

SOS#24: How Extreme Flying Fuels Fearless Focus and Real Success with AJ Wilder

AJ Wilder: 0:00

first thing I say is okay, we have 30 minutes or whatever the time limit is. Here are the three things I have to get out of this meeting. We're not leaving this room till I get those three things. And then everything else falls into place under that. You know, because especially when you're in a meeting, in a professional situation, you know the conversation. People like to hear themselves talk. They go all over the place but they don't stay on point. And one of the things about flying is if you're not on point, you're dead.

Marcus Arredondo: 0:27

Today's guest is my friend AJ Wilder, an architect, entrepreneur, world-ranked aerobatic pilot and co-founder of the Figure One Foundation, which helps young pilots reach their dreams From building a thriving architecture firm to performing stunts at over 200 miles per hour within an invisible 1,000-meter box, achieving up to 14 Gs. Aj's relentless drive to conquer new domains is nothing short of extraordinary. I want to pause on this point. 14 Gs is equal to 14 times your body weight and can cause serious injury and loss of consciousness in an instant 9 Gs is what fighter pilots can traditionally withstand with specialized suits and normally only for brief periods of time. But what's most striking is the juxtaposition between his unwavering tenacity and steady presence. It's like the bear in the background of this video, symbolizing his strength, resilience and relentless pursuit of mastery, while he remains unruffled and self-assured under pressure.

Marcus Arredondo: 1:15

As a side note to listeners, the video is worth watching, since a portion of the discussion involves commentary on shared screen of his gravity-defying aerial maneuvers. Aj also discusses his ability to enter a state of flow, optimize his mental and physical performance and maintain clarity through meditation and biometrics. I'm excited to share this wonderful conversation with one of the most generous, positive people I know. Let's start the show. Aj Wilder. Thanks for being on. I'm so excited to talk to you, welcome.

AJ Wilder: 1:42

Thanks for calling.

Marcus Arredondo: 1:44

We've been trying to schedule this for a little bit of back and forth, so I know you carved off a little bit on March Madness Friday, which is also I'm grateful for.

Press cmd⌘ + p or ctrl + p to print this transcript. Sharing with one or two friends is ok. Posting on the internet is not.

AJ Wilder: 1:54

Yeah, hurry up, because I got to get my bed set, I know.

Marcus Arredondo: 1:56

We got to get in the bracket. So you've been a well-regarded part of the real estate community for many years, highly loved part of the real estate community for many years, highly loved. I want to talk about Walcott and you acquiring Walcott. I want to talk about some of your side businesses on the way to doing that. I also want to talk about some of your charity work. But I want to kick this off with your flying, because I think people get an idea that you are a pilot and that you do some crazy shit, but I don't think they understand the gravity of what you're doing. No pun intended there. I literally don't think they understand the danger and what the acumen is. So I'm hoping, if you can kick it off, just tell us what you're involved with and how you got into it, and then I've got 100 questions to follow.

AJ Wilder: 2:49

Yeah, sure you know it is a very dangerous sport, To your point. I mean, we're flying, you know, anywhere from the surface level to 300 feet at over 200 miles an hour, and we have to keep the sequences when we're competing in a thousand meter by a thousand meter box, so things happen really fast. It's unfortunate. I can count 32 plus of my friends that I've lost in the last call it, 10 years. It's a real high ratio of people getting hurt. That ground comes up quick and it's not forgiving. You can't hit the repeat button. So I've been on.

AJ Wilder: 3:35

Well, backing up, I've been flying for about 30 years. I actually got into flying like a lot of things in my life. I was out and hooked up with a friend and he's like, hey, you want to go flying. I'm like, yeah, and the person who I flew with, I would not say, is one of the smarter people in the world that I went to high school with. So I'm like, well, if he can be a pilot, I could be a pilot, why not? So I started back when I was in New York and, of course, I picked one of the harder airports to start out with. It's an airport Farmingdale, Long Island, and it's wedged between Kennedy, LaGuardia and Newark, so a lot of stuff happens really fast and I figured, oh, I'll get this pilot license thing. Then I started flying. So that was airplanes. Then I started flying. I did that and of course I was trying to be an architect at the same time. So you know, poor, no money, splitting time with another student. Another student left there when I came out here in 97. So back there I had my private commercial. Came out here, realized because of the marine layer you can't fly unless you have an instrument rating. Got my instrument rating. Then I was like, well, I might as well get my flight instructor in case I ever want to teach. I did that. I ever want to teach? I did that. And then I got my ATP, which essentially is the highest level of a pilot's license you can get.

AJ Wilder: 5:11

Then I got bored and a buddy of mine said hey, you know, you can fly planes upside down. Go out and do this upset training recovery course. I'm like, really. So I went out there and did it and I was deathly ill for the first. Call it two weeks of training out there. I literally would land and from being upside I was so afraid of being upside down, I'd hold on as we would go inverted and he'd be like, dude, like let go, Like don't hold on, Like, and I'm thinking, no way, man, I'm not letting the seatbelt like hold me in place. So did that, had a really bad motion sickness for a long time and then I started to get into it and another friend had said hey, why don't you try to compete?

AJ Wilder: 6:02

So I bought my first plane, Great Lakes, and started competing in the lower categories there's five categories and went out to the first contest and got thrown out of the contest because I flew the entire sequence on the wrong axis. It was a start, it was a loop, was the first figure, and in the loop I did a clover leaf and I flew the entire sequence the wrong way. And the committee came together and they said and I had a safety pilot, because I didn't know what I was doing and the committee said well, you know, we can't let you fly the other two flights and it was rough. So I was like, hey, whatever, this is cool, I got the experience. And the person who was on the committee, the head of the committee said, hey, whatever, this is cool, I got the experience. And the person who was on the committee. The head of the committee said oh, don't worry about it, there's been national and world champions that have done this. And I'm thinking to myself, dude, I'm coming back and I'm coming at you. And he was in the advanced category, it was much higher. And I was like I'm coming back and I'm going to nail you to a post and I'm going to beat you. And I'm not only going to beat you, but I'm going to work my way up. I'm going to be nationally ranked and then I'm going to be world ranked. And you know just a lot of hard work I was.

