming, I looked them in the face, they knew who I was, and I said, "Did you do all your burpees?" "No." I cut their medals off and I took them [inaudible 00:36:09]. Anybody who said no, hopefully they were honest. I cut the medals off and I took them.

Dave:

Wow, that's-

Joe:

All right? So I don't believe in participation trophies.

Dave:

That's a clear sign of it. And so if you're listening to this, if your kids would feel cheated by getting a participation trophy, you're doing something right, and if they feel like they deserve one, maybe you should take them backpacking or do something that causes adversity without making them feel abused, and that's my question for you. How do parents listening to this know, "Well, I wanted to be tough on my kids, but they started crying"? And then one of the two parents said, "Oh, poor Johnny, give him a ham sandwich." So how do you know when you're pushing them far enough?

Joe:

Well, listen, let's use the Grouse Grind as an example, a two-mile hike with a four-year-old, and we're hiking up this mountain, and little Alex, my daughter, starts to cry, "It's hard." Why is she crying? Is she bleeding? Is anything broken? Has she not eaten for five days? What's the issue? Because as a human being, four years old, she should be able to walk two miles. We should [inaudible 00:37:17].

I'm not saying we have to race it. We can sit down for a half hour if you want, but we should be able to walk two miles, so why is she crying, and why is it ... and I've done thousands of tests with these kids, why is it that all of a sudden she's happy when we get to the top if she was crying? How did that happen? So anyway, that's the litmus test, that's what folks need to do, is they need to just really ascertain what's truly going on, and in 99% of the cases, it's the adult that's the problem. It's not the kid that's having a problem. The adult-

Dave:

The tears are okay, is the bottom line. You've got to sit with the discomfort. And somehow, parents know if they are not too traumatized, whether it's actually traumatic for the kids, but if the parents haven't done their personal development work, their radar for trauma is not there. So they see tears, they feel like they did when they were traumatized, and then they rush in to give him a gum drop, and [crosstalk 00:38:23].

Joe:

I had a performance psychologist on the Spartan Up podcast last week. He does performance psychology for the Army, and he said something really interesting, which I'm sure you know. He said, "Most people, the reason they're not successful at whatever the endeavor, whether it's throwing the javelin or running a restaurant, whatever it is, they're focused on what other people think as opposed to just having some confidence in themselves, blanking out all that white noise," and just focusing on getting the job done. And I think what happens as parents, what happens to us is we're so focused on, "Oh my God, what are the people on this trail going to say because little Alex is crying?" Who cares? Little Alex is mine. Kids cry.

Dave:

Well said, kids cry, and every other parent is thinking, "Thank God it's not mine." They're not judging you for your kid.

Joe:

Exactly.

Dave:

Okay, in your book, you write about something called true resilience, and you talk about hard work, and challenge, and failure, which is one of those F words that no one likes to even talk about. When you say the word, failure, most people feel something in the pit of their stomach like, "Oh, I don't like that. It's uncomfortable." And I've been praising my kids for failing for years now, like at the end of the day, what's one thing you failed at today, something you worked on, and you didn't get?

And if they don't have any failures for the day I'm like, "Oh, maybe tomorrow can be a better day," because you didn't learn anything. You didn't push yourself. I don't know that I do that every single night anymore because, well, they're teenagers, they catch on, but I hope it worked. But what's the role of actual failure in building resilience. How often do kids need to fail? What kind of failure works best?

Joe:

Well, I can't imagine Dave Asprey became so successful without some failures. I can't imagine Elon Musk became so successful without ... There's no way to get to the top of your game, no way to get a gold medal, without a ton of failures, and failures allow for you to reflect and look back. I love the saying from Thomas Edison, he supposedly said, "I didn't learn how to make a light bulb, I learned how not to make a light bulb 999 times." And so how would you possibly learn? You can't learn without going through lots of iterations and making lots of mistakes.

My son lost a wrestling match, he was all upset, I said, "Hey, here's the good news. You got to lose about 700 more before you get good." So that's just the deal, and the quicker you embrace that, I forget who it was, Steven Pressfield, a famous author, he wrote Gates of Fire, he said, "I'm a writer, Joe, and I get these white pieces of paper ..." he like the old-fashioned typewriter. You got the white piece of paper, and it's blank, and it's staring at him, and he doesn't know the words to put down, and he goes, "As soon as I realized in my life, that I'm going to face resistance every single day," he goes, "It became so much easier."

Somehow, we bought into this idea that everything's going to be smooth, we're not going to fail, it's ... What planet is that on? Not this planet. So accept it, suck it up, and I love what you said to your kids, "Hopefully tomorrow will be a better day." I get people that send me texts and emails that say, "I hope you have a shitty day today," and that's a compliment. That's a compliment.

