

Julia Winston:

Take a look around. You'll notice them everywhere. Facilitators. People who guide other people, create connection, and make tough things easier. This is Facilitator Forum, where we meet a magical mix of people who offer us insights and inspiration through the stories of their work in the world. I'm your host, Julia Winston. Welcome.

Julia Winston:

Hello, beautiful people. Before I introduce today's guest, I want to stop and do a little check in. How are you doing? Are you enjoying this podcast? I sure hope so. I've been getting great feedback, which is super encouraging. I really appreciate all of you out there who are listening, reviewing and rating, spreading the word to your friends. Thank you so much. I've been having an absolute blast creating this podcast. I'm learning so much, from the guests mostly, and of course from the creative process, and it just feels like a dream to be in a creative state. That said, I am going to share a little shadow from behind the scenes. Producing and hosting a podcast is a lot of work, y'all. I like to check in with myself every now and then, kind of like I'm checking in with you right now to see how I'm doing.

Julia Winston:

Lately, I've realized that I've been having that kind of overstretched feeling, like I'm doing too much, and like it's my own fault. Ever had that feeling? I have three goals for this podcast. The first is to shine light on awesome facilitators. The second is to invite everyone listening to see themselves as a facilitator, to expand the definition of that word to be inclusive and empowering for everyone. And the third is to have a blast doing this work, to love the creative process. So I've decided that the third goal might be in peril if I continue releasing a new episode every other week, but that I can hit all three goals with gusto if I scale back just a little and release a new episode once a month.

Julia Winston:

So, starting in January, 2022, I'll be releasing a new episode every third Thursday of the month, instead of every other Monday. I know you have a million things going on too, and you're constantly being bombarded with new content, so I figured and hoped you wouldn't mind. That's our check-in. I'm always open to your feedback, so feel free to reach out on facilitatorforum.com if you have any questions, comments, or if you want to commiserate about being the kind of person who over-commits because you're just so excited about things.

Julia Winston:

Speaking of being excited, it's time to introduce our guest. Caleb Spaulding is a multidisciplinary creative based in Brooklyn, New York. He guides people to connect to their authentic voice to create extraordinary lives and relationships through his work as a facilitator and percussionist. Caleb is the founder of Rhythm of Happiness, a multimedia company that uses rhythm to help people connect to their creativity. He's the co-founder of Sounds Nice, a popup at the intersection of sound and mental health. Beyond that, he's also a co-author of a sex journal for couples, and a facilitator who's worked with clients like Google, LinkedIn, and Hinge.

Julia Winston:

As a performer, Caleb has appeared at Oprah's 2020 Vision Tour, an in partnership with Lenny Kravitz's Let Love Rule Foundation, as well as hundreds of other events around the world. Through his travels, he

continues to study the power of rhythm, and he shares stories of the people he's met and lessons he's learned through his Rhythm of Happiness documentary series. You also might recognize Caleb's name as one half of Gasoline Tequila, the group that produced and recorded the music for this podcast. We're about to get inside the mind and heart of an extraordinary percussion facilitator, and prepare yourself for a two-minute drumming experience towards the end of this episode. If you can find a way to be seated and still for that part, that would be awesome, and if not, it's still going to be awesome. All right, away we go. Caleb Spaulding, welcome to Facilitator Forum.

Caleb Spaulding:

Thank you so, so much. I'm so pumped to be here. This is a long time coming.

Julia Winston:

It is a long time coming because earlier this summer, when I was first thinking about this podcast, one of the very first steps I took was to reach out to you and ask if you would create the music.

Caleb Spaulding:

Which was such a cool moment, such a blessing for me, and such a gift for me to be able to do that for you.

Julia Winston:

Thank you. Well, I'm loving the music. It creates such a vibe that just feels like Facilitator Forum.

Caleb Spaulding:

I love that.

Julia Winston:

And so Caleb, give us a little taste of the work you do in the world. What are you facilitating?

