

Antony ([00:00:02](#)):

Welcome to the Grow My Salon Business podcast, where we focus on the business side of hairdressing. I'm your host, Antony Whitaker, and I'll be talking to thought leaders in the hairdressing industry, discussing insightful, provocative, and inspiring ideas that matter. So get ready to learn, get ready to be challenged, get ready to be inspired, and most importantly, get ready to grow your salon business.

Antony ([00:00:30](#)):

Hello, and welcome to today's episode of the Grow My Salon Business podcast. I'm your host Antony Whitaker, and as always, it's great to have you here with us today. I wanna start by saying thank you for the feedback on the podcast. The reviews that you've posted really mean a lot to me. I do read every one of them, and I wish it was like social media where I could reply to you individually, but you know who you are. So a heartfelt thank you. And if you haven't already left us a review, I do have a little favor to ask of you, and that is that you write and review us on the Apple Podcast app. By doing that, it helps other people find us, and it motivates us to keep producing great content for you. But more importantly, all my guests give up their time freely to be on the show.

Antony ([00:01:15](#)):

And so if you find the podcast helpful, a review can be your way of thanking them for sharing their time and ideas. All you need to do is go to Apple Podcasts, Search, Grow My SalonBusiness, scroll to the bottom of the page, select ratings and reviews, and write a review. It'll only take you a minute, but we would be very appreciative. So, well, that said, on with today's episode, I do look forward to speaking with all my guests on the podcast, but my guest today is someone I've wanted to speak with for the last couple of years, and we have finally been able to make it happen. Her name is Nina Kovner, and amongst many things, Nina is a fellow podcaster, albeit erratically, and is a passionate advocator for mental health. She's also a salon business coach and the context creator for her business Passion Squared. In today's podcast, we'll discuss the importance of taking care of your mental health, social media, and mental health, how Gen Z or Gen Z, depending on where you live, are prioritizing mental health and what leadership really is, and lots more. So without further ado, welcome to the show Nina Kovner.

Nina ([00:02:32](#)):

Hi, Antony. Thank you so much for having me.

Antony ([00:02:35](#)):

Oh, it's my absolute pleasure. I, as you know, I've wanted to talk to you for over a year, and we've sort of dipped in and out of different conversations. Well, we did have a conversation on, we did a couple of times on Clubhouse and yeah, that was good. That was a lot of fun. That was in the, in the thick of the whole sort of Covid era. So I'm sure we'll, we'll touch on that at some point. But Nina, a lot of my audience will not know you or your background, so can I start off by getting you to sort of give us an overview, just a sort of a two minute backstory of who is Nina Kovner? And then we can sort of you know, jump into some other interesting things and have a bit of a dig about.

Nina ([00:03:21](#)):

Yes, absolutely. Who is Nina Kovner? That is an incredibly awesome question, and I know my therapist has asked me that question before. I'm just a human that is passionate about empowering the people that I love, and I started that in the eighties as a hairdresser, so I know that a lot of your folks are

hairdressers. I graduated from beauty school in the late eighties and very early in my career, jumped into the business side of the business. And, and with that came all sorts of experiences and world travels and just wisdom. You know, I, I just collected so many things over the years and, and so yeah, so I'm just a human, just like you, that is passionate about empowering the people that I love. And I do that through my company Passion Squared, which I started in 2012. It's an online coaching company. And I, through all these decades of being in the industry, I have become very passionate about mental health and wellness as someone who struggles with treatment resistant depression anxiety and panic disorder, and all sorts of other things that have allowed me to just be even more helpful to the creative community that I serve every day. So yeah, I'm just a, I'm just a human that's trying just like everybody else. And yeah, well that's a short, super short story.

Antony ([00:05:13](#)):

No, no, no, that's good. You touched on a couple of key points there, which for our listeners before we started recording, I said, is it okay if we talk about this stuff? And, as always, you said, Antony, I love talking about it. So mental health is a, you know, it's a, it's a big part of who you are. Have you, as you've just alluded to, you've struggled with, with your own mental health over the years and, and you readily share a lot of deep wisdom, and, you know, every time I hear you talk about stuff, there's a lot of really heartfelt things there. So we're certainly not gonna run out of things to talk about on this call.

Antony ([00:05:58](#)):

So let me start off by asking you that question. How are you?

Nina ([00:06:05](#)):

I mean, I'm okay. I am better than I was a year ago, and that's really kind of the benchmark that my therapist and I use. I just like anything, it really is one day at a time, because especially with treatment resistant depression, it's not treatable. Like there's no, like traditional or nontraditional therapies that have worked for me. And so every day is like, I don't know what's gonna happen. So I really, really focus on one day at a time, being where my feet are and just tapping into the resources that I have available to me and being of service to our community, which always is good medicine.

Antony ([00:06:56](#)):

I love that expression. You've got it on your homepage of your website. Be where your feet are. Tell us about that. What does that mean?

Nina ([00:07:05](#)):

Well, I entered recovery in 2007 for depression and like, almost every addiction that is available to us. And in my recovery, very early in my recovery that was shared with me. And I don't even remember where it was shared or, or where I heard it or whatever, but it really stuck with me because not just if you have like mental health issues, but just life in general, especially in leadership, business ownership, especially with the social and digital web, especially with the shit show that is all around us in the global climate in general, we so easily can get pulled, right, and start just floating into all of, you know, anxiety and floating into negative thoughts and, you know, just all the things. And so it really is like a, it's a mental thing. Like be where your feet are.

