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Robert Swan  
Polar Explorer  
First Man to Walk Both Poles

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Webinar

Moderator: Dan Schulman  
President and Chief Executive Officer, PayPal  
Vice Chair, The Economic Club of New York

Welcome everyone. This is Barbara Van Allen, President of the Club, and we will get started in exactly one minute. Thank you.

## Introduction

Vice Chair Dan Schulman

Okay, hi everyone. We are right at the top of the hour, and I want to welcome everybody. I wish you a good afternoon. And we are now on the 599<sup>th</sup> meeting of The Economic Club of New York in our 114-year history. As hopefully most of you know, I'm Dan Schulman. I'm Vice Chair of the Club, and I'm President and CEO of PayPal. As many of you know, The Economic Club of New York is the nation's leading nonpartisan forum for discussions on economic, social and political issues, and our mission is as important today as it ever was as we continue to bring people together as a catalyst for conversation and innovation. I want to give a special welcome to the members of the ECNY 2021 Class of Fellows, which is a select group of very diverse, rising, next generation business thought leaders, and a welcome to the graduate students from the School of Business at Fordham University.

It is a pleasure for me to welcome our special guest today, Robert Swan. His appearance today is right in line with last week's celebration of Earth Day. Rob is an amazing person. He is the first person to have walked to both the North and South

Poles. Obviously, he's a great explorer, but he's also a leader in energy innovation. He is a founder of the 2041 Foundation, which is a non-profit dedicated to preserving Antarctica as a natural reserve, land for science and peace.

On January 11, 1986, Rob and a team of three on a journey called, "In the Footsteps of Scott", arrived at the South Pole. Their 900-mile journey was the longest unassisted march in history. And then, as if that weren't enough, three years later, in 1989, Rob led "Icewalk", with a team of eight to the North Pole. And during these two historic expeditions, Rob experienced firsthand the effects of climate change and environmental degradation. At the South Pole, his eyes actually changed color because of the damage due to the prolonged exposure of ultra-violet rays as he walked under the hole in the ozone layer. At the North Pole, his team nearly drowned because of the premature melting of the ocean ice. These two hard-hitting and unexpected incidents galvanized him to launch the mission, 2041.

Robert has received the Polar Medal and the title of Officer of the British Empire from Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, and his contribution to education, energy innovation and environmental action have been recognized by the United Nations through his appointment as UNEP Goodwill Ambassador for Youth, Special Envoy to the Director General of UNESCO, and as a recipient of the UN Humanitarian Innovation Award.

He is the co-author of four books and was a keynote speaker at all of the UN World Summits for Sustainable Development, the World Economic Forum and the Corporate Eco Forum.

The format today will be a presentation by Rob followed by audience Q&A, which I'll facilitate. I'd like to ask everybody, if you do have questions during Rob's presentation, to please use the chat box feature to submit your questions. We'll end promptly at 3:00 p.m. and as a reminder, this conversation is on the record as we do have media on the line. And so without further ado, Rob, I'm so pleased to turn it over to you and the mike is yours.

### Presentation by Robert Swan

John, thank you so much indeed, and it's a real honor for me to come and speak to everybody today. And I'd like to start just with a couple of sentences that I truly believe in. First, that the last great exploration left on earth is to survive on earth, and the heroines and heroes of that exploration are people that are kindly listening to our story now. And I've tried really hard to live by the following words: If you can do, or dream you can, begin it now, for boldness has genius, power and magic in it.

This is a story about hope. And it began for me the last time I was properly dressed at

the age of 11 – check out that haircut – when I saw a film about the real explorers: Scott, Shackleton, Amundsen, Peary, the greats. And I was truly inspired by what I saw and made a commitment that one day I would become the first person in history to walk to both poles. Everybody laughed at me and they still laugh at me. But in between, we achieved that.

And at the age of 22, I had to raise \$5 million U.S. dollars. In those days, you couldn't fly to Antarctica. You had to buy a ship, sail there, live for a year. It took me seven years to raise that \$5 million U.S. dollars, based in London on the River Thames. For five years everybody said no. I was driving a taxi on the streets of London. My family were talking in terms of counseling and psychiatric help. They still do, but they did a bit more then. But at last, after all those years, seven years, I raised the money. We buy our ship, Southern Quest, and we now head south.

