



Nicole Mejia Wants You to Love Yourself--All of You

She launched herself as an Instagram model. And then Nicole Mejia built an entire fitness brand, Fit and Thick, to empower women to embrace their natural shape and work to enhance it. Now, the fitness entrepreneur is rebranding her empire as LULY, and encouraging a different type of well-being: one that begins on the inside. Alicia gets her to go deep on acceptance as the starting point of transformation, resisting the urge to constantly change and evolve, and why self-love often means “making difficult decisions to honor your needs.”

Alicia Menendez:

I have been following Nicole Mejia on Instagram for the past six years, and in that time, I've watched her evolve from fashion model to fitness instructor, to the entrepreneur behind the lifestyle brand, Luly. She's a leader in a larger movement that's about embracing the body you're in and challenging us to rethink what it means to be happy and healthy. Nicole, how fun to see you after all these years.

Nicole Mejia: Thank you so much for having me. So exciting to be here.

Menendez: You've built an empire in the blink of an eye.

Mejia: It's been six years, girl. It's not in the blink of an eye. But thank you. Thank you.

Menendez: So you've just rebranded, but I think most of us know you for the original brand, which was Fit and Thick, so let's start there. What does it mean to be Fit and Thick?

Mejia: Yeah, so Fit and Thick originally started when I was at this crossroads in my own life. I was getting a lot of feedback about my body when I was modeling on Instagram, and people were like, "Your legs are too big. Your boobs are too small. You have too much cellulite on your butt." I kind of came to this place where I was like, "Okay, I can either accept my body or I can conform to what these people's standards of beauty are."

Menendez: Strangers on the internet?

Mejia: Oh, yeah. That's the way it goes. You know-

Menendez: Yeah.

Mejia: You know the way that Instagram goes: if you put yourself out there, people think that you are asking for their commentary on the way you live your life, or the thoughts and images that you project. So, I kind of came to this place where I was like, "Okay, I can either accept my body, or I can conform."

: And I chose to accept my body, and I did it, you know, post on Instagram, and it was just about me saying, "I'm fit. I can sprint fast. I can lift heavy, and my cardiovascular is in shape, but I'm also thick and not because I work out to be, but because that's my natural body and they're not mutually exclusive. Someone can have cellulite and also be strong."

: So it's about embracing your natural shape. It's about feeling confident in who you are, accepting where you are, so that you can improve upon yourself. We believe that acceptance is the start, and then you start to work on improving your body through fitness and nutrition.

Menendez: Who or what was instrumental before all of this--before Instagram--in shaping your sense of self?

Mejia: Yeah, that's a really good question. I guess it really came down to my parents never commenting on my body. When I was young and I was overweight, and I remember my mom would take me to the department stores as a young girl, maybe like 10 or 11, and I couldn't fit into the kid sizes, and so she would take me to the adult sizes and that was just like this... Like I still remember that as a super traumatic experience, which, first world problems in a way, but she never made me feel uncomfortable or less than because of the fact that that's what my body was.

I know that a lot of Latin families, they do comment on their kids' bodies growing up and that either they're too fat or they're getting too skinny. They're never enough. They're never just right.

Menendez: You were teased as a kid-

Mejia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Menendez: For being overweight.

Mejia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Menendez: Do you remember what that actually felt like? What they said?

Mejia: I remember the last time that someone said something about my body. I was a freshman in high school and I was wearing Softe shorts, because it was a pep rally, and some kid walked by and he was like--in front of everyone--he was like, "Hey Nicole, my mom has this machine that helps her to work out her cellulite. Do you want me to bring it in for you?" And in front of everyone, I was like, "Wow, that's really fucked up." You know? And-

Menendez: Not even a clever burn.

Mejia: Not even a clever burn, but humiliating at the same time, you know-

Menendez: Of course.

Mejia: Because of course everyone then looks. And from that moment on, I made a decision. Like that was actually a pivotal moment in my life where I was like, "I'm going to take my image into my own hands."

