

Episode 69

Emotion at Work in Authenticity and Breaking the Fourth Wall with Adrian Salazar from SafetyWing

Phil Willcox

Hello and welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast, where we take a deep dive into the human condition. And today we have the pleasure of welcoming Adrian Salazar onto the podcast. Now, Adrian is the head of culture and integrity, which I think is a fantastic job title in of itself, but we'll get onto that later, at SafetyWing. And SafetyWing, they're a provider of nomad insurance for global travel and insurance solutions for remote teams. And then today we're going to delve into, I think, some quite meaningful topics, such as authenticity. And we might even look at some buzzwords that might be shaping company culture, but I don't know, are they all that helpful? And then we'll dive into SafetyWing's culture and the use of things like integrity and authenticity, and stuff like that. Anyway, enough for me. Let's get our guest on the air, so welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast, Adrian Salazar.

Adrian Salazar

Hi, how are you? Thanks for having me.

Phil Willcox

Thank you so much for coming on, Adrian, I'm really, really excited to have you on today, it's going to be a really useful episode for our listeners I think

Adrian Salazar

Cool, I'm excited.

Phil Willcox

Good. And as per usual for this podcast, what I'd like to do is open with our unexpected yet innocuous question, so, a question that you haven't been able to prepare for, is innocuous enough that it's not going to ask you to disclose your deep, darkest secrets and also will help us get to know you a little differently or a little more. So, my question for you today is, what is a memorable shop from your youth?

Adrian Salazar

A memorable shop? Like a store?

Phil Willcox

Yes, like a store, yes.

Adrian Salazar

[Laughs] From my youth. What does that mean? Like, how young are we talking here? Five year old or ten year old?

Phil Willcox

Let's go say, I don't know five to 15.

Adrian Salazar

Five to 15? Okay. There was this music instrument shop back in Lima where I was born and raised. It was a tiny shop, but it was also primarily like a repair shop. And the guys who used to run that shop were friendly, and I used to go after school just to hang around, just to see the instruments, play guitar, like grab someone else's guitar that was there for maintenance or whatever. And they were very kind to me and very inviting, and that was one of the reasons why I started formalising my music training.

Phil Willcox

Wow! And what music do you play?

Adrian Salazar

I play blues guitar.

Phil Willcox

Blues? I love blues. And do you write your own material, or is it you're playing other people's stuff?

Adrian Salazar

Well, I've been writing on and off for 20 years, and I haven't released any...

Phil Willcox:

Wow.

Adrian Salazar

Yeah, any body of work, any meaningful body of work. Although I do have a YouTube channel with a few million views, maybe.

Phil Willcox

Wow, we are definitely putting a link to that in the show notes.

Adrian Salazar

[Laughs] All right. It's a bit out there, but it's cool. And now I'm actually recording an album, compiling compositions from the past 20 years, yeah.

Phil Willcox

Wow. I mean, I feel like we could do a whole podcast episode on your musical back catalogue. What is it about music in particular for you then?

Adrian Salazar

Sorry, can you repeat that?

Phil Willcox

What is it that you enjoy about music, whether that be writing or playing?

Adrian Salazar

Well, yeah, that's a very deep question for me, because my father is a musician, so I've always been surrounded by music and art in that way. And my mother was a university professor, so it was sort of half and half, science and art. So, music is embedded within myself on a fundamental level. What is it about it? I think it's one of those things that gets you in a state in which you don't think too much. And for someone like myself, who thinks a lot and it's kind of hard to stop thinking sometimes, that's a very viable alternative to stop thinking.

Phil Willcox

Yeah, wow. And do you get to bring that musical side of you into work then? So I guess you described there that you use it as a release because you spend a lot of time thinking at work, and then the music allows you to not. Do you get to bring that musicality of yours into what you do at SafetyWing?

Adrian Salazar

Yes, but not directly, indirectly. There are two channels for that. One is what you get from most art forms, which is a kind of good taste, you learn to mix ingredients into something that doesn't exist. So that is a very valuable skill, I would say. I think, at a neurological level, it shares something with cooking. To me, that's the closest thing to music is cooking. You don't have anything and you have a few ingredients, and then you create something and you taste it and you adjust. So the feedback loops are tiny, just like music, you move your finger one millimetre to the side and the pitch changes slightly, or you press slightly harder and the pitch also adjusts. So it's just like cooking. So there's this good taste that is acquired, trained good taste, but there is also this mindset of experimentation that is also multidisciplinary. It doesn't matter what you do, you have this mindset of venturing into the unknown and for life and for work that is a useful tool that gets some people uncomfortable, but I use it [laughs].