AJ Wilder: 7:17

I had a lot of good coaches. I had a Russian coach that worked with me for several years, a French coach that has been working with me, and about three or four years in, I was climbing up the categories and a buddy of mine said hey, why don't you go try out for nationals and go fly nationals? I was like, all right, Flew nationals twice. And then I was like, yeah, this is really where it's at. I mean, a lot of people, a lot of competitors. And one of the guys was like well, why don't you try to make the team the advanced team? I was like, all right. Well, it seems like a big thing. So I ended up making the advanced team and then went to Worlds because it's every other year, Went to Worlds and did pretty good and I was like this is where it's at, it's the best pilots in the world, the best 60 pilots in the world are going to go head-to-head for four flights and you're flying sequences you've never flown before.

AJ Wilder: 8:21

It's a really interesting process. After the first flight, which is the free known, everyone picks figures. And then you have that night. You put all the figures together in sequences and then you can pick from any sequence, but then you have to go out and fly it, which sounds like okay, no big deal. You go out and fly it, but you know there's a lot of components to it. You have the wind component that you have to deal with and you have to wind correct because again, it's a thousand meter box. And then you have the density altitude component ie, you don't want to hit the ground Right, so the air gets thinner when it's hotter. So you have to figure out your altitudes because there's seven judges on the line and they're all judging you. It's kind of like figure skating. They're all judging you, Each seven judges on the line and they're all judging you. It's kind of like figure skating they're all judging you, Each figure has a K factor, which means a hardness factor, and then they give you a score of zero to 10 on that figure and then it adds up and then you get a presentation score. So I mean it's it's pretty interesting.

AJ Wilder: 9:19

This year is tryouts for next year, which will be the world's, will be actually in New York, upstate New York, so super psyched about that, and so tryouts will be in September. So this will be my eighth US team. If I make this team, it'll be my ninth team I've made. So I've been competing doing this a long time. You know I have that world.

AJ Wilder: 9:47

And then, because of the foundation, I never wanted to sit at a table and have someone more qualified than me. So I decided this was a couple of years ago I decided, well, I'm going to go get all my helicopter ratings. Same thing. I got my private commercial ATP and I'm like, well, I might as well get my flight instructor ratings. Got my flight instructor ratings, my cfi and double I in helicopter, and then I was like, well, what else can I do? So I did the same thing in glider, got my commercial and then got my flight instructor rating and I figured, okay, there's anytime. I'm talking about the foundation, which I'm super passionate about now. I can sit pretty much with any pilot et cetera, and typically I won't come across someone that has more experience than me. I'm over 10,000 hours now, which is what a lot of commercial pilots are when they retire the guys that do this for a living, so it's super cool and you've never flown a commercial plane professionally.

AJ Wilder: 10:52

No, no, I mean no is the short answer. I'd probably be bored out of my shorts. I mean, that was one of the things that got me about flying, because it's become so automated that I was like this is kind of boring and that's why I got into aerobatics. And then, once I got into aerobatics, I was like, wow, like you can take an airplane where we just modified another modification of mine and now, if I really get on it, I'm pulling 14.5 from horizontal to vertical. So you know that's 14.5 Gs. So you take your body weight times 14.5 Gs and that's what's going through the bottom of the plane. And then when I'm inverted and I push up, it's anywhere between 8 and 9 Gs. So nine times your body weight is sucking you out of the airplane.

Marcus Arredondo: 11:42

What would be the average Gs most people would pass out at?

AJ Wilder: 11:46

You know, if you get in a race car and it's a long-term, you know, just take race cars. I mean there are two, two and a half G's. There's a whole physical way of keeping the blood in your head or out of your head so your eyes don't explode basically in your head or out of your head, so your eyes don't explode basically. I mean, if you think about it, you know, in the beginning of the season I always get broken capillaries around here. I'll look like a raccoon because you know your capillary is just like anything else. You've got to work them to have them accurate and an average person walking around has only got one G on them.

Marcus Arredondo: 12:23

Hence, your body weights, right.

AJ Wilder: 12:25

So when you add more than that, you, your body doesn't. A, your body doesn't like it, but B, you have to work your way up into it. So it's, you know. You know, on a flight, on a training flight, during the season, I'll do three training flight, two to three training flights a day, you know, and there are six to 800 calories per training flight and the training flight's only 25 minutes. But your, your body, is trying to keep the organs where they're supposed to be, so you're using muscles you normally don't use. So it's, I mean, it's intense.

Marcus Arredondo: 13:02

Are you monitoring all of your metrics? You know your, your heart rate, your blood pressure while you're flying. Is that something that gets monitored?

AJ Wilder: 13:09

Yeah, more in the beginning. I mean, now I'm so acclimated to it I can tell by certain signs. There's been two times when I pulled myself to sleep, which is like watching the TV, and the TV goes in and then you're out, which is really interesting. I mean for both reasons I was dehydrated and I didn't pick up on the signs early enough. And it's a really strange thing. I was on a down line. I pulled out it was a long pole into a loop with a bunch of stuff on it and as I was coming around the pole, instead of lightening up on the G, I just kept the G on and my whole field of vision came in and then went poof and disappeared.

AJ Wilder: 13:55

And the thing is, when you pull yourself to sleep or you over G yourself, you know the first thing that comes back is your ears. So you're hearing, which is really bizarre. So picture, you're in the moment. You're in, you're looking at the ground, you're pulling away from the ground, you're looking at the sky and then all of a sudden it's black and it's like someone knocked you out. And then a couple seconds later you start to hear like oh, I'm in an airplane.

AJ Wilder: 14:22

But then you can't tell if you're sleeping or if you're awake and the last things that come that comes back is your eyes. So then all of a sudden you know you can see what's going on, but you're in that I just woke up phase like waking up from sleeping, and the interesting thing about it is like, in that particular case, I was inverted, I rolled upright and the one of the coaches on the ground was like all right, bring it in, let's go you, ok. And I said yeah, yeah, I'm fine, no-transcript. And the coach was like AJ, knock it off, knock it off. Like you're inverted and like I could not tell if I was right, side up or upside down. So that part's very dangerous.

Marcus Arredondo: 15:17

What's the timeline in that scenario between when you clock out and when you come to again, at least auditorily?

