Episode 341 Transcript
Rediscovering Your Inner Child: The Transformative Power Of Play

Zander Phelps: Maybe we shouldn't take life seriously. Maybe we need to rethink that, because that's the stress level that keeps us in that state of deterioration. Our bodies reflect that and starts eating us away from the inside out. When I approach people from that way, I try and get them to recognise that play is not the antithesis to work. Play is the foundation of success. If you're in a playful state, people want, you're going to work better together. You're going to create a team environment. You're getting your creative ideas will start flowing in a playful environment, and that's what you need for success. That's how you come with innovation.

Tony Martignetti: For generations, we've gathered around the campfire to share stories, build trust, and pass along what we've learned. Welcome to The Virtual Campfire. I'm Tony Martignetti. Here we go. Beyond the success you see on the surface to uncover the stories of transformation behind it, the challenges, pivotal moments, and small steps that led to big leaps. because every journey has a story, and every story has something to teach us. Let's gather around the campfire where stories spark transformation.

Tony Martignetti: It is my honor and my pleasure to introduce my guests today, Zander Phelps. Zander is best known as Z Play coach. He is a lifestyle and wellness coach, keynote speaker, and author who's on a mission to help people overcome burnout. The transformative power of play. After experiencing burnout himself as an entertainment in the entertainment industry, he spent years traveling the world exploring how play impacts our minds, our relationships, and our well-being. That journey led him to develop the play flow State, a neuroscience backed approach to helping people reduce stress, spark creativity, build resilience and perform at their best. This is going to be a conversation about rethinking success, rediscovering curiosity, and why play might be one of the most overlooked tools for living a meaningful life.

Zander Phelps: I couldn't agree more.

Tony Martignetti: And I'm so thrilled to welcome you to The Virtual Campfire today Zander.

Zander Phelps: Thank you for having me, Tony. Pleasure to be here.

Tony Martignetti: Well, I'm just thinking about what we just shared in terms of your intro. There's so many things that you talk about and that you've experienced that I'm looking forward to digging into, because I think all the things that you share so, so important right now, people forget to play. And it is the most important thing that we can do to really explore what's real for us. So let's do this thing.

Zander Phelps: Let's do it.

Tony Martignetti: Let's dive in. Yeah. So the way we navigate on The Virtual Campfires through what I call flash points, the points that are in our journey that have ignited our gifts into the world. And what I'd like to do is give you a chance to explore what are those flash points, and you can share what you're called to share. And along the way, we'll pause and see what themes that are showing up. So with that, Zander, are you ready to go? Ready to go?

Zander Phelps: Let's do this.

Tony Martignetti: All right, my friend. Take it away.

Zander Phelps: Well, when you said the flash points. I was actually thinking of one instance, which is like, usually my origin story of of when I started traveling, if you will. But actually the flight, when you said mentioned flash point, I'm like one of the more bigger impacts I had in my life was when I was younger. I had my eighteenth birthday in basic training in the Air Force. And I just remember that that was one of the pivotal moments of my life of like, you got to grow up because, you know, I've had, I had, I grew up in a pretty, you know, middle class, you know, white American type of thing. And then that was the first big slap in the face of like, you gotta just grow up. So it was incredibly transformational point at that period of my life. So it was just like when you said that I was like, oh, okay. Even that goes back even further. That was not even in the book, but that was pretty transformational.

Tony Martignetti: Did you grow up in a military family or.

Zander Phelps: No, not at all. Not at all. My dad was in the military, if you will. But like, you know, he just he did the basic service. And then every generation of my family has had somebody in the military. Right. So my generation hadn't. And so my dad, I was the youngest of my generation. And so my dad was kind of like going, hey, I was going to actually, my whole thing was I was going to stay at my hometown to stay with my girlfriend at the time. And I was just going to get a local job and just be able to hang. And my dad was like, no, no, no, no, no. Well, how about this? If you're gonna stay here and do the job, why don't you go take a practice interview and go down to the recruitment station? Yeah, I'll do that. Dad, as a seventeen year old guy walking into a recruitment station, the military. You're not going to leave without signing the paperwork. They're trained to do that and they're like, sucker. So I first, I that's how I first signed up. And it was just like, yeah, but it was definitely, it impacted my life tremendously. That one one move.

Tony Martignetti: Yeah. And Air Force is no joke for many reasons. I mean, it's not like, you know, first of all, you're it's military training, but it's also at a level where, you know, you're flying planes, you're thinking about the technology of, you know, that goes into what a plane is all about. So there's a lot of things that go into it. And so you exit the Air Force. What happens next?

