



Becoming Flawesome

What if your flaws could become your strengths? Kristina Mänd-Lakhiani sits down with James to explore the concept of her book, *Becoming Flawesome*.



Kristina Mänd-Lakhiani

James: James Schramko here, welcome to my podcast. This is episode 1017. Today, we're going to be talking about becoming flawsome with Kristina Mänd-Lakhiani. Welcome to the call.

Kristina: Thank you, James, so much for having me.

James: Yeah, look, it's always good to catch up. I've seen you in real life several times. Sometimes when I visit conferences, we've even had some meals together, which has been great, and been in many different countries, which is amazing. And it's great to see what you're doing. Of course, some people recognize the surname, you co-founded Mindvalley, with your then husband Vishen, and [he's been on the show, too](#).

So it's really great to just sort of round out, maybe we'll get another generation in the future. Who knows? You've been pretty busy; you're an entrepreneur, writer, speaker, philanthropist, mother. And you've been pretty heavily involved in the personal transformation industry.

Self help in the Russian market

And I believe you took it to Russia, which must have been a fascinating venture.

Kristina: Yeah. Well, thank you so much for welcoming me. And you know, when I saw your name in my calendar, I felt so comfortable. I was like, Oh, thank God, someone I know. So thank you for that. I totally share in the pleasure of talking to someone that you know in real life, and actually, you do know me from the time when I was doing Mindvalley in Russia.

I get quite often that question in the English-speaking market, So where have you been? Because I've been a co-founder of Mindvalley from the beginning, which is 20 years ago. And of course, people are surprised, Where have you been? Well, I worked in Russian market until recent events. So I'm not new to that industry. But I'm very new to the English-speaking audience.

James: I heard somewhere, and I have to ask you if this is true or not, is it true that in the Russian market, there weren't some of the actual words to describe self-help?

Kristina: Until now. Well, a lot of the new ideas come to Russia from English-speaking world. I'm not sure if that's going to continue. But for the 30 years past Soviet Union, that has been the case. So some of the words, since actually, you know, translation was one of the professions I got as a child, like a long, long time ago. I know that a lot of translations have been done inaccurately, and a lot of meanings have been a little twisted. But yeah, even my book title is a huge question, we still don't know how it's going to be translated.

James: Wow, that's something so personal. And it must be one of those things that actually could be quite a difficult decision to be involved with, because you're so close to it. I've enjoyed learning about that market through watching movies, of course, you know, like the Chernobyl series, I watched, and I watched one about Tetris, which was fascinating. And I know they're all made for movies.

But it's really interesting that you've made that translation. And I'm sure you've helped a lot of people with the work that you've been doing, and you're about to help a whole lot more. You have a book, Becoming Flawesome. And it'd be great to talk about that today.

Kristina: Yeah, you know, on your previous remark, I feel like I was Don Quixote, you know, fighting the windmills, sometimes, trying to translate certain concepts and convey certain concepts. And Russian market has been very curious, because in essence, people are the same. But then our background does influence very much our perception of things.

I have stepped away from that market now. And I'm fully immersed in English-speaking language and enjoying it very much. In fact, you know, I started writing my book in Russian, because I had many more contexts in Russia and I had context to the publishers there, the biggest publishers there and everything.

But then, as I started writing, I remembered that classical song, If you have made it here, you've made it everywhere, about New York. [laughs] And I thought, No, I'll start in English, I won't do it in Russian. And that was before the war. So of course, nowadays, it would have been even more complicated.

Success versus authenticity

But yeah, about my book. It's my baby. I've been in personal growth for 20 years, and I guess it was bound to happen.

James: Yeah, so you've been at this for a while. And you did actually live in New York for a while there, too.

So you said that there's 10 years' worth of therapy in one book.

Kristina: [laughs] It wasn't me. It was my editor, my first editor. My book has had, I think, five or seven editors. It's insane amount.

James: How do you end up with five editors? I'm curious.

Kristina: Yeah, it's a process. I think we can talk a separate show about writing a book in general.

James: [laughs] Well, I just did an episode not long ago about [writing books and editing](#). And it's so difficult.

