

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/mental-health-for-entrepreneurs-entire-talk/>

Andy Dunn is an entrepreneur, author, and investor. Dunn co-founded the menswear e-commerce brand Bonobos in 2007 and served as the company's CEO for its first 10 years, pioneering the digitally native brand movement. In 2022, Dunn published a memoir lifting the veil on the mental health demons he'd been privately battling as he built Bonobos. "Burn Rate: Launching a Startup and Losing My Mind" chronicles his journey at the intersection of entrepreneurship and bipolar disorder. In this conversation with Stanford adjunct lecturer Ravi Belani, Dunn shares his experiences with bipolar disorder and encourages everyone to acknowledge mental health challenges, including in the world of entrepreneurs.

This talk includes discussions of suicide and self-harm. The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is a hotline for individuals in crisis or for those looking to help someone else. To speak with a trained listener, call 988. Visit [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org) for crisis chat services or for more information. The Crisis Text Line is a texting service for emotional crisis support. To text with a trained helper, text SAVE to 741741. It is free, available 24/7, and confidential.



## Transcript

(lively music) - Welcome, everybody 00:00:29,670 to the Entrepreneurial Thought Leader Seminar at Stanford University. ETL, as you know, is a seminar for aspiring entrepreneurs at Stanford. This is a very special ETL and we're coming with a watch party here. ETL, as you all know, is presented by STVP, the Stanford Entrepreneurship Center in the School of Engineering and BASES, the Business Association of Stanford Entrepreneurial Students. I am Ravi Belani, a lecturer in the Management Science and Engineering Department at Stanford, and a Director at Alchemist and Accelerator for Enterprise Startups. Today we are thrilled to welcome virtually Andy Dunn to ETL. Now, all there is so much to talk about with Andy that I'm gonna give a little bit more of an involved introduction just so that we can spend the limited time we have with Andy on the more meaningful topics of today. And also because I wanna create room for all of you if you have any questions, to ask Andy questions and start thinking of those questions, we'll turn it over to the students in about 30 minutes. But Andy is the son of a Midwestern high school history teacher, father, and an immigrant Punjabi Indian ultrasound nurse mother who's an immigrant who came to the United States and they created Andy. Andy grew up in a solidly middle class family in the suburbs of Chicago, and even today, is a diehard Cubs fan.

He was preternaturally smart, he skipped the third grade, but school was not always easy. He was teased with a moniker from a student in school calling him a windu, a white Hindu early on and I think that sort of foreshadowed Andy's ability to straddle between worlds that oftentimes don't overlap. But Andy went on to go to Northwestern University and graduated with a bachelor's degree in economics and history, and then went on to get a coveted position at Bain as a management consultant post-college, then another coveted position in private equity, and then yet another coveted spot at Stanford where he came to the farm and got an MBA from the Graduate School of Business in 2007. Now at Stanford, his roommate Brian Spaly, conceived of and put \$50,000 of his own money into founding a venture to create better-fitted pants for men. That venture would become the e-commerce company that you all know of as Bonobos. But in an unusual founding story, Brian gave the company to Andy to run as CEO while Brian joined a private equity firm post-Stanford, when he got his MBA, in fact, I think the same private equity firm that Andy was at prior. Andy also had coveted offers. He had an offer to join a venture capital firm, which many people go to Stanford Business School just to get, but he turned that down and he cashed in his 401K and put his soul behind Bonobos as the CEO and then adjoined co-founder. And Brian would later return as Bonobos succeeded and ultimately Brian and Andy would then part ways yet again in a founder divorce that if we have time was intense and we may be able to talk about that today. But Bonobos would go on to raise over \$125 million from luminary VCs

like Lightspeed and Accel and Forerunner and eventually would sell to Walmart for \$310 million.

And Andy's on several lists. He's included in the Forbes 40 under 40, he's in Business Insiders' Hundred People Transforming the World of Business. And right now today, Andy splits his time between Chicago and Rio de Janeiro, where he lives with his Brazilian entrepreneur wife and their son. But Andy is also an author and quite a riveting one, I should say at that. And I think the creation of his book may have been the biggest impact on the world, even more than Bonobos. And he has recently authored a book called "Burn Rate: Launching a Startup and Losing My Mind." And in it, in fact, this is a recently put out, just last year in 2022, Andy has gone public that he's been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and he's making this announcement, I believe, it's been 22 years since that diagnosis. And the reason why it's partly it's been taken 22 years is because of the public shame around talking about mental health and being bipolar. And so, part of the intention today is to really lift that shame and to have sort of a collective conversation with the Stanford entrepreneurial community and the broader community that joins talking about mental health and shedding light on something that very few people are willing to talk about. So it's so rare for us to have someone with such pronounced success, but also be open about their mental health as Andy is. So everybody, please welcome Andy to ETL.

