

Vikas Garg-full 6-21-21

[00:00:00] **Vikas Garg:** [00:00:00] A big part of what we are is an online experience, but that online experience of course extends into the offline world and often extends into something that we all love, which is the funny thing is this is something that we do three, four times a day, and it plays such a pivotal role in. The global economy and in so many, so many aspects of our lives, but also from a sustainability perspective.

[00:00:29] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:00:29] Hi, and welcome to the innovative mindset podcast. I'm your host Izolda Trakhtenberg on the show. You get my conversations with peak performing thought leaders, creatives, and entrepreneurs. We explore how you can innovate through creativity, compassion, and collaboration. I believe that innovation combined with compassion and creative thinking can save the world and I aim to bring you ways.

[00:00:51] You can do it too. If you're enjoying the show, I'd be super grateful. If you could support it by buying me a cup of coffee, you can buy me a cup [00:01:00] of@buymeacoffee.com slash IzoldaT. And now let's get on with the show.

[00:01:13] Hey there and welcome to the innovative mindset podcast. My name is Izolda Trakhtenberg. I'm super happy that you're here and listening to this incredible episode. I'm also incredibly happy to introduce you to this week's guest. Vikas Garg is the founder and CEO of a billion, a global community on a mission to help a billion people create world changing impact.

[00:01:34] You know, that's right. What I'm going to love talking about Vikas is a dedicated supporter of education and conservation initiatives around the world. He's received credit Suisse's global citizenship award is a young leader of the Milken Institute and a charter member of the Indus entrepreneurs.

[00:01:53] He's amazing. And he had a bold idea to change the world, and that is exactly what he and his team [00:02:00] are working on. I'm so thrilled to welcome the cost guard. Thank you so much for being here. Hi, how are you? I am fabulous. Thank you so much for asking. I, I wanted, I want, first of all, I want to say that you, I am in New York city and you are in Singapore, so it is in the evening for me.

[00:02:18] And it is the very next day in the morning for you. And that's that, that was a little trippy for me. So I was like, oh yeah, it's tomorrow for you. So, and for you it's today and I'm, I'm here, back here and yesterday. So I yesterday that's right. I am, I am so honored and excited to have you on the show actually, because anybody who knows me for any length of time will hear me talk about being vegan and being plant what I call plant powered.

[00:02:46] And I, I want to sort of lift up this notion that you have of changing the world and that a billion is about something that's really close to my heart. [00:03:00] It's about getting 1 billion people. To commit to being plant-based by the year 2030. And I was wondering what started this for you? What made you decide that this was going to be your mission?

[00:03:15] **Vikas Garg:** [00:03:15] Oh, great question. And, and thanks. Firstly, thank you for having me on the show. Thank you for having me on the show. My pleasure. And it's always, always nice to, to talk to a fellow New Yorker. I've been living out here in Singapore for the last six years, but grew up in New York city and just immense gratitude for, for having us on the show today.

[00:03:35] Yeah, so, you know, I found. So how has the New Yorker? I originally came to New York when I was four years old from India. And one of the things that my mom and dad did to really in a way to preserve our culture and our heritage there were many things that we did, you know, including just like we used to speak Hindi at home, but we also stayed sort of tried and true to our vegetarianism when I was a kid.

[00:03:58] And so I, from, [00:04:00] from the day that I was born I was raised vegetarian and growing up in New York in the eighties. You know, like being vegetarian meant that like pretty much my entire food pyramid often was like a slice of pizza. It was like the easiest thing to pretty much get everywhere. And like, you kind of, you know, you could sort of, as a kid, know what you were getting, get like a slice of cheese pizza or a bagel with cream cheese.

[00:04:26] And I grew up, so I grew up vegetarian. I grew up never eating meat. And so, and I grew up a big animal lover. Even a bug lover. And it was just something that I got from my mom and dad. It was a really big part of our culture. So, you know, fast forward in my twenties, I decided I wanted to go vegan and that was due to a number of different reasons.

[00:04:46] Both my mom and dad got sick, really, really, really sick. And I started to look at like, why are two very, very seemingly healthy people getting so sick? I getting things like heart disease and cancer. And a [00:05:00] lot of the time I started look at a lot of it just started to point to food. I also just other factors kind of involved in that and, and I.

[00:05:09] I basically, I went vegan. And what, for me, even as a vegetarian felt very hard at the time because it meant that it meant giving up a lot of the things that I had come to love. Right. It meant like giving up on things like cheese and, you know, especially when you're talking about certain kinds of cuisines foods, whether it's Italian food or Indian food, you know, there's, there's butter in everything.

[00:05:34] There's, there's you know, there's eggs and everything there, dairy and everything. There's cheese in nearly everything. Right. And, and it just felt like a huge compromise. And I was already sort of the weird, you know, the, I was already the guy that whenever I went out with all my friends, I've asked like two questions.

[00:05:52] To make something vegetarian. And now I was the guy that had to ask five questions to make something be good for sure. You know, and, and so it was, [00:06:00] it, it really very much, it really, in the beginning felt like a compromise and a sacrifice for me. Fast-forward or I'd say that this idea of me going vegan has probably been one of the defining influences, one of the defining factors in my life.

[00:06:19] And one of the things that's created, immense joy and immense positivity and immense mindfulness, and really given me so much confidence and control over my life. And

it's something that has gone from being sacrificial and compromising to something that's just truly an inspired way of living that helps me feel incredibly connected to everything and incredibly connected to the earth and cry more connected to other people.

[00:06:46] You know, very, very, very sort of. I'd say clued into who I am and giving me a sense of purpose and values and that every single day, every single choice I make is, has that [00:07:00] connection as that little connection back to my values, which gives me a lot of confidence in life because I'm leading a life full of purpose and values.

[00:07:09] So that was, you know, w w just going back to your question is to sort of, how did I come about this is I finally had, you know, sort of the opportunity in my life. I finally felt like I had gotten to the stage where I was ready to start a company. And I had a career. I didn't have this, we're effectively, we're a technology company, but I, I didn't have a career in tech.

[00:07:32] I had a career in finance. And I, you know, I just felt like, okay, I I'm going to make this. I made this decision that I'm going to start my own thing. And I just looked around and I just was like, You know, I spent my entire career, my entire life, 15, 16 years working in an industry, but I ha I was gonna sort of do what I was going to do now for them.

[00:07:55] I had the opportunity to do something for the next 30 or 40 years. [00:08:00] And I had an opportunity to really choose what that thing was. Right. So it started to really feel like, wow, I'm still, even though I've been doing something my entire life, I still feel like I'm, I'm, I'm in the early stages of the rest of my life and what do I want to do with it?

[00:08:17] And so, you know, I, at the time, I just felt like it was really an opportunity to improve social media, to improve the whole landscape of e-commerce. To build something that was more inspiring and impactful. You know, and I th I really felt like social media was broken. That social media was this sort of failed experiment.

[00:08:38] It was this great connector of people, but then it, it, you know, these communities around the world had formed and some of them had become extremely toxic. And, you know, you can see what happened, you know, the 2016 election or even in the last election, right. And many, many other events that happen in society every single day that, you know, that, that social media is, is, has sort of [00:09:00] become responsible for it.