AJ Wilder: 15:24

Typically it's six to eight seconds, at least auditorily. Typically it's six to eight seconds. You know, what needs to happen is the G has to come off of your. You basically depleted your brain of blood and oxygen, so the blood and oxygen have to get back, and then your brain has to kind of recalculate all your gyros to get them right. So you know, okay, I'm right side up, I'm out in a field, whatever, and you have to get your way about you. It's not something you want to do and the problem is, as you get into higher categories and we're low to the ground, so, although we have to wear a parachute, parachutes don't work unless you're above 1500 feet, because if you jump and I've had to consider this a couple times and you're not at 1500 feet, we had a guy in the desert. He popped out, jumped, he was at 1200 feet, the canopy half

opened and when he hit the ground it cut him in half, and then you know about 15 minutes later, he died, so it's rough.

AJ Wilder: 16:28

It's really really rough.

Marcus Arredondo: 16:30

So what do you do? So how long are the seasons typically? I mean, is it time off? Then time back on again.

AJ Wilder: 16:36

Yeah, I mean I try to knock off from, like November to the end of January and then I start slow, get my G tolerance back up so you don't hurt. You'll hear pilots talk about the wobbles which essentially the crystals in your ear that should be on the bottom of your ear get to the top of your ear and then you get vertigo and once you get that it's very difficult to back up and get rid of it and that can be career ending for air show pilots and everything.

Marcus Arredondo: 17:05

How do you mitigate that?

AJ Wilder: 17:11

You know there's been a lot of science about where you put your chin when you're doing high rate turns or, you know, rolls. You know I have my seat actually pushes me past vertical, so I'm not vertical to the plane, I'm actually ahead of it. So my ears are never 90 degrees to the rotation. So my ears are never 90 degrees to the rotation, which is the best spot to be right. As you get further away from 90, the arm gets less, so you have less pulling. But you know that's a dangerous thing because once you get the wobbles trying to land an airplane.

Marcus Arredondo: 17:44

It's damn near impossible.

AJ Wilder: 17:46

And when's peak competition season. So you know the Worlds are always in the summer for us, so there's a lead up to that. Nationals are in and about right after that in the fall, and then you know we start shutting down everything the end of October because the plane usually has so much maintenance that needs to get done on it. You know from during the season you break stuff, you put temporary fixes on it, but then you got to go back in and tear it apart and fix it.

Marcus Arredondo: 18:15

So we're in the middle of March, which means you're sort of in prime workout, conditioning shape. I'm curious what does your day look like? What are you doing to stay in shape? And I would like, if you can

talk about, what do you do for your mind? I mean, I think your body is one part of it, but there's a level of focus that's required in these circumstances that I would suggest is unlike any other endeavor out there, I mean outside of being an astronaut maybe.

AJ Wilder: 18:45

Yeah, I mean. So something I started doing about four and a half years ago was I was working out wrong. So I'd go in the gym and I would do, you know, pyramid work. I do moderate heavy, you know benching and everything else. And we got a new coach and he's like we're changing this. You guys are going to do explosive stuff because that's what happens in the plane. So instead of doing, you know, four sets of 225 on the bench and trying to get 10, we're going to bring that to call it 340. And you're only going to get three, two or three, call it 340, and you're only going to get three, two or three, and so it was all explosive exercise. So that was a big difference and what like.

AJ Wilder: 19:33

When I put my head through the canopy, he was big on building up your neck like a wrestler. So a lot of neck curls, a lot of body weight on the neck, and I think that's why I didn't get paralyzed when my head went through the canopy, because when I went and got the mri and the doctors looking at it, because I lost feeling in my hands, the doctor said you know you should have. It was like running into a wall at 20 miles an hour with your head and your neck absorbed all that. And that's what saved me, because I've, theoretically, I should have broken my neck and then I obviously would have been screwed and I would have ended up in the ground. But so neck is big, lower core is big. I think a lot of us do sit-ups and that works your upper part of your stomach but that doesn't help you from a blood standpoint. When we start pushing, like before I G up for a pull to keep the blood in my head, I start with my toes, of all things. So you really have to ratchet down your toes, you have to tighten up your calves and you work your way all the way through your core till you get up to your neck. So there's just a lot of muscles that if I took you out flying and I pulled really hard, I mean you'd be out, and it's just because you don't know how to tighten up.

AJ Wilder: 20:52

Yeah, you know a lot of the guys like the blue angels and them. They all have um g-suits on, so the the water in the g-suit is supplementing their, their blood, you know, to keep it where it should be. We don't have that. That's one of the things we can't. We're not allowed to have any of that when we compete. So we have to train our body to hold all that you know during the time.

AJ Wilder: 21:15

But you know the gym is big, you know hitting it an hour and just doing heavy exercises, doing a lot of lower core work, it's amazing how important your legs are in this sport and we tend to always work our upper body out but not as much our lower body. So, leg stuff, a lot of workouts, bare feet, with your toes extended, so you have a good base, and what that does is it strengthens your toes. So, like when I'm doing curls and stuff, I'm actually doing it on a quarter ball toes. So like when I'm doing curls and stuff, I'm actually doing it on a quarter ball, so I'm actually working on balance while I'm doing stuff like that. So a lot of those step exercises.

AJ Wilder: 21:54

And then, from a mental standpoint you know there's there's all different theories about how to do this I I work with a group called Peak Brain and it's a passive way of training your brain and they've done a lot of white paper on this which, like, if you have a stroke, it fixes the dead, it rewires the dead spots of your brain. So the snowboarders were really where it came out of the professional snowboarders and it allowed them to hyper-focus in. So what they do is they look and see what damage you have to begin with, and then they try to activate those damage or workaround areas. I had a lot of concussions from sports when I was younger, so trying to fix that first and then work on hyperfocus, and it's interesting, you stare at a screen and, as your brain does the right thing, it tiles the screen until you make a full picture. So it's very bizarre but really effective.

Marcus Arredondo: 23:01

So is it electrodes on your head while in sort of conditioning, sort of those neural pathways that you start to use your eyes?