Dave:

I'm putting that one up on Instagram. That's hilarious, so that'll ... You know what makes me really pissed off? When I tell someone I'm going somewhere and they go, "Oh, stay safe." I'm like, what a horrible thing to tell someone. How about, "Have a great time"? Focusing on the opposite of that, so I love, "Have a shitty day."

Joe:

"Have a shitty day," and you're going to love this. We have a Spartan prayer, and we borrowed it from a French paratrooper, World War II, they found him dead in the field, and they found this prayer in his pocket, and they pulled it out, and he basically said, he said, "God," he said, "I know everybody out here is asking you for the good stuff. They want a warm meal, they want to be back with their spouse, their girlfriend, their boyfriend, they want a shower, they want to be back with their family. You probably don't have any of that left, so I want you to give me the worst stuff you got. The turmoil, the pain, the suffering, and give me the strength I need to deal with it. Just keep it coming." And so that became the

Spartan prayer, like give me the shitty days, give me the failure, because I know I'm going to become better dealing with that.

Dave:

Okay. I really like that. One of the things that parents do is they make mistakes that they don't know that they're making, and they end up teaching helplessness. So I want to know, what is the number one mistake that parents make that teaches their kids to be helpless?

Joe:

They remove the obstacles.

Dave:

What's an example of an obstacle [crosstalk 00:43:35]?

Joe:

"I'm going to help you with the homework. I'm going to get in touch with your teacher. Oh, you're late?" I watched it this morning, you and I talked about the wrestling practice, guess what? There's two girls on the team. There's 50 boys, there's two girls. I got to hand it to the fact that these two girls are in there fighting these boys, right? She showed up, I don't know, 47 seconds late, the coach said, I heard the coach, I was on my Airdyne bike over there, and I heard the coach, the coach said, "There's got to be consequences. You sit here and you just watch the practice today. You don't get to participate in it. You don't get to suffer with us." And she just sat there, and that is where we fail as parents, right? We don't want to do that. We don't want to traumatize the kid, we don't want to say to the kid, "Hey, walk to school. You figure it out. Oh, you don't like the broccoli I put on your ... Good, then you'll starve. Go to bed and figure out what you're going to eat tomorrow."

Dave:

That one piece of advice right there around eating, I must have said that 20 or 30 times in interviews. "Oh, my kids won't eat." I'm like, great. They've chosen to do an intermittent fast. And my son tried that once, my daughter never did. He said, "I'm not going to eat this," and I said, "Great, you've decided to join me in an intermittent fast. This is fantastic. I'll put my food away too and we can eat tomorrow. By the way, we'll be eating that anyway, but you can go as long as you want. It's totally good. You won't die. You have about two months of not eating before you die."

Joe:

You remember the scene in The Revenant with, what's his name? The famous actor? Why am I drawing a blank? Titanic. What's his name?

Dave:

Oh, Leonardo DiCaprio.

Joe:

DiCaprio, he's starving, he was attacked by a bear, he's crawling his way back to the camp, he's nearly dead, and he comes-



Dave:

I love that movie.

Joe:

He comes across the bear-

Dave:

Revenants? Isn't that a-

Joe:

The Revenant. Yeah, The Revenant.

Dave:

Relevance, Revenants, something like that?

Joe:

Revenant, and he's eating the raw meat, and the blood is dripping ... If you get hungry enough, you'll eat anything.

Dave:

Yep. I'm kind of putting on my parenting hat, the helicopter parenting hat, and trying to imagine what it's like to be one of those. And then if they were to read your book and go through the 10 steps in the book, how would they know where to start without just completely trashing their kids? They've had 10 years or 15 years of teaching the kids, "Oh, don't worry, the world's made of cotton candy and rubber bumpers," how's that going to go? Do you just pull the Band-Aid off?

Joe:

I got to tell you guys, my dad, when I was growing up the first 10 years of my life, was really successful. In this neighborhood where people were doing bad things, he was on the line, and ran businesses, and was just doing really well. So I was a cocky little spoiled kid for the first 10 years of my life. My parents got divorced, my mother got very little from it and moved us to Ithaca out of Queens, Ithaca, New York. And then my father ended up losing 90% of his money, went out of business, lost his real estate, and I watched the whole thing happen, and then my mother couldn't pay her mortgage.

That was the best thing that ever happened to me. That was like the 1942 French paratrooper. I got what you would think was a bad deal, but it made me better, it made me stronger. When I was 16, a few years into that, my mother locked the door in her house and she said, "FFIO, fucking figure it out." And again, listening to this, you'd say, "Oh, that's terrible." It was the best thing my mother could have did. I had to figure out how to cook my own food, I had to buy my own toilet paper. I had to go get a job, I made \$14 a week as a [inaudible 00:47:24]. Like, yes, rip the Band-Aid off, make the kid ... Look, we've only been here in Florida for three days, Dave. I took the kids right across the street, we rented an apartment, went right across the street-

Dave:

But what city did you pick?

