

Episode 43: Three Fears Perfectionists Have, with Michaela Thomas

Mandy: Are you scared of being ordinary and mediocre, as if that relegates you to the low achieving, boring, not-living-life-to-the-fullest-bucket? Hmm. Or maybe you are scared of failing, so you only do things that you're already good at, but secretly you'd love to take more risks, ideally without looking cringey and embarrassing. Or maybe you're scared of success, because it would mean that you're getting too big for your boots and a little bit wonky and full of yourself, so you dim your light and play it safe. If any of these conundrums have you nodding, you are in the right place. I'm doing a Q and A with author and clinical psychologist, Michaela Thomas.

Michaela specializes in perfectionism in helping busy, stressed out people find balance over burnout. She also runs the 'Pause Purpose Play podcast' where I've been a guest, so go and listen to that when we had a lot of fun. So before we dive in, welcome to Enough, The Podcast. I'm Dr. Mandy Lehto, your host and executive coach, and recovering perfectionist and overachiever.

This show is for you if your life looks shiny and successful on the outside, but inside you feel like a fakey pants fraud, who's never quite good enough. You're driven by the need to keep achieving and acquiring thinking one fine day, you'll get to the promised land of good enoughness where you can finally sleep and accept yourself.

Guaranteed, you're exhausted, though no one would ever know. Welcome, I'm glad you're here. So Michaela, let's start with the question of why we're so afraid to be ordinary and mediocre. Oh, and by the way, there is some spicy language in this episode, so headphones if required. Ready? Let's dive in.

Michaela: I guess because we live in a society where good enough feels like failing, where good enough is not good enough, good enough feels like you're a below average. And that's the funny thing with statistical averages, right? If you look at a bell curve where you have most people being in the middle of the curve, that's the average, and then you have outliers to each side, the below average and the above average.

You cannot have people in a statistical curve all be above average. It is not possible statistically. So if someone has to be below average. But when we think about what that means, the idea of being below average is something, if that sparks a sense of fear, sparks a sense of shame, we can then think about what happened when we were growing up, if we fell below average, or if we were, "just average".

What happened? Was there an absence of praise? Was there an absence of joy within you? Did people notice? Did you even get outright punished or shamed for it? Then no wonder then that the idea of being average or below average, gives a sense of fear into us. It's sort of like, 'Oh my God, I can't go to that place because that's not good enough'. And that's something I work with a lot with high-striving individuals that it's okay to have a sense of ambition and want to go for those high milestones to be extraordinary. But there will be things in your life which will not be extraordinary. There will be just ordinary, and that is okay too. And that's a huge learning curve.

It's almost like a sensitization process, like you sensitized yourself to pollen all of a sudden, instead of getting the allergic reaction that this is not enough, you then start to gently, gently, slowly, gradually over years sensitized your body and your system to be okay with average in some areas of your life. Because if you want to be truly extraordinary and above average and excel, you need to tolerate that some areas of your life will not, otherwise you will burn out and then you're not achieving any of the things you want to do.

Mandy: So there can be a sensitivity to certain things in terms of not being extraordinary, like when it comes to, I don't know, I'll randomly choose something, Golf. It doesn't trigger me at all that I'm not extraordinary when it comes to golf because, I think I played once when I was 12 and it doesn't trigger me. So if somebody said, "Oh, you're really not enough when it comes to Golf. Okay, fair enough. But there are certain things that are very trigger prone areas or reactive areas.

So when it comes, for example, to achievement or when it comes to, having a tidy house or the way that I'm put together when I go out into the world and I don't know, what are some of those reactive areas for you?

Michaela: There's certain things I definitely don't really give a shit about, if I'm honest, and there's certain things that are very triggering. My parenting is a huge trigger point for me because we hurt where we care is, is one of the things that Steve Hayes, one of the founders of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy says that "We care about it." So that's why it hurts if we have the prospect that is gonna fall below average or full short of the standard we've perceived is the must have, and must be, a really attuned, caring, attached, emotionally, available present parent kind of thing.