Once south of New Zealand, the ocean becomes rough and I'm thinking maybe I should have chosen a warmer place to go. And seventy-five days out of London, we arrive on the shores of Antarctica, the last true great wilderness left on earth. And even by the standards and size of the USA, this is a big, big place. We land and then five of us are left alone. Imagine this, hard to imagine, but we're left alone for a year. We aren't connected for a year because it didn't exist. We have no satellite phones. They didn't exist. We have no communications for a year, and we just hope like hell the ship returns

a year later to collect us once we've reached the South Geographic Pole.

Five of us live in this small hut on the edge of Antarctica and then after a year, three of us lay out our equipment on the edge of Antarctica and it's extraordinary to look at this 30 years on. No radios, they didn't exist. No GPS, it didn't exist. We will navigate to one building 900 nautical miles away in the center of a continent twice the size of Australia, using the sun, the sextant, and a watch. No communications at all with the outside world. Off we go, on each sledge 350 pounds per person. Eighty days of food and fuel. And we know that we're going to get thin because we couldn't pull any more weight. I would lose 69 pounds in body weight in 70 days. This would be a hard journey that lay ahead.

We cross over 5,000 crevasses. And if you go down a crevasse, that's it. You're not coming home. We carried no rescue equipment, no ladders because you can't eat them. Every ounce of our equipment would be towards food and fuel to get us to the pole. Once past the crevasse zone, think of this, we are standing in an area the size of the United States of America, and we are the only people there. Think of that. A bit lonely. If you twist your ankle, break a leg at this stage, you're left to die.

And beneath our feet in this photograph is 90% of the world's ice, 16,000 feet of solid ice, 70% of all the world's fresh water, we're standing on it. Now, ladies and gentlemen,

mark my words, if we continue to melt this, the sea level around the world will rise by an estimated 500 to 600 feet. It's the most dangerous, lethal, powerful force and silent force on earth. We're now closing in on the South Geographic Pole. We don't know this is happening. We just hope it is, that our little ship, Southern Quest, has now returned from New Zealand. They land on the edge of Antarctica, unload a small airplane. The plane will fly to the pole to look for us. If they find us, we go back to the base camp and do something we promised to do.

To raise \$5 million when you're 23 years old and you've got no experience and no credibility, you needed some help. And I'm proud to say that Jacques Cousteau, the great Jacques Cousteau became my friend and became my patron. He gave me the credibility to do this. And, you know, at the end of that time, he said, Rob, I don't need anything back except one thing. When you leave Antarctica, take away all your garbage. Take away all your equipment. Leave just your footsteps in the snow of Antarctica. Show respect to the last great wilderness left on earth. And I said, okay, Jacques, we're on to do it.

So when we get back to the ship, we load everything up and we sail north to where the sun shines. Those last few miles to the South Pole, ladies and gentlemen, they live in my nightmares because if we'd gotten one calculation wrong using our sextant, we could have been 50, 80, 100 miles off course from the South Geographic South Pole

station, we'd arrived at the pole, two days left of food, no pole, dead.

But I was with the best. Roger and Gareth navigated us 300 yards off course in 900 miles. Incredible. There was the South Geographic Pole. We, as a small team, had done what people said could not be done, and we were proud of it. We had five minutes at the South Pole to go, Yes!, and then the Base Commander came out from the scientific station, looked at me, and he said, sorry, Rob, got bad news. Your ship sank five minutes ago. Frankly, it's the sort of thing you want to hear when you've walked 900 miles, spoken to no one on the outside world for a year, that your ship sank five minutes earlier. The most important thing, everybody is safe, but we've lost our ship. On this day, I go bankrupt because being me, I persuaded my bank manager to lend me more money and I said, don't worry, we'll sell the ship when we get home and you can't insure a ship this far south.

Now standing at the pole, I thought to myself, we made a commitment to Jacques Cousteau to take away our garbage and equipment from Antarctica, and I believe that if you do what you say you're going to do, people will listen to you. So, to cut a long story short, we had to spend another year in Antarctica. And eventually we got another ship in, we loaded up our equipment and delivered on our word to Jacques Cousteau. I had a personal debt at the age of 28 to do this of \$1.2 million and I'd never had a job. And it took me ten years to repay it, but you know something, it was worth it.

