

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:00:09 What's up, everybody. Welcome to this week's episode of Hidden Forces with me, Demetri Kofinas. Today, I speak with Fred Swaniker, a leader, and innovator in the area of secondary education. He is the co-founder of three organizations that aim to catalyze a new generation of ethical, entrepreneurial leaders in Africa; the African Leadership Academy, the African Leadership Network, and the African Leadership University. A passionate entrepreneur, Fred also served as founder and CEO of Terra education, a global education company that today provides leadership training to about 4000 people annually at 46 sites in 20 countries. Prior to his work in education, Swaniker co-founded the biotech company, Synexa Life Sciences with operations in Cape Town, Berlin, London and Dublin.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:01:02 He has been recognized as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum, and was listed by Forbes magazine among the top 10 young men in Africa. He has an MBA from Stanford University's Graduate School of Business, where he was named an RJ Miller scholar, a distinction awarded to the top 10% of each graduating class, and holds a BA in economics and a minor in Mathematical Statistics from Macalester College. Fred, welcome to Hidden Forces.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:01:29 Thanks, Demetri. Pleasure to be here.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:01:30 It was quite a job getting through your bio there. How you doing?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:01:34 I'm good. How are you?

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:01:35 Good. Good. How long have you been in New York?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:01:36 I've been here for about four days.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:01:39 When you go back?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:01:41 Well, I'm in a month tour.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:01:42 Oh, really?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:01:42 From here, I'm going to Chicago and then to San Francisco, and then London and then back to Minnesota.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:01:48 Chicago, San Francisco, London and then back to Minnesota? Why, that's an interesting geographical route.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:01:55 Yes. I would have left after my trip to San Francisco, but ... Sorry, and then just head out to London. But I'm the commencement speaker at graduation this year at Macalester College where I went to college.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:02:06 Oh, that's nice. That the first time you've done that for them?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:02:09 Yes. It's my first time, and then I'm also getting an honorary doctorate from them.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:02:12 Oh, that's very nice.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:02:13 So, I have to come back for that.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:02:14 When did you graduate from Macalester?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:02:17 In '99.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:02:18 1999.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:02:20 Yeah.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:02:20 What did you study when you were there?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:02:22 I studied economics and Mathematical Statistics.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:02:24 That's right. I just read that. All right, so let's get started. Let's not beat around the bush here. For our audience who doesn't know this. I learned about you and your university from a listener of the show, Aaron Appleton who works for you, who's a learning experienced designer. And I was very pleased to discover your work. I find what you're doing really inspirational, inspiring and encouraging, I was saying.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:02:45 Thank you.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:02:45 Why don't you tell our audience for those who are not familiar with you, who is Fred Swaniker?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:02:52 Well, I would say that Fred Swaniker is just a humble servant of a big mission. Where what drives me is my passion and my love for Africa. I believe that Africa's people are its greatest assets, not just for Africa, but really for the world. And so I'm on a mission to unlock the tremendous potential that exists in Africa for the benefit of Africans and for the benefit of the whole world.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:03:21 This passion comes from my experience of living and working in different parts of Africa. I've lived and worked in about 10 different countries in Africa. When you spend time on the ground in Africa and with Africa's people, you can't help but be struck by just the tremendous potential that exists there. So, the question that's always been on my mind is, how can we unlock this potential? That's really the mission that I'm on.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:03:44 That's interesting, you can't help but be struck by the tremendous potential. Can you elaborate on that?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:03:50 Well, everywhere you go in Africa, you see there is a difference between financial poverty and poverty of the spirit. When you go to Africa, you'll see people who are financially poor, but their spirit is very rich. They are driven, they're hungry, they're passionate, they all are striving for a better world, because they really have no choice. They see, they need to believe in a better possibility.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:04:16 When you are there on the continent, and the other thing that will strike anyone who goes to Africa is just the youth that exists in Africa. Because the average age of an African is 19 years old.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:04:30 19.5 to be exact.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:04:31 19.5 to be exact.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:04:31 Can you tell us the statistics for China, Germany, even United States-

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:04:35 For Germany and Japan, it's about 46 years old. The nice thing about young people is that young people are naive enough to be still be optimistic, and they're naive enough to think about alternative ways of doing things and to imagine possibilities that others cannot. So, therefore they're inherently more innovative and more optimistic and more passionate than you would see in most other places of the world.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:05:00 That, for me is untapped treasure for the world. Because in a world that is faced with so many challenges, you need people who think innovatively and who are driven and hungry and want to find a different way of doing things to solve all these challenges for us. So, that's why I really believe that the world's greatest hope lies in Africa.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:05:21 Well, I want to drive that point even further home because I have some of these demographics here. And I think it is

important for our audience to take note of, obviously, we know that the Japanese have very poor structural demographics, 46 as you said, Germany about 46 as well. The EU as a whole about 43, America 38, but China which has a billion people and which has been the economic miracle over the last number of decades using the industrial growth model of the West is that 37.4. So, we're talking about a drastically different demographics in Africa, and also very different institutional and infrastructural realities, which I think underlie the solutions that are possible and required. We'll get into that when we get deeper into your learning model, and your entrepreneurial approach. Tell me a little bit more ... I want to learn more about you. Where were you born?

- Fred Swaniker:** 00:06:12 I was born in Ghana, and then at the age of four, my family left and we moved to Gambia. It was a tiny country in the middle of West Africa. And then at age of eight, we moved to Botswana. Then while they were living in Botswana, they sent me to school in Zimbabwe.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:06:25 Why did you move so much?
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:06:27 Well, Ghana had an excess supply of skilled labor. There's a statistic I once read, I can't remember the source, which said that at the time when Ghana got independence in 1957, there was something like 22000 university graduates in the whole of sub Saharan Africa, if you exclude South Africa. Of those 22000, 18000 came from two countries; Ghana and Nigeria. So, the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, only at 34 University graduates when they became independent.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:06:59 So, you can imagine a nation-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:07:00 I'm sure those are all people that were part of the government that were the kids of ruling elite of that country.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:07:05 Yeah, probably. As other countries in Africa were developing, if they need a teachers and doctors and lawyers and engineers, the place where there were some semblance of supply was Ghana and Nigeria. As a result, the Ghanaian professional class, of which my parents or my dad was a magistrate, my mother was a teacher and a social worker, they were being given opportunities to go and work in other countries. And other countries were coming to poach talent from Ghana to help drive their development.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:07:37 That was at a time when Ghana's economy wasn't doing so well. Therefore, all of these talented people were looking for opportunities elsewhere. So, the Ghanaian diaspora spread throughout the world as a result of that.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:07:48 That's very interesting. So you came of adolescence ... What country were you in when you were an adolescent?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:07:55 Between Botswana and Zimbabwe.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:07:56 Botswana and Zimbabwe.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:07:56 Yeah.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:07:58 You've mentioned in speeches before that, when you were 18, I believe, you lost your father?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:08:02 Actually, when I was 16.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:08:03 16?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:08:04 Yeah.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:08:05 What was your relationship with your father? What was that like? What was that experience like?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:08:10 Well, both my father and my mother were huge influence on my life. Since they really set very high expectations for me. I vividly remember one day, my dad, I must have been 10 or 11. He looked me in the eye and he said, "Fred, you're going to be a Rhodes Scholar one day." I didn't even know what a Rhodes Scholar meant. I went online-

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:08:34 You were like, "To study roads and infrastructure?"

