

CONFERENCES FOR WOMEN

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"Dealing With Life's Curveballs"

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Guest: Ishita Gupta

**WHITNEY GRAY WILKERSON:** Hi, everyone. This is Whitney with the Conferences for Women. Thanks so much for joining us today for "Dealing With Life's Curveballs."

With me is Ishita Gupta. Ishita is the founder of "Fearless" magazine and Ishita Gupta Media. She's been called Fast Company Meets Oprah by 15,000-plus readers. "Fearless" is a digital magazine featuring best-known names in business on how to live without fear.

**ISHITA GUPTA:** Hi, there. Thank you so much for having me. It's a pleasure.

**WGW:** Now, I know you speak at conferences around the U.S. on entrepreneurship, fear, coping with life's curveballs, so we're really excited to have you here today.

And I want to just welcome everybody to the broadcast and remind you that we are tweeting live. If you are a Twitter fan, please join us @pennwomen, P-E-N-N women, @texaswomen, or @masswomen, of course depending on which of the three states that you are located in.

Now, Ishita, let's just talk a little bit about how you became such an expert on dealing with life's curveballs. Give us some perspective here.

**IG:** All right. Yeah, I mean, the reason I'm an expert, and I imagine most of us have some expertise in the curveball area is because I've been there. You know, I have been to rock bottom and back with my business having gone from making zero money and renting out my apartment in New York City when I started my business five years ago, to a six-figure business; to having no online presence to having, you know, 20-, 30,000 readers; to not really being -- not really having a clue as to what I was doing in the world, what

I was here for, what my purpose was, to really creating a solid career and a brand that essentially speaks to my message and what I really, really believe is important in the world which is confidence and overcoming fear and feeling free, financially and personally.

In terms of curveballs, I've also been there personally. I've been through crazy, crazy heartbreak, crazy depression, years and years and years spent confused and frustrated trying to figure out my own career until I finally learned my own cocktail, so my own formula of what it meant to live confidently, of what it meant to feel free and clear in myself without judging myself, you know, and professionally what it means to do the work in the world that allows you to have financial freedom, freedom of time and that fulfills you.

So I guess the expertise, I always feel a little bit strange with that word but you know what? I am. I am, and we all are, in a certain way, if you have been there. So that's really the broad strokes of my background. I'm happy to go into more detail.

**WGW:** Well, you mentioned having found your own cocktail, and it would be really interesting to hear some of the things that led you to finding what that formula was.

**IG:** Yeah. I -- you know, the biggest thing that led me to -- I've been on a search for I would say the last 10 years. It's been a decade of personal development and figuring out -- quote/unquote figuring out -- what makes me feel good every day, what makes me feel strong enough to show up, to speak on stage, to do the work that I do.

And it started, really, and it always starts this way, I think, for everyone, it starts from hitting rock bottom. I had -- you know, I started my career pretty late in life, I would say, when I was about 26, 27. And prior to that I was on this track of going to med school. I grew up in a family of doctors and that was kind of my route. But I knew it wasn't right for me because I had felt -- always, always -- this restless feeling of what am I here to do?

I don't feel like I belong in a traditional system, and for about four or five years really struggled with what

do I want to do and what does that look like professionally? And I jumped around from thing to thing. I got into med school. I didn't go. I got into clinical psychology grad school. I didn't go. I started photography school which was of my own volition and I really loved it, but professionally I still felt restless.

And the real impetus for this, really where my career and where my belief in myself started was after about four or five years of struggling and trying everything under the sun out, where I applied for an internship with a man named Seth Godin. He is a big blogger online. He has, like, 500,000 people read his blog a day. He's called America's Number One Marketer. For all intents and purposes, he is The Man in business. I was, like, low performing at work one day reading blogs, and Seth's blog comes in and it says if you could change your life, would you?

Now, at the time I was actually working with a really famous photographer. You guys know, he's the one who photographed the Afghan girl on "National Geographic," and then 30 years later he photographed her again. I was working with him studio managing, but I was still feeling really, really restless. The kind of restlessness that you feel like I feel really big inside, but I cannot allow my bigness to kind of show up.

