

#42 - 3 Ways to Unlock Opportunity and Get Unstuck with Eric Koester

Donna Ferris: [00:00:00] Welcome to Bounce Back Stronger, the podcast that explores ways to find peace and purpose after difficulty. I'm your host, Donna Ferris. And today we have Eric Koester with us, a leading expert in mentorship, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

A little about Eric. Eric is the founder and CEO of Creator Institute, a B Corporation dedicated to inspiring and supporting tomorrow's creators, authors, podcasters, entrepreneurs, and innovators.

He has coached nearly 1,000 first time creators and is a celebrated professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation at Georgetown University, where he's been honored twice as the Entrepreneurship Professor of the Year. He is also the host of the podcast "The Learning Project", which has had guests including Arianna Huffington and Tiffany Haddish. Today, we'll discuss Eric's latest book, *Super Mentors, The Ordinary Person's Guide to [00:01:00] Asking Extraordinary People for Help*. Eric redefines mentorship for the modern age, sharing how anyone can build a network of extraordinary mentors to open doors and create opportunities.

Eric, thank you so much for joining us on Bounce Back Stronger.

Eric Koester: Of course. Yeah, and the only thing I'll share with you about that intro is it's now almost 2,200 published authors through this crazy community we've created, so it's wild to sort of see how kind of this crazy experiment has turned into this wild and crazy community now.

Donna Ferris: Oh, that's wonderful. And we met because Stephen Tang was one of your authors, right? And I love his book. I mean, that was such a great book. Thank you for doing that.

Eric Koester: Of course.

Donna Ferris: Yeah. He's a class act. So maybe we'll start right there. Can you tell me about this journey and how you got here to be in a spot where you're inspiring people through the Creator Institute?

Eric Koester: The story of how this came to be was really, really a happy accident in [00:02:00] my career. So I spent a lot of my life, you know, as a professor. I've been a serial entrepreneur. I've, you know, done investing in companies. I've had all these really, really crazy, cool things. And one of the things that was interesting that happened to me in my 20s is I wrote and published two books.

And these were not books that were like these big bestsellers. They were with trade press. But what was interesting behind it is when I look back and trace some of the real inflection points in my life, they, they line up to the book. And so I really can look at those and say, well, that was the moment where I was able to break out and become you know, my own entrepreneur and when I raised capital, all these things behind it.

So fast forward about 10 years from that point, when I published the books I moved to DC with my wife, you know, starting a new company, doing all these things. And I met someone at Georgetown and they were like, Oh, you're really interesting. Like, would you like to teach here? Which to me, that ask was the most surprising thing of all, because I wasn't smart enough to get into Georgetown.

And yet here I am being asked to teach a class at the school that I wouldn't have gotten into. And the reason why was because of this idea of [00:03:00] books. Like I had this knowledge that they deemed to be valuable and viable and real. And so it was a really cool opportunity and I enjoyed it and I started teaching first in the MBA program, then the executive MBA program, and eventually started teaching undergraduate students.

So these were 18 to 20, 22 year old kids. And I really, really enjoyed working with them. Except the fact that to them, this class that I was teaching them about how to start a company was, was really more like make believe. They weren't really serious about starting a company at that point. And so I found myself kind of feeling unfulfilled about the idea of like, what I was going to do behind it.

And so I basically sort of, tried to quit and Georgetown said, no, you can't quit. We don't have anyone to teach your class. And so I was really miffed about the whole thing. I was like, well, I don't want to teach the class. It's not working all this stuff behind it. So about three weeks before the class is about to start, I hatched this crazy idea with a friend of mine.

And what he told me is he's like, listen, Eric, if you're going to teach this class anyways, do something that's meaningful for the students. Do something that will matter, make a [00:04:00] difference. And he said, and what's the worst that can happen? It's not like I can fire you. You already quit. So I put that behind it to really, really lower the expectations.

And so I thought about it and I said, well, all right, what's had the most meaning to me? And I flashed back to that experience I had to write and publish two books in my 20s. And so without a lot of thought and without a lot of backing in it I took my syllabus that was how to start a company. I pushed control F and I replaced each instance of the word startup with book.

And then I walked into class and that was it. And the crazy thing behind it is that you know, when I shared this crazy idea with these students, they had no idea. This is what they were signing up for. They were signing up for a business school class and entrepreneurship. They weren't writers. They had no idea.