Zander Phelps: Okay, I'm gonna track that really quickly because that's almost a misconception about the Air Force. Yeah. Oh say it. Yeah. Air force is actually the brains of the military. They're the ones who overlook everything, but they're the eyes in the sky. If you really want to fly the best places to go. Navy. Right? Because they're the ones who do the fighter jets and things like that. And those are the more pilots in the Navy per se. Like Air Force is more like just the support part about the whole organization. So it's a little bit different. And I didn't learn anything about planes. I was stationed in a bunker underground without seeing the light of day. My whole life was just. I had literally the worst job in the military. That's what they labeled my job. So. But we can go on and on about. That's another book. But you know, I really that's just like, that was just a flash point of my life that changed me dramatically. But that's not the most interesting part. Interest, most interesting part came a little bit later.

Tony Martignetti: Yeah. Well, so let's get to it. I mean, I think that's so first of all, thank you for clarifying that. I always think that that I think that the ninety five percent of the people out there think that Air Force is like, oh, let's just fly some jets.

Zander Phelps: Yeah, well, it was so funny because after Top Gun came out, Air Force recruitment skyrocketed. But Top Gun is Navy. Yeah, that's all Navy stuff. And nobody knew that because they glance over it. But it's that's Navy so pretty funny. So but anyway, so let's fast forward a number of years after I got back home from military, I landed an internship helping my cousin do something, and I walked into his office. And he's for graphic design and he's doing an album cover for Peter Gabriel. I'm like, wow, that's pretty cool. He's doing a trailer for the Intel Company about the new

microprocessor they're coming out with. That was pretty crazy. And then we're going to do something small for NBC. Well, we finished the other projects and then NBC. Things start spiraling. And just like these different design ideas and my, my, his partner who was insane, crazy guy, his, he started coming up with more creative and creative ideas. So he kept on pitching new ideas to NBC, and they gave us a little bit of cash as to help us keep it rolling, which eventually turned us to redesigning the whole on air time of NBC. Right. So it's me and three other guys, a guy I was coming in for the internship and a guy took my place who became my best friend. He was my anchor to keep my sanity through the roller coaster ride that we were on, because it was just crazy days. I spent about a hundred hours a week working. I'd sleep at my office, wake up and start going. So this thing of changing the network quality, we digitized it. It was the first time that they switched from analog to digital. It was in nineteen ninety five, so the computers were just coming out. They were able to handle it. And so we crunched the credits over to one third the screen to open up the other two third screen for entertainment, and then put the shows back to back. So it all went seamless into the next show and trapped people. That was great. But after working all that time, I was given the opportunity to either continue with NBC and write my own check there. Like, like, just give us all the figures you want, give us your plan for like, you know, your six month plan, one year plan, five year plan, ten year plan. Give us all the things you want. We want to keep you on board and make you happy. I wrote on a piece of paper, I quit and I handed it back to my boss. Wow. So I'm like, he's like, what are you doing? I'm like, I can't, I just can't, I cannot edit another thing. I'm, I'm crazy right now. I need to reset. So that was like the first monumental decision that I made in my own life. I literally just jumped off the cliff of just like indecision. I had no necessarily any plan. I just knew that I couldn't continue on the path I was going.

Tony Martignetti: Yeah. Wow. That is remarkable. There's something about walking away from something that's really good. You know, to you, it didn't seem good, but that's pretty enticing for a lot of people. And to say no to it and do something else, then you need to be pulled by something really powerful. So tell me, what did you do next? Because at that point, you must have been like, ah, what am I doing? Why did I say no? But obviously the reasoning pulled you to something that's really interesting too.

