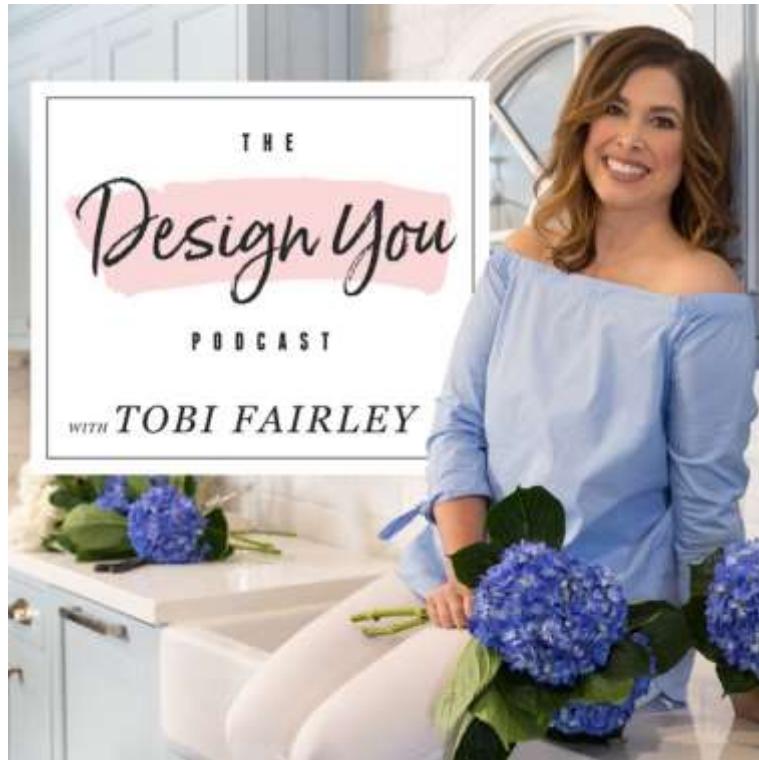


Ep #126: Turn Pain into Power with Valerie Gangas



Full Episode Transcript

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Tobi Fairley

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Tobi Fairley: You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode #126.

Female Announcer: Welcome to the *The Design You Podcast*, a show where interior designers and creatives learn to say, “No” to busy and say, “Yes” to more health, wealth, and joy. Here is your host, Tobi Fairley.

Tobi Fairley: Hey, everybody. How are you? Are you feeling anxiety right now? We've been in this pandemic for a while, right? Is it five months? Six months? I don't know I lose count and I'm sure you do, too.

Well, today on the podcast we're going to talk about this. We're going to talk about why we're feeling anxious and how we can really start to use this time as an opportunity to go even deeper into the best version of ourselves. So, today I'm talking with Valerie Gangas and she's a transformational speaker and a life coach and an author of a book called, *Enlightenment is Sexy*, which I love. The subtitle is, *Every Woman's Guide to a Magical Life*.

She really specializes in helping people make radical shifts in their self-perception to gain a deeper understanding of who they are. So, the whole point is she helps people genuinely live and thrive in the world and she does that through sharing her own story and her own transformation and experience with transcendental meditation and just really developing a higher level of consciousness.

I know that this is an interesting and meaningful episode, at least for me, and I hope that you'll listen with a really open mind. Because there's so much we can be doing in our own lives and with ourselves in this time that is so unprecedented. It's like in no time that we've ever felt before and if we can really get an understanding of what's creating the anxiety and the stress in our lives and think differently to show up in a new way and really, again, use this time to become a completely different version of ourselves.

Because let's just be clear, we're probably not going back to the version we were pre-pandemic, pre-George Floyd, pre-everything that has happened in 2020, right? I don't know that we can go back or that we even want to in

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a lot of ways. But I think as opposed to resisting and creating so much anxiety, if we can learn to lean into this and use it as a catalyst to become a different version and a better version of ourselves, one we really, really love then I think it will all be at least the silver lining for all that we've been through this year.

So, I think episode plays greatly with the Dayka Robinson episode that was recent, at the end of July. If you haven't heard that one put these two together and you're really on your way to this whole other way of showing up in your life.

Get out your notepad, again – this one actually, maybe your journal. You're going to want to do some thinking with this episode and see what comes up for you because this is a really, really interesting conversation with Valerie Gangas.

Tobi Fairley: Hey, Valerie, welcome to *The Design You Podcast*.