[00:09:01] And I just felt like, you know, look, there's, there's an opportunity to create something that actually improve people's lives and improve people's lives and actually stood for something. So that's been the grand experiment for us. I just felt like if we could create something and bring people together in a community, and then we could inspire them and make it easier for people to around the world to live in a more sustainable way.

[00:09:23] And remove sort of the barriers and, you know, part of those barriers are, you know, when you go out to eat, some of them are when you go shopping. Some of them are when you travel. Some of them are just sort of when you're, you know, when you're, when you're out and about your day-to-day lives and said, Hey, and some of them involve just having support in your community, right?

[00:09:43] Because you may not have that support in your community. So we really wanted to create this kind of community, an online community, a community that, you know, people around the world really could join and feel supported in this journey towards a more sustainable world, a more vegan world. And we felt that this idea [00:10:00] of going vegan, whether it's all the time, or even just consciously making an effort to be.

[00:10:07] More vegan some of the time was a huge step in the right direction for the world. And that was something that was worth fighting for it. And then that's sort of how it got started about three and a half years ago.

[00:10:20] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:10:20] Wow. I feel like you should just go and Mike drop and that's it. Yeah. Wow. I'm taking all of that in everything that you said, and there's, so there's so much, there's so much wealth that you've talked about and that isn't necessarily monetary wealth, that feeling of being connected, that feeling of having that confidence.

[00:10:44] I love that what you have chosen is to be purposeful with the work that you're doing, because you could have done another app on time management. You could have done another app on, you know, this is how you buy stocks or whatever, but, but you turned it on its [00:11:00] head and you went, no I'm going to do something that means something and use all my skills to do it.

[00:11:04] And so when you, when you talked about the sort of early days when you were growing up and how you had to, you know, I'll have a slice of cheese pizza, things have evolved, things have changed, and now we can get there. There are so many restaurants that are vegan only for example. So, so within that framework, within that framework of, of things evolving, what role do you see a billion playing as things move forward?

[00:11:31] Cause I know you've got this 20, 30 timeframe, but what role do you see a billion playing in addition to yourself in making that go even further than it otherwise might.

[00:11:42] **Vikas Garg:** [00:11:42] Yeah, sure. So we start, excuse me. So we start with the idea of consumer advocacy first, right? And how do you take data? How do you take consumer data and really use it to actually improve the world?

[00:11:55] So where obviously a big part of what we are is an online experience, but that [00:12:00] online exterior experience of course extends into the offline world and often extends into something that we all love, which is ticking. Right. And the funny thing is this is something that we do three, four times a day and it plays such a pivotal role in the global economy.

[00:12:17] And. In, in so many, so many aspects of our lives, but also from a sustainability perspective. So for us we started with this idea that, Hey, like people are gonna, you know, people, people get on our app. They, they network with each other. They kind of, you know, they follow each other. They use the app to find great vegan options that can be vegan dishes at any kind of restaurant anywhere in the world.

[00:12:39] And we kind of gamified the whole process. We don't focus just on vegan restaurants or vegetarian restaurants, but he's really said, Hey, like if we're going to actually,

if the world is going to become a lot more sustainable through vegan food, what we really need to do is create a, create a business, create a company that helps the world helps all of the world's businesses [00:13:00] create.

[00:13:00] More vegan food and popularize that amongst people. So that's really, that's a big part of what we do is we do a lot of consumer advocacy. So when, for example, if you went to a restaurant today, you took a photo of your vegan dish, right. That review, then just go, then it goes into the app, but it doesn't stop there.

[00:13:20] Our team then goes and figures out. Who's the owner of that business manager of that business, et cetera. And then we get that review back to those business owners. We not only do that, but if we're talking about, let's say it's a Japanese restaurant in Midtown Manhattan, we're then going to send that restaurant.

[00:13:37] All of the best rated vegan, Japanese dishes information, a reviews, op options, information to show them. And for many, many different restaurants around New York city and around the world, we might send them the best rated vegan, Japanese dishes from Tokyo. And the whole reason we do that from a consumer advocacy perspective is we want to show them that there's [00:14:00] this global movement growing.

[00:14:01] We want to show them that there's an, there's an economic opportunity in having great vegan options. And if we can really have that conversation with that business, that, Hey, it makes sense to have three, four, five, six, 10, you know, to have 20, 30% of your, of your menu being plant-based. Then we actually really start to move the needle.

[00:14:22] When you start to think about sustainability, if we could get thousands of restaurants in a, in a, in a geography to actually start thinking this way, And shifting from, you know, let's say one vegan dish, one vegetarian district, you're even lucky to having 10%, 20% than 30% of their menus be plant-based, we'll make a really, really big impact for every body.

[00:14:46] And every thing that's kind of involved in the global food system, including the animals and land the environment and people, of course. So that's really in a way, that's, that's a big part of the role that we want to play, which is consumer advocacy [00:15:00] working on behalf of the consumer to give you a sense of it.

[00:15:02] Last year, we sent more than 5 million emails all around the world with this kind of information and that sort of competitive landscape, really trying to in a way, create a meritocracy for the whole plant-based industry, trying to say, Hey, Hey, steakhouse. Right. Like, there are people who will go to a steak house and eat right.

[00:15:24] If they have a great vegan option and, you know, ironically I, in my career, that's exactly what I used to have to do because I was a banker in New York and, you know, I'd have clients come from other parts of the United States. And I they'd want to go to, you know, some of, one of the famous steakhouses in New York, like Peter Luger and Brooklyn.

[00:15:44] And, you know, I'd be sitting there as the vegetarian and then the vegan, and I'd always have this, you know, I'd have this awkward moment where it was like, okay, I'm

getting tomatoes and I'm getting and I'm getting some broccoli, all things that I really love. Right. Like, cause like [00:16:00] I'm very much like I, more than anything I love, well, I love my pasta, but I like more than anything.

[00:16:06] I love my whole plant-based sort of, you know, foods and. I just would always be having these conversations with restaurant owners, be like, Hey look, like, I wouldn't mind coming back here and bringing my parents and bringing up friends. Right. But like, can you have one or two really great options for me?

[00:16:26] Right. And often that feedback, they would respond to it. Right. And, and, you know, overwhelmingly, we felt like, okay, if we could do this at some scale, then that would be really great. If we could leverage technology to do this instead of door to door activism, if we could leverage technology to do this on a much larger scale, we could really move the needle.

[00:16:47] And so today, if you look at just with restaurants and then there's a whole other side to our platform, which is which is, you know, purely from like a consumer review perspective, it's consumer products. And today we have [00:17:00] 160,000 consumer products across about 40,000 brands on our platform. I get to that later, but like the you know, when you look at just the restaurant side of it today, we have.

[00:17:10] About 50,000 restaurants on our platform globally, about 65% of them receive this kind of information from us. Sometimes, sometimes it's just impossible to find out any information about a business. It's a business is sitting in Vietnam or maybe in Thailand or in, you know, in, in, in, in, in. You know, in, in Argentina for example, right.