Nina ([00:08:15](#)):

Like, you can think that, but then you can also actually like, I'm doing it right now. Like play, really get those feet, get your feet on the ground, and it just, it's like a grounding, physical grounding. It's mental grounding, energetic grounding that is so simple. It's a simple tool. It's kinda like gratitude. Gratitude saved my life and I discovered gratitude very early in my recovery. And it just was like a light bulb for me. Not that I was never grateful before, I was always grateful, but not actively, not consistently, not daily, not using it as a tool. So the be where your feet are tool is kind of like the gratitude tool. No matter what's happening, you can always grab a gratitude list, right? You can always just make that quick mental list in your head. You can grab a piece of paper, write it down.

Nina ([00:09:07](#)):

And over the decades, gratitude has actually been proven to really change our physiology, is it physiology, whatever, they come, I don't know. I'm not a doctor. I'm not a therapist, I'm none of those things. But it, for me and, and what I share with our clients at Passion Squared, it's certainly, if nothing else is a perspective maker, it's so easy to lose perspective. Just like with, you know, I mean, it's so easy to lose perspective, especially with the internet and being so tied up in everyone else's business, right? Or that what we think, you know, that thinking, everyone's got their shit together when the reality is that is what we see is not the whole story. But perspective is critical. Perspective is critical, again, for leadership, for wellbeing, for all the things. And gratitude helps with perspective. When I first entered treatment, one of the things that I was taught was doing a daily gratitude practice.

Nina ([00:10:08](#)):

And I'll never forget when we went into our group, we had groups for like different, like issues that we had. And so my group was the Depression Group, and when we went into group our therapists, we had to, we couldn't enter group the door without our gratitude list. We were denied entry without a gratitude list. And the gratitude list was just five things you're grateful for. Well, when I was in the, you know, grips of suicidal thoughts and all that, like day one, day two, day three of treatment, I was like, gratitude. Are we allowed to cuss on this? I never even asked

Nina ([00:10:48](#)):

I usually ask,

Antony ([00:10:49](#)):

Hearing you talk without, you know, dropping the F bomb would just be an anomaly would be like, who is that girl?

Nina ([00:10:56](#)):

I wanna be respectful.

Nina ([00:11:00](#)):

Okay. So anyways, so I'm like, I'm not grateful for anything, you know, my brain's like, everything's horrible, every, you know, whatever. So I, I think one of my first gratitude lists was of course my dogs, right? So grateful for the dogs. I'm grateful for ice because there's this pebble ice, I don't know if they have it where you are, but it's like soft. It's like this soft. Anyways, I was grateful for pebble ice espresso, of course, always, except there was no espresso in rehab. There was no caffeine, no sugar, no nothing. But like at home, I was, you know, I was grateful for espresso and like, something super ridiculous, like,

I'm grateful for my Louis Vuitton book bag. Like, it was so dumb. And by dumb, I mean, I'm judging myself. It was just ridiculous for me. But it was my reality.

Nina ([00:11:56](#)):

I could not find anything to be grateful for. That was of any, you know, significance. So that alone, like that shift, especially now, the last few years I've been in this depressive episode, which started before the pandemic for context, this was not pandemic caused. Pandemic made it worse, but it was not caused by the pandemic. Now when I make my gratitude list, they're very different. And yeah, I'm still grateful for ice. And of course dogs always get on the list, but it's more about I woke up and some days I'm not grateful that I woke up. That's the reality of mental illness. But some days I really am. Right? And some days, like most days, almost all days, even as dark as they can be, I'm grateful for squirrels and the birds and like nature, cause I live in nature. And and so it really helps with perspective. Like, I'm grateful for my lip gloss that like smells good, you know, it literally can be things that help us gain perspective. With that being said, it's not minimizing at all the problems that we have. We have to identify and acknowledge that, especially people with mental illness, that they are in deep pain that most folks do not understand. But we can still have all of that and still find something to be grateful for. And that perspective is critical to navigating mental health and wellness.

Antony ([00:13:31](#)):

Yeah. I know your personal journey, you know going back, you know, 10, 20 years or whatever, 30 years in the industry that you were a real corporate high flyer and

Nina ([00:13:45](#)):

I was,

Antony ([00:13:46](#)):

you know, would've been taken for someone who didn't have mental health problems, I'm assuming. Okay. And from what I've....

Nina ([00:13:52](#)):

Correct for sure.

Antony ([00:13:52](#)):

heard, you know, read, heard you talk about, is that there was a moment in time where you know, your life came sort of crashing down. Not a specific day, but a buildup that sort of ended up being quite sort of catastrophic for you. Talk to us about that because, you know, there's a lot of people you know, that are so career orientated, that are so driven, that are so, they're workaholics and I know that was part of your issue. So talk to us a little bit about that and what the signs are that people need to look for and how they should take care of themselves.

