

313: Letting Go of External Validation (with Kristen Pierce)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Jen Riday

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You're listening to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast. On this episode we'll be talking about letting go of the need for external validation and giving yourself the validation, you need. Stay tuned.

Hi, I'm Jen Riday. This podcast is for women who want to feel more vibrant, happy, aligned, and alive. You'll gain the emotional, physical, and spiritual tools you need to get your sparkle back and ensure that depression, anxiety, and struggle don't rule your life. Welcome to the Vibrant Happy Women Podcast.

Well, hey there my friends. We have an important episode for you today talking about those things in our lives that cause us to worry what other people think of us. Maybe it's a parent who was an alcoholic. Maybe it was a divorce. Maybe it was someone being incarcerated. We all have these little skeletons so to speak in our closet that we worry, what if people knew, what if people found out what happened in my past.

Well, my guest today, Kristen Pierce has exactly such a story. It's not a story that inherently should be shameful, but she was a child and a teen when she was going through this experience, and it formed and affected how she thought about herself.

As you know when we're young we tend to internalize everything happening as if it's our own fault, parents fighting, parents divorcing, parents having problems. And we can carry that shame forward if we don't use or come to understand the tools that can help us to release those experiences, tools like inner child work which Kristen talks about in this episode so beautifully.

So, if you have some deep dark secrets or some things you might be carrying shame for from your past whether it's growing up, or things that

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happened in your college years, or maybe early marriage, whatever that is for you this is the episode for you.

Because when we can release that shame and stop worrying what other people think of us and just know deep in our hearts that we've got our own backs, that we are absolutely good enough. No matter where we came from, what kind of family we had, what we may have experienced, what type of upbringing we might have had we can be good enough right now because we say so. The minute you decide you're good enough and that you can validate yourself you don't need that external validation and that is beautiful.

That is our episode today. It's a little bit of a longer one but stick with it because there are so many nuggets in this one. Now, before we talk about the validation piece, Kristen and I also talked about her career as a coach at Arizona State University. She helps college kids with time management. And it was so fascinating for me to listen to the things college kids are struggling with. And I am now personally committed to teaching my kids even better time management skills.

So, if you're a parent you're going to want to listen to that part as well, it was fascinating. So, lots of good things in this episode today. Go for a walk, wash your dishes, fold your laundry and tuck in for an amazing episode.

Jen: Hey, everyone, I am here with my friend, Kristen Pierce, who I met through the Vibrant Happy Women coach certification. She is from Phoenix. She's a mom. She works at Arizona State, right, Kristen?

Kristen: Yeah, Arizona State University.

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Jen: I'll let you finish that introduction but I'm so happy you're here because we're going to talk today about external validation and shame, and letting go of the need to make sure others approve of us. And I think it's an important topic that we all can relate to. So, I'm so happy you're here to talk about that.

Kristen: Thank you, Jen. I'm so happy to be here and so excited. And I just have to share, I found you through your podcast probably back in, I think maybe 2018, maybe a little earlier than that. It was before episode 100, I know that.

Jen: Wow. A long time listener.

Kristen: Yeah. So, that's, yeah, I was listening for a long time and then decided to join the club and then coaching certification ultimately. So yeah, I live in Phoenix, Arizona with my husband who's an Air Force veteran. We have an eight year old daughter. Right now, I'm working as a professional coach for Arizona State University. I'm a success coach for online students, specifically online students.

But prior to that I worked in state government for seven years as a grants and program manager for the Arizona Commission on the Arts facilitating public grantmaking for arts and culture organizations. And then prior to that even I worked in performing arts.

Jen: So, what, you know, a lot of people listening to this, we'll just have a little side topic here. They can hear you talking about career transition. How did you make the choice to change careers when you did? What guided you with those decisions?

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Kristen: Well, I think the first major career change was from working in performing arts and working backstage. I was mostly working on the production side of things, direction, and design, and backstage work. And I decided after doing that for about 10 years that I wanted some more stability in my life. It's a really fun engaging lifestyle but it's hard, it takes its toll. And I was thinking about wanting to settle down in one place and not have to move around a lot, starting a family.

