



GameChangers
Season 1: Episode 4
Kristian Martinow

Seth: Welcome to GameChangers, the show that's about playing by your own rules when it comes to your career. Join us as we speak with people who have taken the road less travelled, and found their niche. I'm your host, Seth Robinson.

Kristian: The very common thread that's out there is "I'm stressed, I don't know who I am, and I don't know what I'm doing".

Seth: Despite being a finite resource, time is something we tend to undervalue. Today's guest has made it his mission to recapture those lost seconds. Kristian Martinow is the founder of watch company The Timekeeper. He's also a mental health advocate and facilitator. Kristian, it's great to have you with us today.

Kristian: Thanks for having me, Seth. Pumped to be here.

Seth: It's absolutely fantastic to have you in the studio. To kick things off, I was wondering if you could just tell us a little bit about yourself, your story and how you came to be sitting here today.

Kristian: First, I just want to acknowledge the name of this podcast, GameChangers, because I actually facilitate for an organization called Game Changers.

Seth: I promise we didn't know that ahead of time.

Kristian: Some synchronicity there, it's cool. So, I studied here at University of Melbourne. I did a Bachelor of Commerce in accounting and finance, I then did part-time honours over two years while I was teaching full-time. I taught for three years here. I took a year off to establish The Timekeeper, a business I'm passionate about. I did one year in strategy consulting, and then the last 7 or 8 months I've recreated myself again and started to do facilitation, predominantly in the emotional intelligence area, leadership, focused for young people.

- Kristian: Earlier days: family of five, two older sisters. Recently: have a partner now, we've been seeing each other for just over six months. Health and wellbeing is something super important to me.
- Seth: Kristian, you trained as an accountant here at the University of Melbourne and then you spent some time working in consulting before, charting your own path. Can you tell us a little bit about what that experience in the working world after uni was like?
- Kristian: During the last years of uni, I really wanted to be a strategy consultant, so I applied for a grad role at different consulting firms and was really lucky that Stratergen was my number one preference. I knew a lot of friends that had been there and had a great culture, so I secured that. In between that year off, though, that's when I went through that transformative journey. I became very different, view of the world, behaviour seen. I started in strategy consulting, and it was great. I was learning, meeting new people, seeing big business, the corporate world, and really recognizing the people in consulting, surrounded by really intelligent people. Working at Stratergen also gave me access to broader PwC network, so the ability to network and understand what's going on in different arms of business.
- Kristian: Worked on some great projects as well. Multiple different industries; Blue Sky strategy, through to cost out projects, through to new products, through to merges, new tech ventures. It was very interesting. It was probably after I'd been there for nine months that I really recognized another cycle or pattern coming back for me which was burnout. Overworking, managing a business one day a week on the side and then working pretty long hours. Consulting is pretty demanding. I started to recognize also that I wasn't enjoying the skillset that was being developed, which is a lot of time on Excel spreadsheets modelling, whereas my nature is to go more towards the human behaviour and the empowerment and the different elements.
- Kristian: I struggled for a few months there, personally, just not taking responsibility for the environment or the state that I was in. A lot of complaining. People told me "Kristian, I think it's time for you to go. You're losing your self-confidence, things are dropping." But it took me a while, it took me to go through another immersive program to actually see the blind spot that holding me back, and it was very much tied to this "I have to be there for a year", this societal conditioning, or this fear of rejection, or income, wealth.
- Kristian: Once that disappeared for me, I actually left and began to forge or weave that path. For me, it was fear that was holding me back from weaving that path, and I see that happening for a lot of people. I can see myself in a lot of people in that circumstance, and I look back at that consulting experience as, that's going to be invaluable for my life and my business and everything that I'm looking at doing, and learning a lot about how big business works. It was an exciting time, and it was a rollercoaster time, and it was burnout periods. It was a real journey and, coming back to that word of growth, I grew a lot from it.
- Seth: So, health and wellbeing is something that you've tied into The Timekeeper, which is kind of your primary business at this stage, I would say?
- Kristian: Yeah.

