

**EPISODE 008**

[INTRODUCTION]

**[00:00:05] ANNOUNCER:** You're listening to 10,000 Swamp Leaders, leadership conversations that explore adapting and thriving in a complex world, with Rick Torseth and guests.

**[00:00:19] RT:** Hi, everybody, Rick Torseth, and welcome back to 10,000 Swamp Leaders. Today on the show, my guest is Ulzii Jamsran. Ulzii is a 25-year veteran of the United Nations Women's Initiative. Right now, she is the representative in Kyrgyzstan.

In our conversation, she's going to talk and explain how human change really happens on the ground, and why, often, the change begins as a one-on-one conversation. She will speak directly to the importance of having tools and processes and change frameworks that you can use that are stable enough to be replicated. If there's going to be any change on the ground, she understands that that work is a human-to-human connection and it requires not only the resources of the agency of the United Nations, but also the human touch with the people delivery network.

She explains why she's in the scratching business and how being a positive deviance can actually change the world. So let's head to Kyrgyzstan, and let's have a conversation with Ulzii and find out just how she's working this magic.

[INTERVIEW]

**[00:01:28] RT:** Hey, everybody, it's Rick Torseth. And welcome back to 10,000 Swamp Leaders, a podcast about leading in difficult situations by people who have made a choice to be in that world to choose to have impact. Today, it is a great pleasure and honor to have a colleague and friend who I've known for, I don't know, Ulzii, about 5, 6, 7 years, something like that. Ulzii Jamsran, who works for the United Nations, and she's worked all over the world. She'll talk a little bit about that.

So Ulzii, welcome to the podcast. Let's begin a little bit with maybe you telling people where you are in the world right now and what you're doing, and a little bit about the work that you're involved with the United Nations. Welcome.

**[00:02:12] UJ:** Hello, Rick. And thanks for having me for this podcast. So my name is Ulziisuren Jamsran. And very nice to greet all of you who are listening to this podcast. I work for the UN, the United Nations, specialized organization called UN Women. And as you may know, this is an entity which is focused on the advancement of women's rights, women's empowerment and gender equality. So I'm connected to you from Bishkek from Kyrgyzstan, where I have arrived about two and a half years ago, and where I'm acting as a representative of the entity and working as part of a larger UN system on the ground. So Rick, would you like me to tell you briefly about the work part first? The ethics part?

**[00:03:07] RT:** Yeah, let's give everybody a little bit of on the ground context for what you're doing right now. You have a long history in working on women's issues in United Nations around the world. And we can go down that road a little bit later. Set the stage for us right now, what the work is that you're doing, what your focus is, and then we'll go from there.

**[00:03:25] UJ:** Alright, okay. Maybe I will indeed take a little bit kind of a step back and try to bring a perspective from the global level.

**[00:03:34] RT:** Perfect.

**[00:03:34] UJ:** So as many of the listeners know, the current Secretary General, when he was appointed, he came with a very ambitious, very important reform agenda. And currently, all of us, both in the system, as well as those who are partnered with the UN, basically everyone, is trying to make it happen. And of course, that is also a very, very important and a big call on all of us who are serving in the organization.

So the important part, the actual justification of why this reform is so much needed both within the UN as an entity as well as in the work that UN entity as a system pushes around the world is related to the urgency, to the need to accelerate the changes that are there that is so much needed in the framework of sustainable development agenda.

And talking about sustainable development agenda, the whole globe has set a deadline by 2030. And by 2030, we should be able to attain the goals that we have agreed back in 2015. Now, as we speak, Rick, we have only eight years left until we actually attain the final year of this target. And we are already in the so-called decade of acceleration, because during this 10 years now, it's already eight years, we must accelerate the results on the ground. But then there is basically a million-dollar question how do you do that? What do you need to do? What do you need to change in order to really accelerate your results on the ground?

So this is exactly one of my major motivations and major tasks that is ahead of me, because I know it not only from the perspective of the call that SG made because of the lives women go through and what all the challenges women face on the ground. And we see that this radical change, transformative change, is very much needed, and it's urgent. And we also see that it is possible. And when it comes to the opportunities and possibilities, we're actually testing on the ground different ways of working by bringing the system together differently, by bringing partners differently, so that we actually truly immerse ourselves into understanding the issues and finding solutions differently.

