

# DEAR MINDFUL CHANGEMAKER,



HOSTED BY  
MEICO MARQUETTE WHITLOCK



## Dear Mindful Changemaker Podcast

### Episode Nine - Nejeed Kassam Transcript

#### Podcast Intro

**Meico:** As a changemaker, you're dedicated to making a positive difference in the world. You love what you do, and you're good at it. But here's the thing. With all the things on your plate, you may struggle with finding the right balance between work and having a fulfilling personal life. And as the world becomes more complex, it may seem change, disruption, and uncertainty have become new norms in your life and work.

**Meico:** But it doesn't have to be this way. I'm Meico Marquette Whitlock, and I'm on a mission to help changemakers like you improve your well being while increasing your well doing and changing the world without burning out. In every episode, my intention is simple, to share practical wisdom about the inner and the outer work required to take care of yourself while building a better world, especially when it feels like work doesn't love you back.

**Meico:** So, let's get started.

#### Part One

**Meico:** Changemakers, welcome back to another exciting episode of the Mindful Changemaker Podcast. I am here for a very special episode in our series of conversations with everyday changemakers. I'm here with a friend with a colleague. and I'm sure that you all are going to learn so much about this particular person and be inspired by their particular journey.

**Meico:** We are here with Nejeed Kassam. He is CEO of Keela and I'll let him tell you a little bit about Keela a little bit later on. But what I want you to know about him in the

meantime is that he is a proud husband and father, of a rambunctious boy and husband to an amazing wife. He serves as I mentioned CEO of Keela an impact technology company dedicated to empowering nonprofits with powerful data driven software.

**Meico:** I am privileged to be in partnership with Keela. I have been a part of your events. I've done consulting work with you and for the team. I've done webinars. And I know that you all are doing amazing work as part of the Canadian, I know that a lot of your base is in Canada, but I'm curious if maybe you can tell us a bit more later on about who else you all are serving in terms of market.

**Meico:** But with that being said, I want to welcome you to the podcast.

**Najeed:** Thanks, bud. It's nice, nice to see your face in a little while. It's nice to see you.

**Meico:** Likewise, nice to see you as well. And so we're going to go ahead and dive in. And I think this first question will give you an opportunity to really expand on the abbreviated bio that we shared at the outset. And I really love this question as an opportunity for you to tell people who you are.

**Meico:** So I'm going to ask you this question. Who is Najeed? What do you want people to know about you as they listen to this?

**Najeed:** So you're starting with an easy one, right? Not existential at all. Well, firstly, it's an incredible honor to be here and to be on the pod and to sharing this stage, so to speak, with you today. I've obviously had a chance to serve on the NTEN board with you. I've gotten to know you as a friend and obviously we've done some work together.

**Najeed:** So very grateful. Thanks for having me on. Who is Najeed? I have no idea, but if you can figure that out, or ask ChatGPT, and they'll tell you. no, I think you said it. My most important job descriptions come as father, husband, and then I guess you have to say CEO at Keela. I'm sure I'm a lot of things.

**Najeed:** Being a dad, being a husband to my amazing wife, certainly occupy the most important, the pole position, so to speak, in my life. And I'm really grateful. also a lot of the work that I do is really stemming from, what I'm building, what we are building, what I'm contributing to, for the next generations.

**Najeed:** And that's really, I'm a recovering corporate lawyer. And when I left law, I thought to myself, no, I don't know if it was this eloquent or this articulated, but I have to think about my grandkids and my great grandkids and what I'm building and the structures that I'm breaking down and rebuilding to help build a better, more equitable, more interesting world for them. And my family has a long history of migration and immigration. I think three of the last four generations, I think have left their homes, not usually by choice. And so the work that I do, the work that we do is so important.

**Najeed:** And I'm proud to, to be an aspiring change maker in all of that. So I don't know if that answers your question, but it's certainly a good place to

**Najeed:** start.

**Meico:** Yes, it's a great place to start. And I do want to come back to what you shared about the family story. I think often even if we are not conscious of it, those threads tie into why we do the work that we do and how we show up in the works. I do want to come back to that. And, as before we move forward, I want to situate you,

**Meico:** and can you tell us geographically where you are? And the reason I ask this is because for many of the folks that are listening, they're based in the U. S. And when we think about this type of work, I think we tend to center the U. S. And so I want people to understand that people are doing this work all over the world.

**Najeed:** So I'm based in Canada, in beautiful Vancouver, British Columbia. Keela's work is very much U. S. centric. Ironically, most of our clients are American. We have a significant customer bases in the U. S. and Canada. And then global customers in Australia, New Zealand, and the U. K. So we are growing globally.

**Najeed:** There are so many opportunities to empower fundraisers and nonprofits across the world. So while the U. S. and Canada are obviously The most central for folks like you and me, because we live in North America, it's super easy and we can often get myopic. I think my vision and my dream is to move beyond just our continent and to go across oceans and to, and I've had the incredible privilege of working for the United Nations and working in places where I've been posted all around the world.

**Najeed:** I've seen change making happening in Cairo, just after the revolution in Belgrade. In India, in East Africa, like I it's South Africa. I've been to so many places and I had the opportunity and privilege to do so much important work

**Meico:** Excellent. And I'm excited for you. And so speaking of important work, let's talk about the first real job you ever had. I love this question. And I want to situate you and have people understand where this journey started for you. And I always think it's an interesting starting point to understand people's first real job and how it connects to what they're doing now, if there is a connection they can see.

**Meico:** I'm going to ask you that. So your first real job, if you can remember, think way

**Najeed:** I can remember I was 13, turning

**Meico:** okay, tell us about that.

**Najeed:** So

**Najeed:** my second real job feels more like my first real job, but I'll tell you, so I'll tell you a great story. And I don't, my, so I started a company when I was 13. It was a marketing company. Yeah.

**Meico:** CEO since 13, 13

**Najeed:** Literally, my younger brothers are 18 months younger than me.

**Meico:** And we started a company when we were, I was 13 turning 14. So I was mostly, I was like almost 14, but I was still 13. So I'll take it. And a half, 13 and three quarters.

**Najeed:** exactly. That's about right. like two months from my 14th birthday. Look, we started a marketing company. This was back in the, In the early 2000s, I think it was, yeah, early, very early 2001, maybe, no, before that 1998, 1998, I think, where things like Canva or whatever didn't exist.