And I told them this, and I said, "Hey, I know this sounds crazy, but listen, if you want to do something crazy, I'm going to help you do it." And so at the end of that first class, I, I could tell I'd lost the room, right? I knew it because they were looking at their phones a lot. They were all like, it was, it was not going well.

And so at the end of the class, I told them, listen, I understand it's [00:05:00] crazy, but you know, if you don't want to do the class, just don't tell the Dean. But if you do, I'm going to help you do it. I'm going to help you do something awesome. And so I went back from class that night, kind of like a little disheartened, thinking, ah, you know, tried, but we'll see what happens.

Maybe one or two students will come back and we'll, we'll see what this thing looks like. Well, the next week I show up to class, I'm a few minutes late, I get to my classroom. And as I get outside of the classroom, I see There are people outside of the classroom I think to myself, oh god, this is bad, like, what's happened?

The dean now knows, like, what is this going on? Turns out what had happened is over the course of the week, the class had tripled in size. These students told one another about this crazy thing, and not only did they show up, they brought more people with them. What I learned in that instance was something really, really important.

And I think it's a big color of what I've tried to do with my life, which is people want to do things that matter. They want to do meaningful things, things that will mean something, leave a legacy, whatever is behind it. They just don't want to do it themselves. And so this idea of doing hard things, but doing with others has really been the core of what a lot of what I've learned, not only about mentorship, but [00:06:00] also about really helping people realize their potential.

So that experience has really colored a lot of what I do. I now run an author community where I've helped about 2,000 plus authors do it. In fact, the very book that you were talking about, *Super Mentors*, came out of this very thing, but also really colored a lot about my views of mentorship. And what you'll see, and what we'll talk more about, is the example of a book.

The reason it was so powerful for my students, as they started using this book to get jobs, to create opportunities, to get TED Talks, wasn't the book itself. It was the fact that the book served as a collaborative project that they could use to get people involved in themselves and their book behind it.

It became this way to really demonstrate that they were exceptional, that they had something going on, build these collaborative relationships. And that's really what led to outcomes. So that experience of like forming this crazy little class and community, which has sort of rocked my life in crazy ways.

Really led me to realize that the power today is not about finding the perfect mentor. It's finding the right project and using that to [00:07:00] attract mentors in who will become the people who change your life. So that's really how I got to this point today. I use books as a really powerful demonstrable project because I like writing.

I enjoy books in that kind of way, but really what we've talked about in the book is there's a whole bunch of different projects that people can take. And so if you find yourself stuck, a lot of people say, I need a mentor. My answer is you need a project, and you use that project to attract people who will help unstuck ya.

Donna Ferris: Yeah, and I think why this applies so well to the Bounce Back Stronger idea is that a lot of people, when they go through difficult times, one of the ways they come out is with a purpose. Yeah, this is really a way to create a demonstrable example of your purpose, right? And that you can carry it with you and learn a lot from that.

Like, no matter what happens with the book, you have shown the ability to do something with this creative energy that can come right out of something that's difficult. My first book was a memoir written because I needed to write my [00:08:00] way out of a really difficult time. And the second book that I wrote was all the things I learned in talking about my memoir and workshops and retreats and so forth around it and put it in the second book.

And you're right, I think it creates purpose, but it also gives you a jumping board to whatever discussions you might have with other people.

Eric Koester: I think the macro thing in this one is that we oftentimes think very transactionally about people.

We don't mean it on purpose, but we think very much like, I need something, therefore I'll reach out to my network in that way. It doesn't work, right? I mean, it's like, I get people all the time saying, Hey, will you be my mentor? And I'm like, what do you really want? They're like, well, I want to get a job.

The whole thing has been transactionalized versus when you have a project, whether it's, "Hey, I really want to put on this conference, or I really want to host a podcast, or I really want to write a book," whatever it is, you have this project. That's not transactional. It's something that you care about.

That's for your purpose, whatever it is. And then we invite people to participate. Crazy things happen because now they have context. Now they have proof that [00:09:00] you're awesome. And frankly, they also just feel invested in you in a different way. And so. It's sort of very obvious when you hear about it, but I think a lot of people, they just don't see this one in that way, and they think, Oh, well, you know, no one's going to want to help me.

