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Robert Glazer: Welcome to Elevate, a podcast about achievement, personal growth, and pushing limits in leadership and life. I'm Robert Glazer, and I chat with world class performers who have committed to elevating their own life, pushing the limits of their capacity, and helping others to do the same.

Welcome to the Elevate podcast. Our quote today is from William Arthur Ward, and it is, "Adversity causes some men to break, others to break records." I can't think of a more fitting quote for our guest today, Sean Swarner. Sean has overcome more adversity and accomplished more than most people on earth. He's a two-time terminal cancer survivor, whose climbed the highest mountain of all seven continents. He's been to the north and south pole, and is the author of 'Keep Climbing.' He's also the subject of the recent documentary True North: The Sean Swarner Story. Sean, welcome. It's so great to have you on the Elevate podcast.

Sean Swarner: I appreciate it, man. I'm excited. I think you're absolutely right, it breaks some people, and maybe it'll bend them to snap back on others.

Robert Glazer: Your story is so incredible that I don't know where to start. I guess you should start a little bit at the beginning to catch everyone up who've not heard about it at all. Can you tell me a bit about the first time you were diagnosed with cancer?

Sean Swarner: Yeah, yeah, that goes back to when I was in the eighth grade. I was 13, and interestingly enough, I was playing basketball in eighth grade in the gym. I came down, and my knee ended up snapping. I heard this audible tear, almost like when you're eating Thanksgiving dinner and you can hear the gristle pulling away from the bone. That's kind of what it sounded like without getting too descriptive. But I hobbled over to the little theater area, and kind of sat down, and hobbled throughout the rest of the day. But when I went home, my knee ... You know, I was a skinny kid, too. My knee was the size of a grapefruit, if not bigger.

Mom instantly thought something was wrong, so they wanted to take me to the doctor. The doctor stuck me in an x-ray machine. He's like, "You know, there's nothing wrong in there. It's just maybe a strain or something." Eventually, a day, maybe a day later, my entire body swelled up. Every joint, you know, it started with my knee, but every joint ended up swelling up so much that my mom and dad couldn't even recognize their first born son. They stuck me in the local hospital, Willard, Ohio. The population's like 5000 people, and they started treated me for pneumonia, which you're not going to be curing cancer by sucking on a nebulizer. I wasn't getting any better. Took me to Columbus, Ohio, and started doing a bunch of tests. As a 13-year-old, they ended up telling my

parents, "Hey, your son has advanced, stage four Hodgkin's lymphoma, and the prognosis is only about three months." So they told my parents, "Hey, your firstborn son's going to be dead in three months."

Robert Glazer: And so what happened next?

Sean Swarner: What happened next was went through a number of treatments, and they started doing a bone marrow test. Which is when they take surgical blades, basically, these surgical needs just above my butt. They went into the bone there to pull out some of the marrow, and they decided I didn't have it in my marrow, which thankfully I didn't have it there. Went through a number of chemo treatments, my whole diet was out of wack. They put me on an all you could eat diet. I think at the time I loved it, because I was eating nine or 10 pancakes, a dozen eggs for breakfast. You know, protein shake here, there. Bacon, bread, you name it. But the bad thing was, I gained about 60 or 70 pounds. Again, in about a year after I started the treatment, thanks to the miracle of modern medicine, family support, prayer, and just the inner will to not give up, I walked out of the hospital a hairless, happy, bloated young man.

Robert Glazer: I have a couple of questions on that. When they told ... I assume they told your parents that you had three months to live. Did you know that? What did your parents tell you? Was the treatment designed to try to cure the cancer, or given that diagnosis, was it just supposed to provide comfort?

Sean Swarner: Great question. It was designed to actually cure the cancer. They didn't tell me. In fact, my step grandmother, not blood related, passed away recently before I got diagnosed. The doctors and my parents didn't want me to associate the C word at the time, cancer, with a death sentence. So, they just told me that I was sick. You know, any teenager is going to be nosy and curious, so I went to the hospital library and did some research and found that Hodgkin's lymphoma meant cancer. They didn't tell me that I only had three months to live. Looking at it from that perspective, I think if you tell someone, "Hey, you only have three months to live," they're learning that from a professional at the time. I think that that would've planted the seed, "Hey, I'm on my deathbed." You know? My god, what am I going to do?