Nina ([00:14:36](#)):

There's so many layers to that. There's so many layers to that and obviously hindsight, hindsight, you know, looking at it, looking back, we see so much when we're in it, we don't always see much of anything, you know? Yes, I was a corporate high flyer. I love how you say that. I, sometimes I call it a suit, even though they wear Gucci suits, there was still a suit. I just got pulled into a career and journey

and experience it. I never had plans for, I went to beauty school to be a hairdresser, just like so many folks. Like, I was passionate about that and really wanted to like, make that my life. And so I was unprepared, completely unprepared for the amount of responsibility that I had. And I was also a perfectionist and cared deeply about my responsibilities.

Nina ([00:15:38](#)):

And so it was kind of like the perfect storm of perfectionism, workaholism, insane amount of responsibilities, passion and obviously not being aware that I had some stuff to work on, some old stuff to work on that does catch up with us. It does catch up with us. How and when and where is gonna be different for everybody. But I had a really, just like many folks, brutal childhood, and it came with so much stuff. And I was busy. I was busy being a corporate high flyer and traveling the world and making soap and marketing soap and, you know, doing all those things, leading and growing and you know, all the things. And so it wasn't until, and also doing like what society said, like, you're supposed to make money, You're supposed to get a cool car, you're supposed to buy a house. I had none of those goals.

Nina ([00:16:51](#)):

Like most people like have all these goals. I've really never had any specific material or career goals. I just haven't. And I know it sounds kind of odd cause people are like, wait, what? And I'm like, no, I didn't. I just didn't, I didn't think I'd be alive, to be honest. I just never really looked forward. So I woke up one day in my 40, I was 40, I just turned 40 and I'm turning 56 next week. So this was quite a while ago. I thought everything was gonna brighten up at 40. Like, I'm like, I'm not gonna be in pain. I'm not gonna be struggling mentally or whatever emotionally. I'm not gonna be stressed. I thought just like this magic switch, like I'd wake up. Well, that didn't happen. And that really began a complete and utter spiral that from the outside was generally not obvious.

Nina ([00:17:46](#)):

People that knew me knew something was wrong. I really even wasn't sure what was wrong, but it kind of all came to a head. It was about a four week period in my, I was in my 41st year and I was planning my exit from the world and I was just in a horrific place. And I, at the time had a lot of resources. I was obviously making a ton of money. And I just one morning picked up the phone and said, help. And that was in 2007. I didn't even know what was wrong with me, honestly. Like, so yeah. So what I learned was that I had a lot of unprocessed childhood trauma and worked on processing a lot of that in treatment and of course perfectionism, workaholism all of that stuff. And I've been working consistently since 2007 on all that stuff with my same therapist that I found in 2007 after I left treatment.

Nina ([00:19:03](#)):

I actually returned to that treatment center last year because I was in a very similar place dealing with complex grief and trauma. Did a five day, did a five day, which helped a little, you know, helped me kind of, I'm here so it helped a little. But yeah, I didn't know we, I didn't know what was going on, but I learned a lot. And eventually because of my healing and recovery, I made a decision to leave my big corporate high flyer position because I probably would've not lasted very long. I probably would've died. Yeah. Which is sad, you know, because some people handle shit really well. And I did for a really long time until I didn't. And that's just me. I'm easily overwhelmed. I mean, I used to handle, I can't even believe, like I think sometimes about like what I led and managed and dealt with.

Nina ([00:20:06](#)):

I can't, I just can't even, so, you know, it was a, it was a huge, huge decision and not one that I made lightly or took lightly. But it saved my life and allowed me to create this, which, you know, I just get to help people. I have no need to like be the face of anything or be the name of anything or have the title of anything, or have the material goods of anything. I have none of those needs. I've been so fortunate and blessed to have had a life and I say goodbye to that life and created something that I could survive and thrive in which I have thrived through this even though it hasn't been the best few years, I've had some really great highs in this new life. And I wouldn't trade it. I wouldn't trade it.

Antony ([00:21:05](#)):

I know your

Nina ([00:21:07](#)):

Did that answer your question.

Antony ([00:21:10](#)):

No, that was good. No, that was good. That was,

Antony ([00:21:13](#)):

It just gives everything some context because yeah, I know you are not a a therapist. No, But you have done a phenomenal amount of work and you have a lot of experience. And I asked you right at the beginning, I think before we were recording, I said, Do you ever get sick about talking so honestly about your struggles with mental health? And you said, No, not at all. I love talking about it. So what I wanted to ask you was, you know, there's people listening to this, salon owners as busy people, that they've got families, they've got businesses, they've got staff, they're overwhelmed, you know, covid, inflation, yada yada, on and on. It goes layer upon layer of pressure and stress and whatever. What are the things that you advise people or what do you, from the outside looking in say, you know, if you want to have good mental health, these are the things that you need to do to look after yourself. These are the non-negotiables. What would you say they are?

Nina ([00:22:22](#)):

Well, I mean, one of the primary causes of mental health issues, now, again, I don't wanna confuse talking about general mental health with actual, like mental illness. Right? Okay. Very different situations. So let's, for context, let's be clear.

Antony ([00:22:40](#)):

Good point.

Nina ([00:22:40](#)):

But definitely one of the biggest struggles that I had and what landed me, one of the causes of my implosion was the lack of boundaries. Like none. Like zero. Like I'd never heard of the word until 2005 when a family member was in the treatment center that I ended up going to. It is the cause of, well, the root, root cause of boundary issues is codependency and family systems, right? Childhood trauma based on dysfunctional family systems. And so the treatment center, which I've been asked the name of it, it's the Meadows for anyone that is, is wondering the Meadows in Wickenburg, Arizona.

