

EPISODE 176

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:02.6] PF: Welcome to Episode 176 of Live Happy Now. This is Paula Felps and today we're talking with Keiko Agena, author of *No Mistakes: A Perfect Workbook for Imperfect Artists*. Well, you know Keiko is the actress from TV shows such as the *Gilmore Girls* and *13 Reasons Why*. Her new book explores her artistic side and it invites you to do the same. Let's listen as she talks with Live Happy executive editor Donna Stokes.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:28.7] DS: We're huge fans of your work here at Live Happy and excited to pick your brain about creativity. I'm just wondering, what inspired you to start this project and how long has it been in the works?

[0:00:39.8] KA: Well, this book has been in the works for about two years now and originally, it was going to be an adult coloring book. So it actually – it started with the artwork. I draw and I was talking about it on the Gilmore Guys Podcast and someone who work at [inaudible] had heard about that and through the podcast actually, we were talking about what it could possibly be and then this book, that's more of a workbook.

It does have some coloring elements into it but it's definitely more of a journaling workbook type of endeavor, it sort of grew out of our conversations about what this book could be and that was – My rough draft was turned in about a year ago. This whole – Now, coming to the end of it just launching on the 7th. Yeah.

[0:01:34.1] DS: Great. That's interesting that you say it started out as a coloring book because I love your artwork in it and my instinct was to get out my color pencils and just start coloring in your art. What is your personal definition of creativity?

[0:01:51.2] KA: Well, I guess it's been a great question because for me, the way I approach it, I think that we're all creative people. I do think that some people decide to make a profession out

of it, maybe they focus on one aspect of their creativity that they like and they want to make money at it.

But, you know, whether that's someone or not, I think we're all creative people and so, the exciting thing for me about approaching this book is I would love for people who maybe don't exercise that side of themselves as often as they'd like, to pick up this book and to use it as an easy, gentle way to access that side of yourself that I believe everyone has in them.

That's the way I look at creativity and a lot of times, it's a softer voice but if we take the time to pay attention and listen to it then – and give it chance to grow, it could be a very wild, wacky, strong, loud voice, which is what I'm hoping for.

[0:03:01.7] DS: What do most adults get wrong about creativity and how do we get back to more of a freer mind, more of that loud, crazy, wacky mind?

[0:03:14.2] KA: Yeah, I think that – Oh I know one thing is that, and I fall into this too, is that we sort of equate the cynicism with intelligence, you know? When people are very hard or very critical, we go, “Oh, that person must know, they must be very smart,” and we look down on people who loves things or just open or generous with their praise or obsessive about things and somehow that naïveté, we associate, you know, or we say, “That's naïve or that that person doesn't know enough to be critical,” and that I would love to change because I'd love to change into myself too of holding negativity almost to a higher standard than appreciation. So if that can change, then that I think, that's a great step in the right direction.

[0:04:09.8] DS: The title of the book is *No Mistakes*. What is your no mistakes philosophy?

[0:04:17.2] KA: Well, originally, it's from improv, which I'm obsessed with and so in improv, when something happens, what we say is there's no mistakes, you know? Anything that happens in an improv, because nothing is planned, it's sort of a great opportunity and so you kind of jump on it almost and it's – when something goes wrong or somebody slips up, then everyone gets excited and kind of focuses on that and this “mistake” in order to make it sometimes the most enjoyable part of the show.

So what I wanted to do is to find a way to look at what I perceive as imperfections in myself in a different way with that same kind of joy almost of discovery of where does this lead? Because if I'm so focused on being perfect all the time or some other person's idea of what perfect is, then I'm shaving off all the sides of myself that might be interesting or might actually lead to a unique voice in myself. So I thought, well, if I feel that way about myself, maybe other people can feel that way about themselves too.

[0:05:22.2] DS: That really came across well in the book and I think –

[0:05:26.0] KA: Oh good.

[0:05:26.7] DS: — that readers will definitely have fun with the exercises. How do you feel can listeners apply *No Mistakes* to their lives? You touched on it a little bit there and moving away from perfectionism and not – and resisting that urge to smooth out our ragged edges.