**Najeed:** And so we built

**Najeed:** a

**Meico:** is like next. Was Netscape still around?

**Najeed:** Netscape. I think we had dial up AOL, business cards were all the rage, this is the. And the story was honestly a question of need. We, my brothers and I are all athletes. And so we wanted to film our serve with a video camera so that we can make, the big cameras of, the whole deal that we could get better at serving and work on our tennis games. And, we didn't have this.

**Meico:** There was no iPhone, like there was no phone cameras. There's none of that. It was like a big, expensive investment. And so we said to my dad, we want a video camera. And he's no, I said, he said, okay, I said, then, then the negotiation began. So he said to us. If you, I'll buy you, I'll loan you the money to buy a camera, you buy the camera, you build a business out of this, you, I'll be your first customer and I'll pay 50 percent of what you owe me for that first customer, but you got to produce real product for us. You got to go door to door to get, business and sales. So I learned sales and marketing because I wanted a video camera to video my serve. And so we built, Meico over the next few years, I think we did tens and tens of thousands of dollars of revenue. Wow.

**Najeed:** Because, nobody did.

**Najeed:** I remember one year, our, one of the ads we designed was on a bus. It was wild. We did the menus for the sushi restaurant up the street and the Greek restaurant. We, you know, so it was, we wanted and we paid our loan back and we grew and we had cash money to spend on God knows what we spent it on as kids. I think I had, I walked into university with a bunch of cash, that was my first real job. So I went door to door marketing, door to door sales, drum up business. I got rejected. I got rejected. I got accepted. We got, we had to learn how to do all the work we were trying to sell. So it was a, it's a hell of a first job. My second job was coaching tennis, which is a lot more normal as a first job, but it was my second job. So I've been hustling since I was a kid.

**Meico:** He's like, yep, I've been CEO since 13 and a half. Yep. That's my story.

**Najeed:** Basically

**Meico:** So take us forward from first job as CEO, and I think it was the second job, you said tennis coaches with that. Is that right? Okay. And then to where you are now, you mentioned CEO of Keela. I wonder 2 things. 1, can you tell us about what Keela is?

**Meico:** I know Keela as a fundraising software company, but I think you're more than that. So I'm curious to hear how you would describe it. and then the 2nd thing is. Keela is very specific, right? In terms of a type of work, but you in terms of change making work in your vision for the impact you want to leave.

**Meico:** It's much broader than that. So I wonder if you can speak to that as well. But let's start with the 1st part in terms of what is Keela.

**Najeed:** Look, it's interesting. Keela is a donor management reporting predictive analytics fundraising tool built specifically with fundraisers at their core. And this is really important because so much software is either built for the donor or just built. We said, who are the people doing actually like the most work?

**Najeed:** Who are the most stressed out, the most frustrated, who have the most opportunity to be empowered? And we said, let's build for them. And that doesn't mean we don't build great donation forms for donor experience, but really the centrality of what we do is about the fundraisers experience. And we said, how do we build a tool, not for the largest organizations, but how do we democratize access to leading and emerging technologies?

**Najeed:** And Keela became the vehicle through which I was able to help to do that. So we build donor management, fundraising, and predictive analytics, intelligence tools for nonprofits and specifically for fundraising. Our customers raised, I don't think we crossed the billion dollar mark last year, but we got close.

**Najeed:** So hundreds of millions of dollars for the sector. They use us as for charity, receiving and compliance, for donor management, for fundraising for reporting. And we've added things like automation and predictive analytics using machine learning and help understand how people are giving and how to unlock generosity.

**Najeed:** So we feel like we're the thing where the operating system for a fundraiser.

**Najeed:** and. And it's pretty wild, we have tens of thousands of fundraisers using our tools every day or every week and they love what we do. And they're really part of our journey. And I think that's what makes

**Najeed:** us really special apart from the AI and the automation and all the cool stuff centered on what we build and why we build it and how we continue to evolve the tools to solve for fundraisers.

**Najeed:** And Keela is a tool used by thousands of nonprofits across the world, especially in the U S and Canada. And, we hope to be the best tool in the sector for kind of mid small and mid market nonprofits that fundraise and our goal is to say nonprofits shouldn't have crappier technology than for profit businesses.

**Najeed:** In fact, nonprofits should lead on emerging technologies because we need all the damn help we can get right. This sector needs as much support, as much rocket fuel, whatever term you want to use for it. And I think we have an opportunity to be that technology and. It's one of the reasons I know you love Keela so much because you see that and you do our work and we're so grateful to all the amazing community we have that's building, building with us.

**Meico:** The work that you do with Keela, the way I look at it and look at what you, the work you've done over your career, is really situated at a specific point in time and it's a microcosm, I think, of a larger vision. So can you tell us about your larger vision of the work that you're doing in the sector?

**Meico:** Keela's part of that, obviously, but what do you, what kind of change are you trying to make?

**Najeed:** The answer to that question is actually very personal. So

**Najeed:** my family, like I mentioned, left, East Africa and before that left South Asia. Really not with a lot of choice. My father in law was a refugee. My parents fled when they were kids. My grandfather lost all his assets due to political turmoil. And so my mom and dad landed in the UK and England, London, which is where our family's kind of from one generation ago with relatively little, if nothing, And it was the support of civil society. It was the support of nonprofits. It was scholarships and the community that helped them, really helped me, because I was born. I never fled anywhere. Man, I fled the school dance and the girls said no to me. That was the extent of fleeing I had to do. And to think about one generation going from being worried about survival to being worried about girls at the dance.

**Najeed:** That's pretty incredible, right? And that's on the backs of civil society, and on the backs of a sector that supported us. My mom was brilliant. She still is, but she was really brilliant as a kid. Got scholarships, got to go to the best schools, got to be, supported and was able to become, you know, a brilliant, my parents are both dentists and to imagine. going from that to that in one gen is really remarkable. But what's more important in all that is that we're a story that's too. It's too common, right? So many folks struggle in so many ways. And, especially in North America. The erosion of the welfare state, where less and less people are being taken care of.