Something happened to me, as Dan said, that changed my life. As we walked to the pole, our eyes blistered out. The eye actually changed color. Our faces literally blistered away. The skin came in huge lumps off our faces. This had not happened to the explorers 100 years before us. So what was happening to us? Well, when we got home, NASA told us, yes, that we walked under the hole in the ozone layer the month it was discovered. And in those days you didn't have fancy Oakley dark glasses. Things were a bit lean in that department. No goggles. So our faces and eyes had been burned by this, and this started me thinking that maybe, maybe I should have a part to play in our survival as rather an ungrateful species – I might say – our survival here on planet Earth.

Please don't laugh. You're all eminent business people. But I thought to myself, great, we can pay off the debt and go to the North Pole. This was one of the worst business choices I ever made. It actually tripled the debt. But honestly, who cared. This time we head north. This time eight of us from seven different nations will now walk 700 miles, every step away from the safety of land.

The South Pole is ice on land. The North Pole is a frozen ocean. So you step onto the ocean and you start walking, every step away from land, above an ocean seven miles deep. It's desperately hard physical work to go to the North Pole, much, much rougher terrain. This would be our home for eight of us from seven different nations for 56 nights

in a row, camped on the Arctic Ocean.

We had to learn patience. And check out Daryl on the right, he would become the first American to walk to the North Pole, but you can see in this photograph how much he truly enjoyed Rupert's musical skills. Let's just say, not much. But as a team, we had to hold it together by listening to each other and also holding patience with each other. Here's me coming in from washing, naked, at minus 72 degrees Fahrenheit. A bit chilly. And any gentlemen watching will see clearly that there's absolutely nothing hanging down in the central area of the photograph. This is cold.

After 642 nautical miles, every step away from land, so near the pole, but the nightmare now begins. Over a four-day period, the ice starts to move, grind, groan, creak and then the entire ocean melts beneath our feet. This photograph was taken in April. The ice at the North Pole was supposed to look like this in August. Now this is way, way beyond, sorry, way before words like climate change, global warming, even like sustainability. So we weren't thinking, oh, great, this is climate change, what are we going to do? We were thinking, yeah, we're dead. No one knows where we are. We're way beyond any rescue. No airplanes can land. We're beyond helicopter range. And the entire ocean is breaking up. And we're right on the edge of death.

And the only way we can get through this is to cheat time. At the North Pole, in summer,

it's 24 hours of daylight. So I order something. I've never ordered anything before or since, but I order 40-hour days. We can do it because it's always daylight but it's going to rip the team apart. One hour's rest a day. That's it, for a week. And the team starts to rip to pieces. Daryl, our brave American, loses his heel, 105 clicks out from the North Pole. We're beyond ringing up Mummy for help. We're not some survivor program where you can check into a hotel. Daryl has to keep going on this foot. He does, incredibly brave, young man.

And 12 miles out from the pole we get some luck – I think you can make your own luck if you try hard enough – and the wind changes direction. The ice comes together and we have a platform to stand at 90 degrees north. And we were proud to fly a flag, which I still believe is important today on planet Earth. And we'd done this. Yes, I became the first person to walk to both poles, but I couldn't have done it – I'd still be in the warehouse talking about doing this back in London – we'd done it. Let me tell you, ladies and gentlemen, that now it is physically impossible to walk to the North Pole in summer. There is no more ice, and that has happened in 30 short years.

I go back home, thought I'd go and see my mum, but no, hauled in by the great Jacques Cousteau, he didn't say, well done, Robert, for your efforts in walking to the pole, well done, Robert, for removing all your garbage and rubbish from Antarctica. He looked at me, 30 years ago, and he said, what are you doing for the next 50 years? And I said,

could I just sit down and have a cup of tea while you tell me.

And 30 years ago, he gave me a simple but rather difficult mission. He said, Rob, in the year 2041, the treaty that governs Antarctica, the moratoriums that stop mining and exploitation in Antarctica, we could be stupid enough, as a world, to alter, change or throw away that agreement, that treaty. So, could you go out, Rob, over the next 50 years and make sure that we, as Dan kindly said, have the sense to leave one place alone on earth as a natural reserve, land for science and peace.