[0:05:45.9] KA: Yeah, I love the idea of just journaling and also to – if you go through like that little exercise that I have in the book of putting your creativity out in the world in a real way. Because a lot of times, sometimes we think things to ourselves and we have these conversations with ourselves and more like, “Oh, I could never say that out loud or I can never put that down on paper.”

But what's fun is to start putting it down on paper, you know? Have it be in a physical form and let it exist for a little while and say, “Well, that is weird, what's weird about it? What's interesting about it? What do I find — what makes me giggle when I look at it? What am I curious about that thing?” and to almost like you're following down maybe a path in the woodlands to just kind of keep following nugget by nugget and see where it leads because it's probably going to lead you somewhere unexpected. That's where your creative voice is, I think. Or the way you expressed your creativity is down that path and not someone else's path.

[0:06:47.9] DS: Absolutely. I agree, and just to give our listeners a little bit of a taste of some of the exercises, do you mind if I ask you a couple of the fill in the blank exercises from the book?

[0:06:58.4] KA: Sure, great.

[0:06:59.7] DS: Okay, “If it wasn’t such a risk, I would want to ____.”

[0:07:05.1] KA: If it wasn’t such a risk, I would would to _____. If it wasn’t such a risk — it’s funny because I was actually asked this recently, we did a little book launch and I was so scared to answer it in front of people but it’s true because I want to be honest but if it wasn’t such a risk, I would want to be a foster parent.

[0:07:31.1] DS: Oh wonderful. The other one that I had was, “If I didn’t worry about disappointing people, I would probably quit ____.”

[0:07:38.6] KA: I do feel that at this point in my life, I feel lucky that I don’t have anything that I’m not happy to do. Now, that’s not always going to be the case but I think right now, there’s nothing that I would want to stop doing.

[0:07:57.0] DS: Right. Maybe vacuuming or something like that?

[0:08:01.8] KA: Oh yeah.

[0:08:02.6] DS: Along with the exercises in your workbook, what actions can we take today to feed our artistic impulses when everything around us is trying to tell us to be responsible and to take care of this, take care of that, check off the to do list, how do we feed that?

[0:08:21.4] KA: Well, I love the idea of just trying to carve out time because I know that especially in the way, in the real life world in which we live, it feels like everything is scheduled down to the minute. So I think the first step is to just try to carve out a little bit of time for yourself because personally, I think that when we are running at max all the time and we don’t take time for ourselves to take a break and be creative and feed ourselves, feed our internal selves that the break is going to happen anyway.

I think either we get sick or you know, sometimes when I get very stressed out I have like an allergic reaction to something or something else will happen. So I think in as much taking care of yourself in a nutritional way is important, I think taking care of your heart is important too and I think creativity is part of that too and it’s important to preempt all those unnatural breaks that are going to happen anyway by carving out a time for yourself.

[0:09:32.9] DS: How do you personally use your creativity to make yourself happy or to find joy?

[0:09:39.2] KA: Well, I will say that I do really love when I get some time to draw. So for me, I love what I do, I love acting and writing this book has been an amazing process, but drawing is still one of the things that I kind of, for the most part, even though some of my drawings are in the book, for the most part, that's still what I do for myself.

I kind of look forward to those times where I say, "Okay, you know, today, I'm going to put on a movie in the background," my favorite is Herb and Dorothy, that's the movie I always throw on in the background, and take the time to almost meditatively draw and just see where that goes and I find that very appealing and it gives me some space to unwind.

[0:10:34.3] DS: That's great, I love that tie in with mindfulness that a lot of people don't, you know that creativity is almost like a competition, you know? Who can come up with the craziest idea but I love tying it to mindfulness and being in the moment.

[0:10:50.5] KA: Yeah, because you know, it's difficult, I mean, I live in Los Angeles and a lot of being in the creative space here is that competition a little bit of sort of pitching your idea. "Well what script are we working on now and what idea do you have for this?" Even creativity is sort of almost measured against other people to creativity and it's hard to take a pause and separate the business side of it from actually taking the time to feed that inner-self.