Valerie Gangas: Thanks for having me on.

Tobi Fairley: You're so welcome. So, this is a very interesting topic to me. We're going to talk today about the extreme levels of anxiety that people are feeling in the world and especially in America right now. Set the scene for everyone. Tell them a little bit why you are the right person for them to be listening to when it comes to things like dealing with anxiety.

Tell us a little bit about how you are and your story so that they kind of understand what perspective you're coming from and then we're going to get into what's happening every day for most of us, the news, everything else that's causing extreme anxiety and we'll start to get into some ways that we can really deal with that.

Valerie Gangas: So, growing up I never remember feeling very anxious or depressed or anything like that. I remember worrying that my mom was going to pass away because she had stage 4 breast cancer and she was in treatment for almost 14 years, so it was a really long run and I remember

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that was something that I was carrying with me that was always in the back of my mind. I worried about her, but I never experienced extreme anxiety and extreme depression. It was maybe like a little bit of floating anxiety because of her situation.

Then in 2011 she passed away and it felt like all of the stress I had ever felt in my whole life just hit me at once and I started having panic attacks. I was very depressed. I became suicidal. I was not functioning at all. I couldn't work, couldn't leave the house.

Basically, I was brought to my knees and now I had experienced what it felt like to just be destroyed. What happened to me is through a series of events I ended up learning how to meditate, transcendental meditation specifically, and in one meditation I went from feeling suicidal – I remember telling my therapist a week before, “I think you need to put me in a hospital. I’m really sick. I can’t pull out of this.”

Then I learned to meditate and it all lifted. It was like I received a miracle. So, from that point on within weeks of learning how to meditate I was working at Oprah Winfrey’s studio giving talks about meditation and things like anxiety and depression and sleeping disorders. Then, I started speaking all over the city of Chicago on these topics.

Now, during this pandemic I, too, started feeling some anxiety that I had not felt in nine years. I mean, it was so intense. I was telling you before we started the interview that I was in San Francisco when this whole thing started and they were the first city to go into lockdown. I didn’t know what it meant.

I didn’t know if the National Guard was going to come in and lock us in our houses. I felt really, really scared and it took me I’d say at least a month to really wrap my mind around how am I going to handle this and how am I going to help other people? Now, four months later I’ve been in a really good place but it took a lot of effort on my part to get there. It was overwhelming.

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Tobi Fairley: Yeah, which is so interesting because you had already been through this process before so at least you kind of knew what to do about it because you knew how you had felt in the past when you had been in that really deep place. But for a lot of people although they have felt – gosh, I think we have an epidemic of anxiety in the world in general, at least a constant low-level anxiety.

But it's not very often as in never before have we seen a scenario where at the same time we have a pandemic, we have a bunch of political unrest, we have racial and social justice issues happening, we have all these, economic downturn, potential recession. It is like you know how they say, "Don't make five major life changes at once"?

They're like, "Don't get married and move and get a dog and get a new job." I feel like we just did that but not by our own choosing and here we are in the midst of every bit of that, right?

Valerie Gangas: That is perfect what you just said because that is what it feels like. All of a sudden our lives were just turned upside down and at least, to me, it felt like it came out of nowhere. I mean, I was starting to hear whispers about this virus, but I was like, "Who cares? I mean, whatever, it's going to be fine."

Then it just hit me like a hurricane, so I'm sure everyone was experiencing that shock. All of a sudden you're not going to work, you're not leaving your house, you're not seeing your friends, you're not dating, you're not doing anything and that is really hard for people, especially people that aren't used to spending time alone or used to some more silence.

I was used to that, but this still was intense and this leads me back to what we were saying, again, before the interview. It felt like there was a lack of leadership. I had no idea what was going on and that is part of the reason I think I felt so anxious because I felt like no one knew what was happening.

Tobi Fairley: Right, yeah, I think so, too. I was asking you, I was like, "What do you think it is?" We were just kind of prepping for our interview

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and you said, "I think it's a few things." You said, "I think the news terrifies people every day. I think there's a lack of leadership. I think that we've never seen our country this divided." No matter which side of the issue you're on we're not trying to make this political necessarily, we're just like, "It is so divided." I think that every day because I am on one particular side and I feel very strongly about that side and I know that my friends who are on the other side or my family members feel equally as strongly and I think we're at a place where nobody has any interest in moving closer together.

