

Transcript(S7E5)

Makayla: Welcome to season seven of the ShermCast, the official podcast for the Sherman Center at Northeastern University. I'm your co-host, Makayla Mutz.

Sanyuktha: And I'm your co-host Sanyuktha Kumbha. If you're new to the ShermCast, it is a show dedicated to learning, about and showcasing all sides of entrepreneurship. If you are returning, welcome back.

Makayla: We'd like to make an important note that November is Native American Heritage month. This is a commemorative month for native people and the United States of America to share their culture, tradition, music, crafts, dance and ways and concepts of life. With this we would like to acknowledge the indigenous nations and land that the Northeastern University Boston campus occupies. Northeastern occupies the length of the Massachusetts and wampanoag people's land. Before we get into our episode today, we would like to give you a few quick updates on the latest things happening at the Sherman Center. We would like to give a huge shout out and congratulations to the 2023 Sherman venture. Co-ops, firstly we got two Sherm casts alum Hannah Ung and Kojo Addaquay. Joining the 2023 Sherman co-ops and then three new co-ops, we have Sofia Urrutia, Andrew Shenouda. And Jai Senthil Kumar. Congratulations to all.

Sanyuktha: Our guest today is Parul Punjabi, the CEO of AIME, a non-profit organisation that uses imagination, mentoring and unlikely connections to create a fairer world. Join us as we explore Parul's unique journey from being a consultant at one top firms in the world, to a film-maker in Europe and now the CEO of multinational non-profit organisation. We're really excited to talk with him and learn more about things going on at AIME. So let's get into it.

Makayla: Welcome back to the ShermCast everyone. I just want to give a quick disclaimer that my voice may sound slightly different. I'm recovering from a little sickness, but we're over it now and getting back and better than ever, but we are very, very excited to welcome our guest today Parul the CEO of AIME, so Parul, if you want to go ahead and introduce yourself who you are kind of where you're from and kind of just maybe some basic background.

Parul: Awesome hey nice to meet you, Michaela and Sanyuktha and I hope both of you get well soon 'cause you're coming back from viral illness. Me like I'd love to start these conversations. Any new conversation? I'd like to start by acknowledging the lands we're on, and it's important to remember that we're on Aboriginal or Indigenous First Nations lands. So I'm dialing in currently from this beautiful office in Manhattan overlooking the Hudson River. And although it's a big building and it seems like this is the New York that everyone thinks of, but this land has been around for many thousands of years, tended to by the Aboriginal people. This land, the Lenape people, and Manhattan used to be called Manahatta back in the day. So yeah, paying respects to the Aboriginal people of this land and acknowledging the elders of the past, present and the young ones emerging. So we'll start there. And where I come from, I come from India, although like I'm Indigenous to the center and one line of my family comes from the north. Although I was born in the South, so a bit of like everything, but then my home has been in Italy in Australia. More recently, America and New York, especially starting to feel like home, so I've lived across the world. I've done a bunch of different things. From consulting in the private sector, to governments to making my own movies, to being a monk for a little while, and now currently I get to lead this beautiful body of work with AIME and AIME used to be Australian indigenous mentoring experience started as a not-for-profit almost 18 years ago in Australia. But now it's expanded to be a global movement of social change. It's effectively a network that connects. Kids, especially from outside the margins to the power holders of today and tomorrow, to help rewire some of the systems that are obviously not working. Including the education

system and so on. And we also have a bunch of fun along the way. So yeah, that's a little bit about me and who we are.

Sanyuktha: I'm curious, Parul like when you just started off you acknowledged the land and the people who belong to it. So what's the story behind that?

Parul: That's such a beautiful. Question for me it's returning back to who we are, remembering that we are not just these modern creatures running around in cities or living lives that are handed down to us by predominantly Western worldviews and systems which want us to be successful a certain way. I'd say the strength of the human race and civilization lies in the fact. But we can relate to nature in a different way. We call it in the East. You may know we call it the custodial role of humans. How we are here on the planet to tend to the land to look after the animals? We're not here to exploit it as more recent thinking would have us show, but and that's my way of returning. And sort of acknowledging the land and also it's an important statement to make that this land does not belong to me. I am a visitor traveling through someone's land and I am walking softly on these lands of the Lenape people, and it's also paying respects where they are. I suppose it's just saying, hey, remember who we are. Firstly as human beings. And then secondly remember where we are. I think it's a good way to start any conversation.