Joe:

I found ... You're going to laugh, Orlando, there's this little town called Winter Park, which I found-

Dave:

Holy crap, you picked Winter Park?

Joe:

[inaudible 00:47:45] Winter Park, and it's got, moss hanging from the trees, and it looks to me like what Savannah would. I've never been to Savannah, Georgia, but I kind of like it. It's got some brick roads, it's got this school, it's got this crazy coach. I like it.

Dave:

All right, I got to tell a story here about Winter Park. I haven't thought of that in a long time. Back when I was maybe 22 or something, this was when I sold the first thing ever sold over the internet, before the name, E-commerce, existed. The journalist that reached out to me when I posted about it, some obscure forum on Usenet, which was way before we had things like chat rooms and Reddit and whatever, I posted I was making money online, and she called me. She lived in Winter Park and I'm like, where the hell is Winter Park? I've never heard of this, this tiny little town in Florida, and I ended up writing for her. And she said, "Well, Dave, you know all this tech stuff, so I want you to write this article, and you can ghostwrite it for me, and I'm going to publish it in some tech magazine."

So I wrote this article, and I sent it to her, and she goes, "This is the biggest piece of shit I've ever seen. This is terrible. I should just spike it." And I go, "What's spiking it mean? I'm not a writer," and she said, "Spiking is when you tell them it's so bad that you don't pay them, and she said, "But since this is your first time, you can do it one more time and sent me something about what a nut graph is." By the way, guys, if you're a journalist, you know what a nut graph is.

And so I ended up doing a ton of work, and I rewrote it, and it was acceptable, and that was the launch of my brief journalism career in tech. And actually, it was the start of my writing career, which has gone pretty well. She let me fail, really kind of punched me in the face for it, and was like, "Well, do it again," because she wanted to get the work done. But even then, your Winter Park story makes me think, "How did I fail around Winter Park," and that was a failure story, but wow.

Joe:

[crosstalk 00:49:32].

Dave:

That is a tiny town where only old people live. That's what I heard. Is that true?

Joe:

It's a tiny town. I haven't seen the old people. We're right by the school, and the school has over 1,000 students. And then I'm in Lake Nona, which that's where I'm sitting right now because Lake Nona is attempting to be this health and wellness capital, blah blah blah, and so they gave me an office here, and I'm hiring people here, so yeah.

Dave:

Well, congratulations. I think Florida's a growth part of the world, as long as it doesn't go underwater. We'll figure that one out.

Joe:

I can swim.

Dave:

Yeah, you can swim, there you go. You certainly can. It's the alligators that you want to worry about. Now, I know we're coming up on the end of the show. What do you do to make family units resilient? there's a lot of people getting divorced, a lot of relationship stress, increases in abuse and all of that, that happen during times of stress, and certainly when there's all these government things that even kids can see just don't make sense because of a lack of consistency and a lack of logical underpinnings. I'm not even saying whether they work or not, it's just that you can't do it some of the time here and here. Anyway, there's a lot of chaos that's putting pressure on things, and it's not lending itself to resilient families. How do you recommend that families stay resilient, versus just building resilient kids?

Joe:

A couple things. One is, first order of business, sit down with the entire family, figure out the things you value, the things you believe in, and gain alignment amongst everybody in the family on those things that all ladder up to a mission statement. "We are ..." fill in the blank, "And this is what we stand for."

Imagine you had a coat of arms, this was 1,000, 2,000, 3,000 years ago, what would that say for your family? What would your family emblem be? So figure out your beliefs, figure out your values, ladder it up to this family mission statement, make sure you're all aligned, and commit to it. You don't want the wife on one side, the husband on the other, the kids on the other side, all being wishy washy about [inaudible 00:51:43], you got to find common ground, so nail that, number one.

Number two, the family has to operate like they're Olympians. They got to get to bed early, they got to wake up early together, they can't be out drinking and missing appointments. That creates fractures and stress and fights. We got to treat everybody ... Look, there's a great blog, Will It Make the Boat Go Faster? And it was about, I think, a 2008 eight-man crew team from the UK that had no chance of winning, and the coach said, "Listen, we got 18 months to train, we're going to stand by this statement. Everything we do every single day in our personal lives or our rowing lives, we're going to ask ourselves this question: will it make the boat go faster? You got to do that with your family."