Phil Willcox

Yeah. And I suppose the link that I'd like to take then is that that's an important part of you, so that's why I was curious about how you get to bring that into work? Because when you talk about integrity and authenticity at SafetyWing, I suppose I was wondering how much of that, how much of you do you bring or can you bring in?

Adrian Salazar

Right? That's a good question. So it seems like the self is governed by a few different, let's call them spirits or slightly different personalities. So what you bring to work is when you try to bring your authentic self is a good representation of these spirits, a meaningful, accurate representation. Although not every single one, right? So if you have a tendency to be hedonistic, for example, maybe that's not a great idea to bring that to work, but if you're authentic, you are deliberately authentic, you bring a good representation of that. Definitely in my case, in my own personal case I bring the artistic me, 100%. I bring the kind version of myself. I pick and choose the qualities that I think are the most meaningful to the work we do and to the work I do. Which is authentic but it's not completely transparent. Completely transparent is not great in my opinion. Just like you don't bring



everything to art, you don't bring everything to family, you pick and choose and you don't contradict. That's important too.

Phil Willcox

And I think we discussed this when we spoke off air in the planning for this episode, I struggle with the buzzword of authenticity. I support the sentiment behind it and I struggle with the, I guess, the practical reality of that, probably even more so with the phrase, "bring your whole self to work." I think I struggle with that even more because, again, do you really want my whole self, every single part of what that is?

Adrian Salazar

No.

Phil Willcox

I mean, I sing a lot and I sing really, really badly, and if I bring all of that into work, I'm not sure that's going to be a great thing for everybody. Granted, I also publish it on YouTube, but more for, I think, poking fun at myself than for serious reasons. And so for you, I guess, from a cultural perspective, how do you balance that authenticity bit?

Adrian Salazar

That's a very good question/reflection. I think it's important to establish the value of authenticity, to expand on it. So I think there are two primary benefits of being authentic. Being authentic is like being consistent, coherent with your true oneself, particularly when that posture or a posture of yours contradicts or goes against that pressure from society. That seems to be a good description, the pressure from the groups, the different groups in life. An authentic self is able to go against that pressure when it makes sense, when it's coherent. So the value of authenticity, the value of that act is twofold. So on the one hand, authenticity is a great connection mechanism. If I bring my authentic self, I'm bringing my authentic self with you right now deliberately, and by the end of this conversation you probably will have a good impression of who I am, what I believe. And over time, that impression, because it's authentic, will compound and create a predictable representation of myself quickly. If I'm not authentic, on the other hand, you wouldn't know exactly who I am because I would be sort of hiding behind the societal thinking or something like that. So it's a connection mechanism. It streamlines connection between people. And the other one, on the other hand, it's an anticorruption mechanism, meaning, and this is particularly important in groups like companies or like functional teams, it sort of scales very gracefully. So anticorruption, because if you have an idea, and I don't have one, I can shut up and let your idea through. That's great. But if you have an idea and I disagree, I can state my disagreement regardless of who you are, I can say I disagree. I authentically don't align with what you're saying. So that is very important because the alternative is political thinking, political action, like you believe something, you're my friend, you're my boss, you're whatever, I agree with you or you're my enemy, and I disagree with you. And those are very corrupt ways of acting. Being authentic is a better alternative. So if that is authenticity and if that is the value of authenticity, and God knows maybe that's true. That's why it's important to bring your authentic self but that doesn't mean bringing your whole self. There is a difference there. There is a difference of choosing what is productive.

Phil Willcox:

There was so many different elements of that, that I really enjoyed. Because when you said corruption, I was thinking, wow, that's a big word and one I associate with large systemic things, whether it be corruption at a governmental level or a corporate level. I hadn't thought about it as a corruption of my authenticity at like a micro level. So in that moment where I might think that's a really different idea to what I would have, and I think there's a different way of going about it, and I'm going to keep that to myself, I hadn't thought about it in terms of a corruption of my authenticity I suppose in that way. So that was a really interesting reframe. Yeah, just really, really got me thinking about it in a different way. And then as you were bringing what you said to a close I'll be honest with you, Adrian, I wasn't listening because my head was so full of everything else you've been saying before. So the last, probably 20 seconds of what you were saying, I didn't listen attentively to you because I was lost in my own head. And I'm hoping you might remember so you can remind me?

Adrian Salazar

[Laughs] I was talking about authenticity being two different things, like an anticorruption mechanism, a connection mechanism. And it's very useful that way. But also, authenticity doesn't mean complete transparency. If you're having a bad day and say that you're a barista, right, you serve coffee, I love coffee, I have so much admiration for good baristas, right, but say that you're having a bad day, your dog died, whatever and you're feeling emotional and you go to work, you choose to go to work or you have to go to work. Bringing those emotions to work is not professional. You see what I mean? If you cannot cope, it's probably a good idea to take a day off, take a week off, whatever you need. But if you do show up, you do have to bring your curated authentic self. Let's coin that term now, curated authentic self.