Kristina: Yeah, I won't go into that. But I'll give you a little bit of a premise or the context to that. So my book is about being true to yourself, finding your path back to you. We all get lost as we live our life and aspire for our goals. At some point, we forget what the true human insight is. So my book is about that, about finding your path back to you.

So naturally, I wanted it to be, well, very much me. And I wanted to self-publish, because I thought that's the only way to be able to make my own decisions about the book, about what to write, how to write. And I wrote it to be self-published. But of course, it doesn't mean that I would skip on the process.

So I found an editor, a professional editor, who is also a ghostwriter, although not for my book. I wrote my book myself. She was my first editor, she loved the book, she said, It's like 10 years' worth of therapy in one book. But then when it came time to actually publish, again, I thought that I want to give my book baby the best possible start in life.

So I want to at least attempt to make it to New York Times bestsellers and all those lists. And that meant I needed to find a publisher. So in the process of finding a publisher and working with a publisher, a whole bunch of other editors jumped on my book and left their mark in it.

James: That's funny. So this really sort of touches on one of the topics that you cover, which is authenticity. What it actually is, it sounds like you needed this book to be authentic, and it had to find its pathway but not be compromised along the way.

Kristina: Yeah, it is a battle for a lot of us. But a lot of the battles we fight unconsciously. Because being true to yourself was on the surface in this book, I was very aware of what's going on. So even when we found the publisher, you know, when my publisher, Hay House, finally got their hands on my book, and it came back from the last publisher, that was already a few rounds into editing.

So when it came back from Hay House's editor, it had something like 1400 corrections. It's a lot. For a 280-page book, it's a lot. And it was a painful experience, because some of the corrections were, well, the thing about the punctuation and language doesn't bug me, it's just the form. But when it comes to the essence of the book, you know, what stories to leave, what stories to remove, there was a whole chapter removed, which happens to be my favorite chapter in the whole book.



JAMES SCHRAMKO

“We face that battle sometimes, do you stay true to your values, to yourself? Or do you compromise what's important to you for a chance at success?”

- Kristina Mänd-Lakhiani

And that was such a battle, because we face that battle sometimes, do you stay true to your values, to yourself? Or do you compromise what's important to you for a chance at success? You see, if I'm working with a big publisher, of course, I'm tempted to listen to the advice because they've published so many books. So don't I want to be successful?

Very often, we are told to change something about ourselves, because somebody says that that's what you need to do to be successful. Take any speaker, you go on stage, you get off stage, there are well-meaning people who come and say like, Oh, but now you need a speaking training, because you aren't, you know, they don't like something, but maybe that's what you are, that's the way you are. Or social media, Oh, no, no, no, you can't do your social media like that, because nobody does it like that anymore. This is not going to take you anywhere.

So you always have this question, do I stick to my own principles and my values? Or do I listen to what the so-called experts tell you and follow that path? And sometimes I felt like I had to sell my soul to the devil, just so that I have a chance to be successful. Yeah, that was a battle.

James: And did the chapter make it in the book?

Kristina: My book is a balance. I actually, I did allow the first part to be massively edited. But by part number two, and I have eight parts, my heart was aching so much. I actually went back to that first editor of mine, and I had to cry on her shoulder. It's just too painful. And she said, But Kristina, that's editor's work, to leave red marks in your book, because if they don't, they haven't done their job.

And then she said, It's your book. You have the right to decline all the edits, which I did, after part two. Well, not all, but almost all. And surprise, surprise, nobody said anything. They said, Okay, good. [laughs] Let's go. Let's go. And that's the weird thing. We sometimes think we have to do certain things that we are advised to do, but then do we?

James: Well, I think anyone with kids knows that definitely there's some flexibility on the hard lines, right? I'm glad to hear that you were able to get the best of both worlds, that mass distribution, but also with what you really wanted to publish.

The dragons you can't vanquish

You talk about dragons. That basically, you can't vanquish the dragons, they're still going to be there. And this probably was a bit of a dragon breathing fire at you. Can you talk about how that metaphor works?

