

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

Episode 27: Karen Walrond

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself Podcast. I'm Whitney Johnson. I think, write, speak and live all things disruption. Today's guest is [Karen Walrond](#). For those of you in the blogosphere, you may know here as [Chookooloonks](#). Based in Houston, Texas but hailing from Trinidad and Tobago, Karen was formerly an engineer and attorney before disrupting herself to become an author and photographer.

In 2016, she was on our [Forty Women Over 40 to Watch](#) list. Her latest book is [Make Light](#). She also recently [launched a podcast by the same name](#) where she features people whose mission it is to thrive out loud.

K: Hi, I'm so excited to be here. I'm Karen Walrond and I'm a writer and a photographer and an author. And most of my work has to do with, um, finding your beautiful different and using it as your superpower, and also talking about what it means to thrive, particularly, um, after 40.

W: Let's start off with the big question—and really what piqued my interest about us having a conversation—which is about, I guess, ten years ago, or so, you made this huge career shift. Can you walk us through what that shift was, what it looked like, and how people responded?

K: In my past life I was a practicing attorney; I'm actually still an attorney. I keep my license active because you never know. But, um, but I was a practicing attorney and, you know, it's so funny, because this is such a long story, but as a kid what I really wanted to be was an architect. That was, that was my dream—to be an architect—but everyone around me told me that I was not artistic. I wasn't a creative person; I wasn't an artistic person, but I was good at math. And so, I, I ended up going to engineering school and realizing that I **really** didn't want to do that so I ended up going to law school. So I was a practicing lawyer, um, and luckily landed in a gig that I really loved. I was a software lawyer; I negotiated multi-million dollar deals in the oil and gas industry and I really, really loved it. I...it was a fun job, mostly, actually, because of the writing—because I was writing contracts—and, um, which it's funny because most lawyers look at me and go, "That is the most boring part of, of practicing law." But I loved it. I would just stick my headphones on and write these contracts and I loved writing them. So, I was doing that and I was really good at it and unfortunately, when you're really good at something they tend to promote you. And so I ended up being promoted to General Counsel, which is very prestigious and very wonderful, but it's a lot more stress. Because I don't get to write the contracts, anymore—my lawyers who were working for me were writing them—um, and I was the one dealing with all the

bad stuff, like if the contract poorly or, you know, if employees had a problem with each other or we were getting sued or whatever. Like, I was basically the fireman; I was putting out fires. And it was really high stress for me. And I switched from that General Counsel job to another, smaller company as an Assistant General Counsel; then it really was just more of the same. And so I kind of decided that was it. I had a young daughter at the time and I was working crazy hours, which I don't mind doing; I work crazy hours now, so it's not that. But I was working crazy hours at a job that I really didn't enjoy. I was getting what I now know were panic attacks; I didn't know at the time what was happening. I assumed I was just getting older; I was in my early 40's at the time. And I thought, "Could this be perimenopause; what is happening here?" My heart would race, even though I was lying in bed, and just really sort of weird stuff was happening, so I thought, "You know what? It's time; it's time to quit." During all this time I'd been a photographer. I'd been, you know, as a hobbyist. And I thought, "What would happen if I focused on that even though I'm quote—I'm doing air quotes now—not an artist, and see what happens?" And I never looked back. As far as how people reacted to it, my boss, who I'd worked with for many years; I'd actually followed him from the first company to the second, when I told him, I said, "I'm leaving." He said, "What are you going to do?" And I said, "I don't know yet. You know. I don't know. I'm going to find something fun to do. And I'm going to work from home and, you know, maybe I'll take some, some legal clients on the side, but I frankly don't think I will," and I actually never did. And he said, "Well, um, I think you'll be back," I think is what he said.

W: Oh, interesting.

K: He goes, "I think you're going to be back." And I said, "I really don't think I am." And I said, "No offense; I loved working for you, but I really don't think I am." And he said, "No, you're too, you're too gregarious, you're too much of a people person and you're too smart," I think is also what he said, "You're too smart not to be back." Um, which was vaguely insulting at the time, but I know he didn't mean it that way. Right? Like I knew...

W: Right. He didn't.

