

41. Kara Goldin

[00:00:00] **Sonali:** kara. I am so excited to have you on my show. Welcome.

[00:00:03] **Kara:** Thank you for having me.

[00:00:05] **Sonali:** Could you start by giving us a summary of your career transition?

[00:00:11] **Kara:** Sure. Well, I started my career actually in journalism. I wanted to be a writer initially for fortune magazine, which never ended up turning out the way that I wanted, but I ended up going to time magazine.

[00:00:29] And actually started my career in circulation, which I didn't even know what circulation was when I took the role, but circulation essentially is, subscriptions. And so a lot of the background that I use today to help me to really understand what's going on in direct to consumer. I was recruited out of time to go to what I would term a late stage startup back in the early nineties called [00:01:00] CNN. And it was still at a time when Ted Turner was running around the office and telling everybody there has to be 24 hour news. I was living in New York at the time, met my husband. He was graduating from law school. He decided to look out west in San Francisco because that's where all the technology stuff was happening. So we were engaged and moved out to San Francisco. I had really followed this guy, Steve jobs, and I thought, how do I get a job at apple? And couldn't figure that out at the moment. But while I was doing some research, I stumbled upon a little startup that was actually developed by Steve himself inside of apple. And the idea was to take graphics because we were still at a point in history where it was dial up service. And basically graphics had a very difficult time getting across the center. In any type of speed, so everything [00:02:00] would slow down. So Steve had this idea to put the graphics on a disc and just tell the consumer to insert the disc and upgrade.

[00:02:07] Many ways I credit Steve for that whole concept and the consumer doesn't need to know why to upgrade. They just know that they should upgrade. And so the idea was figure out whether or not we could make e-commerce and shopping happen online. So I cold called the five members who worked for Steve at apple, who were incubating this company called to market. That's when I disclosed that I had worked for this company called CNN. And the gentlemen that I got on the phone said, what's Ted Turner. He was so enamored by this idea of another visionary entrepreneur and he said why don't we grab coffee or

lunch? And so that's. What I did and walked away from the meeting with a job offer.

[00:02:55] And the job would be to go out and get these retailers. And

[00:03:00] I thought, I don't know how to do that. And so I took the role and then I just started cold calling everybody from Mickey Drexler at the gap to 1-800-FLOWERS and J crew.

[00:03:13] This was 1994 e-commerce was almost an impossibility because of the speed of where things were. One of our investors America online decided to acquire us. And so as part of the acquisition, they asked me to come inside of America online and be the vice president of e-commerce and shopping partnerships. It was one of the few women Level and the youngest vice president. I was managing a group of 200 people and really making e-commerce and shopping happen again in a time that nobody was quite sure it actually would happen. And it was at that [00:04:00] point when I was looking at not only their health and trying to figure out what do I put in their bodies but also my own. And I had gained a lot of weight over the course of my pregnancies. I had also developed terrible adult acne over the course of many years that I didn't even have as a teenager. I never connected the weight and the acne together, or my low energy, but that's when I started looking at maybe it's something that I'm putting in my body, maybe I'm, having. Too many preservatives. When I looked down at my diet soda and started looking at the ingredients and diet Coke in particular and.

[00:04:43] I didn't understand what I was drinking. And yet I had been so careful about what I was preparing for my children. And I thought maybe I should put this to the side and just start drinking water. That'll be better for me. But there was one problem that was that [00:05:00] water was so boring. And so I started slicing a fruit and putting it in water. I kind of wondered if I was cheating. I just thought. Making it tastes better, but I don't know if there's any calories or but at least it's making me drink or drink the water. And so two and a half weeks later after having this experience, I lost over 24 pounds. My skin cleared up and my energy levels were back. My curiosity at that point really sort of took over because I thought what just happened? Am I doing something else that's causing all of this to happen? And that's when , I started looking at this point for a water, similar to what I had made in my kitchen, in the stores, because I miss the convenience of being able to go to the store and buy my diet Coke, 12 pack.

[00:05:53] And I was shocked. All of the different products that were on the shelf. I [00:06:00] kept seeing healthy perception versus healthy reality because everything had a sweetener in it.

[00:06:05] Many of them had coloring, many of them had preservatives. And I thought maybe while I'm taking a break from my tech executive role I will develop this product. I'll just get a product on the shelf. And then I'll go back to my tech role.

