



Titans as Teens

This is a transcript of Episode 2 of Titans as Teens.

Guest is Nikolai Bratkovsky.

The podcast is here:

<https://www.titansasteens.com/nikolai-bratkovski-entrepreneur-extraordinaire/>

[Theme Music]

Brody [00:00:05] Hey, Brody here with the new episode of Titans as Teens. A podcast where I have detailed conversations with interesting people from all walks of life about their teen experience and the knowledge they have for teens today. In this episode, I was really lucky enough to have a long conversation with entrepreneur extraordinaire Nikolai Bratkovski.

Nikolai [00:00:28] I was 18. I ran a nightclub. Legally, I couldn't be in a nightclub because legal age in Canada was 19. But then I had this liquor license. I would go to the store to buy alcohol, to restock the nightclub. They would scan through all this - fifty thousand dollars in alcohol and then be like, can we see your I.D.? To be honest, I looked like I was 12 and I would be like, Do you think I'm going to consume fifty thousand dollars of alcohol myself? This is for a nightclub. Here's my license. Could you help me load this in the car? And they're like, (laughs).

Brody [00:01:05] Nikolai was born in Belarus and moved to Canada at age 14. He's an incredible entrepreneur and businessman. His experiences include being the CEO and co-founder of SIMMS, as well as CardioTrust, as well as the co-founder, former CEO and current chairman of Opencare. Nikolai and I had an amazing conversation that ranged from his experience moving countries and early businesses to his meditation, practice and ideas on happiness and methods to success.

[00:01:35] Short background. Self-taught software developer dropped out from two universities, first company right out of high school, we put radiology and cardiology into the cloud that's SIMMS, and we scaled that to do 10 percent of all diagnostic imaging in Canada. It was, it was exciting at the same time, quite stressful because we're talking about times of Internet Explorer 5, pretty sure a lot of people don't even know what that is. And the Amazon Web Services didn't exist. So the whole concept of cloud didn't exist. We had to actually run the physical data centers. And I spent some sleepless nights on the floor. And the data centers, even though it was very exciting on the other side, was quite stressful because whenever our data centers went down, 10 percent of Canadian health care system went down.

[00:02:19] So I was I thought that I would be losing my sleep over something else in my late teens and early 20s, but that that was one of the reasons I was losing sleep. So then sold that to private equity, build a chain of cardiology clinics, that was CardioTrust and the whole vision was - and the first company - we've drastically improved quality of care. We cut down reporting time on radiology and cardiology from like a week to under twenty four



Titans as Teens

hours. But what hasn't changed was the patient's experience. So everybody was talking back then, "Well, we should shift from acute care to preventative health care". But whenever I looked at how patients were treated in a diagnostic imaging centers where our software was, they were basically treated like farm animals and they were like, hey, sit down here, wait for a few hours, we'll let you know what's going to happen next. No shit, nobody will want to do preventative care once they've had that experience. They'll be like, "I'm never coming back here." So the chain of cardiology clinics really came about to change that. There we controlled everything. So we owned the centers. So we designed a new patient patient journey flow where it was all about patients. Patients were raving about it and it was awesome. But then I guess the naive technologists, I realized that brick and mortar is very different from building a tech company. So it took us a year to set up five cardiology centers and it would take us another five years just to serve the area of Toronto. And that's where I used to be based. Whereas with technology, once you figure out product market fit in five years, you can be 10 percent, 20 percent of the whole market. So sold my stake in that and then built Opencare. I originally found it and was a CEO for seven plus years and recently transitioned to chairman at Opencare. Basically, the whole vision was to take what we've learned in the first two companies and figure out how to get people to consume preventative health care. We started with all specialties and ultimately we learned a lot of lessons and zoomed in into dentistry. And that's what a company is focused on right now, Getting people to proactively take care of their oral health versus going there only when they're in pain. So, yeah, now I'm on a sabbatical. That's basically in a nutshell,.

Brody [00:04:48] How did you actually get into health care?

Nikolai [00:04:51] Yeah, that's a good question. So I touched on the fact that I was self-taught software developer. I had a computer since I was a young kid in high school. I had my first job was well, to be fair, not the first job, I worked some factory jobs which sucked and I hate it. And finally, I got a software development job, I think it was after grade 10 in the summer, and we were building some crazy, weird shit. So basically this accountant did taxes for the bottom five percent of a population. That's basically criminals, prostitutes, I don't know. The list goes on. And what's interesting about them, they've never done taxes. Government owes them tens of thousands of dollars that they've never claimed. So he helped them to get this money and he would say 50 percent. But he in a past dealt with them in person, which was insanely dangerous. So we build the first automated store, where they would walk in and and like the computer voice would ask them, that's that's 2002 or 2003 computer would ask them what their name is and Social Security number and it would like pull out their favorite music and start playing it so they would just calm down and guide them through the process. It was just like super cool weird shit. The start of the we did a lot of fun stuff, but as a as a manager, he's like a very unique guy.