Seth: So, tell us a little bit about that. What is The Timekeeper and how does that all come together?

Kristian: It's a great time to ask that question. It's actually going through a bit of a transformation, the business itself. It very much started off, early days, as a very opportunistic idea. I wanted to be an entrepreneur, and what happened is, in my personal life, I actually got sick. I got a rash, some kind of adrenal fatigue, as well as I started to lose my eyesight. I discovered this journey which took me around mindfulness, yoga, health, diet, psychology, philosophy, awareness, personal development. The Timekeeper very much became a manifestation of that.

Kristian: Very simply, what we do is we sell watches as an anchor to the present moment and how to live our lives in line with our values. Time is precious. We donate proceeds to youth mental health and we share people's stories, so the struggles of their past, what they care about today and what they're inspired to create.

Seth: That's incredible.

Kristian: Just this month, the team has grown to six, and we're going a bit of a shift of focus to get closer to the mission. So the statement that we're putting out there is that we help young people be focused and productive with their time by giving them the mindset and tools. We're looking to actually expand into services and workshops and working with people on the mindset. Tools, such as the watches, are a reminder, but also other things such as journals. We're at a bit of a transition point at the moment, but it's very much focused on the link of time and mental health

Seth: [crosstalk]

Kristian: If someone's living a life in line with their values, it's very likely that they're happy, excited, enjoying life, whereas, a very common thread that's out there is "I'm stressed, I'm busy. I'm mentally feeling symptoms, I'm physically feeling symptoms. I'm in the hamster wheel, I don't know who I am and I don't know what I'm doing."

Seth: Wow.

Kristian: That's the problem we're looking to get into.

Seth: That's fantastic. So you found, in your personal experience, that once you started taking time and addressing your mental health and wellbeing, the physical symptoms responded to that?

Kristian: Yeah, correct.

Seth: And have you encountered people working through The Timekeeper where it's been a similar story?

Kristian: Yeah. So the team I have now, we were having a brainstorm the other day and a very common thread in our own personal lives, but in that that we hear from others, is "I'm busy, I'm stressed", either mental health issues coming out or physical health issues, burnout, adrenal fatigue. It's that thing of just not taking the time, it's like each of us has had that realization moment that's made us pause and stop, and

there's a lot of people we talk to that relate to the mission. That's why we're trying to get closer to "how do we actually help these people directly?" Rather than necessarily selling watches and donating proceeds, it's "how can we actually get closer?" Because people are really resonating with the time and the mental health/physical health component.

Seth: That's fantastic. So, it's a really tightly bonded team then, it sounds like.

Kristian: Yeah, definitely.

Seth: So, tell me, because you're essentially building two things through The Timekeeper, there's a business, which has a, kind of, commercial, economic element to it there, but then there's also very much this social engagement, which is part of that. Have you found it challenging to build essentially two different organizations rolled into one, that both come with very unique challenges?

Kristian: Yeah, definitely is the answer to that. The business, I would say, is like a baby, and I'm learning how to be a father. At first, I started opportunistically. I went into donating 100% of proceeds to education and youth homelessness. Then I went through an incubator program, they're like "Kristian, what you really care about is mental health and human behavior." And it kind of pivoted again, and now it's pivoted again. So it's kind of constantly levelling up or transforming. A big aspect is, I very much started the business very altruistically. It's like, just give what I can, give my time. I've learnt over the journey, or got some realizations along the way, that first and foremost, I really need to create a sustainable structure around it and not just give and give and give, and actually look much longer-term. So I've pivoted around, tried to apply some of the accounting concepts around performance and whatnot, to make sure that this is really a growing and sustainable thing and it can go beyond me as well.

Seth: You mentioned accounting there, that was what you studied when you were at the University of Melbourne here. How was it entering a field that wasn't necessarily related to your studies? I imagine accounting supported that, but you would have had to do a lot of learning on the go to tackle these things.