Sadly, shortly after, we lost Jacques Cousteau. I had no budget. But we broke this mission down. First, I like practical things because if you want to inspire young people, then you have to show them, not tell them. So our first mission was to go down to Antarctica, a team of 35 young people from 25 different nations. And there, the young people found, much to my annoyance, over 1,500 tons of garbage and rubbish left there by the former Soviet Union. And the young people said to me, Rob, could you move it? It would be very inspirational.

I made the commitment to do it, but this was one of the hardest things I've ever done. It took us eight years, a joint cooperation with the Russian government, which is complicated. It took eight years because you can only go there three months a year. But gradually, with businesswomen, businessmen, engineers, young people, we started to

pull this together. At this stage, the Russian government just did not have the money and resources to make this happen. Managed somehow to get a beautiful yacht sponsored from the country of the Netherlands to become, if you like, our communications vessel for this mission.

Took down a giant ship – and just stop for a minute – and know that I only have a team of four people who do all this. We have no government money. Every single thing, we carve it out as best we can. Took down this giant ship, loaded that ship. That took four months to do. And inspired by my mum who, by the way, sends you all lots of love together, to all of you together, my mum is 105 years old, turning 106 this October. And she inspired me, as a young man, to recycle, way before it was on a box in the corner of the office. And said, Bob, you can't possibly go to Antarctica, remove all that rubbish and not recycle it, boy. So I said, mum, we're on it. And I'm proud to say that we did recycle all of that back in the country of Uruguay, South America. And the beach was clear. Think about it. The penguins came onto their beach for the first time in 41 years.

But on this day I learned something, and I think it's important for all of us because all of you are leaders. I think it's important just to stop occasionally and check that one is being relevant. And I realized on this day that I couldn't possibly help preserve Antarctica if I was just a garbage collector. I had to think in terms of business. So why would people go to Antarctica? Why would they go there in 2041 to exploit it? They'd be

going there for energy and resources for fossil fuels. And I thought to myself, okay, if we're using more clean renewable energy in the real world, then actually KPMG will save Antarctica because they'll produce a balance sheet and say it's simply not worth going there to exploit it financially.

So we changed the game, tried to become relevant, to become renewable energy champions and testers. And to do that, we launched a voyage around the world where we were – any yachswomen or men listening – we would do 225,000 nautical miles around the world showing young people – we started under my favorite bridge, not far from where I'm speaking to you from now, the Golden Gate Bridge, on a voyage around the world showing young people, any people actually, how renewable energy could power our yacht – wind and solar. Even had solar panel sails on sails made from recycled plastic bottles. Show people, don't tell them. And testing in our engine on the yacht different types of biofuels, synthetic fuels, alternative fuels.

And every year, we go to Antarctica. And I take young people especially, businesswomen, businessmen and even more senior people like myself go. And on these expeditions, we take people from all over the world. We have over 80 different nations. A lot of young women have come from the Middle East, representing nations where often they're the first person to go to the Antarctic beating the men in their own countries, which is always good value.

India, and let's never forget that India – and let's send our hopes and prayers to them now, they're having a rough time – but India has 1.4 billion people. We should never forget that there are more young people under 25 in India than there are people in the whole of the United States of America. And if they get what we have, and they have every right to get what we have, but if they get it in the same way we still get it, we're going to swim faster than we think. So a lot of young people and business people come from India. The same goes with China. And India and China will be key people, key nations to make sure in 20 years that we have the sense to leave Antarctica alone.

And what we see in Antarctica is devastating. I go every year. I see the changes year on, year off. It's desperate. I can think of no better word. Huge amounts of ice pouring off this continent. And the sea level will rise, I'll explain why in a few minutes. And again to try and do something, I can't say that what we do, ladies and gentlemen, is massively important or has huge impact, but we try. And I think lots of small things together can make a difference. So especially for teachers who I love and respect, we built these little education stations all over the world running only on renewable energy. There's no one in there, but they're a resource for teachers. This one having a nice time in Antarctica. Check out those solar panels.