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:08:37 Exactly, to study roads. But what he was saying to me was that I see greatness in you. And I believe that you can actually be great and that you can achieve something. That was always the spirit in our house. It was an encouraging environment. My parents had high expectations of us, they made us believe in ourselves. This is one of the thing that hugely influenced me, and also that is now part of my educational philosophy. Because I believe that young people rise to expectations.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:09:06 If you believe in someone, and you say that you are going to be great, you can actually achieve something. Then those people develop self-confidence, and then they start to believe. Because

I believe, actually that we are limited only by the size of our dreams, and by the size of what we think we can do. What my parents did, and the influence that my dad had on me was really saying, think bigger, believe in yourself. And that, I think, was a very powerful influence on me at that age.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:09:31 How many siblings were you?
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:09:33 Four of us. So, I have three siblings.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:09:35 Three siblings.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:09:35 Yeah.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:09:36 when you said about that we're limited by the scope of our ambitions or our dreams. That's absolutely true. I couldn't agree with that more. Even in an athletic competition. the vast majority of people will give out at some point before their body gives out.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:09:51 Exactly.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:09:52 It's the similar sort of thing. Your mother was a school teacher, correct?
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:09:56 Yes, she was.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:09:57 As I understand it, there's something in your history before you left to go to the United States where you were appointed a school master of sorts in the local school?
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:10:06 Yes. So, what happened was, my dad died when I was 16. And around that time, my mother was approached by several parents in the town that we lived in Botswana with the request for her to start a school for them. Because she had a good track record as a teacher. She always got really good results. And so they said, "Your kids do well in school, you're a great teacher. So, why don't you start a school for us?" And she said, "Well, my husband has just passed away. I've got four children to look after. They're about to go to the university. I can't quit my job and start a school."
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:10:34 But they kept pushing her. So, she decided to set up what she called a study group. She rented a small building in a church and then she had five kids that came and one teacher. Then one year later, the number of students had increased to 25. By this time, I had finished high school, and I had a year to wait before I

went to college because of the way the academic calendar works in Zimbabwe versus the US.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:11:00 During my gap year, essentially, she made me the headmaster of the school. For a year, I managed the school of 25 children. I grew to 50 kids-

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:11:10 How old were these kids?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:11:11 They were anywhere from five to 13 in different grades. And I was the headmaster. I managed about four other teachers. I taught some classes myself. I collected the fees from the parents. Then when I'd go home, I get advice from my mother about what to do the next day. Basically, I ran a school as an 18 year old as a headmaster.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:11:30 Let me ask you something. So, you were doing this using your gap year?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:11:33 Yeah.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:11:34 You said you were going home and you were getting advice from your mother. What was your mindset during this time? I don't just mean that ... So, yes, you had a job to do. Let's say you're a responsible young man or adults, however you want to say it and you do your job. Separate from that, what else were you thinking about? Where was your mind at? Where was your head at when this was happening? How did this fit into your larger ambitions? You're just coming of age. How did that all work for you?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:12:00 Well, at the time, I didn't really have any ambitions beyond just going to college. I was looking forward to going to college. I was thinking about becoming maybe a lawyer like my dad had been or an engineer. As an 18 year, you keep saying today I want to be a lawyer, tomorrow I want to be a doctor, tomorrow I want to be an engineer. That was all that was in my brain and it was a fun activity, it was something to do to while I wait time and the responsibility that my mother had asked me to do. So, I was just doing it.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:12:34 I had no idea that it was preparing me for what I would do later in life. One of the things that I've come to believe is that many things happen in your life by accident or by choice that are actually preparing you for your destiny. Every now and then you need to pause and look back at all the things that have happened and see the thread of things that have been

happening that have uniquely positioned you to do something almost better than almost anyone else in the world.

- Fred Swaniker:** 00:13:03 For example, how many people have the opportunity by the age of 18 to have lived in four African countries like I had? I had no choice in that matter. I didn't make any of those decisions. My parents made those decisions. Life happened, and I moved. But that was giving me the pan African view and the continental perspective that one day would shape my life. How many people have the chance to be a headmaster of a school at the age of 18, that also wasn't a choice I made.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:13:30 I continued, I went to college in the States. I started my career with McKinsey. And then I started a biotechnology company and went to business school after that, I went to Stanford. When I was there, I did an internship between my first and second year at Stanford and ended up going back to Nigeria and met these wealthy families who were complaining to me about fees they were paying to send their kids to university, to high schools in the US and the UK. At that point, I said, well-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:13:56 That was back then.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:13:57 Yeah.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:13:58 That was back then.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:13:59 Right.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:13:59 Now, it's over \$2000 for a four year.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:14:01 Exactly. At that point I said, "Well, why are these parents in Nigeria making such big sacrifice to send their kids outside of Africa? Why don't we have good schools on the continent that they can go to.? And then I was like, "Well, I know how to set up a school. I did it with my mother when I was 18."
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:14:16 This was when you were at Stanford?
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:14:18 This was when I was at Stanford. I was 25 at this point.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:14:19 Right.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:14:21 Because of that small project that I had done when I was 18, I actually had the audacity to believe that I could start a school. It was a much more complicated thing, much bigger goal, we were going to try and recruit students from 54 countries in Africa and

develop them into leaders and get them to top colleges. We would need to raise millions of dollars. It was a much bigger vision. But if I hadn't done that small project at age 18, I wouldn't even have thought that I had abilities to do this.