[00:17:33] It, it just sometimes it's is a bit difficult, but generally we're able to find that information more than half the time. And we've seen tremendous results when we first started here in Singapore three and a half years ago. And we day one, we started sort of as a global app, but we had zero content.

[00:17:49] We had zero users. We started with zero users, zero content, you know, and, and built it up from there. But when we got first got started in Singapore is probably because [00:18:00] we're here because the company is here and all of our team this year, you know, this is one of our most engaged markets globally. When we first got started here in Singapore, I think in our first year we found that there were like less than a thousand vegan options available on restaurant menus, right.

[00:18:17] Uh, Restaurants on our platform and that number, like we just did our second annual Singapore, top 50 vegan dish awards. Right. And it's funny because like 40 of those restaurants that are on that list for, you know, the 50, and it's not 50, it's not 50 restaurants, it's 50 dishes because we really think that that's what people, you know, people care about what they're eating, what's on their plate more than anything these days, but like of the 50 dishes, I think around 40, at least 40 of those restaurants are not vegan or vegetarian restaurants.

[00:18:50] But they're just, we we've, we just did that. And today, thanks to a lot of the work that we've done. A lot of the work that a lot of other organizations, [00:19:00] companies, et

cetera, people have done, we've gone from in the last three, four years. We've gone from a thousand vegan dishes on menus to 16,000. Yes. And you know, so that's pretty awesome.

[00:19:11] Like, and it's a huge honor, of course, where, you know, You pick the top 50 from 16,000 it's it's, it's quite a big honor. Right? So it was seeing restaurants respond to that. And like, you know, people get our frame certificates and very meat, heavy restaurants who would have never thought that they were getting, you know, they were going to get an award from a vegan company, a vegan organization, and they're so delighted, you know, they frame it, they put it right up next to their wine spectator award and, and, you know, and, and what ends up happening is they create more plant-based options and they start talking about them and then those things get started.

[00:19:49] You know, those ordered, they get ordered and that's really ultimately what creates impact, right? Because that larger pool of businesses around the world that, [00:20:00] you know, we know are never going to, they're likely not going to become vegan businesses. But there's a real opportunity that if we can get them to sort of shift to 20, 30, 40% vegan, that's going to make a massive impact for everything that we care about.

[00:20:16] So that's a big role that we play. Obviously we need to grow. Like we want to grow our user base. We want to grow our membership around the world. Our community is really strong right now, and it's in a hundred plus countries. And we just want to grow that and continue building. And as the community gets stronger and the use case gets stronger and the, the, the, the, our sort of product, which is our app gets better and better and better that impact that we make sort of on people in terms of being able to sort of guide people and show them.

[00:20:51] And, you know, you mentioned like, You're getting, like, I think that, you know, I've liked a couple of your posts and stuff like that. And it's, I was talking to one of our members in Vancouver [00:21:00] two, three weeks back, and she was telling me how, like she became vegan a year ago. There's a farm animal sanctuary I'm on Vancouver island that we support it's called Rosta.

[00:21:12] And she got a flyer about the sanctuary from a friend of hers. And she said, you know, I'm like, this is interesting. You know, I, maybe I should cut down my meat consumption and share that the, the, the sanctuary talks about us as, you know, a great tool for that. And so she started using our app about a year ago and now she and her entire family had become a hundred percent vegan.

[00:21:33] And, you know, not only are they become vegan, but they're trying out foods from around the planet. So because they're able to see like people in Singapore or other parts of Asia or parts of Europe and south America are eating, there's a feed. And she, her whole family has gotten an inspiration for cooking and trying new things.

[00:21:55] And, you know, and it's, it's, she's felt that it's a very, very [00:22:00] supportive, positive community that really backs her up, that when she posts something, right. Whether she makes something at home using, you know, a plant-based meat product and she takes a photo of it when she posts something, she sees all these comments and she sees all of this

engagement and she's built this community and it really feels very supportive and it's really helped her continue on her journey and path to being vegan.

[00:22:27] And we love that. Like, I love that, that, that is in a way that is the biggest thing that we can do from an impact perspective is how do we help people and support people on this journey? We know it's hard, right? We know it's not perfect. It's not about perfection, but it's about how do you provide a really supportive community that just rallies behind everybody and supports each other.

[00:22:51] And that's really the big shift that we see that we want to see happening in social media as well. So super, super excited about that. And [00:23:00] and you know, really just trying to, trying to build that up and trying to really help people sort of create impact and feel good about creating impact. We have a lot of sort of work around that, that we're doing, but we, I think we do a pretty good job of it today and it's been amazing to, to kind of, to, to kind of see it grow and where it's going to go in the next eight, nine, 10 years.

[00:23:20] I can't, you know, I, I can't tell you, but we're, we're all working hard towards that goal. Have a billion

[00:23:25] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:23:25] people. I love that goal. I'm, I'm 110% behind you, a billion percent, if you will. You know, w what's interesting about what you said, and there's so much, there's, you know, you're talking and I'm going, yes, this, I need to ask about this and I need to ask about this.

[00:23:40] And, and the thing that, that struck me so hard as you were talking, I've, I've had that happen. The, I go to a restaurant and I have to pick the vegetables that I'm going to ask you to put together. And I go, you know, can you put this together in a salad? Or can you saute these for me in some oil and some garlic, blah, blah, blah.

[00:23:58] What's often happened [00:24:00] is. That the chef and I've had this happen several times. The chef comes out and goes, you know, I've never thought of putting these together like that. Do you mind if this is tomorrow is special? No, I do not mind if this is tomorrow special and I've actually had dishes that I've sort of put together, like that end up on the permanent menu of restaurants and amazing.

[00:24:20] Yeah, it's really, it's, it's very, it was one of them was called the Isolde salad, which I thought was just hilarious. But, but but the reason I'm bringing this up is because it was a, it was a perception shift, I guess, for the chef. So that notion of we can change, not just the consumers, percept perceptions, but the people who are actually running the restaurants are making the food, their perception that it's possible to make vegan food.

[00:24:48] That is good for you and all of that, but also that is scrumptious. That is really

[00:24:52] **Vikas Garg:** [00:24:52] delicious that people want that people

[00:24:53] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:24:53] want. Right. So, so, so how. How do we do that [00:25:00] on a, on a, and maybe this isn't part of a billion's mission, but how do we do that on a bigger scale? Because yes, I've, I've had the, as oldest salad become part of, of this

Italian restaurants, permanent menu, but, but what do, what can we do as, as people who might be on a billion or people who might not yet know about it, but now of course you do.

[00:25:20] So go and get the app, but how, what can we do to change the perception of the people in the industry? Like I see that you're doing the mailings to the restaurants. Is there anything else that we can be doing? And if so, what do you think that is?

[00:25:34] **Vikas Garg:** [00:25:34] Yeah, look, I think that we all think that we all can be really great advocates, right?

[00:25:39] So anybody who's listening in on this, on this podcast You know, it can be a voice. Right. And I think that that's one of the most powerful things that you can do is communicate with people. Often, like, I mean, I, in, in Asia specifically when I got here six years ago, one of the things that I saw was, you know, people, a lot of people, when you go to a place, just kind of [00:26:00] accept the status quo for what it is.