So, I thought about what would take me to that next career level so that was getting my master's degree. I got a Master of Fine Arts in theatrical production. Because I was thinking I was going to teach on the university level. So, then I could kind of plant myself one place. But that ultimately along the way led me to working in non-profit on the production side of things, arts, and culture. I started working when I couldn't get that backstage work, I started taking work in the front office writing grants, putting together fundraising events, working with patrons.

So, I started transitioning to the front office side essentially of non-profit organizations.

Jen: Cool, yeah.

Kristen: Yeah. And fell in love with that and just did that work and kind of, so transitioned in that way too. So, I ended up working as directors of development or patron services, things like that on the front side. And learned more and more about the non-profit sector, about how it works, how it runs, the different parts. There's animals, and children, and arts, and all the different parts of the non-profit sector that come together that are all very different but have a lot of the same, they function in the same ways.

And that is fairly stable work and so I was able to kind of settle down and do that too. Didn't actually teach on the university level. I could if I wanted

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some day maybe. So, I did that kind of work. And that ultimately, that background with non-profit organizational management led me to working with the government position serving those organizations because I knew about board development, and I knew about non-profit accounting and management. So, I worked in a role with the government, state government, supporting those people.

So, helping to make grants to support their organizations, teaching them grant writing. So, it was just kind of a natural progression.

Jen: Natural, up the [crosstalk].

Kristen: Yeah, it just kind of yeah, it kept flowing.

Jen: Yeah. Then the big transition, you decided to become a coach, that's so interesting. What drew you to wanting to be a coach?

Kristen: Well, honestly, I think it was working in those circles and especially working in state government was really tough. If anyone's done it or working in the non-profit sector, you're usually a department of one. You've got a lot of constituents that you're serving. And it's kind of never ending. There's always someone else that's needing something, that needs help, that needs assistance. So, I worked really hard. I kind of, I burned myself out essentially in that kind of way.

And I just got to the point personally where I couldn't do it anymore. I wanted to help people, but I had no joy in it for me. I felt like for everyone I was helping there were 10 that I was letting go. And there was failure in that. And I didn't know how to handle that for myself. And I burned out, I crashed hard, and I burned out. And I finally got to that point that I needed something for me. And that's where I discovered, you know, so that's

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where I started getting into self-help and led to self-enlightenment, and growth, and all the things that are here with you with Vibrant Happy Women.

That's when I kind of discovered Vibrant Happy Women and discovered and grew through that process. And finally got to the point where I wanted to help others do that too. I've always wanted to be in service to others or other things. So, becoming a coach was the next logical progressive step for me, was like, I've learned this for myself. I feel like I'm not an expert, but I've learned. I've made some progress. And I want to help others with this now too because I have essentially seen the light. So, I want to help others see the light.

That's when I decided, yeah, I'm going to be a coach. And I'd also experienced some executive and leadership coaching in my professional career that was also very pivotal for me as well. Those were some really smaller aha moments along the way that helped me figure out, gosh, I want to do that. That was really amazing. That helped me so much. I want to do that. And that was even, I think, two years before getting into anywhere near coaching certification. So, it was just kind of a natural progression.

Jen: That's cool. So, I remember not long after you graduated from the coach certification you had found this job offering at ASU. And I wrote a letter of recommendation for you. I couldn't recommend you highly enough. And you have the job. I think that's so cool because you're one of our first graduates who is working for another institution and not just as an entrepreneur. So, there's some benefits to that, not needing to do marketing.

Kristen: Yes. And I did, I tried it. I tried starting my own practice and I still kind of have that hanging out in the bottom. But yeah, I mean I think being able to take the skill and work for a higher ed institution, a university, to

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work with their student population, using my coaching skills to help them succeed as students, it's amazing. It's an amazing opportunity. And I really wish I had had that as an undergraduate student back in the 90s, but it wasn't even really a thing.

And yeah, the infrastructure is there. I don't have to do my own marketing. I haven't had to essentially search for clients. I've just been handed a fairly large book of clients to reach out to. So that's had some challenges too. But yeah, it's definitely had the advantage. And I guess there are other universities that have this kind of thing. It's not unique to ASU, I've discovered slowly along the way. But they call it different things. But it essentially uses the same coaching skills, so it is out there in other ways.

And I think, I've actually heard now from a few people too that larger corporations are starting to consider having coaches on their staff instead of hiring consultants and things like that, they've actually started toying with the idea. Because people have started to see how effective it can be with retention of their own employees, with happiness, with things like that. So, it's out there. I think it's growing.

