Introduction to Zak Williams and PYM

– Alright, our next guest is somebody that I just met recently and I was so impressed with him. I actually interviewed him for my podcast and I said, you know, hey, I got to get you on our summit. So I'm excited to have him here.

His name is Zak Williams. He's a CEO and co founder of, along with his wife Olivia of a neurotransmitter health company called PYM, P Y. M. And you can see in the background there, if you look over his right shoulder, prepare your mind. It's also his middle name which his dad gave him, but he's a mental health advocate and a speaker and on top of all the great work he's doing in the mental health field. He's also an investor in technology and and many other companies, early stage investor. So Zak, it's great to have you here. Thanks for being on our summit.

– Thanks for having me Tom. I'm thrilled to be here. – Yeah. Two interviews and what in two weeks? One week? Yeah, yeah. Now the title of what we're gonna be talking about today is finding healing through mental hygiene and I think that's so pertinent. You know, we're hearing so much more about uh mental hygiene and really, you know, all these things that people are facing that they never talked about before and now public figures are coming out a lot of athletes, even the last olympics.

Gosh, darn it. What was her name? – The demon bios – The demon bios.

Personal Loss, Trauma, and Mental Health Struggles

Yeah, I mean, and she had the courage to come out with it under the pressure of the olympics and say, look, I'm just not right right now, I can't go compete at my best and and risk an injury.

And so it's so refreshing to see this uh take us through a little bit of of how you came to become so committed to helping people with their mental hygiene.

– Sure, well, thanks for asking. Or I guess you're not really asking, You're requesting. I my journey relating to mental health started with denial. You know, when I was younger in my teens, my cousin who was a very close friend of mine died by suicide and I tamped down the trauma. I wasn't able to acknowledge the experience and that that nature of denial continued with me for decades after, you know, it wasn't until my dad who was entertainer Robin Williams died by suicide, that things started spiraling out of control.

I was diagnosed with complex ptsd, generalized anxiety disorder and depression and was doing really unhealthy things like self medicating using alcohol to the point of alcoholism.

And all of that was coming to a head whereby I was having trouble concentrating the relationships in my life, were breaking down. I was isolating, I was going through a major transition with a divorce, in part due to my mental health and self medicating and and I realized something had to give because if I didn't enact change.

What would end up happening was I would likely not be with us here today, wow, so a couple of catalysts occurred. When was I discovered service, starting in the California state prison system, I started teaching a financial literacy class at san Quentin prison. I didn't know that, wow.

Working with an incarcerated individual who's now out went by the name Wall Street. Yeah. And I found that supporting and teaching others through volunteering was helpful for me.

It helped me focus on other people and, and, and you know, helping teach was ultimately creating a feedback loop that helped me. I found that starting there led me down a path to starting to work with mental health organizations and I work with several at this point, but through the lens of teaching, I ended up establishing systems based

advocacy as my focus.

Service as a Path to Healing

And I discovered through that lens that service was my path to happiness. And – Do you think that's true for most people? I mean, because to me, I know that that's a path to happiness and I know we're gonna talk a little bit later about making sure we take care of ourselves as we go through that, but I think that's kind of a universal theme, like if it's always just about us, it's really hard to find happiness when we can feel like we're in service or maybe, you know, we feel like we're fulfilling our purpose by helping others.

Doesn't that typically bring some happiness to people. – Sure I'd say, you know, my answer would would be a a little bit more nuanced in not to your question, that wasn't a question, but my answer requires looking at the nature of being self centered in activity and the nature of taking care of ourselves so we can show up for others.

So, first, to directly answer your question, I think most of us can discover service as a path to happiness. But first, we need to establish a foundation for ourselves because if we're dis regulated, if we're finding ourselves anxious, depressed, stressed, in psychosis, but any number of different things, we aren't able to be of service in the way that enables us to have this positive enrichment cycle. – That's a great point.

And even if we are in service, that is pretty dysfunctional, like it's yeah, that's great. – So I think the starting point would be, you know, we need to find stable foundation and then determine, hey, what, what is it that I'm passionate about that I can commit time to, I would qualify as service oriented and would that ultimately make me happy?