[00:26:03] Right. And, and so you just ended up, you either, you use a search and you try to find places that have things that you want or things that you can have and you set things as a way. It is a little bit more and we just really wanted to change that. Right. But at the same time, like you get in a place like New York, right.

[00:26:20] Where I'd say that, you know, at a place like America, where businesses are much more likely to adapt and try to do anything, they can. To, you know, to, to please a customer and ensure that person's happy. You know, we ha we all have a voice. And so the best thing that anyone can do is, you know, is, Hey, like, you know, be a voice, be a voice for the movement.

[00:26:46] Right. Always ask the question and try to have that conversation when you can and try to be really positive about it. Right. So I think that sometimes what happens and, you know, it's always hard to generalize. I don't like generalizing, but I think that sometimes what [00:27:00] happens is some of the, some of the ways that we sort of go about having a voice sometimes are not sometimes can be a bit, bit more argumentative than they are helpful.

[00:27:11] And I think it's just a matter of sort of, you know, tone and it's matter of of, of, of, of casting sort of what we're doing, what we want in a very positive way. And reinforce it very positively. I know that the challenges with social issues, right. Is there so much on the line, right. And it's so personal.

[00:27:35] And I, you know, so, so for me, like I grew up as an activist since the time that I was a kid in New York and I went to my first peanut rally when I was just seven or eight years old, you know, and, and I kind of always been clued in to sanctuaries and, you know, and, and, and I, and so I, I, I grew up in sort of around this and I was also like, I was a constant debater and I was on the debate team and, you know, and I just, what I [00:28:00] have found is that debate for the sake of debate and you know, or, or, or this like that, you need to be right.

[00:28:06] Sort of mentality often. Ends up putting you in a box and I, and, and what you want. And sometimes we forget about, well, what is it that we want? And what's maybe the most effective way to get what we want. And often I would just say that at least what I've learned, and I just turned 40 is can just have it.

[00:28:26] You can have a pleasant conversation with somebody that usually does that. I can usually do the trick or at least plant a seed. So yeah, I think that's something that all we all can do. And of course, like, you know plea, like, of course, you know, folks can get on the, get on the app. Like we're really building the social community around this sort of positive messaging and consumer advocacy.

[00:28:45] And, you know, give it a shot, try it out. Because not only will whatever work or whatever time you invest in this. Help you and it'll be fun cause it's fun. Just, you know, social [00:29:00] media has to be fun and it's meant to be enjoyable for whatever amount of time you spend on it every day. But then not only that, but it also creates a lot of impact in the world and a lot of positive social change.

[00:29:12] And that's really why we designed it is really to give everybody, even people who are not necessarily comfortable, you know, going around and sort of speaking and doing that. Or maybe you're just too busy, an opportunity to just do something fun and gamify that. Do something fun and still make a lot of positive change in society.

[00:29:34] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:29:34] I like that you combine both of them. That's that's wonderful. And it's interesting what you were talking about being positive. The app definitely feels, it feels very upbeat. It feels very positive. It feels like I'm contributing to something. When I, when I leave a review and I, and I love that. And, and yet I was telling somebody about it who is not vegan.

[00:29:55] And the response I got was, Ugh, another vegan thing, you know? [00:30:00] And that's that, I'm not always positive when I talk about it, because I get, I get into that whole billions of animals are slaughtered every year mindset very quickly. So it's hard for me to stay positive when that is in the forefront. And yet.

[00:30:13] When I'm talking about the app to people who are already either vegan, friendly or vegan themselves, it's a really positive experience and I'm getting people to sign up and go, oh, this is cool. When I talk about it to non vegans, there's a, there's an eye roll. And so what is your, what is your thought?

[00:30:30] How, how is it best to talk about these subjects? And you said positive and that's great. And yet if they're, if you immediately meet sort of a wall of resistance, is it just a, okay. You're not a person I can talk about this with, or do you have any strategies to talk to people?

[00:30:45] **Vikas Garg:** [00:30:45] Yeah. Yeah. And, and, and you just, you know, just to clarify, like when I say positive, I, you know, I can imagine some of my friends were very passionate activists, their eyes rolling, because it's like, [00:31:00] it's what I want.

[00:31:02] I don't mean, you know, like what I don't mean, like, you know, it, it wouldn't be cool for, like, we all know can like racism. Right. Let's just take racism for example, right. There's no, like, we're all like trying to like, from, from like a, a vegan activist perspective. Right. If I was to where my, my sort of, you know, my, my, my activism hat for a second, right.

[00:31:24] I would, it's not, I would say that it's not cool. It's not cool to kill a little less. Right. Like, I would say something like that, like you know, and, and we would, I'd say that most people, if you ask them, is it okay to be a little racist? They'd be like, no, what are you talking about? Like, that's not, that's not cool.

[00:31:44] Like, you can't be a little racist. And so it's like, you know, I would make the arguments as well. So you're saying, is it okay to kill a little, right. Cause like, they'd be like, no, it's not okay to kill a little bit. That's what you do every single day when you, you know, [00:32:00] you eat animals and things like that.

[00:32:01] So like that sort of positive, I guess that's the, that idea of sort of positive messaging just for it. What I mean by that is you, to you, what I have found that works the best is sort of being able to relate to people. Right. And we can talk about all of the animal lives. And when you start talking about things like in the billions, often people kind of zone out cause it's, it just, it takes somebody out of their immediate sort of day-to-day life.

[00:32:35] But when you can talk to somebody in a way that really connects with them on a personal basis, and the best way to do that is to tell your own personal story. And really like, why are you doing this? And how does it impact you? And really I'd say that that's probably the thing that I have found, you know, it doesn't always work, but that's what I, at least when I come at it [00:33:00] from a very, very personal way, and I talk about my own health and I talk about my mom and dad, and I talk about, you know, I talk about my dog for instance and I talk about the changes that I felt and the struggles that I had you know, that then becomes a very personal story.

[00:33:23] And while somebody may not agree with it there, I'll probably a lot more willing to just kind of accept it or recognize that. Okay, cool. I get what this person is about and that's. Like that's their journey. And I respect that. Right. So then like, you know, at least you stroke, I think you establish a foundation which you can then build on from there because the person at least appreciates where you're coming from, some people will, of course never be receptive or be open-minded.

[00:33:57] And, and, you know, unfortunately, you know, [00:34:00] like we, we, we live in a world where there's a lot of, you know, human beings are very complex and intellectually, emotionally, mentally, physically, we're also a very, very diverse, you're not going to convince everybody. And that's, you know, th th I, I don't know if there's, you know, it's really about that.

[00:34:20] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:34:20] Well, it's it's for you. It's about a billion, which I think is good and, and more than a billion would be even better. I, I that's for sure. It's, what's interesting. That feeling of connection that you talked about earlier is similar to what

I heard you say just now that, that it is it's meeting people where, where they are with where you are and I, and I totally respect that.