**Najeed:** I'm not picking a political side here. I'm saying, whether it's health care, whether it's housing, whether it's, opportunity education, the gaps are not insignificant. And I'm not, again, not placing blame here or there. Nobody can argue that those gaps exist. Nobody. It's the reason that the nonprofit sector is 5.6 percent of the U. S. GDP. It's needed, right? So my M. O., my modus operandi in life is like, how do I strengthen the fabric of civil society? How do I make the sector stronger? So folks who I've left tough situations so their kids and their great grandkids can get the

support they need to build the next Keela or the next X or to be in the privileged position I do and so my work with Keela is one part of, my wife and I have a rule we dedicate, no matter how you know kids and work and whatever we dedicate five hours a week, at least to service. And that's how I do it from my service perspective. I build from for the infrastructure through technology at Keela. I sit on boards, one of my first books I put out was about social change like my entire life. And I don't mean this hyperbolically but in some ways is working towards that idea of strengthening the fabric of civil society.

**Najeed:** When I went to grad school, I did a lot of research on the role of civil society and democracy, and as we're seeing today, every day, there are threats to democracy that are heartbreaking. Democracy that let me be a person of color, go to the best schools and get into great universities and, have the opportunities and compete as an athlete, because it didn't matter, democracy let me do that.

**Najeed:** And so my research is on the role of civil society and nonprofits in democracies and specifically, in the creation of democracies. But also in the maintenance of how to prolong them and that the assaults were feeling and hearing on democracy that happened now can be countered by a strong civil society.

**Najeed:** The work at Keela, the work on my, the boards I sit and serve on, the work in my writing and my speaking, all of that is to serve that kind of bigger goal of strengthening civil society.

**Meico:** I appreciate you sharing that, as I was listening to you, I was struck by how common the story that you describe is for folks that have an explicit mission focused on changemaking work. Literally, I could swap out your name. And, insert somebody else, insert a different organization, and they might have a story that parallels yours.

**Meico:** And and 1 of the premises that I have, is that for many of us in a changemaking space part of what draws us to the space is that we have a primary or secondary trauma that we've experienced that drives us to do the work that we're doing, right? To drives us that pulls us toward the suffering, as opposed to away from the suffering right because we

**Najeed:** And I'm wimped out on occasion, Meico. I want to be clear. I have, when I first started my legal career, I started in refugee law. So I was a law student at a refugee clinic. I was gonna build my practice in refugee law. And honestly, I couldn't handle it emotionally.

**Najeed:** Like I was too traumatic. It was too real for me. So I took those skills into corporate law, because I was a corporate litigator and that trauma, that generational, nothing's ever happened to me, but it's there. It's generationally there. And I'm certainly not a victim to be clear. I'm certainly not a

**Najeed:** victim, but I think that seeps through our pores on occasion.

**Najeed:** And hopefully, like you said, it drives us to being better and stronger and building incredible institutions or dedicating ourselves. And for sure, it's personal for me. I can be doing a lot of things in my life, but this one's personal.

**Meico:** Absolutely. absolutely.

**Meico:** And I think that's one of the hallmarks as well for us that is, it's deeply personal it's not some random. for most of us, I think it's not a random thing. It's not an accident. So let me ask you this. So we've talked about Keela and you've mentioned here and there different things you've done, including, the, your briefs that doing refugee law and the corporate law.

**Meico:** You mentioned the service work that you and your wife do, you make a commitment to doing that. Is there a particular project? Is there a particular initiative? That stands out to you that you're particularly proud of that. You say, hey, when I look back over the things I've done, this is one of the things that really stands out to me?.

**Najeed:** Good question.

**Najeed:** I mean, so, when I was at law school, I took a year and was seconded with the United Nations. It was so I was in Egypt just after the revolution, the revolution was

**Najeed:** like six days and then it lasted six months after that, right? So

**Meico:** Yes.

**Najeed:** I got a chance to be there in Tahrir Square. I got a chance to watch democracy bud unsuccessfully in many ways, but happen. I got tear gassed when I was there.

**Najeed:** I felt the, Okay. I don't know if I did anything there. I was mostly, I was working for the UN, so I wasn't doing much. I certainly wasn't, nobody, if I wasn't there, the results would have been exactly the same, to be clear, but I got to experience and watch heartbreak, hope, dreams, power, play out.

**Najeed:** And it was just, it was, it was remarkable. It was remarkable, Meico. I'll never forget it. I'm sure there's a lot of stuff I've worked on, but I'll forget. I will never forget the feeling of being in Tahrir Square. A few like for months, right? Or, at least I remember I lived right off the square and I would it was

**Najeed:** remarkable.

**Najeed:** It goes back to that civil society work, right? There's lots of theories and lots of political scientists have opined and hypothesized around why democracy, the beauty of the budding of it and the ultimately struggle Egypt has gone through with, to establish the robust democracy

**Najeed:** we all hoped and dreamed it would have. And one of the causes and what I'm a bit of my research before this was like the role of civil society, the role of nonprofits,



the role of political parties and unions and all these, non corporate, non governmental institutions and it played out in real time for me.

**Najeed:** I got to watch it happen. And I'm a bit, while I'm not a technologist, instinctually, I'm still very old fashioned in many ways. The raw power of technology to build infrastructure to support the development and the sustenance of civil society. I think a lot of it came from watching it, right?

**Najeed:** It was, I was there. I felt it, I smelled it and it, the opportunity to create, to help sustain those things for the next revolution or the next one, wherever that might be, certainly, certainly played a big impactful role, even though, again, I was inconsequential. it wasn't about me.

**Najeed:** It was about me learning and growing and feeling and experiencing something that has given root or seed, to, I've dedicated a lot of my life to Keela, right? And I think that's a big part of it.

**Meico:** I appreciate you sharing that, and I would offer to you that your role wasn't consequential, right? There's power in bearing witness, right? And there's power in bearing witness courageously, right? And it sounds based on what you described, that's what you did, right? You were there to bear witness courageously, and you taking that with you.

**Meico:** You could have said, okay, that was interesting, and just went on about your business, right? I'm going back to

**Najeed:** You know me pretty well. That doesn't sound like me, right?

**Meico:** that was that.

**Najeed:** Yeah.

**Meico:** I got your

**Najeed:** Close.

**Meico:** on Instagram and

**Najeed:** Had good shawarma and I'm out. No, that was definitely not the lasting impact. And I think, obviously it's interesting because I didn't get to see my parents or my grandparents or my great grandparents go through struggle like that, but to see the rawness of that struggle, it I don't know if it like reminded me or generationally.