And, as I said, being relevant, you know if I took a yacht to India, it would be completely pointless. No one would even sort of look at it. It's not relevant. So sometimes being

relevant can hurt. So between 2011 and 2014, I spent 7,000 rather painful miles on a bicycle going around India. Why? Because if I'd had arrived to schools, colleges, universities, you know, in some limousine wearing a white suit saying to people, well, really we ought to clear this up a bit, it wouldn't have gone down well. But arriving as a fat Englishman completely red in the face, those young people will never forget that. So I think it's important to try in one's own small way to be relevant.

And on that journey in India, we went high into the Himalayas. And this is the source of the mighty Ganges River, the Ganga River, that only provides 400 million people with water and that glacier is retreating almost at crawling speed. Ever been thirsty? I'd rather not be. And again, making an effort we built little education stations high up in the Himalayas serving communities.

Teachers and young people can go to these little stations and communicate with the rest of the world with a positive message. Find out what's going on in California all the way from the Himalayas. And every year we go up into the Himalayas and give people electricity who have never had electricity, but from solar. And a couple of years ago, we did a monastery, and this guy could see what he was doing for the first time in 2,000 years. We try.

Three years ago, I was invited to go in to see NASA. I really respect them. They're not

emotional. They measure things. And they took me in and they said, Rob, these colored areas in Antarctica are melting much faster than we thought they would or what science thought they would. And just to give you an idea of scale, that colored area at the bottom of your screen, that is the size of France. So these are big areas of ice. And they said to me, well, Rob, why is no one listening to this?

And unfortunately, big mistake, I took my son in, Barney, age at the time, 23, to see what NASA was saying. And eventually we came out of the meeting and my son said to me, Dad, you do realize, do you not, that ice that's floating, if that melts, it doesn't raise the sea level. But ice that comes from land does raise sea level. And once the ice has gone out from being an ice shelf, anything that comes in comes in faster to the ocean. And my son said, well, Dad, it may not matter to us in Manhattan, London, San Francisco, Los Angeles, we can build a few extra walls. But what happens to the people who did nothing to deserve this who are already having to move homes in places like the Maldives?

So my son sat me down and he said, right, Dad, you stick to 2041 and let's preserve the last great wilderness left on earth. But he brought to my attention a simple thing that all of us I'm sure have thought about is that young people today have every right to be really angry about the state of the world that we have left them. They have every right to be angry. And at the moment they're pointing fingers. They're frustrated. They're

criticizing. It's incredibly negative. And my son said, this isn't going to get us anywhere. So he launched a campaign, which is for young people, but is simply saying, look, be angry, be frustrated, but let's get solutions going. We do not have time to be angry only.

So father and son joined forces. And I was thinking, this is sounding fantastic. Well done, my boy, type of thing. And then he said to me, but I'm really sick and tired of being Robert Swan's son, you know, the guy that walked to the pole, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And he said I want to make my own journey. Will you walk to the South Pole with me? And I said to him, no, absolutely no, I've done all this stuff. I've hung up my skis. That's it.

And he said, well, what happens if we do it a bit differently? And I said, what do you mean? Well, we can go from the other side of Antarctica, Dad. If you make this journey, the green line, Father, you will have crossed the whole of Antarctica on foot. Does that sound interesting to you? And I said, well, yeah, a bit. And he said, well, how about making the journey only on renewable energy. It's never been done. So I said, right, I'm in.

And working with NASA, incredibly we developed these systems where you melt ice and snow in these containers and in six hours you've got hot water. And I'm proud to say that these systems they'll use one day on Mars to survive because they won't send

astronauts to Mars, they'll send people like me because the first people that go to Mars won't come back. So we're proud to have worked with NASA to test out this technology, and off we went on this journey.

It was great to be making a journey with my son. Generations have to join together on these issues. We can't have young people working here and older people like myself, we have to join together. So this was a great moment. You know, the old warrior, the handsome, young son. This was good stuff.

But after 300 miles of this journey, 300 miles only, my left hip disintegrates and I can't sleep, huge pain. And if you don't sleep on a journey like this, you're going to slow down the team. So for the first time in my polar life, I've failed. I've failed in everything in life, but I'd never failed to get to the pole when I said I was going to get there. But I was holding back the team and I have to go back to base camp.