Sanyuktha: Well, that's the first we've had. We've never come across something this unique.

Makayla: In terms of AIME, so it's a mentorship program that connects younger, Native American people to mentors. And you said, like powerholders, is what you said. So can you kind of explain what you mean. By that

Parul: Yeah, so it's not necessarily just for the Native American population. Here we work with. Currently we're trialing a program with the African American population in New York. Like young people, as well as the Hispanic American community in Texas, especially in Laredo. On the border of US and Mexico. So we work with any group of young people, or for that matter, any community that has been historically marginalized over the last few centuries and we connect them back into the mainstream and we don't go in there. Our mentoring methodology does not rely on the idea that, hey, we know all the answers or we are here to help you. 'cause you need help. We think that kind of thinking is flawed in the first. As we say, because you've been pushed outside the margins, you've got a unique worldview and a unique look into the system and some of the systems that are not working. We obviously need your intelligence to help plug and rewire some of the systems. Let me use an example so we all know now that the earth is limited. It's a tiny. Blue dot in space. It's spinning very rapidly, although we can't feel it at the moment, but until humans took off on the 1st spaceship that took us into outer space and looked back and there's that truly popular pale blue dot image and people look back at the earth and then realized, OK, you know what? We can't keep wrecking the planet because. It is a limited planet that we have. Whilst we're in it, whilst we're so deeply in the system, we forget that it's limited. We think it's unlimited. We can mine as much as we want. Or we can. Take as many animals or plants as we want and we can be a destructive species. But once we have a bit of perspective we're like, hey, this is not our role. We are here to do something different and so it's the same with when we push a kid or a community or a particular group outside the margins. We think they're superpowers that they've. Marginalized for now, and that intelligence is what we need to plug some of the gaps that are currently in our education system or in the workforce, or in the way we do finance, for example. So yeah, that's and when we say we connect them to the power holders so our mentors are traditionally historically our mentors have been. Call it students like yourselves that want to do something meaningful in the world. There might be studying bio engineering or different fields, but want. And want to lead change have a fire in their belly saying the world isn't working right and I've got to play my part. But then we also have corporate CEOs and prime ministers, and the Mandela family and really interesting people give their time as mentors across our various offerings. And AIME is much more than a mentoring platform, although that is. Heartbeat of the movie. And we have an apparel line designed by the kids. We have our own TV

platform. We have our own university that trains everyone in the model we built so AIME is more of a conglomerate global network of change is how I describe it and everything we do sort of centers back on the superpower of imagination, which we think all humans have. But then. Some of our systems thwarted, and our job is to free the imagination to do more things.

Makayla: That is, I love that that mission as a whole, and I think I'm glad that it's almost. It seems to have expanded to just marginalized communities in general, 'cause I know it did start out as aiming more towards Native American people and whatnot. So I'm glad that it's kind of evolved. I guess they did to be able to. Include warranty be able to provide this like great mentorship and program to more, but we what we do know is that we know that you didn't necessarily. You didn't found AIME. You were initially like the director of AIM, correct? And then eventually kind of became CEO.