And even though I know consciously through all the research that good enough parent is actually more helpful, where you are gonna meet your child's needs about a third of the time and a third of the time you really mess up and a third of the time you repair those messes. And that is what serves your child best in life, setting them up for being able to be fully functioning adult rather than meeting their needs perfectly all the time. I can know that logically, but it still triggers me. I have to say that, whenever I feel like I've messed up or I've not done what I wanted to do with my children, then I definitely feel that's a trigger point because it means something to me.

So Golf probably holds no meaning or value to you, and why we care about the things that hold no meaning or value. Now there can be areas of domains of people listening, of their lives where they don't actually hold meaning or value, but it's attached to previous experiences of maybe praise or punishment, so that it can still have been an arbitrary value attached to it, like if you don't tidy your house properly, maybe your mom would've gone of like, my mom has occasionally done pulling the finger along a ledge and be like, "It's dusty", that kind of very innocent on surface level kind of comment can then have made you attach meaning to the domain of cleaning that, "Oh, my house must always be perfectly spotless before guests arrive", even though it stresses me out to the point of having arguments with my husband, that kind of thing. This is an example rather than how it is for me but these are the things I hear a lot, that is the must and the even though. I must do this, even though it's costing me an arm and leg, even though it's impacting on my family or even though it's impacting on how I am with my children. And that's one of the things that you see a lot of with the striving and the pursuing of perfection, that I must do it even though it's costing me exhaustion, stress, burnout, overwhelm. All of these things that we don't actually really want to know life, but the pressure to be perfect, the must is too strong for us to resist it.

Mandy: I shared a YouTube video with my teenage daughter this morning. In it, Cristiano Ronaldo, arguably the most talented soccer player in the world, wears a bearded disguise in a fat suit, I'll put the link in my show notes. It's really worth watching. He spends an hour in a Spanish square kicking a football around, doing this incredibly fancy footwork and trying to get people to engage, like kick the ball a little bit.

Almost nobody did except this little boy called Nicholas. And Ronaldo eventually picks up the ball, asks the boy's name, pulls out a sharpie, and then peels off his bearded facial disguise. And the boy just looking at him with these saucer eyes. All afternoon, Ronaldo had been doing his mind blowing footwork with that ball and nobody paid any attention.

And within seconds of removing his disguise, he was mobbed by crowds with their phones out. There's so much to unpack in that video, and yes, seeing a famous person does weird things to some people, which is a whole other story. But what struck me was that as an ordinary, slightly plump guy, no one cared.

It made me reflect on society's emphasis on appearances, on being remarkable, known, famous, and extraordinary. Social media is full of sleek kitchen renovations and Dwayne Johnson physiques. We revere accomplishment so child prodigies playing Shostakovich, with no notes on the piano. Multi-medal

Olympians, New York Times best-sellers, gymnasts winning medals with broken bones in their feet and I'm not trying to diminish any of those things. Those are extraordinary, but I can't help but wonder if this instills in us that ordinary bodies, ordinary skills, and talents and homes and accomplishments are comparatively dull and undesirable, maybe even unworthy. And on a less meta level, where else might this deep urge to avoid ordinariness and mediocrity come from?

So I'm reflecting on me, but I'm gonna invite you to think about your own upbringing. So as a child, I had well-intentioned family members who drove me to achieve. I had to do times tables drills until I cried. I was constantly being told by teachers that I had so much potential, or that I was extraordinarily mature for my age. But, there was little tolerance for failure and mediocrity or like for being an ordinary kid. And let's face it, a massive part of daily life is ordinariness. Very little of ordinary life is extraordinary. So the script is kind of internalized that extraordinary and remarkable feats equals worthiness. So if you need a peak state to feel enough or that other people are, you know, looking at you with acceptance and bestowing love on you, if you need that to be enough as a kid, it's gonna be a pretty miserable self-doubting existence whenever you're not in extraordinariness.

So we're moving on to the next question, but if you wanna go deeper into this fear of ordinariness and mediocrity, check out Catherine Gray's new book called 'The Unexpected Joy of the Ordinary'. Next, I ask Michaela about what she would say to someone who's a perfectionist at work.

Michaela: I mean, I could try to speak to well-being. I can try to say, "striving for perfect burns you out", guess it does. I can try to say "striving for perfect is gonna cost you more than it's worth", but people probably don't listen to that. I could say "you're gonna be more well if you take a break."