[0:11:26.8] DS: Absolutely, I can definitely see that. Who would you say the workbook is for and what would you like readers to gain from it?

[0:11:35.4] KA: Well I think that the workbook is really for people who – well because I've got to put it into a couple of different categories. I think that there are some people who benefit most from workbooks that are out there that are very structured as far as being goal-oriented and get you fired up but my sensibility is not so much that I ever had a challenge of getting, like being very goal oriented. My challenge is always I have a lot that's in there but I am just scared. You know where I am the one stopping myself from letting that creative voice come out.

So I think that a person who could really get the most out of this book are people who may be their own internal critic. It's maybe turned up the volume or turned up too loud on that person and you could use some tools, some suggestions in the book to dial down that voice and for me, it doesn't even necessarily need to be someone who wants to be creative for profession definitely or even wants to be more creative, but just anyone who wants to dial down that inner critical voice that's who I wrote the book for and hope that will help people be able to do that.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:12:58.8] PF: That was Keiko Agena, author of *No Mistakes: A Perfect Workbook for Imperfect Artists*. We'll be back in just a few minutes to tell you how you can learn more about her workbook but first, we're talking to Live Happy CEO, Deborah Heisz about *Finding the Good*.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:13:12.7] PF: Well Deborah, welcome back to Live Happy Now. We're always so happy when you drop in, so thank you for being here today.

[0:13:19.3] DH: Hey, it's always my pleasure. You know, the podcast is still my favorite part of what we do here.

[0:13:23.8] PF: We're like the favorite child, aren't we?

[0:13:26.1] DH: You are because it is so much easier sometimes to talk about this stuff and to get people to listen to it than it is to get people to read anything. But more importantly, when we talk about it we can just have a lot more fun.

[0:13:37.9] PF: That's true, we do. So what are we talking about this month? I know every month you give us something great with finding the good and tell us how to find the good in the world around us. So what are we talking about this month and more importantly what are you talking about this month?

[0:13:52.6] DH: Well you know, this is the time of year where people are sending their kids back to school and people have come off summer and they've done a lot of activity and they are doing a lot of stuff and they are trying to get back into their routine. What I'd like to do is talk about finding the good and taking care of yourself because this is also the time of year we have so much trouble doing that.

[0:14:13.7] PF: Yeah, it gets so busy and we put ourselves as the very end of that to-do list.

[0:14:19.1] DH: Especially if you're a parent and you are coming up on the holiday season in a few months and now you've got soccer practice again and you've got basketball practice again or whatever it is that you're kids are doing or scouts. You know, my kids are involved in all of it and you always have good intentions of taking care of yourself but then you don't feel good in the morning. You're like, "I don't want to go to bed, I just needed the extra 20 minutes of sleep."

Well that's true, we do need that extra 20 minutes of sleep but it's also the guilt over, "I could workout but I also need to run that errand. I could do that," and I think we forget about the good that taking care of yourself not only brings to you but brings to the rest of your family.

[0:15:03.8] PF: Well, it's really hard because you do feel guilty if you are taking that time to go and say take a yoga class when as you've said, "I've got that errand to run. I know there's laundry waiting for me." There is no shortage of things, especially for parents, there's no shortage of things that need to be done.

[0:15:20.6] DH: Well and I think our world is always geared around the things we have to do and then that list of what we have to do is somehow oddly includes things that maybe aren't "have-to right now's". Yeah, eventually you need clean laundry but do you really have to have clean laundry today over taking a yoga class, going for a bike ride, even going and chatting with a friend? Because we all know emotional care is something that's really important for all of us as well.

[0:15:48.7] PF: So how do you go about keeping those priorities upright? How do you keep in tuned with yourself and making sure that you are taking care of yourself?

[0:15:58.8] DH: Well, like everybody else I am not perfect at it but –

[0:16:02.4] PF: Oh man, you just crushed some dreams there.

