



Conscious Life presents

Regeneration, Restoration and Reciprocity

Guest: Felipe Simas, Pablo Friedlander, James Aronson

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[00:00:15] Alexander Beiner

Hi, everybody, and welcome to a very special panel organized in partnership with El Puente. El Puente is a foundation for facilitating grants and investments into projects owned by, operated by, and supporting Indigenous peoples and nations.

The subject we're looking at is the link between psychedelics and the need for environmental and cultural regeneration and restoration, particularly in the Amazon.

Our guests are James Aronson, PhD, who is president and co-founder of the Global Action Network Ecological Health Network, and a senior scientist emeritus with Missouri Botanical Gardens Center for Conservation and Sustainable Development.

We also have Felipe Simas, who teaches at Viscosa Federal University in Minas Gerais, Brazil. His background is in agronomy and soil sciences, and he has spent his career working with the creation and planning of environmentally protected areas in Brazil.

We also have Pablo Friedlander, who is executive director of El Puente and born in Argentina, of both Indigenous and European ancestry, he holds a PhD in natural philosophy and a master's degree in anthropology, history and aesthetics. And he's done extensive fieldwork in the Amazon and the Andes.

So, welcome everyone. So, a first question I wanted to ask is just to give people a bit of context and a bit of framing about why we're having this panel, why we're having this conversation. Could you explain, how do you define and approach regeneration and restoration? And perhaps we could start with Felipe.

[00:02:00] Felipe Simas

Hi, Alex, hi, everybody. It's a big pleasure to be here with you and talk about this very important topic. So my experience comes from natural sciences and with a background in soil sciences, so more in this ecological field.

And for me, so understanding regeneration, for me, first it brings to the capacity of life to generate itself, to perpetuate itself as it's been happening throughout the evolution of the biosphere in our planet.

So regeneration to me brings this idea of, you know, generating again and what is being generated? Life. So life generating life. That would be a first idea to frame my understanding, but also it's what's been, you know, agreed, I think, from most of the people working in this field, you know, dealing with regeneration.

Alexander Beiner

Great. And James, maybe if you don't mind picking up from that, giving us your definition, why some, why it matters.

James Aronson

Hello, everyone. I'm a restoration ecologist, but originally a botanist. I chose botany because plants are so much easier to work with than people. But I've learned that we have to work with people because our lonely planet is in peril and we really need to get hard at work together on restoration and regeneration.

And I distinguish between the two terms. After 30 plus years in the field of ecological restoration. And I'm promoting, together with a bunch of other people around the world, something we call holistic ecological restoration, that brings us and our field much closer to the movements around regeneration, because it addresses both ecological problems or situations as well as social ones at the same time.

And it's a hugely needed thing. I don't know how many people in the audience, please raise your hands, have heard of ecological restoration. It's a science and a practice recognized in universities around the world and by the United Nations, that has declared this a UN decade on ecosystem restoration.

So I won't assume any prior knowledge. We can talk if there are questions at the end, but the approach that we're talking about here, in the context of this Super Psychedelic Conference, is very particular.

And of course, there's great convergency between the psychedelic movement today, a worldwide phenomenon, and the restoration and regeneration movements. So this session, this panel discussion, is to try to clarify a bit what's in the interspace between these different movements, Alex.

[00:05:13] Alexander Beiner

Fantastic. Thank you for that, James and Pablo, perhaps you could give us your definition now.

Pablo Friedlander

Yes, I believe it's so important in these times where the regeneration movement is showing, all other movements, to get more clear in the definitions, because we are synergizing from the different fronts of the rewinding of the regenerative movements, more based on the food systems of the ecological restoration programs that are really focused in the forest and in the water sources around the planet.

And in many other interventions that are happening that probably are not that coordinated yet in a front line, that really take the tasks of this decade with responsibility and with certain coordinates.

That's why my perspective on regeneration, that it's a broad category that includes the different protocols and interventions of ecological restoration, especially the holistic approach and the different holistic farming and agroforestry, rewilding.

Each one have, of course, different contributions to their regenerative actions. That sometimes is more related with ecological restoration. Protocols are related, of course, with the natural environments around it, and then, if it's more related with the proper agroforestry method or permacultural method, probably more related with the food and medicine production inside that natural environment.