Zander Phelps: Yeah. This is when the foundation of what I do now kind of kind of solidified a number of years to get done in hindsight, in retrospect, to get exactly what it was, but Eventually I got rid of everything. I sold all my stuff and then got my all my possessions down to a backpack. Yeah. And I was like, I'm just going to start traveling. I had plans to meet my dad in Africa at one point, and then I'm just going to go to Europe first for two months and then meet my dad in Africa. And then I made kind of plans to go with my cousin to New Zealand and Australia. I'm like, okay, let me see if I can work this all in. But as I was leaving with my backpack, one of my friends pulled out this thing out of his pocket and he said, do you have one of these? Which eventually becomes one of these? But he's like, do you have one of these? And I said, no. And he gave me his foot bag and he said, this is going to be the best gift anyone's going to ever give you, buddy. Just keep it in your pocket. And he gave me one that eventually becomes my tagline now later on. But at the time, I'm like, okay, cool, it's a foot bag. Give the guy my friend a hug. But I go to the airport and my flight is three hours delayed. As I'm going to the terminal, I sit down. I'm about ready to pull out a book. And then I felt in my pocket the hack. Yeah, let me give this a shot. So I went to a corner. I started kicking this thing around. Just goofing. Right. Just. I'm. It's all over the place, but I'm having a little bit of fun. Some guy asked to jump in with me, and immediately we become friends. Yeah, right. Immediately start encouraging each other. We're laughing, having an amazing time with this thing. And the three hours goes by where we hear the lady go, hey, guys, the plane's here. You're about ready to leave. Come on, get over here. So we didn't even realize that three hours had gone by, right? But we run to the terminal and the lady stops us, and she just says, look, I just want to say thank you. You have no idea

about this. But everybody was talking about you guys playing hacks. You just entertained the whole terminal for the last three hours. This is in nineteen ninety five. Pre this. Nowadays you go in the airport, everyone's just like this, scrolling on their phones, everyone's faces down. Nobody's looking up. But at the time that wasn't possible. So as we go on to the plane, like somebody gives me a high five, you know, this whole family is like all being, you know, smiling at me. This lady's like, meet me in the bathroom, give me her phone number. But, you know, I mean, whatever. So, but by the time I get to my seat, I feel like a superstar. I'm like, everybody loves me. I'm so amazing. Oh, but I sit down and my body's tingling from the exercise, right? I'm just like, oh my gosh, I've just done three hours of core crunching activity. I'm feeling amazing. And then I felt that thing in my pocket just like going, it's playtime, it's playtime. So everywhere I went after that time, I would just go to a park somewhere, take my shoes off, which is I found out later on is grounding, which is incredibly good for you. And I play Barefoot Hack and I would get somebody to join with me almost every time. So that was communicating with somebody through the art of play. Don't need to speak the same language. We're playing a nonviolent competition game, building upon each other our successes. So eventually I labeled footbag or Hacky Sack is the coin name by Wham-O. They own that name for their foot bags, right? But I call that the ultimate physical exercise. I'm like, what it does for our bodies, our core balancing, kicking this thing out of the air. It is extraordinary. But the whole premise of play was the interaction. I had any country I went to, I could always play and meet cool people who would just be instantly friends and be like, come to my house for dinner. You know, you need a place to sleep. No problem. You know, just it was an overwhelming, amazing thing. So when I learned how to make them, I'd give them away to people and say, keep this in your pocket. It's gonna be the best gift you will ever give you. So I've made thousands of these things over the years, and these eventually became my own thing. I call them Hacky-Dos, which is like a hack. I do hack your mind, body and spirit through play.

Tony Martignetti: Yeah. First of all, amazing. I just love the sense that you don't really need anything else besides the ball. You don't need a stick. You don't need anything else. It's a simple gateway into connection. It also takes is the courage to invite or not even invite just for you to show up. It's really the courage move is for other people to jump in and say, hey, I like what you're doing. Let me join in. And I think that is such a wonderful way to get things started. So the simplicity is what makes the the process so simple and easy for people to jump in. And the connection that it invites, the stories you just shared are just great. I mean, I think about some, I have some other guests who I've had on who have done things when they travel around like doing handstands. My friend April Renee, she does this all around the world and people are always like curious, like, oh, what is she doing? And that draws people in. But it's a simple act. You can start on your on your own. You don't need to have other people. But of course, it does get curious people to say, mm, interesting. Let me join in.

Zander Phelps: Yeah. It's yeah, it's a, it's a certain level of character to like somebody who wants to join in and play with the complete stranger. Right. But hack is also one of the most inviting games I've ever come across. You don't need much space. You don't need different courts. You just need that small space. But it's people can jump in really easy at any level. It's not a hard level of entry.

Tony Martignetti: Yeah. And it's off the screens, which I think all of us have, you know, kind of gotten into this world where we're just sitting there in our own world on a screen, and we need to invite ourselves to come offline and do things like this. So that's the combat of it that this. And again, you could put this in your pocket.

Zander Phelps: That's that's the thing. As I say, you don't need any other things. But this one thing you can carry with you all the time. Even if I'm not playing with, it's a reminder that I can play at any moment. But another thing I do is I juggle everywhere. So hack is juggling came later on. But hack is

the ultimate physical exercise juggling for me. I call it the ultimate brain exercise. So I'm a juggle pusher officially. So I, you know, I'm always like, Tony, do you juggle yet? Do you juggle yet?