: And in the beginning, I did that kind of in unhealthy ways. I mean, I was not eating, and not like I was anorexic, but I just learned--I wanted to control my body--and I learned that was a way in which I could control my body. I could eat once a day, at dinner with my parents, and then I will lose weight. And that was the goal.

Menendez: So very restrictive calories.

Mejia: Very restrictive calories. And then I joined swim team, and then I started to build muscle. And I was like, "Oh, wait," and my body started changing and needed to eat more calories, because we were burning like a thousand calories and in a practice. And I think the communal aspect of swimming and just the strength that I felt, the improvements that I, you know, saw in my body and in my mind after exercising, like that really were the seeds, along with my dad's influence with running in the morning with me. But those are like the seeds of my love for exercise.

Menendez: How did exercise then change your relationship to your body?

Mejia: Well, it's evolved, right? When Fit and Thick was born, it was about, "Let's embrace this curvy body and let's work out to accentuate it," which is neither good nor bad. It just is, and it's a preference, and everyone is free to have their own goals with fitness.

But as I continued to evolve and as I continued to go inward with myself, I realized that what really, really mattered was that I felt strong after a workout, that I was consistent with my workouts so that I felt strong. And physically strong also leads to me feeling mentally strong. I think that's like, when you want to work on your mind, work on your body. Get in the gym and develop consistency with a fitness regimen because that's going to build you to be strong-minded.

Menendez: Absolutely.

Mejia: Yeah, making yourself go, pushing through the pain, understanding that like the pain of getting through a workout is worth it because of the endorphin high, the dopamine hit, the benefits, the calorie burn.

Menendez: Yeah.

Mejia: But now, yeah, it's more about way I feel after, and not so much the way I look, if that makes sense.

Menendez: Do you then, on the flip, remember the first time you got positive, perhaps too much, positive attention for your body?

Mejia: Oh, I mean, hello? Yeah. And I think attention can be such a dangerous thing for your body when you are insecure, because that's how it started with me. I craved attention. I craved acceptance and love and validation, because I didn't have those things for myself, and so I put a couple of pictures on the internet and I got all the attention that I had been seeking.

And because the ego was fragile, and because my sense of self was based off of what everyone else perceived of me, as soon as I started getting negative feedback... Or too much feedback, right? Like that can inflate your ego. It can also affect the hierarchy of

importance that you place who you are, what you are, you know? And yeah, it can get skewed.

Menendez: You were studying to become a nurse.

Mejia: Yes.

Menendez: You started to do some modeling. Talk to me about the pressure to look a certain way. I think part of it is you don't fit neatly into a box, right?

Mejia: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Menendez: It's like you didn't fit neatly into the fitness box. You didn't fit neatly into the-

Mejia: Model box.

Menendez: 5'10" 105 pounds. So where did you fit?

Mejia: Yeah, I didn't feel like I fit. And when I said I owned my body--which, by the way, saying that you own your body, that's the start of a process, right? It's not like, "Oh, now I love myself;" it's a daily process and it still is something that I work on.

Actually, after I claimed that, then the real pressures started, because when so many other women identified with that, I felt like I was in a leadership role and that I had a responsibility to those women to do right by me so I could do right by them, if that makes sense.

Menendez: To really live it.

Mejia: Exactly. Exactly. It's easy to talk about it.

Menendez: What was the pivot point where you weren't just focusing on fitness for yourself, but you were focusing on fitness for other women?

Mejia: From the very start of modeling, I knew that that wasn't the end goal. Once I started to amass a following, I was like, "Okay, whoa. This is a thing. I have influence and I have an audience, and now what am I going to do with this? What do I want to say?" And then when I posted that post and I started sharing my workouts, it felt like more of a purpose, more of a mission, rather than, you know, a way to garnish notoriety or even money.

And so from that point, from the moment that other women identified with my truth, I felt like I wasn't just living for myself, but I was also, of course living for myself, but also using that as a means to inspire and empower other women.

Menendez: As you started then training other women, what did you learn? Which patterns emerged?