No one's going to want to join my podcast. No one's going to want to talk about their book. And the reality is most people really do.

Donna Ferris: Yeah. Connection is very healing and very helpful no matter where you are in your life. So you're creating the ability, in a time when a lot of people would say that connection has been lost since the pandemic. And technology, which I love technology, so I'm not bashing it. But, you know, this gives you an opportunity to create that in younger people. Are most of the people younger, or do you have older? I think

Eric Koester: That's a big misnomer, actually. So first off, I'm going to tell you why that is part of the problem.

Not, not you, but the fact that, like, assuming that younger people need mentors. It's actually the problem. You know, actually the research is, is that older people need mentors. [00:10:00]

Donna Ferris: I think that's true. They need it more.

Eric Koester: Because here's, what's interesting about it. And again, the context of whatever your project is, people assume that like, Oh, well it's something that a 20 something year old kid will benefit from.

And frankly they do. But the more interesting thing behind it is that. The older you get, the harder it is to find ways to get help, right? So think about it in this way. It's like, you know, when you're in your mid 50s and you want to transition to a new field, you don't want to go back and get a new degree, right?

Because you've already established yourself. So a lot of what we find with these projects is there are ways for you to have a safe way to build peer mentorship in that way. You mentioned Steve Tang, you know, Steve, has referred to me as his mentor. Steve's older than me, right? Like, Steve's been a publicly traded CEO at a company.

So it's not about age, it's about context and what you have into it. And I think frankly, it's just a different way to think about how we build relationships. Some of my best mentors are people who are a decade or more younger than me. And there are people who I've involved in things that I'm working on, or I've got involved with.

They are. But it's [00:11:00] really just the best way to learn today, frankly, is have a project, invite smart people to be part of it and kind of create a safe way to do something awesome together.

Donna Ferris: Especially when it involves technology, I think, because everybody has different capabilities with it. And, and it takes time.

So you, you need a lot of other people to come into your group. So with now 2000 creators that you've been working with, what are some of the common challenges that they face?

Eric Koester: They're almost all the same, I would say, and I think it's the common challenge is what's in between their ears, right?

So I'll share with you a couple things that I've learned about people tackling something new and different, and particularly in the context of projects. You're talking about bouncing back stronger. My whole advice for anyone, whenever they find themselves stuck or they find themselves unhappy or they find themselves something is off, my advice is start a project.

You need a project is the first thing behind it. And so a couple things that I'll give you just to help your audience sort of scope what projects are. [00:12:00] So we've done a lot of studying of what are these projects. And again, the way to understand what a project really does for most people is it's an inflection point.

Finishing a demonstrable project will help you. Open doors, it'll create opportunities for you. It just, it does. It's an inflection point, whether it's a book, a podcast, whatever it is. But the couple of things to know first about the projects that we found is there's really three things that are kind of in common in them.

The first thing is they're not things that are done primarily for money. So going and starting a company is not a project. So you want to do something that you're doing because you want to learn, you care about it, a podcast, a book, whatever it is, that's the first thing. The second thing is it's finishable, meaning you don't want to say, I'm going to start a blog or a podcast. It's a bad idea. And the reason is, is that when you say, I'm going to start a blog, the only way to like finish it is to stop posting on it or kill it in that way, or to continue doing it. Same with the podcast as well. So I would tell people to say, I'm going to launch an article series, a 10-part article series, or I'm going to have a [00:13:00] 12 episode podcast season, and that allows you to finish something.

Why does that matter? Well, number one, success could be finishing it and not continuing it. But also you have a package that you prove you could finish it. I set out to do 12 episodes. I wound up doing more. I set out to write a book, you know, that kind of way. So number one is something that's not done primarily for money.

Number two, it's finishable. And number three is a really important one. It's a collaborative. So as you're taking a project, there's those things we found nine different ones in the research that we saw. As we studied, you know, successful projects again, books, podcasts, putting on an event, doing a video series.

There's a whole bunch of them that you can sort of see in the book. But the first thing I think is identifying a project. Because you're excited about it, right?

Like, you're like, you know, I've always wanted to do a podcast. I like listening to podcasts. I'm going to do one. So picking the first medium is, I think, the first thing that you have to do, not because you over-engineer it to think, gosh, well, I saw this other person, they wrote a book.