And then, of course there are distinctions. And of course there are many misunderstandings, like the ones of the rewilding systems or movements are bringing to the field. Like James say, there are some scientific standards to measure and to monitor these actions.

I am with the definitions that really follow the traditional standards that we know, because it's the only measure that can be demonstration for these times. And at the same time apply experiments, the new models that can escalate that action and adequate to the different biomes and cultures.

That is, for me, a proper conception of the regeneration in these times, considering the scientific element, the social elements of the movements, that is very important factor in this year particularly.

And then, of course, if that is rooted in the Indigenous or originally wisdom or know how about each one of the ecosystems involved that will really make a new conception of regeneration, not only the western one, but the one coming from the communities involved in the life of these ecosystems from much before and we hope for many generations more.

Alexander Beiner

Great. Thank you everyone. And so, Felipe, maybe you wanted to add to that. I think.

[00:08:16] Felipe Simas

Yeah, I think it's also important to add that regeneration...So it's a process of recreation, of life recreating itself. But it's also a term that came in the table and in the vocabulary that's being used now when we address the need of a healthier planet, of a healthier culture for everybody.

And so I think regeneration comes also to go beyond. To make it clear in a term in the different word, to go beyond sustainability, beyond sustainable development. And so in a way that it's really about, like Pablo said, it's not only about the natural systems, it's about creating regenerative cultures.

So how us, as human kind, as a culture, which is living because we are living beings, how do we really create a change in the paradigm so that all our actions, economic, ecological, social relationships are really regenerative? How that brings more life and more vitality to the system where we are acting on locally and globally?

So I think it's important to distinguish this as a new idea, that it's not enough to just sustain what we have for the next generations, because it's not so the sustainable idea, we need to go beyond. So we need to regenerate, recover, restore the ecology, but also ourselves so we don't cause the damage again. So it's a more systemic idea of this regeneration concept in my understanding.

Alexander Beiner

Yeah, thank you. And it's more inspiring to me, you know, the idea of thriving rather than just surviving somehow comes up. I want to ask in a moment, each of you around why it's so important to engage with local communities. But before that, I'd like to place, for our audience, I want to deepen that link between the psychedelic world and the world of regeneration restoration.

So if you imagine that someone might be watching this and they've watched the conference and they're thinking, "Oh, I think I might go out to Iquitos in Peru to drink ayahuasca. Or maybe I go to Bolivia, or maybe I'm doing a mushroom ceremony in New York City", or whatever it might be.

Why does it matter for them to be thinking about regeneration, reciprocity, restoration? Why does that matter? So maybe I'll start with you, James, because this is something you touched on.

James Aronson

Great, thank you. I'd love to take a first crack at responding, Alex. The fields, the movements and the disciplines we've been talking about, most of which begin with the letters 're'. They're mostly framed in Western, empirical, scientific language, mostly in English, but also in all the romance languages and Chinese and others.

But we don't have written records or oral teachings about them from Indigenous peoples. Why? Because traditionally, they maintained, they stewarded, they cared for their land and their forest and their ecosystems, and the word restoration didn't really come into it.

As long as they were left alone with their ecosystems. But now the world is in a different place, and we need their wisdom, their know-how, their traditions, their customs, their approaches.

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And they need ours, because we know a lot about soils and laboratory studies of microorganisms and mushrooms and plants and animals and the climate that's changing and these invasive organisms everywhere today that the Indigenous people don't know about any more than they knew about the diseases brought to them by European invaders 500 years ago.

So there's real room and real need for partnering, networking and reciprocity, a word that we need to dwell on quite a bit here. I could go on, but I'm happy to let Felipe or Pablo take over and I can talk again later.

Yeah, wonderful. I think. I'm really glad you brought in the word reciprocity and its importance. Maybe, Pablo, you would like to pick up on that bigger question. Why should people be thinking about this along with psychedelics?

Pablo Friedlander

Yes, that's a very important question, because when we go to the Indigenous communities, in my case with strange, I go, but I come from at the same time. But when the organizations come to the Indigenous communities with ecological restoration programs and many other great ideas and interventions that are happening in diverse ways in diverse biomes, generally in wise communities, have first answered that we receive is "Okay, that is all good".

