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Dwayne Betts:

I am going to have to explain this to my sons, and I want to have a ability to make them more educated than I was 10 minutes ago. So how would you explain your work to a 10-year-old?

Speaker 2:

We have a new mission to increase the life expectancy of black women by 10 years and 10 years. If we just made our communities more walkable, it seems like it would do it.

Speaker 3:

When I got out of prison, I knew that I couldn't vote. The idea that we'd take people's voting rights, I pushed people to try to reconsider that and to think about that. Why do we do that?

Speaker 4:

I definitely knew that I needed to do immigrants rights work for no other reason than just to be able to help my own family that had immigration issues.

Dwayne Betts:

I'm Reginald Dwayne Betts, and this is Almost There from Emerson Collective, an organization dedicated to removing barriers to opportunity so people can live to their full potential.

Speaker 5:

I'm seeing people right now vote on how millions of dollars are spent to invest in alternatives to policing that keep people safe on school campuses.

Speaker 6:

I ran across this technology, which involves feeding seaweed in a very small amount to cattle. It's like Beano for cows or Gas-X for cows.

Dwayne Betts:

Almost There's a series of conversations I'm having with people who are doing the work, architects, nurses, activists, lawyers, scientists, journalists, artists, and the captain of a canoe that sailed around the world.

Speaker 7:

This is up to me to figure this out. And for the next 3,000 miles, you just go mile by mile, day by day.

Dwayne Betts:

I want to know from each of them what is meaningful. I want to know the change that they're making. I want to know where they're coming from and where they're trying to go. Each of these people, they do the work as a part of a collective. They're all fellows at Emerson Collective, and I want you to know their stories.

Speaker 5:

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I want to say we're almost there and this podcast feels like a push, a call, a call to action for us to almost get there.

Dwayne Betts:

But what does it mean to be almost there? Since the people at Emerson Collective brought these folks together, I asked them.

Speaker 8:

I have to say my very first reaction to when you say that is a lot of discomfort.

Laurene Powell Jobs:

It's a beautiful question because it's all about the journey and not necessarily about the destination.

Speaker 10:

Failure is part of the creative process.

Speaker 11:

And we have amazing days and we have heartbreaking days.

Speaker 12:

We should be as astonished by the messy as we are with the marvelous because there's so much to learn along the way.

Dwayne Betts:

For me, Almost There has never been about a destination. It's a kind of acknowledgement of a journey. When I was 16 years old in solitary confinement facing a life sentence, I was almost there. I didn't know it, but I was and recognize it in retrospect. I listened to these folks characterizing what it means to be almost there for them, and sometimes it is a deeply emotional, optimistic, rallying call. And sometimes it's an acknowledgement of how hard it is. Listen to folks. The thing that you recognize about being almost there is they're always talking about community. It's never just them being almost there. It is the work that they do together. This spirit of togetherness is what drafts Emerson Collective. Here's Laurene Powell Jobs, is president and founder who named this organization after the great American poet of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Laurene Powell Jobs:

What's most compelling to me about his writing is the notion of transcendence and how humans can transcend circumstances of their birth to get to a place of the extreme realization of being human, of what is this existence of a spirit in a body for a short amount of time.

Dwayne Betts:

But the second word is just as important as the first, collective.

Laurene Powell Jobs:

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There are a couple of reasons why I am drawn to that word and that notion. There are times when you work on something for years and sometimes decades and it's dispiriting, and that's when a collective comes in and those people are right alongside you, shoulder to shoulder, bringing different energy to it. And it completely changes your sense of what's possible.

Dwayne Betts:

Sometimes I feel that I struggle with being the center of a thing that I allow to be possible when I know that I'm only able to make it possible because of a thousand hands and names that people never hear.

Laurene Powell Jobs:

Yes, that's the truth for anyone.

Dwayne Betts:

And if you talk to my wife, she'll tell you that I talk way too much and that I talk about myself a whole lot, but-

Laurene Powell Jobs:

She's probably right.

Dwayne Betts:

She is. But during this podcast, it's been powerfully freeing to know that I'm supposed to be the conduit for the stories of others. And maybe this is the beauty of a collective is that when you bring all of these stories together and all of these narratives together, they do become a thread that reminds you of what it means to be human in the world.

And who am I in all of this? Well, it depends on who is doing the asking. I'm a father of two sons. If you live in my community, I might have been coaching your kid in basketball since he was five or six years old. I got three undefeated seasons. I graduated from Yale Law School. I spent eight and a half years in prison for carjacking a man when I was 16. I might've written a letter for somebody who you love, helping them to get out of prison on parole. If you're Terese, I'm your husband, and I'll be home for dinner. Seriously. But I am a storyteller, a poet, a lawyer. I'm Reginald Dwayne Betts, and this is Almost There from Emerson Collective, a podcast about the original thinkers and unexpected ideas that could remake our world. Subscribe to Almost There Apple podcast. The first episodes drop on June 20th.