[00:34:45] And yet when I, when I think about it, I'm going okay. So there are all these benefits that you, that you have sort of rot, if you will, you've brought all these benefits from being vegan. And [00:35:00] yet, I don't know. Do you sometimes feel like you're tilting at windmills or do you see enough potential that it, that it's worth it to keep going?

[00:35:14] **Vikas Garg:** [00:35:14] Oh, definitely. I mean, I definitely see a lot of potential. And you know, we do a lot of things. Sometimes things work, sometimes they don't work. Sometimes they don't work in the short term and often there is sort of this sense. It's very easy when you've got a whole room full of people to like constantly be pivoting or changing their mind.

[00:35:35] And often the hardest thing to do is to stay on tack a hard. One of the artist's things to do is, is really believe in what you're doing and believe in something that maybe not a lot of other people really see as as valuable. And, you know, look, you've got to take it in and you've got to, like, you've got to really analyze it.

[00:35:54] You've got to do your work. But you've also got to have conviction and things in life and, [00:36:00] and that's sort of the hardest, I'd say that's one of the hardest things. Sometimes because you could talk to five different people and get five different opinions. Sometimes it's just the way that you ask a question you know, where, you know, you're, you're almost setting yourself up to, to get a certain kind of response.

[00:36:16] So it's really, it's it's, I think it's about, I think it's about having, I think a lot of it it's about having conviction and then really thinking, at least for us, like thinking about like, okay, well, how do we build a business and how do we, and some to some degree stay grounded in the way that business works.

[00:36:33] And you know, and, and, you know, you're trying to create a new kind of business in an industry that, you know, is evolving, but not a lot of people are sort of accepted yet. But you think it's the future. And so it's, it's hard. It's really, really, really hard. But, but it's also really fun and it's rewarding and.

[00:36:55] You know, it's it's when, when you do have your wins, it feels really, really great.

[00:37:01] [00:37:00] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:37:01] I'm sure it does. Absolutely. And you know, it's funny. I, there are people who've known me forever in a day. And one of the first things that they ask me when they see me again, after not having seen me for a while or so you eat meat yet.

[00:37:15] And it's it's as if they think it's a temporary thing. And I'm like, it's been over 30 years, I think. I think I'm done. But the interesting thing here is that thing that you said about confidence, there is, there is a, there is a power in my mind to. Standing in your truth. You know, my truth for me, I'm never, I'm never eating animals or any animal products.

[00:37:38] Again, I don't use animal products. So that's my truth. And you said earlier that you feel a greater sense of confidence since you have gone vegan. And I would love it. If you could talk a little bit about what the flavor of that is, what is the root of that and, and how do you see it playing out in the way you've [00:38:00] innovated this entire social media space?

[00:38:02] He does.

[00:38:08] **Vikas Garg:** [00:38:08] Sorry. Could you repeat that question?

[00:38:12] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:38:12] I got the room. Yeah,

[00:38:14] **Vikas Garg:** [00:38:14] I got the, I got the, I guess, sorry she knocked on the door and knocked on the door. I heard, I heard the, I heard the first part of it, but then I wasn't, I'm not, I wasn't clear. No

[00:38:25] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:38:25] worries. No worries. I love it. Well, the question. No, no, no, no, no, no.

[00:38:29] That's great. You know, it's it, this is about it's funny. I the podcast got into the fourth edition of podcasting for dummies. It actually was, was featured in the book and it was featured in the slice of life podcast area. So that's because that's what this is. Things happen. This is a slice of life.

[00:38:47] So the question was actually about how your level of confidence has suffused your ability to innovate in, in the social media space, which has innovation, things like, you know, Tik TOK or [00:39:00] whatever. But this is, this is innovation with a purpose. And I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about how your level of confidence relates your ability to go to, I don't know if you have sponsors or if you have investors, but your ability to go to people who don't know anything about this, who don't know anything about veganism and be confident enough to go.

[00:39:18] This is a really cool thing, and this is why you want to be part of it.

[00:39:23] **Vikas Garg:** [00:39:23] Yeah, look, you know, you have to turn over a lot of stones. It's very competitive. And depending on who you talk to one person's sort of one person's gauge of success looks very different than another person's gauge of success.

[00:39:39] And you know the, the, the thing about, you know, the thing about the space is there's there's, you just, you have to, you have to find, you have to, you know, you have to do the work and you have to, you have to find the people who are going to support you, whether it's financially, and we're very much a venture backed [00:40:00] company at this stage you know, and, and our revenues.

[00:40:03] You know, if, if, if tomorrow our funding just completely dried up our revenues definitely wouldn't support what we're, what we're doing and building, we're not a very cap. We're not a very capital intensive business at this stage. We will become a more capital intensive business at this stage. And so it's really, again, it's setting yourself up for thinking, okay, like, well, what does this business really look like over the next three, four, five years?

[00:40:25] What are we building? And and really being able to communicate that effectively and meet the folks and build relationships with people and, and, and yeah, and convey, convey that sense of confidence. But behind that sense of confidence, it can't just be back, you know, behind that sense of confidence.

[00:40:48] There also has to be work and a plan and a, and being able to sort of describe and show and build. All the things that we need to do [00:41:00] in order to make our business, you know, fundamentally sound and sustainable. So we can be in business in the next 20, 30, and 50 years and get level over the next two.

[00:41:11] Yeah, let alone the next sort of two. Right, right. You know, which it really is. It's like, it's like, you want to build yourself for longterm success, but you've got to really think about like, well, okay, how are you going to survive in the next one year, in the next two years? Especially, I'd say that until you get to the stage where you have a hit product, right.

[00:41:30] And that takes time, you know, with some of the biggest companies in the food space that that's, you know, that's taken them before, before everybody, you know, in America had heard about the beyond burger. You know, it was even well before it was even the beyond burger was called something else that company had been around for, for almost a decade, by the time, you know, people really started to kind of, it started to go mainstream.

[00:41:57] And so while, [00:42:00] you know, while folks like Ethan and the people around him had that vision, they also were very smart about executing and building. And I'm sure that, you know, while they were thinking about what 10 years ahead were those probably very early on in the business, they were probably just thinking about what the next six months looks like.

[00:42:17] So there is always that sort of, you know, there's always that sort of, and I don't think that it's a, I don't think that it's an inherent conflict. I just think that it's a responsibility to be thinking about, well, you know, what do you need to do short term? What do you need the next three, six months and nine months and 12 months to look like, right.

[00:42:38] What do you need to build? How do you get the, you know, how do you, how do you build something. You know, short-term get that to scale and, you know, what's the long-term vision of this and are the things that you're doing right now matching up with the long-term vision for the car.

[00:43:00] [00:42:59] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:42:59] It's a lot, it's a huge balancing act, I imagine. And also just a lot, a lot of balls in the air. So you're, you're a juggler on a, on a unicycle. It sounds like and my husband is a clown. He was a clown in the circus. So I know of what I what's, I'm curious about the, how do I put this? You're it's it feels, it really does feel to me like you have a foot in several worlds, like you have the foot in the activist world, but you also have to have a foot in the sort of bottom line, financial interests world.