Parul: Yeah, so my journey with AIME started. I think in 2016 2017. And I did kind of find AIME in a way that's when I had moved. To Australia and yeah, Australia is home to me now like I've lived there for over six years on and off. But and I didn't know much about the indigenous story in Australia, I didn't know about the native Australian story as much. And it's similar to the Native American story. It's similar to the native Indian story. It's similar to the native story of people all across the world that settlers arrived at some point, dispossessed people of their land and culture, and then took over, became the more dominant culture and started like pushing people outside the margin, and so on and so forth. But what was unique with Australia? Was that for almost 60,000 years these people, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had flourished on the land they lived and there were over 250 different countries across the continent of Australia had their own languages, had their own customs, had their own practices. So on and. So forth, and then, once the settlers arrived, and this is just recent history, it's 200 years old, 1788 is when the settlers arrived and that started changing. Some of the story. It did not kill the people. It did not kill the spirit, not in the least, but it did start writing a new story. That said, if you are native or indigenous to this land. You're likely to fail, and then we said, Nah, that's probably a flawed narrative. If you look at the bigger history of humankind and there's a beautiful video which I would recommend that you all Google and watch, which is called welcome to AIME. If you put welcome to aim 2020. It captures the whole history of Australia and the world in 3 1/2 minutes and in places AIME in that landscape. So it's been yeah for me a really rich story to meet a man. I was like both of you, a student in Australia and I started volunteering my time as a mentor. Fell in love with the model, I said hey, this thing. Could work in India. It could work in Africa. It could work in US. It could work in different parts of the world. And Jack, who's the founder of AIM who started this almost 18 years ago. Back in 2005, as a young university student at the University of Sydney, saying, I'm going to change the world, I'm going to do it yesterday. He started this and I was like hey, this can work in different parts of the world and he was like funny. You say that 'cause we've been talking to our board about going global. Why don't you come work with us? Work on our global expansion, so that's what I did. Initially I was the director of our global partnerships. I was one of the team of a few of us that helped expand. Came from Australia. Initially to Africa and now to America and now we have programming or some form of presence in 52 different countries which even for us is mind boggling if you ask me. And late last year early this year, I stepped into the CEO role for our US foundation, 'cause we have a global entity incorporated in Sydney. But we also have a US charity incorporated here in New York, and I stepped into this role almost reluctantly 'cause I was happy where I lived in Australia and I was happy with my prior titles. And the work I. Did, but it was necessary 'cause we're trying to do some big things here. In America, we're trying to move some of the systems, and so I had to be here and like I was telling you before we started recording on the podcast. I probably. I've spent six months in the US this year all up and I spent maybe six months elsewhere. So I'm living all over the place, but that's a little bit of my aim story.

Sanyuktha: So in this podcast we also like to learn more about our guests and their journey so far, like what brought them to AIME, or for example in your case, what brought brought you towards, you know, say social work. you've come from a very diverse background out there like. You've done consulting, then

you've done film studies. Could you, like, we'd like our audience to know more about your journey and what made you land here?

Parul: Thanks, that's a beautiful question and my journey has been almost like a river. That's the best way I can describe it now. I've been through mountains and valleys and hills and deserts, even to come where I am now, and it's been a journey. Like I mentioned, I grew up in the South of India. Had my fair share of challenges just inheriting the two songlines or storylines of my ancestors, but also had like amazing role models and mentors, including my mum that made sure I found myself in the places where I was meant to be, including doing my undergraduate at. What's the best university in Asia, studying commerce and economics? And then? That led me straight into a consulting career with the likes of Bain and McKinsey, and although I enjoyed consulting. And at the end of the day, I asked myself am I making rich people richer? Not really shifting things around, so I didn't buy into that narrative of having the highest paying job is perhaps. Maybe I bought into it until I got the job, but once I got the job I was like no, this isn't for me. I've gotta wonder, I've gotta explore. I've got to find what my real purpose and passion is. I was always socially conscious growing up. But then it took me a while to realize that this is my full time calling, and it's not some side hustle that I do, so I ended up after India. I left India when I was 21, moved to Italy, studied international relations as a masters on a scholarship and then started working in the consulting space there, but working with the European Commission, the European Parliament. Effectively working with the governments to do policy consulting, which. Required similar kind of strength, but it was more exciting 'cause I was trying to figure out how along with a team of people we could move money, resources, networks from the richer north of Europe to the South or the richer West of Europe to the east. To make your Europe as a whole more equitable and fairer for all, so that kind of also feeds into the work I do. And at that point, whilst I was doing our work and I did that for a good five years, on and off, I'd say, and that's when I got really interested in storytelling, the power of cinema as a means of telling stories. I was also very curious about the arts, so I ended up in the UK doing a Masters in film and working in that sector, making these quirky, independent offbeat films and the stuff I was making was around. Why are we here on the planet? What's our purpose? Why should we get up? Why should we do anything and that put me on a? A deep spiritual quest and a journey, and I left my flourishing film career. Went back to India. I lived like a monk for a few months. That completely changed the way I think about the world and who I am in the world. And that gave me a clear grounding that whatever I do had to have a strong social reason or purpose. Otherwise, I shouldn't be doing it. And like I said, I ended up in Australia in 2016 by some alignment of the stars. I did a fellowship with the Australian government, met a man Jack pretty early on in my Australian days fell in love. With the work that was happening. And the rest is history.

