



Season One: Episode Five.

Interview with Gideon Mzembe

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Welcome everyone to the very first solo episode of Bold and Brave. After the last 4 amazing interviews I wanted to mix things up a little bit. Because, while it's all well and good to listen to cool people showing up in incredible ways, I want this here podcast to be more. I want us to learn from each other, to take the lessons that we hear from these interview and think about how we can apply them to our lives. That's why I am going to jump in here every so often and do one of these 'reflection' episodes.

What do I mean by reflection? Well, I went back and listened to the interviews so far and read over the show notes. I scribbled down a whole lot of trends that popped up in the conversations that I think are worth talking about more. Today we are going to dig a little deeper into two of these themes, and I'm going to introduce myself to y'all a little bit more. If at any point you've been listening to an episode and you think 'agh, I'd like a bit more of a deep dive into that topic, reach out! I can't express enough how I want to build this as a conversation, a community.

So, are you ready?

Before we go too much further into this series, I figured there's benefit in me spending a little bit of time sharing my story. Because, as you'll see, this is important.

I consider mine to be a journey that really highlights the profound impact of understanding and embracing who you are. Warts and all. For as long as I can remember in my business I have talked about my underpinning belief of 'enoughness'. The 'not good enough' mindsets are powerful and it's one that I have battled with (and continue to do so) myself. But in reality you are already good enough, just the way you are. But through our life experiences we've come to the point where we no longer see or believe in that. And this was my story, and the journey that I've taken in my work and in building my business Promote Her.

I've always had a strong 'do gooder' attitude even as a kid. Armed with a degree in sociology, I set out to work in international development, dreaming of creating meaningful change in underprivileged communities. However, life as we know has all sorts of twists and turns to navigate. Well, my twists and turns placed me square in the field of human resources, which fed into a deep-seated passion to improve people's lives and work. This of course was a little naive and despite going back for a Masters degree in HR and sticking it out for a good 15 or more years (some would say I am a slow learner), I learned that HR really wasn't where I was going to make my



mark. Throughout time constantly felt the misalignment between my personal values and those of my employers. Not that any of my employers were bad, but this misalignment sparked a fire within me—a deep desire to seek work that authentically aligned with my values and skills and enabled me to make a more profound impact.

But there was a problem with this grand claim.

Because this awareness came about the same time as my long-term marriage started dissolving. A point when I realised I didn't actually know who the fuck I was. How could I truly do work that aligned with my values when I didn't know what they were? How could I do work that I loved and make an impact in the world when I wasn't sure what my skills were. If I had any at all?

I had spent the vast majority of my twenties and thirties, working, building a home and marriage, having babies, doing all the 'typical' things. Now I don't know about you, but as a woman growing up in a not-so-wealthy home, there was one thing that was drilled into me. Get a good education and a good job, maybe get married and you'll be 'financially' safe. Which is what I did. It was 'on paper' working too. Then that big life moment happened. Divorce. Now apart from all the practical things that come with a relationship ending, there is the big existential questions that hit you too. Who am I when I am not one-of-two? How do I navigate this next phase of my life?

Now it doesn't have to be divorce that happens to you for you to get this kind of life shake-up. I've had a number of clients that have talked about other key life moments where they felt side-swiped by the 'who am I' question. Parents passing. Children leaving home. Being made redundant or facing a substantial health crisis.

Listening to both Andrea and Gideon speak about their journey in their respective interviews made me reflect on this. Andrea mentioned that it was the passing of her mother that made her start her personal growth journey. Gideon spoke of his moment on the cliffs at Kangaroo Point here in Brisbane where he realised that he was more. For Leanne it was her experiences with her post-natal mental health. These are very different, but similar experiences.

Writers call this the dark night of the soul, It's that moment of reckoning that makes you shift your thinking, and often the trajectory of your life.

During this time, a very fortunate passion was unfolding —my love for photography. I found joy in capturing moments that celebrated the beauty and authenticity of my clients. It was through the lens of my camera that I felt like I could hold up a mirror and show my clients how other people saw them. A perspective that was outside of the conditioning and doubts that they had about themselves. It was a bit magical. It also started to make me question the way that I was thinking about myself. How could I recognise that my worth and my impact were not defined by other people. I had to dig deep, connect with myself in ways that I had ignored when I was doing the career, wife and parenting juggle.



But it wasn't just about the photography. Because I was building my own business at this point, and I needed to work out what MY brand was. This is one of those moments where I realise that there is a greater force that may be pushing your hand. It was where I saw the overlap between my personal journey within and the external journey of building a brand. They are powerfully similar.