[00:43:29] And. What, where, what is the line there? What, what, when you have to make a decision based on what's best for the company, what's best for the bill for a billion what's

best for, you know, the, in your mind, what's best for the planet, the animals, et cetera. Where do you fall? How do you navigate that when you have to make those decisions?

[00:43:52] **Vikas Garg:** [00:43:52] Well, I think that we have a very strong sort of core set of values. Right. And I think it all [00:44:00] starts there. So one of the great things about running a company that's built around values and purpose is it's pretty, it's, it's pretty clear to everybody what you stand for. Right. And you know, it's pretty clear where you stand on a number of different things you know, in terms of right versus wrong in terms of.

[00:44:24] You know, do we do the right thing by people? Or do we take like a more sneaky approach? You know, like just generally it does clear up, it clears up a lot of confusion. It clears up, I'd say clears up a lot of stuff that other companies, you know, would have a problem with because at the end of the day, running a company that's based on values and purpose is an extraordinary filtering mechanism for who even comes into the door right now.

[00:44:52] Like, you know, and, and that, that also, I mean, I'm not gonna kid you, like, I sit here and lie to you. Like that's not a perfect thing either. [00:45:00] Sometimes you want to have the sort of the very opposite views. You want to have the conflict you want to have as sophisticated people. You want to have, you know, the most successful, but you want to have the best people who are going to help build your growth, you know, your, your growth engine.

[00:45:19] You want to have the most successful people, the most experienced people on product. You want to have the most successful people on biz dev. And so sometimes those sort of, as a company that is built around a mission and a company that's built around values, right. As opposed to, Hey, we're just going to build this really fun sort of video sharing app.

[00:45:39] Right. And let's just go out and we don't care what kind of content people are posting. We just want to make sure it goes viral and we want to build that. And, you know, and that's it. We want to create this highly addictive app. Well, you can then welcome just about anybody on the planet, into, you know, into that, except for maybe people who are really [00:46:00] values based.

[00:46:01] And so the difference is, is we're quite the opposite of that, right? And so I'd say that one of the biggest challenges that we faced in the flat in the first three years is actually scaling our team. So like, we're finally, you know, we finally have gotten to the stage like three years in where, and especially during last year, like we started last year, With eight, seven or eight people on the team full time.

[00:46:25] And today we're at 32. Wow. So like it finally, like last year in spite of COVID in spite of everything last year was really the year where we started to grow, where the team started to grow, where, you know, the, the, the, the number of years of experience and the depth of that experience in terms of colleagues, new colleagues signing up joining was, was, just, was, was, was really sort of got, got a big upgrade.

[00:46:52] And it's really nice because like, we have a very highly motivated team and a lot of the, a lot of the [00:47:00] folks who may not have as much experience what they lack and experience they make up for in motivation and initiative. But the reality of that is that. What ends up happening is you end up having a lot of debt.

[00:47:13] You ended up having a lot of technical debt on your engineering team. You end up building things on a weak foundation. You end up constantly wanting to iterate, but not necessarily having great plans around it. And so we're finally, you know, or you build something wanting to get to a next stage and maybe you get there, but then you're like, what's next?

[00:47:36] And you kind of forgot that like, okay, you might get to the next step, but have you thought five steps forward from there? And so like, we're finally getting better at a lot of those things. And you know, that, so being sort of a values-based organization, being an organization that has a very purposeful mission is now actually I'd say in a [00:48:00] way, a breath of fresh air for a lot of people that are kind of coming into the organization and that's something that's been missing in their lives.

[00:48:06] Working at other companies,

[00:48:09] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:48:09] you're singing my song. I love

[00:48:11] **Vikas Garg:** [00:48:11] it. I'm going to, I'm going

[00:48:12] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:48:12] to apply. That's it. I'm going to do it. Okay. So to be, to be perfectly Frank you know, I don't, I I'm, I feel a little bit like I'm like, yes, everything you just said and, and it feels, it feels just a little disingenuous, even though it's not disingenuous, I really wholeheartedly support your mission because it does feel like it's not a, if you're not being vegan, you're, you're directly responsible for killing animals perspective.

[00:48:39] It's more like a, Hey, this is something you can think about. And this is something you can dip your toe in if you will. And yet you y'all are activists all over the place. Right? So one of the things that I love, and this is a, I think maybe a gamified thing that you did is that for every 10 reviews you leave.

[00:49:00] [00:49:00] The company will make a donation. And I thought that was so I thought it was cool. I thought it was super cool that I got to choose a sanctuary to get my little \$10 donation from having given 10 reviews of, of dishes or whatever it was I did first. So what, what it, what role does that sense of play play in the app?

[00:49:25] **Vikas Garg:** [00:49:25] Yeah, so we started with this whole idea that look, you know, we, we want to create an impact. And we think that there's an opportunity here to build a really great company. And we're a really great technology company, a really great platform. And we, I just felt like, you know, people are signing up, they're going to be contributing information.

[00:49:47] That information is valuable. They're going to be spending time in their lives and how do we. How do we enrich that experience and how do we help people kind of connect back this idea, this small idea. [00:50:00] So we'll give you a sense of it. Like 65% of our users today are B eaters. 35% of our users are, are, are, are, are vegans and vegetarians.

[00:50:08] So for the 65% of people, right, I really felt like, what are, what can we do to help kind of. Create that connection. So they've gone and they've eaten something vegan or they've bought something that's environmentally friendly and cruelty-free, it might be, let's say it could be, you know, a vegan beauty product, or it could be you know, like the, a, a bag or, you know, a pair of shoes.

[00:50:33] That's, that's made without any animals harmed. And so, you know, they share that experience. They share whatever they purchase on the, on the platform to helping build our community. How do we keep them motivated and how do we gamify it a little bit? And how do we help them see that connection all the way through, with what they're buying with the life that that's impacting.

[00:50:55] And so that's how we started was if we could just reinforce this [00:51:00] and really create a daily sort of habit around them, choosing this lifestyle on a more regular basis. And we could game-ify that. And we could do that by connecting them. With really impactful causes around the world. And I know that you had captain Paul Watson on your show recently.

[00:51:20] But see shepherd is, is one of the organizations that we support that we are, we are, we are very, very, very honored to be partnered with them. But so for us it was, it really it's been, this is the sense of, okay, how do you help organizations around the world that are creating world-changing life-changing impact?

[00:51:38] How do you inspire people and how do you motivate people? You know, to basically keep going to, to keep, to, to, to, to keep trying to live this lifestyle and more regular basis by kind of gamifying it. And at the same time, reinforcing it with, Hey, look, this is the impact that's being created. So, you know, at the time the simplest thing that I could kind of come up with was, Hey, let's [00:52:00] put a little sort of award in people's pockets when they choose vegan.

[00:52:03] And we chose that to be a dollar. It's just really simple, right? It's a dollar. And what you can do with this on a dollar that you get, like in an Amazon gift card, or that you could go and spend on something, but it's a dollar that we donate to one of our partner organizations and we have about 65 partners around the world from, you know, ranging from farm animal sanctuaries and places like Argentina, to organizations like sea shepherd, which are really focused on Marine life to, you know, to organizations around the world, activist organizations.

