



## **Name: Kara Goldin: “I Won’t Back Down” Season 4: Episode #6**

Speaker 1:

Welcome to Stayin' Alive In Technology, a series of conversations with Silicon Valley veterans talking on war stories from the past and practical advice for today. And now here's your host, Melinda Byerley, founding partner of Fiddlehead, a digital marketing consultancy.

Melinda Byerley:

Hello and welcome back to another episode of Stayin' Alive in Tech, as we continue to make our way through this fourth season. I'm excited to introduce our next guest, Kara Goldin, who you may know as the founder and CEO of Hint Water, a flavored water brand she founded back in 2005. But that's not where Kara's story begins.

Prior to her entrepreneurial career, she got her start at Time, Inc., where she worked in circulation before transferring over to CNN to do advertising sales. She eventually switched gears and moved to San Francisco to join a start-up called 2Market, a spin-out of Apple that pursued a computer-based shopping idea developed by Steve Jobs, and was later bought out by AOL. Kara stayed on with AOL as the Vice President of Shopping and E-commerce Partnerships until the company acquired Netscape in 2001.

Melinda Byerley:

By this point, she was a mother to three kids, and decided it was time to step back and focus on her family. It was during this time that Kara cultivated the idea that would become Hint, a bottled water that uses fruit to naturally (and lightly) flavor and sweeten the water. She developed the concept for Hint in response to all the sugary drinks and artificial sweeteners that seemed even more prevalent back then, especially with so many of the water products on store shelves.

Kara saw a need, and she stepped in to fill it, even though she had absolutely zero experience in one of the most competitive industries on the planet. But as you'll find out, this was not the first time she jumped head-first into something she had no experience with.

Melinda Byerley:

Since launching Hint, Kara has received a number of accolades that include making Forbes' 40 Women to Watch Over 40 list, and being named as one of Fortune's Most Powerful Women Entrepreneurs in 2011—an achievement that certainly carries a bit of irony and satisfaction once you hear her story later. She also put out a book in October 2020, titled “Undaunted,” which I've recently read, and is a podcaster herself, currently serving as host of Unstoppable, which tells the stories of entrepreneurs and founders.



Well, today, you're going to hear Kara's story, and I think you'll enjoy her tales and insights about trusting your gut, using curiosity as an asset, trying new things, and of course, not backing down—even when you may have no idea what you're doing.

Melinda Byerley:

Kara, thanks for coming to the podcast.

Kara Goldin:

Thank you! Thanks for having me.

Melinda Byerley:

So, I was reading in your book, Kara, that you grew up in Arizona. And I wanted to ask you a question that I didn't read in your book, and it was, what did you want to be when you grew up?

Kara Goldin:

Ah. You know, I think partly it was because my brother, who was significantly older than me, I have two brothers, but my oldest brother wanted to go this route. He is a lawyer, but he kept talking to me about law school, and so I sort of as a young kid watched him always doing everything because he wanted to go to law school. It's funny, I think, until I went to college, I really believed that I would probably be a lawyer—and I only married a lawyer. I didn't actually become a lawyer.

Melinda Byerley:

(Laughs) Close enough.

Kara Goldin:

Yeah. Close enough. Yeah, it's pretty funny thinking back on it. So, I tell that story a lot on college campuses, I instead knew that I wanted to write and kind of teach the world in some way, or I should say, change the world in some way. So, I became a journalism major and that's... You know, I tell the story in the book around wanting to write. I never thought I'd write a book. I really thought I'd write for magazines or, I don't know, maybe go and work for a television studio and do some kind of writing.

Kara Goldin:

And I think as so many people agree, it's just, unfortunately, you go to school and it's not really real life—what happens and what these different roles are. Frankly, they change over time too with technology... I mean, when I graduated from college, we weren't talking about like, direct-to-consumer and retention. Right? I mean, it's just not even... It's a whole new thing that you continue to find in your journey.

Melinda Byerley:



So, thank you for the segue. You talked about how we weren't aware of things, and we're not far off in age, so I'm with you. There were like three computers on campus when I went to college.

Kara Goldin:

Yeah.

Melinda Byerley:

So, when did you become aware of technology, however you define that? When did it sort of enter your consciousness?