[00:06:23] And a lot of times we build features that I think nobody really cared about. I felt like I really didn't like building the features that I thought are useless. And I told myself then that I'll never, ever have a job again. And literally right out of high school, I was like, well, I don't want to do a factory job that I used to do as a kid to make some money to build my computer. I don't want to be a software developer where people tell me to build features of



Titans as Teens

that I don't like. So what can I do? So we started a software dev shop with my friend, and we're building all types of software, manufacturing software, accounting software, etc. And on the side, I was teaching kids how to program and then a few people came across trying to build this medical imaging software and being eighteen, I didn't really care about money. I just felt that it was much more meaningful than all the other software I was building before. There is something that was like impacting people's life in a tangible way. Like we, for example, we built windows, doors, manufacturing software like, nobody give a shit of doors and windows or manufactured more effectively, like I didn't care. Yeah, there's definitely value on that, so started building that and instead of getting paid, I took equity stake in that and that's how that came about. One of the co-founders there was a very interesting guy who was like, gets passionate about health and health care. And that definitely introduced me to that world. And that's kind of got me into the whole space of biohacking and doing weird shit to my body and et cetera. And from there on, I guess health care has been a long journey.

Brody [00:08:03] What's some of the weird shit you've done to your body? Just curious.

Nikolai [00:08:09] (laughs) So I ended up in the E.R., I guess, a couple of times or a few times, which wasn't fun, but the stories that were kind of fun and a lot of friends joke about that and bring them up.

[00:08:23] So I was playing around with Keto diet, which is mega popular right now. But think about it, I don't know, 10 years back or something like that. So one day I was just working at a computer and I was like, I read that like coconut oil is great, is one good way to get into Keto, so I just took a jar and started just eating it while I was working and I didn't do any research and whatever. And so I ate half a jar, and then I feel like, wow, that was very fulfilling. And I was like decent sized jar. It's like maybe half a liter or something like that. And I was like, OK, whatever I went on with my life, woke up four a.m. in the morning. My stomach was hurting so bad I felt like somebody was stabbing me repeatedly and twisting the knife. I've never experienced such bad pain and like, literally, I thought I was dying the dots to coconut oil. I'm telling you about coconut oil. Imagine you waking up and not knowing you're like, oh, I eat normal food and nothing happened the previous day. So I called 911. They didn't want to pick me up because apparently with stomach issues, you have to wait two hours. I was like, "Guys, I feel like I'm going to die here in two hours." Well, they knew better after two hours that it's clear they spent a lot of time in the washroom but started feeling better. And then what happened as I went on was my life. Next day, of course, I was exhausted and I was like, I didn't feel well. I stayed at home, didn't go to work.

[00:09:55] Then I thought it was a great idea to crush a pizza because I was in bed. I felt like I deserve the pizza after this horrible night. So I order a pizza, ate a pizza, fuck it was awesome. And then next day I was like, Yeah, I'm good to go to the office. I show up at the office, I'm doing one on one with one of the engineers. And I see people, people from my dream from the night before walking through the boardroom.



Titans as Teens

[00:10:21] So I'm like fucking hallucinating and I'm like hundred percent sober. It's like a normal day. And I was like, holy fuck, what is going on? So I was like I was like I told the engineer, I was like, Listen, dude, I'm not feeling well. I go to washroom. I was like, starting getting confused. Where am I, who am I? Blah, blah, blah. I was like, okay, maybe I should go home, sleep it off. So I told everyone I was like, you know, guys, I'm not feeling after that instance of not feeling well was going to go back, get downstairs to the building. It was winter in Canada. And I get out, I walk maybe like one minute I feel like I'm going to collapse, like, not sure what's going on. So basically the ambulance finally picked me out. They're like trying to figure out if I'd like maybe I have brain tumors, run on all types of that, like CT scan they did like, I don't know, all types of bloodwork and the basically saying everything is normal. And I was like, what the fuck? I'm like, well, I was sitting in ER, I was like tripping balls, being completely sober. I'm like seeing shit like etc..

[00:11:21] So apparently, I don't know, 10 days later, after a lot of research, I connected the dots. So you can imagine all this, post this time I'm like thinking something's completely wrong with me. And I'm like, I'm like something bad is going to happen. And what I figured out what happened is like coconut oil kind of forced me into Keto. Then pizza forced me out and my body started getting confused how much sugar I have in my blood. So I had like hyperglycemic reactive hypoglycemia, which is like basically body thinking that I don't have enough sugar. So it starts jacking adrenaline. So it's the same feeling as if you jump out of the airplane the first five seconds, you're a little bit confused and like, what the fuck is going on? But imagine here you're sitting in the boardroom and you're having that feeling. So you kind of hallucinate that you're like, yeah. So that was one of the examples where I learned I should do my research before I heavily experiment with my body, which I don't know, I felt like I didn't fully learn that lesson because other shit happened as well. (laughs)

Brody [00:12:30] Lesson learned do not eat coconut oil, then pizza.

Nikolai [00:12:34] Well, in large quantities, apparently, coconut oil, people can handle like a teaspoon, maybe two teaspoons. I ate maybe like 50. The big learning was once again do more extensive research. I think only 40 or 60 percent, one of those, of people can actually be on keto, in ketosis.

Brody [00:12:55] It's crazy how much shit like to me, it's crazy how much shit we just don't know about diets these days. Are you working on that or any of any sort?

Nikolai [00:13:02] I know. Like I found, I'm on a sabbatical, on a sabbatical, and I'm figuring out what my next business will be. And I'm kind of like very passively figuring it out. One area I'm passionate about, you kind of noted by now, is health, health care, et cetera. But I've been spending a lot of time thinking. So my original thesis was that 80 percent of health comes from physical body. And I've spent like hundreds of thousands of dollars doing all types of weird shit.