Andy, lots of love for you. I know you can't physically feel it, but I hope you just know that there's lots of energetic love coming at you. Andy, I'd love to start off just by talking about in the book you talk about this overlap. You have some impressive numbers and research on the overlap of neurodiversity and entrepreneurship. Can you speak to that a little bit? - Yeah, so while I was writing the book, 00:05:52,350 I learned that for American adults there might be 2% of folks who deal with some form of mood disorder or bipolar. The University of California, San Francisco has a center where they study entrepreneurship and mental illness and their research suggests that that number is 11% in the entrepreneurial population. So it indexes five to one. So now when someone with bipolar approaches me and says, "Hey, is it okay to be an entrepreneur? Should I do this?" I say, "Of course. You're five times more likely to be successful, right?" There's a five times higher rate. And as we go through other stripes of neurodiversity, ADHD, OCD, high functioning autism or Asperger's, unipolar depression, other issues like addiction, they all overindex in neurodivergent populations.

And so, I think it is high time to acknowledge that our strengths often have shadows, but those shadows need not consume us if we find a way to hold ourselves accountable to getting better, and the getting better requires the disclosure. We can't get better if we're not honest with ourselves, our families, our friends, and our colleagues. And a big part of that, as you so articulately put it, is expunging the shame that so unfairly and unjustly accompanies mental health challenges. And I think we can do it. I think it's happening in real time and I think I'm a tiny part of the way that zeitgeist is changing right now. - Well, I think it takes these, quote unquote, "tiny parts" 00:07:26,220 to create movements. And we have seen like Elon Musk has sort of self-professed that he's has Asperger's or he's on the spectrum and he's hinted that other very financially successful entrepreneurs are, even though they haven't sort of felt comfortable to divulge that. And there is this strange conundrum where the very virtues that I think we trumpet in entrepreneurship, the bold visionary who's able to paint an alternative future despite improbable odds of success overlaps with some of the symptoms and things that will present themselves also in things that we classify as mental disorders. Can you talk about that? Can you talk about how the entrepreneurial journey is shaped by a mood disorder? And where is it healthy? Where is it unhealthy? And when should you be grateful? When is it a virtue and when is it a vice? - Yeah, so I wanna talk about hypomania. 00:08:17,850 We may be familiar moreso with depression.

It affects 20% of the population. We think it was up to 50% of American adults during COVID. By those numbers we have so much personal experience with it or we have loved ones who've gone through it. So depression, we can understand. And unfortunately for bipolar, for bipolar one in particular, the depression can become so crushingly catatonic that the suicide attempt rate for bipolar one over a lifetime is 60% and the suicide rate for bipolar is 19%. And so, picture being 20 years old and there are definitively by stats people in this audience who have been through this, you're fine one day, and then this thing happens to you, you're diagnosed. Typically that's either a major episode of depression or a major episode of psychosis or what you could also call mania, which we'll get into. And all of a sudden you learn that there's a one in five chance that you're gonna end your own life. The most probable way that you'll die is by suicide. And that is just unacceptably too high.

And I believe we can bring that way down and we're bringing it way down because of advances in treatments, advances in the quality of medical care, and also so critically advances in us having conversations and noticing folks who are suffering and finding ways to get them help. On the flip side, we have mania. And what is mania? Mania is typically delusions of grandeur, racing speech, the flight of ideas, messianic zeal, a decreased need for sleep, risk-seeking behaviors sexually, financially and otherwise, intersection with substance use. All of these ingredients can lead one to a place of having a psychotic break, one where you no longer have your feet rooted on the ground. And so often that comes with delusions of being super powerful in some way. For me, my first episode, I thought I was God. It was the turn of the millennium. It was turning from 1999 to 2000. I remember watching a TV show, a bunch of folks praying for the return of the second coming. I was smoking a lot of pot, I had done mushrooms for the first time, I was drinking a lot.

I was partying like it's 1999, which is literally, I think a Prince song. And the millennium was turning and I went off the rails and I had this moment after a few nights of sleeping less and less, and my friends and family helped me stitch together, I was writing the book that we think I was up four nights in a row with zero sleep, four nights. And I came to this conclusion of, oh, I know who God is, God is coming back, it's me. And one of the things that makes bipolar so humiliating to talk about is

this idea that we thought that and how embarrassing that that is. And it took, I was probably 200 sessions deep with my psychiatrist. So, maybe it took a year of two sessions a week to begin to be able to talk about that without being embarrassed, to realize that we're all incepted with a God delusion as infants. We get everything we need. If we survive infancy, every time we cried we were comforted, every time we wanted food, we were given food, mother's milk or formula as it were. And so, we have this amazing sense that the universe is a safe place. And the womb, I mean, talk about the womb is a beautiful place to be, right? It's just, it's a perfect state.