But they told my parents that, and my parents kept that from me until later. But again, like I said, after about a year of treatment and a year of changing my diet. Because after being on that all you could eat diet, doctors were like, "Okay. You're in remission now. Start eating broccoli and eat egg whites, and start eating healthy again." I went on a crash diet again, and went back to being, if there is anything, a "normal" teenager. I tried to be as normal as possible after going back in remission, because that's all I wanted to do. You know? My friends were worried about trivial things in my mind. Worried about being popular, you know? The latest shoe styles. Whatever it might be, I was literally fighting for my life, because there were nights I went to bed not knowing if I was going to wake up the next morning.

Robert Glazer: How did you get yourself through that as a 13 year old? Do you remember kind of what your thoughts were, what your coping mechanism ... You're a very optimistic guy now, but were you always that way?

Sean Swarner: You know, I think ... Human beings are a representation of repetition, and whatever you constantly do every day kind of defines who you are. If you're constantly looking for the negative in things, that's exactly what you're going to find. With the treatments, one thing I decided was I wasn't going to be focused on not dying. I was focused on living, you know? I slowly changed how I looked at life, and I didn't want to avoid the negative parts. I wanted to be attracted to the positive aspects of it. Another aspect that I really had was a sense of humor, and I didn't take life ... I still don't. I don't take life too seriously, because you never know when your time is up, so enjoy every moment you have.

One particular tool that I used, and I still do, I'm a huge believer in the mind/body connection. I did it when ... Because I was an athlete, even before I was diagnosed with the first cancer. I always visualized myself completing the race. You know? I was a huge swimmer. I would visualize myself, stroke for stroke, in touching the wall, looking up at the clock and seeing the time that I wanted, and going backwards and seeing me coming out winning. I did the same thing with this, but I kind of visualized myself inside my body in a microscopic spaceship, flying around, destroying the cancer with these missiles and bombs and stuff that were laden with chemotherapy.

Robert Glazer: That is an awesome story. I'm sure you've heard, it reminds me of Michael Phelps. You know, also visualized all his races and his timing and his strokes. And when he won that gold medal, when his goggles came off in the Olympics, it was because he had visualized the thing and then sort of knew it all. It's an amazing story. I've heard people say similar things. So unfortunately though, you're clean. You're late in remission, but that wasn't the end of your cancer story. What happened a few years later?

Sean Swarner: Yeah. I guess being a normal kid only lasted for about a year. I was in remission for only a year when I was going in for a checkup for the first one. I guess I'm an overachiever. They found a second cancer. They actually diagnosed it completely separately from the Hodgkin's, so it was a second primary tumor, completely unrelated to the first one. It was called Askins sarcoma, which has a prognosis of roughly 6%. If you have 100 people with this illness, because of the prognosis they gave me, 94 people pass away. It's so rare that only three out of every million people get this disease. And lucky me, I'm the only person in the world who has ever had both of these, so the doctors didn't even know what to do. This time, I was 16 years old, and the doctors told my parents that I had a prognosis of only 14 days. So, I now had an expiration date.

Robert Glazer: Did you know this time now? You're a year later, so how did your parents communicate that the second time?

Sean Swarner: I remember laying in the hospital bed, because in one day they found a tumor in an X-ray. They did a needle biopsy. They took out a lymph node, they put in a Hickman catheter, which is like a permanent IV. They cracked open my ribs, they took out the tumor. They put in a drainage tube and started chemotherapy in less than 24 hours, so it was that devastating. But, I remember after they did the needle biopsy, I was in the recovery room and I was going over to ... Well, the doctor came into the room, pulled mom and dad out in the hallway. And again, being nosy, I kind of grabbed my little buddy, I called my IV pole at the time. Grabbed my little buddy, and waddled over to the doorway, and I just listened to the doctor converse with my mom and my dad.