That's how I felt. There was, like, this feeling, not in, like, a feminine way, not a feminist glass ceiling, but in a way where I just wasn't feeling as big as I knew I wanted to feel.

So I read this blog that said if you could change your life, would you? And I thought to myself, man, Ishita, you have done so much oddball stuff, and you have tried these things and you have done this and still, you are working with the only person in photography that you would want to work with, and you're still feeling restless.

So I said I would want to change my life, so I quit my job that day. I am, like, not risk averse at all. I'm not the kind of person that needs my ducks in a row so I quit my job that day. And I was in a lot of fear, but I applied that day for what Seth went on to explain was a six-month MBA program, six months with him and nine other people in this environment, learning about

entrepreneurship, business media, the whole thing, and it felt like it was made for me. It felt like it was the opportunity I had been waiting for.

And when I was studying photography in Boston -- I'll tell you this story because it's really relevant. When I was studying photography, I actually went to hear Seth speak in New York City. I took a bus from Boston to New York and I heard him speak. And I was weeping hysterically throughout his lecture which was about Tribes, his new book that was coming out about connecting people and being the leader and starting a movement.

And I was like, why is this stuff resonating so much with me? I don't have a business background, I don't have a marketing background, and yet it was speaking so much to me that as soon as I left that lecture, I don't know where it came from but this big, booming voice inside of me said you will work with him one day.

**WGW:** So Ishita, a question.

**IG:** Yes.

**WGW:** You are talking about so much uncertainty. And I know that a lot of our listeners, maybe they want to take a leap like you have mentioned but there are so many unknowns and so many responsibilities.

**IG:** Right.

**WGW:** What are some specific things that you could share with them that helped you to cope with so much uncertainty --

**IG:** Right.

**WGW:** -- when you took this leap yourself?

**IG:** Yeah. Well, I'll tell you that. And you know, what people can do is what I did. So I'll finish, in part, this story because I think it's really relevant.

When I started working with Seth, which is the only thing that I thought I wanted, guess what happened? That same -- the very first night, we started on inauguration day, and that same night, the amount of fear that I felt skyrocketed. And for the next year I

was in so much intense fear that I actually thought I was going to die. I lost 20 pounds. My skin freaked out. I ended a relationship and an engagement. I was a zombie. You couldn't even talk to me, I was so freaked out.

So what people listening to this call can take away from -- and I felt that for the next full year. The first thing you've got to take away is that the thing that you most want, the thing that you're -- the job opportunity, the new promotion, the new house, the new relationship, the thing you most want you have to know is going to come with an equal or more amount of fear and uncertainty. Like, preparing for that is a necessity, right?

So the most successful people I know, the bigger and better things that they do, the more opportunity they have, they don't shy away from the fear and the uncertainty because they know that it's going to come. New level, new devil.

So the first thing I want people on this call to get is, you know, do not panic when that insane amount of fear sets in, right? You have to know that what you are reaching for is huge, and along with that comes a huge amount of uncertainty. So had I been prepared for that, I probably wouldn't have -- my shit probably wouldn't have hit the fan like it did. So that's first and foremost.

And then the second thing that helped me that I think a lot of people can also do is you have to learn the way you learn. What I mean by that is I could not have gotten out of that insane amount of fear if all I did was judge myself and say why am I not out of this fear? Look, I have this big opportunity in front of me. Why am I not taking advantage of it? That judgment. All I could do in that moment was be in survival mode.

So anyone who is in that moment right now, maybe you left a job and you are in transition mode. Maybe you are getting a divorce and it's incredibly hard to be in that space. You've got to really recognize that, you know. Learning how you learn means doing what you need to do for survival mode, to be -- to get yourself out of survival mode.

For me, that meant starting a magazine. You mentioned the magazine that I created at the beginning. In order

to stop feeling fear for even one second, I started interviewing people. I started interviewing best-selling authors, people around me, CEOs. I talked to them all about fear and loneliness and grief and panic, and I wanted to know how they made it through because I learn from really specific advice. So that became the premise of the magazine.