Kristian: Definitely. For me, learning or growth is aliveness. Background is studying accounting, commerce, finance, you could say the other element outside of that is learning how to set up a business, so business development, startups, spending some time in the not-for-profit space, learning how that space works. Spending some time teaching at university, learning a little bit about education. And then more recently, really learning around facilitation and coaching and presenting is a completely new skill again. Managing teams as well. Constantly learning.

Seth: Very cool. So you mentioned facilitation, which ties in nicely to the other work you do, which is with The Man Cave. Are you bringing the two organizations together or are they still very separate spheres?

Kristian: I'm a facilitator for The Man Cave, so I don't lead The Man Cave. Something I'm super passionate about, this is where it all comes together, is a mission in my life is to transform the education system. So I've been spending a lot of time learning about the different spaces and spheres, understanding how they work.

Kristian: So university while teaching, understanding how the department works, how students are behaving. Spending time in the startup space and the not-for-profit space, understanding how that works, the human behaviour there. And then, more recently, spending time in schools, so high schools, primary schools, and understanding the teachers' interactions, the students, where they're at, the parents. Get into people's worlds to understand how people are viewing the world, what they're dealing with, how they're seeing the world as well. So for me, The Man Cave has been really valuable and really great for that experience because it's been life-transforming for the young boys, and I would say for the teachers, and their families. It's also giving me an insight into the challenges that are happening and some insights into how the education system can actually transform to help these young people.

Seth: Did you want to share any of those insights? Anything that you think would be really valuable to see in the next couple of years, even?

Kristian: One thing I hear is, The Foundation of Young Australians, they do a lot of research on young people, amongst other organizations, and a common thread that's coming out is, the world is changing so fast, so quickly. Technology is changing and young people are going to have, on average, quite a high number of jobs in their lifetime. So how do we prepare young people with the skills? Both technically as well as emotionally, so the ability to adapt, communicate, deal with change over their lifetime. I see a fundamental flaw in the education system is the old model of go to geography, go to history, study commerce, do this, rote learn; big part of it, rote learning; to get the VCE script into uni to get into the job. Then people realize "Oh, that's not what I wanted to do" or over time, they have to change jobs but they don't have the emotional resilience or skills.

Kristian: It comes from a bit of maybe the Humanities area, or the philosophy, psychology, emotional intelligence area. My question is, why don't we have emotional intelligence in the curriculum? And the earlier, the better. There's a lot of curriculum coming in about respectful relationships and different things, so they're starting to see it. But now I see the challenge that schools have is a lot of organizations are selling programs into schools, and the schools don't have budget. Parents in public schools don't have budget either. And then there's a lack of consistency; different schools are getting different consultants, educators, to provide different curriculums, frameworks. But there's not a consistent thing across the board, and there's so many different things.

Seth: So it almost sounds like, in your mind, it needs to be a federal decision that happens across the whole country and the whole educational system. You've mentioned a few different age groups, is there a particular time where you think this would be really valuable learning? Because often, not everyone goes to university, so it would be great if you could be equipped with those skills beforehand. And, obviously, as you mentioned, there's respectful relationships coming in and those sort of teachings. But do you think there's an age bracket where you think it's particularly important?

Kristian: The earlier, the better, but I think it has to be sprinkled along the way. Because at different age groups, we're forming our brains and patterns are forming in different

ways and we go through different challenges, through different stages or cycles of our life, so I think it needs to happen along the way.

Kristian: When I was at a primary school the other day, I was amazed by what the teachers were providing the students around taking ownership and individual responsibility, around leadership. And seeing how they were so engaged in technology platforms. What they can do is incredible. So I think it is starting. And then there's in the high school, but there's other challenges coming. As we go through puberty we start to explore who we are as a man or a woman, or other identity, and then how we relate to different people as well. Communication, conflict. I think there has to be different skills and touch points along the way, I don't think it's just at one point and then it goes off.

Seth: Taking a little bit of a sidetrack, again, going back to what we were discussing initially which is the idea around burnout and hustling. There's the hashtag here 'GSD' which is 'get shit done'. When it comes to entrepreneurship, do you think that success needs to be redefined and move away from this mentality a little bit? Are there other ways that you can approach being successful and setting up projects and businesses, like yourself?