In my position, as a representative of one of the UN entities on the ground, I always carry this very important call of this change in terms of like everybody's role that matters, who are in the system, and outside of the system, to really make this change happen. And this change not happen only tomorrow, but every day. Every day, we work. This change needs to be felt.

**[00:06:46] RT:** This is a mammoth challenge. It's a huge challenge. We were talking a little bit ago, probably the most well-known organization in the world is the United Nations. It's everywhere. It's giant. It's very bureaucratic, I would imagine. So for you, personally, as a leader in your organization, talk a little bit – Because I want to connect these, this change that the UN's declared for 2030, your path there. Help people with the context, the work that you are actually tasked with as a contributing effort to that larger agenda to get to this goal 2030. So talk a little bit about the work you're doing with women. And you have a very long history in this field. So you know an awful lot of stuff and what the challenges are. So give people a personal connection to the kind of people you're working with and the challenges they're facing so that

we can understand how the UN is getting from a global level down to the ground with the people that you're trying to affect.

**[00:07:45] UJ:** Rick, this actually is the core of this change that we're talking about in the system. At the end of the day, it is about seeing all those very concrete changes in the lives of women, for instance, in rural areas in Kyrgyzstan. So just to give you a few examples what we are working on and what we see happen as a result of work, which I'm leading with my team of young women in Kyrgyzstan, but also as part of a larger UN system.

So imagine a situation whereby, in the current context of Kyrgyzstan, there is a very good legislation. There are very good policies that were adopted to actually protect and promote the rights of women, and to attain better gender equality nationwide. At the same time, everyone recognizes the fact that the laws are very much like behind. And one of the major problems is the usual social norms that are still very much prevailing throughout the country, especially when it comes to the positioning the status of women **[inaudible 00:08:52]** of children, you name. And unfortunately, we always marginalize this group saying that this is a vulnerable group, or marginalized group.

And so imagine a situation whereby you basically see a very concrete like community in rural Kyrgyzstan, and girls 16 or 17-year-old, who get up in the morning, goes to school, and she doesn't come back home in the afternoon. And then family tries to find out what happened, why she's not coming back home. They learn in the afternoon, or toward the end of the day, that she was kidnapped for marriage, for forced marriage. And this kind of traditions still very much prevail even in highly democratic, like open societies like Kyrgyzstan.

Unfortunately, in this particular country, the level of this early marriage or forced marriage is very, very high and around like up to 10% of women up to the age of 24 basically report that they came to marriage through these forced arrangements. They didn't know whom they were marrying. They have never even met with them. This is really a very sad. And another very aggravated form of one of the most widespread form of violence against women is domestic violence. Different types of, also, sexual violence. And still, every fourth woman aged between 15 to 45, they face like different forms of domestic violence actually once in their lifetime.

**[00:10:40] RT:** What is the work that you're doing to get in the middle of that and end that?

**[00:10:45] UJ:** Yeah. So I'm actually coming to that now closer, because one of the major urgency around this is for community to understand that this is one of the worst forms of violations of bad girl of that woman's rights. Despite the fact that, again, the law prohibits such actions. There are systems in place. There are police in place who are actually watching this still. This is taking place throughout the country. So one of the major issues is to have very concrete awareness both among, of course, the abusers. And in 70% of the cases, these are men. But also, among women themselves, because oftentimes – So we have the data, it's very unfortunate data, that around like 50% of men in the country and around 34% of women, they tend to agree that men sometimes can hit a woman for any reason, including for preparing not tasty meal.

In this particular context, the most important part is really not to work with the belief system, to work with women who actually managed to change their belief analysis. Because, obviously, there are very concrete parts of the community which already know that, “Yes, yeah, you cannot do it.” And the part of the committee, according to this data, they think that, well, it's still okay.

So our main entry point is to find those women who have actually transformed their belief from accepting different forms of discrimination and violence against them towards becoming the advocates who actually raises her voice, stands for her rights and rights for the others, because she actually managed to change this belief.

So we have used different innovative approaches, I mean, including positive deviance approach, in order to identify this women from among the communities themselves. Especially, we call those like close communities in further behind like mountainous areas that would very difficult reach now from the center basically speak up.