**Najeed:** reminded me about, this shit's real, excuse my language, but like it's real, and I think that sometimes we live in a, I live in a very privileged world.

**Najeed:** You live in a very privileged world and circumstances where sometimes we forget how real things can be. And so, whether it's for our grandparents or people that live 12 blocks from us sometimes right and

**Najeed:** it definitely left a mark and I'm sure there's other stuff that I've worked on or done or whatever that have left big imprints but that's the one that certainly sits right here for me.

**Meico:** Yes, and I think that, and even if you don't recognize, I think even just the way that you're sharing, you're keeping the memory of that alive, right? And the lesson from that, right? And for you, the connection between that work and how you, really center democracy and civil society work.

**Meico:** So, I think that's that is something and it's not to be understated.

## Sponsor Break

**Meico:** All right, it's time for a break. We'll be right back after a brief message from our sponsors.

**Meico:** Changemakers like you are driven to do more and more, often with fewer and fewer resources. But there comes a breaking point where your passion dwindles under the weight of pressure, the mission suffers, and you feel like you love the work more than it loves you back. That's why I wrote the book *How to Thrive When Work Doesn't Love You Back*.

**Meico:** A practical guide for taking care of yourself while changing the world with a forward by Beth Kanter, author of the "Happy Healthy Nonprofit." This book is a succinct, practical, and action-based guide for changemakers seeking to make an impact without burnout. Learn more and order your copy at [mindfulchangemaker.org/books](https://mindfulchangemaker.org/books). That's [mindfulchangemaker.org/books](https://mindfulchangemaker.org/books). The reality is, if you really want to make a difference, you must start by taking time for yourself right now because you can't change the world if you're not around long enough to make that happen. This isn't about working harder and smarter, it's about making a commitment to work differently so you can take care of yourself while making an impact for the long haul.

**Meico:** In "*How to Thrive and Work Doesn't Love You Back*", I share practical strategies grounded in the well being while well doing change framework. And I wrote this book after experiencing more than my fair share of burnout and overwhelm in the name of saving the world during my previous career in government and non profit work.

**Meico:** I share what I've learned to be the most impactful strategies for my personal practice and my experience helping changemakers around the world just like you create lasting balance in their lives. These are the same strategies I teach teams and organizations through my live trainings, self-paced courses, coaching programs, and tools like the Intention Planner.

**Meico:** Each chapter has a summary of key ideas and a checklist of practices you can start implementing right away. I know you need practical strategies and resources to help you create sustained balance in your life and work so you can lower your stress level. And focus on getting the important things done right now.

**Meico:** So, this book isn't about theoretical concepts. It's about what to do and how to do it. Learn more and order your copy at [mindfulchangemaker.org/books](https://mindfulchangemaker.org/books). That's [mindfulchangemaker.org/books](https://mindfulchangemaker.org/books).

**Meico:** All right, let's get back to our conversation.

## Part Two

**Meico:** Let me ask you this. So, I, when we do this work, the, when we think about success, we have conversations like this. For example, people post on social media. Generally speaking, people are posting the highlights, right?

**Meico:** People are posting the wins, right? People are posting the things that look good, that look great. That show them in the best light. But we know that is not how life unfolds. There are peaks and valleys. There are ups and downs. And so, I want to ask you about that. I would assume that your journey that you described here hasn't been a linear sort of upward continuous progress.

**Najeed:** No, has not.

**Meico:** And so how do you stay inspired? How do you stay motivated when you have those inevitable ups and downs along the journey? Is there a practice or strategy that's working for you?

**Najeed:** I drink a lot of coffee Meico. I drink. No, I do but that's not the only thing.

**Najeed:** So thankfully couple things first day. I surround myself with really friggin smart people who align with what I believe in or, the goals I have. People who are smarter than me. And that starts with my wife, right.

**Najeed:** People who, give me perspective. They give me energy. They kick my ass on occasion. They challenge my assumptions. They support me when I'm struggling. And I think, I think there are more lows than highs to be honest. And one of the reasons I don't have social media is because I don't want to paint this.

**Najeed:** BS picture of what my life is or isn't, and I'm private too, but I don't think, I don't think it's fair to myself or to the people. I have a relatively large platform, so to speak, and I don't want to pretend because I don't think it's, I don't have the energy to do, to share everything, and because of that, I don't want to pretend my life is something that it's not, right?

**Najeed:** And. but start by, so to go back to your question, start by surrounding myself with really good people,

**Najeed:** and starting with my wife and my family, my staff and my chief of staff and, the people that.

**Meico:** Yes. Yes.

**Najeed:** With, like really get into it with and knead the dough and really. Go through that. that pain. The second one is to, to accept the struggle. to and I'm not like thrill seeking for the struggle. Many times, I wish it didn't happen. So, I don't want to romanticize it. But I also think it's really important to note that if you expect sunshine and flowers all the time, you're going to be disappointed. So, I expect it, I want it to be hard, because if it's hard, I'm doing something right, I'm pushing myself. My father used to say, and I hated it as a kid, but I think it's so apt, Be comfortable being uncomfortable. all the good stuff happens when you're uncomfortable. All the good stuff happens when you're in that, when it's grimy and difficult and you're down on those valleys, and I think that perspective some days I want to punch holes in the wall once I actually did punch a hole in the wall, which I don't recommend anyone doing it really hurts your hand.

**Najeed:** It really hurts your hand. Some days it's hard. It's hard and it's exhausting and it's frustrating. And some days even I want to quit. The people, the perspective, the team, and then just like that North Star is the last thing. There is something I'm building for, its strengthening civil anxiety is tough because it's almost like you can never really do it right, but you also can today, I'll take today, Meico. I got an E, a LinkedIn message from a client, a fundraiser at a tiny little nonprofit, I dunno, New York or Toronto or something like that. Who said we use your technology and I wanted to say it's changed our organization. Thank you and please can we be connected. I thought to myself, damn, like you forget between dealing with, payroll and product and hiring, I don't know, performance management, like you were like, this is actually doing something and all the stuff that I, we just talked about actually does happen on, on a daily basis to people whose lives are transformed and who are helping more importantly helping transform other lives. And so that's the stuff that's that North Star that between the

**Najeed:** people and the, and the ride the wave, it's interesting. I'm a terrible surfer but I love to serve. And if you've ever anyone who's ever served knows. You get your backside handed to you by the ocean the majority of the time you're there. But when you find that way, when you get that customer that sends that LinkedIn message, when you see one of your staff thrive, when you see that, the work does something, it does help during those tough times for sure.