K: ...I know he was trying to be encouraging. So I left and I didn't really know what I was going to do. I had...I had been blogging for a while and the blog had had some success even without me trying, because it was really not something I'd ever put my focus on, but it had a pretty good following and it was a photo blog primarily. And I knew I could write...

W: Mm hmm.

K: ...and so I thought, "Well, what am I going to do? What if I focused on this? Like this is being...this is successful just kind of as a, you know, something I

do on weekends. What would happen if I focused on it, and like really put my heart into it?" And I remember thinking, "What's my title? Like if I leave, what I...I have to have a title. Like, who doesn't have a title? I have to have a title." And so...and I don't even know what I'm going to do. So I remember I sat down with my journal and I decided to make a list of everything I loved to do...like everything. No matter how ridiculous or how mundane. Singing in the shower made it on the list and reading to my daughter made it on the list. I mean like I literally put everything on this list, and then, after I exhausted it, I started going through and thinking, "Well, why? What is it about writing contracts that I love?" And, you know, for me, like I said, it was taking something that was particularly complex and breaking it down so that anybody could understand what was going down. Because I...that was something that I, I was very passionate about, was being a, being like a lawyer that didn't use legalese.

And as I went through I started seeing patterns and the patterns were I love public speaking, which is something I've always loved, um, I loved writing, and I loved shooting. Speak, write, shoot; I loved photography. And so I decided, you know, what...that's what I'm going to do. I don't know what a person who does that is called, but that's what I'm going to do. And I made business cards and I didn't put a title on it; I just put speak, write, shoot on the card. Um, and thought...and then I redid my site to make it clear that that's what I did and then I sat back and thought, "Let's see what happens."

W: Let's go back to you growing up and people telling you you weren't creative. Like, where did that come from? How did...what was the genesis of that, because clearly you were, so what was happening that people were...had that...were they projecting onto you that they weren't creative and therefore you weren't? What was happening?

K: I remember when I was in my twenties, um, my dad, you know, calling me into his home office and saying, "Here. Here's all your documents from when you were a child." Like, I don't need these anymore; you're grownup. Here's your stuff." And he had every single report card and medical document; everything about me. Like my life was in this, this thing. And I remember going through it and I found a report card from when I was in kindergarten, so maybe four, um, four or five, and, um, the teacher wrote, "Karen excels at English and math but doesn't show any artistic ability." Right?

W: Ooooooh.

K: So I probably couldn't draw or whatever. I don't know. I mean, at four how do you...how do you know....

W: A dagger going through my heart right now—those words, the power! Okay, keep going.

K: You know...I know. But I mean like it was the seventies, right. It was ages ago...

W: Yeah. They didn't know.

K: ...teachers would never write that now. Right? It was a totally different time. And I think probably what happened after that was, because I was good at writing and math, um, everybody just sort of, you know, urged me to follow that. Right? So...

W: I think there's an important point here. Just tell our listeners briefly what your dad did as a profession and what your mom did, because that will help reinforce why people thought you were good at math and English.

K: Sure. Yeah, so my dad is a petroleum engineer. Um, he has a PhD in petroleum engineering. And my mother was a schoolteacher. She actually did languages. She was a...she...my mother is sort of...my dad is like a math prodigy, like, always has been. He's amazing. And my mother is a languages prodigy. She, she can go anywhere and pick up a language. She speaks like five different languages and she was a Spanish and French teacher, but they lived in Norway for a while and she's fluent in Norwegian; they live in Azerbaijan for a while and she's fluent in Russian, so she's kind of prodigious about that. So that's just what they are. Neither artists; neither one of them were artists at all.

W: So for your teacher, that was sort of...part of...I think part of what people do is they look at what your parents do and so...anyway, I just think that's an interesting little theme there...not a theme, but just something to highlight...

K: Yeah.

W: ...of what they saw and what they were expecting you could do. You say, "Alright, I've been doing this. I'm really good at the law and now I'm going to do something else because I'm done."

K: Yeah.

W: And you discover that you're going to...what is it? Write?

K: Speak, write, shoot.

W: Speak, write, shoot.

K: Speak, write, shoot. Yep, uh hmmm.