**[00:13:10] RT:** Let me ask you then. As you know, Lars Thuesen was just a guest on this podcast last week. And I know you know Lars quite well.

**[00:13:19] UJ:** Oh, yes.

**[00:13:19] RT:** Let's take a little trip down the positive deviance intervention strategy, because Lars is advocating it to people like you. You are now somebody who's actually implementing the ideas of positive deviance. So for people who are listening who may not know what positive deviance is all about, give a little overview, but why you think it's a useful strategy to do the kind of culture change that you're doing in the country as an intervention strategy?

**[00:13:49] UJ:** Yes. Okay. So let me do that. And indeed, when we use this term positive deviance among people who have not come across, obviously, we definitely have to explain. And this very much can be the case with our listeners today. Positive deviance – So let me try to explain it on the basis of the example, which I also want to bring it here. So I'm going to give you another example from among women or men living with HIV.

So during this around like 30 years of independence of the country, the whole Kyrgyzstan had only one woman living with HIV with open public face. Meaning that she was not afraid to speak about her own status. She was outspoken and participating in public debates, TV, you name it. After we have applied the PD, or positive deviance approach, during this two and a half months testing, we have identified around nine other positive deviance. And now the whole country has all of a sudden 10 persons, both women and men and living with HIV, who openly speak up. They're all public figures, and they're coming from different backgrounds. Some of them are government officials. Some of them are community residents. Some of them are public figures of stuff from sports or arts. And it is important to basically recognize what had actually happened so that, all of a sudden, during the two and a half months, we got these people.

So the positive deviance approach that we have applied is basically coming from the belief that despite the fact that the community members have exactly the same conditions, challenges that they're facing, there are people in the community who actually find different way of solving their problems. They have a different value set and beliefs.

But what we have seen – So this is like coming really from the literature on PD, and it's usually the search for readily available PDs. But in practice, what we have seen is that there are a lot of people who are actually ready to become PDs. Meaning that those nine persons that we have spoken about living with HIV, they are very close to becoming PDs, but they're not PDs yet. Meaning that they still have like this – We call it like one step away from very concrete

transformative actions, which would liberate them, which would really help them to have that particular change so that they can free up themselves and lead their own lives or the lives of others differently.

And our instruments is where, yes, again, so about finding those PDs, working with those PDs, helping them to realize, to understand that what they have found as solutions for themselves is extremely important, is very unique, but it is also replicable by many others if that is made known to others.

**[00:16:59] RT:** What's the strategies you have when they're one step from being a positive deviant? What's the work you do to support them to make that last step over the threshold to the "other side"? How do you do that?

**[00:17:12] UJ:** So, here I can explain it using this eco model system, or eco model, or ecosystem model. Many of the listeners might be aware or maybe not. So, basically, we're looking into like more systems approach by putting the person at the center. And then you see the closest environment, like family, friends, very close colleagues, and then all the way to office, or community, or all the way to policies, institution, to the bigger context. Yeah, so this eco model system.

Now, within this eco systems model, one of the things which did not necessarily really work in the system, which we have actually exposed through our work, is that if you really take the person as a whole person, that this person, if that person gets training, support, services, etc., then that person will be able to actually move to the near the circle, like expose him or herself and then change. This model did not necessarily really work especially in the areas like hours.

So what we have explored is that we really have to understand and we really have to give recognition to the fact that the person has basically two competing natures within him or herself. And we explained it through the concept of the self. Yeah, the shadow self and the persona side. The shadow person is the one that is sitting deeply inside of me holding all those beliefs, which is coming from the community and from the ancestors. And then the other side of me who's actually interacting with the community. And that is the side of me on the face of me, which we put on ourselves when we go out from our own families.

So we already know that, like, the bigger the distance between the two, the shadow side of you and then the sunny side of you, this person has the biggest internal conflict and it is very difficult to help this person or for this person to actually just help themselves to move out from wherever they are.

So, understanding this particular part is extremely within development, because I understand that we will not be able to work with every person in this manner. But knowing this characteristic of where the major issues are, why a lot of development interventions, which is spending millions of funds, which is coming on the basis of the assumption that, “So, if I train this person, give good service, like have great laws, then this person will be developed.” Why this doesn't happen? Because it is actually linked very much with the fact that this person has a huge internal conflict.