**Meico:** Yes, and there's so much richness and what you just shared and, I'll start with what you share, which struck me. You said that, for you, the lows are more than the highs, right? And in terms of how you move through that, how you process that, how you navigate that, you talked about three things that stood out to me.

**Meico:** One, surrounding yourself with the right people, right? And that, I think that comes across in what you shared at the top of the conversation about, being a father, being a husband. That's number 1, right? and obviously good people in terms of the

work relationships and personal relationships that you have, you talked about accepting.

**Meico:** the reality, right? The reality,

**Najeed:** think this is the most not that it's the most important but it feels like it's the hardest one for people to do in my opinion.

**Meico:** Acknowledging the reality. And it's interesting. part of the work that I do training on boundaries because understanding how to create and protect boundaries is an important part of being able to be if you want to put in place any type of sustainable transformation or practice, you have to be able to protect, put boundaries on it to actually make that possible.

**Meico:** And 1 of the things I'll talk about with setting boundaries is that just accept that human beings, that people are having a human experience are fallible. They're going to make mistakes. They're going to disappoint people. They're going to break expectations. You're going to make mistakes.

**Meico:** You're going.

**Najeed:** I think that's the big one. If you realize they're going to do it by golly,

**Najeed:** you're going to be doing it too. Even with the best of intentions and the

**Najeed:** hardest work you can do, And I think I've learned that. I think that's a good lesson in marriage, by the way. And I think, it's interesting because, my wife is my best friend.

**Najeed:** She's my partner. She's a wonderful mother, a brilliant executive, a better lawyer than I am. We've acknowledged that we both screw up with each other all the time.

**Najeed:** And sometimes we dig ourselves into our, dig our heels in the ground. And you fight and, but when you get some perspective. You realize, we are fallible, we're gonna make mistakes, and so are people at work, and so are people

**Najeed:** who are your mentors, and so are your shareholders, and so are

**Najeed:** your constituents at a nonprofit.

**Najeed:** And call people out, absolutely, but remember that the fallibility is like a guarantee, and I think that's really important.

**Najeed:** Yes. And on the other side of that, I say, get good at giving and receiving apologies. Mean it. Don't just fucking say it. Actually, my dad, again, I hated this as a teenager, but he's don't say sorry, act sorry. And I think that's really important for me.

My, my big thing is if you screw up, eat that humble pie. do it, live it, make up for it. Don't just be like, sorry, dude, mean it, feel it, own it. And it actually makes you feel better. That's the part that I never understood.

**Meico:** It's for you.

**Najeed:** A hundred percent. And I never got, maybe till I was, I'm getting close to 40 now. I think it's gotta be recent, Meico, that like I got, when I apologize and own something, I'm the one who feels better. I don't know what they feel, but I certainly do. And there's like a weight release. And I think that's super fascinating.

**Meico:** Yes. I think the other part of that I love what so inclusion specialist, Amber Cabral says when you're a real apology is, I'm sorry for or I apologize for and. Moving forward, I will fill

**Najeed:** X, Y, Z. Exactly. Yeah.

**Meico:** Yes. So, it's to your point. There's the acknowledgement piece and there's the words, but the words are really just starting the process

**Najeed:** So, they're preamble to what actually has to happen.

**Najeed:** Yeah.

**Meico:** right? The actual action, right?

**Najeed:** And it's interesting from a leadership perspective, because I'm learning this more like. I was actually talking to somebody today and he said to me, a lot of startup founders and I coached them. I invested in them as a human.

**Najeed:** So, I see this a lot, but this feedback was very apt. He said, they think they know it all. And I said, I think I know almost nothing, except on the tennis court. I'm cocky as hell on the tennis court, to be honest, but everywhere else, I don't think I know much. And he said. Starting with the I don't like I don't know that much relatively is actually a great place to be great from because you're always learning you're always owning the mistakes you made and you're actually the and xyz that you just talked about starts with that self I don't know if it's self-awareness or self, the position you hold yourself.

**Najeed:** And that was really it was really wonderful. Like I know a lot of stuff, but relatively cosmically, whatever, I have so much to learn in so many places to grow in a natural, I'm going to make those mistakes because I'm human. And that's, I don't know, for me, that's really important. And it's not something I was able to act on until not.

**Najeed:** I wish it had been longer.

**Meico:** Yes. so, to that point, I think we're all in our journey, right? We get what we get when we get it, right? that's the, and that's the journey and it's about how you manage and deal with that going. I think it goes back to what we're just saying about expectations, right? you have this expectation that, oh, I should have gotten this earlier or really what's happening.

**Meico:** I think for many of us is we're comparing ourselves to someone else's journey, right? And so that comparison kicks in, right? That anxiety and those stress levels spike because we're all of a sudden, we're looking and we think, okay, the grass is greener over here, right? This person has this. I want to be like that.

**Meico:** I want to have that experience. And meanwhile, you've taken the eyes off of the blessings that are already in front of you, right?

**Najeed:** And the only person you have agency to change, which is you, right? Like you

**Najeed:** gotta, I started playing, I'm terrible, but I started playing golf and one of the things I love about it is I'm my own competition, right? Like it's it's Najeed versus Najeed.

**Najeed:** That's a game I can work on. I can't beat you or maybe I can, but that's not the point.

**Najeed:** It's out of my control. I, that, that ability to hold myself accountable to myself, to grow from myself. That's really helped me and it's certainly a process, we

**Najeed:** all get caught up. We all make those mistakes. And but I think that point is well taken that we're all on our journey and there's lots of ebbs and flows as we continue to grow.

**Najeed:** Right?

**Meico:** Yes. And I think this is a natural segue into a conversation about balancing the demands of work and professional responsibilities. You're a husband, you, you're a father and, you're also CEO, right? And so, I think some people listening to this are thinking, Oh, he's privileged to the CEO, like he has all this flexibility and he gets to control this and that and, and so on and

**Najeed:** Not true. By the way, all the things, all those things, sound great. I want that job,

**Meico:** Yeah. and so, I wonder if you can give us a picture of what the demands are for you professionally. And how you balance that with being present as a father, and a husband, and tennis, and surfing, and golf.