And there's two things I want you to take away from that. The first is that do what you need to do to get yourself out of survival mode. Was it the most natural and seemingly wise thing for me to get counsel from all of these other people? I mean, it's kind of counterintuitive. One would say go see a therapist. Do some self-care. You know, work harder. You know, the thing sometimes that you actually need to do is counterintuitive, right? So it didn't make sense for me to slow down and just get free therapy, basically, from all these big people and start this magazine, but that's exactly what I needed to do. So if you are in a moment like that, think about the thing that's counterintuitive.

And the second beautiful thing that you can take from that is "Fearless" magazine, which now has 20-, 30,000 readers, I didn't think one other person gave a hoot. I didn't start it because I thought anyone else was going to read it, I started it to solve my own problem. So the thing, that huge uncertainty that you are facing right now, the huge fear and panic that you are facing, just like that was my gold and I was able to create something meaningful out of that, you are sitting on a huge amount of gold. You are sitting on something hugely creative, hugely beneficial to yourself and others.

So the second thing is to not see it as a bad thing, right, but to see it as pretty much a huge opportunity for you. Does that make sense?

**WGW:** Yes. So finding opportunity when you feel as if all doors have closed or perhaps everything has unraveled around you.

**IG:** Yeah. And using rock bottom to be the thing that you stand on. Use your rock bottom to lift yourself up. That is what people mistake and they skip. They don't think it's useful when, in fact, it is the most useful. That is where you have to dig deep and pull yourself out.

I mean, rock bottom is really the place where our learning comes from and where we can show ourselves what we are made of. Humans will coast. We will coast until we are pushed. You know, if, on a given day, I'm not pushed, I will eat cheese and watch "The Cosby Show" all day long. But I have clients. I have employees. I speak on stage. I'm pushed to fill my true potential.

And that's what we need to realize and stop framing our rock bottoms as bad. I'm not saying they don't feel terrible. They do, because all we can see is that fear. But if you can just hold off a little bit and not instantly go into panic mode and kind of see a little bit beyond that fear and a little bit beyond the heartbreak and a little bit beyond the, you know, tragedy that's hit you, if you just hold off a little bit and see beyond it, something -- your gold. That's where your gold is.

**WGW:** So intense moments of panic. So you have been let go of your job. You've been told that you're going to get a divorce. You find yourself in one of these spiraling-out-of-control moments. What do you suggest that people who are listening, how can they handle that? How can they get them through that immediate moment?

**IG:** Yeah. The first thing you have to do is not make it wrong, okay? So it's not wrong or bad that you got fired. Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not saying it doesn't feel that way, but again, the stories we tell ourselves are important.

You know, I had a team member of mine quit two weeks ago, three weeks ago, and when I was on the phone with her internally I was panicked. I was straight panicking. But you know, I had to take my panic and I had to channel it into something that said, you know what, Ishita? You really needed to manage that situation and that employee. You needed to take responsibility for how to manage that. And I sat with myself and I actually learned the mistakes that I made in terms of my management style, right? So it wasn't necessarily a bad thing because I was able to say wow, I'll never do that again. I'll never make that management mistake again.

Similarly for you, whatever you are going through right

now -- and I'm not just saying rationalize it. This has nothing to do with rationalizing and make a bad thing good. It has everything to do with saying man, this has happened to me, you know? I'm going to have a party for myself and cry and panic and do that for an hour or a day, but I am not going to allow this to define me, right?

This is not your defining moment, right? When you make something bad and you make it your defining moment, that's when we get into helplessness. That's when we get into overwhelm. Because this stuff always happens to you and you are always the loser. You are always getting fired or you are always not stepping up. But that's not true. If you look at your life, you have far more tally marks on the good side than you do the bad, but what we do is we fatalize things that happen to us. We make the bad far, far more large than the good.

So the first thing you need to do is to make your feelings and to make what happened the same size. Make all of your feelings the same size, meaning make your panic the same size as when you feel good. Make your fear the same size as when you feel confident, okay?

I'll be a little bit clearer about that.

What I mean by that is there's a reason they say happiness is fleeting because when we're happy, we rarely think about it. We dwell in it for a little bit of time. But let's say you just got fired. I mean, that takes over. That takes over your day, your week, your month. It could take over your year. So we need to frame this and not make it wrong, just make it something that's happened.