I love **[inaudible 00:20:10]**, of course, because these concepts really help, these academic concepts, which was developed based on lots of evidences as well behind. So the concept of big assumptions, the big assumptions, until we really have the person to dig into his or her own big assumption of him or herself and to really take that out and bring it to the surface, it's very difficult to develop or help this person out.

So within these PDs with HIV, so what we have done is we really help them to understand that there are these two sides. So you have to, you have to understand yourself. You have to accept yourself the way you feel it internal in your shadow yourself. So, it literally – Now, like it did not require a lot of work. We worked through a few psychologists with a few sessions. But most importantly, to really bring these people together, that it really helped them to reveal themselves. One day, they woke up and said, “You know what? I'm ready to go and announce to all my friends that I lived with HIV, because even my friends don't know that I live with HIV.”

It's very similar with women who are constantly beaten up by their intimate partner, or family member, or even a parent. They never recognize, because it's a big stigma. It's a shame. And because until they really recognize that you are part of the solution, that you have the power, you have the agency to solve and change the situation. All the external helps don't –



**[00:21:53] RT:** Don't work.

**[00:21:54] UJ:** They really don't work.

**[00:21:56] RT:** So I'm imagining people who are listening here thinking, "Hold on a second. This is United Nations. They go around the world and they deposit large sums of money in their program officers whose job it is to spend that money to do the work of the United Nations. And they're listening to you thinking, "My goodness, she's at a one-to-one level, or a one-to-four level, or some small denomination of work helping the individual actually reconcile these two parts of themselves so they can cross that threshold we talked about.

So I'm imagining they're thinking, "This has got to be slow." And so talk a little bit about the pace of change, because your culture changing here, you're changing human beings, wiring system about how they think of themselves. For those people listening, what keeps you going? And how do you get grip on all of this stuff you're trying to do kind of one at a time, or two at a time, or three at a time?

**[00:22:57] UJ:** Right. Exactly. Rick, what you have said, this is exactly how we have felt when we started to dig into the actual problem. We really had to tell ourselves, "Hey, if we will be doing this kind of stuff, going to actually accelerate. Isn't it going to be very slow if you're doing that?" And it's a very, very natural question that you're asking.

The fascinating part is exactly on the contrary. It is exactly the opposite of what we can possibly imagine. Just to continue maybe on the same story on the case. So why we see this is an acceleration? I mean, by just saying the number, we had for almost 30 years only one person. No one has done this work before in order to relieve these people to come out to public and say, "Hey, I've lived with HIV. I'm extremely happy now. Striving. And my kids and my whole family, we are a very happy family." And for people who have never had that kind of experience, it is very easy to do. For people who have been under this huge stigma and discrimination, it's a huge heroic action. It's an absolutely big deed.

And for us, I mean, why this is important? And how this is actually helping to help create this acceleration is, that in this pathway, we are engaging partners both from the government, from

the civil society, from media, to do this work on the pathway to basically learn new way of working, but also to even unlearn. Because we have seen in our work that learning part is actually easy. But unlearning is almost impossible, unless there is something to replace it with. And that's why it is so important that now partners immerse themselves immediately into something new path, like new journey. And as they acquire something new, then they have a chance to unlearn some of the things, which have actually never worked in the past. But the problem is that they wish they have never questioned.

So one of the things, what we have also tested as part of the work with this particular group, is that we have facilitated the work of six NGOs. And at the start, at the start of this very, very short testing, or experimentation, the most difficult part was for them to clearly define what was the problem. Because in majority of the cases, the definition of the problem sounded like women, or these particular group of people, they face this kind of violence, this kind of discrimination.

So if you ask, "Is it the definition of problem? Is it a problem statement?" Yes. In a way, yes. But then is it going to really help you to understand what is exactly happening that what you're going to do to solve it? No, it doesn't help you. So this level of generalization, mega structure, mega mechanism in the development field in general, like using a very good policy, tools, institutions, etc., that are already there, we got so much accustomed to what we already know, what we have worked with, that we don't actually question already whether it is really producing results or not. That's why we've been keeping doing over and over the same stuff that we were like blinded by the fact that doing something and being busy is actually giving some kind of – Yes, it does give result. But it doesn't give transformative results.