**Najeed:** I don't do those last things much these days, but in theory, they're there, they're in my heart. How about that? So, I think, start with being a father and a

husband, and I'm a better father than I am husband, to be clear. I like, I wish I, it's a time game. And I, I think I,

**Meico:** you're in a particular season, right? So, tell us how old your son

**Najeed:** Absolutely. Yeah. So, our son's three and my wife's expecting our second. we're in it early. this is the early, the most important startups I'll ever work on are my kids. And we're in the early stage, early, early stage.

**Meico:** Yes.

**Najeed:** but then I'm also a CEO that works 60, 70 hours a week to be honest, and that's not always often unhealthy. And I'm the 1st, I'm working on it. It's a work in progress, but from a being present perspective when I'm present, I'm really present. I actually leave my phone in a different room. when I'm with, my wife or, with, especially with my son and hopefully kids, it's really important that they feel heard, listened to, engaged with, that they're not, I'm not there, so to speak, but not really there.

**Najeed:** When I'm there, when I'm with them, and I'm with my son. And that's really important to me because the minute, I think. And there's an intimacy to that, right? I have a shower with my son every day. No cell phones in the shower. There's nothing. It's just the two of us soaping, literally,

**Najeed:** and there's That there's an intimacy. There's a beauty. There's a presence because all you can do is focus on shampooing his hair and cleaning his back. there's nothing else to do. And the

**Najeed:** conversation, the intimacy is so important. And when we're at dinner, I will leave my phone and, in my office, or upstairs or something to really focus on being there talking.

**Najeed:** I'm actually hearing and listening. What do you have to say? Not just You know, being so much in, being distracted. I hate this.

**Najeed:** idea of being distracted with them. My wife, I'm not as good at that, but I do try a lot to, to do the same kind of thing. We get our, we carve out our time. Once one of us has put the, it's often me these days, putting the, putting our son down to sleep. We'll have a cup of tea together. We'll sit down. We'll be off of our phones. We'll chat. We'll catch up, debrief, whatever it is. And some days that doesn't happen, but many, most days it does. And. so being really present is really, it's also restorative. It helps my brain restore itself. Cause I've got to work really hard.

**Najeed:** I've got to think I've got to make difficult decisions all the time.

**Meico:** Let me ask you this. I think folks think differently about this, but is it a necessary burden? Are you choosing to work a certain way? Is that what it calls for? What are you, how do you think about



**Najeed:** It's a good question.

**Meico:** the work? Or is it

**Najeed:** I think sometimes it's necessary and sometimes it's chosen, to be honest. And I know that's kind of a BS answer, but I'm going to give it. There are sometimes where the burden is. Irrevocable, undeniable, you have to do it, but there are some times and this is where I can be better to be self-aware is where I live the burden, but I don't probably need to, and sometimes you're so tuned into being the guy when you've got to be the guy, so to speak, to holding that burden when you don't have a choice that you're unable to de burden even when you

**Najeed:** do

**Meico:** a default

**Najeed:** Exactly. It's exactly. That's a really good way to put it. And so, I would say sometimes, yes, it's the burden that comes with a job and sometimes I need to get better at unlocking from it or, moving, changing my position, if that makes any sense.

**Meico:** Yes. Yes. Yes. and it sounds like if I'm unpacking what you're sharing, Okay.

**Najeed:** Yeah, of course.

**Meico:** you're make, you're making time for your family, and you talked about, okay, you have time with them and you make that time count by being fully present. and you talked about the one distraction, it seems like one is the primary distraction is the phone.

**Meico:** So, you're aware of that, you're conscious of that and you have taken action to address that

**Najeed:** And I recommend that I like I saw I recognize Meico that I was I think to my cell phone and not social media like I was addicted to working on my cell phone when we, I used to sleep when it was BlackBerry I just sleep on top of my BlackBerry, so that when it buzzed it would wake me up like that's a problem man. If people need to get ahold of you, they'll wake you up with your home phone or with the ringer or whatever it might be, you don't need to sleep on your friggin BlackBerry right and so as I've gotten older, especially once we had kids, I learned that the, I don't even sleep in the same room as my cell phone anymore. I bought a like old school alarm clock, like the one that rings in the movie, like not the one with the little bells on top, but a regular alarm clock that's because I need that separation. It's really important to me and that's something that I learned over trial and a heck of a lot of error.

**Meico:** it's critical. It's actually one of the strategies I recommend. So, I talk

**Najeed:** Oh, really?

**Meico:** and social practicing social distancing with technology and buying a real alarm clock and charging your devices outside of

**Najeed:** We charge it either downstairs or in the bathroom.

**Najeed:** it's different.

**Meico:** yes. so

**Najeed:** I got my wife to do it too. So, the two of us, there's no phones. And we do, 10 bucks a month, we got a home phone. It's \$10 we're very lucky we can afford that. So if somebody, like someone dies or something's brutally, the phone rings and it's worth waking you up for, but otherwise

**Meico:** Yes,

**Najeed:** waking me up is the kids, man.

**Meico:** it's interesting. So, if I even in those situations, even like the most dire situations, what I tell people is, okay, let's think there's still, let's say someone is dying. are you a doctor?

**Najeed:** No.

**Meico:** you actually do anything in that moment for that person?

**Najeed:** I'm not a doctor. but and that's the thing. That's the why the phone doesn't ring very often.

**Meico:** Yes. so let me ask you this. So, you've been clear about you make time for work. You make time for, your family. When do you make time for you and how does that?

**Najeed:** Enough of it. Not enough of it, to be blunt. it's something I work on with my coach. It's something that I think once our kids are a little older, I will feel less guilty doing, and I know that's not a good answer, but it's the honest truth. I'm being really real here.

**Najeed:** if I have time, I do sometimes go for lunch though, like three or four days a week, I'll take 37 minutes I know how long it takes. I will drive to the Vietnamese restaurant, have a bowl of pho or a lemongrass chicken. I'm listening to a basketball podcast. That's my 37 minutes. And it makes a, the days I do it. I did it today. I'm a better guy today than I did. Then I

**Najeed:** didn't do it. yesterday, And so that, that's one of the things I do.

**Najeed:** And I feel so guilty about listening to sometimes I used to about those basketball podcasts. I love basketball, but I was like, I can't be listening to a business

podcast right now, nonprofit podcaster, whatever, Nope. I listened to some punks talking heads, talking about inconsequential things in basketball, but it's really important for me.