[00:13:32] And my learning was that and 80 percent of mental health and 20 percent is actually physical health. So it's like think about it this way. You can have a Ferrari engine,



Titans as Teens

that's your body, that you've like, fucking done all the top treatments, IV drips like vitamin I.V. drips, massage every third day, you know, like all the latest and greatest stem cells, injections. But then if you put fucking piss into the tank or into your Ferrari engine, it's not going to run. And ultimately our brain or our minds, produce all the neurochemical reactions that send signals to the body of how it's supposed to behave. So it could be the best physical body. But then, like we're sending alerts that were in stress mode and all types of like cortisol and etc are being released and like damage in the body. So it's irrelevant what what physical body is, actually starts with mind. And then the next level is, I guess is more esoteric, but consciousness. And it's like people think our brain or mind is in charge of our body. But there's more and more research coming that there are more signals coming from your heart to your brain, from your brain to your heart or to your body. So it's like actually the heart is a more dictating organ, which takes us to this, I guess, less scientific and a little bit more handwavy topic of consciousness and etc..

Brody [00:15:02] Yeah, I like to call it Woo Woo.

Nikolai [00:15:04] Exactly. (laughs)

Brody [00:15:06] You meditate by that way?

Nikolai [00:15:06] Yeah. Extensively. And that's actually so I think. It's interesting, I did a presentation to my company, so the first 30 people or twenty five people at Opencare, were trained on Transcendental Meditation and we paid for it. And and then but we couldn't get people to meditate consistently. So my my self, my co-founder, a few other execs were pretty consistent. I've been meditating probably now, I don't know, three or four years, a couple of years. Mindfulness and TM, a couple of years, and now I'm on a different thing right now, Finder's Course, you probably heard about that or came across that. So yeah.

[00:15:47] So basically the presentation I did to the team trying to inspire them to meditate is that I spent so much money, biohacking, trying to do all types of weird shit. And ultimately TM had one of the highest impacts on my life. And I found it was the easiest meditation, especially for people that like working extensively. Like right now I'm doing like hours of meditation. I'm on sabbatical. It's like easier to fit into the schedule, whereas TM is like twenty three minutes in the morning. Twenty three minutes an afternoon, very easy, super high impact recharges you, et cetera, et cetera.

Brody [00:16:20] You give them a quick synopsis of what TM is for people who don't know.

Nikolai [00:16:25] Yeah. So, TM, transcendental meditation. I think it's TM dot org. It's basically mantra based meditation. And mantra is a word that's given to you. It's a little bit I've I've avoided TM because it's a little bit feels a little bit cultish when they train you, they're like bunch of requirements and they have to do it in person. It's like a bit annoying and you have to pay some money so you can not just download an app. But it was like a thousand percent worth it. So the whole concept is that they give you this word that you



Titans as Teens

repeat in your mind and it helps you transcend. And it basically, I guess, train/expands your consciousness, it makes you more aware and etc.. And I've definitely, definitely seen massive impact. So tying it back to the presentation that I gave after like hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on biohacking, TM was by far the highest impact. And it's I think it's a thousand dollars to get trained. And one statement, one slide was there, it said "I wish I was trained on TM when I was like three years old. "

Brody [00:17:29] For you personally, what was the impact? Can you be more specific?

Nikolai [00:17:35] Yeah, so becoming more aware of of everything of the world. I like the way I would summarize, becoming more aware of internal and external world. So it's like, how do I behave in specific situations? How do I get triggered, what is actually happening? And then also observing others and like what is happening with them, what is happening in the company etc.. It's almost like creating some space and distance between like feelings, emotions, events, etc, where it's like almost you can hit a pause button, like observe it, and then decide how you're going to react, which probably not react at all or like respond rather than reacting in a thoughtful, thoughtful way. Another one is observing a lot of patterns that I couldn't connect dots before, on. So it's like, oh, I see a consistent pattern in my behavior here. So and I see what it's actually how it's undermining me or how blocking me or how it's causing pain or harm to other people, et cetera, et cetera. So like noticing those patterns and behaviors, which previously was I guess was like I was blind to. So those are some examples.

Brody [00:18:56] Would it be fair to say, this is what it sounds like to me, that it raises your emotional intelligence?

Nikolai [00:19:02] Yes, definitely, and I think it goes beyond. One last point I would throw in there, it's the reason that I'm on sabbatical right now due to some health challenges last year. And it's funny, I'm like biohacking and I'm in health care and whatever. But I think those health challenges were triggered by the fact that, by meditating a bunch, I started becoming aware that I'm doing things that are not in alignment with my life purpose, and that's coming back to this Woo Woo concept or whatever. So that goes beyond emotional intelligence. You start feeling, it, it builds your almost intuition and you become...and it builds your honesty with yourself. It's like being intellectually and emotionally honest with yourself.

[00:19:51] And, you know, previously I could using my brain, I could brainwash myself into doing whatever the fuck I thought was a great idea to do. But that became harder and harder as I meditated more because if something wasn't fit with what I supposed to do or what I need to do or should do it, there is like almost some kind of a resistance or emotional clash.

[00:20:15] And that brings me to one point. When I look back an extension of meditation, if I look back to my teenage years. I feel like the fucking Western society is so backwards, putting so much value on teaching us to think, and when we say thinking, we also align it with logic, and then we'll align it with math.



Titans as Teens

[00:20:42] So we make almost this like especially now computer science is fucking popular and all this you've got to be engineer, blah, blah, blah. That that's like that's like one of the biggest piles of crap that's just being reinforced right now heavily. And where I'm going with that and I'm one of those guys, I'm like, I'm a nerd, I'm fucking love science, love tech, etc. and I got to a point in life somewhere by mid-20's, and it was like a build-up, right. Like I did a lot of math competitions, computer computer science competitions, etc. and like won a lot of them, like blah, blah, blah, and just kept reinforcing that this thinking, logic, math, etc. is the way to navigate the world.