**[00:26:58] RT:** This is a really important point you're making. What's an example of somebody having a problem statement, and it being too general? And what do you do to help them get it to a place where they actually know what it is and now they got different moves to make? Beyond just your work, not just your work, the work – Every human being could probably benefit from getting from 10,000 feet to the ground by truly understanding their own challenge. So how do you help them do that?

**[00:27:27] UJ:** I would say it's through dialogues. I mean, we just sit with them in the same room. We question them. We take them through five levels of the why. We take them like

through a thorough thinking. So you can imagine like us sitting together in the same room, literally for half a day. But even that half a day was not enough. They have come up with brilliant ideas or solutions. I'm talking about NGOs. Great ideas, great solutions. But we know that at the end of the day, this might not work. Why? Because these are like coming from the usual space.

I've been challenging them like going around the table talking to each and every one of them. And you cannot do it like as a workshop. You have to really work with each partner for them to really dig into. So what they're actually looking into? Because just stating that these people are facing this kind of discrimination does not help them to really understand what they have to do. We've been asking them to really take into – So exactly what they mean by this board, by that term?

So at the end, so I will give you maybe some fresh example, like maybe from Palestine, when we were working also with NGO partners on, also, girls early marriage. So initially, they have formulated a project around we will train. We will reach out to like 1000 fathers, raise awareness among 1000 others, to say no to their girls' marriage. So sounds really fascinating. Sounds really great, very ambitious. It's a small project, but still.

So at the end of like number of rounds of dialogues with them for them to really understand the problem. So they changed their tactic. They understood that the problem is not about awareness, awareness raising has been done. So they started to understand that they actually really lack very concrete examples, which are a known. And they lack very concrete leadership on this one, on the part of men, fathers.

And then so they reframe the whole project and then they, at the end – Because they dig into the platform, they changed absolutely upside-down the solution space as well. So instead of training, reaching out to 1000 fathers to train, raise their awareness, they decided to target only 20 fathers to go round and search for 20 fathers who already said no to their daughter's early marriage, to really dig into their belief why they have done it. What they can share with other fathers to do that?

And you can imagine how powerful project it was, because it was a small community. And when they have identified not even 20, I think they have identified much less than 20 fathers, but it

turned into such a powerful community space, community dialogue that everyone was curious to know, “How come that all these men existed already there with their practices? We did not know.” And all the other fathers who had no idea, they said, “I also want to do the same, because I also deeply, in myself, belief that I should not be doing that. But I saw that fathers were agreeing. So I was almost about to agree not to marry off my daughter.”

**[00:31:05] RT:** Would it be fair to say that those fathers that were found were positive deviants of a kind?

**[00:31:11] UJ:** They are. Exactly. So instead of, again, going to the average genetic group and mass of people to just raise the awareness, as a result of which there might be no action, or maybe very little action by very few, which is the usual like outcome of conventional projects. They have actually targeted those who are head of the curves who have already done it, who have very strong belief in the practice, to basically tell people, “Look, this is what I have done. This is how I believe in this.” This kind of deviant behavior, deviant practice, is extremely important. Because if we talk about the bell curve – Yeah? So in the bell curve, if we put the population, for instance, like, okay, the families who challenged whether to agree not to marry their daughters early or not. And of course, there are lots of other reasons as well, right? Including **[inaudible 00:32:18]**, etc., you have people, majority, they present approximately maybe in the middle, the gray mass. Or according to US elections terms, it’s a swing states. The swing states who actually don't necessarily really decide where to go. But actually, you have the states which decided **[inaudible 00:32:36]**. But then you do also have people who are left behind, which is the SG term, very important term, who are very, very left behind.

So basically, on this bell curve, instead of targeting those who are in the gray mass, who don't necessarily really decide, because they're far away from taking concrete actions, we find people who are ahead of the curve from the same group who have done it, who have shown even – And there are amazing cases that they were already leading their way, but they never recognized themselves as leaders. They have never recognized their practices as something that their communities would immediately benefit.

