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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Tech Founder Parker Conrad Shares Candid Lessons on Skill-Building, AI, and the Future of Work at Freedom Institute**

Naples, Florida — Parker Conrad, CEO and founder of Rippling, spent approximately 90 minutes today engaging with high school students (grades 9–12) and invited community leaders at Freedom Institute as part of the school’s American Dream Conversations at Freedom series.

The discussion, held at 11:00 a.m. on Freedom’s Naples campus, was hosted and emceed by Tom Grady, founding board member and chairman of the Freedom Institute Board of Directors.

Conrad offered an unfiltered look at his entrepreneurial journey from an early venture he described as “years of slow grinding failure,” to a later company that grew rapidly and ended publicly, to the disciplined rebuild that became Rippling, one of the fastest-growing workforce technology platforms in the country.

“Success rarely follows a straight line,” Conrad told students. “What matters is how you respond to setbacks, how quickly you learn, and whether you’re willing to take responsibility and keep going.”

His message resonated strongly with students preparing to enter a workforce being reshaped by artificial intelligence, automation, and rapidly changing career paths.

### **Connecting the American Dream to Modern Work**

Freedom’s American Dream Speaker Series brings accomplished leaders into direct conversation with students to demystify success and show that resilience, judgment, and adaptability matter as much as credentials or titles.

“These conversations are intentionally real,” said Tom Grady, founding board member and chairman. “Our students don’t benefit from polished success stories—they benefit from hearing how leaders think, how they recover from setbacks, and how they make decisions when things don’t go as planned. That’s what prepares them for the real world.”

Chris Marker, CEO of Freedom Institute, emphasized how Conrad’s story aligns with the school’s mission.

“Parker Conrad represents exactly what we want students to experience,” Marker said. “He has lived the American Dream—not as a perfect story, but as a real one. He’s experienced failure, learned from it, and rebuilt something meaningful by adapting to change. That is the reality of modern careers.”

During the discussion, Conrad challenged students to rethink common career advice, encouraging them to focus on developing strengths rather than trying to define a lifelong passion too early.

“People often say, ‘do what you love,’” Conrad said. “I think that’s generally pretty terrible advice. Figure out what you’re really good at—and pursue that. If you’re good at something, you’ll grow to enjoy it over time.”

### **AI, Career Readiness, and Real-World Preparation**

Conrad also addressed how artificial intelligence transforms work, describing AI as a powerful new toolset that expands what technology can do while emphasizing that foundational skills and human judgment remain essential.

“AI is transformational,” he said, “but the people who succeed will be those who know how to learn, communicate, solve problems, and lead.”

He cautioned students against relying too heavily on remote work early in their careers, noting that skill-building, mentorship, and relationship development are often accelerated through in-person collaboration.

“These experiences connect education to life,” said Christy Vaill, principal of Freedom Institute. “Hearing directly from leaders like Parker helps students see that the American Dream is still very real, but it requires resilience, adaptability, and a willingness to grow through change.”

The American Dream Conversations at Freedom will continue throughout the school year, featuring entrepreneurs, innovators, and civic leaders who share their journeys and lessons learned to inspire the next generation.

### **About the Freedom Institute**

The Freedom Institute is an innovative high school program offering personalized and flexible learning pathways that build critical thinking, financial literacy, and the foundations of engaged American citizenship. Through an AI-enhanced curriculum, a blend of high school and college courses, and real-world experiences—including internships, college and career preparation, and job placement—students gain the skills, knowledge, and values essential for economic freedom and workforce success. The Institute’s American Dream Conversations at Freedom series brings civic, business, and thought leaders directly to students to share lessons about life, liberty, and the pursuit of excellence.

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