Caleb Spaulding:

What I'm up to in the world, for the most part, is creating experiences that help people tap into their heart and into their breath, into their internal rhythms, through drumming, through breath, through movement, through music, and through community.

Julia Winston:

So, I'd love to go back in time and hear a little bit about your relationship to drumming and to rhythm and to music. Where did it all start for you and how did it lead to this really unique work?

Caleb Spaulding:

I mean, for music as a whole, it's been in my life since I can remember. I don't remember ever having a moment in my life where I wasn't making music. My mom likes to tell the story that I was singing before I was talking, and that included Christmas carols in the middle of the summer. Growing up, music with my siblings was a really big part of my life. My mom would always crowd my siblings and I around the piano and we would sing songs together, and at the time, I didn't really grasp the impact act of that. But looking back now, I see how much connection came from that, this connection to voice, to self-

expression. Community. I mean, it's like this natural community that was stemmed with my brothers and sister around music really got me jazzed on the idea of making music with other people.

Caleb Spaulding:

And I started playing drums in sixth grade, so a little bit into my life, and had this deep obsession with rock music and, I mean, still do, and really wanted so badly at that time to be a rock-god drummer, touring the world. Being in front of people energizes me in such a big way and I love being on stage and I love performing. But a few years ago, I think it was 2014 or '15, I got invited to play hand drums. I got to play djembe at a dance party with the DJ, and I was on the dance floor drumming along with this DJ and was just face-to-face with all these people. It was much different than being up on a stage playing at people. I really felt this connection where I was playing with people, and there was the way that they dancing, engaging and pushing and pulling the energy with me as I played.

Caleb Spaulding:

I felt this aliveness that I hadn't experienced before, and it was very intriguing to me. And I shifted my focus and my interest from being on a stage to more being with people, immersing myself, and realizing that giving people the permission to play and to tap into rhythm, whether that is them playing drums or just dancing, or just even being in the presence of rhythm and movement and music, it's such a gift and I wanted to give that gift as much as possible. And that's really, on a high level, what has brought me to do this work as a facilitator where I am using drumming, where I'm using rhythm, to help people, and to be with people, to give people the chance to really express themselves. And that's such a cool service to be able to offer to so many people.

Julia Winston:

Yeah, absolutely. Because we're so out of touch with ourselves in our day-to-day lives. It's like our bodies are going through the motions, our brains are in 50,000 different directions. We don't even know how we feel, and you're offering a set of tools for people to tune into, how am I doing? It's like a locating of one's self in order to know what... It's like helping people make better decisions, probably.

Caleb Spaulding:

Hundred percent. The image that just came to mind as you were saying that was a person on a beach with a metal detector trying to find buried treasure. I feel with these rhythmic experiences, the pulse, the beat that is connecting to the breath is helping people scan their bodies and locate these areas of discomfort or dis-ease and help them connect to it deeper and to just, A, locate it, B, explore it, and see what might come from moving that energy around, moving that friction around inside of ourselves. Because I think that there's so much that we can learn from somatic experiences. The body is so intelligent, and so a lot of what I'm offering is the opportunity to feel and to unearth through physical sensations.

Julia Winston:

I think we have very few options for ways to do that, that we know of, in our mainstream world. Exercise is a big way that we can move things around somatically in order to get to a different state of mind. Dancing is another one that sometimes people don't feel comfortable doing in public, or even with themselves. And beyond that, there really aren't very many opportunities for us to connect through our physical sensations, through our bodies to understand how we're doing and to shift it.

Caleb Spaulding:

I think a lot of people are just searching for and waiting for the moment and the permission to be able to open the valve and just let it all pour out, whatever the emotion is. And even yesterday, this client who came over mentioned that one of the drums I was playing at one point during the experience really brought up a lot of aggression for him. And he, in the experience, wasn't necessarily demonstrating or showing aggression. There was nothing he was doing outwardly that would've told me he was feeling aggression, but he shared it afterwards and just told me that that was in his body, that he was able to feel it. And I think that that is such a cool thing to hear and to name, especially as a man. I think men labeling that they are feeling aggression has so many layers of connotation underneath that, like, oh, is it unsafe? Are they going to act out and do something harmful to someone?