[00:52:34] We, for instance, we support all three of the farm animal sanctuary is located in South Africa, do a lot of work in South Africa. And it's really just a global movement. Of course we do a lot of, you know, we have a lot of partners in the U S are closest to you as Woodstock in upstate New York in new Paltz.

[00:52:52] And Woodstock's been mowed. Woodstock was one of our earliest partners. So yeah, we've just been, you know, I've just been really focused on, on growing [00:53:00] that way and growing responsibly that way. And it's been amazing. I mean, we've donated over half a million dollars since we first got started to amazing organizations around the world.

[00:53:10] We're now supporting children's literacy programs in the developing world. So for a dollar, you can put a girl in school for a day for a dollar. You can buy a local language children's book for, for a kid you know, in, in, in a poor country for a dollar you can plant a tree as part of reforestation projects, In parts of all of pine parts around the world for a dollar, actually, not even for a dollar, but for 80 cents, you go through the United nations world food program and something called share the meal for 80 cents.

[00:53:43] You can feed a hungry child, three nutritious meals in a day 80 cents. Wow. Right. So like, we don't even think about 80 cents, right. That doesn't even buy you a pack of gum, but like 80 cents can feed a kid for a whole day. Right. It's an amazing program. [00:54:00] And the funny thing about it, most of the meals are plant-based.

[00:54:02] Most of the meals are a hundred percent plant-based right. Whenever possible. So, so this, these are the kinds of organizations that we think are making a real impact in the world. They're nonprofits. We want to support them. And a big part of what we do is really connect that our user journey back with that impact that they can create.

[00:54:20] And I'd say that's one of our most unique selling points for the platform is, Hey you know, we're creating impact in this way and we're just always working on how do we make this part of sort of the, the platform better. So you mentioned when you get to 10 posts, you get \$10, you get \$10 every time we get 10 posts, we're actually just, we just remove that barrier.

[00:54:40] So in the latest, in the latest version yeah, because we just felt like, Hey, you know, the reason we did it when we first started this two years ago, it was purely administrative was, you know, I'm literally sitting there and manually making these donations. Right. So is that okay? Well, like [00:55:00] let's, you know, and at the time time, in a given week, we were, we might've made a couple of a hundred dollars, a couple of hundred dollars donations.

[00:55:07] Now that number has grown. Now we're doing, you know, we're doing, we're doing like 40, \$50,000 a month that we're donating to organizations around the world sometimes more. And It, you know, it was just purely administrative is how do I manage all of this stuff? Manage all these donations and things like that.

[00:55:25] As, especially as we scale the number of partners, now we have more than 60. Wow. And so we've gotten better at what we do. We've gotten better at sort of, you know in terms of just building the platform. So this stuff can to some of it's, to some degree, some of it can be more automated and more responsive to the user.

[00:55:44] So yeah, we just went live with we just went live with that feature. So it's, you know, for the folks that are listening to the podcast, download the app, take a photo. The

next time you go to a restaurant, if you eat something vegan, take a photo of it. It's just like creating an Instagram [00:56:00] post. It takes 30 or 40 seconds.

[00:56:02] And you know, we'll put a dollar in your account that you can use to create impact. Or if you've got something at home, if you've just opened your fridge. Whether it's a bunch of kale or it's a pack of beyond sausages, or it's your favorite vegan butter from Yoko's or any other brand, take a photo of it and share it.

[00:56:23] You're going to help the company because, you know, ultimately that review helps the company. It goes online, it helps get them more customers in a way you're going to help that company. Even if the feedback is bad, you're still gonna help the company. You're gonna help that restaurant. You're gonna help other people discover that option and make the world a little bit more vegan every single time.

[00:56:48] And you're going to create impact for a life besides your own. And it's just fun. It's a fun thing to do, taking a photo posting it, you know, and really in a way, [00:57:00] creating impact and logging that on a day-to-day basis. So you have this beautiful sort of view of all of the wonderful vegan, you know, your whole sort of journey around all of this and whether you're vegan already.

[00:57:12] And you're just, you know, using it to record sort of, you know, your, your day-to-day habits and create this kind of impact or, Hey, you know, you want to see and socialize and be part of this community and, and, you know, which is really, really supportive. And we backed that up with this amazing little thing that we do which we think is really awesome.

[00:57:31] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:57:31] I think it's really awesome too. And there's another benefit that you haven't talked about, which is close to my heart because I'm a writer and that is. That you get to put your writing hat on when you create a review, when you write about it, and you say that something was scrumptious, or you say that it was malicious or that it needed this, or it needed that, or, or this is what you liked about it.

[00:57:52] That those reviews, you know, you say something like, I don't remember if it's 50 words or 50 characters per review on the, on the app. But the point [00:58:00] is that one of the things I love to do is give my I'm a know it all. I admit that. And, but I love giving my opinion. I love giving my review. I review everything I do.

[00:58:09] If I go traveling, I review the place, I do a travel guide. If I go to a new restaurant, I take pictures of the food and I review it and I love talking about it. And so one of the things that the app does is give you the opportunity to have your say, to say it in a way that's really fun and creative, but still to give your opinion on, on what you've experienced.

[00:58:30] And I think that's a really big positive in what you're

[00:58:33] **Vikas Garg:** [00:58:33] doing. Oh, thank you. I really appreciate you saying that.

[00:58:38] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [00:58:38] I mean, it's just the truth and take it from me. As I said, I'm a know it all. So I admit that feely there's anybody who's ever met me will go. Yes, she's a know it all. It's okay. So, so I, I am thrilled and I could, I could keep you talking for

the next six hours, but I know you have a life to get back to, and you have a daughter who's been knocking on the door and wanting your [00:59:00] attention.

[00:59:00] So I, I was wondering if you wouldn't mind sharing how people can find you on social, how people can find the app, and we're going to put it all in the show notes, but I kind of like having it said as well, just because people learn in different ways.

[00:59:18] **Vikas Garg:** [00:59:18] Yeah. Sure. Well, thank you. So the app, it's just called a billion, a B I L L I O N.

[00:59:24] And that's exactly who we are. We're trying to build a social movement for a billion people that makes the world a lot more sustainable that, you know, helps animals that helps people around the world that helps people live in a more healthier and more sustainable way in a happier way, in a more mindful way.

[00:59:39] So you can download the, a billion app in either app store and Google play, or if you have an iPhone in, in the iPhone and the apple app store it's completely free. And it's completely free to use. And and we do some really fun things in there. There's vouchers from restaurants every now and then there's lots of stuff going around.

[00:59:58] You can engage with businesses. [01:00:00] You know, you'll find that a lot of businesses will respond to feedback. A lot of companies are starting to jump on board. We've gotten a few thousand companies to sort of. To jump on board as well. And it just, it's just a great way to sort of record your daily impact and really find a supportive community around that.

[01:00:16] So it's called a billion, that's all one word. And we're of course you can also go to our website. It's a billion www.abillion.com where you'll find all of the information there, if you don't like to use apps. And and that's it. And then as far as find finding me, we're also obviously on all socials.

