



## When Everything Feels Like a Personal Attack

Mesh credits much of his career success in the investment and media fields to feeling like an underdog who needs to prove himself. But he also recognizes this outlook has come at a great cost. Stevon helps us understand trigger responses to rejection, and offers tips for how to avoid taking things personally.

---

Stevon Lewis:

What's up, everybody? Welcome to How to Talk to High Achievers About Anything. I'm Stevon Lewis, a licensed psychotherapist. Today we welcome Mesh. Mesh left the investment world to pursue what he loves. Started a podcasting company. He has often felt like a newcomer and an underdog in many personal and professional situations. In fact, wanting to prove people wrong has motivated him to work really, really hard all his life. At the same time, it's cost him a great deal in his professional life. Let's get into it.

Mesh:

My name is Mesh Lakhani. I am the founder of Lola Media as well as the co-host of shows like Founder Stories and Better Call Paul and Talk Money. I started my career in the investment world and as much as I liked investing, I didn't like running a fund. And so I decided that I would leave that and go learn how to do podcasting. And I spent a long time doing that until I was ready and said to myself, "Look, I think I can actually do this. I think I could create a universe of shows that entertain an audience, that approaches people that felt left behind or have felt that something wasn't created for them." I think that anytime you want to start a company, you have to have conviction that you're good at doing this and you're solving a problem that you think others personally or potentially cannot solve. And I think that you do need an ego to do that.

I think a lot of us grow up with a chip on our shoulder. We feel that we are not good enough or we haven't been validated enough. Since I was a kid, it was like, "I didn't get on this team." Or, "I was supposed to be in NHS," which is the National Honor Society, "but they didn't give it to me." And that has followed me a long time. And a chip on your shoulder is another way of saying you have a little bit of an ego and you're trying to prove people wrong. And I do think that can be a really, really great driver and motivator. You do want to prove people wrong and you want to say that, "Hey, I might be an underdog here." But you carry all those chips on your shoulder. You carry all the toxic traits and feeling like you want to get

back at people. And you really do need humility. You can't just be the guy who hates everyone and wants to be an asshole all the time. That's been an interesting balance for me to figure out.

Mesh: My ego is essentially my alter. It's an alter ego. It's a separate personality. Not like I'm fucking crazy or something, but it's like it's the person that comes out, thinks that they're defending me and doing the right thing, but they actually cause more collateral damage than anything else. Let's call this alter ego Meshy. And I think it started coming out more when I was in my early 20s and I didn't understand what all my frustration was. Whether it was rejection or just feeling underappreciated or just feeling like people didn't get me and just kind of discounting me and again, the whole underdog syndrome. But then, over time, it ended up just making me more of a bitter person and an angry person.

I remember when I was working on this music discovery app. And I remember talking to a very, very influential tech, not only an investor, but he writes amazing work. And I remember him telling me, "Look, I really like this idea, but I think you should go this way. Don't go the way of record labels." And I remember I just was sitting there and I was like, "Well, I'm going to do it." But he knew from his experience that those conversations were not going to go anywhere. And I just completely ignored him. And I was like, "Nah, I don't need this guy telling me what to do. What does he know? I can prove him wrong." And he was exactly right. And I remember thinking that was a relationship that I really wish that I had gone back to and gone back for a couple more coffees and learned from him.

I have a tattoo. It was my first tattoo on the inside of my arm that a friend gave me a long time ago. And I'm not much of a religious person, but I identify culturally as a Muslim. In The Prophet Muhammad, there's a paraphrase quote from him that's, "The real strength of a man lies in controlling his wrath." And, obviously, wrath is a biblical term, it's a historical term. In this case, it means the real strength of a man lies in controlling his ego. And it's easier to get mad, it's easier to throw things and say no and put your pride up, than to sit there and think about things and try to go through those emotions and figure out what the best answer is there.

Mesh: I think the most important thing about being a leader is that humility and setting your ego to the side, because that's where it could do the most damage. I also think it's about the team that you're creating. Making sure that they're happy in their job and they love working on this, because if they love working on it, then we're just going to continue to make great stuff for the audience that we're trying to build for. And I think I know now that keeping this in control and finding the right balance where, "Hey, ego to the side, Mesh. This is not benefiting anyone."

Mesh: And if you're just going to be an asshole, especially in the world now where people can go off on their own and either be a creator or join a company. I mean, people don't work at companies for 10 years anymore. They'll leave and they'll go do something else. And so, part of the balance of ego is not only letting things go, forgiveness is very, very important here. And just assuming that other people are going through shit as well. And don't take things personally. Especially in your personal life, but in this case your business life and especially when you want to be a leader.

Lewis: Thank you, Mesh, for sharing what you're going through. Mesh's experience is really interesting because his response is one of righteous indignation. He is appropriately upset about being overlooked at times he felt as though he should not have been. And it seemed to happen more often than not and he still holds onto it today. And so a lot of his life and success is a big middle finger to those people that did not allow him to thrive and shine at an early age.

I think that Mesh's response is probably the least common. His comes off and he talks about this as he's developed an ego and that he is somewhat bitter and angry and has something to prove like a chip on his shoulder now. Most people that are high achieving that struggle with imposter syndrome or had experiences early on in childhood that didn't affirm who they were, are still yearning for that and so they come with a more deferential approach. Meaning that they are saying, "Hey, look at me." But in a way that suggests, "Please notice me." And Mesh is not saying, "Please notice me." He's saying, "I'm right here."