[00:21:28] And I got to a point, and that's a funny one, where even my dating, I took spreadsheets. So why not once I got one out of one of my long relationships, I was like, OK, I'm going to approach this one differently. I wrote up a model and criteria and every date it was almost like an interview, like it wasn't an interview. It was like natural. But like I would go back and I would fill out the spreadsheet and then whatever was missing, the second the second date was really like a fucking interview because I needed to fill in the other columns. So that's how far it went.

[00:22:05] And where I'm going with this is. I wish I spend more time not only meditating, but learning practices to get in tune with myself and more importantly, with my intuition. And what I realize - fast forward like 15, 20 years - I'm thirty four right now - Is that the problems that we face as people or like like, I don't know, as an executive, as a human in a relationship, they get so much more complex than they were before, that no amount of logic/math/spreadsheets/modeling can answer those problems. And one of the big limiting factors, of course, is data. We cannot even get the data around the complex problem that's in front of us, because a lot of data is just subjective or emotional or whatever. So hence, it's like this concept of like thinking, training that muscle that will help us solve complex problems, is actually biggest bullshit ever. It's it's like our intuition or our consciousness has access to much higher power, problem solving capabilities than than our, like, tiny fucking brain.

[00:23:26] And what's interesting, tying it back to as an example like Albert Einstein, if you read about him. A lot of his problem solving, he did in trance state. He would induce trance state, where he would like kind of meditate into a trance state and he would hold this metal bowl in his hand. And because it's easy to transition, trance state is the state between being awake and being asleep. And there is a specific waves, I think it's gamma waves or delta waves that are happening in your brain, I don't remember exactly which ones, that unlock the next level of creativity and problem solving. So whenever he would cross over, he would release this metal bowl, that would make a lot like loud sound and wake him up, and he would repeat that. So even he was like basically going away from this, I'm just going to crank through a fucking formulas and shit like that. I'm going to like, be in this this somewhat of a dream state to access this deeper knowledge that we have, like as humans or deeper capabilities to solve something that hasn't been solved before.

Brody [00:24:33] Tell me, or just interrupt me if I'm getting off the topic you were trying to say. But this reminds me quite a bit of a book I was reading yesterday that I can't



Titans as Teens

remember the name of, of course, but it's about the difference between the left brain and the right brain. Are you familiar with that?

Nikolai [00:24:46] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Brody [00:24:47] It talks about how, right now the world is completely left brain centered.

Nikolai [00:24:52] ya.

Brody [00:24:52] Where, as you were as you were talking about, everyone's centered on mathematics, equations, logic, trying to get the most sensible answer. The author is making the argument that the world is going to become increasingly right brain, as the future progresses, and right brain is more creative, design oriented.

Nikolai [00:25:10] Yeah, and I would take it to the next level. So that's we're still operating within the brain the limitation of the brain and the next one is going to the concept of heart or consciousness or whatever it is. So like, yeah, we should become more balanced right on the left, but that's like step one kind of thing. And then the next thing is like, how do we, how do we tap in into our intuition, which I don't know, comes through gut, heart, whatever it is. That is much more powerful than the whole brain put together. That can solve substantially more complex problems than the brain can solve.

[00:25:48] I read about this concept as our body and our brain being an antenna. So it's like a connector of conscious world to the physical world. And I'm definitely starting to experience this more and more. So it's like the consciousness is universal. It's like basically everything and everywhere and nothing at the same time. But this human being is attached to it and acting as one singular antenna to experience the physical world as I'm like roaming this game or physical world or, you know, whatever you want to call it, Matrix. And and that, I think, is an interesting concept where it's like, so our brain has a specific purpose as a subset of this very complex antenna. It can do specific actions. Then our heart has specific thing. Then we have all these senses. So it actually basically it's like a bridge. So it's almost a human body is a bridge between this concept of consciousness that is like, can be defined in a million ways and the physical material world that we live in, and I've been definitely experiencing more and more of that.

Brody [00:27:02] mmm. I think we should step a bit out of the deep end of it, go back into the shallow end of the pool.

Nikolai [00:27:10] (Laughs)

Brody [00:27:11] And let's talk about your high school experience. What was life growing up in Canada like socially?

Nikolai [00:27:18] Well, I think my experience in teens was interesting because I grew up in Belarus up until I was 14, turning 15 and I moved to Canada a couple of months before I turned 15. And it was definitely. I feel like really lucky, that's that's how my life unfolded. I



Titans as Teens

grew up in a very small town. Six thousand people, let's call it a village. It was more than a village, it's quite modern and et cetera. And I had this, I guess, opportunity to grow up in a small community which is safe and in nature, and I was just roaming in nature as a kid and never thinking about anything else. I went to pretty good school there, blah, blah, blah, and then I was kind of growing out of it. It's like a small town, by the time I was like 14, I was like, I need something bigger. I want to take on the world, you know, and experience the world. So it was like almost perfect time moving to Toronto, which is put it in perspective now, larger than Chicago. So I guess it's the third largest city after New York, L.A. and then New York and L.A. So that was fascinating.