Barney, at 23, bravely carries on with his two companions. Fantastic effort. Another 300 miles to go only surviving on renewable energy. He loses most of his toe but he was willing to suck that one up. And I managed to hitch a ride to the South Pole and share his moment. Nothing to do with me. And I think it's so important that people like myself genuinely hand over the baton to young people to empower them, to give them the chance to tell stories to their own generation, and I was extremely proud of what Barney

had achieved.

However, I was thinking, okay, I can't look at a map for the rest of the life and think there were 300 miles to go. So I got a brand-new hip put in and this time last year went back to the exact spot where I turned back and Barney had carried on, to do what we call The Last 300. This time I literally needed the A-Team and I was very lucky and very proud to have persuaded the two top polar explorers, Kathinka from Norway, Johanna from Sweden, to lead me to the pole assisted by our brilliant cameraman Kyle from Norway. Off we go and again testing out incredible new technologies.

We had jet fuel made from the CO<sub>2</sub> that we put into our atmosphere. So the dirt we put up there sucked out, made into jet fuel. I even had my dark glasses made from CO<sub>2</sub>. So lots of great new technologies never forgetting the mission of preserving Antarctica. And this was fantastic, absolutely incredible. I actually enjoyed polar travel for the first time in my life because Johanna and Kathinka knew how to lead an expedition. There was none of that stiff upper lip British nonsense. This was great.

And 97 miles out of 1,640 miles of travel over Antarctica, 97 miles to go to have crossed the Antarctic land mass, I lose my focus. Because I think, we're there. Get out of the tent in the morning, fall over, and my brand-new hip blows out of its socket and I'm left lying in the snow crying, feeling extremely sorry for myself that after all that effort, all

those miles, all those years, that the hip just hadn't lasted and I've made a mistake. And I was flown into the pole and it felt so empty. This was really awful. And, you know, I'm 64 years old, and people like me shouldn't be doing this stuff really. And I felt such a failure and such a disappointment. It was just appalling. Twice I've been knocked back now.

And I came back home and of course Covid attacked everybody, and I'm an international public speaker and there was no international and there was no public speaking anymore. And I felt really sorry for myself, but I thought damn it, time to brace up, Rob, be what you say you want to be and what you are and get on with it. So, yes, more repairs to the hip, a few extra nuts and bolts put in there to hold it together. And at the end of this year, beginning of 2022, I'm going back to the South Geographic Pole to finish the job. And I thought how boring could it be for me, the old warrior, to go and sort of put a flag in at the South Pole, what would it mean? Not much. It means something to me, but it wouldn't mean much to anybody else.

So I thought how can I make this more special? How can I make this more relevant? So I've always had a huge respect for wounded veterans. I think they have a fantastic story to tell. I'm working with Cameron Kerr, who sadly lost his leg in Afghanistan in 2011, the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne. I said, Cameron, how about this? So he went off and trained himself up, and he will be with me on this last 97 miles with some wounded veterans, women and

men, from your great nation, the USA, to make that journey to the pole to show resilience. Because their story is such a relevant story right now and I also think there's a point which matters to me as well, and that is that they've suffered because of war and war should never darken the doors of Antarctica. It should never happen. So we're making that journey at the beginning of 2022. And this will mark only 20 years to go until that magic year, 2041.

Ladies and gentlemen, I really believe these words. And I think so many people at the moment, especially young people, feel frozen about the issue of sustainability. And I think the world, in the last year, has given us all a lot of hope. See how our world has recovered in the last year environmentally, ocean is clear, air cleaner, all these incredible things that have happened just in a year. So I think our world has shown terrific, terrific resilience. And I feel that many of you run very important and great companies, and I'd ask you to imagine being one of your employees and, of course you all have incredible new missions on sustainability, you're doing great things, but remember you're driving the ship.

So my suggestion is please remember two words: sustainable inspiration. Because you've got to remember the people in the engine room on your ship and sometimes people can start great things, great missions, great sustainability campaigns and then forget that a lot of people in the engine room, their enthusiasm and their passion for

these things can dip. So revisit those things and pull them up and get that inspiration to become sustainable. Employees are, as you all know, the key, absolute key to making sustainability happen.