And then we learn as small children that our parents are gonna die and later we're gonna die. And our culture is just filled with stories of superheroes and superpowers. It is the stuff of most religions. It is the stuff of what does Disney do other than educate us on our parents' eventual demise and the fact that we're gonna transcend that Harry Potter, Marvel DC comics. And so the problem with someone going into a manic state is they let that little thought slip through. Hey, maybe I have superpowers. And they don't disbelieve that thought. And that then leads to terrible things. And so the week that you spend, and I don't know those of you that have been God for a week, I've gotta tell you, it's very fun. It's like, it's very exciting to be the Messiah for a week, but it is a nightmare for everyone else.

It is a nightmare for everyone else in your life trying to figure out how you get back to the ground. And that requires sleep, medication, typically hospitalization. And then you come out of that and bam, this sledgehammer diagnosis hits. And unfortunately the result, you talked about my biracial family, one thing that the Indians and the Scandinavians had in common was no talking about mental health. You know, we don't talk about mental illness. And so, it became this ghost lurking in the background and later we can go deeper if you'd like on, I'll give you the highlight on a mood state called hypomania, which is very difficult to discern. Hypomania is just like mania, a lot of the energy and a lot of the delusion, but without fully leaving the stratosphere. And for better, for worse, those criteria for hypomania that I laid out, convergent with those for mania are more or less essential casting traits of an entrepreneur having a good day. What is an entrepreneur if not someone with delusional self-belief. What is an entrepreneur but someone who has a flight of ideas.

What is an entrepreneur but someone who might be working too hard and sleeping too little? What is an entrepreneur other than someone having relentless energy and potentially indulging in high risk behaviors. When it runs amok, we get really calamitous, the calamitous examples that we have out there, right? People who really start drinking their own Kool-Aid. And we can see it in the news, we can turn on the news right now. And so I think our job as a Stanford community, which is such a wonderful community, such a birthplace for entrepreneurial innovation, is to figure out how do we approach being an entrepreneur with a mindset of having great mental hygiene, of taking care of our brains? And I think we can do it. I think it's possible. And I think it's beautiful that this conversation is happening because it's a great community to be talking about this. - I think it is as well 00:14:20,130 and I think a part of it is just actually navigating this conversation so that we actually can have the conversation and hold space to actually talk about these things that can be difficult. And a lot of this is actually undoing the shame of sharing these stories. And a lot of this is documented in the book. For those who don't know, Andy, your first manic experience was in college as you sort of detailed- - Yeah.

00:14:43,410 - And you sort of gave a quick overview of it. 00:14:45,720 But one of the themes that I think came up in the book that I really wanna make sure we all internalize is the aftermath of disclosure, of what happened after you had all these people who actually saw you in this state. Can you share about that and then how that shaped you? And you already hinted at that a bit, but so, you have, just for everybody. So you have this manic experience the first time in your life in college. You're in a fraternity. Your fraternity brothers actually all come to the hospital. - Yeah. 00:15:18,780 - Everybody's seen you in and also your friends and family 00:15:22,170 have seen you in the ward. And then can you share what happens after? - It's sort of, if it weren't so difficult, 00:15:30,090 it's sort of fascinating what happens. There is a small group of people who know exactly what happened, in my case, my family and my close friends, who never talked about it.

And then everyone who I met after that who never knew what had happened. So, it was a secret from everyone I would meet going forward. It was known by a select group of loved ones who never discussed it. And so, I wrestled with what you might call a traumatic memory. It was once a month or so, I would think about it. I would have a rising panic. Oh my god, I have this thing. And we do something really cruel with bipolar and other mental illnesses, which is we conflate the identity with the illness. We say someone is bipolar rather than they have it. We would never say someone is cancer.

That would be a terrible thing to say. We say they have cancer. And yet with mental illness, the moment that you are diagnosed, you no longer just have to deal with this new illness, you actually are the illness in the eyes of society. Imagine being a disorder. And that was how I felt for 20 years. And then the beautiful thing that happened in my life story is when the mania recurred 16 years later and it caused a reckoning for me and for everyone. Then it was, we were all in a different world. We were in a world of transparency, acceptance, how do we deal with this? How do we fight it? How do we navigate it? And it was a funny thing. And I'll just give the headlines on the story. I had a second catastrophic manic episode in 2016.

I, at that time was in a different place. I was 36 years old. I had an awesome girlfriend. I was ready to settle down. Bonobos had 600 employees. We had 60 stores. We'd raised, as you alluded to, over 100 million in capital. We had over \$100 million business, had a lot of responsibility. I had a lot more to lose in some ways depending on how you define loss. And I had this terrible episode.

Same thing, messianic delusion. This time I thought I was a hybrid of the Dark Knight and the president, which by the way is a badass combo, right? Can you imagine it? Batman in the Oval Office. And unfortunately after a week in a hospital when I was ready to be discharged, I was discharged straight in the handcuffs. Four NYPD police officers arrested me. They took me straight to the sixth precinct in Greenwich Village across from my favorite restaurant. I'd never even noticed it was there. And I was arrested and charged with felony and misdemeanor assault because during the mania I was naked, I was trying to run into the street as this Batman president hybrid, and I struck my now wife and now mother-in-law. And that led to a very difficult six months afterwards of going through the legal system, trying to figure out if I was gonna have to step down from the company. And most importantly, was I gonna lose the love of my life? Was I gonna lose this job that I cared for so deeply? Was I gonna lose my reputation depending on what news may come out of it? And I remember talking to my arresting officer in jail and I said, as he took my mugshots, "Are these gonna be on the internet?" And he turned to me and he goes, "Dude, you're not the founder of Google. You just sew pants." And it was a moment of comic levity but it was true.