AJ Wilder: 23:10

It's passive, right, so you can't like focus on it and it'll make the tiles go. Like when your brain does it right, it hears an audible sound and a new tile appears. It's really, really interesting, because it's the stuff we don't tap into. Sure, you know when you're, when you're flying right, the challenge is you're in fight or flight mode or what is it? It's a, it's a flight, fight or freeze right.

AJ Wilder: 23:38

Yeah. So you definitely don't want to freeze, you'll die, you, you. You have to apply yourself, which means I know exactly what my heart rate needs to be, I know where my blood sugar level needs to be. You don't want to be too high, too low, because if you're in the plane and you're doing this it's a mess and you know we're flying with precision. So if we pull up and we do a three quarter roll and we're over by 10 degrees, we get penalized for that. So precision is key. And then you have to put that role in the center of the line. So any length after or before that, you know, within that line you get penalized for. And as you get up, like where I am in the unlimited category, there's so much stuff going on on each figure which I sent you a couple of the things I mean. It's, it's super intense.

Marcus Arredondo: 24:30

So how are you? I'm curious what? What is your heart rate typically? Where? Where is that ideal frequency for you?

AJ Wilder: 24:38

It's funny you say that because I had to do a stress test and I cannot. It it takes and it's just because I've conditioned my. My normal heart rate right is 110 over 80, it's right where it should be. I cannot, under extreme stress in the airplane, I cannot get it over 130 and it's 130 no matter what I do. I really like when they put me on the treadmill for the stress test, you know the incline has to be really high, high and have to really push it for me to get in the 40s. And it's just because my heart is so conditioned with being consistent in the pump.

AJ Wilder: 25:15

And nor do I want to be 110 when I go to fly. I want to be about 118 is sort of my sweet spot. And then you know if you have external things happening. You know something's broken on the plane as you're getting ready to fly. That might bring it up to, like you know, mid 120s, but typically it's not high, it's not where it should be. I mean, if I took you out I could get you to probably 155, 160 in a couple seconds, easy.

Marcus Arredondo: 25:43

Yeah, that's incredible. Have you measured your HRV?

AJ Wilder: 25:48

seconds, easy. Yeah, that's incredible. Have you measured your HRV? No, it's interesting that you talk about that because that's been discussion about. You know really monitoring that we have so much technology now to be able to look at that and utilize that.

AJ Wilder: 25:58

You know a lot of what we're doing when we fly is you have the obvious factor right, you don't want to die, but you know, you, you, you have to maintain, because it's like the worlds are over a course of two weeks, so you may fly on day one and not fly until day five.

AJ Wilder: 26:19

So for those four days, you know, I'll go back to my hotel room, like this past one when we were in Poland, and then the background noise. I'll go back to my hotel room, like this past one when we were in Poland, and in the background noise. I'll have the video of me flying. So I'm hearing the airplane engine all four days. So I'm conditioned to it. I'll tend to in a hotel room, instead of just sitting up straight like working, I'll try to make myself put my feet on the bed and be upside down. Essentially, you know my preseason training, I actually hang upside down and try to read really boring stuff because it works the capillaries in your eyes and you start to get used to the pain of having blood pressure high in your head. And I do that training and that seems to be super effective.

Marcus Arredondo: 27:04

Well, we can hear it in your voice and it's in the way you carry yourself too. But there's two components here that I'm really interested in how it applies to business, and then I want to transition over to the photos and go through a video so that you can walk us through it a little bit. But focus is certainly one of them. But there's a tranquility to your presence and, I think, putting yourself in those stressed environments so frequently and conditioning yourself, I'm curious what it's like, how you bring that into just run of the mill, everyday situations that most people would get pretty amped up about.

AJ Wilder: 27:43

Yeah. So I think you know, one of the things as I get older and I do compete more and more is and I find myself doing this at high competitions I'm actually taking in the experience which All of what I'm telling you I've applied to business, right. So if I'm out in a competition and I'm actually enjoying nice sun, you know, I'm looking at the surroundings, I'm enjoying the people. I never did that when I got into competition. I was, you know, head down, focus, focus, focus. And then when you start to realize like, hey, life is short and we've all known, you know, those stories I'm seeing it firsthand, right, that guys are getting killed right

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in front of me, that I know that, I had relationships with that, I know their families, and when you realize that it's such a, it's such a blessing to be able to enjoy this sport, enjoy it.

AJ Wilder: 28:49

And so taking that back to business, which is, you know, a client calls and they're upset about something, and if you can take a step out of that, that moment, and just take a deep breath and this is like what I do before I go and fly, like before I dive into the box I take three big breaths, hold it for a couple seconds and it triggers the sense in your brain to say it's going to be okay.

AJ Wilder: 29:21

And when I do that and I take those three deep breaths and I hold it because I do a lot of meditation and other things when you're talking about for your brain when I apply that to business like I'm walking into a potentially a contentious situation with a client on a you know some complicated thing on the site I take three breaths. I'm already grounded and I can actually detach myself from the situation so I'm not emotionally attached to it. And the clarity that you see then you know again, learning this from flying the clarity you have where you can pull yourself out and look down and go I got this. It totally changes the way you approach a situation.

Marcus Arredondo: 30:03

Yeah, if we get time, I want to come back to the meditation um component, but in the meantime I'm going to screen share here I think the video we sent you is a um, yeah, so this is some of the planes I'm flying so we've got to.

Marcus Arredondo: 30:24

Let me just let me prep this real quick for those who are listening. We, we're going through a visual sharing. Aj, I'm going to go through a bunch of photos. I want you to talk us through it. And then there's a couple of plans for lack of a better word, I don't know what they're called and then we'll watch the video. So I'm going to let you come, I'm going to let you talk through these but let's jam through these little by little here.

AJ Wilder: 30:53

So what are these? So the one on the left is one of the planes I fly with the team. The one on the right is one that I use for practice and I also compete in. You'll see a bunch of video of that. This is one of my hangers out in Santa Paula, and then you can see that this is out in Tennessee training. A lot of the team goes out to Tennessee because it's centralized and we train out there. This is over in Poland. You get a sense of how big the crowd is, absolutely.

AJ Wilder: 31:25

To see these. We were obviously on the stage and they were introducing us, so there's a lot of in Europe. This is a much bigger sport than it is here.