As far as young people, as I've mentioned, young people are your future employees. There's a lot of young people who are your employees. So again, inspire them. And that's really good for recruitment to your fantastic companies. It's good to retain people if you're doing the right thing and it's beyond just words. So I think recruitment, retention, that idea of inspiring your employees, making sure that they have sustainable inspiration because things are a bit grim right now on inspiration and hope, and I hope that all of you have enjoyed our story because this isn't my story, it's our story.

And I wish you all the very, very best of luck as all that you're doing and I hope that you now feel that those words I said at the beginning might mean a bit more. If you can do, or dream you can, begin it now, for boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Good luck to you all and be safe. Thank you.

#### Discussion with Robert Swan

DAN SCHULMAN: Rob, that was an amazing set of stories that captivated me from the moment you started speaking, and I know did the same with our audience. I would ask if

any of you have questions, to please put them in the chat, and we have a couple already.

Rob, maybe I can start off because each story I couldn't believe what you were saying and the challenges you faced. But the first pole that you visited, nobody had done that in generations. There were, I guess, three of you that walked there. I think I remember you saying that you had something like 80 days of food and you got there in 78 days. Just how do you prepare for something like that, both physically and mentally? Just, in my mind, I thought to myself you must be freezing all the time, you know, barely enough food. How do you mentally and physically get ready for something? How do you prepare for something so immense like that?

ROBERT SWAN: Well, I think, as a very successful business person, Dan, and congratulations and thanks for your kind words, I think if you think you're going to reach the pole on the first day, you're going to die because your brain will just explode. So what you train yourself to do, I mean physically you've got to get, put on as much weight as you possibly can because the easiest way to carry weight is on you. So you've got to get as fat as you possibly can and as fit as you possibly can, and you know you're going to lose a huge amount of weight. And you've got to prepare to be very hungry.

And people often say to me, what's your lasting impression of walking to the poles, I can

tell you what it is, that you never forget starving. And you think to yourself that so many people starve every day and I just did it for 70 days. You know, you think about that. So prepare yourself to get very hungry, get fit and fat, that's how you prepare physically, and get strong.

But the whole thing, after 10 days, has got nothing to do with physical. It's all in your head. And, as I say, if you think you're going to get to the pole, it's game over. So you've got to break it down, like I'm sure business people do, and say, right, okay, fine, you know, end of the day I'll have an extra piece of chocolate or in an hour I'll stop for some soup or maybe I could do 100 steps and then count them and then do another 100 steps.

So breaking it down and realizing that I made a choice to do this and that, you know, however grim it got, you know it was my idea so I kind of had to sort of see it through. And only when you've done it do you realize what you went through and the biggest thing you went through is isolation. Because without – now it's fantastic to have a satellite phone and safety – but to have nothing, Dan, was just incredibly difficult to know that one mistake, it was game over. But huge respect for the real explorers in whose footsteps we were following.

DAN SCHULMAN: So I've got just one other question, then I'll start to read the other

questions that came in. So you mentally prepared for this and you got physically fit, but you're with a team of two others, which is a small team, if one of them starts to, you know, lose it in some way, lose confidence, to your point, starts to get disoriented, you had seven other people in your other journey, like how does that start to work? I'm sure at some point during the journey, one of you – if not several of you – started to despair at some point or start to become more difficult, how do you manage that in such a confined environment, which was another thing that was tremendously impactful to me, and keep that comradery and that goal in mind?

ROBERT SWAN: I think, you know, it was really down to a couple of things actually. One is that I'm number seven in a family, the last, youngest, and I realized pretty early on in life that why people annoyed me, Dan, is because they were right. So I didn't choose all my best friends. I chose people that were radically different than I am. So if you like, I raised the money to make the journey happen, however, Roger and Gareth, who went to the South Pole, you know, are top professional mountaineers. We have absolutely very little in common. In fact, we don't even like each other that much, but they're the sort of people who go and climb Everest without thinking about it.

So I would get everybody to the beginning and then they would truly lead. So I really was in a support role and not looking over shoulders, but really trusted them. And I think that created a sense of people like feeling, okay, Rob's behind us, he's not leading us.

We're doing this. We're in charge. I think that helped. And yes, of course, things unravel. People become angry. People become frustrated. It was very hard sometimes.