So, I feel like it's really interesting. Speak to that a little bit. Because I agree with you that there's a lack of leadership, and again, that can mean any number of things depending on what side you're on. It can mean lack of leadership from the President, it can mean from Congress, it can mean locally. But in general, it's just felt like nobody is really in charge. We don't know who to trust. So, all of these things are going to create a ton of anxiety because of the way we're thinking about it.

Valerie Gangas: Yeah, I mean, our own President was refusing to wear a mask so what kind of message is that sending out? I feel like when you look at other countries and they also went into total lockdown, they were able to get this under control because people actually took the steps in order to stop this virus and our country that didn't happen here.

So, now we have these pockets of Florida, Texas where it's exploding again and it feels like we're back at ground zero after all the sacrifices a lot of us made. That, in and of itself, it frustrating, so that definitely did not help the situation.

It's been five months now. I think about all of those restaurant owners or small business owners, how are they going to open back up? How are they going to make it? All of those people their lives have been destroyed and we're sitting around arguing on social media about if we should wear a mask or not.

Tobi Fairley: Right, if schools should open, if we should wear a mask. Everything is so binary and dualistic. It's always just two choices in our

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mind. It's this or that. So dualistic thinking, right? It's either got to be open or closed. Wear it or don't wear it. To me, we've gotten so binary in our thinking, and I'm sure we have been for years, but that can add so much anxiety, too, because we're always either the victim or the villain. We're always on the good side or the bad side depending on what our beliefs are and as long as you're picking a side you're also, I feel like, creating the anxiety of always having to watch your back. Or who's not on your side? Or who's against you?

It creates a lack of safety. Again, I'm sure it feels this way whichever side of the coin you're on, right?

Valerie Gangas: Right, and life is not black and white like you do not – okay, now let's get into higher states of consciousness, expanded awareness. When you are operating at that level you don't see things as this or that, black or white, that's not how it is. There's many, many areas in-between but it seems like our family, our friends, people around us, the news, everything it's all black and white and yes, that would cause anxiety.

So, now you go to dinner at your family's house or your friend's house and you have your uncle or whatever that's on the other side of you and it's going to be a fight if you talk about anything. Then, in your mind you're like, "How can this person think this way? I thought I knew them."

Tobi Fairley: Right, and we're like, "I'm just on the side of common sense here."

Valerie Gangas: Common sense, right, but like you said that other side they also feel like they're using common sense and they're right and you are wrong. All of that gross energy is just in the air. It's everywhere. You cannot escape it.

Tobi Fairley: Right. So, we've never been this divided. I don't even know that I believe that we can be united. I mean, I hope that we can again, but I don't know that I believe – I mean, it'll look different. There will be different times when things change or we're going to hit a tipping point where we

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have no choice but to which it feels like we're almost close to that right now.

It's hard for me to even envision, because like I said I don't have any intention of thinking differently in a lot of ways. I can, for sure, be open-minded about things, but there are certain non-negotiables for me and there are on the other side. So, if we're not going to come back together necessarily and we don't have leadership or we don't feel like we do and the news is scary, what do we start to do?

What can we do individually? Which I kind of hate that a little bit because the whole problem is that we only think of ourselves a lot of times and that's how we get so divided, but at this moment if that's all we can control is ourselves and if we can get ourselves out of this state of anxiety, maybe things will change. How do we start to move in that direction of some level of healing or calming ourselves? What does that look like?

Valerie Gangas: Well, first of all, if people are making decisions from a place of fear, we have a problem on our hands.

Tobi Fairley: Yes, totally, 100%, yes.

Valerie Gangas: That's not good thinking going on. So, again, moving yourself out of that place so you can think clearly, make good decisions and I always tell people, "Educate yourself." This virus is going on, but the reality is 98 or 99% of people that get it they're fine. They're okay. I'm not saying don't wear a mask and don't take precautions, but if you watch the news and every single time a person dies they talk about it and people die every day from cancer or heart attacks, all sorts of things.

I spent basically 20 years in a hospital with my mom and my brothers and in ICUs, all of that. I mean, hospitals are always pretty full and people are sick. We all die, but if you keep focusing on the news and how much they're scaring you I don't know if you'll ever stop feeling anxious because it's just creating so much fear.

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I always tell people, “Turn the news off.” If something major happens, you’re going to hear about it, but 24/7 listening to that it’s so, so unhealthy.