Phil Willcox

Yeah, okay.

Adrian Salazar

That means bringing a good service, bringing a smile, making someone else's life good for 15 minutes. That's so valuable.

Phil Willcox

And that reminds me of one of my favourite books is by a researcher called Arlie Hochschild called The Managed Heart. And within that she coined the term emotional labour, which is that work that we have to do with that sadness that we might be bringing, for example, because in that context, in that role as a barista, when someone says to the barista, oh, how are you today? It wouldn't be appropriate for the barista to say, well, actually, I'm devastated because my pet passed away recently and I've had to come to work because it's a distraction from loneliness that I feel at home now. Because the customer is going to go, whoa, I didn't necessarily want all of that, I just wanted a nice cup of coffee.

Adrian Salazar

[Laughs] Right. There is like a line there too, right? Because it seems like there is a way to bring that

up, you could, but I think the way in which you go about it, the timing if to say it. Yeah, there is a line there, there is no formula, but you could bring your life situation if appropriate. There is this reading the room thing.

Phil Willcox

Yeah. We had a guest on this podcast before called Eric Hessin, he's a researcher from Israel, I believe, and he talked about how the relationship between the people involved in the interaction, the goal of the interaction, what the interaction is there to do, and the intensity of the expression of the emotion being moderating factors in where that line is. So if the emotion is really intense, that might make it more difficult to cross the line, and if that relationship is quite close, that might make it easier to cross the line. Whereas if the goal of that interaction is to achieve something quickly and move rapidly, then the line might be further away, if that makes sense in terms of when it may be appropriateness to disclose.

Adrian Salazar

Yeah, that makes sense.

Phil Willcox

So how does the authenticity and the integrity bit then, because I mentioned at the outset that your title of the head of culture and integrity, I find fascinating as a title in and of itself, so could you tell us a bit more about that?

Adrian Salazar

Sure, definitely. Let's talk about integrity. That one is fascinating to me. So, I've been in this role for three years now, almost three years, and the word integrity has always been puzzling. At first in an aspirational way, like it sounds good type of thing, but as I grew into the role I discovered integrity. And I was talking to this guy a while back and he had this description for integrity, he will say that human integrity, like what we mean in the context of human behaviour, is just like structural integrity. So he was saying, if you think about a bridge, right, the bridge has this structural integrity to it. It can uphold until whatever weight it, it has these conditions, it can, I don't know, survive this kind of earthquake or whatever, it has this structural integrity to it. And it's a physical thing, it follows the laws of physics. He was saying, personal integrity is just like that, you cannot have personal integrity. And it seems like that's what people usually think, right? It seems like you think that you sometimes act with integrity, and hence you're a good person. But other times you don't and those are like flaws or exceptions or that integrity is conditional to context. And that's bullshit. That's just a way to justify yourself, to justify the lack of integrity. So I actually subscribe to this notion that, of structural integrity, you either have it or you don't, and I think it's one of those things that it's like, always work in progress, because we are humans and indeed we break our own principles. But I think it's a good framework. So at a company level, depending on your values, depending on your mission, depending on the conduct that you want to institute, acting with integrity is acting along those set of principles. And acting with structural integrity means no exceptions. This is how we do things. No exceptions. So I'm one of the people in charge of making sure that we have this structural integrity in place.

Phil Willcox

And I guess the question that's going to be really easy for me to say, and I imagine harder for you to answer is the how question. So how do you do that? So either how do you develop it or how do you maintain that structural integrity?