Jen: Go ahead and tell our listeners the biggest things that the students you work with are struggling with. Because kind of an aha for me on what I need to be focusing on as a parent.

Kristen: Yeah. The biggest thing, one of the biggest things, I have the conversation with folks every day is related to time management. Just how you're keeping track of all the things you need to do for yourself, when things to do, what you need to get there. And blocking time for themselves. Giving themselves time to do those things. So, time management is a huge, huge challenge for a lot of folks. And I tell them what I tell my students is, "It's okay that you don't know this right now. We're not born knowing how to do this. It's a skill you have to learn."

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And some people learn it very quickly or they pick it up somewhere else. And some people, they haven't really had practice with it. So, it's like building a muscle. Because a lot of students feel like, God, why can't I get this? What's wrong with me? And it's like that's not it. It's a skill. It's not something we're necessarily born with. So, time management is huge.

Another one is self-care, just taking care of themselves. Just realizing that they have to put on that oxygen mask before they can do anything else, not even take care of others, I mean that's a given. But just do all the things they need to do. When they're working full-time and they've got online school full-time, so essentially they've got 40 hours a week already chalked up to their work schedule. Then they've got another 36 hours a week they need to study.

And then just figuring out, okay, when are you going to sleep? When are you going to eat? When are you going to exercise or do something fun for yourself? There's still that idea that self-care means I have to go to a spa for a day or I have to go on vacation. And it's, no, you need to look for bite sized micro chunks, even 15 minutes to go stand outside in the sun, get some sun on your face, and breathe. That's good. But if you don't schedule those things for yourself sometimes it's just really easy to push them and never get to them and then you burn out. So that's a big thing.

Also dealing with imposter syndrome but I've just learned recently to think of it as imposter phenomena because syndrome kind of implies an illness with yourself, a chronic illness. But it's actually more liberating if you kind of think about it like imposter phenomena. Okay, this is just a phenomena and it could go and so I don't know. So that's a big one, just self-doubt essentially, they're going to find out that I'm not supposed to be here. When they find out that I'm not a good student or I don't know how to do math or science, they're going to kick me out, for just across the board.

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And then the double edged sword of perfection and procrastination. How that fear cycle feeds into each other. They want to get good grades. They want to do a perfect paper, but they don't know how to do that. So, they don't start, and they put it off. And then it's, oh, my God, it's due tomorrow and then I'm going to stay up all night and do it. And then it's not perfect. And just really trying to step that back for people. The perfectionism myth, what I think is perfect you may not think it's perfect, their teacher may not think it's perfect.

So really trying to choose progress over perfection in whatever they do just to make some forward action. What I've started saying to my students is that, "I would rather make imperfect progress than to stand perfectly still."

Jen: Yeah, do the B+ work or the B- work.

Kristen: Yeah, I've had that, yes, even C, Cs get degrees.

Jen: Cs get degrees, that's a good phrase.

Kristen: They do.

Jen: So, you said before we started recording that ideally these kids will use a digital planner like Google Calendar. It's taken me a while with my own kids, I'll just speak from a parent perspective. It's been so fascinating but our kids' schools, up through the end of elementary were handing out paper planners, still are. They're training the kids to write the things down and sign. I found my kids struggled with the transition from that to then what.

My oldest, I told him all through high school, "You need Google Calendar, you need a Google Calendar." He resisted because that's what teens do.

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Fair enough. And now he's almost turning 21 in another month or so and he said recently, "Mom, you were right. Ever since I started using Google Calendar last year, my life, I can do it." And I'm like, "Oh."

Kristen: I was right.

Jen: Well, I didn't say that, I wanted him to think it's his idea.

Kristen: Right, of course.

Jen: But with my kids still at home I'm starting to like, "You're not using my Wi-Fi until I see your stuff on your calendar." They've got to leave my home with the skill. I'm not going to have kids going to college and struggling like that again. And so, I'm trying to do people like you a favor, Kristen, so just a warning. I'm sorry I'm talking so much about my kids.

Kristen: No, you're fine.