Mejia: That a huge issue that people face is not, "This is the right workout. This is the wrong workout. This is what I should eat. This is what I shouldn't eat," because losing weight's very simple; it's calorie restriction. But it's not easy, right?

And so, people are always looking for the right and the wrong thing, and they're jumping from plan to plan, thinking that the plan is the problem. The problem is within. The problem is lack of motivation, lack of support, lack of self-worth, lack of self-love, limiting beliefs, you know, them growing up and their parents or people in their lives telling them that they're not worthy, they're fat, they're always going to be fat, and they believe those things and then they self-sabotage.

And so that's where like I really am passionate about helping people unlock internally and heal. Because it's not difficult to find fitness programs, you know, it's difficult to stay committed and think that you're worthy and capable of doing those things.

Ad: *Making Latina to Latina has been an incredible ride so far. Now we want to bring you closer to the show by deepening our connection on Patreon. Your monthly support, \$5 or \$20, or whatever's in your heart to give, helps us find new ways to connect and bring together this awesome community. Plus, we have extra perks for Patreon members, everything from early access to the podcast to one-on-one coaching sessions with me or Juleyka. Head over to patreon.com/latinatolatina to join us today. That's patreon.com/latinatolatina.*

Menendez: You've come so far.

Mejia: Thank you.

Menendez: I mean, when I started following you, you are still in probably what was a transitional phase, where the modeling resembled thirst traps in some ways.

Mejia: Yes.

Menendez: I mean, you were definitely showing your body for an audience that wanted to consume it in a hyper-sexualized way.

Mejia: Yes.

Menendez: I watched as it became about empowerment. And what you're talking about now is miles from where you started. How do you feel now when you think back, and look back, at where this all began?

Mejia: I almost feel like it's not me. And for a long time I rejected it as part of my journey, but now I recognize that even though it wasn't the most desirable. It was the most public part of my journey, because now my following has started to top because of the fact that all the people that followed me at that time, were there to consume that. And that's probably what they still want to consume. And I'm like-

Menendez: "What?"

Mejia: You know, posting about spiritual books and shit. They're like, "This isn't what I-"

Menendez: They're like, "Where are pictures of you in your panties? That's what I came for."

Mejia: "Show us your ass. You talk too much." Now I recognize that in order to get where I was, I had to go through that. And so now I'm learning to embrace that and be proud of that. But I also feel like there's so much more to grow and there's so much more to evolve, and a lot of that has to do with me grounding down and feeling super confident in all that I am, instead of continuously searching to change and evolve.

Menendez: Let's talk about the exercise.

Mejia: Yes.

Menendez: For someone who is curious about that piece of things, what does the week in the exercise life of Nicole Mejia look like at this point?

Mejia: Okay. So, it varies. I do yoga two to three times a week. Not just like restorative yoga; I like to do power yoga, power flows, and feel really strong and flexible at the same time. I lift weights. I walk almost every day. I walk about two miles almost every day. I got rid of my car, so I'm like, you know, part of a new wave in Miami, walking around. Drivers beware, because they don't even know what a pedestrian is in Miami.

Menendez: No.

Mejia: I move my body every day. Our bodies evolved to move, and so I move every day, whether that's getting on the floor and stretching and foam rolling, and doing something unorganized while I watch a show or listen to a podcast, going outside to walk, or going in the gym and lifting super heavy.

And it's kind of intuitive at this point. If I've been traveling a lot, and I feel weak, and I feel low energy, I'm not going to force myself to go down to the gym and lift a bunch of weight, I'll go for a walk or I'll do yoga. Conversely, if I feel really strong and I had a high carb meal the day before, I'll go and I'll rip it up in the gym. And it's taken me years, like 10 years of training, to get to this point where I can move intuitively and maintain my body.

: So the goal with the women who follow my programs is that, you're going to sample everything. I want you to pay attention to how you feel during and after each workout, and connect to that, connect to how you feel afterwards, because that's what's going to give you feedback on whether or not something is for you. Because everything is not for everyone, right? And I think the real answer in us changing our bodies is not looking outward, but looking inward, while we sample everything that's out there. Yeah.