Kristian: I think success is defined for us in society from a very early age, so there's a conditioning that we have. We're very unconscious to it from an early age. Speaking from my personal experience, success was get a good VCE score. Success was get good grades in uni. Success was do all the internships, all the consulting competitions, get a really good job. That was my world. Now, when I actually stopped, paused, began to look at my values, what's important to me, break things down, look at my behaviours, where my stories came from, from a very early age, I began to redefine it for myself.

Kristian: What I see out there is a lot of this burnout or action or ambition, you could say it comes from many different components. The competitiveness, the social conditioning of in society around "you've got to be the best, you've got to be wealthy, powerful." Different elements. But again, if you're in different spheres or pockets of the community, if you're from different cultures, success is actually very different too. That's something I definitely noticed going into different schools with different backgrounds and cultures. Success for me, if you could say redefining it, was very much me getting in touch with my values. What are those five important areas of my life? For me, I used the lens or filter of time, as well as goals. How much time am I investing in each of those areas and then, based on my goals in those areas, how well am I working towards those?

Seth: And what are the five areas? That you consider your "areas of excellence" I believe you called them.

Kristian: In priority order, too, so you could think of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, or there's another framework, Barrett's Seven Levels of Consciousness. So I've tied my values into where I am in survival, all the way through to self actualization contribution. The first one is health and wellbeing. For me, I know what it's like to not have that, so that's number one. If I don't have that, I can't serve others. That's number one.

- Kristian: The second is what I call love and community. What I mean by that is relationships. It's the idea of, without my relationships, for me, life would be very meaningless. Also, my social structure and health defines how good my life is too, so that's very important for me.
- Kristian: The third one, you could say, is career and wealth. I kind of tie that in together. It's like how much, as an entrepreneur or facilitator, for me, the value is tied into wealth and value is aligned. So if I'm creating a lot of value for society, my wealth is building. I had a negative view of money originally. I got money drilled into me from a very young age, and I flipped it which was like "Oh, money is against love, so money's bad." So I've had to work through that to actually bring wealth to become a value again, because there's been periods of my life where I just actually don't care about money at all. I keep giving my time and people are like "Kristian, you've got to start building wealth into that." So that's the story behind that one.
- Seth: I imagine that, also, is part of supporting other elements of your life. It gives you capacity to do things like taking time to take care of your health.
- Kristian: Correct. And it's the whole thing of abundance [inaudible] your mindset around that as well, which we can go into.
- Kristian: The fourth value for me is growth. Personal and professional growth. For me, as I mentioned before, growth is aliveness. If I'm not learning and growing, it's almost like a heartbeat monitor's flat. When I'm growing, it's going up and down.
- Kristian: The last component for me is leadership and contribution.
- Seth: It seems like each of those, as you view it in a way as a pyramid, if you like, they definitely support each next step as you go. To become a better leader you would imagine that you would have to grow and learn to do that. That's really fantastic.
- Seth: In terms of learning, what works well for you? Is it a matter of personal learning, reading things, listening to podcasts, seeking out that knowledge independently? Do you like to do online courses or go back to university? What is your learning methodology?
- Kristian: So much. Life is learning. Reading, definitely. Books. I read a lot of books around business or personal development or that sphere, or philosophy. The other element for me is podcasts, or watching videos, whether that's YouTube or any other platform online.
- Kristian: Mentors. So you could say, I kind of look at it as senior and junior. So people that are younger than me, learning from those young people I work with. They have got so much wisdom coming out of them. And then older people, people that have been there before, done it, have failed, learnt lessons. People that can guide me.
- Kristian: Also doing courses. A lot of personal development courses, [inaudible] immersive experiences is kind of what I've been engaging with recently, which we can talk about too. As well as action. What I mean by that is growth and mindset, taking actions. So I can read a whole lot. It's like university, you read a whole lot, learn it

theoretically, but not actually understand it until I've taken the actions or immersed myself in that experience to actually see, in reality[crosstalk 00:22:08]

Seth: And put it into practice.