I think for a lot of people, we feel like what happens with mental health or mental illness can limit or ruin our career. And so, part of the journey here is how do we make disclosure of mental health issues and of mental illness not a career-limiting move, but maybe even one day, almost like a career-enhancing move. Like this person has this superpower and we're all attuned to it, we're all here to help that individual stay healthy 'cause we recognize that there's some beauty in it and there's some potential for creativity and high performance depending on what it is. And I think we can, and you raised Elon, and I think he's a fascinating example, right? He's the most influential entrepreneur on the planet and he took some interesting venues disclosing being on the autism spectrum on "Saturday Night Live," and then apparently disclosing having bipolar disorder in his new book. I can't comment on any of that but I think we come to expect people who are doing innovative things to have something, quote unquote, "crazy about them." And I'll just close this little section of our talk with my editor at Penguin Random House wanted to call the book Here's To The Crazy Ones after the Steve Jobs Apple commercial, after he got fired from Apple and came back, and talked about how effectively the crazy ones are the ones that change our society. I took umbrage at that title 'cause I didn't want to additionally stigmatize the idea of, quote unquote, "being crazy." I think it's a choice of someone who is dealing with mental health issues or mental illness if they wanna self-describe in that way. I actually don't mind describing that, self-describing that way but I didn't wanna impose that on anyone, on anyone else. And so, I think that's kind of the job here. The job to be done is how do we unlock the potential, if we can call it that, of that, quote unquote, "craziness," maybe better put neurodiversity, but not be taken down by it, not have it do harm to ourselves and to others. - And so, I wanna navigate that 00:20:37,680 because I do think that that is the path.

And even if you don't have a diagnosis on mental health, there's always this, there's always something about bringing your full self to any situation which can be confronting. And it was 16 years since you had the first manic episode that you had the second. But when you went to Bain, I assume you told no one. - No. 00:21:01,890 - When you went to the private equity firm, no one. 00:21:04,530 - One fraternity brother from Northwestern 00:21:05,970 who knew something had happened 'cause he was friends and there was chatter. And I remember him looking at me. I'd already gotten the offer, and he just said, "Hey, are you okay?" And I said, "Yeah, I'm good. Like, what do you mean?" Right? And so, it was always a thing in my mind, did he tell my colleagues or not? And one of the wonderful things about this disclosure now that I've done it, is I've realized nobody really cares as long as you're doing well. No one is sitting there obsessing, hey, what mental health issues is Ravi dealing with? No one cares.

Maybe your wife would care, your children, your friends. But we have this fundamental attribution error where we think that people are really focused on us. It turns out they're focused on themselves. And so, the amazing thing about disclosure of challenge, whether it's mental health-related or not, is it draws other people into our life story. It helps them feel more connected to us. The paradox of leadership in the 21st century to give kind of the corny way of saying it, is that we're drawn more to vulnerability than we are to stoicism. And so, I argue in the business setting, don't disclose how you're doing because it's gonna be healthy for you alone. Don't disclose it just because it's gonna create a safe space for others. Disclose it because it's actually gonna make you a better leader. It's gonna make you someone that other people wanna follow more.

And then the additional benefit is a beautiful one, which is you then make space for other people to share what they're dealing with. And I'd like to add on one thing to what you said, which is that we all have mental health, right? I'm affiliated with a not-for-profit called Project Healthy Minds. They have this saying, we all have mental health. You don't need to be in the, quote unquote, "subset of people" that have a diagnosable mental illness, which we think might be as high as 35 to 50% of entrepreneurial populations, right? To have a mental health crisis affect you in a meaningful way at some point in your life, let's talk about other mental health crises. A breakup, the death of a parent, the death of a friend, the loss of someone in your world to suicide, financial stress, fear of financial ruin, career challenges, self-esteem challenges, postpartum and partum issues, eating disorders, addiction. There 100% of us deal with an acute mental health challenge at some point. And the entrepreneurial journey certainly foist those on us, right? There's a lot of stress of self-esteem, of the ego, financial stress. So what we can do here is we can expand the aperture and include everyone in this auditorium and say, we all have opportunities at some point in our lives to improve our mental health, to disclose our challenges, to get better together. And by the way, it's gonna draw everyone in around us, which has just been a wonderful thing to realize that this secret that I had bottled up actually was the key to connecting with other people in a more meaningful way. - And I wanna, so I wanna double click on this 00:24:19,020 'cause I think that is the heart of this whole narrative is the power of vulnerability to actually create connection.