Tony Martignetti: I'm starting now.

Zander Phelps: There you go. Yep. Yep, yep. I tell people, if you knew how good it was for you, you would have started yesterday. Like it is literally that I'm studying like the neuroscience behind it right now. But oh my gosh, what it does for your left and right hemispheres, your corpus callosum and the way organized, you can get into that at some point, but it is extraordinary.

Tony Martignetti: Like most things like play seems like on the surface, it's like no big deal. But when you really start to go deeper, just like you did as you reflected on what you did in the in the airport, it's like, well, wait a minute. This is not just on the surface. You go deeper and you realize there's a lot more happening here. You're getting the exercise, you're getting that connection, but you're also stimulating your whole body from the inside out and your brain. So I think I love the fact that there's so much happening. And we got to take things a little deeper and understand the neuroscience of what's happening in play. And I've been thinking a lot about play because I think it is a great place for us to explore our identities, our ways of showing up in the world. So I'd love to hear your perspective on what did you learn about play after this initial foray and then starting a company around it?

Zander Phelps: Yes, that's a great question. And this goes this goes directly to the neuroscience behind it, Tony, because all of us are experiencing burnout. All of us are under stress all the time. The neuroscience behind play is once you start playing or even think about play, your brain switches off like the. It goes from fight or flight to I'm safe, right? Cortisol levels plummet immediately. You get dopamine, oxytocin. All these beautiful brain chemicals start. Start being released into your body just from the thought of play. But once you start engaging your body, you have that movement going. This also starts releasing all this pent up stress that you have in your body. So play instantaneously is the reactive for the brain to start just being able to readjust. So I especially promote this to people who are in that burnout stage. They're experiencing brain fog. They have creative issues going on. They can't sleep. They cannot find any calmness in their life. The reason why it's not because they're tired all the time and they just haven't had enough rest. Because if, if vacations worked, you'd come back and you'd be like, oh, yay, I'm back on track. You're not. You stay frustrated. You stay in a negative state because your brain hasn't had a time to go out of the fight or flight. Play is the equality of that. It's the main thing. No matter what you're doing, if you're playing, you're not being chased by a tiger. You're in a state where you can relax. So your brain immediately associates that with, okay, things are cool. Now I can start repairing. Your body starts repairing. Once the cortisol levels plummet, your whole body can start repairing and going through the process of getting your brain to start rediscovering new ways creative outlets flourish, connectivity happens. You start lowering your stress levels, which means your anxiety decreases, which means that your frustration decreases, which means people are drawn to you more. They're less likely to feel like you're irritated because you're not. You're in a playful state.

Tony Martignetti: Exactly right. It's the most open door. You know, the door is open to connect and to, to explore more ways of connecting and finding new connection points with others people. It's really wonderful.

Zander Phelps: Yeah, yeah. And that's the main thing is like just training your brain to play find. We all have it in us. We're born playing. That's, that's how we discover the world as children. But eventually we go through a system that teaches us that plays a negative thing. It becomes you have to conform to society now. So stop goofing off. You have to go to school now. So you get playtime in a recess break, and then you go through high school and it becomes play becomes sports, which is competitive, which is not what how children play. When you watch how they play, they balance out

game so that the play lasts longer. It's not about crushing the competition because that takes away from that spirit of unity which they which we crave. You know, we crave that connection. So it's not about separating us into teams. As adults we do that. Everything is a competition there. What my job they want. You know, I have to beat them up. I have to do this whole thing. And that takes that childlike play that's inside of us and puts it into a corner where it doesn't feel safe.

Tony Martignetti: Yeah. I just love what you're tapping into because this is exactly where I wanted to, to head around this conversation is like the naysayers. And, you know, as we get become adults, we start to say, oh, play. It's no, that's for children. It's not. Or, you know, that's for only when we're on this on the field or in sports. But the reality is we need to maybe embrace that a little more fully. And I'd love to hear the pushback that you get from people when you, especially adults, when they say like, I don't have time for that.