Kara Goldin:

Oh, it's so funny, I was just telling the story actually, that when I was in college—I went to Arizona State University, and again, I was a journalism major and I was a minor in finance—I took a computing class that was coding, and I mean, I had no business being in that class. It's shocking that they were even offering it, and I think I just had some friends that were taking it, and so it was my Vietnam, like it was so hard.

Melinda Byerley:

(Laughs)

Kara Goldin:

I happened to be there when there were mainframe computers and suddenly they set up—I mean, leave it to ASU to me this innovative, because I talked to other people who were in college at the same time—including my husband, who went to Amhurst and had a very different experience—and I told him I went to the computer lab. He's like, "You guys had a computer lab?" I'm like, "Yeah, we'd fight for these 12 computers." And my options were: type my papers on a typewriter with whiteout and get the whiteout stuff in the keys, or go wait in line at the computer lab.

Kara Goldin:

They had just put brand new computers into the computer lab, and they were the iMacs. So, I had this beautiful experience with iMacs. You know, again, you're in it at the time, you just think like, "Oh, what are these things?" They're smaller than the mainframe computers and they actually are much more useful. I remember hearing about this guy Steve Jobs and thinking, wow, this is the most amazing thing, and clearly they were smaller than the mainframes but they were larger than what exists today.

Kara Goldin:

I think the first thing that I remember was technology used to be clunky and big and not as design-interesting to me. Then suddenly I saw what Steve had created at Apple and thought, "That's pretty darn awesome in a lot of levels. How do I learn more about this business?" So, that was when, you know, years later, when I moved to Silicon Valley, that was the first person... I think probably at college I heard about and, "Oh, Apple is based in Silicon Valley."



Kara Goldin:

Then I sort of let that sit in the file cabinet for a while. And then when I was moving to San Francisco, trying to think about, "Okay, do I stay with CNN or go do something else?" I thought, "How do I get a job at Apple?" Okay, well I'm not an engineer. I had a very difficult experience with coding in college and so I'm not trying to do that. Instead, I had heard about this small little company called 2Market that was doing CD-ROM shopping that was a spin out of Apple and a very not-talked-about project inside of Apple that was a Steve Jobs idea, called En Passant.

Kara Goldin:

So, I never worked for Steve. I never worked for Apple. But I worked for five guys that did work for Steve at Apple and I think I was just... For me, it was like, "If I could just get a job there eventually, hopefully they won't figure out that I know nothing about computing at all." I mean, I had this idea five years out of college that I had to have all this like computer experience in order to work for a computer company. Again, that's something I speak on, especially in college and MBA classes a lot, that you feel like, you know, you're going to go be an engineer, and so that's going to be for a tech company. But you may go and be an engineer for a lot of different companies. You may actually go and do... You may really enjoy marketing and beverages one minute, and then go and work for another industry.

Kara Goldin:

So, I think that that's just something that's not really talked about in school I think, and it should be talked about more. That it's just instead finding what the task is that you like, and what you're curious about, and why you like something, and then try and figure out, "How do I go do that for a while and not be so set on having it be perfect either?"

Melinda Byerley:

It's such a great... It's almost like you saw my questions in advance, but you didn't, so it's great. Because you're going exactly where I want to take you, which is, I want you to tell the story—even though it's in the book—about how you got your first job out of college.

Melinda Byerley:

Because I will tell the listeners that when I started reading Kara's book I... You know, we're both women of a certain age in Silicon Valley. We have some shared experiences. And I'm reading, and this story stopped me in my tracks. Because it told me something about you that I think is really cool. So, I'd like to hear you tell it in your words, like not just what you told in the book, but just tell people how you got your first job out of college.

Kara Goldin:

It's a funny one where, you know, again, when I was living it, it wasn't that funny. It became much more funny as I started hearing from people that thought it was funny over the years. So, the story was that I was living in Arizona. I only had one goal, and that was to actually leave Arizona. We were a super middle class family, the last of five. I mean, I was a journalism major with a minor in finance and I thought, I'm waitressing for side money while I'm in college and anyway, there was a guy that used to come in and sit



down at my table, and he knew I was graduating, and he was like, "What are you going to do when you graduate?" That horrible question that all seniors get from stupid adults, right?