Adrian Salazar

Right? Well, the biggest factor is hiring the right people. It's just like having a relationship with someone. If you have a relationship, if you're thinking about having a relationship with someone, choose wisely. Choose the person who aligns naturally with your worldview, otherwise it's going to be a constant struggle, probably you're going to end up hating each other at some point. Say if you are very orderly, right, and you start living with someone who's not orderly, which is very difficult to adjust. Like it's a fundamental personality trait, you're most likely going to have issues around how orderly you are. One person is going to want all the dishes clean immediately after dinner, and the other person would like to have like a beer and watch TV and think about it later. So in the company context, it's exactly the same thing. If you hire for people who are naturally aligned with your mission, that's a lot. If you hire someone who would make progress toward your mission independently from being hired by your company, I mean, that's a big, big, big plus because you share an objective, just like a family or a couple. If you have, say, a wife and you have kids, then you have a shared objective, that simplifies many things in most of the cases. So naturally aligned with your mission. Naturally aligned with your values. In SafetyWing our values are tools, are not phrases, are not slogans, are actually very specific things designed to navigate SafetyWing in a successful way. So, for example, one of our values is be authentic. If you hire someone who's authentic, if you hire someone who's creative, that's another one of our values, then most likely you won't have to correct for these things. Finally, you shouldn't hire assholes, that's another, even if they are good at what they do. So that's another thing that you can get wrong too, by the way, there is some error here. But hire someone that you would like to have a cup of coffee with, someone who seems authentic is also a very good indication. So, yeah, hiring right fixes proactively most kind of misalignment issue. You make mistakes and when that happens, many times you have to make the tough decision of separating the person from the company, it never works. Like you can teach skills but you cannot teach worldview, that seems to be right. Yeah, and then I think that's it. I think that hiring the right people...well, and there are some tactics, right. Constantly talking about your mission, not in an instrumental way, that's the thing, in SafetyWing we have an amazing mission that we're actually trying to accomplish. And it's not like we want to be the top distributor for the Northwest. No, it's like we are building the first country on the Internet, which is a lofty, amazing mission. So, we constantly address the fact that what we're doing is meant to fulfil that mission. We constantly talk about our values in different ways. Like, for example, one of our traditions is during our strategy team meetings, one of our team members will do a presentation about one of our values in her own way, like in her own interpretation, how does this live in your work, in your life? Many times it goes through work into life as well. Yeah.

Phil Willcox

And you mentioned that be authentic was one of the values, and I'd love to come back to the mission about creating a country on the internet, because I think that sounds incredible and massive altogether at the same time. So what other values does SafetyWing hold then? So be authentic is one?

Adrian Salazar

Yes. We have ten, and I don't remember all of them by memory...

Phil Willcox

Sorry, I wasn't intending it to be a test, sorry [laughs].

Adrian Salazar

No, I can try. Yeah, let's see, I think I can say all ten. But first one is aim for the ideal. This is a cool one. It has a sort of story to it. Aim for the ideal. So when I joined SafetyWing that value didn't exist. Most of the other ones did, but that one didn't. And the first thing when I joined SafetyWing is that I spoke to everyone in the team and I asked them about the values, about the company, the work. It was an amazing experience and something that many people said was around this concept of building something to make the world better, bringing something that is more ideal. And the team felt extremely idealistic to me, like big ideas people. So I thought we should probably add this to our values. And we did, and it is our first value. I don't know if the most important one, but certainly the first one. Second one is be authentic. We discussed that already. Authenticity is a huge part for those two reasons, anticorruption and true connection. The third one is create, don't copy. I'm cheating now by the way, I'm using this little booklet that we created.

Phil Willcox

That's fine, it's okay.

Adrian Salazar

Yeah, it's like a storybook for children based on our values, it's one of my favourite projects we ever did. So, create don't copy is all about being creative, because we want to reach somewhere, we want to go somewhere new, the only way to do that is by making new things. It's also a great answer to what sounds like, let's do this because it's best practice. [Laughs] So, yeah, create don't copy. Or if you are going to adopt the best practice, and many times we do, you need to have a reason for that. Number four is, simple is better. Because simple things take less effort from the customer, from the user, and that makes them better. Simple is better. Do only what matters. This is a tricky one. Do only what matters is about prioritisation. You see this every day, you can be very busy doing a 100 things at a company, a 100 meaningless things, or you can do only what matters. Do one very important, future defining thing. This one is very hard to do proactively. Easier when you look retrospectively than proactively, but it's one of those things that you always optimise for. It also supports everyone, every team member into not appearing to be busy. That's pure corruption. Number six is make things people love. And that is a powerful one for me personally. I remember I was talking to Sandra our CEO when documenting these values, and we both are big Seinfeld fans, and we were talking about Seinfeld and how it's an example of something that people love, because they made it with great care and passion for the comedy. It wasn't superfluous. It was only meant to be funny, and it was made with great care, and it stands the test of time. Number seven is dare to make mistakes. Such a good and important one. Dare to make mistakes. Because you cannot predict the outcome of anything you do. So if you want to do something new, you probably will make mistakes along the way. Many of those mistakes will shape the path that you took somewhere.

Many of those mistakes will be necessary, will be pivoting points, will determine where you go. I'm about to be done, but I'm very passionate about all of these.

Phil Willcox

No, I'm loving it, keep going.