Jen: But maybe it provides an example. I sat down with my daughter, she again, her grades were sliding. And this girl is brilliant. She skipped a grade. It's all time management, all of it. And so, I gave her the list, the same list I give everyone in the Vibrant Happy Women Club of first, write down everything you need to do, get it all onto a paper. Next, write down how long each thing will take. That step alone is shocking to people that this is only eight hours.

Next, schedule it in your calendar, each little [crosstalk]. And then put in when you have to work, when you're going to do the self-care, when you're going to have fun, voila. Open that every day and you will succeed. It's so simple. So, do you have success getting your students to do things like that? What's the trick?

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Kristen: I think, yeah, no, I think it's slow progress. I think, one of the things I ask them when we're discussing it is what would make it fun? What would make keeping a schedule fun? Sometimes it's stickers. Sometimes it's colors. I've had long conversations with students with Google Calendar especially about creating different colored overlays. So, they can see all their work in one color. And then they can click the box and if they don't want to see it, it's gone.

And then they can, all of their personal stuff is another color. And they can kind of really – you can go down the digital color wheel with those things and you can get really specific. So, then it's even easier when you look at your schedule for the day and you just kind of see blocks of purple, green, red, I know I've got to work there. And I'm going to study there. And this is, I've got to go to a doctor's appointment. So, what would make it easier and what would make it fun? Those are some of the questions I use to help them think just about those things.

What would make it easier? My daughter, she's eight, I'm working with her right now even with scheduling. We have a desk calendar like a blotter size that hangs outside of her room. And right now, we're at the point where every month I do the main updates. So, I put her scout meetings, her karate when school is out early. All those things that relate to her schedule. And then I ask her, "What else do you want to put on there?" So, "I want to play with my cousins." So, we try to find a weekend to do that.

Or I put family birthdays, so we know that those things are coming up. And she uses different colors and markers. And I've let her, "Okay, go ahead and write on it, it's there, try not to write on the wall but just write on it." And sometimes she'll make little pictures for holidays. She's finding a way to make it fun. And so, I'm trying to instill that with her early. But that's what I ask the older students too, "What would make it fun? What would make it easy to actually do your scheduling?"

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Jen: Yeah, that's a great question. How would I answer that? Well, for me when I get it out of my head, and I know it's somewhere in the calendar there's so much freedom and relief when I have accomplished that. And if I just stuck with it and do it every week which I don't always, sometimes we're on vacation and I skip it. And then I have to scramble and catch up. But I think about the feeling of thrill I have when it is all scheduled and I know it's taken care of somewhere on the calendar.

Kristen: Yeah. And like you said, it takes less energy. You don't have to worry about remembering those details. If you get it out of your head into another system of existence for yourself then you're done. You don't have to spend energy, or time, or worry about it. It's just there. So as soon as you know something, that's the thing I suggest to them too. As soon as you know something about your schedule, get it out of your head and onto the page or into the digital planner. Just type it out, whatever it is. So, you essentially open up space and energy in your brain for other things.

Jen: Yeah, for sure. Good advice. Well, gosh, that was so fun. We had a pre whole entire episode. Now, let's shift to the real episode. No, I love this. We get two episodes in one, a twofer. So, Kristen, you thought about what you could share that would be helpful for our audience. And you wanted to talk about how you used to be a person who really, really craved external validation. And you're going to share how that related to your childhood and things that happened there.

And then transitioning to internal validation, telling yourself it's all okay and not needing the approval of others. And I hope that's piqued everyone's interest because I think we all have at one time, or another wanted that external validation. So first off, why is that harmful to always want that external validation?

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Kristen: I think for me and in general I would say it's harmful because for me it goes along with that idea of perfection that you may never be able to satisfy other people. You may be giving it your all and thinking you're doing your best. And so, you should be loved and adored, or at least thanked or, "Hey, you did a good job." But you can't control those other people's responses. And so, you may never, you don't ever get enough of it, or you don't get what you're looking for.

Or sometimes you do, and you feel like you're on top of the world. You did it. You did the thing and people are proud of you. But then the problem with that is then if you don't do so well at some point and you don't get that you really swing to the other end of it. You feel I'm worthless, I can't do this. What is wrong with me? I just have to try harder. So always looking for that external validation that you just, you don't have it within yourself, and you just feel really empty and worthless if it's not there at some point.

Jen: Yeah, absolutely, and also you never know what anyone's thinking. Half the time they might be approving of you, and you tell yourself a story that they aren't. I've been guilty of that.