My mom cut right to the chase and she asked him directly, "Is it cancer again?" And the doctor said, "I'm sorry, Terry. It is." I didn't need to hear anymore, you know? I went back to the hospital bed and put my face in the pillow and just bawled my eyeballs out. I heard that it was cancer the second time. I didn't want to know the prognosis. I didn't want to know what type of cancer it was until later. They told my parents, "Hey, your 16 year old only has 14 days to live."

Robert Glazer: Yeah, so you started treatment again. What was the goal of the treatment in telling you that you had 14 days to live?

Sean Swarner: The goal of treatment was to get to that 15th day, you know? And then the 16th day, and then the 17th day. I went through roughly three months of intense chemo, and every time I was in the hospital, the doctors put me in a medically induced coma. So, my cycle was ... Say I go in the hospital Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. That would be half of the cycle, and then I'd be released from the hospital to increase my blood cell count so my body would get stronger, and strong enough to handle another onslaught of that chemical cocktail. Then I go back in Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday. That would be one cycle. And then every time I was in the hospital for those treatments, the doctors put me in a medically-induced coma. So I was there for three months, I was lucid for one month where they were doing the radiation therapy, no chemotherapy. And then, I go back in for 10 more months. So aside from that one month of radiation therapy, I don't even remember being 16.

Robert Glazer: Yeah. As part of that radiation, you ended up losing use of one your lungs. Correct?

Sean Swarner: Exactly. Yeah. It's kind of funny. Whenever you're breathing or whenever anybody breathes, I have to breathe twice to make up for it. I only have one fully functioning lung, that the radiation destroyed so much of my right lung. There's so much scar tissue, there's really no oxygen transfer.

Robert Glazer: But, we're talking here today. You clearly made it beyond 15 days. How did that play out, and when were you cleared from the second time around?

Sean Swarner: Essentially a little over a year, we'll say 14 months. I was placed back in remission, and then the doctor said, "Okay. You can go ahead and live your life again." At that point, it's kind of weird. Looking back at it, I was 13 years old the first time, 16 years old the second time. First cancer, second cancer, remission from the first one, remission from the second one. Going to bed, like I said earlier, not knowing if I was going to wake up the next morning. The hardest part for me, I think, was everybody was excited for me. Went, "Hey, Sean's in remission. That's fantastic! He has the rest of his life." My doctors were happy, my mom and dad were happy, my family was happy, my friends were happy. Everyone was excited! But me, I'm like, "Well, what the hell am I supposed to do now?"

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Sean Swarner: I didn't know, because I didn't think of a potential future. My mind was wrapped around this concept of, "Hey, today is the only thing I have."

Robert Glazer: How did battling cancer as a teenager affect your relationship with both family and friends?

Sean Swarner: You know, just like anyone who's going through anything traumatic, it could be a financial hardship. It could be an illness, it could be cancer. Whatever. You really learn who your true friends very quickly, and then you also find out that some friends disappear. And then some come out of the woodwork, you didn't even know were there. I think it brought my family closer together. In the long run, I know it brought my brother and I closer together, but sometimes we'll go out as adults now. He has two kids. We'll go out and have a couple drinks, and kind of hug each other. I'll just kind of choke back the tears and say, "I'm sorry, man. I'm sorry for taking you through what I took you through." He'll be like, "It's not your fault. You know? I'm sorry, too." It definitely left an emotional scar that I'm going to have for the rest of my life, but I look back at it and I think that it was a good thing, too. It was the worst thing that's ever happened to me, but also one of the best things that's ever happened to me.

Robert Glazer: Sean, it would've been really easy to be a victim in this case, and no one would've blamed you. But you decided to take on a different path, which was getting into endurance sports. I think as your first challenge for this, you chose to climb Mount Everest at the start of your adventuring career. Take us back to that a little bit, and I particularly would love to hear the reaction of others when you told them this is what you were going to do.

Sean Swarner: Of course. I'll start that off with a quote from my dad that I'll never forget. When I told him I wanted to climb Everest after going through two cancers, he literally looked at me and said, "We didn't get you through two cancers to go kill yourself on a hunk of rock and ice."