Menendez: It's also a very similar attitude that you've taken with eating.

Mejia: Totally. Absolutely.

Menendez: So tell me about the move to being plant-based.

Mejia: Yeah. So it was inspired by the documentary Forks Over Knives, which is probably the most fact-based documentary out there that's in support of the vegan movement, and it had a very medical lens that it offered its information through, like a healing, that food heals the body. And then I started doing research on the carbon emissions that the meat and dairy industry produced, along with me living in a coastal city, understanding what's

happening in Miami, understanding that climate change is real, and feeling, I guess, responsible to do my part.

And so the whole medical aspect and the healing of the body, that was great, but what really, really hit home for me was the environmental impacts: how much water we could save by not eating meat, just how much CO2 is produced. You know, it's the leading contributor to CO2, more than the automobile industry.

And so I cut it out, I cut dairy and meat out right away. For four months, I was vegan, and I didn't know what the hell I was doing. Because, I was teaching two classes a day, I was high energy, working all day, then teaching at night, and I was kind of losing weight, but my body was changing in weird ways. Come to find out, I was not eating enough calories and I was also not supplementing properly certain things.

And so, I remember one day, I was on the first day of my period, four months in. I'm driving in my car and I'm like--just pure instinct, Alicia, pure instinct, like I was not thinking, it was just animalistic--I'm like, "I need red meat." And I'm in Doral--that's where my office used to be--and I'm on Yelp, like, "Where's burgers? Where's burgers?" There's this counter. I walk up to the counter, I order a burger and I walk away, and I'm stuffing the burger in my mouth. I sit in my car and like, "I obviously have no idea what I'm doing. I need to do research."

I then went back to the drawing board, started incorporating fish and eggs back in, until I could get an idea, a sense of, how am I going to supplement calories? What macro splits do I need to hit? No. Okay, I'm having 200 grams of carbs, but if 80 of them are fiber, I need to up my carbs, right? Because fiber adds a lot of bulk, but doesn't add a lot of energy.

Menendez: No, this is like high level algorithms that you're doing.

Mejia: Yeah. Yeah. And then through that experimentation--and it took me a year to wean off of fish and eggs altogether--through that phase of experimentation, I developed the Plant-Based Power-Up, which was a five week plant-based program that we offered through the app, so that other women who wanted to transition could do so knowing that they're getting the proper splits of calories and that they're also getting enough vitamins and minerals.

Menendez: Part of what I've found appealing about the way that you present it is that it's not militant. It's very much you're like, "Try this, see if it works for you, see if you can make it work for you, and then assess."

Mejia: Yeah, thanks for that.

Menendez: You're welcome.

Mejia: Yeah.

Menendez: As opposed to sort of a "This is the only way, and you must, and there is no other path."

Mejia: I feel like if anyone who is selling a product tells you that "this is the way," it's a lie, and you need to run the other way because there's no one size fits all.

Menendez: So then, what is intuitive eating?

Mejia: Mm. Yeah.

Menendez: Because that has been the hardest part of my personal journey, is learning how to say, "This is what I want, this is what I need, this is when I'm full," and I'm doing it from a place of intuition.

Mejia: Right, and love and... Yeah, not out of like-

Menendez: Rules and punishment?

Mejia: Or emotional, yeah-

Menendez: Yeah. Yes.

Mejia: Emotional consuming is like a huge one. So my view on intuitive eating comes from a background of counting macros.

Menendez: Which, can you define what it means, counting macros?

Mejia: Sure. So you have calories, which is your unit of energy, right? And in order to maintain the weight that you are right now, you need to eat the same number of calories as your maintenance, right? A certain number of calories in a day. In order to gain weight, you need to eat more calories than you need in a given day, and in order to lose weight, you need to eat less. Simple formula.

Within those calories, you then have macronutrients. Macronutrients are proteins, carbs and fats, and it's where the calories come from. One gram of protein has four calories. One gram of carbs has four calories. One gram of fat has nine calories, so fat is very calorically dense.