Adrian Salazar

All right. Let the best idea win is about having a flat hierarchical structure and trying to prioritise ideas over hierarchies, over groups, over friendships. It's another one of those and you can permanently forever optimise for. And you do need management structures many times. And the people with the most context should make decisions, but those decisions should be based on ideas and nothing else hopefully. I love number nine. Number nine is about personal agency. And you can do it because nothing will happen unless you make it happen. And this is remarkable, I speak with everyone in SafetyWing regularly, like on one on one settings. And this is one of those things that people need to be reminded of, including myself, starting with myself, the fact that if you see something that isn't working, you can actually fix it right now, and you don't have to ask anyone, just do it, you can do it. I think we are trained somehow, I don't know if it's the education system, if it's the way in which we are taught about what needs to work with a group, but many people, again, starting with myself, believe that things are someone else's responsibility or that you have to get consensus, or that your boss should approve or stuff like this, which makes you realise something, and then forget about it. Instead we in SafetyWing we use this garden analogy. So SafetyWing is like a big garden, and every person has like a small part assigned to her, and each person is responsible for maintaining that small part. But at the same time, we walk this garden constantly, all the time, every part of it, some people more than others. But if you're walking the garden or someone else's garden and you see weeds, just pull them out just right away, don't wait for anything, don't wait for anyone, you can do it. Finally, be good to each other, which is about being charitable in interpretation and taking people seriously, because everything we do becomes the culture. That's the end of it. What do you think?

Phil Willcox

So, as you were working your way through, sorry, go on.

Adrian Salazar

What do you think about that? How does that sound to you?

Phil Willcox

So, I think it sounds wonderful and clear. Because I think sometimes single statements on their own could be, I don't know, used or interpreted in a way that may do the corruption bit that you talked about earlier on. And when I then read through all ten, I don't know this, and you haven't said this either, but my guess would be because when you said number five, for example, when you said do only what matters, I could imagine in some situations or some contexts that could be used as a way of abdicating responsibility and not doing something, not delivering something, not achieving something. Because I could say, well, it didn't matter at that point in time, so when it needed to be done, something else was more important, and you tell me to do only what matters. So that's why I did what matters.

Adrian Salazar

That is true. That's a very acute observation. All of these are trade-offs. All of these. Because, yeah, you can be creative up to what are you going to build, your laptop? Is that how creative do you want to be? You see what I mean?

Phil Willcox

Yeah.

Adrian Salazar

Yeah, you're right, yes

Phil Willcox

And then when you look at all of them in the round, it then allows you to go, well, yes, all right, yes, I did do only what mattered. But maybe at the same time, I wasn't being good to each other because you needed me to do whatever that thing was, Adrian, and because I didn't do it, I haven't been good to you. Or, yes, I did only what mattered, but I didn't dare to make a mistake because this other thing that I could have done was riskier, I didn't do it because it didn't matter as much as this other thing did. So, if I would say trade-offs, I suppose, for me, I was thinking a bit more as a way of you can use all ten as, I don't know, indicators that can help me as a colleague make good decisions on the actions that I should be taking.

Adrian Salazar

Yes.

Phil Willcox

So as I...sorry, go on?

Adrian Salazar

No, that's perfect. You can be cynical and you can handle this in a utilitarian way, you can absolutely manipulate most situations by advocating any of these values. And I haven't seen that much, I have seen it like a couple of times maybe, but we hire very smart, kind people and they don't, because what is the foundation for all of this is being an independent thinker and being like a nice person. But you're right, it's like a compass of sorts, it's a sort of instrument that can help you navigating different situations. That's about it.

Phil Willcox

So within Emotion at Work we try and do it within, I guess, two different statements, I suppose, or two different items. So we talk about how emotions can be really enriching, they can enrich relationships, they can enrich lives, they can enrich experiences, and emotions can be really enriching. They can also be quite harmful, harmful to individuals, harmful to relationships, harmful to experiences, harmful to companies, cultures, teams. And so when we hire, we've got like a what we call a ways of working document, which is again is a bit of a buzzword thing, and within that, it outlines at every point in a day, and you're reaching your decision point, and if the answer to the question is this enriching lives? Yes. Carry on. Is this causing harm? Yes. Stop immediately.

Adrian Salazar

Mm, I understand.