- Fred Swaniker:** 00:14:45 That Academy then led later on for me to launch the university, which is now even much bigger initiative where we're trying to develop 3 million leaders for Africa. But I can tell you that I only realized my purpose in life five years ago when I looked at all of these things that have happened from growing up all across Africa, to being a headmaster at the age of 18, to starting different entrepreneurial ventures, and educational ventures at smaller scales from the Academy, and so forth, and then to the university. That's when I realized that I'm uniquely positioned more than anyone else. Because of all these things that have been happening, that my destiny is actually to help to develop better leaders for Africa. That the one thing that I am being prepared for, that life has been preparing me for is to be able to really unlock Africa's talent, and especially its leadership talent. That is now what I've come to realize is really my destiny in life.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:15:47 My philosophy is that people should just do what they're most passionate about at any given time and let life happen. But every now and then you got to pause and look back and see these patterns, and then you realize why you were put on earth.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:15:58 I have a quote from you right here. "Great comes from passion. Someone can be very talented at what they do. But if their heart isn't in it, it's obvious. I believe that to be great at what you do, you need to be fully committed to it." I couldn't agree more with that. You'd have to be insane to do what's required in order to be successful, if you didn't love it.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:16:16 Absolutely.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:16:17 You'd have to actually be like a sadomasochistic-
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:16:19 Because it's hard.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:16:21 Insanely hard. It's the level of sacrifice. Also, I love what you said about not being able to connect the dots looking forward, but only looking backwards. That brings up a question also of faith and trust that the dots will connect, right?
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:16:33 Yes, exactly.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:16:34 When you were young before you had left Africa or right after perhaps you left and you were at Macalester, did you experience anxiety about your future? Did you have uncertainty at all?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:16:44 No. I've always-

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:16:47 Is that a Western disease?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:16:49 I've always had faith. I'm not particularly a religious person, but I have faith and I believe that things will work out, and that there's a reason why we're put on earth, and that you have to believe. I think that many times when this faith has really been tested, and particularly been in the last 14 years of my entrepreneurial journey.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:17:11 For example, I remember, actually, it was in New York, 2005. I had graduated from Business School. I was in New York on a fundraising trip trying to build this African Leadership Academy. I took a train from New York to New Jersey to meet a potential donor. The meeting didn't go so well. I didn't get any money.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:17:36 Brutal.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:17:37 Yeah. I was so broke that I didn't even have train fare to get back to the other side, to get back to New York. I remember walking up and down on the other side of the river, Hudson River, and seeing skyscrapers on Wall Street and so forth. And some of my classmates from Stanford Business School were working in those buildings, and they were making \$200000, \$400000, and here I was with a Stanford MBA, and I didn't have enough money to get a train back. To this day. I still don't know how I got back. I don't know what I did. Did I beg someone in the street, or did I bump into a friend or what happened, but somehow I managed to get back.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:18:19 But I can tell you that during those moments, and I had several of those moments during those early days, I never lost faith.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:18:24 You never experienced fear, though?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:18:27 Those are some of the happiest moments of my life, because-

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:18:29 In retrospect or even then? That you were gleefully stuck in New Jersey? You're the only person Fred, who would ever try to pull that one.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:18:38 Because I was working towards something. I had a dream, and that dream was so motivating that ... Of course, at that moment, I'm sure at that specific moment, I probably wasn't happy. But, if I think about happiness, I look at it not in specific moments in time, but in periods. There's a big difference between fulfillment and happiness. Because I think that you go through difficult times sometimes. It's similar to if you ask someone who's running a marathon at mile 15, "Are you having a good time?" They'll probably say, "Oh, this is horrible. I'm not enjoying it." But when they finished, and you meet that person, they'll be on cloud nine. They'll be like, "I did it, this was amazing, and so forth."

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:19:27 Fulfillment for me, which then through several bouts of fulfillment, you get more sustained happiness. When I talk about faith, having a dream to work on, having something that's bigger than yourself, that is what has taken me through all these ups and downs over the last 14 years to get to this point, where now we have raised about \$200 million for the different ventures that we've been building to develop talent for Africa. We have almost 500 staff between the African Leadership Academy and the African Leadership University, and Global Leadership Adventures, and we've produced 2000 leaders. We've got a model that's winning all these global recognition and so forth. But just 14 years ago, I didn't even have enough money to take a train back from New Jersey to New York. It's that faith, and the passion working towards something that is so much bigger than me or anyone else, that has taken me through all those moments.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:20:23 There's value in overcoming adversity. I know it's not something that's adequately appreciated by the culture, by society. There's value in courage. Knowing that you had to dig deep, and you had to find something, and you have to hold on to it, and you had to walk through the fire. You had to make it through to get there. It changes the value-

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:20:45 But you've got to believe that there's something better on the other side.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:20:48 You have to believe.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:20:48 You've got to believe that it's worth pain to go through the fire because on the other side of it, is going to be a much better world.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:20:56 Would you also say this, interesting since we're talking about this. The way I've experienced it in my own life where I've had

to overcome adversity, it was only at the point where I accepted where I was, and I accepted that I was going to be here as long as it took. And I was no longer concerned about when I would get to where I had to go. Where then it's the skies part.

- Fred Swaniker:** 00:21:21 It frees you. Yes, exactly. Because you have to just forget about what people think about you. I remember when I used to work at McKinsey before I went to business school. If I went to a cocktail party, and maybe you bump into an attractive girl, and then she says, "Where do you work?" You say, "You work at McKinsey." Then they go, "Oh, yeah, McKinsey." They know that you get paid well and you fly around business class, and they want to keep the conversation going.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:21:49 After business school, when I would be at a cocktail party, and they say, "What are you doing?" "Well, I'm starting this school."-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:21:57 No one wants to hear that wishy washy shit, Fred.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:21:59 Exactly.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:21:59 No one wants to hear that.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:22:01 Next thing, they start looking around the room and they move on.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:22:02 Yeah, I don't trust men, no. No one wants to hear that, of course. That's really a great point. Not only are the traditional sacrifices, but there's also just the fact that in order to get there, you've got to be in the in between, and the in-between is nowhere.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:22:15 It's nowhere. And those are the moments when no one respects you, no one expects you ... People think you're going to fail. You have to just have faith. But that's why the dream that you're working on must be so much bigger than you. Because if it is, then all of these things are irrelevant. All of these things that people say, all of the lack of material wealth, the lack of comfort is meaningless, because you see something so much bigger. That's what eventually allows you to become successful.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:22:42 But the slides can still hurt.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:22:44 Yeah-

