**Motivational Mondays interview:**

**Kozhi Makai – *Airing* 03.01.2021 (Part 2)**

**Music intro** [00:00:00-00:00:01]

**Max Irzhak** [00:00:02] Welcome to Motivational Mondays. I’m your host Max Irzhak, and joining us for Part 2 of his interview is Dr. Kozhi Makai.

If you haven’t already listened to last week’s episode, I encourage you to start there. We explored a 3-point process for identifying your strengths, and what we can do to manage our stress in this new work from home world.

I’m proud to welcome the one and only Dr. Kozhi Makai, the founder of Kozhi Makai Worldwide, a consulting agency that uses behavioral science to help people thrive at work, by turning potential into performance.

**Kozhi Makai** [00:00:32] Thanks, Max. Thank you so much for having me.

**Max Irzhak** [00:00:35] You got it. Alright, let’s jump right into it. As a behavioral scientist, one of the things you focus on is helping people thrive in the workplace. What do you look for in a great leader?

**Kozhi Makai** [00:00:46] I think at the start, it’s integrity. And the good thing with integrity is it connects both me as an individual by myself and how I view myself, how I feel about myself, and then how that projects to the world. All of leadership is about influence, it’s very difficult to influence people if im not put together—now I didn't say put together perfectly, I just mean put together.

If there’s a disjointedness to who I am, and who I view myself to be, it makes it very difficult for me to lead. When I'm in the position of being a follower, I want somebody who has confidence—not because they know everything, but they are definite in their charge. This is where we’re going, and this is why we’re going there. I want someone to do that for me. And somebody with integrity, it’s easier for them to do that, because they know where they’re going, they know why they’re going, so they can explain that to me just like they can explain that to themselves. So at the starting point, I want somebody who’s got integrity, I want somebody who’s loyal—they’re loyal to me. As a leader, it’s not about me. As a leader in my own organization, it’s not about me. It’s about our clients and it’s about my team—it’s not about me.

And so unfortunately with leadership there’s so many glamorous aspects of leadership that people aspire to be leaders thinking it’s all going to be about them, but truthfully leadership has nothing to do with me. Leadership is a sacrifice that a human being takes so that others can fare better. That’s what leadership to me is. It’s somebody making that sacrifice to say “it’s not going to be about me”, I'm going to do everything to protect and to provide for my team. If I can do that effectively, then I'm leading with integrity.

**Max Irzhak** [00:02:36] And what would you say is missing from leadership today in the organizations that you work with? Is it a lack of integrity, or something more?

**Kozhi Makai** [00:02:45] I think that there’s something more there. I’ve met a lot of integral leaders, fortunately. I think that the missing link is challenge, and I'm going to define that appropriately. When I think of challenges, a lot of the leaders are not challenging themselves quite enough. There’s this sense of focusing so much on the tactical aspects of work, that they forget there’s another side to it. And it’s pervasive in our society too—we’re very very big on technically talented people, we’re very big on that. So big that in my field when we do training and development, the skills that I tend to focus on they’re called “soft skills” because they say “those are not the important things right, we want our engineers to be great at engineering, and then you can come in and work with them on the soft skills. You know communication, leadership—those types of things.” But most companies, they don't succeed because of the talent level of people on the technical side. They really do well because of those so-called soft skills which is why in our organization we call them employability skills. Employability skills make all the difference.

If i were to pick two leaders, or even two potential employees, one was an A+ in technical skills but a D in employability skills. Another person was an A in employability skills, but maybe a C in technical skills… I'm taking the C in technical skills. Because technical skills can and will improve with time. But when it comes to teaching someone or helping somebody with employability skills, it’s worse than trying to pull teeth. So for me that’s the missing link for leaders, is creating that connection that says your growth is important and it has to be a priority as much as you selling our product, as much as you developing podcasts—as much as you doing all the things that you do in your day to day work—your personal growth and development must be central. Because undeveloped teams and undeveloped leaders, they don't last. They make really bad mistakes; irreversible mistakes because they are tied to humanity. And it’s important for us to strengthen that aspect of our humanity in our communication skills, our leadership skills, in our critical thinking skills—all these so-called “soft skills” but they’re crucial in helping an organization and a team run effectively, but also for a team to win on a regular basis.

**Max Irzhak** [00:05:17] And do you think college students who are entering the workforce can actually fix what is broken?