Phil Willcox

So that could be harm to yourself, it could be harm to a colleague, it could be harm to a client. And it's not to say that you shouldn't then do it, but it's to say that's a stop point where you should go, how do I want to do this? How do I want to do this in a way that can be as constructive as possible? So I did a piece of work last week where a team didn't have a lot of what you're describing, you try and create a SafetyWing. So they weren't really being that good to each other, they weren't fixing it and right now they weren't kind of grabbing the weeds as they were walking past. They weren't letting the best idea win, and they weren't being authentic. And we got to a point where there was just an awful lot of emotion in the room and where people were starting to become overwhelmed with the feelings that they were having and the thoughts they were having about where the team was at and how the team's interacting and so on? And I reached a point where I had to go, if I let this continue, is this causing harm to the individuals here and/or the team here? Because if it is, I need to stop. Because I know this doesn't feel really enriching right now, this feels really tough right now, but it's not causing harm yet, it's causing discomfort, yes, but harm, no. It's a calibration, I guess, for me to go if it starts to cause a problem, I've just got to stop and go, what am I doing? Am I doing this for the right reasons? And so on. So in a way, I like the simplicity of what we're trying to do, but sometimes it doesn't account for nuance, and I really like the balance that you've got across those ten values that allows me to use it maybe in a bit more in an explicit way than we have in terms of a checklist almost.

Adrian Salazar

Let me ask you something, so that's fascinating to me, the bit about emotion being constructive or destructive, but that implies that the person on a personal level, you have to be mindful enough to first realise your emotions, which is not easy, and second, to be mindful enough to stop and to do the act of realisation. Two very different things, right? Particularly when people are feeling strong emotion, that could be difficult. So how do you achieve that?

Phil Willcox

Partly that there's a lot of work that's gone into it, I suppose. So my quest with emotions began 20 something years ago, where I really should have been fired for something I said to a customer. I didn't think they could hear me, I thought I'd press the mute button and they couldn't hear what I was saying, but they could. So when I told them to shut the **** up and stop crying like a...

Adrian Salazar

Wow.

Phil Willcox

They didn't take that too well. Yeah. And it began a quest for me in terms of understanding more about emotions and so on. And one of the words that I use a lot, I think I use a lot anyway, is about being considerate. And I think it's being considerate or considering is an undervalued or an underappreciated word. Because am I being considerate about myself, considerate about how I'm

feeling, what I'm thinking, how that's impacting my behaviour, how that's impacting the emotions I might be projecting onto other people? And similarly, how am I being considerate about what others might be experiencing? And going back to something you said, which I really liked, was about being charitable to each other. Sometimes we might see somebody's behaviour and go, oh, look at them, they've just ignored me.

Adrian Salazar

Exactly.

Phil Willcox

This is all about me, and I've done something to offend them. Whereas if I was being charitable, I might go, oh, I wonder what's going on for them today. That's different behaviour to normal. I want to go and check in and see if they're okay.

Adrian Salazar

That's exactly right. That's exactly the use case we use for be charitable interpretation. You could misconstrue that as being weak or not having clear expectations for others, which is not the intention at all, it's just being charitable.

Phil Willcox

So when I say you, when SafetyWing then are hiring and wanting to make really good decisions when they're hiring and they're looking to hire for authenticity, looking to hire for integrity, maybe looking to hire against these ten values, is there a risk that you end up hiring this, I was going to say clones but that's probably a bit extreme, do you risk only hiring a particular type of person?

Adrian Salazar

Yeah, I think you do, yes, I think you do. It's interesting. So I wonder if implicitly we're saying or accepting that's not good, hiring the same type of person, but let's say that there is something concerning about that. Is that the intention of the question though?

Phil Willcox

So I suppose I'm thinking about it from a diversity point of view, I'm not talking diversity from a particular characteristic, whether we're talking about gender or socioeconomic, those kinds of things. That was what was behind my question, I guess.

Adrian Salazar

Yeah, no, I love the diversity topic, it's fascinating to me because it's very hard to define what it means. So in SafetyWing we hire remotely across the world, there are no restrictions at all for your geographic location or ethnicity or religion, whatever. We hire from the world pool, which is pretty fascinating. And that creates a demographically diverse team. So I'm Peruvian, my manager is Norwegian, my friend is from Texas. You see what I mean? I have coworkers from Romania and Portugal. So all over the place. So that creates a very diverse demographically speaking group. At the same time we have consistent worldview. Within the cultural differences, that's another axis, but say we have very diverse cultures as well.

Phil Willcox

Yeah, absolutely.

Adrian Salazar

Like, someone from Germany will be very different than me [laughs]. At the same time we share the internet culture, which is very interesting. Like most of us were raised during or with or along with the internet. So we share the language, which is not our primary language in many cases, like mine, which is English, and along with the language we share a bit of the culture from the US/the internet. So we share some sort of worldview. So when we talk about diversity, I don't really know what it means. In some ways, we're very diverse. In some ways, we're not. But I think that you're right, we do hire for profile, and within that profile there is lots of diversity in different ways.

Phil Willcox

Yeah, because it was about that, when I think back to your aim for the ideal, create don't copy, make things people love, let the best idea win, if you don't have variety and difference in that, not necessarily, as I said earlier on, I wasn't asking it from a particular characteristic perspective, it was from a, how do you create that difference of thought and that difference of ideas and suggestions and options and solutions for clients and so on? And I guess that cultural...go on.