Caleb Spaulding:

And the vulnerability that he embodied to be able to just say, "Hey, I was feeling a rush in there," and to let that be okay, and for that to not mean that he is an aggressive person, is huge. These moments where emotions can come up, and we can name the emotion, and not let there be any meaning behind what we've named, is, again, something that we don't have a lot of space for. I mean, you mentioned things like exercise and dance, and I don't think... I've never been to a gym where you're allowed to lift weights and scream, or be able to be like, "I'm angry." So I'm a huge fan of anything that gives people permission to move. There's two pieces, though. I think that the movement is one thing, the second piece is to be able to acknowledge what's coming up, so that you're not just like, "What do I do with this feeling?" To be able to put that somewhere and to be able to speak it into an existence and let people know that you're feeling a certain way is so relieving, is so freeing.

Julia Winston:

Why is that important to you, Caleb?

Caleb Spaulding:

I came in contact with this idea of men's work about five years ago and started to learn a lot about the value of sharing my emotions with other men, and it was the most life-changing experience I've ever had. And this, by the way, had nothing to do with my work as a drummer at the time, this was just me as a human, this was my personal life. I started to see how, as a musician, I've been really lucky my whole life to be able to have this outlet, to express myself, especially with drums. I mean, there's... I feel like everyone can conjure up an image of an angry drummer behind a drum set at a rock show, just banging away. There's no better way to release emotions than hitting something. It's amazing and it's so cathartic.

Caleb Spaulding:

And so I think I'm just starting to grasp in the last couple of years how important having this musical outlet, this percussive outlet was for me. And what I started to realize looking backwards was how hard it is to be a... I'll just speak for myself, a teenage boy. I'm sure it's hard to just be a teenager period, but it was really hard being a teenage boy. And I've done some work with other young men to help create spaces, to facilitate spaces of emotional self-expression. And I've seen that that experience of being a young man can be really tough. There's so many expectations flying around about what that's supposed to look like.

Caleb Spaulding:

Through my work, I've seen these young teen age boys be like, "We're hearing this term toxic masculinity. What does that even mean? How do I not become a toxic male?" And there's this fear. I didn't even know what that meant when I was 13 years old, and I had enough to worry about. I didn't really have the tools, I don't think many teenagers have the tools to be able to talk about what they're feeling, and they're feeling so much. And I'm just really, really grateful that I had music as an outlet, and still feel like I could have used another two dozen outlets to be able to just understand what was going on with myself, as I was getting older and going through all these physical and emotional changes.

Caleb Spaulding:

And it's interesting, I'm really kind of figuring this out in real time with you right now, to be honest, Julia. But I talk a lot about this childlike wonder and these states of connecting to our inner child, and there is this pureness that I think kind of gets lost in that transition from adolescence to adulthood. And it happens so quickly, we don't really have anywhere, or I didn't really have anywhere to hang onto it. And I really feel like, again, I'm just going to keep saying how lucky I have been to have drumming as this anchor the whole time. I always knew, despite what was happening, despite all the changes, there was this constant, and it was rhythm for me. I'm holding onto that and trying to bring people along for that ride with me. And of course it's an opt and you don't have to, but I think there's something really magical there.

Julia Winston:

I'm so touched hearing you talk about this. I feel like we're really getting to the heart of your work and your why.

Caleb Spaulding:

Yeah.

Julia Winston:

And, I mean, we're talking about toxic masculinity. We're talking about vulnerability, expressions of vulnerability that are both physical and emotional in nature. And we're are talking about mental health and healing.

Caleb Spaulding:

Yeah.