And of course, with all the mistrust and misconceptions about NGOs and about charity in countries under development, they test us and they check us, and generally a good synthesis of what they manifest after, of course, big listening process, both sides is "Okay. That is okay. And it comes from a good place, a good heart, a good protocol, good money, etcetera".

But before talking about regeneration or reciprocity, many of these very ancient communities would like to talk about reparation, like there is something to repair, of course, that is part of the process.

And we can engage with the communities, thousands of people planting millions of trees in the top of the Andes, like with Accion Andina, but also engaging in previous capacity building of each community that are related also with charity and grants and education and other systems that are not inclusion in the development plans of the western world, but empowerment of them.

And even, in some ways, a more clear way of reparation, when, of course, there is a more governmental or diplomatic track of all that had been done in the last 500 years in these communities, and not only the last ten or twenty of wild extractivism.

But then, that's why El Puente projects and our pilot projects, to demonstrate, to elaborate with the communities, from the communities models of reciprocity, not just to give the reciprocity, or to install, like parachuting restoration systems, but really from that listening.

We empower first before regeneration, before reciprocity, before all the education programs, for both ways of the breach of El Puente in this case, but as a metaphor of the engagement process, we need to proceed in sovereignty processes.

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That means for us, for El Puente, and for many of our partners, not only to help to create or sustain or maintain reserves, the Indigenous reserves that are being co-created or restored or recovered or fenced or warded.

And that way we help them to recover their territory as a mechanism of reparations, even before any other protocol, and in their hands, of course, doing mutual agreements to co-create these reserves, or ecological, or Indigenous, or bio-preservation, or ethnobotanical reserves, many of these cases altogether.

And then, yes, we can establish regeneration processes inside these reserves after proper mapping and after they deciding what are the key species, the pioneer species, the keystone species, to work with, not just stepping in the foot of science that will always verify and monitor the impact of these actions. And that is what we call a proper restoration.

And as James used to say, need to look with two eyes, the scientific eye and Indigenous or visionary eye, to really undertake these actions. That is a big why.

But only then, with these reserves, sovereign created, being in restoration and the regeneration process, not only of the forest, but the foods, the medicines, all the ethnobotanic legacies and living libraries of the forest and of the mountains, and even of the deserts too, we can proceed in educational programs.

And it's not just to educate them, as the old paradigm used to say, but first to learn from them the know how agroforestry systems that are coming from the old times, verified by science, created hybrid methodology to proceed and scale up the method with the youth that will take care of these ecosystems from that place.

And then in this mutual process, we can help to co-create curricula that comes from there to the world and from the world to the communities, to not only increase the technical capacities of engage and regeneration, but also to start to address more complex matters.

As you suggested, Alex, the place of what is being called psychedelic renaissance in these movements for other places, it's not just that, but all the renaissances that are happening are coming back to the sources of Indigenous legacies and teacher plants that are at the core of these ecosystems and of these cultures at the same time.

So that more delicate eco-health, let's say, aspect or noospheric level of interaction using an old term from Teilhard de Chardin and Vernadsky. But this also related with biospherics. We can say that only then we can really go into the reciprocity pillar, as we call it. After the sovereignty pillar is established, the regeneration actions are in movement.

The educational process have proven to be both sides. Then we can create a spin off. We can give back even from the psychedelic world or from other industries same back to the ecosystems and the communities to increase these processes. That's why with El Puente we aim to give birth and test models of reciprocity adapted to different communities and cultures to increase this action of regeneration we are talking about.

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I can continue in more details, but I think there is plenty of research and experience to do, particularly in these conversions of ecological restoration and regeneration in the broad term we are defining and the inner restoration or regeneration that happens when one takes the teacher plants or the psychedelic medicines and is completely comparable in a magical mirror logic, of course, as is proper to these realms.

With this, I will give the world...the word to Felipe that probably is the one with more experience establishing these projects in the Amazon and in the Atlantic rainforest. And happy to also go deeper in this particular theme.