Zander Phelps: Yeah. When I hear that, that I get so sad because I'm like, I'm like, that's those people are the most unhappy. Those are the people who age the worst. Like, I've met eighty year olds who are like thirty year olds just because they're curious and they play with things, they goof around, you know, like, and, you know, grandpa's like, hey, come here, grandma. And he's like slapping her booty or something like that, just teasing each other. And they have such life to them. And the people who don't, the people who are hunched over and they've lost that ability, they've lost that curiosity, and they don't have any inspiration to cling on to it because they come to the stereotype of thinking that play is the antithesis to work. If you're goofing off, you're not taking life seriously. Maybe we shouldn't take life seriously. Maybe we need to rethink that, because that's the stress level that keeps us in that state of deterioration. Our bodies reflect that and starts eating us away from the inside out. So when I approach people from that way, I try and get them to recognise that play is not the antithesis to work. Play is the foundation of success. If you're in a playful state, people want. You're going to work better together. You're going to create a team environment. You're going to your creative ideas will start flowing in a playful environment. And that's what you need for success. That's how you come with innovation. If you stifle it, you're screwed. That's why so many companies are switching to that. They're starting to add play into their routine. They have play rooms now, you know, big offices and stuff like that because they're recognizing it. So it's key to start rewriting the narrative on play actually does and start reintroducing the neuroscience behind it, saying, this is your brain on play. And that's why I call it the play flow state. It was more like once you start doing this and you recognize how quick it is to get in that state with play, then it just makes sense to try and tap into it as much as possible.

Tony Martignetti: Yeah, I mean, I just think I'm thinking about what you're sharing here. And I'm thinking like, if you're coming from a playful mindset, even if it's like you're going into a big meeting, I'd be much more relaxed and much more state of wanting to share good ideas or to be maybe in a more alert and ready state if I came from a playful place, as opposed to coming from a stressed out state of, okay, I'm just prepping, prepping, prepping, prepping, prepping, and everything has got me all tense. Being tense and then going into a tense situation is not going to help. Actually coming from a playful, relaxed kind of dropping down all of that cortisol and letting it all just relax allows me to come in and a ready state. So playfulness actually allows you to become ready better. Would you agree?

Zander Phelps: One hundred percent, one hundred percent. And the other science behind it is we're we're antenna for energy and emotional contagion. So if you're in a stressful state, you're going to, you're going to expand that outward to other people. And other people are going to feel that and it's going to drop them down. But if you start off a meeting with everyone doing something fun and you're like, hey, stand up for a second, everyone just jump around for a second, make a goofy face. What have we got going on here? Just do it for one minute. Just shake yourself out. Come on, everybody,

let's feel it. You get that vibe, that first, that movement going, that energy going. And people are just like goofing around and just, you know, then all of a sudden you said, okay, how are we doing? Everybody feeling good. Everyone feel good. Let's do this, let's crack this, this. What have we got? What's the problem? We've got? Let's make a solution. No more problem. Let's make a solutions. So it's a quick way of just energizing people, getting everyone on the same page. There's no hierarchy about play. It's just about joining together and getting the minds to coordinate on what you need to do. And it's the fastest way of doing that. If you get the emotional, the energetic connection of play puts everybody in that state really fast because we all want that. We all relate to it because it's all in us. That's our natural state. It's just we've been, again, just stifling it and stifling and stifling it under yuck. So get out of that state.

Tony Martignetti: That's not worthy, no doubt. So I'm gonna take us back to maybe a more challenging question here, which is you got into this work and I'm sure there were people who maybe in your family or people who in your life who are like, dude, you're are you seriously going to do this work? Is this really the path that is going to be, you know, that you'll be successful on. What doesn't the naysayers, besides the people who are in the room who experience your work. How did you fight the naysayers in your life saying, are you sure this is the right path?

Zander Phelps: Okay, luckily my path opened up pretty organically. I've always had my dad talking to me about it because he's the guy. He's he's very logical based. He's very like, it's hard for him to get the emotional side of things. And he's very much like, you know, I mean, he was so bummed out when I, when I quit NBC, he's like, what are you doing? You know, and I'm like, I'm just going to travel, dad. Yay. But like, you know, after like three or four years of traveling, he was finally like, you know what? I see how you're improving. I see what you're doing. So just keep on doing it. You're getting the best education possible. So he was very much on board at that time. This the transition I've had in the last, let's say, year, year and a half, I've really started solidifying this whole process for for me. Prior to that, I helped build a couple of companies pretty large, and I was still into the work side of it, although with those companies, I was the play guy. I was the guy who was bringing in juggling into the company. I was the guy who was creating, you know, these custom Hacky-Dos. I made them for the company and I pass them out to the employees and I'd be like, you know, just play every chance, slap them around, throw them around, do something fun. That was the way I was encouraging people on that side. So the whole process of me transitioning it into my own thing was it was kind of an easy transformation. I don't really listen to any naysayers. I don't listen to people who aren't in that position of understanding what play is. If they automatically tell me, oh, what does this play? And that's goofy and stuff, I'm like, we don't need to have a conversation about it unless you want to learn. If you're coming with curiosity, I'll expect that. But if you're coming with judgment and not listening to any other points about them. Other people on the side of the fence who are totally on board, who want to hear more about it and who get even. When you say, let's play, they're like, yeah. And I'm like, that's more the people I tend to like, want gravitate to. And like, hey, look, if you get what's going on, then we got a great, great, it's the sky's the limit.