W: Alright. And you start doing it and then what happens?

K: When I first started I thought, “Oh, well I’m a photographer; I’ll do portraits, or weddings.” And I hated it. I was like, um, “It’s not....” I love taking portraits but I don’t like having...taking portraits where that’s what people are hiring me for. Because people get really crazy about their photographs. Right? Like, “Can you remove the mole? Can you make the wrinkles go away?” And I’m like, “No! You’re wrinkles are awesome.” Like, why would I make those go away, right? So, um, so I was like...it was just that sort of soul-crushing because I kept hearing what people hated about themselves.

And so what ended up happening, of course, was that people would come to me and ask me these things and I would take it and then I would share that I’d done it, so this...I just got to write this really great article and go take this look...you know, go look at this, because it’s a great publication or, um, I had the opportunity to go speak at this organization and you know, here’s what I talked about. You know, that kind of thing. And I started like sort of building a portfolio of work like that and sharing it online and, you know, beefing up my website so that it showed all of those things, and more and more work came. So it worked out really well for me.

W: Did you ever at any point have, kind of, struggle with your identity? When...I mean, you said you needed to figure out what your title was and you just wrote Speak, Write, Shoot.

K: Yeah.

W: Was there a moment where you went from being the lawyer to the Speak, Write, Shoot that you were just like “What’s my identity? Who am I?”

K: Sure. I mean like that, that whole exploration about it and putting Speak, Write, Shoot on there was a little bit weird, and so, you know, people would look at me and go, “What does that mean?” you know, and I would have to explain it. So absolutely there were times when it was really difficult. I actually now...my latest card, I don’t have anything on it; I just have my name. I tend to, you know, I tend to change depending on where I am. So, you know, sometimes if somebody asks me what I do I’m like, “I’m an author” or, you know, sometimes I do a lot of public speaking, you know, sort of on leadership and I tell people that, so...Honestly it changes, depending on what the situation is and where I am and I’m comfortable with it. I mean, I’ve been doing this now for a few years; I’m comfortable with it now. Um, I just think I’m a hyphenate; I don’t think there’s just one thing that I could do. I think saying, you know, saying “Karen Walrond,” you know, “Speaker” is not enough.

W: Doesn’t cover it, yeah.

K: That's not everything that I do. And I still tell people that I'm a lawyer cause I do a lot of speaking at legal conferences and leadership conferences for lawyers. So, uh, it just depends, really, on where I am.

W: So, so, a few years ago you wrote a book called [*The Beauty of Different*](#), which is about...seven years ago now.

K: Yeah.

W: But I think it's just...the theme of it was what makes us unique also makes us beautiful and it may also be the source of your superpowers. So, as you said, you grew up in Trinidad, you then moved to Houston—I think when you were about 11 years old.

K: That's right.

W: So what was the moment when you discovered that you were different?

K: Probably about when I moved from Trinidad to the U.S. at about 11 years old.

W: In the first nanosecond?

K: Yeah, so I moved here to Houston—which is where I live now—I moved to a suburb of Houston, um, in 1978, so I was 11.

W: Okay.

K: Um, and I had a funny accent, right; I spoke like a Trini...So I landed in Houston talking exactly like this, not sounding like...and this is a suburb of Houston, right, so everybody had these very southern drawls and I didn't, right? I spoke like this, and I had very short hair, right; I'm black, which...the neighborhood we were in was like 99% white and I had very short hair. I had a teeny, weeny afro—a TWA as we say. And I just stuck...I just stood out, like a, you know, a sore thumb.

W: Yep. Ok.

K: So, and it was the 70s, which was a lot less of an enlightened time, so I had, you know, I had students giving me a hard time. I had teachers...I had one teacher whom I will never forget who was just horrible to me. And, there was like I think one other black kid in the school and it was just...it was just a really, really tough time. Um, but it was mostly a really confusing time because I didn't understand what the big deal was, right? Having not grown up in the U.S., having not really been exposed to the history of the U.S....

W: The cultural history.