[01:00:32] So on Instagram, we're a billion and on Twitter where a billion app I'm on LinkedIn. I think we're just a billion, but yeah, you can find us on LinkedIn. You can find me on LinkedIn. I don't really hang out on platforms like Facebook. I don't have a personal sort of account on, on social media, a billions the only social media app that I actually use besides LinkedIn.

[01:00:52] So you can find me on LinkedIn as well and Picasso Garg. V I K S G a R G. And I'm based in [01:01:00] Singapore. So yeah, look out for me. And if you hear the podcast, please connect with me and let me know. I'd love to get your feedback, love to get your thoughts and love to get to know you better.

[01:01:09] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [01:01:09] Ah, that's awesome.

[01:01:10] And you know, we didn't really talk about that mindfulness aspect and now I'm sorry, we didn't, you're going to have to come back again and we're going to have to get into the nitty and the gritty of that, because there's something very powerful about the mindfulness aspect of feeling like you're in balance.

[01:01:26] And in fact, if you wouldn't mind talking about that for a second, I'd love to hear your thoughts on what mindfulness is and how it relates to what your, what your mission is. If you don't mind.

[01:01:38] **Vikas Garg:** [01:01:38] Yeah, no, it's fine. You know, I think that living a life full of values and purpose is, is something that really can drive mindfulness.

[01:01:46] I guess if the question is what is mindfulness is it's, it's having. Sort of God, I it's like, I'm like, don't use it. I'm using another word to define and define a word, but I'd say it's [01:02:00] consciousness, you know, it's, it's having something that grounds you and helps you feel connected and helps you sort of navigate is maybe the best way that I can describe it.

[01:02:12] And I'm sure that there's other sort of much better people who can define much better way, but to me, that's kind of what it is. Right. And I'd say the great thing about being vegan is that literally every single decision and choice you make, and there was a Cornell university study, 15, 20 years back that talked about how often.

[01:02:36] We make food decisions every single day. And I still to this day, like, don't understand this number, but like the study said that we make like 200 or 250 food decisions every day. Yeah. Every one of us. Right. And I guess I, I, the way that I think about it and maybe it's like, I have, you know, I've got a bottle of water here.

[01:02:56] It's like every time I decide to take a sip of that water, that probably counts as a [01:03:00] food decision. But the point is that like, you know, as a vegan food is, or somebody who's looking for vegan food or wants to eat vegan food, food is constantly on my mind. Right? What am I going to eat? Where am I going to go?

[01:03:12] You know, all of this stuff. And I don't think it's too dissimilar for others, but the difference is if, when you're vegan and you're looking for vegan food, that's like, you're voting. With your values every single time. Right. And it, it, that's in a way that creates a tremendous amount of mindfulness. Right.

[01:03:34] The other thing that I do is, is you've, I I've found a practice that works for me that creates a lot of mindfulness and a lot of people have a practice or something that they do. And so, you know, like for me, it's, it's trying to smile more a thing that I do that the Dalai Lama does, which has been transformational for me in my life, you know?

[01:03:56] And, and I don't think that you need to believe in [01:04:00] God for anyone who's listening and is not religious. I don't think it's so much about believing in God as much as like, just sort of blessing somebody or taking a time to sort of. Acknowledge somebody's presence when you walk into a room or if you're out for a run in the morning or you're just walking around and you see somebody smile at them, or if that feels weird, because I so probably feels weird to a lot of people to smile at a stranger, right.

[01:04:29] Smile inside. Or what I do is I take the opportunity to just inside say something as small as God bless you. Right. Or just bless you. And that little acknowledgement of that

person in a positive way, for me, not only makes me feel connected right. But also creates a lot of positivity and mindfulness. So that's what mindfulness is to me.

[01:04:54] And I'd say my biggest daily practice around mindfulness is just, that is acknowledging [01:05:00] people is just constantly acknowledging people. And I find that sometimes when I deviate away from that, that's when I go to my unhappy place. So yeah, so that's that in a way is sort of what mindfulness means to me.

[01:05:10] As far as, you know, the platform, it is again it's how do we plant the seeds and create a very positive encouraging environment, you know, for sure and change social media. So we actually can find opportunities to acknowledge each other, to be mindful of each other, to be respectful, to, to like, you know, to, to, to, to, to really reinforce our daily habits and create better daily habits.

[01:05:36] And that's mindfulness to us.

[01:05:41] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [01:05:41] I love that. It's so my, my practice is not to acknowledge them internally. I do this interesting thing where I, if I'm out and about, I find someone. Who I pass in the street at usually almost always a woman to be, to be honest. And I compliment her. I will tell her something that [01:06:00] I, that I think is beautiful about her.

[01:06:02] And then I walk on, it's not like a, it's not like I'm stopping to talk with her or anything. It's just a, your eyes are beautiful. And then I move on and I've had women start crying because they weren't feeling beautiful or they weren't feeling happy. And that. That sort of pushed them into this place of being joyful and this compliment out of the blue.

[01:06:25] So that's my practice. And I think I love that you have a practice that that is, that is less intrusive. I feel like I'm probably pretty intrusive when I stopped them in the middle of walking down the street to tell them that I like that I like their eyes. So, so I have this question that I ask everybody who comes on the show.

[01:06:43] And it's a silly question. It's the last question. And I find that even though it's a silly question that it gives poignant answers. And so here's the question. If you had an airplane that could sky write anything for the whole world to [01:07:00] see, what would you say?

[01:07:06] **Vikas Garg:** [01:07:06] Oh, wow. Interesting question. Oh man. That's a, that's a, that's a very, very good question. Thank you. I would say, be kind,

[01:07:20] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [01:07:20] I love that. I love, love, love that. Yeah. And you might be surprised how many people who I really respect who've been on the show. Cause I don't have anybody on the show. I don't respect whose answer is behind it's it is, it is so many people like you who are living their values, treat kindness as something that's.

[01:07:43] So that's critical. That's crucial in, in the world. So I thank you for that. I really appreciate you saying that because it just reinforces that notion that the people out there

like you, who are living in that values driven space. Have kindness at the forefront [01:08:00] because I'm really grateful that you've taken the time to be here on the show.

[01:08:04] Thank you so much for being

[01:08:05] **Vikas Garg:** [01:08:05] here. How has my pleasure is a little bit and thank you for reaching out. And it was an absolute pleasure getting to know you today and thank you for all of the questions and just delighted to, to be on the show. Hopefully get a chance to see you in back in New York.

[01:08:19] At some point well, and who knows. Right.

[01:08:24] **Izolda Trakhtenberg:** [01:08:24] And, and I might, I might look you up when I go to Singapore, cause it's on my bucket list for traveling. So absolutely wonderful. Awesome. Oh, you have just been listening to the cost guard, talking about a billion. The app that is starting has started a movement and will hopefully change the world with at least a billion people who are committed to a plant-based lifestyle by 2030, this has been the innovative mindset podcast I have been and will continue to be as old attract Nunberg.

[01:08:53] I thank you for listening until next time. This is as older reminding you to listen, learn, laugh, and love. [01:09:00] A whole lot.

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