

Podcast Episode #036

A Real-Life Reinvention Story with Special Guest Markus Grindel

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Pamela: Hi, guys. It's Coach Pamela here, and we are in the second week of our new format. Yes, we are changing things up. If you listened to my episode last week, there is a reinvention happening, a reinvention in the house. Gotta follow my own advice! You are now hearing me. We are having unscripted, unfiltered, unedited conversations, so you're going to get to hear all my little stumbles and all that other good stuff.

This week, I am sharing with you an interview, a real-life reinvention story that I had about a month ago with Markus Grindel. Now, Markus is an international business executive and a serial re-inventor. In fact, Markus and I worked together. We're longtime friends, and he likes to say that he was my first reinvention client, which I find highly amusing, but it's true that we did engineer a reinvention for him. He has reinvented himself several times since.

He has a really interesting story, because as a high-powered executive, he actually left his career to stay home with his child, which is highly unusual for a man. I know you guys are going to love to hear his story. He's now in the midst of yet another reinvention. Lots of really great advice, so let's tune in and hear what he has to say.

Pamela: Hi Markus. Welcome today.

Markus: Hello Pamela.

Pamela: I am so glad to have you here, because we are old -- well, I don't want to say old because we're not old; I should say longtime work friends. You like to call yourself my very first re-invention client, right?



Markus: Absolutely. I mean, every time I talk about you with friends I always refer to myself as your first client, and I think we can date it, sort of like, fifteen years ago, it might be now?

Pamela: Gosh. Well, actually, I think it's been longer, because I've actually been a coach now sixteen years.

Markus: Whoa!

Pamela: Yeah! We really are dating ourselves on this one. You were my first client before I even became a coach, because we used to work together in my last corporate iteration. I want you to tell that story because I have a very clear memory of this story where we were in Hong Kong and it was this turning point for you. Why don't you tell people how this actually happened and what you were doing before, and how we made this switch.

Markus: Let me rephrase that question as sort of who I was before. I think that's more important than what I did before. Who was I before I met you and before we had this really, really life changing conversation in Hong Kong?

The short answer to who I was before was a person that always ran away from himself all the time. I was trying to please other people. I was very popular at school. I was head of the student council. I, then, started studying medicine because that was the most popular and the most exclusive thing, or the best thing that you could study back then. Then I started struggling with that. Not from an academic point of view but, more from a, oh my god, if I study this subject I can only be a doctor my entire life.

I moved to the US, because I figured, well, if I move to the US and I make it there, of course everyone will surely be impressed and I'm going to please everyone that's around me.

Pamela: Right. Well, you should tell people where you moved from, right? Because people may not know.

Markus: From Germany, yes. I moved from Germany to the US which, in hindsight, was probably the best thing I've ever done. Up to the point where I was meeting you, I was running away from what I really wanted. I was near that point, and didn't fully understand that. I was building digital products for the company that we both worked with, and other companies before that. Not really because I enjoyed doing it. It was more, sort of, I was good at it. In hindsight, it was a very unhealthy feedback loop.



Pamela: Right.

Markus: Then, I met you in Hong Kong -- I met you before, but we worked together for awhile. Then, we had that very life changing talk in Hong Kong which sort of started my first re-invention journey. It started in the way you poked me and the way you pushed me out of my comfort zone. I started challenging my own value system, which, as I said before, seemed to be very driven from what other people think rather than what I think of me. I was chasing other people's dreams and not mine. I know that probably sounds very cliché, but I think you, by pushing me, made me realize that I can take ownership; that the value system of other people, what other people think of me, and what I think of me, actually can coexist. Before, that was always a conflict in me. This is what I might want and this is what other people want.

I could take ownership of where I wanted to be. It allowed me to push myself as well, out of the comfort zone. I'd no longer have to play it safe. It was more, I could take risks, because the risk was about my own risk and my own decision. I was about where I'm going to take my career or my life to, rather than taking risks for others. I know that might sound weird but that's how I felt back then. All of the sudden, I was empowered.