[00:28:25] So going from this tiny town to this massive metropolitan was, and in North America, which is much more developed economy, et cetera, was really fascinating. And was that that it was challenging because I was pretty shy. And then also my spoken English was kind of broken. I studied English since grade one so I could read, write, etc., but I couldn't really speak. And I, I learned also studied British English. So when I landed here, North American or American English was so like the accent was so different I couldn't understand shit. Like as an example, I couldn't understand for the first few weeks why people talk about socks, but they were saying socks, something socks. And I was like, why the fuck are you talking about socks? Like, what's up with socks? And then I like somebody explain it to me later that it's a different word with U instead of O. (laughs)

[00:29:19] I also feel like. I don't know, fully integrate into North American high school culture. It felt. I don't know, I guess growing up in Eastern Europe, developing economy, plus it was post Soviet collapse, so Soviet Union collapsed. I was born in Soviet Union. Seven years later, it collapsed. It was Wild West. It's like to give you some examples as a kid, my father had a friend who was like, run the regional KGB and like, we would go shooting guns, like whatever you want. You want AK 47, sniper rifles, whatever. But at the same time, I was fun. But on the other hand, my parents would go for different trips and like mafia would show up at the house asking where my father is. And I didn't understand a lot of that as a kid.

[00:30:15] So it was very different growing up there. It was almost like it felt real. But when I landed into North American High School, it felt very not real. It was like people and like I feel like I'm judging here, but I felt like people were obsessing with problems that were not real. And and whereas I came from a place where it's like, you've got to build something, you've got to do something with yourself. So, like, I never kind of connected. So in high school, I was just like a nerd and I was also like very short, shy, barely spoke English, and I was into science, computers and etc. So I was basically a nerd hanging out with a few people. And I spent most of my time on a computer. I was like one of my closest friend was one of the top, I guess, intense hackers. He was in a lot of underground communities, Canadian version of FBI, RCMP knocked on his door multiple times, et cetera, et cetera. So that's kind of the world I existed in, which was I guess I existed more online than than offline. And that was my escape. I was like building, making all types of viruses, I don't know, pirating software, etc. It was fun. I'm like I'm super grateful the way my my life unfolded. But I definitely had a lot of unique experiences.



Titans as Teens

[00:31:48] Another one, I guess, to throw in talking about end of high school years. I guess that's grade 12 going into university. I was 18, I ran a nightclub. Legally, I couldn't be in a nightclub because legal age in Canada was 19. I think US is 21. And I was pretty fucking entertaining. It was like I didn't know my head from my ass. I wouldn't say I was the best manager.

[00:32:16] Like, some deejays really didn't like me because I didn't understand the concept that they have their sets. But sometimes I would get annoyed with their set and I would literally call them and tell them to change it to something else. Beyond that, of course, I was exposed to a lot of very sketchy and weird, I guess, nightclub scene, managing nightclub. There are other people that were promoting different nights there, that were much older, much more professional. And I was learning all about like, how they make money on the side, I'm not going to say what they do, but.

Brody [00:32:54] We all know.

Nikolai [00:32:54] I couldn't understand why my business model of the nightclub didn't make a lot of money because most of the money you make on the alcohol and some you make at the door. But the door really covers the DJ and few other things. And in their scenario, they're making substantially more money. I was like, OK, that's probably not the business model I'm prepared to run. Yeah.

[00:33:16] And I guess one cool memory was like, I couldn't legally buy alcohol. But then I have this now liquor license, so I would go to, in Ontario, all the liquor sales are run by by the province, so it's government controlled. I would go to the store to buy alcohol, to restock the nightclub, and I would be buying like boxes of vodka, beer and et cetera. And that would come up with like they would scan through all this fifty thousand dollars in alcohol and then be like, can we see your I.D.? And I like to be honest, I looked like I was 12 when I was 18. I literally looked like I was 12 and I would be like. Are you for fucking real? Do you think I'm going to consume fifty thousand dollars of alcohol myself, this is for a nightclub? Of course I'm of the age. I run the fucking nightclub. Here's my license, blah, blah, blah. I was like, could you instead help me load this in the car? And they're like, OK, and they're just load everything in my car and drive it. And I had this. At that age, everybody's trying to figure out their fake I.D. and all that bullshit. And first of all, I didn't need one because I had unlimited access to alcohol, not that I was drinking. I actually didn't drink at all like zero 'til 18. And then I was like kind of drinking a bit.

[00:34:36] So I had my own fridge, like walk in fridge stocked with alcohol. I literally opened this room and that's the fridge. And it's like whatever you want. And I just pick and choose, put it in my trunk and go back, you know, bring it for my friends. So and then another reason I didn't get the ID, because I could just go to my own nightclub. I didn't have to go to the nightclubs. So it was fun times.

Brody [00:35:02] That's like literally the teenage dream.



Titans as Teens

Nikolai [00:35:04] I guess I wasn't perceiving it that way then. And it's funny as we're talking about it, I was and that's maybe another something I would extrapolate. And that's something I could have learned more from North American culture. Eastern European culture would take things too seriously. I was taking shit too seriously. It was like it was a real business. It was like I wanted to make things out of it. Right. Versus actually just letting it go and having fun.

[00:35:32] So it's like I think there is this fine balance of like. Being thoughtful, but also just not thinking, not taking things seriously, and I wish I found that balance earlier, like right now, as I'm telling the story, it sounds all exciting, except, of course, I had a blast, but I feel like I couldn't have had it probably been more fun, but not being so serious about myself and running that business.

Brody [00:36:00] So what was the worst time you ever messed up in high school?