Marcus Arredondo: 31:36

Everybody seems to be standing at attention.

AJ Wilder: 31:39

Yeah, they, well, it was the. They were just starting the whole program, but this was. We were in the background, so I shot this Because you get a sense of the square where everyone gathered. I mean it's really cool. Absolutely, that's coming into land. They have grass strips over there. That's before I took off, one of the photographers shot it and was like it was funny. Before I closed the canopy he goes are you ready? And I'm like bring it.

Marcus Arredondo: 32:05

There's some good AJ in bad act poses here.

AJ Wilder: 32:10

That one's actually out at Fox recently training. You can see the snow in the background. It's kind of cool.

Marcus Arredondo: 32:16

We'll just sort of flip through these. You just stop me. If there's anything in particular, we're going to go through some of your actual flights.

AJ Wilder: 32:29

And I want to talk to you about your state of mind during there. These are great. Yeah, they're cool, right? Yeah, yeah, I mean they're. It's such a great sport and it's you can apply lessons learned in this to everything in life, which is great.

Marcus Arredondo: 32:36

Well, that's what I think I find most fascinating. So there's three you sent. I don't know which one you want to, or four. This one is mind blowing, it looks like hieroglyphics. Which one do you want to go to?

AJ Wilder: 32:46

The one with the all the countries Keep going One more. So this is kind of cool. So we all sit in a room and every team and you can see the country that picked it, every team picks a figure, and then you have to put all these figures together. It's 14 total. It's 10 base figures and then connector figures, and then you have to fly that and if you go to the next one, you'll see what a sequence looks like. So that's a sequence that you have to fly that you've never flown before. So it gets really interesting.

Marcus Arredondo: 33:21

How intuitive is this for you to internalize? Is this something that's relatively easy for you to see a few times and actually get to know? Or is this something you got to study for days in advance?

AJ Wilder: 33:32

Well, you don't have days. I mean, you're going to fly it the next day. So you know, there's like if you go to my hotel room, the entire one of the rooms, the entire perimeter, has exactly what I'll be seeing around the entire box that you click from Google Earth. So I mark the box on the floor and you walk it in the box on the floor. So, as you roll, you know, OK, I'm going to look at that structure. And then you come down and you're like OK, I see the fire hydrant next to the blade of grass. Okay, I see the fire hydrant next to the blade of grass. And then you have to compensate for wind, because every time you pull vertical, if there's 10 knots of wind on you, you move 100 meters. So now you have to calculate in the wind and then, of course, you have to figure out your altitudes. I'm going to start at this altitude and finish at this altitude.

Marcus Arredondo: 34:18

So you're doing calculations up to the last minute?

AJ Wilder: 34:20

Yeah, I mean especially if they change, if they change the direction of the wind, in which way you're going to fly. You have 20 minutes that you have essentially to put. Basically take everything you did the night before and flip it.

Marcus Arredondo: 34:34

That's incredible. And this one is just sort of mind-blowing just because there's so much you can see the level of detail that you know.

AJ Wilder: 34:40

I hand write every little thing and then I can start to figure out, like where my deficiencies are, what I need to be looking at, what am I thinking about? Where do I have to preload? Because if you have three big pushes you're brain dead. So you have to know if you push up and you have a three quarter flick, then you have to push again and then push again and it's a quarter, three quarter roll and it's a quarter, three-quarter roll. You have to have that kind of preloaded in your brain because by the time you get to that third push you're lucky if you can figure out what right, side up and upside down is.

Marcus Arredondo: 35:11

Yeah, that's incredible. You can obviously tell this is architect handwriting. Okay, these are some cool shots. Yeah, these are some great shots. I'll flip through these, but to no disservice to you, because we're going to get to the video here through these, um, but to no disservice to you, because we're going to get to the video here.

AJ Wilder: 35:26

Yeah, so the video was it's a. So one of the flights that you fly is a freestyle, so you can put it into, uh, music. You're allowed to add music and smoke, for the base stuff you can't.

Marcus Arredondo: 35:39

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All right, so I'll just kick this off. We won't watch the all four minutes here, but, uh, I want the viewers to be able to get a sense of. There's a couple of times which I'll highlight here, which is, effectively, this isn't quite that, but it's almost like you're in a free fall.

AJ Wilder: 35:58

Yeah and again this particular type of sequence you're trying to show your artistic ability with the airplane and then you also want to show the capabilities of the airplane.

Marcus Arredondo: 36:09

So this is all within the thousand meter box.

AJ Wilder: 36:13

Correct, you know. So, like that pole was probably a 10 and a half G pole and you can see how fast it rotates.

Marcus Arredondo: 36:21

I was blown away at how fast these fast this plane bobs and weaves. I mean it is rotation, but it's more than rotation, it's 360 degrees. This is what I was referring to, where, for those who aren't watching, you climb to the sky and then it looks like your engine just cuts out.

AJ Wilder: 36:39

Yeah, so you know again. You want to show all the capabilities of the airplane. An airplane is no different than a hammer it doesn't know what it's doing. You are the only one that knows if you're upside down or right side up.

Marcus Arredondo: 36:51

Now, is this something that's as normal as walking for you, or are you still?

AJ Wilder: 36:57

Yeah, now I don't even think about it. Yeah, yeah, I don't think about it and I don't feel it.

Marcus Arredondo: 37:02

And is this freestyle right now? Yeah, I don't think about it and I don't feel it. And is this freestyle?

AJ Wilder: 37:05

right now Are you performing a scene? Yeah, this is just freestyle, so that's kind of the fun part about it is there's an artistic piece to it. So you have the precision piece and the artistic piece. This is kind of more the. You get to have fun with it, put it to music, you can kind of just do whatever you want to do, and they're scoring you on all this.

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Marcus Arredondo: 37:28

You have to have a lot of trust in your engineers and the actual plane itself. Yeah, I mean what?

AJ Wilder: 37:34

you want to do is not have something brave?

Marcus Arredondo: 37:38

Yeah, I would imagine. This is incredible. It's almost impervious to gravity. It looks like.

AJ Wilder: 37:45

Yeah, it's kind of cool because we got multiple GoPros, so you're seeing multiple angles from what I see versus what you see.