Felipe Simas

Well, let's see how I would. Okay, I think it's...If we're talking about a regenerative culture, it's because, you know, we recognize that something was degenerated. So that's why we need to talk about this. So it's really interesting for me now, why do we need to talk about these things?

Because we got up to a point as a planet, as a living organism, where we really recognize the level of degeneration that was created and that was, it's widely recognized that was because of the way we developed as a global culture.

And, you know, then all this history about separation from nature and western culture, your scientific innovational approach and all this that we know about. And so now by recognizing the level of damage and the need to recover, we are talking about sustainability, then restoration, then regeneration.

And when we go even through life, living systems, theories, and approach to thinking of the world as a system that has been evolving a lot, also as a scientific field, also as a Western-minded scientific field, which brings a lot of much more complete, holistical approaches to the world, but still in a, let's say, rational, intellectual level.

And we are understanding better from science, you know, that how the world really is, because like Gregory Bateson says, you know, one of the major problem that leads to our complex crisis is that we think the world is one thing, but actually the world is something much different than what we think it is as a culture.

And now we understand, you know, even scientifically, that, you know, it's about flow of matter, of energy, about entropy. And things are much more complex than just parts of a big machine. Okay, that helps. And that allows us to understand and to act from our heads. But then how do we embody this to be really regenerative agents? How do we really feel that we are nature?

Because one thing is to understand rationally, "Okay, we are nature, humans part of nature. We can't separate that". And that's pretty well understood rationally, how do we embody this in the hearts?

So, like, you know, like Joanna Macy says, you know, in order to make this great turning that we need as a civilization, you know, from this suicidal collapse, industrial growth, society, we need also projects that will change people in their hearts. We need heart projects.

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And that's where I think the psychedelics and, you know, and the plants and the medicines that come from these native communities, that's where they bring, you know, this level of intelligence, of embodied intelligence, of really recognizing and then doing this mind shift. If now I'm, you know, remembering that I am part of this, you know, not just intellectually.

So I think that's why the psychedelic experience can be really helpful for people to feel this. What, you know, teaching atom calls the interbeing, you know, how? Because I think that's in the root of the regenerative culture. You know, it's about listening. It's about deep listening and connection to nature.

And we lost this in our culture. That's why we disconnected, and there was the degeneration. So how to regenerate. We also have to regenerate this level. How can we listen, how can we really be integrated, you know, as part of the system?

And there are many ways we can reach that. But for me and for many here, the psychedelic or the teacher plants, especially with the traditional people in there, in the natural environment, you know, embedded in nature, that really brings a, you know, a very speeds up the process of listening.

And that's why it's so important that we preserve these communities and support them, because they also are being, at the same time, they also are threatened, and they're engaging with the Western world and facing all the challenges of being colonized, or they've more colonized than they already were.

So that's why we think that we should support these communities when we have this room for regeneration, ecological restoration. So us as a community, let's direct this funds and this energy and this thoughts and these brains to these communities, because they can, you know, it's, they need, and it's then comes this exchange of benefits.

Alexander Beiner

Yeah, lovely. Yeah, thanks. I think that's such an important point to bring in about that deep listening and the internal shift of how we're seeing the world leading into that deeper regeneration.

So I wanted to ask each of you as well about a little bit more detail about why it matters to work specifically with local communities in their environments, and also what that work looks like, what kind of projects, what kind of approach.

I think Pablo already touched on it in his answer a little bit, but I think there's more in there. And I thought maybe, James, you could start us off with that, and then we'll go through.

James Aronson

Yes, I'd be happy to. And I'll try to make a transition from the last topic to this one. As a botanist, I've always had great care for an attraction to plants, but from Indigenous cultures and individuals, I've learned that they actually feel kinship with non-human beings in a way that we in Western culture have forgotten.

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When we say kinship, we're thinking of other human beings and Indigenous cultures, no, they feel kinship for plants and animals and place. And that takes me to two non Amazonian communities that I want to talk about in this context. Even though we're focusing on El Puente and its work in the Amazon.

The notion of two eyed seeing that Pablo brought up a few minutes ago, citing me, that actually was coined by two North American restoration ecologists and then taken up and popularized and deepened by the Indigenous scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer, who's become a very important spokesperson for Indigenous cultures in North America, i.e. Turtle Island.