Julia Winston:

If you feel open to it, I'd love to hear a little bit about the mental health challenges that you've experienced.

Caleb Spaulding:

Sure.

Julia Winston:

And if you don't feel comfortable sharing that, then we can go in a different direction.

Caleb Spaulding:

No, let's do it. I appreciate the way you set it up too. I'm very happy to share. I guess in my mid-twenties or so, I was working with my best friend. We were building a tech startup together, and it was just all the cliches. It was just a ton of work at the time. I was playing in a rock band, the rock band that I had moved to New York with, and was noticing how I was having to put music more and more on the back burner and was spending all the hours working on this startup. And had a blast doing it and learned so much, and was very quickly feeling this stress and burnout and depression. And I finally, one day just had this huge breakdown where luckily my coworker, my boss, my colleague was also my best friend and I just pulled him aside and I was like, "This is so hard. I'm struggling so much with just feeling constant anxiety and just feeling down, and I'm missing something."

Caleb Spaulding:

And it led me to finally start seeing a therapist, and I also started to realize around that time that I needed to really prioritize music again. The whole reason I had moved to New York in the first place was to play music, and I had caught myself being like, "I'm barely even playing music right now. All of my time is spent building this tech company that has nothing to do with music." So it almost felt like I was starting over again, honestly. Looking back now, it feels like I had to start over from square one and taking music more and more seriously, little by little, putting more effort into it, putting myself out there. And it was such a... It still is, it's not over. I mean, it's not a mountain with a top. It's almost a climb, but it was such an arduous, long process to kind of undo all these wound up strings of stifling my self-expression.

Caleb Spaulding:

And coming back to this core heart center place of knowing what my purpose is and what I'm supposed to be doing, and how important music is to me and how... It's bigger than me. It's not just for me. I have really come to see and realize how much my playing and what I do with music is a gift for other people, and I had to really give myself that gift in that time first, before I could get to the place where I'm at now, where I can give from this filled-up cup. My cup was as empty as can be, and I really had to refill it, and that was a slow and hard process. Really starting to get myself to this place of, this is who I am and this is what I'm doing, being unapologetic about it, and not having to explain myself, but just doing the thing.

Julia Winston:

Yeah. One thing that I'm hearing now, as I'm listening to your story... And thank you so much for generously sharing that very personal story with us. I'm hearing how you, like so many other people out there, got gobbled up by the machine of capitalism and productivity and efficiency and work, and that you have found your way back to yourself in a way where you're integrating your gifts and you're now sharing them back with the world. So you've found a way to take your creativity and the creative spirit and the artist that you are, and to weave it into the work that you're doing in the world.

Caleb Spaulding:

Yeah. Great reflection. You are a phenomenal mirror.

Julia Winston:

Thank you. Sometimes in these podcast interviews, I make these statements and the people I'm talking to are like, "That wasn't a question." And I'm like, "Yeah, but I mean, this is like... I'm facilitating. I'm just seeing this." And so now I want to take that reflection, because it seems like it resonated with you, and

ask you, what advice, tips or guidance might you have for other people out there who are creative people, who want to find ways to express themselves, and who may not find the time or have the time, or have created a path to do that. What guidance do you have for those folks about how they might tap into some of their true self-expression?

Caleb Spaulding:

I think it starts with crawling before we can walk. I think once I caught myself in this machine, as you so eloquently described and hit the nail on the head, there was this desire to be like, "Oh, I have to undo everything immediately." In a scramble, right? And that did not work. What I learn and what I really like to bring to other people is to take things a little bit at a time, and I do think that the statement of I don't have time, like when you said that I was like, "Ugh," I felt the sickness in my stomach of, all right, yeah. I've heard that one many times before, I've said that one many times before, and you're never going to have any more time. I have 24 hours in my day, you have 24 hours in your day, Julia, we all have 24 hours in our day, so let's just start there and acknowledge that. And it's going to be a rewriting and a rewiring of how we spend that time, because I guarantee you have at least 20 minutes in your day that you could repurpose to do something. And I think one of the big things for me that helped me was journaling. I started the artist's way around this time. The only thing that really stuck from that was the Morning Pages.