:

Each of the macronutrients is important for different reasons. The carbohydrates are the simplest form of sugar. They break down to glucose in your body and then your cells and your brain utilize that for energy. We have fat, which is the macronutrient of maintenance. It's high energy, cushions your organs, lines your cells, lines your nerves. It also is important for the absorption of vitamins A, D, E and K, important in the hormone process, so going on a low fat diet is bad, because fat is super important. And then there's protein, which is the macronutrient of building and repair. So all of your tissues, all of your muscles are made of amino acids, which are the building blocks of protein.

Menendez: So how do you--as a vegan now?

Mejia: Yeah.

Menendez: Vegetarian? Vegan?

Mejia: Plant-based.

Menendez: Tell me about the difference between being vegan and plant-based.

Mejia: Yeah. So, vegan and plant-based. Vegan has a lot to do with the ethical side of the whole movement, which means I won't eat animals, I won't consume the byproducts of animals, nor will I wear leather, silk, any of the things that come from animals. Whereas plant-based, a whole foods plant-based diet, has to do with eating foods that are whole, meaning unprocessed, and plant-based, meaning plants, right?

So I try to eat organic as much as possible, absolutely non-GMO, 100% of the time, and about 80/20, 80% plant-based, and then 20% whatever the hell I want. So if I want to have a processed vegan pizza, I'm going to do that, and that's cool. But more in the past six months, I've been trying to get away from this very dogmatic way of thinking about the diet, and if I feel in the moment that my body needs eggs or it needs fish, I've started to give in to that. Because if that's where my body's calling in that moment, part of intuitive eating is to listen to your body in that moment.

Menendez: It's taken me a long time to accept the role that food and exercise play in my body, the way my body feels, but it has taken me much, much longer to embrace the psychological element of all of this. And you are a big proponent of self-talk, self-love. What does that practice actually look like and how do you learn it? And how do you do it in a way that doesn't feel like, "Alicia, you're the greatest"?

Mejia: Sometimes it is that. "You're the greatest." Yeah. I think it's rooted in acceptance and forgiveness, constantly accepting and forgiving yourself, like on a very deep level. Honoring your needs is a huge part of it, being able to draw boundaries around your needs and around giving of yourself. That's one common thread that I see in a lot of the women that we attract to the programs: that they're givers, and their sense of worth is tied to their ability to give and serve.

Menendez: Is this is hitting home for you?

Mejia: Yeah. And it's crazy because once you really realize that you have to give to yourself, and when you give to yourself, you have way more to give to other people. And so it may feel like a moment of selfishness, which will totally go against what feels natural to you, but "you can't pour from an empty cup" is what I always tell the girls. You know, you have to be able to either find people in your network that can pour into you, which, when you're a giver, is not the way that you've conditioned the relationships to be, because everyone thinks you're the strong one that helps everyone else.

Self-love sometimes is bubble baths and getting your nails done and going to get a massage, but most times, it's making difficult decisions to honor your needs, to define boundaries, and to discipline yourself.

Menendez: And to release yourself from the identity of being a giver.

Mejia: Yes.

Menendez: That if you have long prided yourself on that-

Mejia: Yes.

Menendez: Then there is a slightly narcissistic element to the whole thing, which is, "Everyone's relying on me, everyone's counting on me, everyone wants one iteration of this person." It's like, no, probably not.

Mejia: Everyone will be okay. Yeah, which really, it's like seated in control too, right? Like our desire and need to control everything. Yeah.

Menendez: I once went to a management training where they had great language for people like us in communicating with work partners, but I have found it very effective in communicating with life partners, which is... Well I guess this is more something that would be said to me than by me, which is, "I need you to step back so that I can step up."

Mejia: Hm.

Menendez: Which is that, if you're never dropping the balls, then alright, great, no one's going to be there to catch them. But you're dying for someone to step up and take them from you, right? How many balls can I hold in there?