I should do it. If you really like doing event series or whatever, whatever it is, pick something that you're excited about doing. And that's [00:14:00] the first thing of it. The second thing is really important is, as you said, what stops people from doing projects is really this idea of basically picking something that's not worth working on, right?

A lot of times what happens that people, when they pick a new project, they look back at their life and say, I should teach people what I already know. And frankly, like, nobody wants to do that. Like, gosh, like, I already did this thing. Why do I want to? Go back and rehash these things. I usually tell people to not pick something that they've already done, but to pick something they want to learn.

It can be accretive on top of what they have, but what do you want to learn? A lot of the piece behind it is curiosity. So what is that thing that you want to have? Curiosity behind it. So number one, pick a project that's a real structured project. Pick a topic that's something you want to learn.

And the third thing, and the most important one, is build a system of accountability. And we know this from the research, but yet people kind of time and time again get this wrong. So James Clear, who wrote the book [00:15:00] *Atomic Habits*, says this in a way that I think is as clear as day, but as important as day.

We do not rise to the level of our goals. We fall to the level of our systems. And so when you're starting a project, people think, oh yeah, whatever, like, I know how to write. I'll just start writing. Wrong. Game is what you need. So what we talk a lot about is what's your system. And the most important part of the system behind it is how do you get better at whatever it is you're doing and how do you have accountability?

So what we know about these two things from the research, there's a really interesting study that talked about what does it take to achieve goals? And, when this study that was done, they wound up looking at all kinds of things, telling people about your goals, having a goal, writing it down, whatever it was.

The one thing they found is that people who achieved this goal, 95 percent of them did this one thing. And that was, they had a person that they shared their goal with and met with them weekly. That is the key thing behind it. So if you're really thinking about what should stop you is number one, pick a finishable project, pick something that you're curious about, not something you [00:16:00] already know, and build a system, particularly built around accountability.

And I think that's what really happens when people do it in those right ways. That's why it works. And that's kind of what we built, and a book is a very hard thing to do, as you know. It's like, less than one percent of people that start a book will ever finish it.

We have 80 to 90 percent finish it in a year. And a lot of it is not because of magic, but it's those three things. It's a finishable project, something they're curious about, and there's a system of accountability. That's how you can make any project to help you bounce back.

Donna Ferris: Yeah. I think that's really true.

If I look at how I've seen other people finish books and how many people tell me they want to do books, yeah, because I think every day somebody says, "Oh, I want to write a book," and then okay.

Eric Koester: They oftentimes will say things that are sort of, in some senses, a subtle dig on themselves. It's like, "Gosh, I wish I was as motivated as you," and what they feel to realize is that, you know, there's a lot of days where I'm not motivated, right? [00:17:00] I'm not like super stoked to write this thing. I'm not really willing to. I'm not interested in doing it. So it's not just about being motivated, right? It's about having a system that works even when you're not.

A lot of these things are funny because people assume, well, you know, I like to talk, so I should do a podcast. The talking part is really small. I mean, it's minor, it's the editing, it's finding the guests, and it's rebooking the guests when they flake out.

It's all these things that go into it. And so the system is really what it is behind it, that's I think why the project is important, but also recognizing that you're signing up for this thing almost like a real project should feel like you're getting a master's degree for a year, right? That's what it is. It's this investment you make, time into it, stuff like that, and to your point, even if it's not some massive huge success, whatever the metric of success is.

You still go get a master's degree because you know something, and you have proof of it—a diploma or whatever. So the projects are really important to help people grow even if they don't have the master's degree itself.

Donna Ferris: [00:18:00] Yeah, and I love the quote. You said you drop to the level of your systems or your habits. I think that's really, really true. That's why habits are so important. And just if anybody's out there wants to write a book, you just got to put an hour in a day. Really, you can do it if you put it that time in with, with, with the other, with the other things that you're talking about.

But you have to make the time for it. I think that's one of the things that people don't really realize. Maybe let's talk a little bit about mentorship again. How does the concept of super mentorship work? I really love that you talk about older people needing mentors, and I include myself in that demographic.

What is the difference between a super mentor and a mentor? And you talk a little bit about modern mentorship. So, I think that would be a really rich area for us to talk about.