Marcus Arredondo: 37:52

And how long are these sequences typically for the freestyle than the actual set sequence?

AJ Wilder: 37:57

About somewhere in the neighborhood of eight minutes.

Marcus Arredondo: 38:01

And your heart rate's 115 here.

AJ Wilder: 38:04

Yeah, I mean this part's fun. This is when you take a breath and it's kind of like you can just do what you want to do and have fun with it.

Marcus Arredondo: 38:13

You ever? Have you lost the butterflies in your stomach? Is that even a thing for you anymore?

AJ Wilder: 38:18

When it comes to the world level stuff. No, I think you're just because there's so many people watching stuff. No, I think you're just because there's so many people watching that you don't want to and you've got teammates. You don't want to disappoint the teammates.

Marcus Arredondo: 38:30

How is it scored among the team? Is it just an aggregate score among all of you?

AJ Wilder: 38:35

Note: The transcript was generated by AI and may contain errors.

Yeah, they take the top three guys on the team and that becomes a team score.

Marcus Arredondo: 38:39

And these are countries. But is there a board that appoints or elects who's going to go?

AJ Wilder: 38:46

Yeah, there is. It's called SEVA, which is what it stands for, and essentially it's a world board that you know that controls all the world contests. And for me, you know, you have world and regional, and the world stuff is where I'm focused on, where I've been focused on, you know, I always wanted to Kill a shot. Obviously, this was before I wore a helmet. You know that was quite the experience when I filleted my head.

Marcus Arredondo: 39:19

So you wear a helmet now.

AJ Wilder: 39:20

Oh yeah, yeah, I mean the entire this side of my head peeled back. Oh uh, when I put my head through the canopy um, we sort of glossed over that.

Marcus Arredondo: 39:31

Can you break down a little bit more about that uh event and then we can move on to uh other stuff?

AJ Wilder: 39:38

yeah, yeah. So I was out practicing. Coaches on the ground came in and I I was working on unknown figures to put into the sequences. So you're basically trying to screw all the other people and do figures that no one for sure has practiced. So it was what they call a down-humpty. So essentially 45, a radius and 45 up. So I pushed down. It was a four of eight. So now I'm inverted and you have to push all the way around back to the 45. And when I pushed I pushed so hard.

AJ Wilder: 40:12

One of the ratchets was not 100, closed on the um, on the seat belt, and so I had nine times 220 pounds sucking me through and it, my head went through the canopy slice this open. That's when it was like running into a wall. Don't remember anything after that. But apparently I was. You know. I came up, I was upright and I the guy in the ground thought I lost a control surface because I kept doing this with the airplane.

AJ Wilder: 40:43

And and what was the remaining part? One of the shards was still in and I couldn't get it out and everything was getting bloody inside and you know, once air hits like oil or blood, it goes everywhere. Anyway, fast forward, I get my head out and he says, ok, go back and land. Went back landed. I don't

remember any of this. Came back landed, got out of the plane and I was like, and you know, when you start to taste that saltiness, you know something's really bad. And I looked in and it was like white. You know the white bubbles that are right on the. I knew I got all the way down to my scalp but I completely filleted.

Marcus Arredondo: 41:25

I have to ask. I mean, how do you go back? You know, I think of somebody who got bit by a shark going back out to go surf. It's like there's more than mental fortitude. It might be some maybe mentally unwell, if I'm being honest, but how do you come back to these Mentally unwell? It's?

AJ Wilder: 41:44

discipline. The harder part is you just lost a buddy, he just went in and you've got to fly and the big push on it is you need to. You know, the 48 hours is kind of the witching hour. You need to just get in and go fly, yeah, and if you're not going to you're probably done. And I always said if I get to the plane and I open the canopy, like I'm going to know when I'm, when I'm done, because I'm, I'm going to start to be afraid. And as soon as you're afraid, you're just all brain cells are going to be in that that flight mode versus fight and then you're done.

Marcus Arredondo: 42:28

How do you discern between not being afraid and hubris?

AJ Wilder: 42:33

Yeah, it's an interesting. I don't ever think about it when I fly. It would be like me getting in my car and going down the road Like I don't. You know it's aviation is the safest transportation anywhere ever and the stuff we're doing we're the best trained pilots in the world. So if you know that, that you're one of the best at doing what you do and you don't think about it Like I don't think, hey, I'm going to go up and the bigger thing is you're going to hit a bird or something you can't control. But you know how to get yourself mentally prepared. You know how much sleep you need, you know where your electrolytes need to be, you know you pattern it just like any other sport, and then you don't think about it. What you'd think about is executing the job. Yeah, and it's hard enough just to do that.

Marcus Arredondo: 43:22

So I want to take this in transition. So something you mentioned was, effectively, momentum is sort of getting back out there and I want to take you back to being in New York determining whether or not to go to a trade school or college. We'll fast forward into Walcott, but I want to start there. You're from Long Island, suffolk County. You're from Long Island, suffolk County, right, long Island baby. So I have, through my wife, I have a long, a much better understanding of Long Island, especially that area. It's a blue collar area. Yep, I also grew up in a blue collar city and I'm just curious, you know, looking back on it, what your take is relative to going to the trade school in hindsight, and was that the right decision to go to college? How do you push through and how you've continued to fight for lack of a better word to persist in? You've achieved quite a bit. You know it can be very easy to sit on your laurels. What keeps you as the sky junkie name you've earned? What keeps you pushing in that regard? You know?

AJ Wilder: 44:26

so I grew up in a blue collar family. My dad was a contractor, a plumber, and you know the whole thing was you don't need college. You know that was that era and my mom was hell bent on you're going to college because you know a lot of our family has not and you're going to be someone. And I was like I don't know, I kind of dig this construction thing. And then I started about 14, open my eyes and go. You know these architects are terrible. If they had figured this stuff out and drew it right, we wouldn't be framing it wrong. And you know, at that point now I'm going to date myself They'd show up in their penny loafers where you remember the loafers where you stick the penny and their and their khakis and their golf shirts and I'd be like, wow, like I want to be that.