Mejia: Yeah. That's true what you said about releasing the identity; it's like understanding what your narrative has been, and then going back and rewriting part of that narrative so that you feel more, yeah, in your power. It's so, so true.

Menendez: I've watched your brand go from classes in Miami to a national tour, to now, an app and a fitness program. Was this always the vision or has the vision evolved?

Mejia: Girl, it was never... Like this is the first time, with this new rebrand, I actually have a vision for Luly. I actually ended up partnering with my sister, Noelle, who's the ying to my yang, girl, yin to my yang, it's not ying. I'm like a dreamer and all over the place, and she's very practical and a doer, and so we kind of have this really great balance.

And the brand is called Luly, and our slogan is "live like you love yourself." And we have these three pillars. There's live, which is lifestyle content and blogging. We have eat, which is recipes and nutrition. And then we have move, which is fitness, obviously, starting with Fit and Thick-esque workouts, and then I'm going to move into like yoga and other modalities, maybe corrective exercise.

: And then we have this 28-day lifestyle program called JUMP, motivating women who are kind of at a lull in their lives or feel like they've plateaued, and they need a jumpstart in a healthy lifestyle. And it's a means to empower them to say, "This is not the only way, but this is a way. Use this as a framework. Take what works for you, leave what doesn't, so that when you leave here, you can build on your own."

Menendez: Who has been most critical to helping you re-imagine this as Luly?

Mejia: In terms of ideation, I was really kind of solo on it, at least the first part. But I think Noelle instilled her trust in me, and she was like, "I trust you. I'm here for it. You define what this vision is and I believe in you, and I know you're capable." Because for so long, like I just didn't trust my ability to define the mission or the vision, because what if it fails? And self-doubt. And so, having her instill confidence and trust in me, I think empowered me to be able to come up with the vision.

Menendez: Talk to me about what it takes to materially build a brand and a business like the one that you have built. How much money did you initially start with?

Mejia: Five thousand dollars. That was it. My boyfriend at the time--I was modeling and making a couple hundred bucks a week doing fashion shows and photo shoots, and this was before Instagram influencing--and he's like, "I'm going to give you five thousand dollars and I'm going to open you a business account."

Menendez: This is the boyfriend?

Mejia: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And I was like, "Okay," and he's like, "You can do what you want with it. I know you want to make calendars, and you have this whole fitness thing that has kind of taken off and so, here you go." He gives me five thousand dollars, he opens a business account, he says, "I know you have these things that you want to do, go do them."

And so I did, and invested two thousand dollars into the calendars, made some profit there, invested into t-shirts, made some profit there, and then that's how the business grew. It was like no loans, no investors, it was just people who cared to support, who believed in the mission and the products, and we just kept growing and re-investing.

:

Even the tours, like we would find venues, find flights, know how much money we needed to make, determine how many tickets we needed to sell, put up the tickets and then the sales from the tickets would fund us going on tour. And that's how we grew to where we are today.

Menendez: So were you even making money on the tours?

Mejia: No. No, I mean, maybe a couple thousand dollars each stop, but nothing... It was purely experience and I would do it all again in a heartbeat. People that are like very business-minded, they hear about the tours and they're like, "This is stupid. This makes no sense."

Menendez: The calendars make more sense than the tour. I mean, you can sell calendars while you sleep, okay?

Mejia: You can, yeah. Just teaching classes and touring--obviously there's like a cap to how much you can scale, but I wouldn't trade it for the world, because it put me in the room with the people I'm serving, and it's a continual reminder that it's not about me, it's about them. And of course I'm using my journey as a means to help them on theirs.

Menendez: So then what's the big money-maker? If its not the tours, if it's not the merch-

Mejia: The App. Yeah, it's the App, because it's subscription-based. Once the content is filmed or produced, it just ends up being residual income. And we're in the process of building a new App right now. We'll have a new eight-week program. We'll have new recipes. The goal is to have this JUMP program, and then once they cycle off JUMP--which, it's like very handheld--once they cycle off JUMP and they have their framework in place, then we'll provide content which is tiered down. So, then they can join the fitness program, they can

pick and choose from the recipes that they want, and they can get involved in some of the personal development work as well.