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:22:44 We've talked about this. We had a recent episode with Josh Wolf, a venture capitalists here in New York. We talked about exactly this. We talked about connecting the dots, we talked about, among many things, I had a picture of Michael Jordan in my rundown and he had a speech that he gave when he accepted the induction to the Hall of Fame. He talked about how he had these logs that he would put in the fire. The way he kindled that adversity.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:23:07 Everyone has their approach to that. But it's interesting hearing all of this, it's actually very valuable and informative. I think it informs a lot of the things I've heard and read about your approach, one of which is putting problem solving at the center of learning. So, generally speaking, what I like also by your learning model is that you emphasize learning how to learn, as opposed to learning some facts and figures. But the other thing I really want to get to it, I don't know that this is the appropriate moment. I love more than anything else, and I really wonder how well it works, I really want to know. This model of having the students teach each other. Because that's a paradigm shifting thing if you can make that work. I'd love to get to that. But you talk about what you're doing as a moonshot in education. Moonshots are now, this is a big thing. We actually are shooting rockets at the moon.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:23:59 But generally speaking, given the exponential technologies we have, the moonshot model, whether you're an investor, whether you're an entrepreneur, people are taking these moonshots, trying to make massive gains in a very short period of time. What does that mean when you say that in the context of education?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:24:18 Sure. It's coming from a point of saying, really, that by the end of the century, Africa will have 40% of the world's population. But even more alarming is that in just 17 years, so by the year 2035, Africa will have the largest workforce in the world. 17 years seems far away-

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:24:36 What is that? How many people?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:24:37 1 billion people.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:24:38 I billion in 17 years?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:24:39 In 17 years. This will be bigger than China and bigger than India's workforce. 17 years seems far away. But if you convert that into days from today, it's about 6000 days that we have left

before we get to that point. So, the way I look at it, there's two ways this goes. It's either global disaster because you have a billion unemployed people seeking opportunities elsewhere, climbing over the walls, this is a huge problem for the world, right? Or it's one of the areas of great innovation and prosperity.

- Fred Swaniker:** 00:25:06 The difference between the first scenario, the doomsday scenario, and the abundance scenario is education.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:25:13 100%.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:25:15 The moonshot is really saying, can we, in 6000 days, find a way to rapidly skill this billion workforce that we will have in Africa, at different levels; at primary school, at secondary school, at vocational, at the university level, and other ways of giving people skills. Can we find a way in 6000 days to convert this latent energy of young, vibrant, innovative people into one of the greatest forces of prospecting innovation that this century will see?
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:25:48 A moonshot requires three characteristics. One is the task will seem completely impossible when you say it. Like when Kennedy said, we're going to put a man on the moon in 10 years. That seemed impossible at the time. The second thing is solving the problem will require a radical solution and completely unconventional of doing it. You have to start over, you can use existing vehicles because they just won't get there.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:26:10 And then the third characteristic of a moonshot is that it typically requires some breakthrough in technology. And that technology breakthrough must exist at the time in which you say it. It requires a breakthrough in technology to actually get there. When I say we need a moonshot for education, I'm looking at and saying, we have an impossible task, impossible seeming task of upscaling a billion people at a scale and quality and speed never before done. It's going to require completely unconventional way of doing it. But we actually have the technologies today that would allow us to do it. We just have to think differently and we actually have to completely reimagine education, and we can get there.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:26:53 One of the sub headers I have in my rundown here is necessity is the mother of invention. That's something that I have seen not only in your work, but in much of what has come out of Africa. The payment networks is a perfect example.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:27:08 Exactly, M-Pesa, mobile money.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:27:09 The proliferation of that technology in Africa. You make also the point about the weakness of African institutions. The weakness of African institutions has been a source of problems. It has held back the development of Africa. But at the same time, that weakness can be a strength if-

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:27:30 If you have the right leaders-

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:27:31 If you have the right leaders because a leader can come in and his or her vision, if it's great, and if they have the right ambitions and values and everything can accelerate change in Africa-

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:27:43 Much faster than anywhere else.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:27:44 Which would never happen in the United States or in Europe.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:27:46 Exactly.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:27:47 Talk to me a little bit about that, and how that informs your approach towards leadership. Because leadership is so central to your educational model.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:27:54 Absolutely. I really believe that the impact that a given leader or entrepreneur can have in any society, in a government, and in a community is negatively related to the strength of institutions. Because what are institutions? Institutions are checks and balances to your power. Whether it's the constitution, or the judicial system, or parliament, or Senate, all these things that the media, these are all institutions that hold leaders to account and check their power.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:28:25 If you have weak institutions, one leader can either break the society, which unfortunately has happened a lot in Africa, because there's nothing to stop them. But also means if you're a good leader, you can really make a society at a much faster rate than you could ever do in other parts of the world.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:28:42 In the US, if you become the president of a country, you might think you're the most powerful person in the world, but you're not because you've got Senate and Congress and all these things are going to stop you from-

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:28:51 Public opinion, the press-

- Fred Swaniker:** 00:28:52 Public opinion, the pres. You can't decide you're going to print money. The Federal Reserve won't allow you to do that. Whereas in Africa, you don't have those institutions. There's a downside of that, and we've seen all the downside of it. But the upside of it is that if you can get good leaders in place, then the speed at which development can happen, it can happen much, much faster. Because those good ideas can spread much faster. We can leap frog, we can rapidly develop society.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:29:16 This is what has happened when you look at somewhere like China or Singapore, Malaysia. You had a time where powerful leaders came into place. They had a good vision, and they had good leadership skills. And in a very rapid period of time they were able to drive massive change in their countries. What I'm saying is that if we can develop the leadership and entrepreneur attributes in the talent that we're developing, we can unleash this in Africa, at this moment where institutions are weak to get them to drive rapid change. But one of the things that they must do is they must build the institutions. They must create the checks and balances to their power so that after they're gone, you don't have to hope that other good leaders will follow them. But you've got a system that makes sure that you can continue these societies without having to depend on just leaders.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:30:05 One of the philosophical differences here between the African model to say there's an African model, there isn't some universal African model. But for the purposes of this discussion, the African "African model" versus let's say, the Asian model of development. Is the increased emphasis on self-dependency. Of course, that was true in China, but it was driven so much by the central bureaucracy because they had such a strong central government. They wanted to use an export driven growth model. So, they were dependent in a sense on the consumers of western-
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:30:41 The rest of the world.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:30:42 Right. But because of the technology that exists today, the way I see it, Africa is in a unique position to really dramatically reorganize what an economy even is and what a governance structure is. Like you said, you talk about pan-Africanism, there is a sense in which what you're doing with ALU, ALN, and ALA is that you're almost creating a cultural framework for what it means to be African.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:31:13 You're absolutely right. That technologies today allow development to take place at a much more micro level than in

the past. For example, in Africa, one thing that is really proliferated in the last decade is off grid electrical power. Before, if you needed electricity in a village, or in a town, you have to wait for the government to lay this massively expensive pylon from the power station 500 miles away to come to your village. But with technology today, in its very tiny increments of capital, you can have a solar panel, and you can pay for it with your mobile phone using mobile money, and you're up and running, and you've got electricity and that's bringing energy to thousands of rural households. They've leap frogged, they were not building power lines.