Julia Winston:

Morning Pages.

Caleb Spaulding:

Yeah. And I still-

Julia Winston:

It changed my life too.

Caleb Spaulding:

Exactly. I mean, I still do them, and it's been seven years now. It's amazing, it's such an amazing practice, and it takes 20 minutes, 25 minutes. And there are mornings when I'm like, there's no way I have time for this, and I don't do it sometimes. And then when I don't do it, my days are not nearly as good as when I take the time to do it. It's like acknowledging that even those little moments you were being creative, I think that there is this misconception that creativity has to look a certain way. And so I think part of it is redefining what creativity means to us and getting out of the really tight container that it is like composing a song or making an album or painting a picture.

Caleb Spaulding:

The way I define it, it's just, it's creating, it's playing. It is manipulating something with your hands or with your mouth, or with any materials that might be in front of you. I mean, cooking, cooking a meal, like that... It's like seeing differently you what you're doing, and even just giving yourself a little bit of credit of like, "Oh, cool. I was just creative." Not being so hard on ourselves of like, "I'm not creative at all. I have nothing, I don't have a creative bone in my body." It's BS. I guess there's a little bit of tough love there, and you have the time, and you are creative. Okay, so now what? Now what do you want to do with that? And let's take it a step at a time and not feel like you need to quit your job today and write

your first book. We don't have to go from one to a hundred like that. It's just unnecessary and it's unrealistic.

Julia Winston:

I couldn't agree more. As someone who's also stepped out of the grind and created my own daily path and my own work, I agree that it's not, quit your day job and go jump into something else, but find ways that we can create in each moment.

Caleb Spaulding:

Totally.

Julia Winston:

I would love to give people a little taste of what it is that you do, Caleb, because we've now heard about it for many angles, and we've heard from your heart why you do it. So can we experience a little bit of your magic?

Caleb Spaulding:

Let's do it.

Julia Winston:

Let's do it.

Caleb Spaulding:

I hope it lives up to what I just talked about.

Julia Winston:

Well, we can give people a taste and then if they want more-

Caleb Spaulding:

Just a taste.

Julia Winston:

Yeah, just a taste. If they want more, we'll tell them where to find you.

Caleb Spaulding:

Perfect. That sounds great. Let's do it.

Julia Winston:

Okay. Okay, so we're going to have a two-minute experience now with Caleb. So whether you're walking, driving, sitting, being, whatever it is, just let this take you wherever it's going to take you.

Caleb Spaulding:

All right, so if you are somewhere where you're not driving or doing something that involves you seeing, I invite you to close your eyes if that feels comfortable to you. And I'm just going to invite you, too, if your hands are free to bring your hands to your heart. Start to notice the natural rhythms happening inside of your body, the rhythm of your chest with each inhale and exhale. The way that the rhythm of the heart and the rhythm of the breath sync up together, creating a natural polyrhythm inside your body. And as the drum speeds up ever so slightly, if you feel the urge to move it all, follow that intuition. Most importantly, just keep breathing. And if you can sync your breath up to the drum, do so. If not, that's okay too.

Caleb Spaulding:

Simply let this be a moment of calm, of release. Take a big inhale through the nose, hold it for a moment, sigh it out. As the drum fades out, see if you can really connect again to that drum beat in the center of your body. Notice the beauty of it, the way it gives you life, gives you rhythm throughout your day. If you feel ready, if you closed your eyes, you can open your eyes, coming back to whatever space is around you. Thanks for doing that with me.