K: Right, like knowing about the civil rights...I just really didn't know. I just...it just made no sense to me. And coming from a country where everybody was brown—like, not everybody was black—but, you know, Trinidad is primarily south-Asian and black and Asian and some white. And everybody's mixed, right? Like everybody's...like I have every shade in my family because every race mixed with each other. So, um, I'm just...I just didn't stand out in Trinidad; I look like every...I look like a Trinidadian.

W: And you came to Houston and you did.

K: And I came here and not only did I look different, which I expected, people treated me different because of it, which made no sense, because I had so many family members that didn't look exactly like me in Trinidad and nobody...we were all Trinis and it didn't matter, right. Like, it's not a big deal. So I immediately started changing as much as I could. I grew my hair out; I straightened it. You know, I started wearing makeup which I hadn't been doing. I got this, what I like to call CNN American accent that I'm speaking with now. Where you...

W: Is that what it is?

K: ...can't really tell where from America I am.

W: Yeah, uh huh. Very flat.

K: Right. So, yeah exactly. It's just sort of, "Where is she really from?" You know...I couldn't do anything about being black, but at least I looked more black-American, and then two years later we moved back to Trinidad and I looked like a freak, right. Because I had this weird accent and my hair was straight. Not that...people straighten their hair in Trinidad but you know, it was just like, "Whoa, she went to America and tried to be American," right? So then I cut all my hair off again and got my accent back and started speaking the way I was supposed to speak again, and, you know....

W: Wow, and so, all at this formative...

K: ...wore my school uniform.

W: ...all at this formative age, right? Of 11...like prepubescent...like this is...this is truly a formative experience for you.

K: Right.

W: Okay, so, one experience that I read about that I just thought was such a fantastic experience was when you first decided to try scuba diving. Would you share with our listeners what that experience was like?

K: Yeah. So I decided...actually, how did I decide to start scuba diving? I, um, had a friend at this company that I was a staff attorney at—she actually was the travel manager for the attorney...I mean, for the company. And she came up to me and she was like, “I’m thinking of starting...of getting certified in scuba; do you want to join me?” And I thought, “I’m from the Caribbean; I should do this.” Right? Like, why not? And so, um, we, we got certified together. And I am...I...first of all, I am not a daredevil; I am not the person that loves...I hate rollercoasters. I will never jump out of a plane. Like, you know. So, this felt really dare-devily to me, like I’m going to get certified in scuba diving. And I...but I’m a nervous diver. I love it; it’s very meditative because when you’re under the water it’s quiet and all you hear are the bubbles and it’s very peaceful and you have to breathe slowly so that you can conserve the oxygen in your tank. So what happened? We had gone on a dive together, our first dive together, and it was fine. But then I went to the Caribbean...that’s what it was. I moved to London...you know, I got transferred to London. And then I decided to take myself on a vacation by myself back to the Caribbean, um, to Cayman Islands. And...so this is maybe my third dive, or fourth dive...like, this is brand new at diving.

W: Early.

K: Yeah. And, again, I’m a nervous diver, right? Like I don’t want to get, you know, bent...like, you know, I don’t want to get all the things that you see...Once you become a certified scuba diver you realize that the shark thing is actually the least of your worries. Like, you want to be sure you don’t run out of oxygen, that you don’t get too much nitrogen in your blood; like there’s all these weird things that you have to keep watching: dials and stuff and make sure that you’re doing everything right. So, I was having a hard time equalizing, which is getting the pressure out of your ear, because there’s a lot of pressure as you go down further and further and you have to clear your ears like you do on a plane, in order to get down, or else you can blow an eardrum, which you don’t want to....See, like I said, there’s a lot of stuff about diving. So I’m having a really hard time getting down and I’m telling the dive master—the guy who’s taking the group of us down—that I’m having a hard time getting down. And it’s Cayman Islands, which the water is like glass; like you can see anything and it’s teeming with life. And he said, “Okay.” We go on the first dive, which was a very deep dive and we get down to the ground...I mean, to the floor of the ocean, so we’re at about 100 foot depth and there’s not a whole lot to see—there’s some fish and stuff; there’s not a whole lot to see, but I make it down and I’m like, I’m so excited that I make it down. And he’s like, “Okay, we’re going to go to a trench.” And I’m like...you know, he had told us on the boat, and I’m like, “I don’t know what that means.” And so, we’re diving...he says,

“Follow me” he signals follow, follow me and, um, we, you know, follow; there’s probably six of us. And we’re going like in between rocks so it’s almost like...kind of like a little, you know, not a canyon, but like, you know, I’m like maybe a foot off of the sea floor going between these rocks and then suddenly the floor just disappeared and we had reached the trench. And the trench was 25,000 feet; something like that. You couldn’t see the bottom anymore; like it was just blue.