Nikolai [00:36:08] (laughs) I think it's OK, I'll put it in a high school years, because it is I think is like end of grade 12 or maybe it was like a summer between grade 12 and going to university. I got arrested. And I got arrested for...well, I thought, I'm not going to get arrested. So once again, growing up in Eastern European community, like speeding tickets and all that shit is irrelevant because we had a bunch of hookups, like we have paralegals and lawyers that would just drop them. So I got arrested for so-called dangerous operation of motor vehicle endangering the public, which was not on the Traffic Act. I was under criminal code. And the way it unfolded, not my proudest moment, but definitely made my life entertaining and taught me quite a few lessons.

[00:36:59] In Canada, there's the longest street in the world, I think, is in Canada, it's called Yonge Street, it's like over a thousand kilometers or something. It goes from water from Lake Ontario in downtown Toronto to like in the middle of nowhere, somewhere up north. And I was going driving like a fucking crazy maniac at 2:00 p.m. on that street using lanes of opposite traffic to go around the traffic. And apparently there was a cop in unmarked car that they used to go beyond between the divisions, with a very tiny siren inside the car. And apparently it wasn't as powerful because he couldn't catch up. So he got exceptionally pissed because I was I was like young and dumb, let's put it that way. And I don't know I don't remember the reason why I was going so fast, but it was fun. And sooner or later, basically, I get stopped because the road gets blocked by multiple cruisers. And later he catches up to me and I'm like, well, I guess it's going to be careless driving, six points. I already know my traffic act, right. And I'll be OK. And I'm sitting in the car preparing my driver's license, insurance and whatever, just as I was like as the cop was coming up, as I'm trying to roll down the window, push the button to roll out the window when the door opens, he grabs me, yanked me out of the car, throws me on the hood. And this is like in the middle of, like one of the busiest streets in the city and like, cuffs me, throws me in the back of the cruiser. They, like, rip my car open into pieces because they're like searching for drugs or, I don't know, whatever they were searching for. Literally all the stuff out of my car, including like mats and different panels are just like strewn all over all over the street. And there's like six cruisers surrounding this. And I'm sitting in the back of the cruiser, like, handcuffed and yeah, it was scary. And then



Titans as Teens

basically they started telling me what I'm being charged with and if I like if I want a lawyer. And I was like, fuck, yeah, of course I want a lawyer and I'm not going to sign anything. I was like, oh, you don't want to sign this. And by the way, that's probably a tiny example of police going a little bit overboard. You don't want to sign this. We're going to throw you we're going to throw you in jail for, for a night, then we'll let you call your lawyer. And by the way, we're going to let your parents know. And I was like, fuck this. Of course I'm signing everything. So I signed whatever I needed to sign. So they tried to charge me with this criminal charge. I hired a lawyer. It was, took a couple of years I cleared that, but definitely learned a lesson that I learned quite a few lessons.

[00:39:45] The big one is almost I was just made a comment about North American High School having drama. I was inventing different type of drama for myself. That was almost a little bit too real which prevented me from doing something meaningful. And that was a big lesson. It's so now I had to spend bunch of money, which I didn't have. I didn't and couldn't tell my parents I'm 18. I think lawyer cost me 10 or 15 grand or so. And I was my building my first company where I was not paying my I was not paying myself. So I had to pull out like two thousand here and there to make like installment payments to my lawyer to clear this criminal record. And that was that created so much negative energy that I carried around myself that was preventing like all types of stuff like creativity, productivity and et cetera. So I could have channeled all that energy, doing something great for the world, for myself, for people around me, rather than dealing with this stupidity. And that definitely was reality, one of the reality checks, there are a few other things that happened after that really put me on the straight line.

[00:40:54] And I think one also made my teenage years more challenging. Eastern Europe was romanticizing organized crime and mafia because that was literally 90s and early, 2000s. Those are the people that were heroes in in Eastern Europe. And I grew up on those movies. And that really fucked with my mindset when I was growing up, in a developed economy with good laws, with like save society, et cetera, et cetera. And those two things didn't fit in. And I'm trying to figure out I'm like watching all these Russian movies because I'm so, still so deep in the community, whereas I'm living in this great country and there's just internal conflicts. And this like speeding is like an example of like almost breaking the law to that somehow stem from that.

Brody [00:41:47] We were in the shallow end. Let's go back into the deep end because that was fun. What does success mean to you?

Nikolai [00:41:58] Mmm. I think I wouldn't be able to answer that question, probably six months ago.

Brody [00:42:04] OK,.

Nikolai [00:42:05] So and I'm just putting it in perspective then, like six months ago I was thirty three, something like that, maybe already 34, ya I was already 34. And like it took so much time and iterations to, I think arrive to what I think will be a lasting definition of success for me, because it's an evolving definition and it consistently evolved for me.



Titans as Teens

Coming from a small town in Belarus and moving to Toronto and then starting to build a tech company or the first company building a community, which is not Silicon Valley. Success to me was like, fuck, I want to be part of the Silicon Valley community. I want to be part of this, like, club. And I've spent so much fucking effort and work. And I started spending a lot of time in San Francisco as I was building my next tech company just to realize this is fucking far away from success. Like meaning like. I was surrounded by really awesome, exceptionally bright people who were as broken as I am, and that was a big, real and unhappy as I am, and I thought, oh, if I could just get there, I'm going to be the happiest guy just to get there, to learn that fuck a lot of people around me even less happy than me. What am I doing here?