Kristen: Yeah. The story you create about what else is going on there, yes, that's a huge part of it too. The story you create for others that you have no idea if it's true.

Jen: Well, so tell us kind of the before and after, the phase of your life where you were craving that external validation and why, and how you transitioned to more of that personal validation which is so also a relief.

Kristen: Yes, absolutely. Thank you, Jen, yeah. So, I mean kind of in a nutshell, so just a kind of brief family history. So, I'm one of four children. I'm the oldest of four siblings, growing up here in Phoenix, Arizona from starting in the mid-70s, so most of my childhood, I'm a child of the 80s. So

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as a lot of families at that time, mom and dad got divorced. So, my father, I think the separation started when I was in fourth grade, around, just around 10 years old.

But prior to that growing up there'd always been a lot of tension in my house, tension I could feel around my father. It was one of those situations where dad would come home from work and was tired and grumpy, and would sit in his chair and don't poke the bear. Don't draw attention. Don't make too much noise, just try to keep the peace, kind of walking on eggshells a lot because there was a lot of kind of this feeling of unhappiness and anger.

And never really knowing what that was about as a child, just knowing that there was just kind of this feeling of threat of don't upset dad, basically. So, growing up with that, there was that kind of to begin with, just that kind of internal tension in the house. Then like I said, when I was around 10 years old my parents finally got separated. My father told my mom basically that, "I don't want to be married anymore. This isn't working. We're going to split."

And so that was when, I think she was about in her early 30s maybe at that point. I was 10, so it was 10, eight, five and two I think were the ages of us.

Jen: Wow. My goodness.

Kristen: Yeah, so it was about 85. So then that whole thing happened and parents splitting and kind of visitation on weekends. And the stress and strain that went along with the upset in the life as a child that goes along with that. And I think that's where it really started for me. I don't remember this moment, but my mother has told me the story that I think it was either the day, or a few days after my father actually left and kind of moved out, and moved. That I just sat on my couch and was crying.

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And when she asked me of course what was wrong. I just looked at her and I said, “He abandoned us.”

Jen: Yeah. It’s a fear of abandonment I suppose, yeah.

Kristen: Exactly. And then internalizing that as a small child and trying to figure out, well, what can you do to avoid people abandoning you? You can please them, you can try to perform, you can search for love. What can I do to make myself worthy of people’s love and approval so they’re not going to abandon me? And then it got even more interesting a couple of years down the road was that my father decided to undergo a gender transition. So, by the time I was 13, so that was 89, roughly 89 because it was 85, between the 85 and 89 window but it was still in the 80s.

My father actually started going through at that point in time a gender transition which was almost unheard of at that point.

Jen: Yeah, that was very taboo even in [crosstalk].

Kristen: Yeah. No one was really talking about the gender transition at that point. That wasn’t where things were at that point in time. And being part of – I say being part of a small community. When I say that I mean we grew up, my family grew up mostly in a Roman Catholic parish, went to Catholic school. My whole family went to Catholic school, so very involved with that community. So even when the divorce hit it was already at that point in time because of the religious background.

That kind of feeling of othering, my parents are divorced. There was already, didn’t understand it but that kind of unease. So then add to that a couple of years later this other layer of, wait, what’s happening with their family? The secret that was kind of like, it was out there. It was in the parish

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community. It was kind of known whispered about. So, it started to build for me, this other feeling of like it was my shame, that I was internalizing this. I had nothing to do with it, I couldn't control it, I was a child.

But taking on this idea that I was so shameful of this secret for my family. And again, what could I do to negate that? I could seek external approval. I could be a wonderful student. I could be a great athlete. I could do whatever I could to lift myself up so that I wasn't ashamed of that.

Jen: That is heavy, Kristen.

Kristen: It was something that, yeah, and so fast forward, dealing with that and all the ways that you kind of internalize that. And just the way that grows for someone, basically just being afraid through high school that someone would find out my secret. And what that would mean about me. I didn't want to be made fun of. Just all those things I had no control over but just feeling that I had this deep secret that I was hiding, that if anybody knew it would just be the end of my world. So, trying to rise above that in whatever way I could, so I excelled at everything.