- Fred Swaniker:** 00:32:05 This kind of thinking where people are taking development to their own hands. Using technologies that exists and knowledge that exists to really skill themselves and to create businesses, to come up with innovations, that I think is really where the possibilities lie. Because we can't wait for someone to do things for us. We have to do things for ourselves.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:32:30 Well, it's also a fertile ground for decentralized thinking, decentralized systems.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:32:36 Exactly. Not saying that we don't need good governance, we absolutely do.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:32:39 But what you can do in Africa is reinvent governance. You really can.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:32:44 Yeah.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:32:44 How many of these countries have anything close to non-artificial borders? Is it just the northern countries in Africa? Where-
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:32:52 There was a conference in the middle of the 19th century in Berlin where the colonial powers cut up the continent, and they created all these borders. None of it is natural.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:33:03 I actually had ... I don't know how much you know of African history, I'm curious. Before I started the show I was interested in covering Africa, I have been. I have a friend, actually Her name is Matina. She writes for the Wall Street Journal, and she's based out of Nairobi. She moved there years ago and there's some amazing to see pictures on her Instagram. It really is. It's like, idyllic. But I was interested in pre-colonial Africa. I was curious to see what existed about then? I have this one book and I haven't had a chance to read it and was Kingdoms Of

Africa, something like that. I was just really curious to explore what existed in Africa before the Europeans came there. What were the most organized systems, societies and how all that worked.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:33:44 But I think because of technology and everything we discussed, I think this is the first time where you have a continent or a giant mass of people that can reinvent themselves but don't have to depend on Western institutions to come in and create structure through nation states. This isn't like Woodrow Wilson's model of development after World War I. So, why don't we get into the details of your approach? I have some things that I've outlined here that I like that you've talked about. One is that it's student centered.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:34:20 Exactly.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:34:21 The second is, as we mentioned, it's problem solving oriented. I like the third one a lot, which is that it costs close to zero.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:34:28 Exactly.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:34:29 I like that one. Talk to me about how your model works right now, and also tell us where you have learning academies. You started with a secondary school, right?
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:34:39 Yes. We started with a secondary school last two years of high school in Johannesburg. We now have a university campus in Mauritius, we have another one in Rwanda, and we also have a business school in Rwanda. Then starting this September, we're opening a site in Nairobi. Our ambition is to grow to train 3 million leaders for Africa over the next couple of decades.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:34:57 How much would that cost if you wanted to do that at Harvard Business School? At Harvard undergrad education, a four year degree, if you just wanted to put-
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:35:05 A four year degree at Harvard today costs you \$240000.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:35:07 All right. If you wanted to scale that to 3 million, what is that? I can do that math in my head. But you've probably already done it before.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:35:11 Yeah, trillions of dollars. That's what we're talking about.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:35:14 It's like \$1.2 trillion or something like that.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:35:15 No, more than that. Because just to train 10 million people would be 1.5 trillion. Now, we're talking about training 3 million? So, it's trillions of dollars.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:35:26 That's incredible, right?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:35:27 Yeah.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:35:27 That really is incredible. Because you're basically saying, look, this is the reality we need to train all these people. It's not going to work by sending them to our traditional schools, which cost a fortune. Just to drive this point home, this is why I engaged in this material I was really interested to have you on, and I was so excited that you were by chance in New York this week. Because in America, we're so stuck on thinking about how we need to fix everything that broke because it worked so well.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:35:53 Exactly.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:35:53 But that's not going to work. The world is changing so rapidly and so quickly that if you really want to stay ahead of the curve, and if you want to actually be relevant, it's not going to happen by funding some government training programs, and training to get the skills you need for the job you lost because they went to China or something. You've got to take control of your education.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:36:14 Exactly. You've got to take control of your own destiny.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:36:17 Oh, absolutely. Well, good luck on the whole thing. But at least on education, right? So, sorry, please continue.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:36:25 The way we looked at it is really from the perspective of it being a moonshot, and requiring a completely unconventional approach. We looked at the situation, we said, we have 6000 days to develop people, and we don't have any money, and we don't have many trained teachers or professors or whatever it is at different levels of education. When I first looked at this, I thought, well, this is a problem that cannot be solved. I just couldn't see the way around it. But then we did an experiment at the African Leadership Academy that showed me what was possible.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:37:00 We were teaching a computer science class, but the class wasn't going so well, so, we decided to scrap it. Then the next term a group of students came in, they said, we really want to do computer science. So we said, "Well, we don't have a teacher,

but we'll try and experiment." So we said, "You can take them online class." But we didn't believe that online education alone would work, because there are high dropout rates and so forth. So, the students would get together and they'd watch the lecture. And when they got to a point, it was a class on how to build a search engine, right? When they get to a point where they were confused, the ones who understood what was going on will explain to the rest.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:37:34 The ones that explain it, understand it better.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:37:36 Understand much better, exactly. They realized that when they had to teach it to someone else, it will force them to learn it. So, within a few weeks, these kids were learning how to code and they didn't have a single teacher in the room.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:37:44 Amazing.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:37:45 Six months into the school year, I was sitting with a young woman from Morocco, her name was Zineb, and I said to her, "What are your favorite classes at Academy?" And she says, "My Computer Science class." I said, "What? How's that possible? There's no teacher in that class?" I said, "How did you rate the class last year with the teacher?" She said, "Six out of 10." I said, "How do you rate the class this year without a teacher?" She said, "Nine and a half out of 10."
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:38:04 Nine and a half, she was a perfectionist. I'm not going to give you 10-
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:38:09 But nine and a half. That blew me away. I was like, we're able to offer a better class at zero cost, and then just go graduated from the academy and went to Stanford to do computer science.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:38:19 Really?
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:38:19 Yeah. So this is how she got her base. I realized that I had been thinking about the problem the wrong way. Instead of designing a system around a scarce resource, which is teachers that we don't have, we have to design the system around an abundant resource, which is brilliant students.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:38:34 Yeah, I love that. I love that. I've heard you say that again. Say that one more time.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:38:38 Instead of designing a system around a scarce resource, which is professors with PhDs and teachers, we need to think differently and design it around an abundance system which is brilliant students. I'm not saying that we don't need teachers, teachers play a role, absolutely, and we need as many of them as we can get. But you need the role of the teacher and the ratio of the teacher to students must be completely different. You need different types of teachers so that your learning system goes from being completely dependent on one person to being distributed, where students can learn by themselves, they can learn from each other's peers, they can learn from projects, they can learn from internships, they can learn from experts.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:39:16 Yes, you still have a teacher there. But the teacher's role is now just part of the learning system. They're not the only source of the learning. I think that once again, technological breakthroughs have made this possible. Because when, for example, universities were created, when Oxford was built, it was 1000 years ago. They were established in an era when there was no information. Information was very scarce. You have to go to Oxford to get it from two places; the head of the professor or from the library book. Those were the only places you would get information.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:39:48 And they were building bureaucrats. It was a bureaucratic ... the British Empire.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:39:52 Initially, they were creating people for the clergy and later on for the British Empire and so forth. But today, we live in a world where information is ubiquitous. It's everywhere. A young person has more access to data and knowledge on their mobile phone than someone who was doing a PhD 30 years ago did, right? What that means is that it opens up completely different possibilities for education. That's all we're tapping into is saying, in an era of abundant information. Education is now something that can be student driven. Students can learn by themselves, they can teach each other, and you can now have them apply that knowledge that they're getting by themselves, and from each other to projects that they have to do. You can think about assessments differently, just completely rethink education.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:40:39 What that does, it drives down cost, increases the speed of education at which can move up people. Because now you've removed the key bottleneck to scale. Also, guess what, the students love it so much more because it's much more engaging. They're in control of their learning. They love coming to class now, and they love because the class is not with your