I could say, "if you look after yourself, it's gonna be more sustainable for you".

And I say all of those things, but what I found as the best way in with truly ambitious, high-striving individuals is to say "if you want to go to those places, you're more likely to do so if you do it sustainably." So you're actually more likely to follow your ambition without drowning in it, if you do so sustainably and perfectionism is not gonna take you to that place.

Don't get me wrong, it's a blessing and a curse. It's probably got you all the, a lot of the successes you have in your life. All the tick boxes you've had, you know, look at me, I've got a podcast, I've written a book. I can rile up my successes, but perfectionism isn't what got me there, I'm sort of recovering from my perfectionism and being hardworking, being ambitious, being curious, being innovative that's what got me there. Being playful, but perfectionism is what stopped me opening those doors for a really long time. It took me, I think, 5 years before I wrote my book, and then probably, 2 years of actually writing it. But perfectionism was the thing that helped me back from taking the step, from taking the plunge.

Perfectionism is what helped me overwork and procrastinate rather than create, to compare with others and despair rather than create. So, if I speak to that part of you, if you are an ambitious individual who want to reach your goals, perfectionism is not going to help you reach them as well as sustainability.

So striving for excellence is not the same as striving for perfection, and that's a really important distinction we make in the literature around perfectionism as a clinical problem. And perfectionism as a clinical problem is attached to depression, anxiety, stress, OCD, because you said compulsion. Yes, obsessive compulsive disorder.

And none of those things are going to get you towards your ambitious goal. So I hope there's a better way in that, trust me on this one, if you wanna reach your targets, I can help you get there, that's what I do for a living. I've work with CEOs, founders, entrepreneurs, lawyers, doctors, and they're all very ambitious.

But perfectionism holds you back, stops you from actually taking the plunge. And to use your example of the Golf, that's probably okay because you've played golf like once, twice maybe. You know, you try this, you can kind of think that's fine to be rubbish at that because I've not tried it a lot. But perfectionists often hold themselves back from trying new things because they will be "rubbish" at it. Below par, below average, above, you know, I can't be above average on it, well as I start something new. And that can mean that you

actually don't take risks and do stretchy things you need to do in order to reach your ambitious goals. So, I can just reiterate it again. Yes, the good thing as a bonus is that you will be more well rested and an overall nicer human being if you let go of your perfectionism.

But let me just kind of go in there at that point again, you're more likely to reach your ambitious goals if you let go are perfect.

Mandy: And mike's around the world dropped. Boom.

My next question is around increasing our appetite for failure by taking more risk. How can we loosen our white knuckle death grip on things needing to be a certain way or our fear of looking stupid if we fail?

Michaela: Well, I guess the first word that comes to mind for me is compassion. Being compassionate with yourself doesn't mean I've being nice and nice and tell yourself that it's okay, you don't have to take that risk because that scares you. No compassion says in a brave, courageous way, saying "No wonder that scares the living daylight out of you."

Because the idea of failing is inconceivable. Through no fault of your own, through everything you've been through as a child, as a young adult, the failures you've faced, the rejections you've experienced, the abandonment, whatever it is, the fear of criticism. You have no wonder that all of those fears pull into this moment right here when you're standing there about to jump off the cliff and you think, "Nah, no. I'd rather not, because it's safer here", and just go closer to the wall and not go to the edge. And I guess that's the question of how safe is it. What does safe mean for you? Is it to stay within your comfort zone at all times and never stretching it, because you are in a critical voice tells you that's not good enough.

So it's not safe to be there either, it's safe, nowhere. So I guess when we are worried about taking risks. We have to tell ourselves that the idea of success is built on failure, is built on risks that you've taken and then fallen, and then picked yourself up and then fallen again. And in the amount of times I've fallen flat on my face with things.

I talked to a friend about that the other day, how I put a workshop out and I sold exactly fuck all tickets, you know, zero tickets. So then I went, "How do I make this a success? How do I make this worthwhile? How do I make this helpful rather than harmful for me not listening to the inner critical voice telling me that wasn't good enough."