**Kozhi Makai** [00:05:21] Absolutely. One of the things I like about college students coming out right now, regardless of where they were taught, they have more tools available than I had when I was going to college. There are more tools available today from Google and all these other places. You have to be diligent and careful, and think critically, and pick your sources correctly—but there are more tools available to them. But they also have the opportunity to see 3 to 4 generations of leaders, and 3 to 4 generations of organizational people come and go. And they have an example that helps them that says “in this season of leadership this will be the best thing to do”. How do I know that? Because this group of leaders did it this way… these are the results that they got. The next generation, same thing, and another generation same thing. So they have a few more tools available to them. What they need more, and what they desire is guidance. Somebody please give me an idea of what you expect of me. What is it that you expect of me as an employee, and then I will tell you what I expect of you as my leader. So that when *they* become leaders, they can carry that same mentality of what is it that’s required for this organization or this team to be successful? Which version of Kozhi do I need to be in order for the team to be successful?

And so there’s this idea that a lot of these young people that are coming out of college and going into organizations, if they can start to really bring a little bit of a laser-focus to how they serve, whatever role—whether it’s in business, whether it’s in sports—wherever it is that they’ll serve in their specific vocation and role… they will recognize that there are multiple versions of themselves, and there’ll be multiple versions of themselves that are necessary and needed for the team to survive. That you won't need 50 different people there, we’ll just need Kozhi to choose which version of Kozhi needs to show up today. Because one day I show up at work and I have to take the leading role—I have the gavel for lack of a better term. Other days, I show up, I'm just in for a meeting—somebody else has the gavel. We have to learn both followership and leadership. And that makes all the difference, but I think there are wonderful qualities in the young people that we have today, and if we can help them get that honed, it’ll make a huge difference in the way organizations are run and populated over the next several decades.

**Max Irzhak** [00:07:46] How can college students find mentors that will help guide them in becoming stronger leaders and learning from those who came before them?

**Kozhi Makai** [00:07:53] Three letters: A-S-K. Ask. You just need to have no shame. You just have to reach out to people and people will say no. I’ve been told “no” more than I've been told “yes” in my life. And that’s because I have tried a lot of things. And so me getting into the Navy, I've gotten before—I didn't get a “no” from the NAVY, but I've gotten several “no’s” from other departments too. I have gotten “no’s” a lot, but that’s because I'm willing to take that risk. If there’s anything that I see in the current generation of college students is there’s a trepidation that comes with the answer “no”. And what’s crazy is they're not unique because I know adults, and their parents, and their grandparents who are in the same boat. Nobody likes the word “no”, nobody wants to feel the embarrassment of being rejected.

I’ll give you a nice example; it’s an old example. There was a gentleman in old Athens. They saw him begging from a statue. And somebody walked up to him and said “Hey, why are you begging from this statute?” And he said “I am practicing learning the experience of being rejected.” Every single one of us needs to become really good at begging from the statue, and get our degrees in rejection because that’s going to be normal. One of the things i've found is when I give people the opportunity for me to help them and to serve them, a lot of people don’t take it. I can't tell you the number of audiences I've given my email address—personal email address—and said if you need anything, reach out. And it’s hard to believe how, I can't even think right now the last person that did. There was one student, one High School student, a year ago who reached out to me and I decided to mentor her. I have no problem mentoring her. Many people have no problem doing that. The people who are usually mentoring are the busiest among us. It’s not people who’ve got nothing to do. Also, you don't really want to be mentored by someone who’s got nothing to do. You want to be mentored by busy people because it teaches you how to be punctual, it teaches you how to stay on point and so forth. So I think the simple answer to that is it’s important for the students to ask. With LinkedIn, you can meet and ask just about anyone in the world. And there's nothing more flattering than speaking to a CEO as a 14-15 year old saying “Hey, if you can just give me a tip once a month, that will make all the difference in my life.” That’s a huge compliment to any CEO with integrity, no matter how busy they are.

**Max Irzhak** [00:10:30] Dr. Kozhi Sidney Makai, it's been an absolute pleasure. Thank you for helping us all succeed in our lives, thrive at our jobs, and become stronger leaders. I know all of my fellow NSLS members will be thrilled to hear more of your insights.

**Kozhi Makai** [00:10:44] Thank you so much for having me, Max, I appreciate it.

**Max Irzhak** [00:10:48] Absolutely. And I encourage everyone to connect with Kozhi on LinkedIn, Facebook and YouTube, and to buy Kozhi’s new book “Disrupted”. Just follow the links in the description below.

Thank you everyone for joining us today :)

We’ll see you next week on Motivational Mondays!

**Music intro** [00:11:03-00:11:07]