Kristina: Well, yeah, my obstinacy and desire to be authentically me, like not to compromise, is definitely a bit of a dragon. Now, it's funny because I hardly ever have to define dragons because people somehow understand what it means. But I use the word dragons in my book as a general term for anything, which we feel is our flaw, our weakness, something that makes us feel less than, less worthy, unprofessional, not good enough, you know, all those things, all our self-doubts, whether it's your qualities, your personality traits, your past experience, traumas.

I give them the general term, dragons, because these are the fire-breathing creatures, who kind of make you very uncomfortable about yourself. So yes. And I think in this process, I learned that you can't slay your dragons. Because sometimes when you slay your dragon, you cut off a piece of what makes you you.

James: So I was curious about that. When I was mentioning to a friend of mine today, we had a surf and I said, I'm really looking forward to having a chat to Kristina, because she's got this cool book. And we were just wondering, when you say it's okay to accept you how you are, etc., that you're awesome as you are, where do things like physical appearance or being overweight fit into that?

Kristina: [laughs] Well, these are two different things, right? Because being overweight is definitely not my area of expertise. So I wouldn't want to give advice on that. Although being unhealthy and unfit and having, let's say damaging habits, and I'm not talking about just not going to the gym or eating anything you like, but actual damaging habits, like smoking.

James: Well, I said to my friend, what if you're just like, an angry person or you behave badly? You know, is it okay to say, Well, that's just their dragon?

Kristina: No, no, no. So there are a few distinctions we have to make. And I guess the context to that is that our society is a little bit superficial, and we don't like depth. We like simple solutions. So for solutions, that's why we're getting into troubles, because we don't bother to go deeper. Now, when it comes to self-love and self-acceptance, you have to go deeper. Otherwise, you will have all those distortions, like I have an obvious bad habit, which obviously is ruining my life, but take me as I am. No, that's not what I'm saying.

There is a difference between having a bad habit or having a tendency to a certain behavior, which is destructive not just to yourself, but to the world around, and having certain qualities about you. Now, the people who are angry, there is a difference between feeling extreme emotions, or getting very easily unsettled, or having a very keen sense of justice, versus being rude. These are very different things.

I'm not saying you have to be rude. I'm saying that you have to recognize that you are the person who gets angry easily. So that, you can't change, probably. Probably your reaction to the world is in some way, of course, we were taking it superficially again, I guess you can become less angry. [laughs]

James: So is it about taming your dragon? Say, Okay, I have this dragon. But I'm going to tame that dragon and be aware of it and protect myself from situations.

Kristina: Yeah. There is a difference between you staying true to yourself, and you just being rude. And very often, when people say, I'm just being honest, it's a pretext to an insult, or an uninvited comment coming out. Being honest doesn't mean that you have to profess your so-called truth left and right, or offer your so-called truth to people when they're not asking about it.

Now, on the other hand, when you feel like you are out of place, or you're doing something which goes against your values, projecting yourself politely out of this environment is perfectly fine. But let's say snapping at someone, being angry, being mean, being unreasonable, because they have crossed your boundaries, that's not fine.

So what I'm trying to say is that whatever you are, it's fine. But you still get to choose how you act, how you react to the world, how you interact with people. And that choice has to come from your values, probably, more than from your natural inclinations.

A very drastic example would be, you know, you can walk on the street and find someone super-hot and attractive, it doesn't mean you're going to jump on that person and try to take them into place, because we are humans, we are capable of disconnecting our urges from our actions.

James: Gotcha. That's a really good explanation. I appreciate that. Because I think some people might take your message as having permission to just, you know, continue bad behavior or have bad outputs. But I really like that differentiation.



Kristina: I have to apologize, though, because, you know, if people take my message on the surface, of course, they may misunderstand it. And how many things have been taken out of context, and people don't get it? That's why, in one of my earlier chapters, I talk about actually giving up that superficiality of our understanding of the world and trying to see the essence of things, because this is one of the biggest problems that we as a society have, we're too lazy to look deeper into the essence of things. We're so used to shortcuts.

So yeah, my message is that's the problem with self-love. It's so misunderstood. If you talk about it in simple terms, people will take it out of context and will willfully misunderstand it. If you want to understand it, you have to take it layer by layer by layer and go deep.

James: I think that's wise advice, especially in an era where short videos and social media and people are, their little bubble is so different to everyone else's little bubble. I mean, if you live in a different place, and you have a different culture, and you get exposed to different preferences, it's amazing.