Actually, I gave away 10 spaces to women who needed it, and then that was in line with my values around actually helping people out in this time of grief and funk all around. There's lots of people who are experiencing parental burnout now after the summer holidays. So then I think, how do you, as an entrepreneur for me, how do you bring this into a success?

While there was learning from it, there was lots of things I could evaluate from it and the 10 people I gave it away to, there were 10 people who were now brought into my world that weren't there before. And they gave me lots of rich feedback and, you know, ideas around how I can do these things differently next time.

And the one person who actually showed up live, sitting there giving away a 90 minutes of my time to someone for free is someone who made, joined my group coaching program. So it's never a waste, it's never a failure. It is just learning. And I know this is sort of spouting out Instagram, crap. But this is based on research and evidence as well around performance productivity, that if you are willing to make mistakes, if you're willing to face failure, you are more likely to succeed because you try, try, try and try again. If you try once and it doesn't work, and then you never do it again, how are you gonna grow your skillset? How are you gonna improve your performance? How are you gonna increase your confidence?

How are you gonna increase your competence? None of that will happen when you hold yourself back because of the fear of failure.

Mandy: It's the distinction between understanding that logically and actually, I don't know if it's a nervous system thing or whatever it is that in your body that it's okay to fail. And I think that comes up to a couple of things. Trusting yourself, what is the state that my body is in now? Can I... do I have the capacity to recover

from this, and I think particularly those people who have grown up with perfectionist tendencies and do things that they're only good at, me included, it just closed down so many other potential... you know, I've never tried go-karting for example, because it was just something I didn't think I would be good at and lots of other sports or lots of other things that happen in universe. I'm like, no, no, no, I need to wash my hair, sorry, I can't make it type of thing. And secretly yearning for more freedom.

So it's this, it's a very particular kind of conundrum to try small things. That's what's been useful for me is try small things where failure is safe. So this podcast, for example, I had a really successful podcast in the past and trying something new and scrapping that and starting from scratch all of a sudden felt really scary and having really deep conversations, but the way I do that is I just pretend nobody's ever gonna listen to them. So it's just me and the mic, or me and the guest and the mic, and just imagine that this conversation is just the three of us. And you know, then my team does something and it appears out in the world, but I'm not thinking about that right now.

So that's kind of a way to fool that part of me. And another thing that I do is, if we're sticking to podcasting, but this could be before anything. If I'm doing something where something's at stake and I want to increase my appetite for risk. So right before this episode, you'll see it on my Instagram stories, I play loud rock music. So today it was Billy Idol's Rebel Yell and I dance around in my office and wave my arms, and I get myself into that biochemical state because I read somewhere that listening to loud, fast paced pumping music increases our appetite for risk. So I'm more likely to ask you juicy questions rather than playing it safe if I'm pumped up.

So thank you, Billy Idol.

Michaela: Mmmm, good shout out there. I think working with your body and your nervous system is so crucial because you're right there that people can believe what I'm saying logically and not along to it. Yeah, yeah of course, failure and failure is learning and making mistakes is human and I should embrace risk, but then I don't wanna.

Like, it's just like, ugh, don't wanna. And that is, what we described as the head and the hot lag. The founder of Compassion Focused Therapy, Paul Gilbert talks about that as just a kind of a delay between what you know logically in your brain and then how you sort of feel somatically if you are sure emotionally about it.

So that sense of like, 'oh no', that is much more of, I guess an instinctual, it's much more of a stopping you in your tracks kind of feeling. So then we can't address that with logic. You can't fight fire with fire. You can't go into that space with logic and reasoning. You have to go into that space with emotion and feeling, and this is why in compassion focus therapy and the kind of coaching I do as well, I work a lot with visualization, breath work, you know, things that trigger the soothing system, the part of your nervous system that is about you feeling safe and at ease, relaxed and soothed. And then we are in the space where we can take new learning that will then sink down to the heart level you will start to innately feel that it's true to you, that you are worthwhile, that you are worthy of taking breaks or worthy of with kindness for yourself, but what you were talking about there of putting on the music and sort of, 'I'm just gonna pretend that nobody else is listening', this is the space I'm recording in. That's acting as if, and that's the behavioral strategy that we use a lot as well of, I don't believe that I'm worthwhile or don't believe that I'm enough, but I'm gonna act as if I am.