But it's difficult. So we can say this conceptually but I want the students to actually internalize this. And I wanna look at both sides. There's the receiver who's receiving that information and they can do something. And then there's also the giver who's divulging the situation because you are obviously a very smart soul. But even you, I think even if you cognitively knew this stuff, you didn't disclose it at Bain, you didn't disclose it in the private equity firm. At Stanford you created a speaker series on vulnerability, on people sharing vulnerable shares. And so you knew the power of that but you still decided not to. And then there were moments in the book where you actually do take the leadership eye view as the leadership stance of exposing vulnerability and it's not received well. So, you know, I think 15 years later, it is the first time you actually tell somebody and it's your girlfriend at the time, and then she breaks up with you.

And then your aunt comes and you're vulnerable about your aunt, and your aunt doesn't, who's a doctor, doesn't have the discussion. So, what I wanna talk about is in those moments when you inspire the students to actually say, this is a moment of growth, and for the sake of my team, I'm gonna make myself vulnerable. - Yeah. 00:25:57,093 who's had success, who has financial independence to be able to disclose. And so I feel like my job is to use that privilege to have this conversation. And I invite all leaders, anyone who's had success, to acknowledge that we have an obligation societally to go first because it's not going to jeopardize a career that's already had major milestones. And the goal would be that you can disclose on the way up. But I think it's important to recognize that disclosure is not everything and it's not to everyone. I'm just of the opinion that we don't have to go all the way with disclosure. We can start the way that we would with a minimum viable prototype in an entrepreneurial endeavor with an experiment.

And an experiment might be disclosing to your Uber or your Lyft driver, or the person that cuts your hair, or the stranger at a bar. And then the next step is disclosing to a, maybe it's a close friend, maybe it's not a close friend. And you try it on for size. And sometimes we have to work backwards to our closest loved ones. Sometimes we have to work backwards to our best friends. Sometimes we have to work backwards to our colleagues. If you do disclose in the workplace, maybe you start with someone who, almost certainly you start with someone who isn't your boss or the head of HR. And it's a muscle, right? Disclosure is a muscle that we have to build and I think it's a muscle that is best accompanied by therapy. Because therapy is the weekly, ideally the weekly practice of sitting with someone who is helping you increase your self-understanding. And by the way, they're mental health professionals.

Like, this is what they do. And I've had some funny moments with my psychiatrist where I think, gosh, can I tell him this? Can I tell him that I had this thought? Right? Can I tell him that when my infant child was born, I was worried what I ever heard him 'cause I had heard my now wife. That was a hard thing to say I was worried about but it might've consumed me if I hadn't shared it. And so, this is so critical to recognize the opportunity that therapy has to help us on this journey towards disclosure to help us manage our mental health. And I recommend to anyone, if you have the good fortune to be able to access and pay for therapy, which I think is something that we have to continually bring the cost down of and increase access to. Really excited to be a part of something called the Founder Mental Health Pledge where venture capitalists will now be putting in term sheets, 167 have signed on to this, that they support founders taking care of their mental health, including expensing out-of-pocket, non-reimbursable stuff from health insurance. And I think for anyone, the cleanest bill of mental health that you might imagine being in therapy for six months every two to three years is just game changer for your development as a person and your performance as a leader. And then on that journey we get to milestones where the disclosure might be more meaningful. It doesn't have to start with the fireside chat to the auditorium. That's like the, I don't wanna call it the end of the road, but I'm seven years deep really on processing and synthesizing what happened with the second episode.

And I'm 23 years deep from the diagnosis and it's just too long. It's too long. So we need to find ways to decrease the time between being in acute mental distress and being able to talk about it and address it. That's the goal here. - Yeah and better late than never. 00:29:45,240 You've come back and you're doing a speak, you're the highlight VIP keynote speaker at a Stanford speaker series on vulnerability so it's great. But I wanted to sort of dive in, Andy, then on the other side is that if somebody does reveal a mental health diagnosis to you, your life was littered with examples where people responded to the disclosure with silence. And it felt like one of the big themes or at least maybe I misinterpreted, but one of the big themes of the book was that silent, that that response led you to be even more shy about disclosing in the future. And it led to this 22-year gap between actually revealing the condition. And so, it felt like when you did disclose, people just clammed up and just chose to ignore what you actually said or not actually have the conversation.

- Yeah. 00:30:38,010 what is the right response? - The Be There Certificate, which was funded by Lady Gaga, 00:30:44,760 is a 30-minute video-based training on how to deploy the universal human trait of empathy to have a conversation about mental health with someone who either you're concerned about or who's sharing something with you. And I have to say, when the book came out, I got this question a lot and I had a bunch of answers that I tried to wing it with, right? Like, the irony of this is I'm not a mental health professional, I'm a mental health patient. And then I finally got to this video, I got a chance to do something cool with Lady Gaga and almost everything I had thought was the right thing to do was wrong. So for example, one of the common thoughts is wait till someone has raised something with you. Don't pry. Don't be invasive. And no. No, the right thing to do is to wait two weeks until you have an observed behavior for two weeks. And then to say in a fact-based way, "Hey, Ravi, I've noticed you just, you haven't had your natural light the last couple weeks.