Adrian Salazar

I mean, that's fascinating to me, okay, but I'll give you two examples. Well, I'll give you one and one reflection. So we're trying to build a country on the internet and a global social safety net for that country on the internet. When we talk about the global social safety net, there is a lot of diverse thinking here because our founders are Norwegian, they have a social safety net that works very gracefully, and they want to bring that to the world. I'm Peruvian, I don't have that social safety net. I wish I did. I wish my kids do. So I want aspirationally to create that. Those are very different starting points to achieve our mission. Equally as strong I would say. But the example I wanted to give you is different, that's just a random reflection.

Phil Willcox

It was a useful reflection.

Adrian Salazar

Yeah, I love football, right? Soccer, whatever. I love Barcelona. That's my team. I've been watching Barcelona for ten years. And one of the reasons why they're one of the biggest clubs in the world is because they play the game in a very specific way under a set of rules that are not objectively better, are just the way that Barcelona does it, which are keep the ball, have possession, tactical stuff like that. But also soft stuff like, be good to other players, don't injure other players, play a fair game. You see what I mean? There is this code of conduct and they don't recruit for this, they do, but they don't recruit adults for this, they train the kids at La Masia from age six, and they shape the kids to be consistent. So I would argue that diversity of style, let's call it style, meaning values and worldview and approach to something is not necessarily objectively better than consistency. Think about the Beatles, consistent even for a short period of time. Even with all the dissonance within the personal group, consistency towards what they want to achieve and how to do it.

Phil Willcox

Okay. One of the things that I mentioned in the intro that we haven't touched on yet is we talked about buzzwords when we were doing our conversation beforehand. So we talked about things like burnout, emotional intelligence, psychological safety, that maybe you don't necessarily think help company culture.

Adrian Salazar

Right.

Phil Willcox

And that's quite a different perspective. So I thought it might be useful to hear your thoughts on that, if that's okay?

Adrian Salazar

Yeah, sure. So I'm not against any of these concepts really. And this relates so much to authenticity. What I think is that many people will adopt things without understanding them and their implications. So, for example, I love the whole psychological safety thing. And again, in the context of my own beliefs and in the context of a functional group, like I would say SafetyWing, psychological safety is like saying I have a room in my house in which I won't hit my kids. [Laughs] That's ridiculous, right? Because it means that in every other room I could hit my kids, and I would, and I will [laughs]. So I think that psychological safety is one of those things that people will use to say that right now in this conversation there is safety. Sure, great, the problem is that the implication is that in other conversations there is no safety and that's ridiculous. So I would say that maybe this is idealistic, but in a functional group every conversation should be safe. So I just think it's a little silly to try to bring this. It seems like I don't want to downplay the work that people do, but say, if you work at a fast food chain restaurant and your instructions are quite rigid and repetitive, and maybe people are not extremely committed on average to their work, maybe some of these ideas are useful but they come across as being instrumental anyway. In a good culture, in a good environment, these things are meaningless, in a way, because it's already in place. So most of these buzzwords and trends are so superficial that I find them funny. I'm a rebel [laughs].

Phil Willcox

That's okay. So I guess it's interesting, I like the distinction you've made there to say, well, if I create a psychologically safe conversation here, and I'm calling this conversation psychologically safe, and I guess you and I aren't necessarily colleagues, so maybe my example doesn't scan, but I'll go with it anyway. If I can say well, I can create this emotionally, this psychologically safe conversation here or I can create this psychologically safe team within this company, what does that say about the rest of the team or the rest of the company or other conversations that happen?

Adrian Salazar

Yes, exactly.

Phil Willcox

And similarly, I guess with something like burnout then, if I'm singling that out as something that

happens within a team, a company or an organisation or a profession, by having to single it out because it's happening, what does that say about what's happening in the rest of that? Is that right?

Adrian Salazar

Well, particularly with burnout the issue that I have is that the word means something very dramatic, it's like close to depression or close to exhaustion. People get tired. People need rest. Like in SafetyWing we have this unlimited PDO policy, we believe in stress and rest cycles, just like physical exercise, which I think we believe is healthy. And I'm not saying that this happens in SafetyWing because it doesn't, but I've seen that people using the word burnout as saying I'm tired or I need some rest. And it's one of these words that people just throw around. And the issue that I have with buzzwords is the superficial nature, like the mass adoption comes with superficial understanding of it. It's just something that sounds, that resonates with something that you feel and people feel stressed, but that doesn't mean that you're burning out. Those are very different things.