Jen: I have one small moment, very small compared to yours probably of feeling embarrassed by my parents. My dad was the commander of our local legion in our town of 800. He was a farmer. He had to go up at a graduation and announce the scholarships. And I was in the band that day, probably a freshman and I remember being so embarrassed because he wore an ugly suit and mumbled. You couldn't understand him. I was mortified. My face was bright red. So, your experience, I mean I know how bad that little thing felt to me.

I can see why you would have been really looking for external validation because that's huge for a child and a teen to carry even with the religious connection and the shame.

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Kristen: Yeah. And nobody knew how to deal with it or talk about it. There were no support groups at that point.

Jen: Yeah. What did we have? We had Boy George, that was the most that we had culturally at that time.

Kristen: Right, yeah. There was David Bowie, there was Boy George. I mean, yes, there were some of those things. But as far as gender transition goes, there was nothing. There was no they, them, pronoun. There was no, you know, there wasn't even family restrooms. So, I remember for a while my folks still had joint custody. So, we were still shipping back and forth, the divorced kids on the weekends, spending time with mom, mostly living with mom but spending time with dad.

And I just remember going out in public sometimes and I remember one time specifically having to use a restroom and being followed into the women's restroom. And just having that kind of moment of does anybody know? And probably nobody really did know. I don't know if people paid that much attention, or maybe gave a second glance. But just carrying around that secret for myself and my siblings too. I said I'm oldest of four, so it goes myself, my sister, I have a brother and then a younger sister.

And just kind of dealing with that on regular basis. Then coming to the point where we were asked to not call this person dad anymore. So that was having to deal with that. Essentially looking back at it now it was really in a strange way like dealing with a death of a parent.

Jen: Oh, really?

Kristen: Yeah. When I think about it as an adult because there's a lot of things that are gone, you're not going to have the opportunity to do in a

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regular dynamic of say a father daughter. Especially got really kind of tough when we started having significant others, boyfriends, serious. Bringing people into the family that we had to kind of explain who this person was or what this situation, what this dynamic was because people were just kind of like, “Who is this person?”

Jen: When you stopped calling him dad, what did you call her?

Kristen: The name that she chose for herself was Wendy, so yeah.

Jen: Okay. And Wendy uses she her pronouns now?

Kristen: Yes, absolutely.

Jen: And do you call her – what do you call her, still, Wendy, you, and your family you just call her Wendy?

Kristen: Mostly call her Wendy. I’ve tried getting used to – I definitely – I use she. I have tried using – it’s taken some time to get used to grandma essentially with my daughter. But trying to use that more frequently. We’ve actually used, I think there’s some sort of Polish grandmother endearment or Oma, no, that’s Dutch. So, we’ve tried using things like that but yeah, now we use the Wendy and the she pronouns.

Jen: Yeah, cool, that’s awesome. So, I believe, it seems to me you have a pretty healthy relationship with Wendy. You’re very careful about telling people your pronouns and her pronouns. And how is it now, now that gender transitioning is more accepted, how does it feel different for you?

Kristen: Yeah. It feels freeing. It is much more of an accepted thing. And I think I understand it in a lot of ways, that people don’t understand gender

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fluidity these days. I think I definitely understand because of dealing with it from such a young age, but gender I feel is definitely more on a spectrum. It's not necessarily black or white in a biological sense. Our culture and our upbringing has so much to do with our gender norms that we either choose or that we have kind of put upon us from birth.

So, I think I definitely have a deeper understanding. And I'm glad now for people that it's so much more of an accepted thing. The shame that I felt about just having a family member going through that transition hopefully isn't the same kind of shame that other people experience with it these days, especially those people themselves. I mean it's not my story to tell but the road was really hard for Wendy to go through at that time, people didn't do that. Doctors, there was no procedure, the drugs were new. To go through a full transition, that was kind of a groundbreaking thing.

And I can't imagine the stress that came with that. But also, I will credit Wendy too because Wendy always in some way wanted to still be our parent. So always wanted to be a part of our lives. And actually, I think that was, I think a lot of the earlier frustration and anger that was maybe felt that I couldn't name in our household was that once Wendy was free to kind of explore this and be Wendy that Wendy was happier. But that took a long time to get to that understanding and that point. And yeah, it's been a long road, but I think we have a good relationship now.