Eric Koester: People have very strong opinions about mentorship. And part of the reason that I started to think about mentorship very differently was I realized I was actually one of the world's worst [00:19:00] mentors. And I realized that, you know, and I talk about in the book a lot is I, you know I thought just because people come to you seeking advice means you're a good mentor.

If they come, they must mean something. It's not actually a really good gauge of mentorship in that way. So, a lot of what mentorship is about is really a respite of prior days. Thinking back historically, before the internet, information was hard to come by, and you wanted to break into certain fields or start a company.

You needed someone to give you advice. Well, the internet has really disrupted the advice game. You don't need that one. You can find a lot of great stuff all over the place. There's tons of access to information. So the idea really has been that, okay, well, you know, I don't need this advice anymore, but what do I need?

It's really interesting when you understand what people view mentorship as. They oftentimes seek opportunities, but they're getting advice, and that's the difference that happens. So mentorship historically has been something about advice. And so when people come to you, you give advice because that's what you think they want.

They don't; they want opportunities. [00:20:00] So, we think about mentorship in a very different way. Today, there are what's called advice mentors and opportunity mentors, and the ones who really move the needle are those who give us opportunities. So we call those the super mentors behind it.

Now, part of the research for this book was we studied. Some of the world's most successful people from Steve Jobs and Oprah Winfrey to Bradley Cooper and Stephen King. And what we found was we studied their mentoring experiences. All the things they shared about their mentors.

And what was so interesting about all the ways these people talked about their mentors was they never mentioned advice. They never said, Oh, yeah, well, I got this advice from this mentor. Never once. Instead, they would talk about this connection they made or this introduction they made.

So, it was really about action as opposed to advice. And so the first big insight behind it is that people need to go in being really clear about it. What you're really looking for is network value. You're looking for someone to give you social capital [00:21:00] to move your resume to the top of the stack, to make an introduction to an investor, whatever it is.

That's the first thing is recognizing in that one. Now, the second thing that's really interesting in understanding the difference between mentors and sort of super mentors is people also have long had this, you know, sort of glorified view that a mentor is one person who guides you along the way. It's your Yoda.

It's your Dumbledore. It's your Glinda the Good Witch. It's this person who, takes you under their wing and sharpens you along. And Joseph Campbell, the person who wrote *The Hero's Journey*, has said, like, that's the way we talk about it, this hero's journey, and there's this wise mentor who happens.

Well, it's great in film and television. It's not great in reality. What we also found is that most people don't have one mentor. They have lots of mentors. In fact, the most common thing I heard from successful people is that I have lots of mentors, and that's the interesting piece of it is that the way I analogize this one is that most people think of mentorship as finding a Yoda or finding a Dumbledore.

I liken it much more to a [00:22:00] different movie genre, more like *Oceans 11*. So, if you've seen those, 11. Danny Ocean is at the center of this one. Yeah, Danny Ocean doesn't have a mentor. What he has is a set of people who

collaborate with him on a project. Danny Ocean's 10 other people are basically a collection of people who are contextual to solving this problem.

We use the funny joke about a heist, right? Danny Ocean's using them to steal money from it, but think about it the same way. The people you invite into your podcast, you come to your conference, whatever it is. Those same people collaborate with us, and they're very, very helpful. Some of them are incredibly helpful, others of them are a little bit helpful.

But in general, you're not coming to 'em saying, Hey, I want your advice. I want to get you involved in this heist. This project, right? So that's the big thing behind it: We think about having a lot of mentors and involving them in something. And the reason for that one is all about context.

Here's what I mean. People often think very transactionally about mentors. I have you as my [00:23:00] mentor. Therefore, when I need your help, I'm going to come and ask you for it. It sort of doesn't work that way, right? The opportunities aren't often as transactional in that way. I'll give you an example from one of my students.

So, one of my very first students who wrote a book with me at Georgetown was a guy named Matt. Matt wrote a book about his interest in technology, he was particularly interested in the future of augmented technology. It's like augmented reality. These ideas of like, Smart glasses and stuff like that. So he wrote this book and along the way he interviewed this guy who, at the time, was at Google and learned some things behind it.

And so, you know, Matt, like anyone, was like, "Oh, I'm interviewing all these interesting people. I hope one of them will give me a job." None of them did. And it wasn't bad, but it was just like none of them were at the right point. But fast forward nine months later, this guy that Matt interviewed sent him a copy of the book when it came out.