See I see a personal brand, no matter what your work is, as a way to authentically share your stories, a way to embrace our strengths as powerful business differentiators and to use what matters to us, our values, as a way to make a difference in the world. The fire in me was lit.

But there was another challenge to face.

While I was on an evangelical quest to talk to everyone about personal branding I started to get a LOT of push back. In my photo shoots I would ask clients 'what's the brand we are trying to share here?' "what are the values of this brand?" "What makes you stand out from the others doing this kind of thing. More often than not, they had no answer. And when I dug a little deeper, most of my clients would tell me that they didn't know what their values were, and laughed when I asked them about their strengths.

What breaks my heart more than ever is that for many of my clients they didn't even believe they had any strengths. Ugh... I've got so much to say on the conditioning of women...

Then, there was the whole body image thing. When you don't like how you look, it's hard to have your photo taken. It's hard to admit that you need to have photos to put on your website or social media feed (remembering that me, and most of my clients did not grow up in the selfie era). And let me tell you, in the over 8 or so years I've been photographing women professionally, I can probably count on one hand the number of women who are happy with how they look. Tears were more common than ease at photoshoots.

But, in another example of work and life mirroring each other, as I worked with clients who felt limited by self doubt and body image issues, I had to confront my own. I had to challenge my fears about societal expectations of my worth based on what I looked like.

I soon came to realise that what set me apart from others as a photographer was what I actually disliked about myself the most. My body. It was the compassion and manner that I had with my clients as a result of my own personal journey. What I saw as something shameful became something to practice accepting and owning.

Now, while there is so much more to my own story that I want to share, this is the main reflection point that I wanted us to discuss in this episode. Your story. And I want to discuss this in two parts; your story as the sum of the journey you've taken to get where you are right now, and secondly, your story as in how you show up and share your message.



Consider this. There's loads of photographers. There's photographers that have specialise in personal branding like me. They may have even done the same training as me. They may be the same age, from the same city. But those other photographers aren't me. They haven't had the same life experiences that I've had. They don't have the same personality traits, values and passions that I have. In fact, even with so many similarities, they are still so different from me, it's hardly a comparison. And I think this is something that we forget.

There is no way that you can be duplicated. So no matter what you do do, you are special. And with that uniqueness comes your own story, your own language. Your own unique way to make an impact in the world. Each of the guests that we met shared their origin story with us. In each case it was the process of following the threads of experiences that led them to where they are. The threads gave them the motivation and the unique perspective to show up in the way that was right for them.

Now I've shared parts of my story with you today, some of the key stepping stones you'd say, that have led to me to the work that I do. When I look back on these key points in my life I am more able to start to see linkages and patterns. So I'd like to encourage you to consider this as an activity.

Give yourself time and space to spend charting your own journey so far. Grab a pen and paper and go back as far as you like. I want you to create a timeline of key points in your life. And I am not just thinking about education and work experience; dig deeper. What are some of your core memories or experiences that shaped you in some way. What impact did they have on you? What are some of the decisions that you made in your life, or maybe it was decisions that were made for you as a child that had an impact. Starting school, subjects that you loved, passions or hobbies that you got into. I liked to look at mine a little like a dot-to-dot. I can see how one thing may lead to another, or where the path may have veered off for a while (or a decade) but now I can start to see how that undergrad degree actually did have an impact. The idea of this activity is to help you to see in a bigger picture way that there is a path in your life that you are following, but what when you are down in the trenches, so to speak, seeing this is hard.

For added benefit with this exercise you can also go through those key points and highlight for yourself the lessons that you learned, whether they are life lessons, work redirections, or just a few extra skills you picked up along the way. This will help you really get clear on just how significant you are. It will highlight the multitude of ways that do things that are unique and of value.

In her interview Leanne talked about the tapestry of her work and life experiences and how they weaved together to make the unique fabric of who she is and the work she does. We followed the breadcrumbs of Andrea's journey into the work she does and for Toks it was realising the combined interest in fashion and also taking a stand against division, that led him to where he is today. Gideon highlighted that for him, he has leveraged his skills and talents in sports and personal training as the starting point for building his mindset coaching skills and further into speaking. Each of these emphasise the benefits of using their unique building blocks as a way to deliver their work.



Then of course is the other way that your story matters. In how you show up and share your message.

When you own and embrace the journey you've taken, skills you've acquired and embedded these into your work, the next question is, how can we share this with others?