And so for 18 months, "Hey, guys, we had a great day today. Let's go have some ice cream." Will it make the boat go faster? No, we're not having ice cream. "Hey, guys, we had a great week. Let's go hang out with the girls." Will it make the boat go faster? No, so we're not going to hang out with the girls, and all they did was focus on what will make the boat go faster. Sure enough, they went and got gold. And so you don't have to be that strict with the family, but you want to be strict enough that you get out of your own way, you don't have self-inflicted wounds.

Dave:

So it's aligned purpose and aligned vision, and so that the family vision or the family mission statement is a really cool thing. I know a couple of people I've interviewed about that over the last 10 years, have brought that up consistently, and I can say I've written down that I should do it, but I don't know that we've actually written one down, but it's one of those things that is a really good idea. So I can't say that I've tried it, but then again, there's always room for improvement. I have failed.

Joe:

Chisel it in stone.

Dave:

All right, I like that. We are chiseling something on the door of the house that we've been working on for way longer than we should have, and it's going to be in some inscrutable things, so it'll be in a foreign language, but it'll say, "No empathy for stupidity."

Joe:

I love it, love it.

Dave:

My kids pick that and I'm like, "All right, that's fine. If you do something that's stupid because you knew better and did it anyway, you don't get empathy for it," and in my mind, that's just part of toughness training. It's like, "Oh, did you forget your lunch?" Instead of feeling empathy for you, we're like, "Well, don't forget your lunch again, and you can miss lunch," and that's happened to my kids. And funny, once it happens, they don't forget their lunch anymore, but if you drive their lunch to them, it happens all the time. Who would've thought?

Okay, you have 10 whole rules in your book, which is really cool, and I don't think it'd be appropriate to go through all 10 in just one interview because it would be too fast to even absorb. But the general idea of resilience for families and building resilient kids is something that every parent listening to this, I would say, must do. It's so important, particularly because kids are under more pressure and more stress and just more crazy times than before, so the resilience is lower unless you do your job as a parent to make it higher. And I think you nailed it, and the stuff you've done with a Kung Fu master for five years, that's pretty impressive. I can say I haven't done that, but I hope that my kids are resilient. My final question for you before we go is, how do you know if your kids are resilient? Is there a survey, a quiz, a specific challenge, that you put them through? How do you know you're doing a good job?

Joe:

Well, here's a better way to answer the question. You ready?

Dave:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Joe:

Vermont, up on the farm, I heard a story about a family from the early 1900s. The father and the son headed out in the fall from Connecticut, about 125 miles up into Vermont where we have our farm, and the idea was for them to get some trees chopped down and get things organized so that in the spring, when the rest of the family showed up, they'd have the homestead getting built. And within a few days of being there, chopping down some trees, the father died. Tree fell on the father, killed him. The 13-year-old son had to go back the 125 miles on his own and tell mom and sister. And so I would argue we are pretty damn resilient as a species. we've learned helplessness, we've gotten plump, so don't worry about it. Your kids are resilient. The only thing in the way is you. You are in the way.

Dave:

Yeah, [crosstalk 00:56:34].

Joe:

And so the quicker you can get out of the way, and it's hard, right? Even me, I'm talking tough on this show, I'm writing books about it, I love my kids. I want to help them, I want to push them this morning to eat their oatmeal before they go and do this workout, and then like, fuck them, they should've made their own oatmeal. What the hell am I getting in the way for? You know what I mean? So ...

Dave:

Amen. I'm still having that lack of resilience in my conversations with my wife. My kids, "Did you want a hot breakfast? Wake up early and make a hot breakfast, otherwise throw some protein powder in there and you're good to go. I'll keep you alive, but if you want eggs and bacon, then you cook the eggs and bacon.

Joe:

Exactly, get out of the way.

Dave:

Okay. Well, I appreciate your mindset. You've led an incredibly interesting life going from banker, to farmer, to entrepreneur, to helping build these communities of people, and we've talked about resilient workplaces, resilient families, resilient kids,, resilient everything else, which is cool. And if you're listening to this and you're saying, "Oh, I've heard of Joe, I've heard of Spartan Up, and it's a bunch of crazy people out there," yeah, pretty much, but all communities that care about something look crazy to other people who don't care about the same thing. But at its core, that toughness, that resilience, is there, and this is a fantastic book.

So if you're thinking about how your family and your kids can do it, I think Joe's a guy who's tested the extremes, which means that he's learned something and you don't have to put your kids out in the snow overnight just to see what they'll do, which Joe probably does every Friday night. It's okay, but the directionality that you'll get from it is worth it. So if this episode is of use to you, then read the book, do the work. JoeDeSena.com, D-E-S-E-N-A. Joe, thank you, my friend, for spending some time with me, with this community of listeners of The Human Upgrade. Have a great day.

Joe:

Thanks for having me, Dave. You're awesome.