Sanyuktha: Wow, this is such a unique story. I mean, you don't you find very few people taking the unknown path. What like how did you have the courage to, you know, go about this part like that's something we asked most of our guests who come on the show.

Parul: See, I wouldn't. Even say I was looking at it that I needed courage to do it for me. It just seemed like the right thing to do. Of course, there are doubts that come up along the way, like when I left Bane, which I mentioned briefly was the highest paying job in the country. Back then. My mom was like. Are you sure you want to do this? 'cause you work so hard to get to this stage and it's only upwards and onwards in your career from here, but I asked my mum this question what would you rather have me be happy or successful in terms of money, wealth, position? She's like, of course I want you to be happy. What kind of question is that? Is that a trick question? I'm like no. If you want me to be. Happy then this is. What I'm going to do, I'm going to explore things that make me happy and I'm just going to go on a journey and. You know, wherever I land things will work out and the more you start trusting and I don't say like trust in although I've lived. Spiritual journey and a spiritual path. For a while, I'm not saying trust in some invisible God. If you trust in that that's wonderful. It's beautiful to have faith, but for me what my teachers have always taught me is to trust in the power that has brought you this far. For some reason. You are here wherever

you are, and the more we can. Trust on that, the more we can rely. And know that there's bigger forces at play than our own limited intelligence, which is perhaps why I also did the acknowledgement of the top just to say, hey, there's deeper intelligence in this land. There have been people living here for many, many thousands of years, and my life story, your life story, our life story is a tiny blip in that vast history. Of the universe and across most. Yeah, I would say it's not college. It's almost like my life was being directed and I just didn't put as many barriers. And I've also been fortunate to not have like, for better or for worse. I don't have a family like beyond my mum and my brothers and whatnot like I'm not married or have kids. When you have that, that sort of puts the brakes in terms of what you can explore or cannot explore. But whilst you're young, in a College or university, I don't know. It's the best. Time to explore. I love the fact that the two of you are doing a podcast on this side, like the more we get to explore, and especially in today's day and age when the world is so complex. We need thinkers and doers who can work across multiple different fields. So I'd say all the different things that you're doing on the side are actually a super strength. So keep doing them.

Makayla: I mean with the with the things that you say and the way that you're. Talking and the. The way you kind of describe your your own personal journey. I mean, I can see why you were drawn to this kind of mentorship brought by aim. When I when I'm listening to you, it just kind of makes sense, so I guess I kind of want to know. I don't know if this is more technical or not, but in terms of. You know, mentorship at aim one is the mentorship provided for the younger generation. I guess is it kind of a broad mentorship. Is it kind of narrowed? Is it tailored to the individual? And then again with that kind of. A follow up question is kind of what makes. Mentorship maybe like different than just in just a regular kind of mentorship program. You know, connecting, uh, a young student with the with the experience older student kind of thing like what makes it different from just a regular mentorship program, other than maybe the demographic kind of targeted. But yeah, so that's my question.

Parul: I would say AIME is almost not unique. Aime is returning back to our roots. It's going back to how humans have passed on knowledge from the beginning of time. I think older generations have given knowledge freely to the younger generation. And that's how we've continued learning how to walk, how to ride a bicycle, how to speak a new language. It's mentoring is in built into the very structure of life, so I'll stop there and say that OK aime in a way embodying all the values of human life that we already see happening. We're just trying to fast track that process of learning. Especially for certain groups and communities whose intelligence hasn't been tapped so far. And for us the mentoring is just one pathway out of many pathways. To bring that intelligence into the centrefold of designing newer systems 'cause we know the world is unfair. We know the world isn't working. We know humans are trying to wreck the planet which is all part of it. A lot of it is not intentional, and we're saying how do we bring divergent thinking difference different levels? Of thinking into the main power chambers or decision making rooms to start considering the planet to start considering other people to start considering. Animals and birds and trees and everyone else as part of the whole ecosystem that we belong to. Instead of thinking of humans as different species. And that's kind. Of the the. Mold of mentoring or the style of mentoring we offer to the young people. There's 18 values that guide our work. If you go to aimementoring.com on our website and if you click on about and you go. The values there's also like a little 2 minute clip audio clip. Kind of like this podcast that takes you a journey on each of the values and that will give you a great idea of like how a mentoring is, perhaps unique and different to all the different models that are out there, but at a very broad summary level. We help young people and it's not even us helping them. We provide this stage for them to be the leaders that they already were or are meant to be, and we put them in the right decision making rooms. We bring the right stakeholders together. To hear the voice of these young people, and we empower them to create change for their communities and the world at large. And we don't do it in a one-on-one model. We don't like creating dependency. One of our 18 values is called mentors, not saviors. And the idea is whoever takes on the mentoring mantle they don't put on this idea that, oh, I'm a savior. I'm here to protect you or I'm here to guide you for the rest of your life. We consider and we train our mentors to be