Tobi Fairley: Yeah, and I think also to your point it’s not either or. It’s not like I turn off the news and then I just throw caution to the wind because people are dying. It’s not either or, it’s both and. It’s like turn off the news and still put your mask on and take normal precautions. These make sense.

I think we’re kind of all-or-nothing thinking. We’re either like all in to the fear and listening to every word and terrifying ourselves that we’re going to die or we’re like, “Okay, well if I’m going to turn that off I’ll just go back to normal.” It’s not that. It’s some place to get in the middle, right?

Valerie Gangas: It is. I always tell people, “Save yourself.” Emotionally, mentally save yourself. Don’t fall into this trap of constantly reading the headlines. They’re going to be bad because that’s how they make money. That’s how newspapers and websites and TV stations make money. I’m sure all the news stations their numbers are probably through the roof right now and they love it.

When the protests were going on, we didn’t hear anything about the coronavirus and I was like, “Where did it go?”

Tobi Fairley: Right.

Valerie Gangas: So, there’s a lot of distrust I think of the news media now because of all these different stories that we’re getting. We don’t know who to listen to, who to follow, and then you, again, have the President saying how horrible they are, too. It’s all mixed up. So, you have to go inward now. You have to take care of yourself. Whether that’s your diet, taking long walks, meditating, yoga, I don’t care what you have to do but the bottom line is you have to take care of yourself in order to survive this.

You can no longer look outside of yourself for answers and someone is going to say to you, “It’s time to take it inward.”

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Tobi Fairley: Yes. I love this so much because I think that was always the truth, but we could get away with looking outside of ourselves which was still creating the anxiety we had. Before the comparison and the striving and the proving and all of that was still created by the looking outside of ourselves. It just wasn't quite the same sense of urgency as some of these things that we're dealing with right now, but I love that what you're saying is that it is time. You may not have been listening when it was more of a whisper of stop comparing yourself, but now it's like shouting at us. You've got to turn inward. This is an inside job. You've got to take care of you. You've got to trust yourself.

There's a knowing inside each of us, I think, that we know what's right for us. We know when we show up our best. We know when we get into the news or negativity or arguments with people it doesn't serve us and I absolutely love this. I think, to me, what's happening – and we'll talk about both the going inward, but also something you said earlier which I wrote down I thought it was so interesting, you said there's a lot of silence right now because we've been by ourselves or isolated and people aren't used to it and I agree with you and I do think that's creating the anxiety, but the interesting thing is for some of us it's also creating an opportunity to do some really deep internal personal work.

Valerie Gangas: Oh, 100%.

Tobi Fairley: It's a beautiful petri dish or laboratory of – my mom and I were saying this on a conversation earlier today. We kind of feel exhausted right now of how much we're working on ourselves, what we believe in and all kinds of things but it's kind of like there's a wide open space to do that and we don't have anything to distract us from it, right?

Valerie Gangas: Not everybody – they'll try and run from it.

Tobi Fairley: Totally.

Valerie Gangas: You can't run forever. You can pour yourself a drink every night and be like, "I'm not going to think about it," but eventually it's going to

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catch up with you and that's what happened to me when my mom died. I was just living the life of Riley and nothing was going to touch me, but then it was like God, the universe, whatever, took the one thing away from me that was going to take me down and it did. In that situation I was transformed as a person.

Then, I took that pain and I turned it into power. I think Richard Rohr, he's one of my favorite writers –

Tobi Fairley: Oh my gosh, that's so amazing. We are so sympatico. He is one of my favorite humans on the planet and I read all of his books. I just read, actually I've never read it before, *The Naked Now*. Oh my God. I had read so many of the other ones and I hadn't read that one and I just finished it over the weekend. Oh my gosh. Okay, so Richard Rohr, yes, absolutely 100% everything about him. So, tell me the things that you were going to say about him.

Valerie Gangas: Well, he talks about all great spirituality is transforming your pain and if you don't transform it you will turn around and hurt other people with that pain. That's what it's there for.

Tobi Fairley: Right.

Valerie Gangas: The system that is set up for us humans is actually perfect. So, we do experience these setbacks, these heartaches, these losses, health issues, all the problems but it's the doorway for us to transform as people and it's always an inside job. Yes, it hurts and yes, it sucks, but that's also your opportunity.

So, I don't know if you actually realize that until it's happening to you because you can read about it and be like, "Yeah, maybe," but when it happens to you and you surrender because you are no longer in control of your life that's when magical things start happening. That's when you really start living. Rohr and Thomas Merton call it your second half of life.