I'd say most of us, the vast majority of people are able to find meaning and derive happiness through service. – Yeah, yeah. And you, you learn this new path though a little bit later, you just went all service at first, right? – Yeah. And that burned me out.

– Yeah. – So that that's the complexity with it, right? If we just orient towards helping others without taking care of ourselves, it can lead to burnout frustration, stress, mental breakdown, any number of different things.

And so, you know what I would caution is we can't just orient towards service and go, go, go and not have some detrimental effects associated with it.

Right. And so the nuance of it is some of us can feel like it's self centered to take care of ourselves and certainly one of those people, I was like, it's selfish if I focus on myself.

Building a Healthy Foundation Through Self-Care

And the thing is though, is if we're focused on taking care of ourselves so we can show up for others, you know, that self, that inward approach, establishing a foundation can ultimately lead to being oriented outward – When I think that's a great way to view it internally for those people.

Like, hey, I'm I've been, I think that's what I've done my, my whole life is like, even I want to learn more so that I can help others, but learning more is really good for me, right? I wanna have more energy so that I can have energy when I'm around others, right? So, but I think we, if we view it that way, then that makes it a little easier for us to focus on ourselves to like, hey, the more the better I feel, the more I can help others, right? And just I get to feel better also, right? So – Yeah, you know, I would say it's not necessarily everybody's goal or journey to support and help others.

Some people are on a personal path, whether it's towards the light enlightenment or expertise or generating wisdom, whatever it might be, that's okay.

I think for the majority of us though, we seek meaningful connection and we seek meaning in life in our experience here on this planet. And so what I, what I hope and what I've started to discover is my life's mission is I want to help people find their healthy foundation so that they can then derive happiness and meaning from their activity.

– I love it. So how do we find that the healthy foundation? How did you find it? And how can other people that maybe have not found it yet? What are some things they can do to start to find that? – Well, you know, first off I had a partner through this journey and my now wife Olivia June Williams, who had a similar experience relating to trauma earlier in her life when she was a teen, her sister died by suicide and she spent decades working out healing solutions for herself and she discovered things like nutrition in addition to therapy and so forth, that supported her decisively.

And she introduced those what what we call lifestyle interventions to me? I was skeptical of nutrition, I didn't realize that nutrition can actually be deeply impactful for mental well being and through her introducing things like amino acid support and leveraging things like nutrients, minerals to help neurotransmitter health and ultimately support de stressing and also finding stability.

I discovered something that was not only deeply healing for me but also was something that I believe we need to generate more awareness around because of the nature of how safe it was.

The fact that using natural evidence backed solutions is not a household thing right now. Yeah. And so, you know, from my lens I discovered lifestyle interventions as a means of healing for me, but ultimately wanted to coalesce it into something that I could easily establish a framework around.

And so Olivia and myself, we started calling it mental hygiene. What were our mental hygiene rituals? This is not a new phrase, it was just something that wasn't popular allies and didn't relate to daily activity that we can orient in a very specific framework oriented way.

So we started breaking down mental hygiene into activities relating to nutrition, fitness, mindfulness, meditation therapy, community support and specialty interventions like breathwork, intermittent fasting and so forth.

And so what we discovered in our journey is that for any given individual there's likely a mosaic that works best for them. You know, it's not like nutrition is the panacea that's going to support and heal everyone decisively. It's likely a mix relating to all those different things.

Nutrition, Neurotransmitters, and Mental Hygiene

You know, fitness is generally helpful for most people, but it might be especially helpful for certain people. There's people who, you know, aren't aren't experiencing or are experiencing neurotransmitter deficiencies in a very profound way.

And as a result are feeling dis regulated, depressed, anxious and the fixes around that are pretty straightforward. – Yeah. Didn't you tell me? Like, Isn't the number of over 50% of people are experiencing deficiencies in their neurotransmitters? – Well, we're gonna go into a challenge associated with framing neurotransmitter deficiencies.

There are some issues relating to the testing associated with it. But uh you know, currently to my understanding, the majority of Americans experience some sort of neurotransmitter deficiency.

– Yeah. – Yeah. The challenges is the testing and diagnostics associated with it are challenging because if you were to do, say, blood test or your analysis, what you're tracking is that the metabolic exhaust of those neurotransmitters and so forth.