Nina ([00:23:29](#)):

It is incredible. I mean, they've saved my life twice, so I owe them a lot. But their whole treatment model is a codependency model. So I learned a lot about that, and of course worked a lot on that starting in 2007 and ever since. But so many of these stressors, whether it's family, whether it's team, whether it's whatever, healthy boundaries or lack of boundaries, is a big part of that. And what happens is we get picked and picked and pulled and pulled and we just keep going and going and going. And there's that, those people pleasing vibes. And we're like, well, this has to happen, that client, this and that, and my kid and my partner and my whatever. And then it's not sustainable. So we end up getting resentful, angry, anxious, depressed. And they were like, I don't know what's wrong with me? And it's like, let's take a look. Right? Let's take a look. And many times it is the lack of boundaries and not understanding how to actually practice healthy boundaries. A lot of talk about boundaries in our industry is really more walls and healthy boundaries and walls are not the same thing. Whereas a wall is like ghosting someone, right? Like, we're not, that's, that's not healthy, right?

Antony ([00:25:01](#)):

Yeah.

Nina ([00:25:01](#)):

That's a healthy, healthy boundary is having communication that says, you know what? We need space and again, apply that, apply that to whatever versus actual ghosting. So healthy boundaries is, I mean, I wrote a whole book about it. It really is such, such a big part of why we as creatives, and particularly in the professional beauty space, have trouble. I mean, no boundaries in a salon could look like taking someone's scissors without asking for permission. That's a boundary violation. Gossip is a boundary violation. Shaming is a boundary violation. And we see shaming happening happen on the internet all day every day. People shaming clients, you know, stylish shaming style. It's, it's dysfunctional, right? It's unhealthy. And it's not good for our emotional development. It's not good for our energy. It's not, it's just, it's destructive. So that's one area that I think everybody that's listening could at least examine, check in with those healthy boundaries. Check in with your understanding of boundaries. Yeah. Yeah. Check in with that.

Antony ([00:26:22](#)):

Okay. And a term you hear a lot of at the moment, and again, a lot of this has come to the fore because of covid and people have had a lot of time to sit around and reflect, is this term burnout. And, you know, a lot of people in the industry feeling that they, you know, suffer from burnout, that they work too hard and that they need to find a better you know, life balance. I mean, I'm imagining, I don't know, but from your previous career that it was a degree of burnout as well. And that's connected to the boundaries thing. Never being able to say.

Nina ([00:26:59](#)):

Oh, a hundred percent, a hundred per cent. First of all, balanced is a myth. It is just, it creates shame and guilt thinking everyone has like their equal four parts of their whatever. And then I'm like, I don't have equal anything as a Libra, and we're recording this in Libra season, we are the scales. I do not believe in balance. I believe in finding your rhythm. And I believe in surrendering to your rhythm. And I believe that when we do that, we are not beating ourselves up where one day is like a 16 hour day and one day is a four hour day, and one day we're feeling joyous, and one day we're feeling blue, and one day we're

really in our flow and another day we're not. And another, I really believe in rhythm. I do not believe in balance.

Nina ([00:27:49](#)):

So burnout. Yeah, burnout can be about boundary failures because what's burnout like? I'm exhausted. I'm feeling unappreciated, I'm feeling torn in a million directions. I'm no longer passionate about what I'm doing. Fuck everybody, I'm exhausted. Okay. So actually, I just wrote about this in our weekly dose of awesome newsletter on Monday. I'm currently super overwhelmed. And so I wrote about the process of what, in real time, on Monday of the week that we're recording this, I wrote literally what was going on. So the first step is to identify what's the root cause of the overwhelm to as much detail as possible, right? If we can name it and identify it, we can move through it. So burnout is, can be in some cases similar. Like what is causing this burnout? Well, I was working seven days a week for four weeks. Oh, well, okay, so let's work on reserving space for rest, reserving space for play.

Nina ([00:28:55](#)):

That codependency is what says, no, that client really does need me on Sunday. I mean, no <laugh>, no. Like they can need you. And you can also be like, that's actually not available. And then a codependent vibe will be, they're gonna hate me. They're gonna get mad at me, they're gonna get leave me a bad Yelp review. They're gonna, we just spiral. Right? That kind of codependency spiral. If that's how we show up every day, burnout is guaranteed. And that goes back to healthy boundaries. So, you know what I mean?

Antony ([00:29:35](#)):

Totally.

Nina ([00:29:35](#)):

So it's like, we booked this, we booked this a long time ago. We booked this recording before I got this incredible opportunity to move, which was not planned. And before I started, like a lot of other things that were causing this overwhelm. So you checked in with me and you said, is this time still a good time to record? I had two choices in that moment. You know what, Antony? It's not.

Antony ([00:30:05](#)):

And I would've been fine with that

Nina ([00:30:07](#)):

and that would've been fine. Now, Nina from, Nina from 2006 would have rathered poked needles in my eyes than, than then consider how disappointed you would be, how you would hate me, because I did that. How you would tell everybody that you hated me and they should hate me too. You know, it goes on and on

Antony ([00:30:33](#)):

Just make all this up in your head and it just,

Nina ([00:30:36](#)):

Yeah, of course, of course, of course. Because that people pleaser like, I wanna make sure Antony, so today's Nina is very different. I was honest with you. And I said, yes, actually, it's still a good day and time. And the reason that it is, is because I really wanna do this. I really wanted to do this. And I am so grateful for the opportunity to chat with you and your community. And also I scheduled my week understanding what I could and wanted to commit to and what and the other three tools, delegate, delay, or delete. So this was not on that list. This was something I really felt grounded enough and clear enough to do. So.