[00:43:28] So and some kind of, I guess, alluding to definition of success. Somehow it's related to happiness, but I think it's like happiness has a weird definition and people define it differently. Sometimes people confuse it with pleasure. I think it's just the state of contentment, slash happiness, slash bliss, slash fulfillment. And the way I would define that, or the path to that, to me now it's really discovering what my true mission/purpose is and doing things that are in alignment with that. And that's like so subset of definition of success is discovering that in the first place. The second one is living that life where it's not dictated by conditioning that is brought on to us by everything from our friends to our parents to the society and etc. and rather taking my truly unique journey towards what I meant, what I'm meant to do here and just... doing it was the full heart and putting everything into it.

Brody [00:44:38] It's like finding, maybe not what you can do best, but what you could do to bring the greatest impact to the most people and trying that, is that is that correct?

Nikolai [00:44:53] Yeah, I think there is a there's a pretty good definition that it's like almost somewhat makes it a bit more technical slash framework base. I think the concept is Japanese called Ikagai. And there's this overlap of four circles. Right. Like what you're great at, what the world needs, what you get paid for, like you get rewarded for, and there's something else there as well. And that intersection of those for the standard one is three, I think Japanese is four. So it's like that that intersection of all those circles is kind of that combination. So it's almost like and I think it brings me to another side point that took a long time to unravel. And I wish I could have unraveled that earlier as a teenager is and I by the way, I'm like exceptionally lucky, I feel lucky when it comes to this point, is less of external conditioning, listening less to parents, society, school, any kind of structures. And I've been lucky because my parents let me do whatever fuck I wanted, like run a nightclub when I was 18 or like drop out of university twice. They kind of like, are you sure you want to do that? I'm like, fuck, yeah. I was like, OK, cool.

[00:46:05] So that like I like. I wish that to as many teenagers as possible, but I think. There's a way to go even further beyond that, because even though I was allowed to do that, I was looking up to a lot of idols/people. And by doing that, I was trying to copy somebody else's path. And that is one of the biggest flaws of human society, we're portrayed like, by the way, I love watching documentaries and movies about all types of underdogs, building and succeeding, everything from athletic to like Elon Musks and shit



Titans as Teens

like that. But it actually delivers almost the wrong message to people. It's like, oh, like you've got to struggle, persevere, blah, blah, blah, and do this and this. And you can be like Elon Musk. Nobody should aim to be like Elon Musk. They should be them like you should be Nikolai. We should ask and that's our job to discover what it means. And that could be so much different from, like, I don't know, Michael Jordan or Elon Musk or whatever. Any of those like growing up idols are. And that's what I wish I knew than starting iteration and discovering that versus comparing myself to the other people that inspired me and trying to chase that.

[00:47:27] Like the way I would summarize that, trying to copy somebody's life is like a bad parody. It's like it will never be authentic or real. It's going to always be parody. So it's like how do you truly and that comes back to the statement I made earlier. How do you tap into your intuition or listen to yourself to learn listening to yourself to actually figure that out earlier? And I feel like all the pieces then fall in place, almost like, not automatically, but naturally and organically.

Brody [00:48:02] Actually, I think what you're describing. Is kind of the opposite sadly of what's going on in Western culture right now, with all this celebrity hero worship shit, right?

Nikolai [00:48:14] Yes.

Brody [00:48:14] Where you think of like Terry Crews, he's my idol. I want to be Terry Crews when I grow up. And and what you're saying is you shouldn't be Terry Crews. You can take inspiration from Terry Crews to help you become yourself, in a way, right?

Nikolai [00:48:33] Yeah, so it's like. All those exceptionally successful people that we idolize. The reason they became that, is because they fucking ignored everyone and everything. And they said, I'm just going to be weird to me. Like I think Elon Musk is a great example. I'm just going to be a fucking weird version of me and I'm just going to do this crazy, stupid shit. And hopefully the rockets fly, you know, like and it's like truly, seeking what that. In our unique weird you is, and I think with with a storytelling abilities of today's culture, it's so easy to get misguided.

[00:49:21] And what I mean by that watch a movie about Terry Crews or whatever, Elon Musk, get inspired. Now, I want to be like them and and like try to copy them. And it all becomes like it almost brainwashes, oh, that's the path. Versus that movie teaching, no, like look really deep inside yourself. And definition of your success might not be launching rockets to space in might be building school in Africa or taking care of elderly people in this long term care facility. And that's what's going to truly, truly be your purpose.

[00:50:07] And when that is aligned, that's when I think people truly shine. And it seems like, well who the fuck wants to be like working a long term care facility? There's like you can never be like Elon Musk, but if it's truly your purpose, the passion will come out. The energy will be infinite. That person becomes ultimately the thought leader in that space. So they do become Elon Musk of the long term care facility operating. But the reason people don't is because they land in those jobs or whatever and those visions because, oh, I try to



Titans as Teens

be Michael Jordan. I was OK in basketball, but I watched this all these all his games and blah, blah, blah. And I'm trying and I'm trying, but I'm like, actually, yeah, I made it to NBA, but I'm like subpar. Yeah, it's fine. But it's like, was it really your purpose?