And the second thing to do is not immediately go into your default trigger modes, right, or default habit modes. So my default habit modes in my business sometimes is when I feel overwhelmed, I cry, right? It's kind of embarrassing to admit that, but I cry like a crazy person. If I'm overwhelmed, if I don't know my next step, if something throws me a curveball, my first instinct is to straight-up cry, okay?

And I'm not saying I don't cry now. I do cry now. But the difference between how I used to cry and how I cry now is that when I used to cry, it used to tailspin me

into helplessness. I used to cry. I used to hide. I used to isolate. I used to not search for a solution. I wouldn't talk to anyone. And it kept me in helplessness. It kept me in anxiety because then it was like a self-fulfilling prophecy. I wasn't actually addressing my fear, I was just crying until I got better.

So what you need to do is not go into your default habits. If you are used to running, don't run. If you are used to crying, stop crying. If you are used to panicking, don't immediately go into panic mode. What you need to do is look at your triggers.

Look at your triggers. What in this situation is starting to trigger your panic, okay? For me, I know my trigger is if I haven't talked to or met my girlfriends or connected with people in a couple days, I start to get really isolated and lonely and then I start to just get pissed off and irritated and then fear arises. So I know one of my triggers is isolation. When I start to feel that isolation, my course of action now is to reach out. You got a problem, solve your way out of it.

I hear a question. Go ahead.

**WGW:** Yeah, Ishita, so what I hear you saying is that give yourself permission to mourn or to process whatever uncertainty or moment of panic that you are experiencing, but have a game plan and some self-awareness about at what point do you put a limit on that, move on, and what are the resources that you have to help you to move on?

**IG:** What are the resources that help me move on, is that the question?

**WGW:** Yes.

**IG:** Well, one of the resources that helped me move on, I guess the biggest is to reach out, to not be in isolation. So I like to call it my toolbox. So over the last decade I've developed a toolbox for things that helped me, one of which is reaching out.

I don't just mean reaching out to any old Tom, Dick and Harry. You've got to have people on tap who are the ones who strengthen you, encourage you, and aren't the ones that give you crap, right? So I don't necessarily

call my mom or my sister who they are both amazing, I love them to death, but if I am having a business issue or challenge, I don't go to them first. I go to an entrepreneur who is a friend of mine, who is in the trenches with me.

So the first is a source of support that's strategic. You've got to be strategic about it.

The second is I am an enormous, enormous book reader and, like, audio. I listen to a lot of audios and I read a lot of books.

The two or three authors that I can recommend to you that will change your life -- and I say that with no drama -- are Pema Chodron, she's a Buddhist nun. And listen to the title of her books: When Things Fall Apart; how to do what scares you, or go to the things that scare you; and something like how to have trust in uncertainty. Those titles in and of itself are -- you know, they will tell you exactly what's in the book. She tells you how to feel and manage uncertainty. She's my go-to. Whenever I'm in a moment of panic, I go to her.

I go to Thich Nhat Hanh who is also a Buddhist monk.

And I go to a mentor of mine whose name is Parker Palmer. He wrote a book called Let Your Life Speak which is all about not pushing square pegs into round holes in our lives and trying to run our businesses, and stop the stress and get the balance and just chill, and really let your life guide you instead of you chiseling into your life, two or three of my really great resources.

And then honestly, you guys, it's self-care. What are the things that you can anchor in that you trust?

For me, it's dance. I want to be a hip-hop dancer, secretly, and I'm obsessed. And every time I feel scared, fear, lonely, sad, I bust out and dance. I mean, midday. You know, I have an '80s dance party or I put on Farrell or whatever it is. That, for me, is something I can anchor in.

A, I think I'm a great dancer. It makes me feel good.  
B, movement. Movement, movement, movement. We've all felt, you know, when you're heartbroken or when you're in a sad or bad mood or whatever, the last thing you

want to do is move. You want to sit there, you want to eat bon-bons. I do. You want to just watch TV, you want to surf Facebook, right? And those are the things that we do that are our defaults that keep us in that space.