AJ Wilder: 45:23

And then I got lucky through, one of the contractors I was working for introduced me to a New York company that was doing some architect company and went to school up finishing my five-year program in four. So I had a lot of time on my hands on my fifth year during my thesis to work. And you know I've always liked to have money in my pocket. My buddies never did and it was nice to be like, oh, let's go. You know, go out and get some beer and hang out and like, oh, I got money right and I got a car and I got some cool stuff.

AJ Wilder: 46:07

Fast forward, I go, I start working in the city. I did a lot of work in the Twin Towers. We were one of the architects that were permitted to work in them, worked in the city for a while and then I was asked to come out and do a project out here, came out, and at that time it was February and it was cold in New York and I was going down Hollywood Boulevard in like a Mustang, I think, with a convertible, and I'm is awesome, like I want to be here. Mind you, at the time it was like 1500 bucks for 500 square feet apartment in Midtown Out here for 1500 bucks. I could be in Miranda El Rey on the beach. So came out, rented some space from John at the time, and then it came a point where I was like I either have to go back and start a company in New York or I'm going to stay here and try to plant my roots.

Marcus Arredondo: 47:16

How old are you at this?

AJ Wilder: 47:17

point. Let's see it was 97, 98. So I don't know, I was probably late 20s and I of course had no money right. So I was like working late doing it. And he's like, well, you can, why don't we just work something out? Then you buy the company and then you go from there. Then you don't have to start. The company already has been around for a while and I'm go from there, then you don't have to start, the company already has been around for a while. And I'm like, okay, meanwhile I'm trying to like develop business and relationships because I didn't know a lot of people out here.

AJ Wilder: 47:53

So I was down in Venice Beach and I'm looking at the first of all, I'm looking at the windows in the of the houses and I'm like, man, they're so dirty. And I just sort of packed that in the back of the houses and I'm like, man, they're so dirty. And then I just sort of packed that in the back of my head and then I was like I got to figure out a way to make money, because I have to buy the first piece of stock if I'm going to buy

this company. So, mind you, this is the late 90s. I'm like, all right, I'm going to create a company called Green Clean Green meaning money, not environmentally friendly, all the other other stuff and this thing took off and it became so.

AJ Wilder: 48:29

I was daytime architect and daytime receptionist for a cleaning business that I started and grew that and then started to say, you know, started to think about the venice thing, like, hey, it doesn't take much but a bucket, a squeegee, a ladder and you can get a bunch of people that can clean windows and you can have it more on a repetitive basis as opposed to just one-offs. And then I was lucky enough to have a company come and say we'd like to buy your contacts, essentially from you, and I'm like that's cool. You know, the assets were limited and I was like, well, it just so happens that this is the number I need to make the stock. I didn't tell them that and so they essentially made the stock number work for me because I paid for the first piece in that.

Marcus Arredondo: 49:20

So you were going door to door handing these flyers out Like how did you get? How did you get this up and running?

AJ Wilder: 49:26

So I would get up at one o'clock in the morning and the key is is to hook someone in. It's kind of like now I laugh that they put this on the TV now where they say you get your first cleaning for nineteen dollars and ninety cents or whatever. And of course they hook you and the cleanings aren't 19 something or 20 bucks right, the cleanings are more like 40, but they hook you with that first time and you see how great they do and they go from there. I would put flyers on all the cars because I lived in the Marina, in the Marine Point apartment, put flyers on all the cars and so they'd wake up in the morning and see, oh, we can get a cleaning for 30 bucks or whatever. And it just started going and going and going.

Marcus Arredondo: 50:07

It was more than just window washing, it was actual cleaning, cleaning houses.

AJ Wilder: 50:13

Yeah, it started out with apartment cleaning and then that moved into the window thing because I was down at Venice and I'm like the windows are dirty, like why aren't the? Why doesn't someone have them on it? Like we'll do it twice a month for you for a number, and you know, then it became we want a six month commitment from you on it and then sell it. And then you know, I took those same. You'll see, in each piece I take something I learned here and I apply it to the next. So, like our 501C3, subscription-based donations is better than one-time donations, for sure. So the lessons learned in one part of your life, if you apply them correctly to the next, it works really well, or has worked well for me.

Marcus Arredondo: 50:55

I think that's a pretty common thing actually A lot of young people probably. They think that if they find their passion, they're going to find what they've always meant to be doing and they'll have success. But I

have found most people who found success are actually doers that end up revealing that path more so than it's been predefined.

AJ Wilder: 51:15

Yeah, I mean I always, you know, it's exactly what you just said, right, you have people that think about great ideas, which is good, said right, you have people that think about great ideas, which is good. But if you don't act on it and the issue with acting on it and I've always I came from nothing. So if I lose everything tomorrow, I just make it again. You know so that, and I've kept that attitude like all right, if this thing goes belly up now, obviously I have to be a little more conservative with a family belly up Now, obviously I have to be a little more conservative with a family. But you know, if you really fear, if you have no fear and again back to the flying thing if you have no fear, you will succeed. It may take you a couple times, but you're going to get through it.

Marcus Arredondo: 52:00

Well, you also mentioned something while you were flying about letting go, which is an interesting concept because I found in a lot of sports right, I mean, you just take a golf swing, for example the more clammed up you are, the less effective you're going to be at squaring up the ball. But it's a little bit counterintuitive to let go and give into that confidence. But that's something that happens, I think, through acquiring the skillset and doing it repeatedly and getting momentum, gaining some wins along the way. How did you? I mean, you couldn't have known that that cleaning service business would have been as successful as it was, but you took a stab and you realized, I mean, a common thing would be hey, that seems like a great idea, but how am I going to find those people? You went out and found those people.

AJ Wilder: 52:41

Yeah, I mean, I think, number one. If I sit idle for any length of time, I go bananas. Yeah, I mean, when we have meetings in the office, the guys bring me that that thing of sand with the rake. They bring me fidget toys because I'm like and as I get older it gets worse Like if in the first 10 minutes we haven't accomplished something or I'm done like out checkout. So I think part of it is I need to be doing something all the time. I think the other part is and this becomes this comes from the part of removing yourself from the environment, the situation like I talked about earlier. It's amazing how much you can see that needs to get done. Right Meaning in business, if you look at something and it's failing because someone's not addressing it, there's an opportunity there to grow that into something that you are in and you can pull yourself out and objectively look at everything around. You start to realize, okay, well, that's a problem, this is an issue, that's an issue. And so back to the flying thing.