Antony ([00:31:24](#)):

Good. Thank you.

Nina ([00:31:25](#)):

Long answer.

Antony ([00:31:27](#)):

Okay. No, no, no. Good answer. Why do you think mental health, I mean, I'm older than you but even if you go back, you know, 30 years, you know, 20 years, 25 years ago, it wasn't, certainly wasn't spoken about as much. It didn't seem to be as much of a big deal. And now it's just everywhere my kids talk about their mental health.

Nina ([00:31:50](#)):

Well, it was a stigma. I mean, there's a stigma, There's a, we don't talk about, I mean, you look at, you know, whether it's the baby boomers or Gen X, which is me. We are the don't talk about it generations. And I mean anything, not just mental health. Like you just don't talk about it.

Antony ([00:32:11](#)):

Yeah, yeah.

Nina ([00:32:12](#)):

And so some of that is generational. Some of that is when you know better, you do better, right? Is that Oprah? I think Oprah, Maya Angelou, when you know better, you do better. And oh, just like any evolution of society, when we have more information, when we have more education, we can make different decisions. And that, I believe is part of it. I believe that the social and digital revolution amplified the prevalence of mental health, wellness and illness. And that also brought to light some of, some of that. And I think these younger generations, the millennials and Gen Z who I love, they're like, You know what? We gotta talk about this. So like, the older generations are like, Oh my God, what is it? They talk about everything. Like there's is nothing sacred is do we not keep anything to ourself anymore?

Nina ([00:33:13](#)):

You know? And it's like, you know what? It's healthy to talk about it. Now, of course, with healthy boundaries, some is tmi, you know, that could be a boundary violation, but not in this context. In this context. Yeah. You know what, let's talk about it because when I see someone on TikTok or I see, you know, someone on Twitter or in a blog or whatever, sharing something, maybe I, this person in any place in the world can look and say, I'm not alone. And there's actually resources to help me with what

I'm struggling with. And that is a beautiful thing. And I think that, I don't think I know, I mean, you can see Gen Z's really leading the way in enough is enough. Like our health, whether it's physical or mental, our joy is a priority. And if you don't get it, that's too bad.

Nina ([00:34:14](#)):

We're going to move towards our joy and take care of ourselves. And that's, I love that. And so I think that seeing us so messed up, was maybe one of the things that inspired to say, yeah, I don't wanna be like that, I don't wanna be like that. Now in America, I'm not, I don't know what's happening, you know, in Europe or or anywhere else in the world, but in America we also divested, divested, that's the word, right? Where you uninvest, right? Divested in all of our mental healthcare resources in the country. And we started that back in the eighties. And it's, we're paying for it. We're paying for it cause we've not been caring for our people.

Antony ([00:35:03](#)):

Okay. So I wanna pick up on a couple of things here. Social media, I know that you detox on social media, sometimes you just go, I'm not on social media for a month, or whatever it is. And I think it's generally accepted that social media, it can be a a source of good, but it can also be a very destructive source in terms of people's mental health. And I'm a little bit then, confused is the wrong word, but about the relationship between Gen Z because as you've said, not just Gen Z, but like young people today, there's no boundaries. Let's talk about anything. But a lot of the conversation is one sided. It's just them talking through social media. It's not a discussion so much. It's talking without boundaries. Again, it's just, I'm gonna say what the hell I want on social media because that's just, you know what I do. It's just me on my phone and I can criticize and blame and cuss and do whatever without there being any sort of repercussions. So talk to us a little bit about social media and where it's good and why you detox from it and purposefully come off it sometimes and the damage you see that it doing potentially for some people's mental health. I think it's quite a, it's a very public conversation here in the UK at the moment. So be interested to see what your, what your thoughts are on that.

Nina ([00:36:33](#)):

It's a mess. You know, Passion Squared started in 2012 based on the opportunities I saw and how the social and digital revolution was going to empower creative small businesses like salons. And in fact, it did, right? We saw all that happen. It was unlike anything we've ever seen in terms of adding a layer of word of mouth and relationship building and, you know, value adding and all those things. That is all still true, unfortunately because of lack of boundaries, because of platforms being lacking ethics, to say the least, whether that be meta or meta, it's turned into a messy, messy, messy space. And so what it takes to be able to stay focused on serving your community, building relationships, all of those things has become more and more difficult because human nature, it's like watching, like people that watch a car crash, you know, people that slow down on the, on the, what do you call your roads? Highway,

Antony ([00:37:55](#)):

Freeway, Motorway, Highway. You know,

Nina ([00:37:57](#)):

I wanted to use something that wasn't, I want to be like not American. Your motorway when you're like, you know, when there's a crash, people can't help but like get sucked into the drama. Right? It's a great escape. It's a great way to disassociate. It's a great whatever. It's super unhealthy though. It's super

unhealthy that we have all this noise around us. I'm not discrediting content, I'm saying in general, I don't think we were ever designed to have this much input.