She has a good relationship with my daughter, with most of our family. My siblings, we all have our own relationship at different levels. And my mom and Wendy, they have a decent relationship. When we have family gatherings for the holidays usually everybody's included, it is fairly inclusive. But it's taken since 89 to get there.

Jen: Yeah. So, you went through this as a – by the way, congratulations. You made it through something very heavy.

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Kristen: Thank you, yeah.

Jen: You're kind of on the other side. So, for everyone listening, I think we all have things, for me it was my dad embarrassing me at a graduation ceremony. I mean that's so small, but we all have things where we worry what other people think of us. How did you kind of make that transition of your own to caring less and just approving of yourself?

Kristen: Absolutely. That's a fantastic question. So, I think like I mentioned before, I had to go through a grieving process to let go of the things that would never be, that I wouldn't have a father to walk me down the aisle someday. Just things like that, little things that you think about, that sometimes you don't think about until you don't have them. And I know that could be not just for gender transition, like if you lose a parent or if someone does in your life.

So, I had to kind of go through that grieving process for myself and come to terms with it. So able to be at peace with this is where my family is now. This is what my family dynamic is now. And I can choose to accept this person in my life the way they want to be in some way, shape or form. Or I can resist that and deny it. And for myself I chose to accept it. I think part of that for myself had to do too with I was very involved in working and have a background in arts and culture. And the arts and culture field has a lot of interesting people in it on the gender spectrum, LGBTQIA.

So, working with a lot of different people that were kind of in that space as well gave me a better understanding as a young adult about what goes on for those people behind the scenes, the shame they feel, the discrimination they experience. So really kind of accepting of that. This is not an easy road for someone that chooses this path. And why would they choose this path for themselves if it wasn't something that was so important to them, that

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they had to do it, that their life depended on it to do it essentially. So, coming to acceptance with that.

And then further for me evolving beyond that really coming to love and value myself and that took a long time. That was probably the last step of the journey for myself was getting to the point in my career that I just couldn't sustain trying to appear perfect anymore. Trying to get that external validation and literally burning out to the point where I had to do something different. I didn't know what my options were anymore. And deciding that I had to do something for myself. I had to save myself essentially so I could be here for my daughter and my husband.

So that put me on the journey to self-discovery, self-enlightenment. It was actually, the book that was recommended to me by an executive coach that I was in a leadership training program at that point. That was when I discovered Brené Brown and *The Gifts of Imperfection*. That was a turning point for me to really recognize what I was doing to myself. And how much I was seeking that internal validation and what it was telling me about myself and how I needed to figure out how to let go of that and love myself, and give myself that validation.

And turn my self-talk around, and be my own cheerleader, and nurture myself, and a lot of inner child work, honestly, to heal the small child in myself that was still hurting, that I just pushed down and never acknowledged. Because I didn't even know. I had never heard of inner child work until I started doing the self-discovery. And that's when I slowly have come to learn to accept myself and love myself and be where I am today.

I mean I still get embarrassed. I still have moments of doubt and shame, but I can recognize those better for myself now. And tell myself, hey, it's going to be okay. At the end of the day, we're all so worried about what

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other people think of us that nobody's really honestly paying attention to the other people.

Jen: Yes. So, with that inner child work just for those who don't understand inner child work, we go into it in depth in the coach certification. But you can give yourself the love and say the things you needed to hear as a child. So, what kind of phrases did you need to hear as a child that you've been able to kind of give to yourself now in the present? Because she's still in there, right?

Kristen: Yeah. She's still there. We have a good relationship though now, where I just tried to ignore her for a long time. Just that, it was phrases like, you matter, you're safe, you're loved, it was not your fault.

Jen: Yes, huge, yeah.

Kristen: That you had nothing to do with that. Just those kind of things just to reassure yourself, and that you're always loved, that you will be taken care of. I will give you what you need.

Jen: I love that.

Kristen: I will give you what you need, just let me know what you need, and I will take care of you. Yeah, that you're not responsible. You were never responsible for other people's actions.

Jen: Yeah. It's so fascinating to me how much of a difference just going back and healing that inner child helps you show up differently as an adult. I just love it, it's amazing.

Kristen: Yeah. it was a gamechanger when I figured that out, yeah.