Sharing my story about grappling with self-doubt became what attracted clients to me. But this isn't just about selling. It's about the power of representation and diversity of voice. In the interviews with Andrea, we touched on the fact that no one shares their messages in quite the way that they do. Andrea talked about other women who are standing up for and advocating for plus size women. But that no one else is doing it the way that she is, and that there is power in her voice in this mix.

There are a couple of billion people in this world, and you know that super star in your industry, the one you look up to and think 'woah, I could never say it as good as them. I could never be as good as them' well, it's fair to say that not all of the billions are going to resonate with their message. If everyone is out there trying to copy this industry leader, and do things the way they do, then it becomes a big cacophony of sameness. There's no difference to the message. No variety. Some of people need to hear your your version, in a different way, from a different perspective, and it may just be your perspective that helps them succeed.

The more different perspectives that are out there, the more chance we have of being heard. But we have a tendency to shy away from the parts of our story that we think are shameful. Like me and my body image. See so often we see something from our past, addiction, mental health challenges, the stigma of being in a larger body. We try and deny or hide them from the narrative that we create for the outside world. But when we do we are missing something powerful. These moments, the dark night experiences are what makes us human, and it's our humanity that matters. When we are showing up in any way, whether that is as a leader, in business, as a friend, colleague or even to ourselves, we need to remember that we are human. We have faults and we've made mistakes. But our humanity is what helps us to connect to others. It's what makes us real. It's also our humanity that makes us want to do the work that we are doing. It's what drives us to make a difference.

And in the conversation with Tokes, he even commented on the way that many of us, see our 'weirdness' and think to hide it. Think that others won't like it. But it is our weirdness that makes the world so magical. It's when we dull that shine that we start to blend in with the crowd and disappear.

And here's another thing I want you to consider. We all say we value authenticity. We want people to be truthful to us, but so many of us hide our true selves to others and even ourselves.

Your story is the intersection of potential conformity or genuine authenticity. You can tell a story that skims the truth, that is polished and refined in a way that makes you blend in. OR, you can tell your story in a gutsy real way. A way that reeks of vulnerability and authenticity. And what the interviews we've heard so far tell us, is that when you embrace your story, your impact sky-rockets.



So, I think that I will leave you here on that note.

I am a bit nervous about this as my first solo episode, but it's been fun. I am sure over time I will get a little more structured and comfortable with this format. Because I think that it's going to be valuable for us to talk like this about the interviews.

So today's take aways are all about the importance of your story, both in owning the likely diverse and meandering way you've come to this point in your career, and acknowledging that you have so many valuable life experiences and lessons to share because of it. But also, recognising the value that sharing your story, in whatever form works is powerful, not just for your business or career, but because authentic stories from diverse voices change perceptions, enable dialogue and show our younger generations that it doesn't have to be all so homogenous and same. That we can all live boldly and bravely in our own ways.

There's something powerful in embracing where you've been on your journey, and pulling together all the threads of and weaving them together. We all have a story and Each of us has a story, that intricate tapestry of joys, triumphs, and even challenges. But sometimes, we overlook the power and beauty of our own journeys. We forget that our stories have the potential to inspire, uplift, and ignite change.

[Act 4: The Importance of Personal Stories]

[Act 5: Practical Tools for Understanding Your Story]

Now, let's explore some practical tools that can help you begin to understand and embrace your personal story:

Journaling: Engage in the practice of journaling. Write freely and authentically about your thoughts, feelings, and aspirations. Use it as a tool for self-expression and self-discovery. The act of putting pen to paper can unlock hidden insights and reveal the unique chapters of your life.



Seek Feedback: Reach out to trusted friends, mentors, or family members and ask them how they perceive your strengths, talents, and contributions. Their insights can shed light on aspects of your story that you may not have fully recognized.

Identify Themes: Look for recurring themes or patterns in your life. Are there particular values, passions, or causes that consistently show up? Identifying these themes can help you shape your personal brand and infuse authenticity into your story.

As I conclude today, I invite each and every one of you to embark on your own personal story exploration. Embrace the power of your journey, acknowledge your accomplishments, and find strength in your unique narrative. Remember, your story matters, and by understanding and embracing it, you become a beacon of inspiration for others.

Let us build bridges of personal empowerment, ignite the flame of authenticity, and celebrate the beauty of our personal stories. As women in our early 40s, we have the power to transform our lives, uplift one another, and create a ripple effect of positive change.

Thank you for being part of this journey with me.

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