So what Mesh has done in how he approaches life now is to do the thing that I want people to do when you aren't affirmed in a space and maybe rejected or overlooked, is to lean into yourself. Mesh has done this so well that he's given his new self a nickname, Meshy, which is kind of his alter ego to say, "Hey, I'm right here. You're going to notice me. And I'm going to trust myself over anything you ever say to me."

And so I think that what we want to do is make sure that we guard against going too far to where we don't see value in the insight of others. That we are so leaned into ourselves and trusting of ourselves that we think no one else knows better. And I think that's what Mesh is kind of recognizing about Meshy is that Meshy can go a little bit too far.

Lewis: He's done really well for himself. It's benefited him. And I also think it's important for him to recognize that a lot of Meshy's behavior is really a response to him being triggered in situations today that feel like him being overlooked from his childhood or from the past. And so what he calls his ego, I would say is more of a trauma response. And it's a response to the trigger of being unseen or being

looked over or being rejected. And so that experience takes him back to a time when he could not do anything about it and he's saying, "Well, now I have an opportunity for a do-over. I will not respond the same way as I did before."

Lewis: One thing that he noticed that was really good was that there's a need for some balance. That he needs to implement what he labeled as some humility. So not being so into himself that he is dismissive of the input and value of others around him. He's kind of got a double-edged sword, right? In the sense that in his previous kind of life or space in the world of finance, that way of being is probably rewarded. And so it was probably what helped him rise to the level that he did along with his talent and abilities. And now I don't know that that serves him well to be such a bulldozer, so-to-speak. And so I think he's recognizing that he's got to temper a bit of that stuff. And so he calls it being a little bit more humble. And I'm saying maybe take the fight response off a little bit.

Anyone that has input or that suggests something different from what your idea or vision was is not a personal attack against you. And he's still responding as though they are. Maybe it's people that are really allies that are wanting him to present and get the best outcomes possible and he's not able to distinguish between friend or foe and he treats everybody as foe.

It's easy for me to say don't take things personally when things feel personal. What I do or what I would like for people to do is for them to continue to ask the question, "What do I know of this person?" And also, "Is there any possibility that I could be missing something?"

Lewis: I think people in Mesh's situation will tend to respond this way, "This is what it is. People never see my greatness or my talents and my abilities and they underestimate me." That is possible. I will acknowledge that. What I would like them to do, let's evaluate the information that is being presented to us, because it could be an attack and we should be ready for that and protect ourselves or it could be an assist and we should know the difference. Ask yourself, "Is this someone who's consistently attacked me in the past? Is this person, based on what I know or the interactions that we're having, do they seem to be someone who is wanting me to do better? Would this person benefit from me doing worse than? And is there anything that I might not know that this person could know?"

The goal is to get more information so that someone has a better picture of what's going on for themselves and for others. When I say something like, "What do I know of this person?", I'm asking you to ask yourself, "Is this person terrible? Are they a horrible person that consistently takes advantage of people? Have they ever helped people in the past? Who are they in relationship with? Are they in relationship with people that consistently take advantage of other people? Are

they in relationship with people who are really successful and do well in life?" We want to collect as much data as possible to support our way of thinking or our response. And so we don't want to go through life having a feeling and then operating or responding to the world based on that feeling without having done further investigation.

Lewis: The little tweak I would have people make who may have had an experience similar to Mesh is for you to lean into yourself in a way that says you are clear about who you are and you don't need to prove to others what your skills and what your talents and what your abilities are. You don't take the responsibility on forcing or feeling the need to force people to see your greatness. That you can recognize that you're great without other people being able to acknowledge or see it.

And I know that that doesn't feel as good because we want others to know and recognize our contributions. And we have to acknowledge that sometimes people aren't skilled enough to be able to recognize it. That they have their own stuff going on that prevents them from being able to see the good in front of them. I don't know that we all have the personal time or luxury to be able to address each person that we come into contact with and take them through the journey to be able to see all that they need to see. Sometimes they're just going to have to miss out on the good that is you.

Lewis: And that's a wrap. Thank you so much for listening to How to Talk to High Achievers About Anything. We have really big plans for our show and we want you to be a part of it. We want to hear about your successes and challenges, your sacrifices, the ways you've celebrated and what's ahead as you grow. Send our producer, Virginia, an email and we'll get your story on the show. She's at [virginia@lwcstudios.com](mailto:virginia@lwcstudios.com). How to Talk to High Achievers About Anything is an original production of LWC Studios. Virginia Lora is the show's producer, Kojin Tashiro is our mixer, Juleyka Lantigua is the creator and executive producer. I'm Stevon Lewis. On Twitter and Instagram, we're @talktoachievers. Bye, everybody.

Lewis: And, that's a wrap. Thank you so much for listening to How to Talk to [High Achievers] about Anything. We have really big plans for our show, and we want you to be a part of it. We want to hear about your successes and challenges, your sacrifices, the ways you've celebrated. And what's ahead as you grow. Send our producer Virginia an email, and we'll get your story on the show. She's at [virginia@lwcstudios.com](mailto:virginia@lwcstudios.com). How to Talk to Higher Achievers about Anything is an

original production of LWC studios. Virginia Lora is the show's producer. Kojin Tashiro is our mixer. Juleyka Lantigua is the creator and executive producer. I'm Stevon Lewis. On Twitter and Instagram, we're @Talktoachievers. Bye, everybody.

**CITATION:**

Lewis, Stevon, host. "When Everything Feels Like a Personal Attack" *How to Talk to [High Achievers] about Anything*, LWC Studios., July 11, 2022. Talktohighachievers.com

Produced by:



ERASING THE MARGINS