Kara Goldin:

They say, "Oh, what are you going to do?" I had no idea what I was going to do. So, when I heard that he had a certain role, that sort of set me off on my journey of trying to figure out all these new jobs that existed out there. So, I knew I was eventually going to New York. I knew I wanted to live in a big city outside of Arizona. So, I went on this whole journey of cold calling people and asking people, "Who do you know in Chicago, who do you know in New York? I want to interview for anything. I want to just explore." We had a lot of people from accounting firms, and I think Anheuser-Busch came on campus too, but those weren't the jobs that I really wanted. Like, I didn't necessarily hate those companies, but I just couldn't see myself in those companies.

Kara Goldin:

So, that was when I finally knew I was going to New York. So, I thought my dream job was working for a brand that I really only started reading while I was in college: Fortune Magazine. It had taught me about making finance easier and more digestible in some way. So, I knew based on all the mastheads, that all of these magazines were in New York City. So, when I decided to reach out to the managing editor of Fortune Magazine—doesn't everybody do that when you're in college?

Melinda Byerley:

No, they don't. (Laughs)

Kara Goldin:

So, that's what I did. Right? Yeah. I wrote Marshall Loeb a letter and I said, "Hey, my dream job is working for you and I've been in finance classes," etcetera etcetera. And I get this note back from him and he said, "If you're ever in the New York area, definitely let me know, I would love to meet you." He didn't say, "We weren't hiring." So, I thought that there was a glimpse of possibility there. So, when I got to New York—he didn't tell me to call him ahead of time to set up a job interview. He just said...

Melinda Byerley:

He's your buddy.

Kara Goldin:

If you're in the area.

Melinda Byerley:

In your mind he's like, "My buddy, Marshall. I'll just call him when I get there."

Kara Goldin:

Totally. Right?



Melinda Byerley:

Yeah!

Kara Goldin:

So, I show up at the TimeLife Building where Fortune is housed (or was housed) and there's no security down at the bottom—that was before they needed all the security—and I walk up to the HR office and I ask somebody, "Hey, do you know where the HR office is?" They're like, "Oh, you know, it's on the twelfth floor." So, I go up there and I take my letter out of my little briefcase that I had and hand it to the person who... I mean, I can still see her face—the person who's the receptionist at the HR office—and I said, "Hi, I'm here to see Marshall Loeb." You know, I'm sure he's waiting for me. Right?

Melinda Byerley:

(Laughs) I love this!

Kara Goldin:

She said, "Well, wait. What?" I said, "Yeah. I have this letter." So, she looked at the letter and then she called the head of HR, because I mean, the poor woman didn't know what to do with me.

Melinda Byerley:

(Laughs)

Kara Goldin:

So, she said, "You know, there's this woman here." Whatever. So, the head of HR comes out and she said, "I think there's a misunderstanding. I think he meant if you're ever in the New York area..." Obviously, I look like I'm 21 years old, there was no secret there. She said, "I'm sorry, there's this misunderstanding, but unfortunately, he wouldn't even hire somebody at your... like, with no experience." Fortune is... They want experience.

Kara Goldin:

So, I'm listening to this whole thing, digesting it, and that's when I said, "Well, is there any other jobs in the building?" She said—well, you know, she felt sorry for me, I'm sure. And she said, "Well, actually, it's interesting, there is. There is a role that we've been trying to fill, and I'll give her a call if you're really interested." I said, "Sure." So, she did and I ended up interviewing.

Melinda Byerley:

The same day? Were you like, "I'll wait"?

Kara Goldin:

Yes! Right there.

Melinda Byerley:

That's amazing. (Laughs)



Kara Goldin:

What I found too—again, I share this story with so many new graduates or those who are almost ready to graduate—is, you know, I realized that obviously I'm coming in at the last minute for this interview, and this executive at Time says, "Okay, you know, what's your story?" I'm like, "I'm a new graduate. I had written some letter to Marshall and I was hoping that he was going to be able to interview me, and he couldn't. And that's why I'm here." I didn't even know what circulation was. I mean, It was just a warm body that was going to meet with me on short notice.

Kara Goldin:

So, I had told her about my journey. She said, "Oh, are you here meeting other people in New York?" I said, "Oh, I had a few others. I've actually been traveling for a month. I was in Chicago and LA and all these places that I'd never been before." I mean, we ended up having a two-hour meeting because she was just so curious about, "Wait, how did you get that meeting at Bain? How did you get that meeting at Anheuser-Busch?"