Kristian: Correct.

Seth: That's fantastic. Sorry, so you were going to tell me more about something there.

Kristian: The courses.

Seth: Courses, yes. Immersive experiences.

Kristian: University was a learning period, and you could say after university I've started to immerse myself in what I would call experiential learning experiences to really understand my human behaviour, the stories, the mental health, all that. A few to mention; one is The Mankind Project, which is where myself and 80 men, out in nature, reconnecting with nature and ourselves and what it means to be a man. And going through a process there, and really looking at the deep stories and things that come from my childhood and when I grow up.

Kristian: Another immersive experience is doing the Y-gap accelerator program. That's an incubator program to really challenge how I look at problems, the solution, the business, the team. Understanding business, impact, measurement in that. It's a different kind of learning.

Kristian: Another immersive experience is rites of passage training. That's the idea of ancient traditional cultures. Every culture had a rite of passage for people to move to different stages of life. Young boy or girlhood to woman or manhood. To become a father or mother. To become an elder. To give you an idea, when we're a young person and we're a mother or father, for that young person to become a man or woman, the mother or father has to move through a stage to become the elder to give space and to let go of the control over that child. Something I see a lot happening out there is that mother and fatherhood, even in my family, holding onto something. Why we have children, we're holding onto something, and that has to let a bit of a space for that young person to grow and flourish. So that kind of process.

Seth: So it sounds like a lot of those processes are things that, in contemporary society, we've kind of moved away from. Is that something you've observed?

Kristian: Yeah, so the closest rites of passages I see is Schoolies. At the end of school, I've finished school, I'm an adult, I'm going and getting drunk and all that. We've created our own ones, but that's not facilitated and there's no actual growth around the mental or emotional psyche, predominantly, for a lot of people. Drivers license is another one. Bar Mitzvas. There are different processes out there, but we've lost what all the ancient traditional cultures ran for their communities in the old days.

Seth: So is there an element of guidance to a lot of those rites of passage? You mentioned facilitation, so I'm wondering, is part of it that you're going through these steps by someone who's been before and can give you a little push in the right direction.

Kristian: Yeah, definitely. There is an element of elders passing down wisdom. There's another organization, Rites of Passage Institute, which I have some interactions with as well and they do some amazing work. They're starting to work in schools around the country as well, to facilitate this, in particular, for fathers and their sons. Some other organizations are doing work with mothers and daughters. Even, the other day, the Rites of Passage Institute did one with mothers and sons, so that work is starting to take place and weave back into modern day society.

Seth: That's fantastic. Well, we're almost out of time. I have one more question I have to ask you which is one we ask all of our guests. It is, and you've probably got a pretty good answer for this one, I think you've touched on it a bit so far. What's one thing that's not on your resume, as you would submit it to a job application, that's gotten you to where you are today?

Kristian: Great question. For me, I would say it's the merger between two things which sounds so simple, it's listening into self awareness. What I mean by that is, meditation probably started that journey for me. To actually listen to my thoughts. Where are they coming from; the past, present, future. Are they scarce thoughts? Are they abundant thoughts? Listening to my body. A sensation in my back, a little pain or a niggle, different things. And actually listening to people and nature, and not listening to the voice in my head interpreting what people are saying or judging a sound from nature, but actually listening to the words they're saying, as if they were my own. The commitment behind the words, the emotion behind the words. For me, that listening has allowed me to get really connected to self fear, but also allow space to listen and acknowledge people, and that is a skill that comes in handy with family, with friends, with partner, in business, with team, everywhere. That's a skill I would say is not on my resume, or I haven't learnt it in a formal institution, but through meditation, and also a number of immersive programs.

Seth: That's fantastic. Kristian Martinow, thank you so much for joining us. It's been really enlightening speaking with you, and I'm sure our listeners will get a lot out of it.

Kristian: Thanks for having me.

Seth: This has been GameChangers. I've been your host, Seth Robinson. GameChangers is produced by Sophie Thomas and recorded by Chris Hatzis.