When that guy left Google and started another company. One of the very first people he called was Matt and he talking to Matt. Matt was not a technologist, was not sort of technical [00:24:00] in that way, but he had this knowledge. He asked Matt for some insights, some wisdom before he started this company. Matt put together a presentation, and shared some of his book.

Matt became that guy's first non-founder hire. And so part of it is recognizing here that you're building relationships with these people, and when the

opportunity comes, they'll think of you first. But many times, it's not like I need a job. Therefore, I reach out to my network to see who can give me a job.

Most of the best opportunities come when you're not expecting it, or when you may not even know you need it, but that's because you've built a relationship to now they know you, they trust you, they see what you do, and when something pops up they think, I should reach out to Matt.

So I think that's really what's changed about modern mentorship is it's not this one person anymore. It's not kind of that way. It's really not about advice. And in particular, it's about things where opportunities come to you, maybe when you're least expecting it, but many times that's the opportunities that are the most opportunistic because frankly, if [00:25:00] you're reaching out to someone for a job, you need something right then.

But if you're someone approaches you about an opportunity. That's pretty cool because you weren't expecting it, and it's even better.

Donna Ferris: Do you tell all your authors to send the book to the people that were a part of the book. I mean, that's a really smart thing.

Eric Koester: Every time I tell people you should give away as many copies of your book as possible.

My last book, *Super Mentors* and *The Pennymores*, both came out in 2020. So both books have done incredibly well, sold like 20,000 plus copies, a novel project for middle grade and *Super Mentors*. Which for those of you who are not familiar with the book world, that's a lot of books now, kind of like big marketing thing I've done.

I had over 650 people I invited to become part of the book in advance. I got them involved in it. They were early readers. They were part of my launch event. And therefore, those people became evangelists. That's why the book is in 200 top schools. That's why, you know, so many people have read it. Because you get people involved, they [00:26:00] feel like a stake in that project, and they wind up having it.

So, think about the Danny Ocean heist scene, right? You may reach out to people and they may not be part of your heist, but you may invite them into it. and then afterwards you tell them how the heist went.

You send them the book, whatever it is. So now, down the road, they think of you for their next project, for their next job opportunity, whatever it is. So part of what's important about mentorship is not just the ask; it's about these loops of feedback you give in terms of what you're doing. So the reason a podcast can be a really, really great project to get super mentors from is You launch the podcast, and then you send these people other episodes.

Oh, hey, I'm interviewing this person, that person. They see it. They're reminded of you. And so when something comes across, now they think of you. So it's not just this transactional, will you give me a job? It's, hey, I'm working on this project. Thanks for interviewing for it. Here are the other things behind it.

Now I know, okay? You are actually pretty disciplined and dedicated. You can do something hard.

Donna Ferris: Yeah. You're really nurturing the relationships. I've been a [00:27:00] relationship manager most of my life, and you're doing a lot of the basic relationship management tasks, but it's really brilliant.

So what's something that. I should have asked or you'd like to share before we close?

Eric Koester: I think what I would sort of say is the people that I've met that are interesting, that are fun, that are unique and that are happy. They all have this sort of, I call it their 3rd place. And so I think that what I would say is don't wait until you have a career transition or don't wait until you are unhappy with your job to create this third place. I think we have our home place. We have our workplace. But my philosophy today is that for 90 percent of us, those are never going to be enough to give us complete satisfaction. So we put a lot of pressure on our job to be awesome and our home life to be awesome.

But the reality of it is, is that for most people, you need something else. And I'll give you my own personal story. So, I mean, I am someone who, you know, I enjoy work. I enjoy working hard. I enjoy the work that I do, but I'll tell [00:28:00] you, like, I found myself during the pandemic in particular, finding myself a little bit, like, kind of burnt, right?

I mean, I was like, spending a lot of time working on things to keep the lights on, all that sort of stuff. And I was also, you know, family, those things behind it. And I really was like, well, should I switch something? Should I do something else? What is it? And I realized what I was really missing was that third place that project. So I, as a project, decided during the pandemic to write

a novel, and I did it with my daughters. I'd wanted to write a novel since I was in my twenties. I'd never done it. So I started telling this bedtime story with my daughters, and it was a fun experience, you know, we're making up stuff along the way or six weeks.