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Tobi Fairley: Right, exactly. That third eye thinking, the non-dualistic. That's where that comes from all of my –

Valerie Gangas: When you said that I was like, "Does she like Rohr?"

Tobi Fairley: Totally, I like love, love, love him, and you're right. He says, like you said, that there's really only two things in life that really bring us to this point which is great love and great suffering or great love and great pain. In a sense we're going through both of those right now in so many very visceral ways. The people we love most we're afraid for their health, there's a lot of suffering in general in the world and I think that again, like we're saying, if you're listening, if you're of that mindset, if you're paying attention, it's such an opportunity to step into a different version and I agree with you. It's been such a portal, every one of these individual things we're talking about.

I was just talking to a friend last night who also loves Richard Rohr, we were talking about – gosh, I don't even remember who all of other authors and people that we love and we were saying even how we feel politically, which this is not a political conversation with you and I, but even how we feel about politics if the things we don't like right now weren't happening we wouldn't be moving into the kind of action or belief that we're moving into right now.

So, as much as we can say, "I wish the pandemic weren't here. I wish politics were different. I wish George Floyd was still here" and all of that would be true without each one of those things we don't move into that what you were saying Richard calls "Second half of life." That is the catalyst for the next version of ourselves, right?

Valerie Gangas: Right, it is the catalyst for our transformation and throw in a contemplative practice or like me, I practice TM which is very, very similar to centering prayer. It's basically very similar. So, going past just your thinking mind and bringing some silence into your life that allows you to expand your awareness and really witness what's going on without being so emotionally attached to it. Because when you're emotionally to

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everything and you're like a leaf in the wind, you're just being blown around, there's fear and anxiety, you're not making good decisions. You're not in a good place.

So, that idea of getting yourself to a good place where you can witness all of these things that are happening in the world, but you're not shaken by them, that is true power. That is spiritual power that I think we're made for that, but no one tells you to do that. I mean, I just happened to have a mom, she was an ex-nun, she was a meditator, she wrote mystical poetry. She was in that world so she taught me to live from the inside out, but I know that that's rare.

Tobi Fairley: Yes, totally rare, and it's not natural that most of us know what to do in silence in that place because anxiety usually is the very first feeling that comes up for people because we're so used to just filling all the space with talking or entertainment or TV or busyness or overworking or some other kind of buffering or numbing or whatever and we do that so as, of course you and I both know, so that we don't have to feel the anxiety.

Valerie Gangas: But you can't run forever.

Tobi Fairley: But you can't run forever and what I love to think about is if the feeling is there to teach us something or to tell us something or to have us stop doing something or to have us start doing something and we keep covering it up then we're missing the entire point of what we're supposed to be hearing, right? But most of us aren't willing to be quiet long enough to even hear the message, right?

Valerie Gangas: Don't want to hear the message, don't want to make changes. It's hard to transform your life. It's not easy. I mean, I had a wonderful experience, but really that was just the beginning. I had to change every aspect of my life and there's no road map for that when all of a sudden you're living differently.

There's wonderful writers out there and hopefully you meet friends that can help you along the way, but really this is an individual process and it builds

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character and it builds strength to say, “I’m going to do it my way. I’m going to do things that are good for me and I don’t care what anyone else says.” The old rules no longer apply to you. Now, it’s a new life, but that take courage and dedication and inner strength.

I feel like a lot of that inner strength does come from silence, but first you’ve got to make it through the anxiety and the confusion and all of that, but it helps you. It’s the wind at your back when you start incorporating that into your life.

Tobi Fairley: Yes, I agree and I think when I was just hearing you say that I think what comes up for most people is some kind of belief that we can’t survive the anxiety or whatever which brings up resistance. The truth is, that you and I both know I’m sure, and many other people have learned is that the resistance that we’re creating is the only problem.

The anxiety may not feel great, but it doesn’t kill you. It’s not that uncomfortable. It’s just a sensation in your body. It’s honestly, not the big deal that I think the resistance often is the bigger problem than the anxiety itself.

Valerie Gangas: Yeah, and it’s hard when people are having panic attacks all the time or real anxiety, but I have found that many people that have a lot of anxiety like that there’s some part of their life that I think it was Brené Brown that said if you trade your authenticity for safety then what you will get from that is eating disorder, anxiety, depression.

Tobi Fairley: Yes.