Antony ([00:38:26](#)):

Yeah,

Nina ([00:38:27](#)):

Constant like, this horrible thing happened, this awesome thing happened, this horrible thing happened, this awesome thing happened. Look at this discourse. Look at the, I don't, I don't think our nervous systems were ever, ever, ever set up to, to be receiving this never ending nonstop stuff. And as someone that has an online businesses, it's become incredibly difficult to navigate. So about five years ago, I started the Unplugged AF Challenge, and that was to get people to start, you know, And, you know, of course it was, people were excited about it in the beginning and then again, back to boundaries. If we are not awake and aware and present enough to practice healthy boundaries, then we are gonna go down that spiral that you were talking about. No boundaries, talking on people getting sucked into discourse, all of that stuff. It's very hard to navigate.

Nina ([00:39:34](#)):

You had mentioned Gen Z, like talks about everything, and that's boundaryless. I think the thing we have to remember is we all set our own. We all have our own idea of what healthy boundaries are. So they talk about a lot. I still believe they actually probably understand healthy boundaries better than we do sometimes, just cause they're just more aware in general. However, there are still lots of people that are hateful and hurtful and mean. So a few ways that we can protect our mental health and wellness is to take consistent breaks. And I don't mean 30 day breaks, I mean like 48 hours in a row, 24 hours in a row, just off all the platforms. I think setting those healthy boundaries in using the tools that are available, whether it's the mute tool on Instagram, the unfollow, the snooze button on Facebook, or unlike or unfollow, sometimes people get super codependent about like, well I can't unfollow them cause then they're going to see, you know, so we have to check in with that.

Nina ([00:40:40](#)):

So there are ways for us to really control our experience to protect our mental health and wellness, but it is incredibly difficult because we are human beings. And of course we're gonna wanna know like, well, what's happening. There's some like, drama happening over here. I mean, look at how many people watch these reality shows. I mean, it's draw, it's just like the Housewives or the Kardashians, and I'm not judging at all. I'm just saying look at what's happening kind of in the larger cultural scale where we are sitting in our homes watching people in immense pain. We are like watching, watching family systems unravel and watching relationship, it is fascinating. So healthy boundaries around anything that we absorb into our, into our body, into our minds. I watch documentaries and comedies just because I wanna escape too, but I know my brain enough to know that stuff creates more anxiety for me and I want less anxiety, you know, but I'm all about, like, I support, watch what you wanna watch, like I'm all about it. No judgment. We just have to be aware of what that input is doing to our nervous system, to our energy. The more present we are, the more we are where our feet are the more we can get in touch with kind of the triggers and again, root causes of some of the distress that we're feeling.

Antony ([00:42:19](#)):

Yeah. I love the way you talk about all that and your website, I'll put the links for your website in the show notes for today, I love the messaging that you've got and I know that your background is in the marketing sphere. And when I look at your website you know, the wording and the messaging, the messaging is the word I'm trying to get to. It's so well thought through. And you, you'll often see sort of buzzwords. People will have their, you know, their tagline or whatever and it just becomes white noise. Whereas when I, when I look at yours and I, I read the stuff you've got there, I mean, on the homepage of your website, it's a story of passion and purpose and promise and people I know that's so very carefully thought through that didn't, you know, just sort of like, it's not a throwaway tagline there. I know. That's really you. And when I look at your messaging, your reels on Instagram and stuff, I mean, very short, succinct, carefully thought through very purposeful, but passionate and also very much about people. Like you really care about people that comes across. It's not like you're just trying to sell something or whatever. So no, talk to us about passion, purpose, promising people.

Nina ([00:43:54](#)):

Well, it's interesting because again, I went to beauty school, you know, just like many people that are listening to this episode. And I was, I don't know, like the, the universe had a different, a different plan for me. And so very early on in my career, like year two, I was pulled into brand management, brand development and ultimately was responsible for marketing for a really big, a really big company. And so I had a lot of exposure and a lot of experience and a lot of mentorship my entire career when it came to storytelling and brand development. Because that was my job. That was my job. And so when I decided again, you know, to start this company, I wanted to bring something that was not something that was taught in beauty school, which is brand storytelling, which is the foundation of literally any business and something that is very often either misunderstood or just completely ignored in our industry.

Nina ([00:45:20](#)):

Brand story, brand values, that drives everything that drives your culture, your marketing, your pricing strategy. It drives your communications, your social and digital content. It drives your decision making, your hiring and firing your team handbook. It literally is the whole experience, right? The client experience, the team experience. It's all rooted in brand story. And so that's something that I brought from my years as a marketer and brand developer. And of course passion is at the, at the core of everything we do. But I, this brand story framework that I created is brand purpose, promise people, and then of course product service. And it's, it's an offshoot of the original four P's of marketing. If anyone's been to business school that's super old school, but still very super legitimate. When it comes to product and pricing and promotion in place, which is of course distribution. So purpose is what I call brand purpose is what problem are you solving? Sales and marketing 1 0 1 we are solving. If we can't identify the problem we're solving, then we are not in business. Like it's really gonna suck. Right?

Antony ([00:46:47](#)):

What is the problem you are solving? What is the problem that Passion Squared....

Nina ([00:46:50](#)):

Overwhelm, overwhelm, confusion. Lack of focus. Stress. Codependency. Burnout. Yeah,

Antony ([00:47:07](#)):

That's a good starting point.