Julia Winston:

Whoa, that was awesome. I was just... So, I dropped in. I put my hands on my heart, I was breathing and noticing my heartbeat and noticing my breath, and then as you started playing the rhythm and speeding it up a little, I found myself dancing. I was really going for it and finding a flow. I found myself smiling. I was aware of how much I was enjoying this conversation with you and being in my body. And I was also having this experience of feeling like, whoa, I'm doing work, quote unquote, right now. I'm creating something, but I'm releasing myself from pressure. I'm being in a calm, creative and open space while I'm doing this thing with you. So thank you. I hope other people enjoyed that too.

Caleb Spaulding:

That's such a great reflection. I from time to time work with this company called Splice to create sample packs, rhythmic sample packs for producers and DJs to use in their tracks. And I was recently doing one with my friend who works at Splice. We were doing it in a hotel room in Brooklyn, and we had water in a sink and I was playing a rhythm by splashing my hands in water, and with my other hand playing with the drumstick on the faucet of the sink. And it was creating this really cool rhythm.

Caleb Spaulding:

And I was just, I had this moment exactly like what you just said. And I was like, "Whoa, I'm working right now, like this is..." And it wasn't like a, "Oh, sick, look at me, I'm working right now." It was more like a, "This is possible for me to work while I'm playing in water and just making sounds. I would love to give every single person the feeling that I'm having right now, even just for a minute to feel the possibility of play and creativity and expression through, quote unquote, work." And it really further cemented this dream of my ethos of giving people this chance to play.

Julia Winston:

Well, Caleb, thank you so much for giving us this chance to play, and to get to know you and your beautiful work. Thank you so much.

Caleb Spaulding:

Thank you, Julia. It's such a pleasure.

Julia Winston:

What a lovely man, right? And so talented. I felt like once we started getting to Caleb's why, it really opened up the conversation. It started feeling more alive, more dynamic, multidimensional. I thought it was so beautiful the way he named how hard it was to be a teenage boy, and that years later, the experience of sharing his emotions with other men through men's work was transformative for him. The topic of emotional self-expression is so fascinating because I don't think we have many contexts where we're given permission to show how we feel. We're afraid of making other people feel uncomfortable, but sometimes I think we deprive ourselves of opportunities for deeper and more authentic connection because of that fear. For example, I'm someone who cries a lot when I'm inspired or moved, and that happens all the time. So I used to hold back a lot when what was simmering just beneath the surface was actually something really sweet that may have invited moments of real tenderness and made people feel good about themselves.

Julia Winston:

So the last handful of years, I've started experimenting with allowing myself to express emotions when I'm moved by something or someone. I used to apologize when I got choked up, now I practice letting the tears come out, or letting my voice break. Like when I'm telling the story of a powerful experience I had with a friend, or even when I'm facilitating an experience for paying clients. Just last week, I cried a little bit with a group of leaders while reflecting on the amazing work I had just witnessed them do together. I do think this makes people feel uncomfortable sometimes, but that's because none of us really have a social agreement that it's okay to let it flow. We as facilitators can model another way of being. Without dumping our feelings on others or centering ourselves, we can model what it looks like to express emotions that can create more connection. What sweet emotions do you sometimes hold back, that you might allow yourself to show a little bit more? And with whom?

Julia Winston:

Well, that's it for today, everyone. Check out facilitatorforum.com to get the show notes for today's episode, including more information about Caleb Spaulding. I want to thank Caleb, not only for being a guest today, but also for creating the music for this podcast, along with Massimo Lusardi on guitar. Together, they are Gasoline Tequila. Thanks also to Adam Rosendahl for the artwork, and thank you for listening. One of the things that brings me the most joy from 2021 is starting this podcast and knowing that you're out there listening to it, so I really appreciate you. Have a fabulous end of your year, I hope you get some time to rest, and I can't wait to see you for so much more in 2022. Catch you the third Thursday of every month starting January 20th, and until then, I hope you feel powerful in yourself, facilitating whatever it is that you're out there doing to make life easier for other people. Thanks for being you. Take care.