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Jen: Pretty cool. Well, I know you still do one-on-one coaching on the side, not just at ASU. So, if people want to work with you on time management, because I know you are a goddess of time management or inner child work, because you really did a lot of that, where could they connect with you?

Kristen: Yeah. So, I still have a presence on social media at Mission Driven Mavens. That's the company that I started, wanting to work with women who want to change the world essentially, or women that are driven to change themselves or whatever. Yeah, so people can find me at Mission Driven Mavens, missiondrivenmavens.com. There's a contact form there. I'm also on Instagram and I have a Facebook page.

Jen: That's cool. And you can coach anyone anywhere virtually, you do that all day, right?

Kristen: I do that all day.

Jen: This beautiful desert is what you would see coaching with Kristen, so that's awesome. I don't know if we said it, you're in Phoenix, hence the desert.

Kristen: I am yes.

Jen: Yeah, cool. Well, this was humongous. Any last piece of advice you'd like to offer our listeners?

Kristen: Just I think that when I discovered that the two most powerful words for me in my language are, 'I choose' that that really gave me the power to do whatever I needed to do to change my life because it's not victim thinking. It's empowering. It really lets you be in control. So really if

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you think about what you choose to be in your life, it's really how you can start to change anything you want and being empowered to do that. So, I really believe that I choose are two of the most important words in whatever language you speak.

I go further with that, to choose progress over perfection. I think that's one of my big messages too and it applies in a lot of situations, that if you just move forward and make progress to get yourself out of that place of fear, of overwhelm, of burnout. Just anything you can do to move forward to make some sort of imperfect progress is better than standing perfectly still.

Jen: Yeah. It's okay to be Ron and Harry, and not just Hermione, that's what I always say.

Kristen: Exactly.

Jen: Who needs Hermione anyway?

Kristen: I know, I'd be exhausted, oh dear, she needs some coaching.

Jen: We can heal from anything, and we can have our own backs and we can have help with others who have gone through something similar, so yeah.

Kristen: Yeah. I choose to be healthy.

Jen: Yeah, that's great. Well, thank you so much for being on the show. This was phenomenal.

Kristen: Thank you, Jen. And thank you so much for everything you're doing. You've been a big part of my life and my growth too, so I just want to

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thank you for everything you've done. Yeah, so thank you so much for having me, this was very exciting, and it fulfilled a dream of mine when I started listening to your podcast years ago, so oh my gosh.

Jen: Really?

Kristen: I did, I told myself someday I will be on Jen's podcast.

Jen: Oh my gosh, you've done it.

Kristen: I have done it.

Jen: I hope you're going to celebrate big tonight.

Kristen: I am, yes, definitely. My husband's going to cook, it's going to be great.

Jen: Well, thank you, this was fantastic, I appreciate it.

Kristen: Thank you, Jen.

That episode it just made me feel so inspired. I love how Kristen could share her story. And you can feel at times there's still some healing to be done just like we all have. We're all releasing past shame, and past experiences, and stepping into a more, and more, and more empowered version of ourselves. And I love that Kristen was able to speak her truth. Brené Brown says, "Shame can't survive being spoken." And Kristen spoke her story so well, I loved it. Thank you, Kristen.

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Now, Kristen made a career change. And I want to point out that you too could make a difference in the world by becoming a coach, a Vibrant Happy Women certified coach, our program begins again soon. There is always a new round coming up. You can learn more and sign up for yourself to become a coach at jenriday.com/coaching. There is a four part video series there that explains the program. You can sign up to watch those videos and learn more. Again that's jenriday.com/coaching.

I personally love being a coach, I love watching Kristen and how much she has healed through all the tools she learned through the coach certification. I love seeing her being a more confident, empowered, happy version of herself. I love seeing that in all of my students, frankly. And we all can do things like that. We can all take a leap and focus on our own healing and growth. And then turn it round and use that to help others with their healing and growth. That's what coaching is all about.

So, I love what I do. I love getting to be here with you. I love getting to talk to and watch the growth of women like Kristen. I'm so blessed. Thank you so much for listening my friends and I will see you again next time. Until then make it a vibrant and happy, shame releasing week. Take care.

If you enjoy this podcast, you have to check out the Vibrant Happy Women Club. It's my monthly group coaching program where we take all this material to the next level and to get you the results that will blow your mind. Join me in the Vibrant Happy Women Club at jenriday.com/join.