Kara Goldin:

I had talked to all these different companies and it was just it was so much. You know, I'm very curious, but I'm also this lifelong learner. I just felt every time I told somebody that I was headed to New York next, they wanted to be a helper. They wanted to connect me, because they heard my story of what I was doing.

Kara Goldin:

So, she was no different. And the two hour interview, I mean, she was laughing. She was like, "I cannot believe you." I mean, I had over 90 interviews. I had like over 60 job offers. Nothing crazy. I mean, they were one step above a mail room. Maybe a couple of them were mailroom-level. They were just entry level positions.

Kara Goldin:

I think that that's the thing. I mean, even for those people listening who maybe have kids or who are graduating themselves, that especially during challenging times—which I guess, when I was graduating it was the same thing, it was considered a challenging time; a lot of people were having a hard time finding a job—I mean, I've talked to many people who think, "Oh, I'm never going to be able to find a job. I'm graduating. It's a pandemic and it's a virtual world." Whatever. The reality is executives always need entry-level people. The people that are going to go and be the worker bees and help. Right? They need the helpers. It's the people during these times that are at the mid-level who are more challenged.

Melinda Byerley:

Mm-hmm.

Kara Goldin:

But don't put a roadblock in front of yourself to not be able to accomplish something. Especially during this time; I think it's really critical. So, anyway, that was my story. Long-winded way to say that it was a



super interesting way that I ultimately got to New York. But when you're in it, you don't think it's that funny. You just think it's kind of cool that you got a job at Time. That's all I did.

Kara Goldin:

Then the reality started to sink in that I was making \$25,000 a year and trying to live alone in New York City and didn't know anybody. You know, all these things that were real. I had never really managed a budget before. Right? My own personal budget. I was a kid. But I loved it in so many ways and it was a time when I really learned about myself. And I also really built resilience in many ways, because I had no idea what I was doing from day one. More than anything, what I realized is that kindness goes a long way and people really are willing to help if you share what your challenges are. Also, I think just more than anything, being curious is really valued and is such a valuable asset—even over having the right experience. It's really about, "Do you have curiosity and are you willing to go try things?"

Melinda Byerley:

So, you know, you've called yourself an accidental entrepreneur. Speaking as one founder to another, hearing that story, you can see the seeds of entrepreneurship in there, which is being willing to take a risk, trying things you don't know, sort of jumping and assuming the net will appear. Those, to me, are not accidental, but I do think it's a good segue to talk about your journey to becoming an entrepreneur. How do you think it's impacted the way you think about where Hint is now?

Kara Goldin:

Yeah. You know, it's funny. I was just interviewing somebody for a role and he asked me, "What do you worry about?" I think that the more challenges you have along the way, and you kind of get through those, it's kind of the way you've figured out how to smash down a wall or not make it important or focus on something else or however you want to visualize it. And I just don't really allow fears to kind of stop me. Instead what I really focus on, more than anything—and I think it's always easier to look back, to your point—then when you're in it, you don't necessarily see life this way but I think it's really—

Melinda Byerley:

Like Steve Jobs said, you can only connect the dots in hindsight.

Kara Goldin:

Yeah. It's enjoying the ride. I think for many years I used to say the "If it's meant to be" kind of thing, but I think it's more than that. I think it's actually, as I get older, it's really taking the time to focus on when you had challenging times and sometimes you think about those challenging times as, "I never want to go there anymore and think about that." But, you know, and maybe you're thinking about that during a pandemic. Right? You're trying to figure out exactly what the heck was this, why did this come into my life? Why did this stuff happen to me?

Kara Goldin:





But as I always say to people, there's always little grains of truth you can learn through failures—or I hesitate to even call things failures, because I think of them as challenges, and what we learn from those things to be a better human, a better leader, a better CEO, a better employee, whatever those things are.

Kara Goldin:

I think so often that people are not really taking the time to think about those things. And maybe to some extent, they are kind of being critical in some way too. Maybe about how they've done things. But for me, even the book I had totally turned in during January of last year, even before the pandemic, I thought, "You know, it's all turned in. It's all great. We just added Wal-Mart, Sam's Club." You know, we automated a lot of our production line, we were just ready to scale. It was all great. And then all of a sudden, the pandemic hits and I thought, "Oh my God. Here we come. How long is this going to last? We're losing a lot of our office business."

