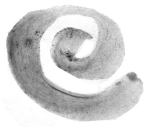
On balance, asking for advice, and the value of a good conversation



Comedian, writer, and actress Greta Titelman on what made her decide to pursue comedy full-time, the difficulty of creating balance, any why it’s important to be friends with all kinds of different people.

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As told to Kailee McGee, 1638 words.

Tags: Comedy, Writing, Beginnings, Multi-tasking, Mental health, Time management.

When did you know you were funny? When did you know you were a comedian?

I knew I was funny when I was like four or five. I would just be very performative and everyone would laugh, so I put it together. I was obsessed with impersonating people. When I was eight years old, I figured out how to do a Long Island accent. I used to do it for my mom, like *The Nanny*, Fran Drescher. My mom would think it was so funny. I don’t know if my mom was being genuine but it made me feel good.

And when did I realize I wanted to become a comedian? I don’t know. I always wanted to do it, but then you know… I didn’t really get the support that I felt like I needed to perform growing up, I went away from it, and I started studying art and whatnot. Then after my mom died, I kind of was just like—it sounds so cliché—but, you’re confronted with time in a different way. And I was like, “Oh, I don’t want to be spending my time doing this anymore. I want to be spending my time pursuing what I actually want to be pursuing.” And that’s when I was like, I’m going to become a comedian, or at least I’m going to try.

What year was that?

2012, which isn’t that long ago when you think about the grand scheme of things.

You’re also a writer and actor and you host your own podcast. How do you balance it all and make time for regular life, too?

I’m not great at balancing things. I’m a maniac, and I’m pretty manic so I don’t balance anything well. I’m very singular. If I wake up one morning and feel like—”today is about podcasting”—it’ll be all about podcasting. Or, if I’m like—”today I’m going to write”—it’ll be all about writing. Or, maybe today I’m going to throw it all out the fucking window and just lay comatose in my bed and watch television all day long—then it’s all about that.

I’m really bad at balancing things, honestly. Actually, that’s not true. I’m good at balancing things. I’m good at chopping up my day. I’m just not a good multitasker. Things take focus for me… I’m so stressed out. I don’t fucking know. See, this is what I’m saying: I’m not good at balancing things because I can’t even answer the question properly!

Your podcast, *The Worst*, features intimate conversations between you and notable funny creatives. How do you prepare for each episode?

I actually think one of my biggest skills is being able to just have a conversation with someone, and when you realize a lot of people actually *can't* have conversations with people you're like, "Oh, maybe I can just have really good organic conversations with people, and see where it goes," and so far it's worked out.

Before we start an episode, we try and talk about the worst shit, whatever that means to you. We talk a lot about high school on my podcast because I always feel like it's such a good place to start. It's just so traumatic for everyone. So, I always preface it by being like, "We speak a lot about high school so just think about that." But yeah, I don't really prepare that much because I think that there's something nice when you get to hear discoveries actually happening in real time.

How are Podcast Greta and Stage Greta different than Real Life Greta?

Podcast Greta and Real Life Greta are more married than Stage Greta and Real Life Greta. Stage Greta is this particular side of my personality, just on steroids. It's more like, I say crazy shit when I'm onstage, or I lean into being an indulgent person or whatever it may be. I'm more playful on stage. That sounds so stupid. But, do you know what I'm saying?

You're playful in real life, too.

I know, but I'm not like… Onstage, I can lean in to just being a ridiculous person. Whereas when I'm podcasting, I'm more myself. But, no one ever sees when I'm being mean to myself or am feeling super depressed. That, I save for myself; I save for my alone time. I talk about that on my podcast, so I'd have to say my podcast is more similar to who I am as a person. But in neither of those places do you see me being insecure, really. I think that's normal. I don't think anybody gets onstage says, "Watch me be insecure." But maybe I will!

Tell me a little bit about working on the extremely funny *Los Espookys*.

It's the best show on television. Everyone has to watch it. It's my dream come true. Working on the show with Julio [Torres] and Ana [Fabrega], who I've loved and known for so long and adore, is just the best. I'm excited for the second season.

Could you share a high point and a low point?

High point was just being on set. And, we shot in Chile, so being able to work in another country with my friends I was like, "Oh my god, my dream has come true. I'm working on a television show, it's created by all of these people I so deeply admire and respect, and I'm shooting it in this amazing location, and I'm just having a great time!" Low point is me not speaking Spanish. I wish I spoke Spanish.

I love all of the character bits you do on Instagram. I feel like I know real people like that. For you, where is the line between making fun of someone or commenting on something or just being funny?

I never try and make fun of anyone. I just love observing people, and I don't know—it's never to be mean. I don't think meanness is funny. Sometimes it can be, I guess, when the person's really bad, and you're making fun of someone that's an evil piece of shit. But, none of my characters are ever meant to feel like I'm attacking someone. They are all just fucked up people who live inside of me.

What kind of people do you surround yourself with creatively?

All different kinds. All of my friends are people who I think are funny and interesting and good. All of my friends are funny across the board, whether they're actually in comedy or not. It's always been really important to me that not all of my friends work in the same field. I actually think that's something that's helped me stay

grounded—having friends who work in other worlds.

Who do you ask for advice?

I ask my sister for a lot of advice. I ask my sister for the advice you would ask your mom for. Since I don't have a mom, she's my next best thing. I ask my fiancé for a lot of advice; he's very practical (which I am not) and gives me a lot of great advice. I ask all my friends for advice. I ask a lot of people for advice. I ask my one uncle for a lot of advice; he's very wise. Everyone has some knowledge, somehow.

What advice do you ask? Is it career stuff or is it life stuff?

My sister is very good at being super-professional, so she is really good with work stuff. And when it comes to advice about family stuff, I will talk to her. When it comes to business advice, I talk a lot to my fiancé who is very knowledgeable. I talk to trusted creatives that I love. Mitra Jouhari, Matt Rogers, Patti Harrison, we'll chat, chat, chat.

How do you feel about your relationship with your phone?

Bad. Does anyone feel good about it? If you say you feel good about it, honestly, go fuck yourself. I feel bad about it all the time. I hate my phone. What I need from it, I hate. What it gives me, I hate. But at the same time, I need it. It sucks my soul. It makes me feel like shit. I look at Instagram, and it's gotten better recently, but 60% of the time, it'll make me feel like shit. It'll make me feel like I'm not doing enough, like I'm a loser. I don't get FOMO as much as I just get "compare and despair." I work on that a lot with my therapist. I just can't wait for the day where I'm so successful that I don't need to be on the internet, and I can have a landline.

It's only about social media when you ask people about their relationship with their phone. I try not to text too much. Don't text me; call me. People want to text me and have these text conversations, and I don't—I can't.

What does 2020 have in store for you? What's on the books and what are your hopes and dreams?

I'm going to completely pop off. I'm getting married. I'm going to continue to get hotter. I'm going to start being more involved in the community, and I mean that in a genuine way. I want to make music… And, I just want to continue being a good person. I really want to actively be a better person to myself mostly, I'm always good with other people. I want to have more balance, and I just want to see through all of my dreams coming true. And that is just what's happening in 2020!

Greta Titelman recommends:

Sleep
Being nice to yourself
Dancing
Buying a pair of fabulous shoes
Making Out

Name
Greta Titelman

Vocation
Comedian, Actor, Writer