I remember, and this was not in Hong Kong, we were back in New York, and I remember that conversation as well. We had a conversation about what job I want to do down the road. I believe I said I want to have the job of a colleague of mine. I'm sure you know who I was pointing to. Then from that day I set that goal, and did everything I could, probably even subconsciously, to work toward that goal. It was fine, because it was my risk to take. It was my goal to achieve.

Pamela: Yeah. Well, and let's let people in. Let's pull back the curtain a little bit, because I think talking about where you came from and this idea of really trying to please others is such a fundamental part of this journey. I know that many of our listeners are going to be feeling the same way, right? Because we grow up, and we're trying to please people and we don't know how to tune in to what it is that we want. You were on the technical side. I know that from my perspective, I mean, because we were colleagues in the way that you were on the technical side and you were helping me, on the business side.

I looked at you, and I said "I think you should be on the business side." I remember saying that to you and you're like, "Well, no, I'm technical." I'm like, "No, I think actually you're business." Let's talk about how you viewed yourself versus that moment when I said, "No, actually you have these other skills" and what that woke up, or how that awakened you to pursue that other goal for taking a job in an area that you would have never even imagined before.



Markus: Well, it comes back to what I said before. It was that unhealthy feedback loop. I did something because I was really good at it. People were telling me I was good at it. I was pushed in that drawer and never really looked outside the drawer, and stuffed in there. The pleasing element of it is like, everyone was happy around me. My mother was happy. Everyone in my environment was like, “Oh, you're doing a really good job. You're really good at this!”

In the corporate world, you have that. You're pushed in these categories because you're good at one company doing something, and then the next company hires you because you were really good at the other company. They look very black and white sometimes at your skills. It's very rarely that someone like you comes by and says, “Well actually, your technical skills are very applicable in this other area as well, and look at your soft skills that you haven't even discovered yourself yet.” At that point, when we had that conversation, when you were probing, saying, “Hey, have you thought of this? Yes, you're a technical person, but I think actually you could also do that.”

I've never thought about the soft skill and I never made the transfer of -- well, actually in the end the interface is the human being. If you can deal with human beings you can move across disciplines.

Pamela: Right. Although, not everybody who's technical can deal with human beings.

Markus: No.

Pamela: That's where it really becomes a matter of knowing your skills. I think it's interesting because sometimes we're sitting in a chair and we're in a chair, and we think we have the skills for it, but we actually don't. Sometimes, we're sitting in a chair and we're looking at a different chair, and we think, “Oh, I don't have the skills for that” but then we do. I was actually testing your skills. I was pushing you outside your comfort zone, which is a key piece of this whole re-invention process.

On that trip in Hong Kong I remember sitting in a meeting, I believe we were in Korea, and I threw a business question to you in front of about twelve clients, and said, “Okay Markus, you answer this question.”

Markus: Yeah, which I remember to this day because it felt like I was hearing that question in a muffled sound in my head. I was thinking, “What is she doing? What, what? Hang on. No, no. This is not for me. I'm here just to answer technical questions. Why is she doing this?” It was a very scary moment. I don't know if it was luck or very calculated by you that I then sort of pulled myself out of the hole and actually managed to answer that. The meeting went on and then, I believe it was a successful meeting.



Yeah, the comfort zone is a key element. I think what I learned in that moment and obviously, not at that time when we had this meeting, but as I reflected on it afterwards, and many years afterwards, is that you need to push yourself out of the comfort zone. I couldn't push myself out of the comfort zone because, up until that point, everything I did was really for others and not for myself.

In this process with you, not only on that trip but also on many other trips after that, I started allowing myself to push myself out of the comfort zone and think less about how others might feel about it, but how I feel about it. Yes, it's scary. But actually, if you own that scariness, it's a good thing. It motivates you to push yourself even further, in my case at least. It pushed me further and further.

Pamela: Yeah, yeah, because I remember. I do. I remember that moment distinctly, and I remember, even afterwards, sitting in meetings with you. Acutally, I have to say it was a little bit of self interest on my side, because I knew that I didn't want to be in the role that I was in forever. I wanted to know whether or not you were interested in taking over that role. The person who would have been the obvious next choice, I knew, couldn't do that job. I knew you could.