Kara Goldin:

You know, I can't say that when I was living in it, it wasn't stressful. But it was sort of like, "Okay, now what am I going to do?" Then my editor for my book passed away in March while all of this stuff was going on. I remember somebody said to me, "You actually seem relatively calm through this whole thing." I'm just like, "I think I've just built up so much resilience because I just know that situations are situations, but complacency is what will kill you, ultimately." So, you have to figure out how to keep moving forward no matter what the situation is.

Kara Goldin:

So, for me, I looked back on a lot of heavy stuff coming on my plate and when I looked at my business, which is my fifth child, I thought immediately about the 2008 to 2009 financial crisis—which I talk about that in the book—and how it was one of the worst times in our business. And I felt like I had a knife in my stomach. It was awful when I think back on it.

Kara Goldin:

What I remember most about that time and why it hurt so bad is that we didn't have enough money in the bank to operate. I've thought about many, many times over since then that if we would've had two years worth of money in the bank it would've been a lot better. We would've had the ability to sleep at night, but we didn't. So, we had to make some moves and it all ended up working out, but it was very stressful times.

Kara Goldin:

So, when the pandemic hit and we saw all this stuff happening and the offices were shutting down, I said to my CFO, "We need to raise money." He said, "We have plenty of money in the bank." I said, "No, no, no. We need two years worth of money."

Melinda Byerley:

Yeah. This isn't going away now. Yeah.



Kara Goldin:

This is not going away. But I don't know when it's going away and I'm not even going to take the time to make predictions. His response back was, "Well, everybody's sitting at home and no money people are going to meet with you. They're all on Zoom." I said, "Zoom is a tool. We need to figure out how to use this tool in order to do what we need to do, which is raise money." That is what I sat there and I focused on.

Kara Goldin:

Now, did people tell me over the past couple of years in particular that you should have a couple year's worth of money in the bank? It went in one ear and out the other, until I said, "What do I know and how do I not go back to 2008, 2009, because I don't want that stress again? So, now I look back on that time in 2008, 2009, as that was all meant to be for when I was managing during a pandemic, that I quickly knew exactly what to do. We went out and raised money. I would share with my friends and other colleagues that we were doing a raise. They said, "Are you kidding? I mean, seriously?" I mean, people laughed about it and again, being able to do something when not everyone is doing it is a really good thing.

Melinda Byerley:

That's a win. Oh yeah.

Kara Goldin:

Right? It's a win.

Melinda Byerley:

I mean, it's hard to know if you're too early or too late but I think with money it's hard to be too early.

Kara Goldin:

Yeah. No, totally. But again, if I wouldn't have gone through what I had been through... Again, it's book two for me. So many lessons learned about what stopped you and it's just because nobody's doing it. Or if 10 more people said to me that you can't do what you're doing because everybody's operating on Zoom right now, maybe I would've believed it. But that's a whole other strategy. It's like, instead go out and try it and don't allow people's opinions to stop you because they've never been through a pandemic either. They have no idea whether or not you're going to be able to raise money or not.

Kara Goldin:

So, that's how I view the world. Once you have enough of these in your belt, notches in your belt, then you just become much more willing and able to kind of just go and try.

Melinda Byerley:

I have found the conversations, the one I had with Tom Peters at the beginning of the pandemic because it was the second time I've interviewed him and he's much older than I am. And I was like, "What advice do you have for me?" He's like, "I've never been through a pandemic either." (Laughs) I mean, he was so



humble about that. And I think that also is what allows you to have that curious open mind, to say, "I've never experienced that before. There's opportunity here." This assumes, of course, that you're in a safe place and that you have all the privileges that we have, but once you're there then you can say to yourself, "Wait a minute. There's opportunity in change, and what is it?"

Kara Goldin:

Yeah. Totally. I really think it's a matter of being curious, but it's also a matter of just being willing to try.

Melinda Byerley:

Yeah.

Kara Goldin:

In almost every single instance that's really the way, whether it's a pandemic or whatever, right? That's the stuff that you really care about.

Melinda Byerley:

You know, your book is called *Undaunted*. And I'm sure I've mentioned it before, but I like the subtitle, which is "Overcoming Doubts and Doubters." Boy, is that an example. One of the questions I had was to ask you for an example of a doubt or a doubter that you overcame, but that seems like a pretty good list.