And if I acted this, if I believed I was enough, if I believed that I had everything it takes to take this risk, what would I be doing? Well, I would be doing X, Y, and Z. Well then go and do it. You don't have to believe it at this point, but if you take that action, you will send a message to, I mean, we can talk about this on a neural pathway level, you will actually start to create new neural pathways in your brain. So almost like imagine that you're out in the woods and there's a well-trodden path that we've been on many times, which is, "I'm a piece of shit, or I'm good enough, or other people are better." You know, the root right? We've all got it. All the perfectionists have these sort of negative self-talk roots in their brain. So what we want to do is to go out with a machete and get a new path out there and that's gonna feel really hard. You can have resistance. You're not gonna want to be on that path.

You wanna go back onto your old path because it's familiar and the brain loves familiarity.

It's called pattern-matching. We want to, we want everything to be it has always been, even though the new path might be better for you and lead to better things, I'm gonna choose the old path. So what we do in therapy and in coaching is we do a competition of retrieval. Now that sounds really fancy for just saying, gonna try to help your brain choose the other path.

And the more times you choose the other path, even though you kind of wanna go back to the old path, you tread a bit more on it and the more trodden it gets, the more familiar that path becomes. So old path could be, I'm a failure. New path could be, I'm worthwhile. For instance, the more we trod on the new path, acting as if it's true.

The more that becomes the familiar route, and after rinse and repeat, then that becomes more second nature, which is the bit that kind of comes down into your heart level. This is second nature now that I am worthwhile. So, to me this morning, my second day of coming back from mat leave, rather than sitting straight down at the computer, I've did a five minute meditation because I've missed meditating, it's really hard to do that when you got a baby with you constantly. I made myself a healthy smoothie. I actually dragged my cup of tea instead of pouring it out because I was acting as if I'm worth those things, worth being well, and I've actually achieved a couple more things today than I thought I was gonna do because I'm coming at it from a place of feeling rested, safe, and at ease.

I hope that that makes sense to people listening, that it's not about pushing through, it's not about telling yourself off for having these thoughts of being a failure or thoughts of not being good enough. It's just like," ah, hear it is again, that old path that I know so well, I've trodden on it so many times and it's not my fault.

It is just there through all the things I've been through in life, but now gonna act as if this new path could be a possibility, could be an option, and maybe I can keep treading on that now.

Mandy: My final question for Michaela is around the fear of success. Are we afraid of success? What does it mean to be afraid of success?, that always blew my mind. But before we go there, it's really relevant for me to drop in a couple of points from Gay Hendricks's book *The Big Leap*. And if you don't know the *Big Leap*, do yourself a favor and pick it up today. Gay talks about the four hidden barriers in our belief systems that block us from stepping into our fullest potential. So the first barrier is this feeling that we're fundamentally flawed, meaning that we allow ourselves to be fairly successful, but then when it kind of gets too much, we dim our light.

So if you have a really big win, the voice in your head might say, okay, get back in your box. You don't deserve to be this happy. There's a quiz on my website called *Are you waiting for the other shoe to drop?* So if you are somebody who gets a win, gets a book out there, buys a house, has a major achievement, and then the voice in your head says like, "Ooh, you're getting, you're getting a bit much now", that might be the hidden barrier, is the belief that you're fundamentally flawed. The second hidden barrier is around disloyalty and abandonment, meaning if I expand and grow to my fullest potential. I'll be disloyal to my roots and leave people behind. So this might link to comments that you heard growing up, like, don't get too big for your boots.

Hmm. The third hidden barrier is that success means I'll be an even bigger burden. So, that could be operating under the surface. Like if, I really expand and grow, then my partner will have to carry even more of the burden around the house, or I'll have to spend even less time with my children.

So the fourth one is the crime of outshining, meaning if I expand to my fullest potential, I will make ~fill in the blank look bad.