more like fueling stations. The young people come in, they get a power recharge from you, and then they are off into the world, navigating the world on their own with their existing networks and frameworks. And we also connect them to a wider network. Beyond office mentors, we connect them. In the ideal case, I would love a young person that comes into aim and this is our network. We connect them to a university student perhaps. Like the two of you based in another part of the world, connect them to a teacher based in another part of the world. Connect them to a C or an executive in another part of the world and us. It is then doing some other things and that's the premise of our university. We call this formula unlikely. Connections Times 5. That's the style of mentoring we offer. We connect young people in unlikely groups to lead their own social change projects and not just learn by listening, but learn more by doing. And there's also a couple of Harvard case studies on our impact page that document how AIM is unique. There's also white paper that was done when we expanded into America. People want to read more about like what makes Ames model so unique, but I'd say listen to the 18 values. Perhaps that's a fun journey and those are values. Mentors not saviors that I've referenced, but also things like yes, and when you hear a new idea more often than not, like the human mind, is designed in such a way to tear apart the idea and say, have you thought about this? This is not going to work because of this and we say why don't we use a different style of thinking? Why don't we say yeah, that's a great idea and let me build on this just as fun. Improv play and then see where that idea lands. So that's another example, but. Yeah we do. Lots of fun things with the young people. They say.

Sanyuktha: So when you talk about fun things, I remember in a previous podcast that you shared. You mentioned how you'll get. You'll create a whole different platform or like another platform. You'll set this stage for these these young students that kind of like encourage them towards joining university or. Could you like shed more light on how you're doing? Like those kind of programs like how do you motivate or encourage them to pursue? You know higher studies or. Something along those lines.

Parul: Totally totally, I hear what you're saying, and I think you're referencing the purple carpet experience that we create for the young people before they even walk into. So the way. Traditionally, the model is run and we just take a big. Let's consider the biggest lecture hall you have on your campus and we take a big auditorium, lecture hall, cinema house, whatever space we have a cinema house in Sydney as well, that's our headquarters. And we turn that into a pop-up imagination factory. That's what we call it. So before the kids walk in, we go there the night before we set up the room with beautiful art painting on the walls. We obviously create an environment where the lights can be dimmed and there's a DJ playing the next morning. When kids walk in before they walk into the room, as soon as they come from their schools in their buses, or however, they're getting to the university campus, where or. Or to our cinema house or wherever. We've also created a purple carpet experience where we lay out the purple carpet. It's not the red carpet, but you know you get the idea and we give them like a really special walk in journey as they get off the bus, they're being greeted by them and tours with high fives and they walk onto the purple carpet and the first station asked them to set their goals. For the next 365 days. And they start using their imagination muscle. Where do I want to be in one year from now and then? The next station they walk to is asking them what is the one? Thing you're going. To sacrifice in order to get to your goal. So it sort of makes the the imagination real. It turns it into something tangible. If the young person says, oh, I want to clear this year. Exam or if I want to. My high school and moved to UNI or whatever they want to do. They were like what is the one thing you would give up and they could say oh maybe it's my. My video game time or I'm going to eat healthy or whatever they want to set as they go and they sacrifice something. They write it on a piece of paper, make a paper plane and throw it. We'll collect the paper later and the paper is all recycled, so that's a good part, and then you walk onto the third station where they record a little video or a story capturing how they're feeling. And what are they doing for the next year and so on so that it's also acknowledged and put on paper or on video. And there's a magician at the door asking what's the secret password? What's the secret password and the the young person has to reply. Oh, there's no shame a day and so they're already in a certain mindset. You know, before they walk into the room, and as soon as they walk into the room like