And it's a really beautiful expression, along with a phrase she uses a lot, namely reciprocal restoration. In other words, we can't restore ecosystems unless we're also busy restoring ourselves. And if we are busy restoring the ecosystems in which we live, we are restoring ourselves and we're benefiting from it.

And in North America, there are lots of Indigenous communities that are getting very interested in restoration as they are gaining back lands and access to their lands, and they have their own cultural ways that they want to bring back to those lands.

They use a term in North America that I think is going to go viral worldwide, namely matrilineal for Indigenous peoples to regain access to their former lands, even if they're on private lands or public lands, where they'll never regain full land sovereignty. And there are lots and lots of special problems.

Restoration and regeneration are always contextual, and I could tell stories from North America, but we should concentrate on the Amazon. I just want to briefly mention what's going on in Australia, where there are, as in the Amazon, somewhere between five hundred and seven hundred Indigenous peoples, each with their own language, struggling for sovereignty and all the rest, and reconnection.

And fire is a big, big, big problem there. Australia, in many ways, is a fire country, and that's getting worse, and it's going to get more so before it ever gets better. And the Indigenous people have been living on that land for 65,000 years, so they know a lot more about it than the white settlers who've been there for 220 years.

So there's discussion going on about fire management. And what we, the Westerners, need to learn urgently from the Australian Aboriginal Indigenous people is the concept of boodja, which is particularly strong in Western Australia among the Noongar nation.

And it has to do not only with home territory or land, or what white Australians now call country. As a translation of boodja, it also means caring for land, that if you identify strongly with your land, your home territory, you also recognize your responsibility to it, to care for it and to steward it and take care of your animal and plant kin in your homeland or boodja.

[00:30:40] Alexander Beiner

Yeah, wonderful and really important concept. Thank you, James, for that. And, Pablo, would you like to speak on this, about engaging with local communities and local environments, why that matters so much.

Pablo Friedlander

I think, of course, what I mentioned before, the importance of the projects to be rooted always on departing from the needs of each community, is fundamental, for they really succeed in an intergenerational perspective. It's not only to have the opportunity of giving back to the world, especially through these communities and these ecosystems that are not only the most endangered, but the most conserved.

Indigenous people conserve only being less than 5% of world population. They conserve more than, they say, 80% of the biodiversity on earth. Of course, numbers to double check and very diverse in each region. But that fact to depart from, no matter the culture one comes from. But then, yes, the subtle cultural or worldview aspects that James was just mentioning.

But for me, in this particular case of the conversions of psychedelic renaissance and regenerative movement involving Indigenous communities and the ecosystems of teacher plants particularly, I believe the important things to consider is not the same like when one proceed in a regeneration of a landscape where there are not Indigenous communities, no teacher plants at the core of the ecosystem, etcetera.

So in this case, I believe one needs to consider the worldviews of the locals. And in this particular case of the teacher plants, in psychedelic medicines, not only in the Andes and in the Amazon, but in many other places where there are in the Amazon is more evident. One need to take in consideration what they are, these plants or molecules for the Indigenous cultures.

And then starting with what James recognized. Yes, there are entities for us, let's say, or for the cultures that really believe in another ontology. Not only believe, but they practice another ontology for thousands of years. So there are not molecules or plants that one cooks and ingests, but there are entities with which one enters in connection, learn, healed, or receive what needs to receive and access to a certain time space or space time that is sacred.

And once one is there it's a very meaningful moment. So secondly, it's not a psychological experience. It's something very delicate to be in contact with the forces of the origin from these worldviews.

So if people gain access to these spaces through the different molecules that are flooding the psychedelic market, there are many, many dangers at the same time, many, many opportunities. The dangers of, like the butterfly effect, people entering these sacred spaces imagine from the perspective of an elder, without knowing even that each thing that is doing there affects reality and not only their own psyche.

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And then secondary once the people got it, that happily. And that is in most of the cases, the case connection with nature. We need to give back to Pachamama, to the cultures from all these wisdom come from a typical insight of the psychedelic or teacher plant experience.