W: Oh.

K: And somehow, going between these rocks, when the floor drops there’s this current or something, and it pushed me out over this trench and it is the closest thing to flying I’ve ever felt. Because suddenly there’s no, there’s no ground, right? And it’s deep blue. And I turn and I looked and I realize I’ve just swum off a cliff face basically so I turn and see where I am and the dive master, you know, he comes over and looks at me, cause he knows, and he goes, “Are you okay?” and gives the signal for okay, and I’m like, “Oh my God, I’m beyond...” It was, it was amazing. It was the most thrilling experience I had had at that point.

W: What switch flipped for you? Because you’d gone from being very cautious to all the sudden...because when you first said you stepped off that cliff, I thought you were going to say you were terrified...

K: Yeah. No.

W: ...and you said you were thrilled.

K: Yeah.

W: Like, what happened?

K: I don’t know. (laughing)

W: It just happened.

K: It just happened.

W: You let go.

K: You know, um, yeah, it just happened. I think, you know, if you had told me what was going to happen ahead of time, I would have freaked out. And you know, it’s funny you say that, because there’s, there’s a lot that happens in diving that if you tell me on the boat, “Here’s what’s going to happen. You’re going to go down there and see sharks.” I’d probably be like, “Yeah, I’m not going down there.” But then when you go down there and you see a shark, it’s

like, “That is the coolest thing.” Because all of a sudden...it’s almost like you’re a guest in their world...

W [19:47] You have another book coming out, November 1, 2017.

K: It is.

W: Can you tell us a little bit about it—it’s called [*Make Light: Stories of Bright Sparks, Slow Burns and Thriving Out Loud*](#). Can you tell us a little about the book and the gen...not the genesis but the journey to go from [*The Beauty of Being Different*](#) to this book and sort of what’s sort of transpired in your life over the last seven years, that you want to dedicate this time and this energy and your sort of reputational capital to this topic?

K: So what happened between the last book and this book is I got older. I wrote the last book, like you said, seven years ago, so it came out when I was 43. Um, in 13 days I’m going to be 50. And, um....

W: Happy birthday!

K: Thank you. And I...I started actually...the book actually is an evolution of a, um, a photo project that I had done. I was kind of in the doldrums about my blog and I, you know, was like, you know, I feel like I’m writing 100 percent for an audience, yet when I first started writing the blog it was really 100 percent for me. And so, um, you know, I just don’t have the passion around it that I did. I knew I didn’t want to stop blogging, but I was like, “I need to kind of reenergize and reinvigorate that.” Um, and so, I was, you know...I mentioned this to a friend of mine—actually a friend who’s much younger than me; I’m not even sure she’s 40 yet—and she has a beautiful blog. Her name is [Erin Loechner](#); she writes a blog called [Design for Mankind](#) and it’s just a beautiful, peaceful, lovely place on the internet. Um, and I was talking to Erin about it and Erin gave me this advice that when you hear it you’re going to be like, “Well, that’s obvious, Karen.” But for some reason it really struck me. She said, “You know, Karen, you should write the content you wish you could read online.” And I thought, “You know, that’s really smart.” And so I thought, “Well when I was first writing, I was, you know, I was writing about becoming a new mom.” Like that was the big reason. Um, and that was sort of consuming me. But now my daughter’s 13—or at the time she was 11—and I thought, ‘It’s not that I have everything down about mothering, but, um, but I kind of know where to get answers if I need answers now, right? Like, it’s not something that’s....

W: You have the map now.

K: Yeah, I know what to do.

W: Yep.