And so, you know, we need to actually factor in elements relating to our metabolisms and the rate at which we process what we the rate at which we produce energy, the rate at which the rate at which we process things like nutrients, amino acids and so forth in order to get an accurate assessment of neurotransmitter health, you'd have to do a spinal tap and that's not that's not something that that I would uh would would want or wish upon, let's say absolutely needed.

So, you know, the diagnostic environment needs to be improved. But extending, extending beyond that. um if we're looking at our collective neurotransmitter environments, what's underlying it and what's challenging it also is our

underlying metabolic health epidemic. Because in the current environment in the U. S. 60% of American adults are prediabetic or diabetic.

And there's great work being done at places like the Stanford metabolic psychiatry center at Mass General and Mclean Hospital at Harvard Medical School.

The research is showing that you can establish healing for for our body's metabolism and that in turn would lead to better outcomes. Not only in terms of the nutrition we take on and synthesize but also in terms of how we actually generate and develop, you know, a healthy neurotransmitter system in addition to you know adjacent systems whether it involves our hormones, you know the way in which we produce energy. Our brain health and a number of different things associated with them. – You know diet nutrition is super complicated, right? And there's all sorts of you know using your word nuances there but what are a couple of things that a couple guidelines that are helpful around diet and nutrition. And I want to go through like the amino acids later on too and different supplements, even some that you offer but what's it just you know from a a 30,000 ft view, what are a couple of things that have been helpful for you nutrition wise in improving your your mood, your mindset, your you know, your metabolism. What are a couple of things that have worked for you? – Well, I mean, the one thing that's extremely helpful just out the gate is stay away from processed foods.

– And what do you mean by processed food? Because some somebody might not. What does that mean? Right. What do you mean? – Food? It's foods, that's, pardon me.

It's food that is adulterated with preservatives, chemicals and has ingredients in it that are not considered part of the whole food diet. – So, you look at the label has got 30 ingredients. That's probably not a good thing to eat, right? – Yeah. You generally want to stick to, you know, 10 ingredients or less.

So that could be a bit much less is more. The main thing is that the chemicals and preservatives and so forth impact our bodies Alice static state, which is our capacity to manage stress because their stressors, they impact our bodies home static systems. Our ability to find, you know, and achieve a baseline state. And ultimately can degrade things like our metabolism and, you know, different elements of Oregon health and cellular health.

And so, so, you know, that's a very straightforward thing, processed foods try to process foods extending beyond that start to understand your body's preferences because individuals, any given individual has a preference towards specific diets.

It's not one size fits all. Some people need to be need to be eating or are predisposed to having better outcomes in terms of their health around eating things like red meat or other types of meats.

In addition to that, some people need to stay away from certain vegetables whether they're cruciferous vegetables, like the kales and broccoli's. Other worlds, legumes, for instance, legumes for me are very challenging for my body to digest. Um And I actually get an allergic reaction to it. And so so we actually need to look at our diets and understand what's uniquely suiting for us as individuals – Suiting – Suiting. Yeah. So, you know, things that you would say, oh wow, this is super healthy, because, you know, everybody's telling me that this specific food group is healthy, it might actually not be great for people Olivia.

My wife is allergic to shiitake mushrooms, she's allergic to amaranth things that could be considered. Health foods are actually challenging for her body. And so we actually need to take a deeper dive into what suits us as individuals and then extending beyond that there's nutrition that can be established, you know, distilled nutrition that we wouldn't find as being common part in the Western diet, whether it's things like methylated b vitamins which are hard to find in in uh in significant concentrations.

PYM Supplements and Natural Support Solutions

And methylated b vitamins are transformational for a third of the American adults with the m th fr alleles. But they're also more by available if you don't have the M th fr you know extending beyond that psycho biotics, probiotics and probiotics that support the healthy gut brain connection and serotonin synthesis not super prevalent in Western

diet.

Gaba, which I'm a big proponent of natural Gaba specifically is generally prevalent in things like fermented foods, kimchi, sauerkraut, pickles, certain yogurts. We're not eating a ton of fermented foods in the Western diet and therefore you know we're not providing you know an optimal nutritional environment to support the Gaba system.