I just didn't want to leave the company in lurch because I knew that just as you were going through your re-invention, I was going through mine. I just knew that I wasn't going to be long for the corporate world. I actually didn't have in mind that I was going to be a coach then. It was a whole other thing. I was like, "I need to leave and I need to find somebody to sit in my chair." I was like, "I got to teach you. I got to teach you all this stuff that you don't already know, that you don't think you can learn, but actually, I know you can learn." There was a whole series of uncomfortable moments, of you having to learn that, and then, you having to deal with the politics of the organization after I left.

Markus: Which, obviously, for a technical guy is an absolute nightmare to begin with, because as a technical guy you don't worry about human interaction and you don't worry about politics and all that stuff. Again, you enabled me to face these things and work them out. Obviously, I had you and I think it was a very important thing that you have mentored me and took my along for the ride, because otherwise it would have been very hard. It's not in the sense of mentors that push you on your back and say, "Oh you're doing a good job." It's actually, you have done that back then and when we recently spoke about something else, you did it again. You asked me questions by probing rather than telling. Which I think is a very important skill set that not a lot of people have.

Pamela: Yeah, and even though I had that skill then, back to having these undiscovered skills that serve us down the road: that's actually the skill of a coach, right? I didn't know



that, but it's one of the innate skills that I had. Also, telling you, in those moments, because I am a little bit of a tough coach, when you called me. I think three months after I left and you were whining about the politics. I'm like, "Oh you can deal with it." You didn't tell me how hard this was. I'm like, "I know, but you can deal with it."

Markus: Again, it's the comfort zone. I think, well for me, it was really sort of the comfort zone and allowing yourself to own the pain and pushing yourself, and pushing yourself forward and actually thriving from that pain, because you want to make that pain go away. You need to figure out how to make the pain go away and how to make the uncomfortable situations go away. I think you learn faster. You learn quicker because you want to be in a happy place again.

Pamela: That's right.

Markus: The trick is not to fall back to your old happy place, but to find that new happy place for the longer road.

Pamela: That's right, because there are two ways of getting rid of the pain, right? Either to try to stop it by muffling it, or to grow through it. To, basically, expand and become the person that that now feels comfortable for.

Markus: Yeah, exactly.

Pamela: You went farther than you ever would have imagined on the business side.

Markus: Oh absolutely. It took me I can't remember how many years. In my mind, back then, I said, "This is how many years I give myself to have this person's job." That wasn't yours. That was, I remember, a different one. I went from your job to that different one. It took me a little bit longer than I initially planned. I think that was just the naivete of a young, just-starting-out business person thinking that everything goes a little bit faster.

Then yes, I left the company a few years ago as the Managing Director of that division and that was my goal, and I did it.

Pamela: Yeah, and then you embarked on your second re-invention!

Markus: Oh boy.

Pamela: Yeah, big re-invention, because re-invention's a life skill, right? It takes us through the different stages of our lives.

Markus: Absolutely.



Pamela: Let's share with our listeners the second stage of your re-invention, which is a big shift.

Markus: Absolutely big shift. One that I didn't anticipate. I didn't anticipate how complicated that would be. I have to say as a pretext, I have some deep respect for any woman that took a break from their career to raise children, which is, basically, what I've done.

The feeling that I had initially, and I think the best way to describe it, although that might not work with US listeners very well because, you drive automatic. The initial feeling I had was driving along on the highway at a hundred miles per hour and shifting to a low gear. You know the sound that an engine makes when it runs way too high? You either have to shift the gear again or you have to slow down, otherwise you're going to break that engine. That's sort of the feeling that I had.

For awhile, I had a really hard time just finding the lower gear to slow down. There's struggle there. Again, it was about the comfort zone, but it also was about identity. I had to adjust my own identity a little bit and my own goals. It was no longer about me, which as I said before, sort of making the discovery actually it's important what you think about yourself and how you feel about your own goals, and how you feel about your own aspirations. Now, all of the sudden, it was about a little person that was depending on me and was ultimately about his goals in life, not mine. Mothers around the world are laughing, but for someone like me that really hates dependency, that was quite challenging: to adjust my framework of happiness to my son's framework.