Tony Martignetti: I want to just reflect back on something because at first of all, I think you're absolutely right. You don't your job is not to convert naysayers. It's really to engage the people who are curious and take them further. In many ways, that's what a lot of us are trying to do. And when we have a certain thing we're excited about is like, you take people further. The journey that you've been on is that the unconventional path leads to unconventional success eventually. And so saying no to something that everyone would say, like, you're crazy for not doing. I think that's it takes courage, but it also gives you the opportunity to learn something that is not really for the average folk. The average person who's going to. When you go out and travel, you do learn a lot. But that's not something that the average person's going to go out and do. And then when you go into companies and you start to

see that you're going to bring your playfulness into the room, that's an identity that I always talk about identities and how we can integrate them. That playfulness is something that is good that you kept along the way, because it started to lead you down this path of a yes. And I can bring my playfulness, and I can be the other person who's doing the other work in the work in the room. Eventually, the that identity became a clearer path for you. Yeah, exactly. Exactly. So I just love that when we can follow an unconventional part of who we are, it can really lead us to what's meant for us. Um, but we have to be courageous enough to do that. Yeah. It's a tough world out there, for sure. Unless you have that, that inner guidance or inner strength. It's, uh, you know, you got a lot of naysayers out there. You got a lot of people who want to put you down and take away who you really are. And a lot of people conform. I think that's sad because we're all amazing beings. That's that's the way we can shine with that. We can get encouraged by that. We can we can do extraordinary things. Yeah.

Tony Martignetti: But I think that right now the world is calling for the nonconformist, the unconventional, the outliers. If you I hope you don't feel uncomfortable by me calling you an outlier. Uh.

Zander Phelps: I've been called that my whole life, basically. People always say you're the weird one. I'm like, yep. And weird is an amazing word. And so I love that word. You know, when people call me weird, I'm like, yes, yes. It's what they call the the druids. The magics. The strange, mystical or unexplainable are the weird. So I'm like, yep, that describes it. So yeah.

Tony Martignetti: And what's so cool too, and I just wanted to reflect on this and get your thought is that you start with like a premise and you think, okay, this might be a crazy idea, but you start there and something that just won't leave your mind. You're just like, okay, this idea of like throwing a ball around, but then you start to dig deeper and deeper and deeper. And that commitment to some idea that won't leave you has you finding out, what is it about this? What is it about this that has people feeling this way? What has about me feeling this way? And I think that's what really drives someone to continue to build a company around it. So, you know, just you can react to that in whatever you feel, agree or not agree or dig further. What do you think?

Zander Phelps: It's funny, I reflects me to a conversation I had with one of my good friends, and she was talking about like, you haven't just been doing this for just a little bit of time. You've been engaged in this for thirty years of research, over thirty years. You've been engaged in this play state, and it has been slowly unraveling itself to me, like it was first initially was just kicking one of these things around, and then some of my friends forced me to learn how to juggle, and juggling was something I just did on the side. And then eventually I started like kicking the bag around, like what it does for your physical body. And all these things started coming to me. Like, what more about what it does for your whole system. And then, you know, the barefoot thing came into it. Okay, that's cool. And then juggling, I started figuring out more about what it does for the brain and how your hands, when you engage your hands, what the neuroscience behind what the hands are for your brain, like the neuron connections are extraordinary for the tactile senses, you know, the sensory receptors, all the neurons that come into contact with your hands when you're juggling in this rhythm that the brain loves what it does for all this systems. And then, okay, so I'm playing. So what does play have to do with this? Okay, this is what play is now. And now it's just becoming now that they're studying the brain more and they have these these, the EEG machines, all these different things where they can actually connect to see how the brain is reacting. Now it's all starting to make sense. Now it's coming to a whole other level. Like now it's all catching up to what the whole thing I've been feeling for all these years. And I'm like, oh my gosh, this is this is incredible. So I'm into the power of laughter. What laughter does for us, it's extraordinary too. So every chance I can, I'm like, throw laughter in there. Always laugh as much as you can, you know? So it's crazy.