there's lights, DJ is puppet. It's a weird, wacky environment where they can get. Last for the whole day. Knowing that they're held in a safe space and they can be whoever they want to be, and it's funny. For example, I remember this session we ran in Sydney and we had some friends from Fiji who were trying to learn from our model and implement it in their locality, and then after like they had an amazing experience, we also recently. Had an experience with teachers. I think there were 55 teachers from North Carolina that went down to a pop-up imagination factory in Australia. Experienced the same magic and they all come back and say how did you create this in? I meant where young people are not like booing each other or tearing each other down. They're building on each other. As soon as someone gets up to do something that might be a bit vulnerable, like do rap or make a speech when they're so uncomfortable, everyone breaks into applause afterwards, and they're like, how do you create this? Like subverted almost beautiful human culture. Of us encouraging each other, and I'd say it's that deep values ingrained meant that we build as part of their journey into a man. People start being like we make kindness cool effectively, instead of it being uncool. But yeah, those are some of the. Experiences we create.

Makayla: Before we go any further, you want to give a huge shout lead WRBB for letting us use our recording equipment and studio. Without them, the show would not have been possible. That's really like almost kind of beautiful. I want to say like that's super cool. I don't know. That does sound very fun. Uhm, definitely like even for me as like a university student like that. Just I'm like, I, I think I'd be kind of interesting to do that and to really kind of set those. Goals for myself in in an environment like that where it's like judgment free. Like you said, kindness is cool and stuff like that. And so how, just like logistics wise? How young do they kind of range from old or yeah like, how like what's kind of the age range of. The minties and then also how does like. I'm not how does the process of getting them entities. Is it a recruitment process on Aimes and or is there like another kind of third party thing that does that?

Parul: Yeah, beautiful question. Then again, I'll say like I'll explain the traditional mentoring model, which is university student in school. And then I'll explain the more complex, unlikely connections times. 5 mentoring methodology we're implementing simultaneously, so if I explain the university model or college student model, ideally we'd find a couple of champions within the university setting or college setting like the two of you. For example, if you want to lead a mentoring program on campus, we would recruit the two of you. To come, learn the methodology with us and that would be as part of our imagination university. You can learn all the values, all the tools, how to create an experience like that. How to go talk to schools? We'll give you the tools, we'll give you a one page on this is the e-mail that you can send to your schools to get sort of interest and see if you want to go. And then we'll train you on how to go out to schools. Talk to them, get them NTS engaged and excited to be a part of the program. You would also recruit mentors on your campus. These would be your friends or people you just set up a stall on campus during your orientation week or whatever day when the students are out in there. Numbers and you play a cool video or you have your aime hoodies or you create like some hype or fun activities for people to drop in and want to be a part of the movement. It's not an obligation, it's not something that is a noble thing to do. It's just the right thing to do it. And if you make it cool enough, everyone wants to do it. We kind of say we put the cool kids in the hoodies. And then the rest follows. And then yeah, so it's a we recruit the university or college students. The lead mentors effectively one to five, and then they recruit their pool of mentors. They connect with the schools nearby and we train them to do everything and bring the model to life. So that's the traditional one. College to school children model. But then the other model, which is more of an ecosystem based model. The young person can apply directly to aim or the school can apply directly to and saying, hey, we'd love to mentoring and we put the young person and the teacher. If the teacher wants to come along, or a principal or whoever in this unlikely connections times. Five and the young person gets to lead a social change project within their school within their community. This is the mentee. But we would also have like a young person connected to. Like I said, a university student. That is doing something else, but is leading a UNI student chapter of fame in your locality, connected with a teacher whose mandate would be to make classrooms more fun and engaging for everyone instead of it being these traditional like

it's funny when you look at education of all the sectors. This is a side remark in a Side Story. If you look at. Automobile production if you look at finance or if you look at the way we pay or the way we eat or the way we travel, if you look at photos from 1850 to 1900 to 1950 to 2000. You will see every sector has changed completely almost dramatically, but if you look at photos of a classroom, it's remarkably the same classroom. It's always a teacher in the front. Kids sitting in their desk, half slouched, half board, half interested, kind of dynamic, and we're like that doesn't work anymore. The world is completely shifted and the teachers. Role is to be a mentor, so we train teachers to be mentors as well. So that's the third connection that the young person would get, and then we'd connect. Like I said, a CEO or a director of a company. That is, doing their own bit to bring more diversity and connect with unlikely people into the 4th connection into the pod and the fifth one ideally would just be a citizen somewhere, could be my grandma or my niece or anyone in between that wants to do something meaningful for their communities, and that's amore. Indirect direct form of mentoring where they access a global network of mentors and they work on their own change projects, I suppose.