Nina ([00:47:09](#)):

Good question. Brand promise. How are you solving it? So brand promise, how we're solving it is we work from the inside out. I know cause of my experience that if our insides are messy, as a leader, your outsides are gonna be messy too. And so that kind of brings that business development and personal development. That's kind of the intersection there. How we approach everything at Passion Squared. Brand promise in the context of a salon could be actually how you do a consultation.

Nina ([00:47:45](#)):

That's a how, right? How are you solving problems? We solve problems by blah, blah, blah, right? Promise is also expectations. What you can expect from the experience, how you're gonna feel after the experience. Brand people is who are you solving problems for? So that could be looked at as old school demographics minus the actual demographics because I don't really believe in demographics per se, in our space. I believe in values, shared values, shared vision stuff we care about. Like do we care about the planet? Like if you are a super eco, eco sustainable brands and you don't have, you're not connecting with people that care about the planet, it's not gonna matter. Like you could have the best brand in the world, but you are not clear on who actually sees value in what you're delivering, what you're creating, the solutions that you have available, the stories that you tell.

Nina ([00:48:52](#)):

There's just a complete disconnect. So when we talk about who, we're really looking at that kind of what matters to them, what do they value, what shared values do they have, etc. And then of course, brand product service, The what is, what solutions do you have to solve the problems of your people, which really allows us to be way more strategic when we create an experience menu, when we choose what categories of services we're going to offer as solutions, which brands we're gonna align with for take home products. So yeah, so that's just kind of the brand story framework. And we use that literally everywhere. Like that's, without that, I don't know how you go to work. Like I just don't, I don't know. Okay. Cause ultimately the key is aligning, aligning, aligning your actions, your decisions, all of that with that, your brand.

Antony ([00:49:57](#)):

Yeah that's a really good point. That's, that's a really good summary of all that. One of things you threw in there was about leadership and I know we've only got a few minutes to go, but what, as a leader in the industry, as someone who's been in the industry for a long time and has, you know, a lot of experience, a lot of diverse experience, what's the most important thing that you have learned as a leader? What do you, what do you look for in leadership? What are the values of leadership that you try and you know, promote and live?

Nina ([00:50:40](#)):

Mm, giving a fuck, is a big one. <Laugh>. I

Antony ([00:50:47](#)):

I love the directness of that.

Nina ([00:50:49](#)):

Really, really working heavily on your own emotional development. So you can in turn be present and care for and support and guide those in your care.

Antony ([00:51:08](#)):

See, that's the core of everything you do, isn't it? That's what I was trying to get at before was yeah, looking at your website, looking at your Instagram, listening to your podcasts. That is at the core of everything that you do.

Nina ([00:51:21](#)):

It really, it really is because when we look at the discontent, we look at the, the stress of the salon environment. It's not just salons. Those salons are not unique to this. This happens literally everywhere in business. If we look at all those pain points, it is always gonna come back to leadership right? And so if we're not awake and aware and emotionally available, it is going to be incredibly difficult to lead and coach and guide and nurture anyone else.

Nina ([00:52:11](#)):

And so we have a lot of people just, we have a group of people that care deeply but don't have the, either emotional development or the words, the tools, the skills to communicate in a healthy way. And so misunderstandings happen, resentments happen, judgment happens, finger pointing happens. And then that could cause, what a walkout, that could cause toxic energy and culture that can cause just distress and pain. And it's heartbreaking. It's heartbreaking cause I've been here a long time. Like I've seen it, I've seen it, I see it, I've seen it, I've been in it, I've been an observer of it. And so much of it does have to do with our own work on our own person, right. On us. And to be the best, to be the best and to be present for those that were committed to caring about. That's the leader's job. Like, the leader's job is to care and to create a healthy nurturing environment to allow people to flourish. And flourish can look a little different depending on, flourish could be leaving, right? But then if we're not really like, solid in our own insides, we see leaving as a threat, we see leaving as an attack. And you, you see the cycle. It's just so, it's just so the cycle. So leadership, great question. There's like, I could talk forever on that, but....

Antony ([00:53:59](#)):

Yeah. No, that's good. You touched on a couple of times earlier you mentioned about Gen Z and their different, you know, approach, perspective on life and values. And it's always, I'm always fascinated how it always changes and evolves cause every generation is bought and born into a different time with different attitudes, different technology, different history around them. So of course they're going to see the world through different eyes and that's always fascinating and it always threatens the generations that came before them to whatever degree.

Nina ([00:54:38](#)):

I know.

Antony ([00:54:39](#)):

But what I wanted to ask you about was, was how do you see the industry sort of evolving in relation to the new attitudes and expectations that Gen Z bring to the party about work and about business models and stuff? What are your, what are your thoughts about that?

Nina ([00:55:02](#)):

I mean, that's a whole podcast, right?

Antony ([00:55:04](#)):

Yeah, it is, isn't it? Yeah.

Nina ([00:55:05](#)):

Here's what I'll say. Here's what I'll say about Gen Z. That's really important for leadership, business model, whatever, like the, that's a whole nother discussion. But what I love about Gen Z is they care about their own wellness. And as business owners, we should have always cared about our team's wellness. And to be honest, if we're honest with ourselves, we really didn't. Right? Work, work, work, work productivity, I mean even just the education systems in the industry, like productivity, and this has to be this percentage. And it's like, oh my God. Like one of this questions I ask most often with our clients is, what outcome are you seeking? What outcome are you seeking? And we get so hung up on the number we forget about the outcome.