Kara Goldin:

Yeah. I mean, there's so many. And I think it really does boil down to something I just said too, which is that words are so powerful. I've thought about this a lot. I mean, the word Diet Coke, when I was thinking about starting my company and kind of how I had been fooled by this word "diet," right? I think it's the same way when you're in a new industry and somebody tells you, "Oh, I've been working in this industry for 20 years and this is the way things are done." You immediately give credibility to that person and maybe you give credibility to the person because they're senior, they have lots of years of experience, they've gone to the right school, whatever it is. And more than anything, I've learned to appreciate and frankly preach that they don't really know. Right? They have opinions too, and they don't even know the power of their words. Right?

Kara Goldin:

Unfortunately, when I see it stopping people and creating walls...I mean, the number of people who've said to me— even when I was starting a beverage company—they were more stressed about it than I was. Because I always felt like I could go back into tech. I had done a great job, so why couldn't I just go back? I could still go back into tech. I think, in many ways, what we're doing is a sort of under the radar direct to consumer play and we use tech to enable our business, which is what tech is for—what I think tech is for.

Kara Goldin:

But, I think so often that people just are stuck by sort of... They get psyched out. Right? Maybe they think about it as 'imposter syndrome' in some ways. I often think people don't even know the power of their words. You know, if you're a big soda executive, and here I am coming into your industry, you're just



telling me get lost because you don't want another competitor. You think, "Why in the world is the woman who has four kids under the age of six trying to start a beverage company?"

Kara Goldin:

I mean, there were so many reasons why nobody should've come to work for me in the early days. People always ask me, "How did you recruit people?" I'm like, "They were alive."

Melinda Byerley:

(Laughs)

Kara Goldin:

You know, I'm living in San Francisco in Pacific Heights, I had been a tech executive, I've now got kids practically on my hip and I decide to start a beverage company. The picture was not a pretty one on a lot of levels, and I had been successful in another industry but why did I think that I could be in this industry? I didn't have a good answer. I just said, "Oh, I don't know. Do you want to help me?" So, people always say, "Were you sad when people left after a year?" I'm like, "No, not really." It's a miracle that they even trusted me for that long, because I had no idea what I was doing.

Kara Goldin:

I think about those days fondly, because it's a story of how you're going to have different people at different stages along the way, and everybody's on their own journey, and you do your best to bring in people to follow your dream. But there definitely is something to be said, especially when you've got lots of years of experience, knowing what I know, I'd be more fearful of the little guy that is curious than the person who has 20 years experience, because they don't know how to go in the dirt. Right?

Melinda Byerley:

Isn't that the story? And as I get older and I watch people come in and they're young and they have ideas, I feel that as for myself, I've got to hold back, because you never know when that fresh idea is the thing that's going to be the thing.

Kara Goldin:

1000%. It's something that I always share with people too. When you hear from the venture capitalists that you really want them to invest in your company and they're like, "Oh, I'm afraid of the big guy." Well, I always say, "Do you think Microsoft could've done Facebook?" Of course they could, but they didn't. Right?

Melinda Byerley:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kara Goldin:

They probably poo-pooed his idea, Zuckerberg's idea, and said, "Who needs community?"



Melinda Byerley:

(Laughs) We have MySpace, why do we need Facebook?

Kara Goldin:

Why do we need that? Right? That is the story of so many industries. So, having said that, the venture community, I mean maybe there's a few people that would actually own the fact that it's the little guys that you worry about, but they still worry about the big guys. I mean, I always share with entrepreneurs, go look in the history book. Kodak, they saw digital. I'm sure they saw digital coming.

Melinda Byerley:

They did. The street saw it. If nobody else, the street saw it and said, "What are you doing?"

Kara Goldin:

Totally. They kept trying to convince everybody that this is not what we're doing, this is not the way of the world, but it was coming and they had plenty of time to jump in and they didn't. That is the story of business. Period. Any industry. I think it's one that so many aspiring entrepreneurs, students—maybe I'll go teach that class.

Kara Goldin:

So, I really think it's such a big miss for people. And then when you look at all of those things and figure out who you should ultimately be listening to, put those things hand-in-hand because they really are. It's not the giants. It's not the people with lots of experience. It's the people that think differently that are coming at it from solving a problem, or they're a consumer and they want this product and they'll be the ones that end up going and doing it.

Melinda Byerley:

People who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who can.

Kara Goldin:

Yeah.