K: Or how to find out what to do. And so I thought, “What is it that I’m thinking about right now?” And I thought, “You know, what I think about a lot is getting older.” Um, because at the time I was 47 I think. At the time. And I thought, you know, it’s...and it wasn’t that I was worried about getting older because I’ve never worried about getting older; I’ve never had a problem about it and actually that was the point. I was like, I’m not seeing a lot of writing and content out there about the exhilaration of getting older; about what...how getting older is a really awesome thing.

And yet my experience was I was loving getting older. I felt stronger, I felt smarter, I felt more confident, um, more secure in the person I wanted. I felt like I knew my values more and wanted to live them more and didn’t really care if people thought I should be living in a different way. And that was sort of the experience of my friends that were in similar ages. And so I started photo...a photo project with an old Hasselblad camera, which is this lovely medium format camera that I have that’s film. 100% film. And I thought, “I’m going to take portraits of women who I think are thriving that are over 40. And ask them, ‘What does it mean to thrive?’” And they...and I didn’t know what I was going to get. Right? Like, I was just like...and I wanted...like, I didn’t put a call out. There’ve been times when I’ve done photo projects and I’ve put a call out and let anybody....And I was like, “No, this has to be...these have to be people that when I look at them”—I don’t necessarily have to know them well—but I look at them and think, “That is how...how they look is how I want to feel.” Right? Like, that I want to really kind of be.

W: Mm hmm. I love that.

K: And so I want...and I had no idea what people would say and what was wonderful about it was I was interviewing people who had just turned 40, 50, who were 60, and there answers were really diverse. Like, some talked about thriving as far as constantly learning. And some talked about thriving as...as moving through difficult times with grace and self-compassion. And some talked about thriving as being physically fit. Like, everybody had kind of a different take on it. Some talked about thriving as having a closer connection to their God. Right? So, it was this huge, like, diversity and I thought, “You know what, there’s a book here.” And so that...the book is [Make Light](#) and I interviewed and I have essays; it’s very similar to my first book. There’s some personal essays in it, but there’s also a lot of interviews and a lot of people defining what thrive means. But, um, it’s focused on mind, body, spirit. And my goal for the book was so that women who were 40 or older would look at it and go, “Wow, I have so much life yet to live.”

W: Exactly. Exactly.

K: And women who are younger than 40 would go, “I can’t wait to get to 40.” Right? Like, wow, it’s really beginning when it’s 40. And I, I hopefully have done that. I feel like I have.

W: **[25:02]** You know, um, as you may recall...so you were on our 40 over...[Forty Women Over 40 to Watch](#) list last year and I’m happier...I’m even more happier than ever because you are not only a woman to watch, but you are highlighting women to watch and just showing...just the beauty. [Ashton Applewhite](#)—you’re probably familiar with her—she writes a blog called [This Chair Rocks](#) and she talks...

K: Yep.

W: ...about how when you get over a certain age, whether it’s 40 or 50, it’s you’re not more old, you’re just more. And I just think that...

K: Yeah.

W: ...that’s such a...

K: I love that.

W: Isn’t that beautiful? It’s just a wonderful way to describe it and so I’m so excited for you. So my question to you is, um, how, how do you define thriving?

K: I think there’s two parts. I think one part is thriving means really being very clear on whose opinion matters, and whose opinion matters...the number of people whose opinion matters is a really, really tiny number. And then living your life, right. Um, so, and letting go of expectations and what the world wants you to be because that’s just bogus. Like that’s just ridiculous, right?

W: Yeah.

K: So that’s one part of it. I think the other part of it is, um, searching for—I don’t want to say balance because I hate that word—but searching for....

W: **[26:25]** Why do you hate that word?

K: Because I don’t...I think balance means that you’re going through life, like, every day of your life...

W: Teetering?

K: ...you are...or you’re just, every day of your life, getting as much family time as possible and you’re doing really great at work and you’re working out and

you're praying to your God and you're, like...like you've got all of that in one day and I honestly don't think that's possible, on one day, everyday.

W: Okay.