peers, and you're solving problems and you're learning by yourself and it's so much more engaging.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:41:01 There's no question that teachers can and do add benefit to students that are looking to learn. But I think a really apt analogy here that I thought about, and because also, when I was introduced to you through Aaron, just a few days ago, I was in the middle of preparing for an upcoming episode with a sports writer for The Wall Street Journal on his book called Captain Class. Which he basically explored for years, all the different sports teams around the world trying to find the most elite teams, and trying to find what they had in common.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:41:36 It makes me think about sports here, right? Because kids if you give them a ball, if you give them a soccer ball, they can learn to play soccer. They don't need a coach to learn how to play soccer. They need some information to understand what a ball is, what you do with it. If you want to structure a game, what the rules are, all those things. Of course, it will be helpful to have a coach for many reasons, not just to learn the footwork and the technique but also for the inspiration, for the father figure, for the mother figure, whatever it is. But you can do so much with just a ball and some basic information right?
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:42:09 I feel like that's the parallel here. It doesn't seem to occur, I feel like to almost anyone that the same principles that apply to sports, why can they not apply to learning?
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:42:19 I think you said something very important. You used the word coach. I think that the role of the teacher-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:42:25 I love that.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:42:26 -should be much more like coach than the person whose hand holding you-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:42:33 I think this is freaking genius. I actually think this is pretty amazing.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:42:37 This goes back to what I was talking about in terms of the influence that my father had on me. The role of the teacher in the 21st century I believe, should be less about giving you facts and figures.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:42:48 I love this.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:42:48 Than to ignite the passion for learning in you. Their job is to tell you that they believe in you, and it's to give you confidence, and to build a culture so that you are self-reliant, and that you can acquire things by yourself, and that you can learn things from your peers, and to actually believe in yourself and say, "You know what, I can be great." Because I think half of the outcomes that we see from what's happening at African Leadership Academy and African Leadership University is from things that we do informally. The other half is from things that the students do for themselves. That comes from culture.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:43:21 The role of the teacher in this world that we live in now is to really instill in them that culture. The nice thing about culture is that it's free. It's zero cost once you have it right. And it can then spread from one generation of students to the next. And then to say, "This is how we learn. This is how we do things for ourselves."

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:43:39 We do need teachers, and requires them to complete everything, and to actually give up control, and to trust young people-

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:43:45 I love that. Give up control, and also, they learn how to collaborate. You've got a continent with problems, how are you going to solve those problems? You're not going to solve them as individuals who are thinking, well, I got to beat Susie on tomorrow's exam so I could beat the curve and get my A- or get my A. That's not how you're going to solve your problems. You have to learn the skills of collaboration.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:44:07 Collaboration, yes.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:44:09 Exactly. Here, let's just skip right past all this, because I think this is brilliant. My question is, does it work? And how well does it work? Something else, Africa is its own continent with its own culture. I don't know how much the subcultures within Africa differ from each other, but it has its own particular culture, and it has learning models that are particularly unique to Africans, right?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:44:31 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:44:32 Let's talk first how well it's working. And then how well do you think this could apply to Westerners? How would that work?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:44:40 First of all, I think this model is completely applicable to the rest of the world. When I look at the phenomenal outcomes that

we're seeing from the African Leadership University, I believe that we've come across not just an African innovation in education, but a global innovation education. I'll talk to you about-

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:44:57 No one else is doing this like this? There are people that do bits and pieces of this-
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:45:00 Yeah, different bits and pieces are coming together, but no one has pulled together all the different elements that we have, where we've been able to get such high quality. Because I think that what we're doing, which is quite distinctive, is we're showing that you can get very, very low cost and very high scale, but remaining very high quality at the same time. Because to the extent that others are trying to bring education to Africa at scale, the quality is questionable. So, they're putting this online education out there-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:45:31 Those things suck. If you just have online education, that's not good enough.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:45:33 That's something that, this is not an online university.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:45:36 It's not good enough.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:45:37 It's we're bringing people together because learning is a social activity. You learn from each other, and you learn through projects and all that. It's the combination of all the things, and also the way in which we've driven down the cost to the student, because the innovative financing that we have, and we'll talk about that in a moment.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:45:49 But two things to show you that that is working. One is, our students coming. One thing that was surprising to us, when we put this model onto the world, and we opened applications, we had 180 slots for the first class. Within 60 days, we had 6000 applications for those 180 slots. What was most surprising to me was that 40% of the people who applied were in existing universities in Africa. They saw how we were doing this, and they said, "I'm dropping out." Some of them were going to very prestigious universities. Some of them were even studying in universities in Malaysia, and they came back because they said, "Ah, this model of learnings is what I've always wanted."
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:46:33 We often design education systems without actually thinking about the user, the student. And say, "What do you need?" The fact that they voted with their feet and the left ... 40% of the

people who joined us left existing universities. Some of them were in their final year of college-