So maybe growing up you were a really gifted child and maybe you were accused of stealing the limelight, so the message gets ground in when and achieved. But, don't enjoy it too much. Don't make a spectacle of yourself. Or how about this one? Know your place. So let's get back to Michaela, we're riffing on this experience of the fear of success.

So Michaela's going to mention MENSA, and in case you don't know what MENSA is, it's the high IQ Society for those people who score in the 98th percentile or higher. Okay, let's get back to Michaela.

Michaela: One of the big things that I see as well, and I felt to myself is that fear of success, not just fear of failure, that fear of being really good at something, because again, we kind of mentioned good girl conditioning and the patriarchal society we live in means that women aren't allowed to shine.

Women aren't allowed to really burn bright and be good at something. Something I haven't talked about very much in public, but it's kind of a little shame point of mind. So I'll share it here because you know we're in good company, is that I used to be part of MENSA in Sweden. And I even got to the point of being the national intelligence tester for Mensa, Sweden very briefly.

And I think I was about 20 when I joined as a dare with an ex-boyfriend who thought he was the smartest person alive. And I took the test and he didn't dare to take the test and I got in. But the shame point is that when it came up in discussion at one point at uni, I was studying to be a psychologist at that point. With one of my friends on the course, he was really, really good at football. She was in a women's football team and we talked about something about excelling or being good at something, and she found out somehow that I was part of MENSA and did a dig at me for it. It's like this and this just a club for people admiring each other and just bragging and being boastful about how smart you are.

And at, at no point would I have said anything about her being this part of this women's football club where you're admiring how fast you are running or kicking the ball, or being excellent at figuring out the gameplay or whatever. But it made me leave, MENSA. It got to the point where I thought, I can't be part of this anymore.

It triggered shame for me because maybe you think you are too big for your boots. So if you are successful or you're good at something, actually dimming your light and not there into shine bright is something I see so much, and now in hindsight, I kind of wish I would've stayed there, and said, that's part of my cv, part of my package I've got to offer is that I am proven in a test, smarter than 98% of the population. And it's something that I often hide because it feels like it's something that you should be ashamed of, that doesn't mean that I'm thinking I'm a better human being or more worthwhile than anyone else is just, I'm probably also sort of the lower 2% for height, which we've never actually met in person, but there are things you can be below average on and things you are above average. And I am the outlier in that statistical normal distribution curve. I am on the outlier for intelligence and I'm same outlier by the bottom for height, and I didn't choose that anymore than I chose my intelligence.

There are things you can do to further your intelligence, of course, but you are born into a genetic range of sort of around 10 points of intelligence where you can go up or down in that range. But that's you, that's, you know why I am a short person with glasses and you've got a good brain on my shoulders, and I think that's been one of the things that I've held myself back with a lot because I've been not daring to shine bright using that intelligence, using that bright mind that I have, because sometimes we fear success. Sometimes we fear being really good at what we do, so we go for a high, high excellence, you'll go for a high standard at some point. We also fear that there's so far to fall if it doesn't work out. So that's just a story I thought I would share because I've never talked about it in public and I thought, if I don't talk about my shame memories on this podcast, where will I ever

Mandy: It's interesting that you said that's something I've never, it's just dug outta the bowels of my archives of shame too is something similar. So I was sitting in a group of students. I had a semester abroad or a couple semesters abroad when I was doing my PhD and I was sitting in this foreign country in this group, and there was an American professor who was leading us, and everybody was introducing themselves in this circle.

And they were saying, who they were and what university they came from and what they were studying. And when it was my turn, I introduced myself and I said, You know, I'm studying in England. And then it went on to the next person and he came to talk to me afterwards and he said, "You didn't tell them that you're doing a PhD at Cambridge."

And he said, "That's false humility." And I felt so ashamed that because false humility is like the ultimate form of arrogance, and it wasn't false humility, but I was so taken aback by being confronted by this professor that I respected. I was, I didn't wanna be too big for my boots. It wasn't, it was not any of that like, "Oh, I'm better than everybody here, And you've gone to some rinky-dink universities." It wasn't arrogance at all. It was just like, I didn't, I almost felt like I couldn't share that in that room that, I don't even know what that was about. Like I'm sort of at a loss for words, but I felt the compounded shame of being accused that was false humility.