**Meico:** It sounds like it's a healthy thing for you, right? So, 30 30. So, you got your 37 minute Vietnamese lunch with basketball podcasts in the background and, and your coach, right? So that's important too. Like

**Najeed:** And I do have a good coach. He's fantastic.

**Meico:** Awesome. I, so there you do have a practice.

**Najeed:** There's, it's still a work in, but it's still a work in progress. And I

**Meico:** Everything is a work in progress.

**Najeed:** Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

**Najeed:** Yes,

**Meico:** Everything is a work in progress. We are perfectly imperfect. So, everything is a work in progress. And so, I think you can celebrate yourself. That's

**Najeed:** My wife is so supportive. She's are you going for lunch today? I'm like, honey, no. She's go for lunch. Okay. so no, I'm really lucky and I'm blessed that. Like 16 and 50 cents, I think, and 37 minutes. It's just a big blessing in my life. So absolutely.

**Meico:** Awesome. I'm excited that you get to have that in and that you get to carve out that space for yourself to re energize recharge and be inspired by something outside of working family. So let me ask you, as we begin to wrap up about our work together. So, we have worked together in a professional capacity.

**Meico:** Through Keela, I have done webinars. I've been a part of your annual, donor experience week. we, we did a consulting project where we did a series of self-paced

**Najeed:** By the way, people love they

**Najeed:** love it.

**Meico:** I'm happy. So can you talk about that and how that, and how you came up with the idea and what prompted that?

**Najeed:** So I think it's something that every Keela customer. Yeah, I think it's called Keela mindfulness or Keela mindful. I don't remember. But it's something we're in like the genesis of it was there are fundraisers have difficult jobs. And remember, I talked about Keela being fundraiser centric.

**Najeed:** And so I think I was actually in I have a notepad in my shower for all my only great ideas somehow come in the shower.

**Najeed:** So Although my son uses it for coloring these days. So it's, really important. and I remember having a day where some of the fundraisers were like, man, I'm stressed. And I was like, okay, but there's only so much I can do with technology to help that. What if I like gave you an excuse in your technology to like, take a breath, literally take a breath.

**Najeed:** And so you were one of my first calls where I was like, let's build, I think it's like

**Najeed:** a few

**Meico:** 10 videos.

**Najeed:** 10 videos at 10 videos that like increase

**Meico:** Of different lengths.

**Najeed:** one. Exactly.

**Najeed:** where you can go in and take a breath, like literally watch Meico tell you to like, chill the F out and breathe and center yourself and take a moment.

**Najeed:** And It's people thought I was insane when we had the idea and they're like, what the hell is a CRM donor management reporting tool doing with mindfulness. But fundraisers are just like, I'm stressed, go to the tab, do a breathing exercise for eight minutes. I don't know whatever they are and it makes a big difference in people's lives.

**Najeed:** And I think, technology has an opportunity to be more than just the thing that does stuff or the thing that stores data. It has opportunity to like change behavior.

**Najeed:** That's the kind of behavior I want people to actually take. like I get my 37 minutes for Vietnamese food, my fundraisers who use my technology can do two, four, six, eight, 30 minute videos with you. Just take a breath literally. And I think, there's some data that shows that fundraisers are exhausted. There, there's a level of toxicity. There's burnout. There's all these things that technology that we're building is trying to solve or solve part of, but sometimes you got to breathe. And that was the genesis of it.

**Najeed:** It was fun. It was fun to build. I remember the beginning of it and when we did it and our fundraisers love it. So

**Meico:** I'm excited to hear that and I'm glad that has been impactful. Is there any other aspect of the work that you want to speak to? I know that we've served on the NTEN board together for we overlap for a brief period of time. And

**Najeed:** couple of years, right? A year or two, maybe. yeah, Firstly, we miss you on the board, and I speak for the entire board when I say that, I'm sure, but no, look, your service to the sector is well documented. The people listening this know you and they follow you as they should. But getting to serve with amazing people on, I'm so lucky to serve on so many boards and to think beyond ourselves and to build communities with more equity and have difficult conversations around difficult things with smart Impassioned people. That's the kind of stuff that really also helps to rejuvenate me and piss me off at the same time to give me motivation to make change. And NTEN for you and I think was part of that. we had some fun with lots of laughs too, so that was good.

**Meico:** Yes, excellent. I appreciate you sharing that for the audience and giving some, some context for that. As we wrap up, I want to ask you what's next for you, Najeed, but I want to circle back before we do that to something you mentioned earlier about Keela and you mentioned AI and automation. Can you talk briefly about that and what's next for the platform?

**Najeed:** Yeah. I mean, this is where I get super excited because, We talked about fundraisers and exhaustion and burnout just a few moments ago and to me like data is a big opportunity if done responsibly, if done ethically, if done in the right way with the mind with mindfulness and I mean that in. not the way that we did to Keela mindful, but, it's actually an incredible opportunity. Most nonprofit, like a 4 million nonprofit in St. Louis probably has hundreds of thousands, if not millions of data points that they may not understand or know about, that can help tell a story. It can tell them how to work more effectively. It can help them prioritize their time. It can help them make more data driven or, make better decisions. Data driven is obviously in the case. In this conversation. And with our intelligence, we help to harness that data. We help to shed light on that data and we help our compute our algorithms, our software, our machine learning. Just helps crap, crunch, all that stuff that neither you, I'm not great with, data. I'm okay. But even the smartest people in the world couldn't do, they just can't see that many things and process them. And that's the opportunity we see with our intelligence, with our predictive analytics. And with regards to automation, sometimes you just forget to do stuff or you don't need to do it manually. There are so many things, processes that, we can and should be doing as fundraisers. That we just don't have the bandwidth to do without a little bit of help. So for example, there's a data point somewhere that says when someone makes a gift, you should thank them seven times, who the hell has time to thank a 12 gift seven times. But if you only have to make one or two of those personal, and you can automate a lot of those and make donors be heard and make them engaged and remind you to phone them and say, thank you. And, build workflows and update. Their donor management tools automatically, there's so much I could talk about, but, I

**Najeed:** see this as, as a tool in the arsenal of a fundraiser. When you're, when you're hunting an animal or you're cutting down vegetables, wheat or whatever, you aren't just pulling it with your bare hands. You use tools, right? And they make things more effective. They make the burden on the farmer or the hunter or the fundraiser a little bit less. If we can use emerging technologies to make that burden a little bit or maybe a lot less to give them more time. To do what they're really good at, which is strengthen relationships, rely on experience and instincts and let data be a guide, a support structure to all that. That's special, man. So that's what we're working towards. That's what I'm really excited about. And that's where I see, this, Keela's leading this 3. 0

revolution of how donor management and fundraising is done, which I'm really excited about.