– Yeah let's talk a little about your supplements there too because I tried your Gaba and actually I just ordered some more recently like because I thought it was so good when we were together up in L. A. I really really thought it was super cool and and just created a really nice feeling. So what are some of the supplements that you produce at at Pym that you found helpful for people to add into their their mental hygiene routine. – Sure. Yeah.

Well our first product launched in September of 2020 and it was called the original mood chu we've since called it the mood because we've reformulated it to be vegan for a number of different reasons. Accessibility is key for us and if you're vegetarian and so forth. You can eat our gelatin based products.

So you know we launched the mood chew. The original mood chew to start to provide safe, effective natural means to support things like stress. Overwhelm worry.

And the reason why we launched with that product is because it was a solution that I found to be really helpful, one that you would chew and through it being a chew it could be more bio available than in a pill format. So we also wanted to create something that you could take with you on the go something that you could put in your backpack or purse or briefcase and know that it's there to support you not only when you're in acute stress environment but also to establish prevention around things like stress.

And then from there what we did is we launched our mental hygiene kit and you know we're now calling it a total reset for for mental well being. And the reason why is because it's for products it's omega fatty acids, sustainable fatty acids which are hard to find a vegan format.

So you know we're they're still sustainable fatty acids which are essential for people in terms of getting the appropriate omega's in your diet. Then a psycho biotic which is for a healthy gut brain connection and uh amino fortified methylated B vitamin complex and then a magnesium product that has magnesium three and eight in addition to two other magnesium compounds and amino fortification to support what we call a restful calm and those four products can be taken together. They're meant to be complimentary but you know they're also developed to be bundled. Not everybody needs omega's.

I mean you do need omegas in your diet but you might be taking them through other means, you might have fish that you eat a good deal of and so forth.

So we didn't want to throw the kitchen sink. One thing we wanted to ensure that people could pick and choose what works best for them. And so that's the mental hygiene collection that you know again we're calling the total reset for mental well being.

And then what we realize is that there are things like attention support that needs need to support populations because you know in this current environment distraction and the stress associated with things like focus is something that we realize there's an opportunity opportunity to create a natural solution around. And so we are launching the attention to that. And that's specifically amino acids and nutrients and vitamins to support attention distraction focus meaningfully and you know the lens we have there is that for any individual there are there's a spectrum there's a suite of solutions that they have available to them whether they're pharmaceutical pharmacological or otherwise.

The main lens that we take is people should have an opportunity to have a natural solution in addition to you know pharmaceutical solution. And I don't hold issue with pharmaceutical solutions. What I hold issue with is it's generally the first line of defense and and it's the only option available to many people.

Mindfulness, Gratitude, and Daily Rituals

And so you know really what we sought to establish in launching these products is is have a effective natural evidence back solution in addition to the other solutions available – Without all the side effects. Right? – Yeah.

I mean if you're talking about things like the mood chew right launched if you take if you eat a whole 10 event you're gonna feel tired and you're gonna get tired.

You know we try to orient our formulations around endogenous compounds versus exogenous. So endogenous are things that you're are compounds your body knows what to do with almost immediately meaning amino acids whether you have an mth fr mutation or not. You know whether you have specific mutations or not, your body still knows how to generally take on amino acids, synthesize them into the appropriate proteins. Same same things with you know b vitamins and in the central minerals like zinc and magnesium and all these things are qualified as endogenous exogenous are are valuable for many many people and you know a term that would be used for a class of say stress supporting exogenous compounds would be adapted genes I think adapted genes are fabulous. But there's a variability in how the body will react to adapt pigeons individual. – Yeah it's always it's always good to try natural ways of of dealing with anything we believe.

So uh so your your supplements. I've tried the attention and the mood to. They're both fantastic. I haven't tried your other ones yet. Where can people find those? – Well you can find them at Pym.com.

– Pym.com. – Pym.com. many retailers. And later this year we're going to be available at even more retailers. So you can find us at at many markets in California everywhere from Ella's premier specialty market.

Air 1 natural market, air 1 to anthropology. Where were available to United market molly stones in the Bay Area. And then we're going into about 15 1500 other stores throughout the U. S. Later this year. – Yeah.

That's awesome wow congratulations. – Thank you so much. Were also available on amazon as well. – Okay. Cool. Mindfulness. I know it's an important ritual that you do too.