The dark side to personal growth

Even if you pick up your partner's phone, and start browsing on social, you'll be shown all a different world, like all these different things based on targeting and all the rest of it. To that point, there is a bit of a dark side to personal growth and insecurities. Can you talk more about that, because you're so experienced in this personal development world?

Kristina: Well, I think personal growth industry is like any other industry and any sphere of life. There is the good side of it, and there are obviously traps and difficulties and extremes. In fact, I have a theory that whatever quality you take, or whatever emotion you take, if you take it to the extreme, it can be destructive.

I was doing a chart of emotions for my book, it has like 300 different nuances of emotions. And I realized that whatever emotion, each emotion that I took, whether it's anger or love, if I went into all the intricacies and different nuances of it, both anger and love, which are very often contradicted, have good, and well, so-called good, good and bad nuances to that.

So the same with personal growth industry. Definitely, it's a good thing. But there are distortions, there are traps. And there are extremes. Like, compare it to general education or, you know, the primary education or religion. Of course, the essence of religion is good. It's your spirituality, it's your connection with God. But how much of the religion has been taken to the extreme?

So, primary education, same story, it's good that kids know how to read and write, and mathematics, but how many things go wrong? How many traumas are created by those various systems, which actually were created for good in the very beginning? So the same as personal growth and transformation industry, people come to it out of the best intentions, they want to be a better version of themselves.

Now, I could talk about different aspects of where it can go wrong. But let's take it from my point of view. And I'm talking about self-love and self-acceptance. Very often, our obsession with perfectionist is the exact source of the dark side and the dragons. Because we have the picture of what it means to be the best version of James or the best version of Kristina. And we strive for that, which is in the essence of our industry, you have the goal, you go for that goal, and you look for the tools how to reach your goal.

But what happens is that very often we don't have the practical skills to deal with the fact that our aspirations and reality have a massive void between them. Our aspirations are, by definition, different from reality. Yet, when it comes to the picture of perfection, if you realize there is something about you which doesn't correspond to that picture of perfection, that gap between your aspiration and reality creates a very serious internal conflict. Nobody has taught us how to deal with that.

So for example, I'm a woke, loving person. And I practice love and compassion for everyone. And suddenly, you feel really upset with someone, and you can't even place your finger on that. So how do you deal with that, because that emotion contradicts your picture of perfection? So very often, what we do is we start tricking ourselves, we start avoiding that, we start hiding it in the darkest corner.

That's how actually obsession with perfectionist creates the dark side, because we're so focused on the aspiration that we're completely incapable of dealing with the actual reality, which is, by definition, different from our aspiration.

James: Gosh, it's amazing. You know, as you're saying that, I'm seeing this manifest itself a lot, when, in a business context, I get a lot of people coming with a goal. It's always \$10 million a year, by the way. Always, \$10 million a year. And it's placed there by all the things they've seen in the benchmarking. And there's often a very big gap between capability or talent, or reality of being able to achieve that.

And then the funny thing is, even if they can, when they get there, they're not happy. They're miserable. And they're, you know, I wish it could be just simple, like back in the old days. So I love that saying, Know thyself. Right? I do think it's good to get inside and to think about, this is why I love having topics like this. You know, a quarter of what I do revolves around that mindset. And the person, the founder behind the business, if they're not right, the business doesn't have a great chance.

Kristina: Yeah. I guess it definitely depends on the business model. And I believe since you're coaching people, you mostly deal with people who create business around themselves and around their personality

James: Pretty much, yeah, smaller businesses. Just like, the hundreds of thousands and the sort of multi-millions, several million dollars is very typical.

Kristina: Yeah. But I'm not saying, like, small or bigger, but I guess people who are like, creating businesses for flipping or are into investment, they have slightly different mechanics of how they do and what they do. But I'll tell you one thing, from personal growth, from 20 years in personal growth, it's a huge myth that to become a better person, you have to just focus on that picture of your aspirational picture of perfection. Or as they say, fake it till you make it. It's a huge myth.