Melinda Byerley:

That's such a great lesson. You have a podcast called Unstoppable, so I'm going to ask you the question you ask your guests, which is, what makes you unstoppable?

Kara Goldin:

Oh, you're so funny.

Melinda Byerley:

(Laugh) I do my best.

Kara Goldin:



Well, I think... Actually it's funny. Guy Kawasaki, I had him on my podcast and Guy said this to me—and I think it is true—I think there are things that stop people. It's kind of the key thing is, do you stay stopped? Do you pause for a minute and think about it and figure out, "How do I not stay complacent?" I think about this a lot.

Kara Goldin:

I think that my goal is not to focus on what I can't do and things that I fear, but recognize that those things exist. One of the chapters in the book is about how I have a fear of heights and I go out of my way to find things that are going to challenge that. It's not gone. I've had it my whole life. It's not gone. I psyched myself out even before these adventures that I take, but it's become easier along the way. It makes me more and more curious. When I think about the things that scared me and I've gotten through them, when I actually run into challenges that I didn't expect, it makes those that much easier.

Kara Goldin:

So, I think that being unstoppable for me just means you go figure it out and you just go try and appreciate the journey that you're on. Because I like to think that there's something out there that actually helps you to experience a lot of different things if you're open to it, but you have to know how to keep breaking through those things so that they don't seem so daunting.

Melinda Byerley:

Bill Gates and Warren Buffett have been very open about the role of luck in their success. I was really astonished to hear his story when I was reading Malcolm Gladwell's book about Outliers, and reading about what Gates has said about it. So, I'd love to ask you this question. What kind of a role does luck or fate play in your success?

Kara Goldin:

You know, I think I probably believe in a little bit of both. I think that fate is... You know, I think about those words and I think about kind of sliding doors a lot, how there's just different points along the way. For example, I met my husband Theo, whom I've been married to for 26 years, in a bar in New York City. My college kids love this story. That you can meet your husband anywhere.

Melinda Byerley:

Don't ever tell kids you can't meet the love of your life at a bar. (Laughs)

Kara Goldin:

Exactly. The bar is still there, which is so fun.

Melinda Byerley:

That's even more astonishing.

Kara Goldin:



I know. It's hysterical. Anyway, so if I wouldn't have actually gone into the one of thousands of bars in New York City that night, I probably wouldn't have met him. I probably wouldn't have moved to San Francisco. I probably wouldn't have worked at AOL.

Kara Goldin:

You know, all these things along the way that I just think are... They're just different paths. But they're choices and I think that more than anything, what I've learned is that things can... It really is sliding doors. And how people make different choices along the way. And I'm more likely to say yes to things more than saying no to things, because I think that every 'yes' in my journey has created new opportunities that generally turn out pretty good. Some of them are challenges along the way that I learn from, but I think that generally I'm a believer that there is a little bit of fate in there.

Kara Goldin:

Then you know, I think there is luck as well along the way too. How do I set myself up to running into those lucky situations? I think the more you do say, "yes," I think those kind of go hand-in-hand, if that makes sense. I think it's hard to be lucky and believe in fate if you don't actually say yes more.

Melinda Byerley:

Yeah. I forget who said it: "Luck is where preparation meets opportunity."

Kara Goldin:

Yeah, totally. It's just such an important thing to think about. I always encourage people to try and figure out how to make things happen. I mean, people ask me all the time, "How do you run a business, write a book, have a podcast?" I just launched an author series. All of this stuff. First of all, I enjoy all of them for different reasons, but they are all overlying satisfying towards my need for learning. I feel like I learn.

Kara Goldin:

I'm sure it's the same reason that you do your podcast. You learn all these things from interesting people, and interesting theories, and it just helps you to think more. I always say there's not enough hours in the day for everything I want to do and I mean that really sincerely because I'm constantly trying to figure this stuff out. I knew nothing about writing a book and publishing a book prior to embarking on it. It was never on my bucket list either, even though I was a journalism major and had so many people reach out to me.

Kara Goldin:

I sort of always make things simpler than maybe they were for me in the beginning. I'm like, "Here's what you got to do." Again, that's one person's opinion. More than anything, I always frame it that way because I know that words are sometimes really powerful to people and scary to people and writing a book was scary to me in the beginning. But then as I started getting going, I just learned so many things that are very similar to being an entrepreneur. You just have to keep moving forward and figure out how do you have little wins along the way? There's things that you can't control. I can't control that there aren't online events or big conferences right now.