We're capturing it. They were little at the time, like, you know, six and five, so young, but we started recording these conversations. Well, it turned out I loved it. It was fun for me. Fast-forward to about nine months later. We published it.

Donna Ferris: Yeah. That's awesome

Eric Koester: *Pennymore's* has really become my third place.

I love the work I do. I love the you know, the stuff I have at home, but I'm a [00:29:00] novelist now. And so *Pennymore's* has gone on to - we were a finalist for book of the year for kids on Goodreads - all these kinds of cool things behind it. So the long and the short of all this one is I think that really, if you find yourself unhappy with work or something's off about your personal life or friendships in that way.

Many times, what you might need is something that you can own, a project, that third place. And part of what I think the world has transitioned is away from that one. We used to join the Elks Lodge or we used to be part of the fraternity or whatever it was. Some of those things have gone away, and I don't think it's necessarily because of, you know, the pandemic or social media.

I just think it's because we don't have, you know, such deep affinity towards organizations, towards religious institutions in that way. It's the world. Many of us are missing that third place, and a project can be a really great way to invite people in, to collaborate with them in that sense, so in general, it certainly is something that can help, you know, if you have a career transition, if you're looking to change whatever it is, if you're looking to start a company, I think projects can be great, but I think if just something's missing, [00:30:00] You may not need to switch jobs, you may not need to re-establish your family life, but it may be that you need a project.

And for me, that was really what it was, and now I'm on book starting book three in *Pennymore's*. We have a second one coming out this year, and a lot of it is because I used it to find my third place, which I think has been really a cool opportunity for me. Even though I'm not using it to find a different job or a different life, it's just because I now have something that's mine that makes me happy.

Donna Ferris: How did you find the time? Because that's the first thing anybody says to me when I suggest something like this.

Eric Koester: Yeah, I mean the, the first thing that I would say about any project is, this is why they're awesome, is that in general, most projects you'll spend anywhere from three to six hours a week on.

So projects are ones that you don't find the time for, you make the time. And for me, I have Tuesdays and Thursday mornings are my writing time. I carve that time out. It's sacrosanct. I use it. I do it. And I make the time for it, but if you're waiting to find the time, you're never going to. [00:31:00] It's a little bit like, you know, for me, it's like, rather than paying a therapist to go to therapy every week, I write.

Because I like it, I do it, I enjoy it in that kind of way, and I invest my time and money in those things to do it, and to do it really well. And so, you I think it's again, like anything, you're never going to find time to write a book. You're never going to find time to do a podcast. You're never going to find time to put on an event, but if it's something that I think will give you that fulfillment, build relationships, give you something to learn, you'll make time, and it doesn't need to be something that's all consuming.

Again, if you can carve out a couple of mornings a week, Saturday morning, whatever it is, you could do something pretty neat.

Donna Ferris: Well, I think that we'll leave it there. Thank you so, so much, Eric. I learned so much today. I know the listeners will too. And thank you for all your work.

Eric Koester: Absolutely. Absolutely.

And if anyone does want to talk about their project, I'm pretty easy to access. Every week I talk to, you know, 10 to 15 people who are thinking about writing a book and maybe want some support behind it or a podcast or whatever. Feel free to just reach out to me.

I'm pretty easy to [00:32:00] find online, and I'm happy to have that conversation because the reason I believe that's so important is it was for me about 20 years ago that a 15-minute conversation with a woman named Alison Schenken changed my trajectory. Like, that was what started me writing my first book and everything from there was that.

So I would tell you that in 15 minutes, most of us can have our lives change, find the project, figure out something worth working on but it's hard to do ourselves, and so my hope is to be an Allison Schenken for a lot of people here who may find themselves in the same boat.

Donna Ferris: Well, that's incredibly generous. We will have the links in the show notes for sure, but yeah, I would take you up on that myself.

Well, thank you so much, Eric.

Eric Koester: You bet.

Donna Ferris: That's all for today. If you want to learn more about Eric's books and other offerings, those links will be in the episode notes.

Thank you so much for listening. I hope this episode was helpful. If it was, please subscribe, drop a review, or share it with your friends and family. That's the best way to get it in the hands of those who may benefit.

And if my daughters Sienna and Sylvie are [00:33:00] listening, I just want you to know how proud I am of you. And I love you so much. Bye now.