Robert Glazer: So, how old were you?

Sean Swarner: I think I was 26 or 27, because I summited it when I was 27 or 28. He's absolutely right, but I went through college and I turned into Belushi from Animal House in school. I was reliving my high school years that were taken from me, and I was studying to be a psychologist for cancer patients. When I realized that my whole life, I'd been ignoring the whole cancer aspect because it helped define who I was. It definitely didn't ... It doesn't say Sean Swarner is cancer. Cancer is Sean Swarner. No, but it helped define who I am. And I look back at it, and I realize that I had a choice on how I wanted to see what was happening to me, and how I wanted to take that. You're absolutely right, that I wanted to use what I'd been through to help others. I realize that going through those two cancers really taught me a lot about life, what's truly valuable.

If you want to feel wealthy, take away everything money can buy and look at what you have left. You know? Your friends, your wealth, whatever that might be. I also realized that I understand what true pain really is, and what fighting really is like. I did some research, and I wanted to use the highest platform in the world to literally scream hope, and give something back to people to help them believe in themselves. I think the human body can ... It needs to have hope to survive. So I figured if a guy who was once given three months to live, 14 days to live, who was in a coma for a year of his life, was read his last rights and only has one functioning lung, my God. If he can climb the highest mountain in the world, you can do anything.

Robert Glazer: So, how long was your training for that? What did you ... I assume your doctors weren't thrilled about you going with one lung. How did that whole process look?

Sean Swarner: When I was in school, my brother came with me. We moved from Florida to Colorado, main reason being I don't know too many mountaineers who've climbed Everest who live in the state of Florida. The highest point there is, believe it or not, is the top of the Four Seasons Hotel in Miami. I moved out to Colorado, the Estes part. I literally started doing something every single day, because I understood that to train for something like that, just like training for swimming, running, whatever it might be. You can't cram for it, and you can't just all of a sudden say, "Hey, I'm leaving tomorrow, so I'm going to go out and climb a couple mountains today." I understood that consistency was more important than intensity, so I did something every single day training my body, and the biggest thing was I eventually worked up to this. I took a backpack with about 100 pounds of rocks, and went up and down Longs Peak, which is 18 miles round trip, 14,256 ft. I did that roughly once a week to train.

Robert Glazer: Wow.

Sean Swarner: Normally, people train for years to make this happen, but I only had ... I gave myself nine months.

Robert Glazer: Wow, so you did that everyday? What was the mileage again?

Sean Swarner: I did that once a week.

Robert Glazer: Oh, once a week. Oh, okay. All right.

Sean Swarner: Yeah. Once a week.

Robert Glazer: All right. I was like ... I'm trying to do the math. I'm like, "Wow, you would've been ready quickly."

Sean Swarner: Yeah, right? No. I did something everyday. It could be running, it could be hiking, it could be climbing, it could be whatever.

Robert Glazer: So you made it on your first attempt, right?

Sean Swarner: I did. You know, the heavens opened up and it was beautiful. The clouds parted. There was a slight breeze up top, and that's just unheard of because Everest is an altitude where jumbo jets level off and fly.

Robert Glazer: Yeah. What is the altitude? What is the top?

Sean Swarner: 29,035 ft.

Robert Glazer: Wow. Yes, no joke. What was the greatest anticipated or unanticipated challenge you faced climbing Everest?

Sean Swarner: You know, the greatest unanticipated challenge, which turned out to be the greatest challenge period, was I was at camp three. There are only four camps, so from the fourth camp, you head up to the summit. At the camp three, we were supposed to wake up the next morning and go from there to camp four. Rest that evening, and then climb through the night and summit the next day. But, we were at camp three, right about 23,000 ft. on the side of what's called the Lhotse Ice Face, which is a sheet of bulletproof ice that is at a 45 degree angle that goes on for a mile. So literally, one wrong step, half an inch in one direction or the other, you're going to tumble a mile down and die.