[00:50:58] And I'm bigger and bigger believer, when you truly aligned with your purpose, then the energy becomes infinite. Like it's like the passion, the inspiration, everything, like everything becomes so authentic, that like people just want to follow you, want to support, you want to help you, et cetera, et cetera. And when someone follows somebody else's dream, it's you can feel like people can sense it. It's not genuine. And it's funny, like people cannot put a finger on it, but you can feel like it's like almost same as like I spent a lot of time on branding. Like you can spend like branding is such an intangible science/art. But there's so many frameworks and shit like that. And I read so much crap trying to figure out what branding is like for a company or it could be personal or whatever. And I arrived it to something very simple. Do what you truly believe in and share with people, what you believe. And why are you doing it? And that's branding. That's the most authentic thing you can do. And that's what's true branding is where people come up with this, oh, we got to do this fucking customer psychographic demographic, this shit, that shit, customer interviews, blah, blah, blah. We're going to build this communication strategy. This is the biggest fucking crap ever that just prints money for PR/brand agencies and tying it back to the personal stuff. It comes back. It's like like you can feel what brands are authentic and inauthentic. Same as with people. You can feel what people are truly following their dreams and beliefs because they come off so authentic.

Brody [00:52:34] Verses someone who like in their mind, like, I want to be Elon Musk. They're starting their company and they don't actually care about the company. All they want is the money from the company to help them do whatever their next thing to become. Elon Musk would be right?

Nikolai [00:52:49] Or not necessarily money like people have different models of.

Brody [00:52:53] Prestige maybe?.,.

Nikolai [00:52:55] Prestige, Like publicity, respect. Like as I was unpacking my childhood trauma, like what I learned, I learned two things. The reason I was pretty, pretty good and sorry, let me paraphrase that. The two key drivers that may be pretty good at building businesses, some of them I was not necessarily fully, deeply passionate about, but they were meaningful businesses. Was one: is by succeeding at something, I could close this gap of abandonment when I was a kid, my parents would leave me alone at home, was younger and like I was scared by blah, blah, blah. So there's this, trauma of abandonment. So if I could be successful now, my parents finally would pay attention to me. But under my parents, it could be friends, society, everyone, blah, blah, blah.

[00:53:46] So ultimately it was driven by that trauma versus by internally what I'm supposed to do. And that's, by the way, not only just, you know, I made a comment that our society is so great at the storytelling that we buy into that concept and we try to mimic people. Also another layer of fog that's added to truly figuring out what we're meant to do if



Titans as Teens

the layers of trauma. And the second thing that I realized I constantly like I did a lot of extreme sports, everything from like skydiving, kiteboarding, wakeboarding, blah, blah, blah, blah. And I injured myself a lot of times and I couldn't fucking figure out why would I always injure myself? And like, I really enjoy pushing things to the limit. But then I was like subconsciously I was like, why is that happening? And like when I injure myself once again, it attract a different type of attention, it's like the care that was missing when I was younger, I wanted somebody else to take care for me. So so, yeah, there's like besides money, there are so many different triggers and motivators, it's like a lot of people do a lot of like go through crazy times, I don't know, building companies that are, not that not necessarily great for the world or consumer. Just to just to hear like - I'm proud of you from their father. You know. Money is one very small driver. And I think it's probably the least of the times people build companies because of money.

Brody [00:55:17] All right. Part two, is what is A) really important characteristic that it would be great if everyone in the world could have.

Nikolai [00:55:28] Ability to step into the shoes of others, see the world through their lens,.

Brody [00:55:35] Empathy?

Nikolai [00:55:36] Yeah, yeah, empathy.

[00:55:39] It's like, I think a lot of shit that's happening right now as an example in the US is just people screaming over each other. blah blah blah. I was like, well, try walking in the shoes of this person and that person and etc.. And it's like everything exists there for a reason. And just, I guess more examples to throw in an example. It's like going through this exercise where I'm going through all people in my life and I'm like bringing up their name. And the list is really long and I see what feeling and emotion and experience and if it's a negative one, like there's a technique to release it, and like kind of experience love towards those people. And the big pattern that I'm observing, that I'm noticing, at least for myself, is this pattern of misunderstanding people and as a result, judging them or people who hurt me or screwed me over whatever, I actually feel them feel in a complete piece and can like experience love towards those people, because now I understand where it's coming from.

[00:56:44] Like the reason I hurt people because I had some kind of trauma or because I grew up, I was brought up the following that blah, blah. So realizing and that's not the most pleasant thing. The reason I'm hurting someone is because I'm in pain myself. So it's like the reason that somebody did something to me. They're fighting their own battle and just realizing that, it just blows my mind. I was like, wow, why would I even ever be upset at them? It's like it should be the opposite.

Brody [00:57:16] I want you to now imagine, to create a class, like a school class where your only goal is to have the students who come out of it, be successful and empathetic. What kind, of course would you do? What would you recommend and how would you teach them?



Titans as Teens

Nikolai [00:57:37] Meditate a lot. All types of techniques. That's literally that's what I would focus on and a bunch of trauma/conditioning, releasing techniques. So meditation and like looking at conditioning, slash trauma and working through those and releasing those those, that's literally the course of the two courses.

Brody [00:58:03] And do you think meditation can impact both the empathy and success part simultaneously?

Nikolai [00:58:08] One hundred percent, yeah. Yeah. Well, it depends how you define success right?

Brody [00:58:13] Your definition of success.

Nikolai [00:58:15] Yeah. Yeah, 100 percent. Even if people define it differently, I believe you will get them to a better version of success or they will first help them to redefine it the way it's supposed to be defined, ultimately for them, and then help them get there.

[00:58:28] [theme music under]

Brody [00:58:30] That was Nikolai Bratkovski, an incredible guy. If you want to know more about him, you can visit his Twitter @nikolaiB Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Titans as Teens. If you want to learn more about the podcast or other episodes, visit [TitansAsTeens.com](https://titansasteens.com) for tons of information further reading.