And when we actually come and search for these people, start to work with communities. So instead of, like, trying to convince this big mass of people who are not sure what it is. Just

spotting on those who have done and helping them to connect with their communities differently through recognition of their leadership skills, through the recognition of the concrete practices, you make real transformative change.

**[00:33:42] RT:** Let's catch this for a second, because I think that what I hear you saying is, one, leading transformational change around people and human beings in cultural norms is really hard work. It takes a lot of time. Two, you have to have some craft. You have to have some tools, some processes, some structures, positive deviance, the five why's, dialogue skills. So you have to bring some methodology to the work. I also think you must have to have really seriously good skills at holding space for people to feel safe to explore their challenges and have the opportunity by having safe space, to have insights and awareness expansion that causes them to say, "I could do something different."

So for you, personally, as a leader in the UN, share with people how you're wired to do this work. You said something about it's my belief that within each of us, there's a set of core values that motivate us to take action. So I believe that 100%. So I guess the first question is, what are your core values that drive everything else that you've been doing for people so they understand where do you start from to end up doing this stuff? So could you share a little bit about that from your own personal perspective?

**[00:35:08] UJ:** Yes, sure, of course. Yes, you're absolutely, Rick, when you're saying that in order for someone or from some entities to do this, you really have to be equipped with conceptual basis, tools, space, you name it. But again, at the end of the day, what actually drives actions differently is our beliefs, is our own values in which we believe.

I'm always coming from the perspective that – And again, this is from a very well-known concept, that everyone has their own 15% to contribute. Because whatever result is there, you cannot attribute it 100% to yourself because of the complexity, because of the beauty of what you see around you. I mean, everything is so complex. So it is extremely important. So wait and have – You want to put your own 15% or 15 cents so that it brings a much better value. So my own belief is that, for the change to happen, you don't have to wait for the **[inaudible 00:36:22]**. You don't have to have billions of funds to be there readily available for you to start to plan for the change.

I was talking about on this holding space, the methodologies, the tools. So if you look into our organization, UN Women, and in a wider system of UN, the whole system moved into creating a space, creating an environment for us to act differently. Long ago, we had this possibility, literally, all the time. We always complained, “Yes. The rules are very hard.” Yes, even now, it's a big system that has. It has its own bureaucracies, right? There are a lot of rooms, of course, for change and improvement. But even within that, there are spaces for innovators, for people who are doing things differently to still operate. Because if we want to start to operate only when this whole holding space changes, then the change will never come.

That's why I am a strong believer that every one of us has the possibility now to actually search for those opportunities, even within rigid systems, even within very tight systems. You still find a narrow space to operate, to do things differently. And by this, you start to expand your space where things are possible. And this is my belief, and this is how I am. And this is how my team acts.

And I always say that I always find the great piece in the policy that is coming from headquarters saying, “Hey, look, this is written there. So let's implement that. Let's bring that to the ground. This opportunity is given. Why don't we use it?”

What I find in the UN system, and very sorry for being a little bit negative about on this particular issue, is that now, with the reform, wonderful guidances came out from headquarters, really great thoughtful pieces were given to us. But we see that very few people, including in the system, they read, they know. I'm not even talking about further taking and implementing. So I think that is an issue of it's not about not having the will. It's not about not having enough money. It is actually also about how to make better connection between what is coming at the policy level with what is happening on the ground and bringing it back to the policy, so that policy can keep absorbing these wonderful practices from the ground. So I see this disconnect, too, between the headquarter level and the community level.

At the same time, I also can blame myself, because yes, we are doing lots of stuff on the ground. We're testing the transformative neural pathways. But we don't necessarily find the

possibility to analyze it perfectly, document it, trickle this up. And in this, of course, more systemic work is needed.

Very recently, there are a number of evaluations done in the UN on innovation, including in our own entity, and we were very critical about ourselves. And it's great that we are critical, because we are looking into what works, but what also does not work. What we need to change in our own environment. Because if UN itself cannot change it within itself, it is difficult to talk about us coming and working with our rights holders [inaudible 00:40:15] differently on the ground. So that's why it is absolutely critical that we see this change is happening inside of the organization. We acknowledge what really works well now, but what still does not work openly. And then to reflect it into our development work on the side.