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:46:47 40%, really? That is impressive. Really, are you serious?
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:46:50 Of the inaugural class, 40%.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:46:51 What colleges did they leave? I would never have guessed that. One of my questions that I want to ask you, was there some way to do exchange programs? Because I thought even for myself, I would prefer to have the degree of a Harvard or Stanford as a student in this world right now, because of the paper. If I was actually interested in that sort of thing.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:47:08 Yes, you're right? The people who are most risk averse, and the people who want the safe path will take that. But you see, the people change the world are the ones who like risk. The people who change the world are the ones who will take the unbeaten path.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:47:19 Do things differently.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:47:20 The ones who chose to come in that inaugural class are innovators. They're problem solvers, the leaders and they said, "Ah, this is the place for me." We have kids dropping out of University of Cape Town, which is one of the most prestigious universities in Africa. We had a young woman from Tunisia who had one term left to graduate, and she had already gotten admission to an MBA program in France. She quit that and came to us.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:47:44 That tells you something about just how right this model is for people in this time. The second piece I'd like to share in terms of how well this is working is, a model requires our students to spend every year, four months in an internship. They come for eight months with us, and then four months in an internship. We've cut all vacations. By the time they graduate, they already have a year of work experience.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:48:08 In the first batch after the 180 came through the first eight months of our program, we send them off into internships. Three of them were hired by McKinsey, one of the most prestigious management consulting companies in the world, as you know, including one working in Shanghai in McKinsey. One went to work in Paris with L'Oréal.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:48:25 So important.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:48:25 Two went to work in Silicon Valley. Seven went to work for IBM across Africa, three went to work for Bain & Company, another top management consulting company.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:48:34 You structured all these relationships and partnerships?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:48:35 Yeah, we open doors ... Yes. The reason we did that was not because we want our kids to work in investment banks and consulting firms. No, we wanted to prove a point. We wanted to say, let them go and be tested at the most rigorous global companies that typically only hire kids from Stanford, and MIT and Oxford, and Yale and Princeton, all the top universities in the world. We said, "Go and compete-"

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:48:56 And come back and share this with ... Which is what you've done, right? You've done this.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:49:03 But this was doing their first year of college. They still have three more years to go.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:49:06 Sure. But they're bringing back ... it makes so much sense. This model, it's fertilized by the quality of the students.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:49:14 Exactly. The students are the key driver of quality. But what happened when they went into those internships was, we asked the managers after the internships, we surveyed them all. We said, tell us how our kids did. Compare them against college graduates that you typically hire from all these prestigious universities. On a scale of one to five-

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:49:32 They were so much better, I'm sure.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:49:33 -How do our kids do? They rated our kids on average, four out of five compared to college graduates, and they had only been there for eight months with us. And then 97% of the managers asked for another intern, and five of the kids got full-time job offers, including from some very prestigious companies. They said, "You know what, you don't even need to finish the rest of your degree. From what I've seen from you already, I'm ready to hire you."

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:49:58 Attitude is the most important thing for hiring someone who's fresh out of-

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:50:01 That's right. But the quality of the pool of students that we had produced just in eight months when they went into all these procedures companies was clearly evident when they were

saying, we're ready to hire a bunch of your kids without them finishing their second, third year.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:50:13 They're problem solvers.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:50:14 They're problem solvers, they were innovators, they had the confidence, they thought very differently. What we found last year, our biggest problem was that we were flooded with requests from companies asking us to train their staff, because after they saw the students and they said, "These skills that you're young leaders have, we don't have them in our staff. So, can you train our managers?" Last year, the biggest problem we had is that we were turning away companies coming to us and say, "Can you train our staff in the same way that we've seen these students with the skills that they have?" That for me is the best evidence so far that this model is working.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:50:48 Well, there's some famous psychological studies that have been done that show that children who are able to cope with adverse, not just cope but relish in adversity, and in confronting challenges. They don't view failure as failure as-
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:51:04 They look at the learning opportunity.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:51:06 -as challenges and opportunities to grow. That's so essential.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:51:10 Absolutely. Part of our educational approach is that you learn going through hard things sometimes. Our objective is not to make the three years a smooth ride. We want to prepare them for a world where they need to have perseverance and resilience and courage. Many of those, the experience that we take them through, we don't measure ourselves by whether our students are happy, we measure by how much they're growing and learning. Education is one of those things where you really have to think about what does your customer want versus what do they need? What they need is to go through sometimes, difficult times when their courage is built, they learn values, they learn perseverance. Because those are things that when they go on the world will actually distinguish them and will give them what they need to go through all those ups and downs to actually drive change.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:52:04 I hope that the listeners can meditate on this a bit. Just to imagine, even from a spatial standpoint, how would a paradigm shift it is ... I'm not going to make assumptions about how well this is working, I take your points at face value. But just on a theoretical level, if you have 20 students, or in the case of

college, you 400 sitting all with their backs to the wall, and their face facing some one person who's at the bottom of this amphitheater, and they're just talking. And you're listening and writing down notes, the psychological shift between that group of human beings and one where they're all just mixing and matching with each other, figuring things out. Because, as you said, not only are you learning let's say, better being taught by your students, but then what about the additional learning that's happening from the people that are teaching the other students, not just the fact that they're learning the material better, which is totally true. You and I obviously have both experienced that. When we teach someone, something we learn it better, but also they're learning how to be leaders-

- Fred Swaniker:** 00:53:10 They're learning collaboration, they're learning problem solving, they're learning communication skills. These are the things that when they go on to the world will really make them distinctive.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:53:18 They're learning things about themselves that they wouldn't know, otherwise. The fact that they want to know.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:53:24 Exactly. They're getting self-awareness-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:53:26 Compassion, nurturing-
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:53:26 Humility.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:53:27 Humility, for sure. Also, I would hope, and I don't know how this would work. But, there's so much fear, and the competitive aspect of learning is such a detrimental quality. I feel like-
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:53:37 Exactly. Because you see we need to move away from this belief in the fixed pie, and looking at the world of scarcity to really think of a world of abundance. Well, which is why for someone, when you look at elite universities today, they thrive and relish in the fact that they have thousands of applicants just so they can turn them away. If you look at some of these great institutions-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:53:59 Absolutely. You know who did a great podcast on that, Malcolm Gladwell did a great podcast on that. I don't remember the details though, but he did it. I would suggest for any listeners, he has a podcast called Revisionist History. There's a specific podcasts where he talks about exactly this point, that they make money from turning students away.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:54:16 Yeah. When you look at the quality of an institution, they talk about "Oh, yeah we have a 2% acceptance rate."