You're not speaking as, you're not talking as much. I just wanted to check in and see how you're doing. How are you

doing?" And that's just one example of many. Another one that I thought was helpful was someone, for example, could say to me, "Hey, I've got this issue. I've got bipolar." The right thought might be to be like me too. Wrong. Once someone has put the spotlight on themselves, it's important to stay with them. And then in a follow-up conversation, you can express solidarity because sometimes the equivalency is unhelpful, right? Someone could say, "Hey, I'm feeling really depressed right now." And they might be at like a one out of 10 suicidal ideation. And you might say something like, "I get depressed too." And be like a 4.8 out of 10 because you're just like in a mild funk. They're both important but there could be a false equivalency and it could deflate someone who's now making a bid.

And I had a friend in college who was drinking a fair amount and he looked at me and he said, "Do you ever just feel black sometimes? Just kind of black inside?" And I thought, no. I said no. And he died by suicide three years later. And what happened, when it happened, I remember thinking like, of course this wasn't a surprise. That was a bid that I missed. I'm not gonna take it on and say it's my fault what happened, but I missed a bid. And so when someone makes a bid, it can be just the tiniest comment and we have to lean in. I have a friend who texted me on WhatsApp two weeks ago. He said something along the lines of like, "You know, I'm just not feeling it these days." And one thought might be like, he's just not feeling it these days. And another thought would be like, he could be in crisis.

This is a very stoic entrepreneur, works out all the time, got the, quote unquote, "perfect wife and family," and it's got a unicorn company. And I thought, I'm gonna get right in there. I just hit FaceTime. Just hit FaceTime right away. And I said, "Hey man, how you doing? Let's talk." And he was in tears within five minutes, which was a beautiful thing, right, 'cause what are tears? Tears are pain leaving the body 'cause he wasn't talking to anyone about this. He's not a mental health because person, quote unquote. He doesn't come from a culture where there's a norm of talking to a therapist. I couldn't even get him to do it now, (chuckles) but I said, all right, let's keep talking you and me and then maybe at some point you can upgrade and talk to someone that really knows what they're doing. - So the takeaways 00:34:16,590 and was there a 30-minute video to watch, I forgot. Can you explain that? - It's a Canadian not-for-profit, 00:34:21,480 and it's called the Be There Certificate, - The Be There Certificate.

00:34:24,990 So if people Google that, they can find the guidance. - It's like video-based, you'll get the questions wrong, 00:34:28,620 which will intrigue you. - Okay. 00:34:41,490 and just be, put your attention on them and then just be empathetic. Just be there and listen and ask. Be curious and empathetic. - Listen, ask, make it clear 00:34:50,850 that this doesn't change a thing about the affinity that you have for them, or if appropriate, the love that you have for them, and then to recognize you now are a copilot in making sure that they get help. That's very, that's hard but it includes things like being like, hey, can I help set up an appointment for you to talk to someone? Like, I don't know. Are you interested in seeing a therapist or a psychiatrist? Happy to take the lead. 'Cause if you're in the throes of depression, you can barely walk to the kitchen to pour a bowl of cereal.

You're not gonna get on the internet and research what psychiatrist is the right fit for you. And so, we have an opportunity to recognize that someone in crisis is probably, it's improbable that they're gonna be able to secure their own care. And so, we have a chance to help them. Say like, "Hey, what are some things you're open to?" Get on the internet, learn what are some potential treatments for those symptoms, and help that person get to help. And you can imagine if it's addiction, we can imagine so many ways that you can be helpful to someone that might not be in a position to get that help for themselves. - Terrific. Thank you. 00:35:58,140 Let me turn it over now to the students, there is a watch party happening. Student Okay. 00:36:03,990 I'm curious to ask you, how would you navigate or mend personal relationships if you're suffering from mental health issues? For example, people that you might have hurt during your past when you're having an episode, like how do you overcome that sense of guilt and shame? And moving forwards as well, how do you potentially get close and overcome the fear of hurting additional people? - Yeah.

00:36:23,850 Those are such great questions. I think one important thing, and Ravi alluded to it, is it's never too late. It's never too late to send a quick email or a text message and say, "Hey, I just wanted to say I'm sorry for some of the things that transpired between us. I've done some work on myself, I've learned some things about myself. I don't expect you to want to engage on it but to the extent that you're interested in talking, I'd love to." And you might even give some headlines. "Hey, I was recently diagnosed with bipolar one and I wanted to share that with you and I wanted to apologize for some things that happened. I'm not trying to blame my behavior on that, but I wanna let you know I'm in touch with it. I wanna take, I wanna be accountable. And if you ever wanted to talk again about that, then I'd be delighted too." And that can, that'll typically melt someone's heart, right? An apology plus a disclosure, plus an invitation to talk. And they may not wanna talk right away, but you'll change the temperature in the water.