**[00:40:37] RT:** Meaning, you got to be the change inside that you're advocating outside. You have to be integrated. So you told me a while ago, and maybe this is what you're saying here, but this is a cool way to say it. You said I'm in the scratching business. So what does that mean? Is that what you're talking about here?

**[00:40:58] UJ:** Exactly.

**[00:40:59] RT:** For people who've been listening, all of a sudden, she goes, she's in the scratching business? What is it? So tell people why you say that. What does that mean?

**[00:41:06] UJ:** Yes. Mostly, I used to serve like when I talk to the likeminded people, people who really understand what I'm talking about. Yes. And I do say, yeah, I'm keeping scratching the system from inside. What does it mean? Well, if we take the metaphor of an egg, right? I mean, if you come and crack the egg from outside, most probably you will have a nice breakfast, right? But then if the egg has a proper condition, and then if the egg cracks from inside, the life begins. That's exactly what I'm striving for. I'm trying to like really scratch the system from inside and helping to groom people in the system who also scratches from other parts of the egg so that the life comes in much faster. So that, also, we operate differently. Yeah, so I like this term because this really helps me. And then it also helps to motivate myself and my colleagues in, like, why we are doing this and how we're doing this.

**[00:42:12] RT:** So that's a great segue, because this is a podcast about working on the kinds of issues that you've been describing. But it's also a podcast. It's designed to help – Its 10,000 Swamp Leaders. Trying to encourage more people to choose to lead. So let's shift it a little bit, because you've been leading for a long time, and you got some points of view on what it means to actually be a leader. So if we imagine that there are people behind who are younger, who were thinking about this kind of work, maybe in the UN, maybe in another NGO, but some kind of work, where they're committing to work on really hard and intractable problems. What kind of advice do you have for those people that you've learned that if they had some insight and understanding of might save them or give them a little more pace? So for people who are trying to lead or thinking of leading, what counsel do you have for them?

**[00:43:09] UJ:** I don't know whether I'm the right person to give this advice or not?

**[00:43:13] RT:** I think you are.

**[00:43:15] UJ:** Because everyone's context is so different. But there might be some like principle issues, issues that might be applicable for everybody for any context, be it in public sector, or private, or even in domestic affair. So one thing, what have I learned throughout my – This is like almost like, what? 27 years of my career in the development field? Is not to be afraid to swing between **[inaudible 00:43:51]**. I was just talking about this **[inaudible 00:43:53]** at the level of persons are even digging into the person's brain. Like where and how this person is clashing. And the juggling between the big policy issues or the organizational vision, because we were a little bit of fooled by the belief that the management, the people at the policy level, they can only look at bigger picture, bigger things there. But then when you are constantly only at the balcony and you don't know what is actually happening on the ground, whatever you see from the balcony already is not what is actually happening on the ground.

Obviously, what you'll be seeing, and then on the basis of what you'll be deciding, that will already not be fitting the purpose, right? And that's why it is extremely important to keep changing your places, your perspectives, to really understand what's going on. And there is a beautiful term going between the dancing floor and the balcony, right? I think that is extremely really very important. And not to shy away, because a lot of leaders are afraid. Because there is even a term like, “Oh, you are micromanaging.” This has nothing to do with micromanagement.



It is about understanding the granular matter. It is about like scientists who are looking through the microscope to see, like, “So what is happening in your blood cell?” right? So it is that kind of work, because it really has to be science-based. And that's why you should not be afraid of doing that. That is not true.

Secondly, perhaps, I think it is absolutely important that you have a very clear value set for yourself. You have to really understand what really drives you, where you want to contribute to. You cannot keep swinging, because if you start swinging, then it will be difficult to know. “Okay, so where do you need to go?” So be very clear about your – Very clear set values. Or some of the neuroscientists basically say that, for instance, in order for the person who – Like the thieves. Now, among thieves. Not to really help to change the thieves. If you happen to just tell themselves that, “I’m a great person. I never do this. I only say truths.” And then this person can be fixed really easily, right?