I will bring a somewhat more illustrative analogy. When you drive your car, and you try to go to a place that you do not know, for example, I live in Europe in Tallinn, I can drive from Tallinn to Paris. So I want to go to Paris, I place a spot in the navigation of my car, Paris. The navigation will only start working when it knows what is my departure point. Because a path to Paris from Tallinn and from London will be very different.



And that's what a lot of people in personal growth don't understand. Not just personal growth, and personal growth is just more on the surface. Because we don't have the skills to deal with reality, which is not the aspiration yet, what we tend to do is that we're so focused on aspiration as if we're trying to ignore the reality, or pretend that it's not there, or say yes, maybe I was there, but now I'm jumping.

You don't drop into Paris out of the blue skies, you have to drive there from point A to point B. So any transformation is only going to happen when your two legs planted in your point A, and you accept what you are, you know what you are, and you move from there.

James: It sounds like responsibility. Sounds like ownership and stepping up to confront reality, look in the mirror. I've often said, look in the mirror, that person there is the one that's going to help you more than anybody.

Kristina: It's 100% true, because you know, and I'm sure you know, these kinds of examples of people who would deny that they have a problem, because their aspiration is not to have that problem. But they can't solve it.

Are you a Hermione?

James: Why don't we talk about the Hermione syndrome, and how you could diagnose that, you know, if you happen to be secretly suffering from it? I think that'll be an interesting discussion.

Kristina: Normally, I don't diagnose people, but I would imagine that among your audience, about 80% are probably Hermione, little Hermiones. [laughs] So Hermione syndrome is the term that I came up with. But in essence, I mean in popular literature, it's all known as a combination of perfectionism and imposter syndrome.

James: Well, a lot of people have impostor syndrome. So I think you're bang on the money. And I do know, especially people who are quite technically talented, they tend to be perfectionists. I put a quote out the other day, actually, it was like, Sometimes being too gifted at something can be quite a disadvantage, because you get stuck in it. And you can't let go.

Kristina: That's absolutely true. Yeah. And then, you don't do things that other people sillier than you do easily.

James: Exactly, like how can that person, they don't even know where their domain's hosted? Or they couldn't build a website or whatever. But you know, you start tinkering around with that stuff, you won't actually go out there, and meet people, and make offers, and sell things. So how do you fix the Hermione syndrome?

Kristina: [laughs] Well, you don't fix. [laughs]

James: You're just aware of it. You say, Okay, these are my dragons.


Kristina: So, you know, I'll confess, I don't know why I came up with this term, because actually, perfectionism is pretty good term for that as well.

James: Well, I think because everyone on the planet loves Harry Potter. It's a great newsjack.

Kristina: Yeah, and some people don't identify themselves with perfectionist, but I've been researching this this year. And there are conditions which are very close to being a perfectionist, so Hermione with little nuances. So basically, what it means is that perfectionists usually have really high expectations, and really high bar.

They generally understand that they're pretty strong and pretty smart. Most people, they know when they're smart, most people. Of course, a lot of silly people also think that they're smart. But the problem with perfectionists is that they have very low tolerance of failure, and very low tolerance of personal imperfection. And that's what prevents them from doing things.

Especially if we add to that something that we talked about earlier, or maybe I didn't talk to you about it, sorry, [laughs] there is this tendency in our world, where we deal out love as reward for good behavior. We've learned it from childhood, and we carry it into our grown-up life. So that mechanism is what blocks perfectionists, Hermiones, and other people like that, underdogs sometimes, from doing things.



JAMESSCHRAMKO

“There is such an idea, especially in a perfectionist's head, that there is being an absolute best and everything else is a failure.”

- Kristina Mänd-Lakhiani

Because when you have a low tolerance of failure, and low tolerance of your personal imperfections, you are afraid of challenging yourself. And because you're afraid of challenging yourself, because you're afraid of failure, you would rather not go into things. And there is such an idea, especially in perfectionists's head, that there is being an absolute best and everything else is a failure.

So if I write a book, I'm either a New York Times bestseller author, or I'm a failure. If I'm doing a project, I either blow everybody out of the water, or I'm a failure. If you go into a contest, you're either number one, or you're a failure. And because of that very black and white approach to failure, because literally, everything is failure unless it's absolute best.