[0:16:06.5] DH: But there is a certain element of making it a priority and its broader sense taking care of yourself. I mean yes, there is exercise. There's eating right, not always eating on the go, which is really tough for all of us especially I travel a lot. If I am not travelling for myself, I'm running the kids to practice somewhere and man that drive through sure is a lot easier than going home and turning on that stove.

It really is about building into your schedule, your life schedule, the things that make your life worthwhile not just the stuff you do to take care of yourself but the bigger things. You know, we just got back from a huge vacation. We went onto a cruise to Alaska for a week and it was important to do that because if I don't do that, if I don't check out enough, it is really hard to maintain that intensity that's required to do my regular job, to be involved in my community, to get my kids from place to place.

You need that recharge button and there's something good about that because my kids went on vacation with me and they saw me in recharge mode. You know, when it comes to finding the good, I think most people overlook that sometimes the good is taking a break. It's doing what you need to do. Or how many people are looking forward to retirement? That their number one thing is, "I'm going to have time when I retire." It's like, "Well, that may not happen if you don't take a vacation."

In fact there is a great statistic that you shared with me earlier this week that said, people who take less than three weeks of vacation — it's a great statistic — people who take less than three weeks of vacation are 37% more likely to die young, even if they exercise and eat right.

[0:17:53.2] PF: And that just scared everybody.

[0:17:56.2] DH: It did, particularly if you are living in the United States where three weeks of vacation for a lot of people is not even a possibility because they don't have it. But so many people leave their vacation days unused as well. There are hundreds of thousands if not millions and millions of unused vacation days. In my own company, I stand up as CEO, we

stand up and I say, “Look schedule your vacation. I’ve already scheduled mine and I mean it,” and people kind of look at you like, “Yeah, what’s the catch? I know you want me...” –

[0:18:31.8] PF: “Are you trying to fire me?”

[0:18:33.3] DH: “Are you trying to trap me here?” No, I want you to take the vacation because it is so valuable for your mental health and here’s the thing, if you are looking forward to retirement and you don’t take your vacation now, you may not have a retirement, okay?

[0:18:49.1] PF: Yeah, especially we talk about that stat, 37% more like to die young and I don’t know what their classifying young as, but nobody likes it. Nobody likes to hear that.

[0:19:00.8] DH: No and I do know a lot of people who are planning to later, “I am going to do that later. I’m going to do that when I retire. I’m going to fish more,” whatever it is. “I am going to rebuild that car that’s been sitting in my garage for 20 years when I retire,” whatever it is, why? Why are you not doing that now if that’s what really brings you joy and makes you happy? Why are you not at least setting aside four hours a week to do something like that that really truly brings you joy?

And then take your three weeks of vacation a year and your children need to see you do it. So take the time, take a vacation. More importantly, those weeks you are not on vacation take the time to take care of yourself. Because if you don’t, you’re no good for anybody. Nobody wants a grumpy mommy, nobody wants a grumpy boss. Who wants to be around the person whose life is so miserable that they’re hard to be around?

[0:19:57.2] PF: Well now people can go online, they can find out more about this at livehappy.com, look for *Finding the Good*.

[0:20:04.0] DH: Yeah, we’re going to have some great information there about this and great statistics about people who don’t take vacations versus people who do take vacations. But really, the message that you should have is you have to take care of yourself in order to take care of everybody else around you.

[0:20:18.3] PF: There you go. That's a good one. All right, well Deborah thank you so much as always for coming and talking to us and sharing some of your wisdom.

[0:20:25.3] DH: Thank you Paula. Talk to you soon.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:20:27.3] PF: That's all for this episode of Live Happy Now. Be sure to visit us at livehappynow.com to learn more about Keiko Agena's workbook, *No Mistakes: A perfect workbook for imperfect artists* and to find Deborah's column, *Finding the Good*. If you like what you've heard here today and want to hear more, go to Apple Podcast or wherever you get your favorite podcast, search for "Live Happy Now" and subscribe today so you'll never miss an episode.

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That is all we have time for today, so please join us back here next week and until then, remember to make every day a happy one.

[END]