Valerie Gangas: It’s not only about keeping secrets, but not truly living an authentic life. That friction inside of you, the thing that doesn’t add up causes anxiety. So, now we’re in a pandemic, what if you’re in a bad marriage? Or you hate your job? Whatever, now it’s in your face and so there’s no running from it. It’s a gift, but it’s also going to terrorize you if you don’t make some changes. Again, there’s nowhere to run now so the anxiety levels are through the roof because I think these truths are coming

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out, they're in your face and it's showing you like, "Wait, I'm not living an authentic life," and that will cause massive anxiety.

Tobi Fairley: I agree with you and I think one of the other things I was thinking about a moment ago, well now and then a few minutes before when you were talking about having the courage to step into who you really are, I think one of the problems is things like meditation, yoga, eating right, all of these things we talk about and they become popular in like a surface level.

We all know it's the buzzword and it's the new cool thing or it's not even that new anymore, but the interesting thing is when we really look at a lot of people very few people are actually - there's a lot of lip service to it. People aren't actually practicing it because they're not really willing to do the deeper level of work with it and that – what comes up, in my opinion, when you actually start doing the work is this level of authenticity that you were talking about and the way you show up and change because of that is not going to be super popular to the world and your friends and everybody else.

Valerie Gangas: Not going to be popular. Your friends and family are not going to like it. They're going to think you're selfish or a whole host of –

Tobi Fairley: Oh, totally. It could be a religious excuse that it's not right. It could be a selfish excuse. It could be your work. Honestly, you almost can't win if you're looking outside of yourself because there's going to be someone believing you're not doing it wrong for all the different reasons on all the different sides of the issue, right?

Valerie Gangas: Yes, and you're going to make people very uncomfortable because now you're a different person. Now, you're like in control of your life. You're making decisions on your own. You're not seeking permission from anybody and they want the old you back.

Tobi Fairley: Totally.

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Valerie Gangas: They want the 20-year-old you back that they can – it's not about control, but it's about making everyone feel comfortable. Like, don't rock the boat. So, for me when I experienced this unbelievable grace that just hit me I stayed in Chicago for two more years but I started working with the David Lynch Foundation. Previously, I was in the restaurant and bar business, so really had a different life and I started spending a lot of time alone because my inner world was more interesting than anything that was happening outside of me.

I wanted to write my first book, so I decided to totally change my life and I moved out to a farm in Iowa in the middle of nowhere just so I could be alone, be with nature and give it my best shot writing a book. It was transformative also because I had never experienced that level of silence in and outside of myself and it opened up so much creativity and love and everything inside of me and I was like, "Wow, I didn't even know this existed." I also found a group of people that understood me, so there wasn't that conflict happening like it was with maybe my old friends and stuff. They weren't used to the new Val or whatever.

Tobi Fairley: Right. I love so many things you said. Number one, the fact that you chose to move out in the middle of nowhere so you could create this silence was amazing and what people aren't noticing is that even though it wasn't our idea we were just given the opportunity to do that very thing right where we live if we wanted to think of it that way, right?

We were totally handed that, but we're resisting it, we don't want it, it's not our choice, we don't like people to tell us what to do. All of that stuff. So, that's interesting. Then, a couple of other things, when you were talking about how when we were saying it's not going to be popular to become your truest version of yourself, it was reminding of the book, which I'm sure you've probably read it. It sounds like it would be up your alley, *Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself*. Do you know that book? It's Dr. Dispenza.

Valerie Gangas: He wrote *Becoming Supernatural*, too, right?

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Tobi Fairley: Yes, exactly. So, in that book he talks about how when we do this work – and the book is based on meditation. He has a whole meditation practice that he specifically teaches you to get to this level of yourself, but he talks about how, of course everybody wants us to not change because not for our own selves it's for them because what people like about us, especially if we're moving from a place of where we used to be more negative or gossipy or connecting on things that weren't really serving us. He's like, well then you start to change, you start to elevate, people want you to be yourself because you were playing a role of reflecting back to them the false version of themselves.

When you start looking like not a mirror to them anymore you've changed and it's showing them all the ways that they're starting to question their own beliefs or whatever they don't like. They want you to go back to just being who you were so they can forget their own work in a sense and it's real fascinating when he talks about that.

So, of course, in doing our work we have to be courageous enough to not care what other people are going to say about it because that's just meaning if they're uncomfortable it's bringing up some level of their own personal work which I think is really interesting.