So they're basically creating this value system. So it's very, very similar with that. So we just only have to trick our minds. We really need to understand and dig into, “So what do I mean by that?” So you constantly practice them. You constantly check whether this value that you believe in is really something that helps you to, like, develop yourself, and help others to get value out of this interaction with you. And so by constantly checking that, you can constantly improve on your balance on your own beliefs around those values. I think these would be the important ones.

**[00:47:11] RT:** Okay. So I have one more question here. So this is hard work. It takes a lot, time, energy, focus. How do you take care of yourself? How do you recharge yourself to stay 27 years in this work? You're bright, alive, you burst with energy. How do you sustain yourself so that you can keep going back into the work and do what you do?

**[00:47:34] UJ:** Yeah. I think my answer will be boring, Rick.

**[00:47:37] RT:** It's okay. Please bore us.

**[00:47:44] UJ:** I think it is, again, based on this value thing, because you constantly search. Like you constantly worry what you do and how you do? What you actually get? What kind of

value you bring? Because in the past, we used to always frame it around like results, “Okay, results. What kind of results you bring here and there?”

But lately, I started to understand in all these readings, in all these practices, really started to help me to understand that result is also another very false stuff. I mean, we have to really understand how do we define this result thing. I really started to understand that it is really about what kind of values you are able to create. How you create these values? And once you start to think about it, this is a non-stop. You cannot stop there. It is not about, “Okay, you have done this work. Let's move on. Because I have already this one ticked.” Okay, so you cannot see that you're done here, because you constantly search for new groups, new ideas, because these people are always there. There are always these issues. I mean, this context constantly evolves, especially now after Covid. My goodness! There was a huge dystonic move in everything. And a lot of people's belief, the old, unnecessary, I call it obsolete beliefs, got shattered, which is really great. And now it is exactly the time for us to expedite our work, to think differently. And this is exactly where we need to come in much more forcefully as a system. And using the opportunity of having great listeners of this podcast, I also wanted to appeal to our partners from private sector, from different governments, please come and invest in us. Please come and help the innovators, both in UN system or in other organizations, to really expand this opportunity space, expand this scratching business from inside, because we need that support.

One of the important things maybe I also want to flag once again, without external support, those who bring us the courage and become our journey companions, this work is very difficult. And those encouragement companions like you, like Lars – I have great, awesome professors from Oxford, like Mark Mathias, they really gave us motivation. They really help us to see things differently, change our worldview constantly. And of course, the major motivations are the **[inaudible 00:50:37]** women, children, youth on the ground, because you see the results immediately. You see that it is not – You don't have to wait five years or even one year for very concrete changes to happen.

**[00:50:50] RT:** It can come quick.

**[00:50:51] UJ:** Before, we were always told, “For that result to happen, you need five years. You need this much money. You need this much space.” No. Now we know that, no, as long as you change the way how you work, as long as you manage to really bring the practice with the advanced now knowledge appearing in academia, in science, with your own very concrete value systems, this is it. It just brings that change. Because if you will be operating in the old manner, yes, yes, exactly, then maybe you need 10 years, 20 years for the results to happen.

**[00:51:32] RT:** So I'm going to add here, as we close, another attribute I see in you that I want to draw forward for other people, which is you are a continuous learner. The learning didn't stop 20 years ago. Every day, I think you've come into the world saying, “What's here to learn that we can use to have impact?” And I think that's a very understated value. But I think when I think about the journey you've taken, the work you've done, the work you're going to do, I know that fundamentally is propelled by your curiosity and your values. And you know you got to keep evolving yourself and keep refreshing what you know in order to have impact.

So I want to thank you for your work. I want to thank you for your time on this podcast. I'm thinking we didn't get to the full story yet. So there may be another episode that we need to do down the road here. So thank you very much for being on 10,000 Swap Leaders. It's just good to have you on the job. Thank you very much.

**[00:52:32] UJ:** Thank you so much, Rick, for having me. And looking forward to. If there's another chance to have a conversation with you, I would love to. Thank you.

**[00:52:42] RT:** Perfect. Perfect.

**[00:52:41] UJ:** Thank you for the listeners as well.

[OUTRO]

**[00:52:46] ANNOUNCER:** Thank you for listening to 10,000 Swamp Leaders, with Rick Torseth. Please take this moment and hit subscribe to follow more leadership swamp conversations.

[END]