Phil Willcox

So I had something similar or I have something similar with impostor syndrome. So that's not to say that it doesn't exist, technically the words are inaccurate, because it's imposter phenomenon, not impostor syndrome, because it's not a syndrome, because it's based on the definition by Rose Clance and Pauline Imes or was it Suzanne Imes? By Clance & Imes anyway. It's contextually relevant and episodic in its nature, so it's not debilitating in that way. And also, being anxious or fearful or nervous or scared, does not necessarily equal having impostor phenomenon.

Adrian Salazar

Right. You're right.

Phil Willcox

So there's a number of characteristics that they describe alongside it, and they say that it can be confused with generalised anxiety or it can be confused with being anxious, not necessarily having imposter phenomenon. And anxiety as a generalised anxiety, that's more of a, what's the word I'm looking for? A debilitating condition than it is an episodic experience.

Adrian Salazar

Exactly. I love that analysis. Yeah, I think you're correct.

Phil Willcox

Yeah. Okay. So what we'll do shortly is start to move into closing the podcast off. And one of the ways that I like to do that bridge is to ask one of my favourite questions, which is a what surprised you question. So my question will be, what surprised you most since joining SafetyWing?

Adrian Salazar

That's a good question. Hard to answer. So, okay, here's an answer. And I say this very humbly, as I mentioned, I dropped out of high school when I was 15, very young, and I started working like the day after, I did, working online. And I've done so many things in the past 20 years. Like I started as a logo designer, I was designing logo. I didn't know how to design logos, but I was designing logos for like \$2 apiece. So I did that. I was a developer, I was a musician, I was a teacher, a videographer. I've



done so many things in my life, and I've always felt, and I say this very humbly, I've always felt like the smartest guy in the room since a very early age. When I joined SafetyWing that radically changed, I felt like the dumbest guy in the room all of a sudden. And you could call that imposter syndrome. [Laughs] I'm just kidding.

Phil Willcox

[Laughs]

Adrian Salazar

Not the dumbest, but I felt pretty average. And to me that was surprising, that was inspiring, that was so aspirational, so motivating, like, oh, I need to improve my game here because my peers are so good. And SafetyWing is like, to me, is like this I'm getting paid very well to learn from world class people. So, yeah, that was extremely, and it is still extremely surprising to me.

Phil Willcox

Fabulous. That must have been, as you said, an aspiring experience, yeah.

Adrian Salazar

Yes.

Phil Willcox

So, where can people find out more about SafetyWing then, Adrian?

Adrian Salazar

Safetywing.com, that's the place to go.

Phil Willcox

Wonderful. And you said the mission, I think you said the mission, is about creating a country on the internet.

Adrian Salazar

Yes, sir.

Phil Willcox

And then creating a global social safety net as well. Is that right?

Adrian Salazar

Yes. Our vision is to create a global social safety net and that is health, income protection, retirement products, so you have a safety net if things go wrong, you will fall but you won't hurt yourself for the first country on the internet, that is our mission. And you should do an episode with Lauren Rasavi, our VP of communications about this country on the internet initiative, but that's basically being a citizen as a membership, a citizenship as a membership. That's going to be interesting.

Phil Willcox

Yeah. Okay. And if people wanted to get hold of you, what's a good way for them to get hold of you?

Adrian Salazar

If you Google Adrian Salazar you'll find my LinkedIn profile right there. That's a good place.

Phil Willcox

Wonderful. Then we'll put a link to your profile in the show notes as well. So, as we come to a close then, is there something else, something more, something you're thinking, feeling, or would like to say before I close us off?

Adrian Salazar

Yeah, I guess a reflection would be or my overall feeling now is that I wish this type of work environment and culture to more people. It seems like there is this contradiction and it's a false one, that people believe that if you are happy at your workplace, if you are inspired, if you have well-being, if you're taken seriously, the work must be suffering or the business might be suffering. It's not good for business to do so much for team members, but it's actually the other way around, if you have good culture, good teams, and people are happy, taken seriously and have a good well-being overall, they will contribute to the business in a more meaningful way. And I observe that many places, most places in the world, most businesses don't operate this way, and I wish more people would have access to something like that.

Phil Willcox

Yeah, definitely, I agree with that wholeheartedly. Okay then, in which case, I'll say, Adrian, thank you so much for joining us on the Emotion at Work podcast today, and for you, fair listener, we'll see you next time.

Adrian Salazar

Thank you.

You've been listening to the Emotion at Work podcast and if you've got this far you must be interested in the role emotions have in the workplace either within individuals, between people, in teams or in organisations as a whole, so head over to the Emotion at Work hub which you can find at <https://community.emotionatwork.co.uk/groups>. Thanks for listening.