Pamela: Right. That's right. That's a huge, huge shift in this whole identity shift which is really also a hallmark of re-invention. Our identities have to evolve, they have to expand. Sometimes we have to leave old identities behind in order to embrace new ones. That's what happened to you in this second shift.

Markus: Oh, absolutely, yeah. I think, ultimately how I got around the identity as well as my position in this whole puzzle was that, while it was my son's life -- the fact of raising a happy, kind, inquisitive child is actually the greatest goal that you can have. It was then very much about identifying the things on his journey to achieve that goal, or to be that, to align those with my dreams and to see how I can make those things that you require in raising a child, how I can own those, and set my own goals, or my own identity around those things.

I mean, it took awhile, but in the end I no longer introduced myself as I'm the Former International Media Executive but as the Super-Dad of this child over there. That shift



took awhile but when I started not thinking about my past anymore, and took all the things that I learned in my past and moved on, that's when I actually got over it, and that's when I found my happiness again and my security in life.

Pamela: Now, you're going through another re-invention!

Markus: Yes. Keeping it interesting.

Pamela: Now, it's time to go back.

Markus: Absolutely. I mean, now our son going to the big school and reaching an age where it's really uncool to hang out with your parents, when they become more an embarrassment than anything else. I have to figure out what I'm going to do with the next chapter of my life and obviously, with my career. Interesting enough, it seems very much an internal re-invention, but also an external re-invention.

Let me talk about the external first, which is what I've just recently discovered. It seems that a lot of head hunters and company recruiters, have a really hard time understanding that someone other than a woman takes a deliberate career break. I'm the first generation of dad's that take a deliberate break and they have a really hard time wrapping their head around that. The other day, I was actually on the treadmill and I was thinking, "You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to start writing about my last three years as if I would have worked for a company. I'll call it Online Family Limited and summarize my achievements in business terms so that a head hunter can actually process it."

Pamela: Right. That's called translating your background; putting it into a new language.

Markus: Exactly. In a sense, you have to do that for yourself as well, because, if you look at it's a surface, yeah I raised a child and I built sandcastles, and I went swimming and I played football. All these things have qualities that you can use in other scenarios and in other environments. I have to translate not only for other people, but also for myself.

Honestly, until we spoke a couple of weeks ago, I feel, or at least I can say that now, I feel like I kind of wasted a little bit of time with my internal process, because I came at this as, "Well I was this person before this break, so surely I'm going to be this person, or the same person after this break," which obviously isn't true. It's impossible. Three years, four years went down the road. I changed and the environment around me changed as well.



I really had to start figuring out what I want for my next chapter, but also, what I don't want. Until we talked, and you did it again in your Pamela Mitchell probing kind of way, I hadn't realized that I got really bad over the years again at saying no. Remember that the opportunity was brought to me and I kind of knew that I really don't like it, and I really want to do something else, but I tried to find a middle ground which wasn't fair to that company, nor fair to me.

I fell back into that cycle of, "Oh, let's just please everyone around me and then everything will be fine." Really learning to say no once you actually identify what you want is an important thing. Also learning to look at patterns in yourself. What I mean by that is, I started looking at a job description and I talked to head hunters. I was very quick at deciding, "No, I don't think this is interesting, yes that might be interesting." It wasn't really helpful to say yes and no until I actually started looking at the patterns; why I'm saying yes or no? I started looking beyond just the job description and just the surface of what this opportunity might be, and that started helping me to articulate actually what I want in the job, rather than what I want from the job. Hopefully, with that now, I can look at the much, much wider range of opportunities not only in the media field, but see where the things that I want in a job actually might be also available in other very interesting areas that I haven't thought about it.

Pamela: That's right. It expands your pool of opportunity when you think about what you want in a job, rather than what you want from a job. That is such an important distinction; one that most people don't actually make. Because we're all thinking about, "Well, what can I get from this job?" Not, "What are the qualities that are a part of this job that I want to actually experience?" We put ourselves in the box of assuming that the one way that we think we can experience it is truly the only way to experience it.