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Sean Swarner: We were up here, and I actually started suffering with what's called HASE, high altitude cerebral edema, which is altitude induced swelling of the brain. I remember going to bed one night, and I ate freeze dried beef stew, basically. So chunks of beef, the cubed carrots, the green peas, and the spiral noodles. I chowed down because I was hungry, and went to bed. About 10 hours later, woke up, and I vomited. I could still see the spiral noodles, the green peas, the cubed carrots. Everything was still in tact, which meant that my stomach was not working at all. It wasn't functioning, it was shutting down. It was shutting down because my brain was swelling because of the altitude. I stayed there on oxygen for that night, missing the time that we were supposed to go up to camp

four. Slept on oxygen the night after that, woke up the day after, and I was 100% better.

It was actually unbelievable, because if I would not have had that, I wouldn't have made the summit. Everybody else was on the same time schedule as us going up from camp three to camp four. They left when I physically couldn't, and they made it to camp four. They pushed up to the summit. Weather came in, bad weather came in, forced them off the mountain. So if I wouldn't have had this altitude induced swelling of the brain, I would not have made the summit. So it was a blessing in disguise, actually.

Robert Glazer: You find the positive in everything.

Sean Swarner: Yeah, you have to!

Robert Glazer: Yeah. It's easier said than done, but you've earned the right to say it and do it. You climbed Everest. How did you top that? What did you do next?

Sean Swarner: Well, I guess I kind of started at the top. I figured the rest would be downhill. So after I came home from climbing Everest, I wanted to reach around the world and do something called The Seven Summits, which is the highest mountain on every continent. Figured, you know, I may as well start with the big one and then continue climbing and reach the highest peak on all seven continents on the earth. I did that. And then for I guess good measure, completed the Hawaii Ironman Triathlon, which is the World Championship Ironman distance in Hawaii. It's a two and a half mile ocean swim, 112 mile bike ride, and you finish with a marathon. Compared to everything else, I had a blast. I thought it wasn't easy, but I had fun doing it.

But as for good measure, there's something called the Explorer's Grand Slam, which personally I think it sounds like a Denny's breakfast platter. I didn't name it. It's the Seven Summits, so like I said, the highest mountain on every continent. But also, skiing to the south and north poles. I just completed that a year and a half ago.

Robert Glazer: Yeah. On your trip to the north pole, you brought a flag. You put together a flag of other people who'd been affected by cancer. It was a big endeavor. Can you talk a little bit about why you decided to do that, and the impact that it made?

Sean Swarner: Oh, for sure. That is my 'why.' That is why I'm doing everything I'm doing. So starting with Everest, I actually took a flag up and I had it folded up in my chest pocket. Everyday I climbed up the mountain, every time I moved around camp, it was always with me. It was a constant reminder of why I was on the mountain, why I'm doing what I'm doing. It was a flag ... The first one I guess going up there was probably about two feet by a foot and a half, and it had names of people touched by cancer. Whether in memory of someone, whether someone was going through treatment, or someone who was in remission. I left

that on the top of the mountain. I did the same thing on the highest mountain on every continent. It's like an homage for everyone who's been touched by cancer, and it's physical proof that, "Hey, we're all in this together. One big family fighting this disease."

I did the same thing with the south pole, everything, and it was accumulated at the north pole where it was embroidered ... Actually, it was printed with the word 'hope.' There were literally thousands and thousands of people touched by cancer on this flag. It was six and a half feet by four feet, maybe?

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Sean Swarner: At the bottom on every flag, it always said 'dedicated to all those effected by cancer in this small world. Keep climbing.'

Robert Glazer: Yeah. And to all the listeners, we'll put links to the True North, the documentary story. But, you can see this and see Sean's work leading up to it, and it's pretty incredible. So, Sean. How have you trained to overcome the physical damage that cancer has caused to your body?

Sean Swarner: You know, I think a lot of it is mental. You know? I'm sure you're sensing that underlying tone, where I'm picking out the positive aspects and I choose the perspective that I want.