Then we are talking of a dialogue that makes possible that reparation not only to respect them, the communities and the cultures and the teacher plants and the ecosystems as a key element for the functioning of this planet and of our consciousness and of reality, not just as natural resources.

And then to proceed upon it with coherence, that is more difficult even in the psychedelic industry, even in the cases where the CEO's of the companies really got this that I just had say, the connection with nature and importance to give back with Indigenous communities and to establish this how you say, of course bridges we say, but for both sides, not only for one side to transit.

That is why only with Indigenous communities and with the original context we can, I believe, really proceed in both the regeneration action that is needed to happen in this decade.

And there are practical matters on that and spiritual matters on that front. And of course with the psychedelic renaissance movement under a good guidance, I would say, because the dangers of that are the dangers of all the other industries.

But the opportunity of that particular industry and field and academic field is of course to get engaged in some way or the other with these ancestral values and worries that can really help to shift the paradigm that will not happen alone by innards, but it will depend on each one of our decisions and actions.

That is my perspective why we need to work closely with Indigenous communities, with Indigenous leaders and with Indigenous councils recognizing them. Yes.

Alexander Beiner

Thank you, Pablo. Felipe, you'd like to add to this question?

Felipe Simas

Well, I think I'll. Yeah, try and bring elements from James and from Pablo's words. I think it's because of this capacity, you know, of these cultures, of this traditional local Indigenous and local communities and peoples which they have managed to exist for millennia in those ecosystems in a regenerative way, you know, being another part of that system, regenerating and evolving.

Because regeneration is not something about keeping the same thing. It's evolving as, you know, as a system. So like James said, you know, the, in Australia, though for 65,000 years, in South America and the Amazon for another, you know, so many thousand years, these cultures have coexisted in their environments.

So, you know, so of course we're not thinking we're all going to go back to that as a whole world civilization. I mean, ideally we could even think of that as a horizon, but that's not, you know, it's real. But how can we, you know, look at something different from what we have, you know?

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Because we are so, you know, if we look around in the cities, people who are watching us, most of us, you're not really going to find something different in terms of a worldview around you, you know, unless you go to this, to these communities.

And then we're going to experiment something different. It's another reality because you know, reality is what we think it is. We think reality is something. And as a culture, it became totally, that's what's real. And this community live another reality which is in this animated world, in this, like Pablo said, you know, oriented by, you know, this very direct connection with the spiritual, with the nature centered spirituality.

So I think that's one of the aspects why we need to really engage in these communities, with these communities, and also because these communities, they live in the places, like Pablo said, where we have the highest biodiversity. And the remaining areas of natural, naturally, environmentally important ecological areas are usually in this, within the territories where these communities are dwelling.

But that's not also given because they are in dispute. So at the same time, they're so important, but they are so threatened by the outside world coming and farming and increasing, like in Brazil, the modern agriculture frontier, moving in direction of the Amazon and clearing lands and making soybean, monoculture, transgenic crops and all that things pressuring these communities.

But also the pressure that they face also from being colonized in their minds through education systems, through the health systems. So this level of threat that they are facing, they need support to really go and keep their traditionality or keep their original culture in the midst of that.

So I think as, as people who have, who feel this or experience the benefit of these communities, for me at least personally, it gives me the sense of duty to kind of really direct my effort, my energy, my time, and whatever I can support to this community and these projects while other people are doing other works in different other places, which we need also to restore.

But let us, we're not going to address the whole thing together as a whole. So let us, as a field or, and I think the psychedelic movement is a very, like I said, because of the effect the psychedelics have and because they are inspired. All these communities, most of these original people, have been using plants as healing, as guides.

So as a field, as a movement, we should take care of this part. If we do this, we're going to do a big benefit to regeneration and to building a regenerative culture.

Alexander Beiner

Yeah, very, very important. So thank you for that. Felipe and Pablo and James. We could probably talk about this topic for several hours or maybe years or months. It's a huge one and very important. But I think we've given a really nice overview and some very, very important and meaningful things for people to think about around regeneration and restoration.

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So thank you so much for being here, taking the time, tuning in from all parts of the world and the great outdoors as well. So appreciate it, and, yeah, have a good one.