And your low tolerance for failure and the subconscious programming that you only deserve love if you are a good boy, good girl, if you behave well, if you achieve, or if you're pleasing, or if you correspond to other people's expectations. So naturally, you wouldn't risk to fail, because if you fail, that means that you won't be...

James: You won't be loved.

Kristina: By yourself, you won't be allowed to love and respect yourself. So we'd rather not even go into that.

The only love that matters?

James: And I think your core premise is that your self-love is really the only love that actually matters. Is that right?

Kristina: Well, yes. And there are very many different reasons. First of all, your self-love defines how you present yourself to the world. You're your first critic, and very often, we teach other people how to treat us. There was this recent research, which is absolutely logical, I don't know why they did the research on that, that says that when you are finding a new job or applying for a new job, you're going to be paid according to how worthy you consider yourself to be.

James: I've experienced that in real life.

Kristina: And that's natural, because how is anybody going to pay you for what you're really worth if they don't even know you? So the only way they can go by is, how do you think yourself being worthy? So that's one of the things why your self-love is important because you do teach people how to treat yourself. And I'm sure you can think of countless examples of people who are so confident in themselves. You know, like this Austin Powers character, right? [laughs] No matter how pathetic he is, he is so confident.

James: But he has a very strong self-belief.

Kristina: And by the end of the movie, you start seeing him the way he sees himself. And we have this kind of Austin Powers people around us left and right. So that's one of the reasons. The other reason is a little more philosophical. No matter what we think about our loved ones, whether it's our children, our parents, our partners, lovers, friends, none of them has the obligation to love you. None of them. Nobody has to love you.

Yes, you might expect, you might want that your darling children love you. But they don't have the obligation to do that. The only person whose love you can reasonably expect is your own. And that's a bitter pill to swallow.

James: It's a super powerful way to wrap up. That's the most important message, isn't it? Go deep, and find that self-love. And your world will become a little bit more understandable. So your book, *Becoming Flawesome*, it's available wherever you buy books, but also at mindvalley.com/flawesome.

We've been chatting with Kristina Mänd Lakhiani. This is episode 1017. We'll put a couple of notes and some links off to resources where you see this episode on JamesSchramko.com. Kristina, it's been so nice to chat about this stuff. I can see that you're super passionate about it. And you've done a lot of work, especially finding all those editors and getting the right channel to get this book out there.

You know, this might be the greatest thing on this topic, since that old Japanese thing, Wabi Sabi. You know, it's another good message to the world that it's okay to be you, and let go of that perfect idea of what you think you should be so that you don't have to beat yourself up, and enjoy life better.

Kristina: Can I tell one more little detail to that last message, is that not only it's okay to be you and to accept your dragons, but very often, when you go down that path, what you discover is that the very things that you thought were your imperfections, your dragons, your flaws, these very things hold the key to your biggest strength and the biggest life you have to give to the world. And that's a twist at the end of the journey.

James: I can agree with that. One of my very first audio products, I was in a conference in Las Vegas, and I was beside this other guy. And he said, I've got your product. He said, Your voice is so boring. And I guess that's one reason why I cranked out so many podcasts, because I just want to keep improving. You know, I think okay, well, the first question I asked, Is he right? And in fairness, I probably was a little bit dry in that product.

So it's good to evaluate. But it didn't stop me. I think that's the most important thing. I took it on board. And I thought, You know what, I can develop this and still be okay with it. And even if people don't like it, well, it's bad luck. The information is still good.

Kristina: Well, I do not know. I mean, you're probably - I mean, 1000 episodes, you probably have improved massively, but I would say your voice is steady and calming and grounding. And that's very good. That's amazing.

James: That's super kind. I hope we can have you back to talk about, you know what, I have a suspicion that you might have more books coming out after this. You know, [my book](#) is about six years old now. And I've got a couple coming through the machine very slowly, because it's so difficult for me, the book thing.

I do hold them pretty close. But as they come out, I'd love to give them a spotlight. I know our audience are going to go out there and show you some love as well. I think working on yourself has to be a top priority in life. So it'd be great to catch up.

Kristina: Thank you, James, for having me, and for giving me this opportunity.

JAMES SCHRAMKO

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