Makayla: Again, that is awesome and I think, yeah, I've, I've heard that before the whole. Other kind of industries have changed but for some reason. The one that maybe needs to kind of evolve the most is still relatively the same, so I think it's definitely important that. Teachers as well are getting that kind of mentorship because I mean they definitely are. Kind of. A form of mentorship that, uhm. Most people in you know. Areas where education is, you know where they're able to get education. Teachers are going to be like the first kind of mentor and like a main mentor in someones life. So I I love that it's kind of. Become broader in that sense.

Sanyuktha: Now shifting the focus from AIME back to you. As the CEO of AIME and we'd like to know like. See you on a day-to-day basis. You come across a variety of problems and you're probably probably excited to solve an whole area of them. How do you decide? How do you narrow down which problems you need to solve first? Like well, how do you how? Do you approach that?

Parul: Yeah, it's a really good question. That really depends on who you are as a person. I'd say the more you get to know who you are and what really matters to you, I think that's a good lens to approach any problem or problem solving from. If you are like and there's different ways of finding out, like your own strengths and weaknesses, and I'd say all of our self strengths and weaknesses and the quicker we learn to acknowledge them and work with them, the better we get to navigate. Some of the challenges that keep popping up not only in our work lives or in our entrepreneurial journeys, put in like our personal lives in our relational lives. In who we are as human beings, how do you navigate? What's the problem to solve so it for me it depends on like 1 the urgency of the problem. What needs to be sorted before everything else. And then if you solve this, how many more problems get solved along the side, but also like for me personally, the most important thing is the relationships I hold with people. It's the and I think like the work happens if people are happy. If the people that aim are happy and feeling healthy and working with each other well. All the work we want all the strategic visions we have will be realized. It will naturally happen as a consequence of people feeling good and valued and for me I would center that if. Someone within the team is feeling unhappy or unheard, or UN listened to, or like someone within the community is having an experience which is not wholesome for them. For me, the first problem is to listen like the first solution I can offer is to listen wholeheartedly attentively and not with an intent to defend myself, but to say, hey, I'm wrong. Yeah, I'm sorry like if that's the way you felt my job is. To empower you to allow you to flourish, and if there's any barriers that we're encountering, it's the difference between my intent and the outcome, and let's work on fixing that, so I'd say I lead by being vulnerable, being really open and focusing on the people 1st as my broad parameters. To work with and then of course like the urgency of the problem that needs to be solved 'cause there are so many things you can do within a day, but there's also so much you can only do. You only have 24 hours and you still gotta eat and sleep and look after yourself and do whatever makes you happy. Whether it's doing yoga or going for a. Or swimming, or what? So all of those are equally

important and what limited time I get to work, I get to focus on the most important problems and then. The other frame, perhaps I'll offer, is not even to look at them as problems is to look at them as growth opportunities to look at them as like areas to spread kindness and joy and to use a strengths based approach. We've done adding. We've historically done this thing of. Oh, to change the world, you have to really work hard. You have to get up. You have to struggle. We've used that language of struggle and sprinting. The marathon, which has served its purpose at different stages, especially in our global expansion journey and the ups and downs abroad. But then now we're trying to say, oh, let's not go chasing let's not try to like, let's try and find ease. Let's try and find flow. So we're shifting the narrative as well that we tell ourselves, and then it's no longer problems. Then it's more connections enjoy. That's how I go about it.

Sanyuktha: Wow, that that's really cool. I mean, you're changing the way you like turning into an opposite view of what it actually looks like. You know?