**Meico:** Well, that is awesome. I'm excited to see how it unfolds and I am particularly delighted that it's something that's going to be accessible to small and midsize organizations. Often when we talk about these kinds of technological changes, it's often can be out of reach, at least initially, it can be out of reach, especially with emerging tech, for organizations that are a little bit that are smaller, they may not have the bandwidth of the resources and so on.

**Meico:** And so I think that it's so amazing that you are figuring out within the tool and platform that you have how to make that available

**Najeed:** Small nonprofits need all the damn help they can get, right? Let's

**Najeed:** be honest. They have less staff, less resources, and big responsibilities. They're the most numerous. They're usually, they're often the most direct in the implementation of their services and the constituents they, they serve. They're the ones that we want to give a really big leg up to, not just the like, not just the big guys, so to speak, right? We want, and so that's a big principle of mine personally, and then obviously, of Keela's as well. For sure.

**Meico:** Awesome. Anything else you want to say about what's next for you? What's next for Keela?

**Najeed:** No, being a dad to another little boy, which is really exciting for me. And, that's really exciting. And then I think for Keela, it's like leading this revolution, evolution, whatever you want to call it. We're like, I want fundraisers not to be scared of these technologies.

**Najeed:** I want small and mid sized fundraisers to say, It doesn't need to cost a hundred thousand dollars to get the best technology that can really transform how they work. And I want data to not be a scary word to fundraisers. I worked on a passion project called the Certified Data-Driven Fundraising Program Data, I think it's called, I think it's data driven fundraising.com, or data-driven fundraiser.com. and it's like continuing education for every fundraiser about how to use data. What is it in the fundraising world. how do I, fluency and data literacy and all these kinds of things. And so making people not be frustrated and annoyed, oh, another piece of technology. Oh my gosh, this is exciting technology. That's the flip, the switch I want to flip. And what we're, we as Keela, but also me as Najeed are really working hard to do.

**Meico:** And I, I want to put out there too for something to just expand the imagination of what's possible with Keela and just in the broadest sense, your approach to this. Because what you're talking about is simplifying a process. And I understand that the market that you're focusing on are small to mid sized organizations.

**Meico:** But one of the things that I'm seeing with technology trends, particularly with the pandemic, is that the amount of time we spend in front of screens has increased the skyrocket, right? The amount of tools that we're using to stay connected, especially

at the beginning of the pandemic, when we were really modest organizations who weren't accustomed to being all remote or hybrid.

**Meico:** Trying to figure out, okay, patching together tools to really make it work, right? And I think people are overloaded. People are overwhelmed. And people are craving simplicity. People are craving systems that simply work and just do, one thing very well. And I'm seeing larger organizations. They can afford the more complicated, more expensive systems.

**Meico:** You know what, let's just go back to basics. Let's just get the, let's get the simple thing. So I'm just going to put out there for you that not only are you going to be serving more midsize and small organizations, but you're gonna be serving other types of organizations that are

**Najeed:** We want to do what we do really frigging well. Like we want to be the best in the world at what we do. and actually one of our, I don't know if it's officially a brand promise and I'll probably get in trouble for saying this, but that's fine. one of our brand promises is like a phenomenal fundraiser experience. I think like taking the BS out of software, simplifying, really. Making it accessible for fundraisers, regardless of your organization size, but like your data literacy size to like. To get the benefit of all this tech without having the burden of all the tech, I think is where you're going with this.

**Najeed:** We really strive to work on that. you should be able to learn Keela in two hours.

**Meico:** Well, listen, I appreciate you being a part of this conversation. and I know that lots of gems have been dropped and lots of folks listening to this podcast are going to be, really, impacted in a positive way by your contribution. For those that want to learn more about you, they want to learn more about Keela and stay connected.

**Meico:** Where can they go to learn more?

**Najeed:** LinkedIn is the, if you want to talk to me, that's the only place I talk to any, I don't have social media. So that's the one. I'm always, I'm in the fight. I'm in what I think is the good fight, and I'm always happy to be connected to learn with, learn from, hopefully teach a little bit of amazing changemakers across the world. That's the first one. And obviously, if you want to learn more about Keela, keela.com, and there's lots of stories on the website, to, if it's the right fit, obviously we're happy to support amazing people and amazing organizations across the world.

**Meico:** Awesome. thank you for joining us. Catch Najeed on LinkedIn. If you can get the landline number, call the landline at home.

**Najeed:** Just remember my wife is at the other end of it half the time, so Yes.

**Meico:** We'll put the number in the show notes. I'm just kidding.

**Najeed:** Exactly.

**Meico:** But again, it's been a real honor to have you on the

**Najeed:** Thank you Meico it's been a pleasure.

**Meico:** I really appreciate it. Awesome. All right, changemakers. That was another amazing episode of the Mindful Changemaker podcast. Looking forward to seeing you and joining us with, for our next interview and episode.

## Sponsor Break

**Meico:** I want to take a moment to tell you about a live virtual program to help changemakers like you take better care of yourself while creating a positive impact in the world. It's a live virtual two-day interactive experience designed to help you increase your well being so you can increase your well doing.

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**Meico:** That's [mindfulchangemaker.org/retreat](https://mindfulchangemaker.org/retreat).

## Outro

**Meico:** Thank you for listening to this episode of the Dear Mindful Changemaker podcast. Are you ready to finally prioritize your well being so you can increase your impact in changing the world? Join the Mindful Changemaker community and take the next step on your journey to increase your well being while well doing.

**Meico:** It's 100 percent free when you join at [mindfulchangemaker.org/join](https://mindfulchangemaker.org/join). Again, that's [mindfulchangemaker.org/join](https://mindfulchangemaker.org/join). Until next time, I'm Meico Marquette Whitlock. Take it one intentional moment at a time.