K: And I don't think that's possible. I think sometimes you're going to have really great family days, right, but it means you're not going to be looking at work. And sometimes you're going to have to focus on work and maybe your kids and your partner are going to have to, you know, kind of fend for themselves while you get through this work part. And sometimes you're going to be out there hiking forever and then sometimes you're not. Like I think that's...I think there's, um, like an ebb and flow to all of it. But I think thriving is being mindful of that. Like, being mindful of, "You know what? I know this is a worktime so sometime I need to get back to spiritual time. And I'm doing really great spiritually but you know what? At some point I need to get back to family. Or whatever. Like, I think it's sort of thriving is being mindful of that..."

W: Got it.

K: ...taking care of those things over time. Like, all those three things and because you do that, that when the hard times come—and they will—that you're able to move through them with more grace and more self-compassion and more perspective I think. Because I think doing all three of those things can help you get perspective. Plus I also think—this is a bonus—I also think thriving gratitude practice will get you there. And a lot of it.

W: Great.

K: Because I think gratitude is the key to joy. I really do.

W: Agreed, a hundred percent. So how will you disrupt yourself in the next 12 months?

K: Yeah, you know, I love this question and I've been thinking about it so much because I am turning 50 and it's such a milestone age that I've been thinking like, ok, my grandparents all lived into their 90s and one lived until 102, so the way I figure it I've got my life again to live. Right?

W: Yeah, you've got a whole lot more living to do.

K: Which is a whole lot of potential, yeah. So, there's a couple of things that I've been thinking about. One is I feel in a lot of ways that I've gotten very comfortable with my work. I know how to give a keynote and do a great job. I know how to take a photograph and do a really good job. And I kind of want to push myself. I'm really interested in video and cinematography so I'd love to...creatively I'd like to start doing more of that; just experimenting with it like

I did with photography 20-something years ago and see what comes of it, because I think that could be really fun. Um, and, you know, maybe doing some more workshops, doing stuff that really...instead of having people hiring me to speak, like actually creating events.

W: Oh, you'd create your own events.

K: Where we could do that.

W: Okay. Got it.

K: Yeah, so that I can do that and invite people and do some stuff like that. So hopefully I'll be doing more of that; I think that would be really interesting and fun. And then, you know, I've got a book tour coming up so, you know, I'm sure...I'll be doing a lot of stuff on that. And then, um...you know, one of the things my friend, [Brené Brown](#)—so she's actually a good friend of mine. And one of the things she said...

W: Just let it be noted, I love her work.

K: Oh good, she's, she's brilliant.

W: It must be said. So, okay, so keep going.

K: Yeah, she's brilliant; she does brilliant work. You know, she's a researcher on courage and authenticity and shame and we were talking once and in passing—I don't even remember what we were talking about—but she said the phrase 'legacy work,' and I love that phrase. And, um, really kind of figuring out what my legacy work should be for the next 50 years. Like, what is the stuff I can create that is of service and that helps make women stronger primarily, but people stronger generally. Um, and of all races and gender orientations and religions, because inclusivity is a huge passion of mine.

W: Yep.

K: I...and not just because I feel like, "Well, I don't want to be excluded anymore," but because I feel like there's strength in diversity. We get innovation from diversity and creativity comes from diversity and that only happens if everybody feels included and feels celebrated. And if there's a way that I can use my work to help celebrate and include more diverse people in my work, I definitely want to do that.

W: Okay, so Karen, thank you so much for spending this time with me and with our listeners; I know they're going to love hearing what you have to say and I'm so excited for your next book and thank you again.

K: Oh, absolutely my pleasure. Thank you so much for having me.

So, so much here.

First of all, did you notice how Karen knew when she was on the wrong learning curve? She started to get sick. It's usually a pretty good sign it's time to jump. Once she decided to try something new, as with scuba diving, it wasn't terrifying – though she thought it would be – but in fact, thrilling.

Karen has also been very discovery driven. She wasn't sure what she would offer the world, like with speak, write, shoot. But she started, believing that if she would keep iterating, she would figure it out. And she has.

Change is not linear. I repeat – change is not linear. Elevator pitches make it sound that way, but it isn't. We're pretty good about not expecting our own story to be linear – let's give others the same luxury at home and at work.

Finally, isn't it exciting that Karen's going to make a short film? There's nothing quite like saying a dream out loud to make it come alive. Or in Karen's words, to thrive out loud.