Valerie Gangas: Right. I feel what we're talking about those are the beginning stages when you see the contrast of the before and after of how you've changed. Then, I think eventually you begin to just – you just don't care anymore. It doesn't bother you. I mean, it is a little shocking at first and maybe confusing, but then you meet other people that are supportive and have the same vibe as you or whatever.

Tobi Fairley: Totally.

Valerie Gangas: I seek people now that can see me, that can truly see me and part of the reason I got so sick after my mom died was because I was kind of different my whole life in a way and I felt like she was the only one that could truly see me and so when she died I was like what's the point of being here? No one is going understand me or I mean, really see into me.

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I got really lucky because I moved to a small town in Iowa and the whole town meditates. So, I met the grooviest, coolest people that I consider like my soul family. It was like a miracle. I do think you venture out and you do meet other people that become your closest friends and family because now you're operating on a different level.

Tobi Fairley: I agree.

Valerie Gangas: You leave the other stuff behind or you don't or you're just like indifferent.

Tobi Fairley: I think you're right and gosh, I relate so much. I'm so lucky to still have my mom. She's in great health, she's 72, same thing like she is my person. Then, I have a daughter and she's kind of my other person and so often, like you, I felt like I didn't kind of have a squad. I didn't have those connections at a certain level. I've always been a seeker, I've always been progressive, I've always done a lot of personal development work and so I was just talking to my friend, Gail, today about this what you and I are recording on the day that another episode on the podcast came out from a friend of mine, Dayka Robinson who was essentially in so many words calling us to do the same thing; to step into this authentic version of ourselves.

My friend, Gail, was saying to me, "I'm going to change a lot of things. This is really getting my attention of the things that I need to prune away and the ways that I've been showing up that I knew weren't how I wanted to be." I think part of the courage that we're talking about is that we have to be willing to either not care or be okay with things like seasons and relationships kind of coming to an end or things running their course or being open to finding the new squad of people. It doesn't mean you have to do anything that's in conflict or cause blow-ups or have arguments or anything like that, but I think just opening ourselves up to moving into like you're saying new groups of people that really see us, that really know us at a level that are like-minded, that support you.

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There's just a level of that that I think a lot of us have denied ourselves for a lot of years. We did the opposite. Instead of becoming who we are and finding the new squad we tried constantly to fit into what would fit in the old squad which never works, right?

Valerie Gangas: It never works and I think eventually all of this, all these things we're talking about just become natural. You just start running into people. Like, I met you and you told me, "I like Richard Rohr," instantly then I felt connected because then I knew, I just knew. I think there's a lot of synchronicity that happens when you start living this way. Back to eating well and exercising, again, I think that's just a natural part of it, too. You are operating at a higher level, you have more energy inside of you and so when you look at your body now there's more respect.

Tobi Fairley: Yes.

Valerie Gangas: I want to eat food that will allow my body to keep up with my consciousness, basically. It's just everything about your life changes. So when people talk about like doing yoga or eating well it becomes that. You no longer slam a case of beer and eat a big pizza every night. You're not going to live like that because your [inaudible] allow for it.

Tobi Fairley: I love what you said of your habits aligning with your consciousness or supporting your consciousness. That is such a beautiful way to put that because I think, for me, what has happened over these, I don't know however many years I've been on this similar journey is the closer you get to this kind of way of being – you used to maybe still try to eat well or do yoga, but it had a completely different motivation. It was to look a certain way or for your body to be acceptable to other people or for you to fit into some kind of social construct and that's why you never would maintain it and has all these fits and starts because you weren't really ever doing it for you, you were doing it to be liked or perceived a certain way or whatever which is so out of alignment.

Then, when you do the work to get to this higher level of consciousness and you're in an essence vibrating on a whole totally different plane then

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you're right, your thinking changes and you're like, I don't care if my body never is an inch or smidgen smaller or different or anything that it is physically on the outside for other people to perceive, but what I want to do is show up in a way that I can live this life that I want to. That I can make a difference or feel good every day or yeah, totally.

Valerie Gangas: You want to have the energy to support this new level of consciousness like we said. It's so funny. While you're talking I was thinking about, I had a personal trainer and I would work out two hours a day and I wanted to fit into all these cocktail dresses that I had. That was like my motivation and I never, ever have thoughts like that anymore. Like, I just want to feel good and keep growing in this. That's my motivation, so it's, again, just totally natural now. There's no effort there really. It's just I make good decisions because I just want to feel well always.