In terms of fear of hurting people in the future, for me, it's been about like, I gotta be on top of my shit. You know what I mean? Like taking medication every day to the milligram, two sessions with my psychiatrist every week like clockwork. And you gotta believe, I don't want to some weeks. Tracking my sleep with a Fitbit, sending a screenshot of the sleep report I call it to my mom, my sister, my wife, and my doctor every day because sleep and bipolar, sleep and mood for all of us actually is so correlated. And then recognizing that kind of in Maslow's hierarchy of Andy's mental health, those are the three pillars. Therapy, medication, and sleep. And then saying like, okay, let me go beyond now. How do I not engage in workism and workaholism? How do I make space to spend 24 hours off my smartphone every week? Can I get 15 minutes of sunlight a day which is a great hack? I'm sorry, I can't do the cold showers, it's too cold. I just want a hot shower, guys. But trying to take

the same steps that we would with a physical ailment of doing the things and over time developing the confidence and saying like, you know what? I'm gonna still cause interpersonal harm, (chuckles) but let it be for, let it not be because of this.

Let it not be for the thing that we know that we're dealing with it. Let it be for the unknowns, the unknown unknowns, rather than the known, the known things. - Thank you. 00:39:06,540 - The question, it was an awesome question. 00:39:07,440 Student Hi, Andy. 00:39:10,593 Thank you for vulnerably sharing your journey. Such disorders, mostly behavioral disorders, the ones you mentioned being on the autism spectrum or having ADHD or bipolar. - Yeah. 00:39:27,843 Student Can that somehow box you in personally? 00:39:31,800 It's almost like you expect yourself to act a certain way, that the medical definition of that disease is and even people see you that way. - No doubt.

00:39:55,560 - Yeah, I mean I think it's a hidden form 00:39:58,020 of diversity in some ways, right? Can we be boxed in by our gender? Can we be boxed in by our race? Can we be boxed in by our sexuality? These are questions that we've all been interrogating as a society and these are things that are also on the move as a society, even in my lifetime. You know, I can remember living in New York really having connectivity to gay and queer team members for the first time and being like, these folks can't get married. You know, that was just nine years ago in New York State. I remember being in a amazing show tunes piano bar called Marie's Crisis in New York the day that the Freedom of Marriage Amendment passed in New York State and it was the sound of human liberation. I've never heard anything like it to a people liberated. And we're on these journeys in so many ways, we're still fighting them. And I think neurodiversity is just another one that we've gotta fight. And I think we're doing it. I mean, I don't think I'd be alive if this were the 19th century. You just don't make it out of your 30s with bipolar if you're not dealing with it in so many cases.

So many folks who I meet who've got parents with bipolar, their parents are gone, right? Or their childhood was fraught with terrible, terrible challenges. We are lucky in this day and age that we can be having this conversation, the quality of the treatments where they are. And so, when it comes to mental health, neurodiversity, what we need to do is make sure it's not hidden because otherwise people aren't aware of that diversity. And since we're already bold enough to have people be aware of other forms of diversity, because many of them are visual, the only way we can test that out is by it being known. And I'll just make one quick joke, it's not that funny, but one thing for me when I did share that I had bipolar to my colleagues at work, I had a lot of conversations like this. "Oh. Oh, got it, so you're like high and low sometimes. Oh." And it was, people knew. You know, these are people that were spending 40 or 50 hours a work week with me. So in many times it actually increases understanding and deepens empathy of something that folks are already aware of whether unconsciously or consciously, whether they can name it or not.

- Thank you and thank you for the question. 00:42:30,840 Next question? Student My question to you is, 00:42:35,680 how have you seen the VC and investment community embracing diversity that we're discussing, especially when it comes to betting on a founder? - Yeah, I would say the VCs that I had that backed me 00:42:48,840 were two Stanford GSB alums. And I can remember coming out of a board meeting and one of them from Accel, I said, "Hey, how do you think things are going from your standpoint?" And he goes, "Look, just keep tinkering with every, you know, keep doing what you're doing." The board was aware that I was in therapy, the board was aware that I was taking medications. The board was aware that I was navigating the legal system and they had my back, which was one of the most healing things. And so I think actually venture capitalists are used to, quote unquote, "dealing with entrepreneurs." So they're actually very unfazed I found, and I think the Founder Mental Health Pledge is an example of that. Like literally just saw it coming to life the last week. But I do think it's appropriate to wait until a container of trust has been built before you share everything and you'll know when that is in your gut. And if you find you're working with someone or potentially working with someone who's an investor and you don't feel like that trust, it's an opportunity to think about racing capital from someone else because the right kind of trusting person, loving soul, they're gonna meet that with so much grace and I got to see that, like to a T from all three venture capitalists. Even the acquiring company in Walmart, I had to disclose what I'd been through. Picture, you're in a \$300 million sale process and you have a felony arrest charge on your record.