And even on the North Pole, it was a little dissipated with eight of us from seven nations, but what I've always done, as the leader, is to try and be honest. So if I feel like unraveling, I tell them. And actually on the North Pole, on day one, I thought I cannot be doing this again. I'd forgotten how terrible it was and thought I could have a quick cry behind an iceberg and I was weeping behind an iceberg and the whole team came around and saw their supposedly tough guy leader crying. The best thing I ever did because they became then able to show when they were having a bad time. And like in life, every single person has a bad day, and we were able to get over that sort of bottled-up man thing of not showing your feelings. And I learned a huge amount from Johanna and Kathinka about that on our journey that we made last year.

DAN SCHULMAN: There's a question from Harry \_\_\_\_. And he basically says that during that journey, you're together for so long, what kinds of things did you discuss? Was it everything in life? Was it specific to the mission, like what had to get done that day? Philosophical or what kinds of things came up?

ROBERT SWAN: Well, thank you, Harry. I think in the hut, when we were nine months in the hut, we did try our very best not to sort of go in. We tried to talk about things that,

you know, like what books we were reading and we didn't just talk about the mission that lay ahead although it was always in the back of our minds.

On the actual journey, we tried really, really hard to not just live, once we got inside the tent, because remember you live all day on your own, not walking side by side, so you're living in this circle of your own head, and when we got into the tent, we would try to talk to each other about things that possibly we'd thought about. And trust me, to stay alive, Harry, walking to the South Pole where there's no input, it's all white, you live in a dream world, otherwise you'd go insane. So you would almost be having a dream during the day, like you can have a dream at night, so we'd talk about that.

And sometimes people became very angry with each other because of silly things. And I think that's a good lesson – a lot of us are going through isolation right now – where you know, somebody would be slurping their hot chocolate drink and you'd want to kill them, like literally put an ice ax through their head. And rather than allowing it to become too awful, Harry, one would make a joke to diffuse the anger and that somehow would keep us together, to keep us working, to keep us chatting. And human contact being under such isolation was a hugely important thing, and I have no idea how people make those journeys on their own. I, for one, could never do that.

DAN SCHULMAN: So maybe we have time for one last question, Rob, and I'll do this

one from Chris Perkins, who says, hi, Rob, incredible speech – which I couldn't agree more with. You spoke about taking veterans to the South Pole during the undaunted mission. Do you envision a greater role for this demographic in the fight against climate change? And also what are some of the best practices that we, at our companies, can do to help preserve the Antarctic?

ROBERT SWAN: That's great, Chris. Thank you very much indeed for that question. I think very kindly you introduced me to this talk, so thanks very much on behalf of our little team at 2041. I think that veterans, you know, if I went to the middle of America, which I do, I'm not really very relevant to anybody there. I'm an Englishman. But a wounded veteran with a Purple Heart is well-respected by, it doesn't matter where you come from in America, people respect the military and I really respect that everybody does respect them. So I feel that veterans have a great chance, of course, to tell a story that's really relevant to, if you like, other veterans that have been wounded. But it's bigger than that.

In a world that is, at the moment, rather hopeless, I think that they have a great story about life. But they also have a great story about our planet because veterans for Antarctica, veterans for sustainability, veterans against climate change is a great, great message. And I think that the veterans who kindly will come with us, women and men, can go out into communities, go to companies, talk about ESG, you know, a hugely

important subject that a lot of people don't even understand what ESG means. I think they could be brilliant at getting those messages across about community, about the environment, all the great things that people need to know about.

And I think that what companies and businesses can do is that hopefully they can engage with us to have some of the veterans, even myself, come along and chat to your employees one day. That's possibly one of the best ways that a company could help preserve Antarctica so the employees know about it and then we've got more people behind it for the future. Chris, thanks for that question.

DAN SCHULMAN: Rob, thank you. I'm sure we could go on and on listening to you, all of the things that you've gone through. It truly was extraordinary. And I want to thank you for your really valuable time and your insights today. I know all of us really appreciate it.

I want to thank everybody for attending today. We have a lot of great speakers, maybe not quite as heroic as Rob, lined up. And we always encourage you to invite guests as well to our events. And so I just want to sign off by saying thank you for being here with us. Please stay healthy and safe, and we look forward to seeing you at one of our future events. Take care everybody. Bye bye.

ROBERT SWAN: Thanks, Dan.

DAN SCHULMAN: Thank you, Robert.