Tobi Fairley: Yeah, I agree and I think, to me, that is the ultimate freedom. To me, really, freedom is the opposite or antithesis of anxiety which is you trapped in your own body or in your own mind. So, like this stepping into like an honest version of you is that ultimate freedom from – not that you won't ever feel anxious. Of course, all kinds of feelings will come and pass through your body, but you can see them for what they are. You can know why you feel that way.

You'll be like, "Oh, interesting, because I'm thinking about this," or, "I've had the TV on for a few hours of course I feel anxious."

Valerie Gangas: More insight, more self-awareness.

Tobi Fairley: Totally self-aware.

Valerie Gangas: I always tell people, if you cross this bridge and you really do this your life will never be ordinary again. It'll never be ordinary because you will see the wonder in everything. You can just take a walk and feel like, this is incredible. Everything is lighter, everything is better, it just takes work at the beginning, maybe for a long time, but it takes work. You've got

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to make a lot of changes and all of that, but when you fall into your groove it's the only place I'd ever want to be.

Tobi Fairley: I agree. Even just thinking about it, you're like how much can I lean in? If it feels this good and I'm only at whatever point I'm currently on for me like year 48 of this journey then how much better is it going to feel? That's so opposite of a lot us telling a story of, well, if our country is here right now where are we going to be – because you know I was saying I can't really imagine us coming back together, but at the same time I don't have any fear over that because I'm more leaning into the work I'm doing and this other level, like you said, of consciousness. I'm not sitting around going, "Oh my gosh, it's all over. I'm so terrified for our future." I'm like, "No, how can I lean in harder to this work that I'm doing?"

Valerie Gangas: Each one of us that changes, that grows, you influence all of the people around you whether you do nothing it's just like your energy. So, that's the goal to have more people leaning into this, this way of living because then good decisions just happen. People come together more in love than fight. It's just a natural repercussion of this type of lifestyle.

Tobi Fairley: Right. I think to what you're saying one of the big lessons I'm working on right now which is just a perfect kind of filter for everything we've said is that love and if we don't do the work to unconditionally love ourselves at this level and lean into who we truly are then how can we ever really have that unconditional love for other people in the world, our life, or anything and I think that's one of the biggest blocks and problems that we have, most people have today is we're really not doing that. We're not loving ourselves and as an extension of that we're not really loving anybody else either.

Valerie Gangas: Amen.

Tobi Fairley: Yeah, so good. Oh, so fun! Well, I like you. This is so fun. Speaking like you I keep a little list of like, okay, she's maybe in my squad now. She's kind of my people. I can relate to her and that's exactly what you're talking about. I think it's so beautiful. We sometimes feel so

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disconnected that we're just not even opening our eyes to what's right around us or in front of us, right?

Valerie Gangas: Yeah, there's a lot of us out there and we find each other. It happens.

Tobi Fairley: Awesome. Okay, well, if everybody else wants to find you and they want to see if they want to be in your squad and follow what you do, tell them how they find you. I think you have a book, you have other things happening out there. What do they need to know about you?

Valerie Gangas: I wrote a book called *Enlightenment is Sexy* and I also work with people as a life coach. It's just my name is my website, valeriegangas.com and I'm pretty active on Instagram, too, so that's another good place to find me.

Tobi Fairley: Okay, awesome. So, y'all check out Valerie. She might be your lady to coach you out into this process of becoming your authentic self, right? Enlightened. I love it. Okay, well, thank you so much for being here, I know we could talk forever, but I will look forward to talking to you personally again soon and thanks for sharing so much today.

Valerie Gangas: Thanks for having me on.

Tobi Fairley: Okay, so did you have any shifts? Are you thinking differently than you were about all of this prior to the last 35 or 40 minutes of this episode? I hope so, I hope that's what we do each week is to just open things up for you a little bit more, just give you a different perspective and I really like this conversation. Valerie and I really tried to record this episode even before the pandemic or right around the time it was hitting when we had no idea what these last six months were going to look like and we had issues with the recording and the app we were using and we had to reschedule. I'm so glad we did because that conversation was completely different than the conversation that we had today on this episode and this is absolutely the episode I know we were supposed to have.

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So, I hope it opened you in a new way and I can't wait to hear from you and Valerie can't wait to hear from you, so tag us on social, let us know what you're thinking and thank you, thank you for being here and letting me a part of the work you're doing in your life and in your business every day. Okay, I'll see you again next week. Bye for now.

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