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Sean Swarner: When I'm approached with an opportunity, first of all, I don't see anything as a challenge or an obstacle. I see it as an opportunity, an opportunity to grow or learn something new. Whenever I'm approached with an opportunity like that, I always look for the positive aspects of it. I always try to see how I can use it to help others, and how I can push myself a little bit more. But whenever something new comes up, I firmly believe whether you think you can or you can't, you're absolutely right.

Robert Glazer: Right.

Sean Swarner: So many people are not in tune with their core values, and they don't pay attention to that internal dialogue that we all have throughout the day. You have thousands of opportunities everyday to catch yourself being negative to I guess yourself.

Robert Glazer: Yeah. I've noticed in my experience that many people with low resilience tend to overstate the effect of their environment, rather than focusing on what they control. I'm curious. What's your experience and perspective on that with people you have met, or people even probably who look at you and say, "Well, you could do that, but I couldn't do that. My situation is so much worse," which I couldn't even imagine them saying. But, I'm sure you've seen this. Right? The

folks who, again, what they control or kind of what the universe is doing to them.

Sean Swarner: Everybody's entitled to their own opinions, and I don't think there's any judgment. But, I think that everyone can do a little better. I think it's because one of the things I learned at such a young age, and I think my parents instilled this in me when I was going through the swimming. I never had to be the best, but I had to be my best. So if I was swimming a 50 breast stroke and my time was 30 seconds, my goal was to go under 30, and then to beat that. That way, I was never comparing myself to anybody else. I was comparing myself to myself, because as soon as you start living other people's dreams and goals, you lose focus of yours. That's when people start to get negative. They think, "Oh, I can't do that. I need to do this. I need to do that." No, you don't need to do anything. You should want to do what you want to do. You know? I've seen so many people who, in their lives, like you said, "I could never do that."

That's that internal dialogue, and that's a core thought process that they have when something happens to them. It boils down to those core values that I mentioned earlier. If people can tap into their internal dialogue and listen to how they're talking to themselves, they can change their entire perspective on their own world. You know? We all look at the world through different set of lenses. No one's going to have the perspective that I have. No one is going to have the perspective that you have. No one is going to have the perspective that each individual in the world has, even twins see the world differently!

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Sean Swarner: But, it's based on how you choose to see things. You know, going through my life, why would I want to be negative? Why would I want to look at the bad things in life? You can choose to live a good life or a bad life, a positive life or a negative life. Like I said earlier, I don't want to be motivated by the avoidance of something. I want to be motivated by something positive.

Robert Glazer: Well said. One thing that's interesting is [inaudible], who I had on last year who wrote the book Endure. I'm not sure if you've read it, but it's right up your alley, sort of the science of endurance. When we're talking about a resilience, and I'm curious from your perspective. How much of resilience do you think is mental versus physical? Which is the chicken and which is the egg?

Sean Swarner: I think it's mental on the aspect of you can convince your body to do more. A perfect example is running a marathon, you know, or running a 5K. If that's the first thing you've ever done, three miles. If you want to run around your block, if you're running there and you're saying, "Don't stop, don't stop, don't stop," you're going to stop because you're telling yourself not to do something! But if you're running around the block for the first time and you're telling yourself, "Keep going, keep going, keep going," you're encouraged by that! So, I think that mental prowess and that endurance comes from your own brain. I think

people can work on that, because they can also encourage themselves. They can be their biggest supporter.

And with anything like that, you can focus on the end result, picture it in your mind as clearly as you possibly can, and you know the work that you have to go through in those difficult times that you're trying to push yourself through are 100% worth it. You know? Whatever people are focused on is what they're going to get.

Robert Glazer: Absolutely. You mentioned before your core values. I'm curious, can you share those? Do you mind sharing those with everyone?

Sean Swarner: You know, I don't know off the top of my head exactly a list of core values, but obviously love, respect, giving, success, things like that are definitely high up on my value list. Yeah. I guess that's it. I don't have a specific list of them, but I think what I do that's a little bit different than most people is I wake up every morning and I tell myself, "No matter what happens today, today's the best day ever."