Tony Martignetti: It's so cool. It's like when you think about this is a question that I often think about is like, what do you want to get? What do you geek out about? Right. And like, I think you find out what you geek out about eventually, once you find the passion initially of something like I always say that I'm a music nerd because I love museums. It's something about the art and all the stories and even the architecture. But like, it didn't just start there. Just like I would go into museums and I'd be like, oh, there's something about these places that really call me and you're probably looking at me like, what a weirdo. But I can talk about music. Always a good thing. Yeah, it's always a good thing, right? But like, I think about how you can geek out about play. And, you know, of course people like to play, but the way that you study it is what makes it so geeky. You know what I mean?

Zander Phelps: Yeah. No. For sure. And I love that. I love that because geeking out about stuff is that's our passion. Yeah. And you have to geek out on your passions. I've only recently started to really geek out on it. Before it was just like coming to me and I'm like, okay, now. But now I'm like seeking further. I'm like taking courses on neuroscience and stuff like that because I'm like, I'm intrigued by how the brain works. So how does this fit? How does this make this, all this? It's all coming full circle now. It's just like, it's extraordinary. So yeah, geeking out is amazing. That just fuels us. So I love it. And museums are a great thing to geek out on. That's, that's all positive, right? Exactly.

Tony Martignetti: That's awesome. Well, I know we're coming close to the end of our time together, but I need to ask some more questions because I just. There's something about your journey that really intrigues me. What is something that you've learned about yourself on this path that you have not shared, that you want people to know? Maybe a lesson learned that you want to share with the world.

Zander Phelps: Wow. It sounds cliche, but yeah, follow, follow your passions. Of course. Like it's, you know, we're all, we all have our inner sparks. We all have our things that, that, that really drive us. So if you can find that underneath all the stuff that you've buried and all the, the conforming to society, you can cling on to that and tickle it. Just find out if it's, find out how it goes. Like, like, like, find those things that you're passionate about and keep on tickling them. And maybe that'll grow into something that that can overtake everything else that you're doing. But that was the first belief is like really believing in that, that my passions are more than just fleeting, that can drive upon my whole business right now is based upon that. Let's keep on going. Let's keep on digging and see what we can find.

Tony Martignetti: I love that it's such a well said and has me thinking about this idea of like, collect dots, don't try to connect them immediately, collect them and see what they are and those things eventually will connect to something that's really a core of what you do day in and day out. At least hopefully. Hopefully. Right. Yeah. I mean, there's no, no guarantee. But if you continue to integrate parts of those, those parts of who you are, they start to come together and they become part of your day in and day out. Otherwise, you start to burn out and feel like, oh, I'm just doing the stuff that I was told to do by somebody else. Being the kind of the robot of what you're programmed to do as opposed to, you know, being the author of your day and day in life. So life.

Zander Phelps: Yeah. And unfortunately, that's our school systems are trained us to do. And our workforce is mechanically based is to do things that we're, that humans aren't really good at all these things that like, you know, paper pushers and all these things that we're trying to, that that's not a human at their best. We're conforming and that really kills us. It really slows down our joy. And that just it shuts us down. So you got to find if you're in that type of position, then you've got to find your nuances within there that can help you start again, tickling that creative creativity that's inside of us, that makes humans shine is our creativity and our curiosity.

Tony Martignetti: There's so much that I could, you know, go further into this, but we do have to come to a close. And I have one last question. Can't wait to hear this one. What what are one or two or three? Since you're a rule breaker, I hope you'll break the rules with me. One or two books that have had an impact on you and why?

Zander Phelps: Stuart Brown, uh, he had a book on play. That one was just like the first one that was like one of the first books. I actually, I'm not a big highlighter. I'll just let that. But that's one of the first books I was actually highlighting things going, oh my gosh, this is just amazing. Oh, because it made sense of all these different things I've been thinking about over my life. That was a good solidifier for me of like, okay, the play is extraordinary.

Tony Martignetti: Yeah, right. She went on to start the Institute of Play or something like that. Isn't that what it's called?