Nina ([00:56:01](#)):

If we're getting the outcome, how people get to the outcome is irrelevant, right? Micromanaging versus like visionary leadership, very different. So if these folks value their lives, then we need to get our shit together and say, we value your lives and we're gonna create this environment to ensure that you are fulfilled. Cause that's our job. And when people are happy, clients are happy, and when clients are happy, the business is happy, is it gonna look different? I mean, in some ways yes, in many ways, no, we tend to get a little dramatic in our industry, myself included. That's really myself included. But yeah, I mean, we shift and evolve for sure. And I'm so grateful to Gen Z for standing up and saying, you know what, a lot more matters to me than what you are offering. And the world matters to me and your purpose as a brand matters to me and your actions as a brand matter to me and my wellness matters to me.

Nina ([00:57:18](#)):

And if it matters to you too, we're gonna do great. If it doesn't fuck off. I'll go somewhere else. And I applaud that, I applaud that. Because what have we just been talking about for the last hour? Mental health and wellness. So whether, I mean, it's a global trend. Great. Like I love that yay, global trends for wellness, but it's also generationally driven where these folks have said, I don't wanna be like my mom or dad. Because I watched them just crumble through exhaustion and, you know, addictions and issues based on this unrealistic expectation. And again, a lot of this is America cause we like have this like work, work, work, you know, culture with very little time off with, you know, all of that. So yeah, I'm happy that we're being challenged to look at things differently. And again, not that differently. Like we should always cared.

Antony ([00:58:24](#)):

Yeah exactly

Nina ([00:58:25](#)):

We should have always cared about people's wellness at work. But yeah, if they need to push us around a little bit and like to wake us up, Yay, yay, Gen Z, keep going.

Antony ([00:58:39](#)):

Good things come out of it. Okay.

Nina ([00:58:40](#)):

Yeah.

Antony ([00:58:40](#)):

One thing that I wanna ask you and then we wrap up, and you may have already answered this, I think you've answered it from different angles, but I'm gonna ask it again in case there's another little gem in there. Is, is it, what is the biggest lesson that you've learned in life? Can have nothing to do with hairdressing if you wanted it to be, or it might be something that's related to hairdressing, but, you know, if there was one thing that you wanted to say, look, the most important thing I've learned on my 56 years on the planet is, fill the blank.

Nina ([00:59:14](#)):

I would say one of, one of the things that is kinda present for me now, and I feel like so much of this has to do with age, and I understand that. So context is key. Our time is so incredibly limited.

Antony ([00:59:31](#)):

Yeah.

Nina ([00:59:33](#)):

You know, and I understand the outside pressure to make decisions that are not aligned with what really feels true and authentic to us. I get that. I spent 41 years doing that, you know? But man, it is short. It is short. And, if there's a way to see that as a way to guide your decisions and choices, whether it's to show up for that family dinner, you know, or take that, go on that adventure, be there, answer that phone call, you know, that matters. Those things, those everyday moments and decisions are what makes our life meaningful. And so yeah, I think, I think that's it.

Antony ([01:00:30](#)):

No, I love it. I love it. And I dunno if it's to do with age or not, but maybe it is, because I certainly feel that resonates more and more with me all the time. Just how quick it goes. I mean, I still think I'm 30 and then I look in the mirror and I see this old guy like, Who the hell's that? You know what I mean?

Nina ([01:00:50](#)):

I know.

Antony ([01:00:51](#)):

Yeah. It goes fast.

Nina ([01:00:52](#)):

It's wild.

Antony ([01:00:54](#)):

So look, whereabouts can people connect with you on Instagram or other social media channels?

Nina ([01:01:01](#)):

At Passion Squared everywhere. Passion square.net is our website, but at Passion Squared, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, you can always DM us. Our dms are always open. We love hearing from folks. And yeah, the internet. You can find us on the internet

Antony ([01:01:22](#)):

I will put those links on our website in the show notes. So Grow My Salon business.com for today's podcast. And if you are listening to this podcast with Nina Kovner and have enjoyed it, do me a favour, take a screenshot on your phone, share it to Instagram Stories, and don't forget to subscribe and leave us a rating and review on the Apple Podcast app. And I did mention that Nina has a podcast as well. She's very erratic with it. So if you were looking on your podcast platform and you go, Oh, they're old, I tell you what, there's still gems, there's some real gold in there. So I encourage you to go back and listen to them there's some really heartfelt wisdom. So to wrap up, Nina, thank you so much for being on this week's episode of the Grow My Salon Business podcast.

Nina ([01:02:09](#)):

Thank you Antony. It truly was such an honor and and pleasure. Thank you.

Antony ([01:02:15](#)):

The pleasure was mine.

Antony ([01:02:20](#)):

Thank you for listening to today's podcast. If you'd like to connect with us, you'll find us at Grow My Salon Business.com or on Facebook and Instagram at Grow My Salon business. And if you enjoyed tuning into our podcast, make sure that you subscribe, like, and share it with your friends. Until next time, this is Antony Whitaker wishing you continued success.