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Sean Swarner: That's one of my affirmations, because I want to take advantage of every single day I've been given. When the alarm goes off, boing! I'm up out of bed, you know, and I'm making some matcha tea or some coffee with no sugar. You know, no cream, no nothing. I have a set pattern that I work myself through, and I constantly do something that's positive. Yes, the negative shit happens all the time. I don't know if I'm allowed to say that, but it happens all the time.

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Sean Swarner: You know? You can choose to focus on what you want to focus on. You can choose to have that bring you down, or you can see it as an opportunity to strengthen yourself.

Robert Glazer: Absolutely. Now, you've got a new initiative, where you're bringing a lot of your experience in creating challenges and adversity and resilience for companies and leadership teams, and families as well. Can you talk a little bit about some of the stuff that you're working on, where you're helping people to experience some of the things that you've experienced from your endurance sports?

Sean Swarner: Oh, for sure. Every year, I take a group up Kilimanjaro as a fundraiser for a non profit called The Cancer Climber Association. This year will be my 16th time up Kilimanjaro, which is the highest mountain in Africa. I have always thought, "You know, people come off this mountain changed. They see their own potential, they're doing something that is just astronomically high. It's almost 19,500 ft."

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Sean Swarner: I saw how that journey changed people, and I also recently became a certified professional coach. And I thought, "Okay, well. How can I use something like this to do something?" I'm tagging adventure immersion coach, and I'm taking people out of the comfort zone, putting them into situations such as Kilimanjaro. And, helping them and coaching them in the moment, so it's exponentially more effective as opposed to having a phone call once a week saying, "What happened last week?" "Oh, I forget."

Robert Glazer: Yep.

Sean Swarner: No, in the moment. Right then and there, I'm asking them, "How do you feel about this? What's going on? How can you get over this? What's your perspective, where are you looking?" Everything! I'm also putting together a number of corporate programs, and I'm working on one right now. I can't give away the big pharmaceutical name, but they're working on it and it's basically helping people reprogram their brains one day at a time. It's not rocket science, it's not brain surgery. It's just repeat, repeat, repeat. Do something new, change it to what you want it to be, and then do it over and over and over and over again until it becomes a new set pattern, and you get comfortable with your new normal.

Robert Glazer: You said the Kilimanjaro trips are families, right?

Sean Swarner: Anybody can go. Initially, like I said, it was a fundraiser for the cancer charity. What we do is we actually pay for a cancer survivors trip once a year. So whatever we raise this year goes to a survivor's trip next year, but we are putting together these adventure immersion coaching programs for anybody who wants to go. And anybody can join the trip, you know? I think we're doing it the end of July, early August, so there's still time to come onboard.

Robert Glazer: We'll make sure to provide links and get all the information, maybe if people are interested. But could you give me ... Without who it was, but an example anecdote of either the relationship between two people or someone you saw really change after doing something like that. I think people don't appreciate how much, when your body does something it doesn't think it can do, that it changes your psyche. I wonder if you have a story you could share about your Kilimanjaro hikes.

Sean Swarner: I do, and I'm actually in my office right now looking for a letter that one of the families sent to me. I should have it framed, because it was ... I read it, and it made me tear up, telling me how it effected his son in such a way that he went over there. He had some post traumatic disorders, and he came back. He was super strong, he was confident. It absolutely changed his life, and the respect that we gave the locals over there, and we didn't treat them like they were employees. We treated them like family.

Another one was a cancer survivor who just went over last year, and he said he came back and it completely changed his life, too. He was unsure of where he wanted to go in his life and what he wanted to do. He came back, he got a job. He's now working in construction and he's doing some amazing things. People who go on these trips, it literally makes you see things from a different perspective. You look at yourself in the mirror differently, and you have this internal courage that you didn't have before. It's unbelievable.

Robert Glazer: That's amazing. I'm going to go with you. I'm just going to have to figure out the time to do so. It's once a year. It's two weeks, right?