Michaela: So not only had you "failed" in putting yourself forward, but you also have failed in being suitably humble and modest. So it's almost like you've got a double whammy of shame there that you know, there was an attack and criticism on something that you were doing simply outta your shame of not wanting to sort of, put yourself forward.

And that these things are also culturally and societally, shaped as well and conditioned, not only by the patriarchy, but also what cultural norms there are in your own country. I mean, I grew up in Scandinavia and Sweden and there is a saying which is called the Jante Law, which means that you shouldn't think that you are anything.

This comes from a sort of as an Norwegian statement, but it's so true in Scandinavia and it made me really struggle when I moved to London and I was in job interviews in the UK in like inner city London, cutthroat services and still National Health Service. You think how cutthroat could be, but it really was, and the feedback I got was like, "Well, we can see here on your CV that you clearly overqualified for this role." You were qualified clinical psychologist for coming at an entry trainee level CBT therapist, because obviously they didn't recognize my qualifications from Sweden to begin with. It took a little while before I had the professional bodies recognize it, but they're like, "We can see you overqualified, but why aren't you saying so in the interview?"

Why aren't you pointing to all your different things you can do? And because in Sweden, you'd go into a job interview saying, I'm eager to learn. I'm a good team player. I'm here to grow. Or you know, you kind of say, "Yes, I've done these things, but you would not go and be like, I'm gonna be the best part at this."

I am really awesome at that. You just don't enhance yourself that way. So it was a steep learning curve for me, and I think that's, again, steeped in shame. Definitely in the shame of, you know, bringing yourself out to the front there where you say I am really good at. And it's something I never learned to do because it's seen as a modest, it's seen as boastful, and again, too big for your boots.

You shouldn't think that you are anything, and that Jante Law is still influences me now that you know, no doubt, gonna sit with shame listening back to this interview afterwards, thinking, "Oh my God, how did you dare talking about being on MENSA? And it's, we just have to sit with it because the thing about shame is that it makes you hide.

It makes you pull away from connection with other people. So I'm really trying to be like, what little shame nugget can I throw out? What little thing of imperfection can I throw out? Because that is how I lead with example, How I'm embodying everything that I teach and that I practice and showing that this is how I lead in a kind of a authentic leadership where show people that yes, you can live a life that is more meaningful when you also mess up a bit, when you're also bit rough around the edges sometimes.

Mandy: I ask every guest to leave a brick of wisdom, whatever may have loose, because these conversations are not scripted. I just trust my instinct that we're gonna go where we're gonna go, so, whatever's come up for you, Michaela, of what you want to leave with a listener right now, What would you say?

Michaela: You know what? I know so many people get triggered by the whole be kind to yourself. So I'm gonna leave the wisdom of allow yourself to really struggle with being kind to yourself. Allowing yourself to be triggered by it, to be afraid of it, to resist it, to not want it, and then act as if you could, act as if you could be someone who is that kind of person, someone who is kind to themselves, whatever that looks like.

So what would that mean? You know, giving yourself a bit of slack when you have an off day. Does that mean taking one meeting off your calendar when you're really knackered or counseling something? What

would someone who was able to be kind to themselves do? You don't have to like it. You don't have to kind of look at all these Instagram posts of like self-love and think, "Oh, I should just do that."

Know that this could feel like an alien subject. It can feel like a foreign language, and that's okay.

Mandy: Find michaela@thethomasconnection.co.uk where you'll find out about her book, her podcast, and links to all her socials. She has a new group coaching program and I asked her to tell us what it's all about.

Michaela: So the masterclass, how to Burn Bright without burning out is for ambitious working mothers who put pressure on themselves to be perfect, but as a result, they hold themselves back. They don't take those risks or they overthink, they over check and they overwork. So it's, the outcome will be that you will learn ways of following your ambition without drowning in it, so that you can reach your stretchy goals without becoming overstretched.

Mandy: Thank you, Michaela. If this episode jingled your bells, please share it with someone else who would benefit. And if you're seriously revved up, your Apple and Spotify reviews honestly make me break out in spontaneous dance moves. Thank you so much. Keep them coming. Let's do this all again in two weeks.