Why is that so important? – Well the thing about mindfulness is mindset and establishing an appropriate mind state to do meaningful things is is something that is can be simple and effective to establish. And you know the effort versus the return is extremely high. The ratio low effort for very high return. And it's easy to integrate mindfulness exercises in the daily activity. I'll give you an example making a gratitude list any given day. I list the four things that are essential for me on that day. They changed somewhat, but they generally remain the same. You know, my family, my friends, the opportunity to be of service and to, to establish meaningful work in my life.

Those things are really important. They change from time to time, but it helps keeps me grounded and focused on doing meaningful things. – I like that. So you're not just talking about mindfulness, being, closing your eyes and just noticing your thoughts.

Advice for Healing and Finding Happiness

You're talking about even little rituals like having a gratitude routine or, or just being mindful, Mindful about, you know what you're doing what you're thinking, you know what types of activities you're engaged in.

I love that. Very cool. – Yeah, there are all sorts of other mindfulness activities necessary list them here. But you know, there are little rules of thumb heuristics that we can apply in our daily life that that support better outcomes. Feeling better, Being happier feeling more connected with people.

And you know, it can be kind of a hacky way to feel better near instantly. But also, it's a way to establish a foundation for feeling calmer, more supported, better connected with people.

– I love it. Hey, looking back on your life, you know, going back to when you were in the deepest throes of your, you know, not feeling good uh too now, uh when you look back now right and notice the progression of where you are. When you look back now and look back to where you were and where you are now because there's a lot of people that are that are still back where you were. What would you tell them?

Like you made the journey and nothing's perfect. We're always still growing, right? We need to get better and better and try new things and and prove our lives. But what would you tell people that are in the midst of very challenging things in their life right now?

You've made it through many of the fires. What's your advice to them? – Very first thing. It's okay to be selfish and taking care of yourself because it ultimately leads you to be able to show up for leads.

One to be able to show up for others. That's the first thing. The other thing is be kind to yourself. – I love that. I love that. – It's a simple thing to do. And each and every one of us deserves to be kind to ourselves.

– I oh did you have another one? I'm sorry. – Oh, the third thing is you deserve to be happy. – Yeah, I love that. You know, I've gone through one experience because I've never been, I've always been, you know, pretty optimistic and positive most of my life, even when things weren't going that well, I've been pretty good at that.

But in 2015, I had chronic fatigue and I was not getting better. And I just was like, I did not understand it. I didn't know if I was dying, I didn't know what was going on. And one day I remember I just didn't even feel like eating and because I was having a hard time even getting out of bed and walking, I didn't feel like eating and I got in the car and I was supposed to go do something and and it was just, it was that numb total numb feeling and that scared the heck out of me, right? Like what?

I couldn't connect with my purpose. But I, but I just knew, I mean, I knew I was going to get beyond it, but I did ask somebody, I asked, remember asking a friend of mine, I said, am I am I just like, is this because I've been sick or am I just depressed?

Not that it really mattered, but, you know, many things can make us depressed, right? And I was, I never felt like that before, but it was the scariest feeling cause I was feeling nothing like nothing.

And you know, now I'm way past that, but I've been there and it's pretty doggone scary and I guarantee you my neural transmitters were probably not balanced then, right? There was some things I could have done in terms of supplements, like what you offer now and then, obviously there's things that you know that I needed to do that I did end up doing with with mindfulness and reconnecting to my purpose. And even though I was feeling crappy, like still finding ways to help people and you know while I was working on myself, so I've been there, I mean I know what it's like and it's pretty damn scary, but you're such a great example of somebody coming through that and you told me obviously I knew about your dad, but I didn't you just told me the first time at 13, you had an experience where a cousin you admired, also took their own life.

So I think you're a wonderful story, you're a great role model and I really appreciate you being on with us today. Any final words you have for anybody before we we say goodbye. – You know, I do this because not only does it lead to me being happy, but I want to create a world where or support the creation of a world where my kids can find happy meaningful lives and you know, I hope for any given individual they can find a mantra or tagline that works for them, that they can carry with them through difficult. – What's your mantra?

– Services my path to happiness. – I love it, I love it, you're a wonderful being, thank you so much for everything you and Olivia are doing and we really appreciate you being on our summit Zak – Thank you Tom, thank you so much.