When do you introduce that? My decision was like right at the end. (chuckles) You're like, let's get as far along at this deal as we can. Let me get to know as many people as I can so that they know me. And then I said, "Hey, you're gonna find something on the background check and here's what it is." And the woman that I described this to from HR turned like pale as a ghost and she said the perfect thing. She said, "Andy, I understand. I also understand how common these challenges are. Let me talk to the team and we'll come back to you." And they talked to the team and said, "Hey, all we need you to do is just share your medical records from your doctor with an outside psychiatrist who won't be playing anything back to us with specifics other than just an assessment of how you're doing." And so I said, I asked my doctor, who did they go to? And he goes, "They went to the former head of psychiatry for the FBI." And I thought, well, at least we're gonna get a clean read here. And then I waited on pins and needles for two weeks and they came back and said, "Hey, we understand you're taking your meds, that you're in treatment. We're so excited to consummate this transaction. Let's move forward." And I just started crying because the acceptance from a professional environment to say like, we understand you have this issue and how calamitous things were, and we'll still, quote unquote, "have you," we'll still take you on.

And I'll share one other thing, which is when I saw my mother-in-law for the first time the week after I got out of jail, who the previous time I had seen her was having assaulted her, I thought it would be the last time I'd ever see her. I thought she would say, "Look, you know, my daughter and I need to take a little bit of a break here while you get healthy." And I wasn't

able to see Manuela 'cause there was a restraining order of sorts. And as soon as I sat down at lunch, my now mother-in-law, Lenny put her hand on my hand and she just said, "Andy, this is just like any physical illness. All you've got to do is see your doctor and take your medication. And if you do and Manuela still wants to be with you, then you have my blessing. But if you don't, you are out." Just like that. And again, just tears coming down my face 'cause I always assumed that on some level, no one would ever wanna marry me. I always assumed that no other family would take me. My own family has to take me. But I thought no new family would want me.

And it wasn't until that moment that I felt the grace of being accepted under the worst possible circumstances and it changed my life. It made this day possible because feeling accepted in spite of this is, that's love, right? - Yeah and it's amazing how that reverberates 00:47:08,730 and then the whole world benefits. That's a great gesture from your mother-in-law. I wanna, I know we're coming up to time. This is such an important topic, so I want to carve out space for one more question. Student First of all, I just wanna say thank you 00:47:19,217 for your vulnerability. I have a younger sister who deals with mental health illness and it's been a huge process trying to figure out my role in this. I took the Be There Certificate, so thank you for sharing that. One other question that I have is, are there any other resources you might point people to, to not only educate themselves, but for instance, like my sister struggles to make friends, so I don't know if there's like communities out there or places for people to find jobs, or just anything that you know of that you might point people who have family members or friends in that community, how to educate themselves? - Yeah, absolutely. 00:47:55,380 I think that there's a lot of power in reading and in memoirs and I think if you take any stripe of neurodiversity, there's actually three or five or seven great books that have been written.

And I think as family members, that can help a lot. I think the National Alliance for Mental Illness is a force for good in terms of helping families cope. And there's some great startups coming up and one is called Akin and they're working on how to support family members of people who are dealing with mental illness. So it's out there, the resources are out there. Vis-a-vis your sister, I mean, she's lucky to have you and lucky to have you working with her on this. And I'd say for me, my experience of this is like, there's just so much reason for hope and family members can help so much providing that hope for the patient, so to speak 'cause you don't feel it at that time. And to just never give up on that loved one and to help find those resources. And if we follow up, I understand they're gonna share my email with everyone. I'll do my best to get through them. I can point you the way of some other resources as well.

I do wanna say one more thing 'cause I know we're wrapping up. It's a difficult time geopolitically. You know, these are challenging times and I do wanna encourage everyone to understand that the impact that this can have on us is a mental health challenge as well. And so please be aware of that and talk to someone. And then as it comes to the climate on campus, I would just ask you to love one another. If you want to be inspired, my wife and I went back to Dr. King's Loving your Enemies speech. And just find a way to love people in this moment and take care of your mental health as well. - Well, on that, we're gonna draw this to a close. 00:49:43,080 This has been such a fantastic ETL.

Thank you so much, Andy, for sharing so in such a heartfelt and vulnerable and deep way. But for the sake of time, I have to draw this week's ETL to a close. So, thank you to all the students in the Stanford's ETL course MS&E 472 and to our ETL viewers and listeners around the world. Next week we're gonna be joined by Michelle Lee, the CEO of Medra, and you can find that event and other future events in the ETL series on the Stanford eCorner YouTube channel. And you'll find even more videos, podcasts, and articles about entrepreneurship and innovation at Stanford eCorner. That's [ecorner.stanford.edu](https://ecorner.stanford.edu). Thank you all. - Thanks, everyone. 00:50:23,426 (gentle music)..