Makayla: I I picked out the word kind of there. That kind of I think sums up a little bit of it is flow kind of almost like going with the flow and I. I also love the way you described your own leadership style as being. Uhm, like the word from that being vulnerable, which I think is. Uhm, def. It's it's. It's in quality that leaders that I look up to. I note like they do have that vulnerability. It's just also something that I've never quite like pinpointed to an extent either, but like looking off after hearing you say that looking kind of back, I'm like, OK, yeah, that definitely is something that like. Leaders that I've admired previously or even currently that's one quality that they definitely did have that kind of stuck out to me is vulnerability and like openness. So so I'm really. I'm really glad that you mentioned that and kind of describe. Yourself as that kind of leader and how you know showing how that is important to helping your team and whatnot and kind of going off a little bit on this kind of team and and leading and and whatnot. You know you've mentioned you kind of worked in both the the corporate setting being a consultant and whatnot. And how? You know you left that and then also just put in a lot of other kind of different. Corporate settings, including I. I don't know film would be considered that, but doing film and and other great like fun stuff like that. And then now to running aim which is non profit and. Uh, like just very social kind of base and and whatnot. So between that kind of a corporate and nonprofit. Setting what are some of the differences that you've noticed with how the companies and organisations themselves kind of run and? In terms of like. Logistics and then also in terms of like leadership, style and culture and the team kind of build and. But not.

Parul: I'm gonna like try and simplify, but it's an oversimplification. The real answer is a lot more complex, but the simplified answer I gave up the top is. It really depends on what we value in the culture. In the predominant culture. If, like when I notice, and of course, hopefully the corporate culture is shifting, but it still tends to be. More capitalistic in its nature. In terms of like oh how can I get to the top job the fastest? How can I acquire more wealth or knowledge or positioning or whatever? So it's a chase to the top which I don't find particularly healthy or natural in terms of the systems design, so governments are different. Their mandate is different, but then they bogged down with bureaucracy. Film is a creative endeavor, but it does require a lot of convincing. A lot of negotiation skills, a lot of bringing people together on the journey with you through story. Is and I'd say not. For profits are kind of unique in a way that they're trying to solve a social problem, but even then, not. For profits tend to become depending on the nature of the organization. Sometimes bureaucratic. Sometimes they become these big empires and we don't definitely don't want him to be an empire. We want him to be like a shooting star on the surface or a little bit. It does its job and then disappears. Actually we have a AIME 10 year exit strategy or what we call an intentional death strategy for them. We'd like aim to be around , be around for 18 years now. We'd like it to be fair now. Another ten years and then disappear from the scene saying we've done our job and we've empowered the ecosystem to pick up our tools. We've built enough capacity and other people, and we've enriched the ecosystem and left the soil much richer than we appeared on the scene, and hopefully that sprouts a lot more seeds, and I'd say that's more natural. That's more healthy. Everything dies human beings, plants, animals, so why can't we design organisations that die? So for me that's #1. And all of these cultures are very different. But all of

these cultures, if they remember who we are as a species, why are we on this planet? If you return to that existential question, who am I? What's my purpose? I think a lot of issues can be resolved quite easily, and lots of cultures can be built to acknowledge. That we are here as humans to support each other towards each other fulfillment. And that's where we find our own fulfillment.

Makayla: Unfortunately we are going to have to. Kinda wrap up soon, but we've really enjoyed kind of hearing your own personal journey and like some a little bit of the like cultural. The deeper and the entrepreneurial side of everything. So we want to do real quick before we get going is a little bit of a rapid fire. Kind of questions that we like doing so. I'll, I'll start with one first. What is there a song right now that you're currently listening to on repeat? And what is that song? Hi everyone, this is editing Makayla and unfortunately our audio had some technical difficulties and got really messed up past this point. So the final words from Parul cannot really be heard. Despite this, he did leave us. With these final words of advice. Imagine what's possible. Don't let anyone or anything tell you what you can do. Or tell you what you have to be. Ask yourself what you really want. Discover your identity and purpose by trying and exploring a bunch of different things. And that we are not finished products. So keep working and progressing. He also said that the best way for our audience to help out a minute's mission is to check out the website at aimementoring.com on the website. You can learn more about AIME mission. You can apply to become a mentor or donate to aime. We really enjoyed talking to him. And thank Parul so much for his time.

Sanyuktha: Thank you again for listening with us. Today we had an incredible time learning about AIM, mentorship, people first leadership and the importance of understanding yourself to find your own personal mission.

Makayla: Make sure to check out a AIME educational resources on their website, at aimementoring.com. And reminder that is aimed spelt AIME

Sanyuktha: Once again, thank you all for tuning in and a huge, huge thank you to Parul for taking the time to talk with us today. To stay up to date on everything going on at the Sherman Center, make sure to subscribe to the Sherman Center newsletter, the Gazette, and check out the Sherman Center on social media @nushermancenter. Finally, don't forget to check out our previous episodes of the season and we'll see you later!