[00:06:24] I had this idea for a product and for a company. But what, I didn't know. Was that I was developing an entirely new category called unsweetened flavored water, which no matter what industry you're launching a new category it just takes more time. Because when you. Wait for the consumer to catch up to where you're at. And also maybe convince buyers, grocery buyers. Your product is wanted by consumers. Even [00:07:00] though you're the only company that's doing it all of these lessons along the way I decided to jump in and that's how hint was born.

[00:07:10] And 16 years ago that I launched the company. I was pregnant with my fourth child when I decided I had committed to myself to write the business plan

[00:07:22] **Sonali:** What a fascinating story. I read the article that you had written, where you described receiving the letter from the editor. I think for the fortune magazine, making that trip to New York, asking for an appointment from him. The thing that really stood out to me was, every time the receptionist said no, than you thought it was a, maybe if she said a, maybe you thought it was a yes. And so I wonder. Is that a characteristic that's prevailing in entrepreneur?

[00:07:58] **Kara:** It's a good [00:08:00] question. I was the last of five kids and when I really wanted to do something, I would be very persistent. And my dad was so used to saying no to everything. I had two very naughty brothers who obviously came before me. So anytime I wanted to go to a party or do anything right. No, and so I'd always come up with rationale my dad used to say Kara, the problem is that you, always believe that no means maybe, and maybe means yes. My father encouraged me to come up with reasons why this was really important. And, and he would also say things like tell me what the worst that could happen.

[00:08:41] I think that that training is. Amazing for an entrepreneur. It's really about figuring out not being too frightened by the goal and instead, just figuring it out.

[00:08:55] **Sonali:** Do you have an example for doubts or doubters that you personally overcame? [00:09:00]

[00:09:01] **Kara:** Well, one of the stories that I share in my new book actually is my encounter with a Coke executives. So it came at about a year into building hand. I was getting really frustrated because we were in about 10 stores in the San Francisco bay area. One of them was whole foods my main store. They kept moving the bar up. They said you have a three-week shelf life. I really need an eight week shelf life. That was really hard to get a three-week shelf life, but now you want an eight week shelf life. So then I kind of tuned eight week shelf life, and then they wanted four more weeks shelf life, and then it was six months. Every time I'm coming in, I'm running out of answers at this point. And then they also said we can't just have you in the San Francisco area. We want you in Colorado? We want you in some other states and eventually across the us and.[00:10:00]

[00:10:00] Didn't know how to handle that. I said, do you have a phone number for a distributor in some of these states? I had enlisted my husband to come and help me. But it was really overwhelming in addition to having four kids under the age of six. I just didn't know how to figure this out. So a friend introduced me to a senior person from Coca-Cola and he graciously offered to have a phone call with me. So I described what I had launched in the bay area and he interrupted me and said, sweetie, Americans love sweet. Nobody really wants this product. Did he just call me sweetie. And I, zoned out for a minute was a little bit angry and frustrated. And then I came back in and just decided to listen to what he had to say. The consumer for this product and not my product, but the consumer of the future. And what he believed was that diet drinks needed to [00:11:00] get to zero calories. He said that the consumer actually wants sweeter things they don't want unsweetened things. I'm just continuing to let him. Doubt me when we hung up the phone, I'm quite sure he thought that he had convinced me to just close up shop and just end this crazy idea . I thought to myself the consumer that he's talking about is not my consumer, my consumer were were sharing with me that they like me had a very difficult time drinking water. And so they enjoyed a water that they had found at whole foods that had just fruit in it. I was meeting people who were using this product hint as a tool to help them. Get healthy . It was the first time I had ever heard of this disease called type two diabetes. 16 years ago, it was about one and a half percent of the population had type two diabetes and so I thought I have a choice. I either [00:12:00] convince

him or not. If I convince him It might take them a little while to turn the cruise ship around so I thought instead I'm going to put the gas on and keep trying to find the consumer. You're always going to have doubts of your own. And then you're always going to find the doubters, but you just really have to consider the source.

[00:12:24] **Sonali:** And is that how you would describe a fearless entrepreneur?

[00:12:29] **Kara:** Every human has fears and anybody who says that they don't have fears is in denial or lying but the key thing with the best entrepreneurs are they embrace those fears and they figure out how to get through them. That is something that I encourage everybody to do because nobody wants to live in fear. It's just not, what humanity is meant to do. And I think the number one fear that most people have is [00:13:00] failing. I think tackling those things and really recognizing that what you learn about yourself, it way outweighs actually the fear of not doing it.

[00:13:11] **Sonali:** And I'm curious to know what led you to write the book.

[00:13:15] **Kara:** I was at. Four years to share my story about building hint.