When you start to move, whether it's dance, maybe it's a walk outside in the sun, when you start to do that you are sending different signals to your mind and to your body saying I'm giving you a different pathway to go down. I'm interrupting what I normally do. I'm interrupting that signal and giving you a different pathway to go down. Does that make sense?

**WGW:** Ishita, yes. And you make self-care sound -- obviously it so important, and you also make it sound like it's so easy, and I know that a lot of people struggle with that.

What are some ways that you carved out time or created a system for yourself to really dedicate yourself to the self-care that you needed?

**IG:** Yeah. Well, I hesitate to make it sound easy and I hope I didn't do that because it's not easy. Self-care is one of the things that for busy, beautiful, independent, strong, intelligent, ambitious women, it's probably the hardest thing. It's harder than running your business because we feel guilty about it. We feel like this shouldn't matter, or we feel like I can't really intergate that dance class into my schedule. There's no time. Women, we're kind of trained to put a lot of people before us. I never had that problem, but even still, self-care was really hard for me.

So the way that you have to do it, you have to be very strategic about it. My dance class is totally in my calendar. I plan my vacations before I plan my business programs each year. When I sit down with my coach and we plan out my year, I intend to write out my vacations first. Like, it has to be intentional and you have to make it just as much of a priority as making love to your husband, as feeding your kids, as all of these things that we think are incredibly important.

If you don't have your self-care -- and you know, this is how I learned it. I learned it because I had to go to rock bottom. I learned self-care and how to make it

my first priority because I built my business unsustainably and had great success very fast and felt like an empty, hollow version of myself because I wasn't having fun. I had no idea about pleasure. I had no idea how to, like, anchor into my femininity. I didn't know how to relax.

How many of us can take just a step and relax without feeling guilty or thinking about our to-do list? So without that self-care, you are not going to run a successful business. You are just not.

**WGW:** So we're running out of time, so before we get to the last question, how can people find you online?

**IG:** Yeah. So you can find me online at [ishitagupta.com](http://ishitagupta.com), first name and last name dot com. I'll spell it. I-S, as in Sam, H-I-T, as in Tom, A-G-U-P, as in Peter, T, as in Tom, A dot com, [ishitagupta.com](http://ishitagupta.com).

And I'll tell you something. If you guys go there and you sign up, I wrote two specific guides on confidence, "How To Feel Confident" and "How To Make Hard Decisions," because we all have a problem with deciding and indecision. So when you sign up, you get those two guides for free. You can find me there.

**WGW:** So just to put some closure on our conversation and send everyone away with something they can put into action right away, what's one thing that they can stop listening to this broadcast and do today in order to deal with a difficult situation, conquer a fear? What do you suggest?

**IG:** Well, I have two things. The first is how we were talking about uncertainty earlier. So whenever you are in a moment where you are like oh, this is new, or this is challenging or this is just really scary, the first thing you have to do is notice. Notice, notice, notice where you are going into your default habit pattern.

If your first reaction is to reach for ice cream or to go on Facebook, you need to pause and you need to say if I wasn't feeling this fear right now or if I was in love with myself right now, would I be doing this? The answer to that question is no, you wouldn't be doing it.

So that's numero uno is stop and notice what default

habit you are going into. Just doing that is going to transform how you start to manage these unworkable situations into workable.

And the second thing that you guys can start implementing immediately is self-care, is to prioritize and to pencil one thing that you are going to do for yourself this week. It's Tuesday. What is one small thing you can do for yourself? Is it a five-minute walk around the block? Is it eating a piece of, like, chocolate that makes you feel really good? Is it flirting with the deli guy? I don't know. Whatever it is, what can you do for yourself today that's going to give you that burst of goodness and confidence in yourself?

**WGW:** Ishita, thank you so much for joining in on the conversation today.

And to everyone who is listening in, we will be posting a recording and a recap of today's conversation on the website, so keep an eye out on social media or in your newsletters for that. And thanks so much for joining.

**IG:** You're welcome. This was a pleasure, and I hope you guys all got something out of it. And go with gusto. You have all got this.

**WGW:** Thanks so much. Bye.

**IG:** Thanks. Bye.