AJ Wilder: 53:59

One of the things that we spend so much time on is a post, basically review of what we did. So you have a pre. Well, you know you'll have we call it briefings. You'll have a pre-briefing which establishes the goals and it reminds you of the things that you know that you maybe you haven't done well, that you need to do well, and then you have a post-briefing and if you take that into business, you know, I don't think I think two things come up in business that will allow you to consolidate this.

AJ Wilder: 54:30

Number one when we meet with a client, first thing I say is okay, we have 30 minutes or whatever the time limit is. Here are the three things I have to get out of this meeting. We're not leaving this room until I get those three things. And then everything else falls into place under that, because, especially when you're in a meeting in a professional situation, you know the conversation. People like to hear themselves talk, they go all over the place but they don't stay on point. And one of the things about flying is if you're not on point, you're dead.

Marcus Arredondo: 54:59

Yeah, so the distillation of what's important.

AJ Wilder: 55:03

Yeah, I mean you. You just have to know I mean, if I come away with anything, you know, if I were to summarize the last, call it 10 years is you have to be able to pull yourself out of the situation so there's no emotion. So then you get clarity Right. The second thing is you have to be efficient with the time that you have, with the time that you have.

AJ Wilder: 55:31

I saw on an Instagram, you know, and we've all probably seen it, with the tape measure and the guy who's 65, he's like he takes the tape and he holds it at like I think I'm going to be 75. He cuts it at 65 and he goes. That's all I have left and I'm going to live this like I'm on steroids and once you get that concept in your head, like every minute I spend doing something I don't like to do, I'm not good at, I'm never getting that time back and it's super important. And that's where the flying thing, to me, balances me out. That's where the coming up with different ideas on businesses, which has led me to where we are now, it's all been based on. I only have this much time and with flying, of course, I've shortened that right, because tomorrow could be my last day when I fly that you just come at things very differently. You just your headspace is very different.

Marcus Arredondo: 56:27

How has that influenced your figure? One foundation.

AJ Wilder: 56:30

You know it's so you'll appreciate this. We're a buddy of mine and I are out at a bar and we're throwing darts and it was raining out so we couldn't fly because or else we would have been flying. So we're having a couple of beers and he's like you know, we got to come up with something to give back to the aviation community. It's been great for us. So I'm like okay, well, what do you want to do? He's like I don't know, we got to do something with like kids to get them pilot's license and move them along Like kids that would never have this opportunity. So, okay, well, what's out there that does that? What we realized was not a lot. So I said why don't we call it figure one? And the symbol is the symbol. When you dive into the box in an aerobatic sequence, it's the first figure, hence figure one. So he's like, oh, that's cool, and we're sketching on a napkin. And then he's like well, we need money, right, we can't give away money we don't have. I'm like, okay, here's a list of 20 that we can get money from right away. We can start it. So we're

going through this whole thing. So he's like, okay, cool. And I said, look, I'll have my guys build a website, do all this Literally within a week.

AJ Wilder: 57:42

We had this whole thing together. Then we had a short form. You know there's a short form, long form. We did the short form just to get it going, cause now I had people say okay, I'll give you money, but we couldn't take it until we had the number. So we anyway. This is funny because we get about six months in and now we're starting to get. You know, people are interested and they're like well, we love what you're doing, but how do we donate? And he looked at me and both of us looked at each other. Our heads exploded. He goes dude, we don't have a donate page on our website. I'm like no donate page, we need that. So that's literally how it came about. That was I mean, it's really cool. And now I'm starting to see what have you?

Marcus Arredondo: 58:27

guys been able to do.

AJ Wilder: 58:36

You've really cool, and now I'm starting to. What have you guys been able to do? You've been around for uh, several years now, uh, nine, I think this will be year 10, so a lot of kids and where, where it comes out, we had a kid who, um, you know, actually trained with us. We can train anywhere in the us and we pay for it. We pay, um, you know, the scholarship pays for it. But he came and super young and with his dad, and he sent me a picture of him and his dad next to one of the planes. Covid comes, his dad passes away. He has a boy, so he's got his boy where he is and he where his dad is in a picture, but instead of it being a small aviation plane, it's a 737 for southwest wow, and he sent it. He's like he goes that this would have never been my path in life wasn't for you guys so that's where you just go that, you know it hits you well, I know we're coming up on time.

Marcus Arredondo: 59:23

I uh I could talk to you for hours, man. I really appreciate you coming in here and uh sharing your story this way I there's a lot more paths I'd love to dive into, maybe on another round, but is there any closing thoughts that you think I might not have addressed?

AJ Wilder: 59:38

No, I just think what you're doing is fantastic. I think this is so cool. It's a different perspective. There's no, you know a lot of these podcasts. You know, just in looking at the stuff you're doing, a lot of the podcasts are driven for a purpose. Yours is all information you know, in different walks of life, information, and I really not to blow smoke up your ass, but I think it's awesome. Thank you, thank you, brother, and I wish there was more of this out there because you know you can. You can get people that are viewing these podcasts and you can take snippets of all different things and take it and apply it to your business, your personal everything, and I just I dig it. Man, I'm super pumped for you.

Marcus Arredondo: 1:00:24

I appreciate it. Thank you for being on and I'm very grateful for your support. So we'll talk soon. All right, brother, See you, man. Thank you for being on and I'm very grateful for your support. So we'll talk soon. All right, brother, See you, man. Thank you, Thanks for listening. For a detailed list of episodes and show notes, visit [scales of success podcast.com](https://scalesofsuccesspodcast.com). If you found this conversation engaging, consider signing up for our newsletter, where we go even deeper on a weekly basis, sharing exclusive insights and actionable strategies that can help you in your own journey. We'd also appreciate if you subscribed, rated or shared today's episode. It helps us to attract more illuminating guests, adding to the list of enlightening conversations we've had with New York Times bestsellers, producers, founders, CEOs, congressmen and other independent thinkers who are challenging the status quo. You can also follow us for updates, extra content and more insights from our guests. We hope to have you back again next week for another episode of Scales of Success. Scales of Success is an Edge West Capital Production.