[00:13:23] About five years ago, I started journaling and my prompt for what I would write about when I went back to my hotel room was these questions at the Q and a at the end. Somebody would ask.

[00:13:38] What was it like to raise money as a woman? And rather than saying it was terrible I thought I would share a story about why I thought the way that I thought. Every time I told a story that went along with it, people would write to me, they would email me.

[00:13:58] And say you're [00:14:00] authentic, you're engaging. What I realized is that I wasn't any different than other people.

[00:14:07] Other people had stories too, but so often people wouldn't want to share their stories. They fear sharing their stories. I don't know why, particularly women, wouldn't share these stories and, I thought if I. Put these stories into a format that allows people to be inspired to know that they can actually achieve something this book would be great for an entrepreneur.

[00:14:33] To some extent it was an apology to my daddy, even as a, frustrated entrepreneur. And as a kid, I didn't really understand everything he was going

through. Being in world war II and also having five children, the risk of, actually switching jobs and being happy, he didn't want to disrupt. His children's life and his ability to put food on the table and his ability [00:15:00] to put a roof over our house and things like that, that I truly value today.

[00:15:07] **Sonali:** I'm a big fan of journaling and I read your book of course. And I loved it. I read some of the reviews and I was very interested to get your opinion on the fact that Adam Grant describes you as a dreamer and a doer. And Jamie diamond credits you for bringing the idea of him. To life.

[00:15:31] And I think what I took away from it is that as an entrepreneur, not only do you have vision, but you have what it takes to execute to it, I think that's rare quality, but I'd love to get your opinion.

[00:15:48] **Kara:** Well, as I always say, Ideas are a dime a dozen, and it's your ability to actually execute. Which includes building a team and being able [00:16:00] to really leading that effort. And no matter what comes along. I've had more people call me Zen, especially through this entire pandemic. An we're an essential product. So there was a lot of pressure during March of last year, when it's our responsibility to make sure that shelves are actually stocked.

[00:16:22] I had never been through a pandemic before, so I had no idea what was going on. And we were also sharing that with our team while they were hearing everybody was to shelter in place. We said, here's your end 95 mask and your gloves and, and your hand sanitizers and. As an essential worker, you're actually getting out there and getting into stores and working.

[00:16:45] So leading through that crisis my book was already turned in before any of that happened, but it really is an execution piece too

[00:16:58] I spoke at [00:17:00] two, an engineering College a few years ago. And I think I really upset , the person who was head of the college, because I said, if you want to be mark Zuckerberg at Facebook, you actually need to know how to bring in Cheryl. And bring in people who really understand where your weaknesses are. And sometimes if you don't really know yourself well enough that, and you're really just focused on a task. Those are not the people that are gonna end up running the company. You could even make a ton of money being an engineer. You can have great jobs, but if your dream is to be a visionary entrepreneur, And you're an engineer, then you have to have an appreciation for marketing and really understand how to read a balance sheet, how to appreciate salespeople . [00:18:00] The ability to hire people who are better than you at

that, or who want to do those roles every single day is super important, but also being able, when you have a crisis, to go in and you can actually see exactly what's going on as a.

[00:18:18] Founder, as a CEO of a . 16 years later, it's very rare for a founder to still be the CEO and people have asked me, how did you do that? Again, hiring great people who support you, but also knowing a little bit about a lot in the company. it wasn't.

[00:18:41] My goal was not to compete against Amazon. I really thought about there's going to be consumers as we grow e-commerce that are going to want choice and are going to want more selection. I learned when I was at that little startup with the disc to market and [00:19:00] then America online.

[00:19:01] And so again, really being able to stay scrappy being able to figure things out looking at your puzzle as it's never done. You just keep growing it, you will keep having challenges, but your ability to S to recognize that you can get through challenges because you've been through challenges and you've got great people who can help you do that is, is just so key.

[00:19:33] Fascinating, Kara. It was so much fun chatting with you. Is there anything that I should have asked? And I did.

[00:19:40] You're a terrific interview, it was amazing. Definitely if you haven't tried hint definitely give hint to try you can get it@drinkin.com.

[00:19:52] **Sonali:** Can we find hint in the, in the Northeast.

[00:19:56] **Kara:** Store all stores, Costco [00:20:00] target Sam's club were nationwide at all the stores fresh markets lots of different stores everywhere, and then also online. And hopefully you'll get a chance to pick up the book as well on daunted, overcoming doubts and doubters at lots of bookstores nationwide, and also on him.

[00:20:22] **Sonali:** Thank you so much for your time, Kara.

[00:20:24] **Kara:** Thank you.

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