Sean Swarner: Exactly, yeah. We do a six day hike and a five day safari. You go up and you spend all this energy and all this time, and you motivate yourself to get to literally the roof of Africa, and then we go celebrate with a safari through the Serengeti and Ngorongoro Crater, and Lake Manyara. It's unbelievable, and we stop into ... If people want to, we stop into a local Maasai tribe. It's really, really culturally rich, too.

Robert Glazer: You'll give us the way for people to contact you if they're interested about that, right?

Sean Swarner: Oh, that's easy. Go to seanswarner.com. Sean, like Sean Connery, S-E-A-N. Swarner, with an S, but the Warner Brothers with an S. S-W-A-R-N-E-R.

Robert Glazer: All right. I'm scared and interested to ask you this, but what's your dream destination for your next adventure?

Sean Swarner: Well, I guess the next biggest adventure, I recently got married. I've been told numerous times that it might be more difficult than climbing Everest.

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Sean Swarner: I guess we'll find out. But, the next biggest one I want to do is either going to be January 2020, I think it's going to be January 2020. I want to run seven marathons on seven continents in seven days.

Robert Glazer: How do you even do that logistically? You have to go backwards. I assume you have to go from East to West, so that you're gaining time and not losing time. Right?

Sean Swarner: Exactly. So start off in Antarctica where time doesn't matter. From Antarctica to Johannesburg, to Perth, to Dubai, to Madrid, to Santiago, to Miami.

Robert Glazer: And this has never been done before?

Sean Swarner: No, it has. It has. It's a "thing" people are recently doing, but no cancer survivor I don't think, and no guy with one lung.

Robert Glazer: It can't be a huge thing.

Sean Swarner: No.

Robert Glazer: Like one or two hands you can count the people that have done this on?

Sean Swarner: Right. Yeah, yeah. Not many people. They're kind of tongue in cheek. There aren't that many fools out there, I don't think.

Robert Glazer: Interesting. All right. I'll be watching for that. Last question for you, what's a personal or professional mistake that you have learned the most from?

Sean Swarner: Oh, man. I would say the biggest mistake that I've ever made, and it's actually a physical mistake. If that's not going to fly, then I can do something else. But, I was walking back from training for Everest, and I had my ice ax in one hand. I was just flipping it around, playing with it, getting cocky and tossing it up and down. I lost my footing walking back. I threw the ice ax to my right side uphill instead of downhill, and it got lodged in some rocks. I fell right on my side, right onto the shaft of my ice ax, and it punctured my skin. I still have a huge scar from it, but my ribs stopped it. If my ribs wouldn't have stopped it, it would've gone right through and punctured my lung.

Robert Glazer: And you need that lung.

Sean Swarner: Yeah. Yeah. I need that one, so my lesson that I learned was don't be a fool. Don't play around with your ice ax in the mountains until you get home and you're sitting down. Just be careful with the sharp tools that you have that are designed for climbing high mountains.

Robert Glazer: I've actually heard that more people are injured going down Everest than up, because their guard is down. It's actually similar to what you're saying. When people's guard is down and they're kind of not paying as much attention, they're actually more at risk. Maybe there's a secondary story in there, as well.

Sean Swarner: Oh, 100%. You're absolutely right. When people are so focused on the top, they forget to-

Robert Glazer: Get down.

Sean Swarner: Yeah, climbing is a round trip sport.

Robert Glazer: Absolutely. Well, Sean, thank you for taking the time to join us today. The fact that you're alive is a miracle alone, and the fact that you've completed all these expeditions is certainly a testament to the human spirit and just sheer perseverance. You're really an inspiration for so many, and I can't wait to see what you do next and to join you one day on one of your trips.

Sean Swarner: I appreciate it. I'm excited to take you up Africa, man. It's unbelievable and life changing.

Robert Glazer: We will do it! Thank you again, and to our listeners, thanks for tuning in to Elevate with Robert Glazer podcast. If you enjoyed today's episode, I'd really appreciate it if you could head over to Apple Podcast and give us a review under our new name. You can learn how to review us by following the link on the podcast page. We'll make sure to include links to Sean's website, as well as his book and the incredible documentary that I mentioned before on the episode page and on our site, robertglazer.com. Until next time, keep elevating.