Melinda Byerley:  
Sporting events. Yeah.

Kara Goldin:  
Right?

Melinda Byerley:  
Things like that.

Kara Goldin:  
Yeah. But you figure out another way to do it and get something done. Maybe it's not at the same level, but I think it's also the fact that my book is not going to go away tomorrow. It's got a long tail on it too. So, that's... Anyway, that's the kind of stuff that I think about.

Melinda Byerley:  
Two last questions because I know I have to let you go to go on to your next meeting.

Kara Goldin:  
Yeah.

Melinda Byerley:  
They're ones we ask all of our guests too because it's interesting to compare. The first one is, what do you wish you had learned earlier as an entrepreneur? I call this the lesson of, "I would've saved so much time if I had just understood this from the beginning."

Kara Goldin:  
Yeah. Well, it's interesting. I think actually, I believed that experience just really means that people know what they're doing. And I think that that, if you can stay at a company for a long period of time or work in an industry for a long period of time, then you must know something. What I've realized is that's not necessarily true, that you can stay inside of a company—and I think that the larger the company, it's actually easier to fly under the radar. I'm sure you've worked in many companies too, when you're in kind of a startup and a growing startup, it's harder because you've got to contribute and...

Melinda Byerley:  
You can't hide.

Kara Goldin:  
Everybody's looking around... You can't hide. Right? But, when you're in a large company...

Melinda Byerley:  
You can hide for years. (Laughs)





Kara Goldin:

You can. Right? If you know how to play it. So, no one ever told me that. What I think is most needed is people who are willing to kind of be scrappy. They don't necessarily all want to be a CEO or be leaders, but instead people that are doers and people that have tried things along the way. I wish I would've known that because I probably spent a lot of time thinking, "Oh my gosh, I've got to find those people with years of experience in order to get my company off the ground or solve that problem for me." The reality is those weren't the people that solved my problems. I solved my problems. It's kind of like, misery is company. I found that I could actually think better when I was around people that had solved hard problems in their industry.

Kara Goldin:

So, even like one other thing that I'll say—not really answering that question but an add-on to that question—is that people are always asking me in the beverage industry about which beverage conferences and food shows do you go to. I go to some, but to be honest with you, I've been more likely to go to other industry events because those are the ones where I think better. I'm not sitting there trying to compare myself in some way. Instead, if I'm trying to figure out stuff around direct-to-consumer then maybe I go sit at an internet event. Where there's not a lot of other people that are kind of doing the same thing that I'm doing. That's where I really learn the most, to go and be different in some way.

Melinda Byerley:

Super insight. Last question for you. I love this in the line of this last question, because you talked about how there are lots of people who sort of think they know what they're talking about, and they do in their own area, but it may not apply to you. This is the inverse of that question, which is, what is the best advice you were ever given?

Kara Goldin:

It sounds sort of cliché, but trust your gut, right? I think that people don't really absorb that until they need to absorb that. And maybe they have some experience around it, but it sort of goes hand-in-hand with what I just explained around experience. I think that critical thinking and just being able to kind of speak up and ask questions and really trying to figure it out... Almost gamify something inside of your head around, "Can I problem solve?"

Melinda Byerley:

Mm-hmm.

Kara Goldin:

It's not just about dreaming, but also kind of doing all the steps along the way and getting in the dirt, if that makes sense. I think that really goes back to this idea around trusting your gut, because it's hard to trust your gut if you don't have the ability to execute and go do something. Instead, you just sit there in awe of other people.

Kara Goldin:



I would go back to trusting your gut. If you really stop and think about it and spend some time on recognizing how you've done things when you actually have to. I mean, when I lived in New York City for the first few months, I didn't know anybody. And there were times that were a little scary. I figured out: It was during a time when it wasn't that safe in New York and I figured out I shouldn't walk in Central Park by myself when it started getting dark. That was really stupid. Instead, I figured out how to walk on a street that had lots of people on it. Nobody told me that. I mean, it sounds crazy, but nobody told me that. I think that just paying attention and trusting your gut really is the most important thing.

Melinda Byerley:

Kara, thank you so much for joining me on the podcast. I really appreciate your time.

Kara Goldin:

Yeah, thank you so much.

Speaker 1:

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