Markus: Absolutely. I think I'm in a very luxury position that I actually don't work right now, that I'm still looking after our son until September. I do have the time to take a step back and I think a lot of people, they sort of go from one job to another and never really have that opportunity, or they don't take the opportunity to say, "Hang on, why I'm doing this actually. What is in for me?" rather than, "What I'm getting out of it?" I'm feeling lucky about that and I'm feeling lucky that I spoke a couple of weeks ago to you about this. Its kick started my third re-invention, really. It's super charged my third re-invention. Should I put it that way?

Pamela: Yes, because you're on the journey for sure. I'm mindful of the time and we could be talking about this forever for sure. I want to wrap up by asking you what advice you would have for people who are maybe on the fence about their own re-invention, or feeling a little bit anxious. What wisdom do you have to share with them from your own



journey? If you can look back at yourself and say, “Hey, this is what I wish I had known when I was embarking on my re-inventions.”

Markus: I would say, from my first re-invention, which, you were very much a part of it, I think I learned the journey is as important as reaching your goal. What I mean by that is, or at least in my case, reaching the goal was actually very anti-climactic, because you've done it, you did it. Now, creating a journey towards your goal and enjoying that part of the journey is actually, I think, as important as reaching your goal, if not more important. If you create a good journey, I think other opportunities might open up, but you also have the opportunity to learn from your mistakes on that journey. I think, really, for me that's what I took away from my first fifteen years in the business: the journey is as important as reaching the goal.

I think, really important, and this sounds very cliché, is no regrets. I think regrets are a very poisonous thing. I would suggest to everyone to keep regrets to a minimum. What I've learned for myself is that I don't think I've ever regretted things that I've done, but I've regretted things that I haven't done. Keeping those regrets to a minimum means to me that you need to be open and do things, and experience things all the time, because if you regret anything, the brake in the car just slows you down.

Pamela: Right.

Markus: Also important is identifying the little things that are important to you in a job. That goes back to my third re-invention; what is in the job, rather what is the job doing for me. That sounds maybe a little bit weird. When I left my last job I felt a lot of unrest and I caught myself, a lot of times, thinking maybe I should have stayed a little bit longer in that job, maybe I should have done it a little bit longer. I kind of miss it.

Ultimately, I found out that I'm actually not missing the job, but what I was missing, and that sounds to you probably very weird, I was missing the traveling. Not the traveling because the traveling was fancy, but the alone time, the me time that you get on a plane for eight, ten hours. No one is interrupting you. That was very important to me, having that. Once I recognized that, I made sure, that I have that me time, that alone time, that I'm away from my child and away from my husband, that I'm away from everything in regular intervals and take a break.

Pamela: Exactly.

Markus: That sort of calmed me down. I think it's the little things really, the regret and enjoy the journey.



Pamela: Those are wonderful things to leave everyone with. Thank you so much, Markus, for sharing your story today. It was fabulous!

Markus: Well, thank you. I mean, I think I owe you a lot. Whenever you want to talk, talk.

Pamela: Awesome.

Markus: I benefit from that way more than you do.

Pamela: Today, all of our listeners benefit from it as well. That's a good thing!

Pamela: Wasn't that an incredible story? True inspiration to follow your own path for sure. That's it for this segment of The LiftOff Project. Be sure to visit our website, theliftoffproject.com/podcast where you can download a transcript of today's episode and hear more of Markus' insights, or I should say "read" more of Markus' insights.

Now, we are doing things different for Ask Coach Pamela because as you guys know, I'm going to be doing video podcasts, so if you want, send me an email with a question and if I select it for one of my upcoming video podcasts, then I will send you a free deck of reinvention cards as a gift. Send me a question that you want me to cover for an Ask Coach Pamela video podcast. You can also connect with me on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram @TheCoachPamela. If you enjoyed this episode, please leave a review for us on iTunes. Your feedback truly does make a difference.

Today's LiftOff inspiration comes from Stephen Covey who says, "Your power to choose the direction of your life allows you to reinvent yourself, to change your future, and to powerfully influence the rest of creation." Follow your reinvention and influence and create your world. Thank you for listening today and remember, why settle for good when great is waiting? Take one small step this week to lift your life. Bye for now.

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