Zander Phelps: I'm not sure yet exactly. I don't know. But I tried to reach out to him years ago and it went nowhere. So I'm like, I'm like, okay, well, at least I tried. I might try again now just because I would love to connect with him. Uh, I said to him, like a care package of all these different things. I, you know, play things I put together. I'm like, hey, maybe like a gift thing, but no worries. But he's listening, you know? Yeah. Yeah. So, so, but, uh, yeah. And then another, I mean, the for pure pleasure, I'll give a shout out to Jim Butcher's book. I love a good, uh, sci fi mystery thing. So I always look forward to his books based on, on a Dresden, which is a wizard, modern day wizard in Chicago. So it's one of those things I usually read for pleasure. I hardly ever read. It's like, fill my brain up with other things like that. I'm more of a visual with that. I love being immersed in like in a course or something like that. But just to read a book on stuff like that is very challenging for me to like. I find myself going over back over pages and what did I read? And it's that doesn't absorb as well for me. But for pure pleasure. Oh, I love a good page turner. So it's interesting how you say that. Like, I love the fact that like, you get so much from a fiction or a sci fi, especially that you can then apply in other arenas. It's like just when you think about clay, it's like you when you're playing, you're actually think, oh, this is just nonsensical and it's not important, but it is important because then from that, from that you can translate that into the work. You bring it from, you know, your play into performance.

Zander Phelps: Exactly. And not only do the books help me just relax my brain when I'm doing because it's a pleasure reading, but there's so many little nuggets inside the books that Jim includes in there that apply to real life. So it's just like you're learning something that's amazing and you're enjoying it while you're doing it. So there's no better combination, right? So I always like to find leverage when you can find leverage. It's a great win. You know, doing something that's exercise and play, learning and play. You know let's do that. That's your brain loves it. It really does. That's that's the one thing the difference between exercise and playing, you know, because if you're exercising, just running from, oh, I gotta exercise versus like playing. I love playing pickleball. I'm like, that's my, that's one of the ways I exercise because it's just fun for me. But all things.

Tony Martignetti: Zander. This was so much fun. I can't thank you enough for for saying yes and coming on. I love your energy. I love your stories and just everything you're up to. So thank you.

Zander Phelps: Thank you for having me, Tony. Truly a pleasure, bro. This is it was an amazing time. Yeah. I think we're going to have more conversations for sure.

Tony Martignetti: Yeah. But before I let you go, I want to make sure that the listeners have a place they can find you. What's the best best spot to learn more about you and your work?

Zander Phelps: zplaycoach.com is my actual website. So you're talking about juggling Tony. I have a had to make great juggling balls out of rice, plastic bags and balloons. It's really easy to make and they're really good juggling balls. And then they're right next to that is a video on how to learn how to

juggle with the step process I teach people. So each step is done with one ball, but you get three steps to help coordinate your brain and create a foundation for the left or right hemispheres to communicate. So follow the steps if you want to learn how to juggle and you want to learn how to juggle because it is the best thing ever for your brain, it's extraordinary. So, and I've also got, if you watch the videos and you learn how to juggle post to your video and tag us in your video, because we had to see some, some juggling, we need more people juggling. I can't stress it enough. And I'm like, it's, I can go on a whole podcast and talk about why juggling is so essential for us, because you're giving other people, if you're doing it in public, the other people, the opportunity and the option to go into play is good. We can still do this. We've got this. We don't have to be under stress all the time. But what does for us individually. Incredible. So but I've also got YouTube channel. I'm also on Instagram. Z play coach. So it's all. I'm just actually rebooting my whole YouTube channel. So I'm pretty stoked about this. We'll see what happens. But I'm trying to create all these new videos on the neuroscience behind play in a fun, creative way and give everyone like play exercises to do. So. We'll see.

Tony Martignetti: Well, we'll include as many of those links as we can. We'd love to have people check out your world. And again, thank you so much and thanks to listeners for coming on the journey. I know you're leaving, just really inspired to go out and, and look at play differently, but also maybe explore some different paths for yourself. What do you want to geek out on that you that really will inspire you to do something different? So thank you so much for joining us. And that's a wrap. Yay!

Tony Martignetti: So here's my invitation to you. Make room for a little more play. Try something new. Be willing to look a little silly and reconnect with something that brings you joy simply because it does. You never know what that small moment might open up. A special thank you to Zander Phelps for bringing his wonderful energy, stories and perspective to our campfire. If you enjoyed today's conversation, please subscribe to the Virtual campfire. Leave us a review and share this episode with someone who could use a little more play in their life. You can explore more inspiring conversations and resources at TonyMSpeaks.com. The Virtual Campfire is proudly produced by. It All Works. Until next time, stay curious. Follow what lights you up. And remember, life is too meaningful to spend all of it being serious. Keep your fire burning.