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:54:21 Right, exactly.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:54:22 They love that. But-

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:54:24 I've rejected so many people.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:54:25 Yeah, exactly. But imagine how much more impact they could have on the world if they said, "You know what, we're going to open our doors, we're going to replicate ourselves." Because many of these universities that are doing this have billions of dollars in endowment, and they could open more campuses, they could get access to more people, but they've chosen not to, because the value that they think comes from making their products scarce. What we're saying is that, we believe in a world of abundance, that we can actually give high quality education to millions of people. The more we give that, the more the world prospers, the more opportunities are created. There's enough to go around for all of us. And let's create opportunity for others, not create barriers for them.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:55:09 This is why I think so many great inventions and practices, all sorts of things, ways of doing things, culture will come out of Africa in these coming decades. Because you talked about control, it's to relinquish control. That may just be too difficult a requirement for Western institutions. You have entrenched interests. Universities aren't just going to give up their whole-

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:55:29 Absolutely. You've got faculty who are on tenure who don't want to just give up their position.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:55:32 People aren't going to do that.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:55:33 Alumni who say, "No, that's not how I went to school, you're not going to change that." So, there's a lot of real problems with legacy. You see the fact that there's all this entrenched systems and processes and institutions, means that it's going to be difficult to change. In Africa there's a clean slate.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:55:50 This is what's so exciting about what's going on in Africa.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:55:52 There's a clean slate and we can just leap frog. The point that is one thing that folks takeaway from this podcast, when we look at investing in education and thinking different about

developing talent in Africa, and so forth, we shouldn't look at it as if we're doing Africa a favor and we're going to save Africa.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:56:09 They're going to do us a favor. This is an example of you doing us a favor right now.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:56:14 I believe that many of the world solutions actually lie in Africa.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:56:17 For sure.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:56:18 Because you have the 40% of the world's population is going to come from there. Because in that same population is the next Elon Musk. Elon Musk is a South African-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:56:27 We have to be very careful. We actually did a few episodes on how he's in deep shit with Tesla.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:56:32 But still, he's an innovator.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:56:33 Sure.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:56:33 Look at the things he's come up with; Tesla and SpaceX and all these-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:56:36 He is literally taking moonshots.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:56:37 PayPal, and he's a South African. Today you can get a heart transplant because of a Dr. Chris Barnett who did the first heart transplant in South Africa. Kofi Annan led the UN for long term and drove for world peace. You look at Nelson Mandela, one of the world's greatest leaders came out of South Africa. The scientist who designed the Mars rover robot, that NASA sent to the red planet is a Ghanaian scientist.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:57:01 You have all of these people who have emerged from Africa, but they've emerged and have brought global solutions and global innovations by accident, despite the education system in Africa. Imagine now, if you look and took a deliberate approach, and said, we're actually going to invest in developing the potential of our youngest and most innovative segment of the world, how much more innovation is going to come out of that that's going to benefit not just Africa, but for the whole world? Like you said, necessity is the mother of invention. Because we have so many challenges that we have to solve in Africa, and we don't have resources, it's going to necessarily force us to come up with the most innovative solutions.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:57:45 The world therefore, is going to benefit by really investing in Africa, not because they're going to save the Africans. But because this is one of the greatest opportunities to save the world.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:57:55 I want to actually hit something home there. I think that's a detrimental way of thinking. When everyone was thinking, I need to save this person, or I need to save this, right? That whole dynamic, I don't even know how to describe it, it's so counterproductive. Again, it brings us back to this point of collaboration. Instead of everyone's looking towards the teacher for the answers, we all turn towards each other and we create solutions that we never imagined existing.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:58:19 Exactly. Another thing that I think is important to bring out here is the way we're financing this education. Because in the US today, college students, owe about \$1.7 trillion of debt. What we have been able to develop, what we're doing at scale with this university is a different way of student finance. Where the students pay almost nothing up front for their education, and we get investors who finance their education. And then when the students graduate, they don't pay back a loan with a fixed interest and so forth, they pay back a share of their income.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:58:59 What this forces us to do as a university is to make sure that our students get a job although they're highly employable, that they can become entrepreneurs. The students are not saddled with debt. They just pay back a share of the income for 10 years. It could be something like 10% of their income for 10 years and then you're done, or 10% of the income for five years. So, that's another thing.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:59:16 You should put a cap on that.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:59:17 Yeah.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:59:18 What's the cap?

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:59:20 It's about three times.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 00:59:21 Okay.

**Fred Swaniker:** 00:59:22 But what it means is that if you're unemployed, you don't pay anything as a student. If you're working in low paying job, you're only paying a small amount. If you're working at Goldman Sachs, or you know JP Morgan, you're paying a large amount. And everyone pays what they can afford. It's a much

fairer form of student finance, and it's one that is really leveraging capital markets. It's not requiring governments, it's not requiring families who don't have resources. In itself is another great innovation in education finance, which the rest of the world can learn from what we're doing in Africa. And why not free all America from college debt? Isn't that something that-

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:59:57 The debt is a huge problem.
- Fred Swaniker:** 00:59:59 Yeah.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:00:01 I was familiar with that model. You have not implemented it yet, right?
- Fred Swaniker:** 01:00:06 No, we have implemented it.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:00:06 You have implemented it?
- Fred Swaniker:** 01:00:07 Yeah, we've already invested-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:00:08 Oh, really?
- Fred Swaniker:** 01:00:08 Yeah, we've got about 500 students who are already on it.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:00:10 Okay, really? Wow. What I want the audience to take away from this conversation is, at the very least, what I took away, and anything else they can, which is that this is conceptually something that is really powerful and worth engaging with. I would highly encourage our listeners to check out what you guys are doing. What is the easiest way just to go to ALU's website?
- Fred Swaniker:** 01:00:32 Yeah, [alueducation.com](http://alueducation.com).
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:00:34 [Alueducation.com](http://Alueducation.com).
- Fred Swaniker:** 01:00:36 That's the website. I have a Facebook page where I write a lot about my thoughts. I'm on Twitter, several members of our staff are also available on Twitter and in Facebook and so forth. But yeah, [alueducation.com](http://alueducation.com) is really where you can follow the journey.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:00:49 I wish you the best of luck with this.
- Fred Swaniker:** 01:00:51 Thank you.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 01:00:52 I think you're doing great work.

**Fred Swaniker:** 01:00:53 Thanks, Demetri.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 01:00:54 Yeah, I think you're doing great work.

**Fred Swaniker:** 01:00:57 Its been a pleasure to be on the show.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 01:00:57 No, it's been a pleasure having you on. Thank you so much.

**Fred Swaniker:** 01:00:58 Thank you.

**Demetri Kofinas:** 01:00:59 That was my episode with Fred Swaniker. I want to thank Fred for being on the program. Today's episode was produced by me, and edited by Stylianos Nicolaou. For more episodes, you can check out our website at [HiddenForces.io](http://HiddenForces.io). Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram @hiddenforcespod, or send me an email. Thanks for listening. See you next week.