Menendez: How long did it take for you to be able to pay yourself?

Mejia: That's a really good question. For the first year, I was using the business card for everything, I wasn't paying myself, per se.

Menendez: Wait, did that mean you were going into debt when you say you were using the business card?

Mejia: No, no, meaning if I wanted to get a smoothie, I would use the business card, because I didn't have any personal money, is my point. Like, I didn't have any money. Zero. And then the second and third year, I paid myself... Five hundred dollars a week? Or five hundred dollars a pay period, maybe? Five hundred dollars a pay period.

: But then, I think there was a huge turning point for me at the end of 2017, because I realized that me not paying myself--and instead of paying myself, I would hire someone new or invest in something else--I was actually shorting my worth. You know, I was giving, giving, giving, and nothing was coming back to me.

And so I was like, "That's it. I'm going to make X amount of dollars a week, and we'll figure it out." I've learned that that motivates me. There's a quote that Tony Robbins always says. He says, "If you want to take the islands, burn the boats," meaning don't leave any room for plan B. And I think that certain people that resonates with, some people are like, "That's way too much uncertainty. No, I need a plan B. I need to like do it bit by bit." I'm that person. I'm like, "Okay, I'm just going to rent this apartment. I don't know how I'm going to pay for it, but it's going to motivate me to make more money," kind of thing. And so-

Menendez: Meanwhile, I'm like, "I need a lifesaver and a smaller boat inside of my backup boat, just so we have options should everything go to hell."

Mejia: We have wooden oars, we have retractable oars, we have a propeller in the back.

Menendez: I'm practicing swimming. Like I'm doing everything I need to do in case plan A does not work out. But I see the merits-

Mejia: Yeah. Yeah.

Menendez: ... of that approach.

Mejia: And I see it of yours too. It's probably less stressful, way more secure.

Menendez: What have you learned about yourself as a business woman that you did not know when you started this?

Mejia: That I don't need to know everything, I think is one of the biggest lessons that I've learned. I can either take counsel from someone else, I can call a mentor, go to Google, read a book, because then you just end up leading and making decisions from ego and imposter syndrome.

For a long time, I didn't really feel comfortable stating that I was, because I never worked a regular job. I mean, I was a lifeguard for five years, and I tutored people, I taught swimming lessons, I was a hostess for like a month. And so, I never worked in an office; I never was part of like a real management team and understood the dynamics of an office.

And so, I just always felt, every day when I walked into the office, I felt like, "I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know how to lead them. I don't know what the vision is. I don't feel adequate. I don't feel equipped." Literally, it was just like negative self-talk all the time surrounding being a business owner, and I realized it was because I was trying to... I had never worked an office job in my life. I started my own business, which was a digital business, and then I was like, "Let's get an office and work 9:00 to 5:00."

Menendez: "Let's make this real."

Mejia: But my point is that, it was like I saw an image, what society paints for me of what a business owner is, and I was like, "Let me go be that," instead of being myself, and trusting that me--what's inside of me--and the people around me are what allowed me to get to this point that I could even start a business. So why am I now trying to conform to something that I'm not in order to run this business?

:

And so, I think it's also just like trusting that if you're walking that path, you're walking it for a reason, and that you have it in you; you just have to claim it and you have to trust that it's there.

Menendez: Any advice for aspiring founders listening to you?

Mejia: My advice to aspiring founders is to develop a vision that's so clear that opportunities that will take you away from the vision are a clear no. Because if you don't have a vision, opportunities that look sexy in the moment can change your trajectory, and you have to actually say no more than you say yes. And you may feel like, "Oh, this could be the thing." There's no thing. There's no one thing, there's no one interview.

I mean, you have to maintain it and you have to have a clear vision, right? I think that's the biggest thing and it's been such a lesson for me in this new chapter, is that I can see now that I have a vision, I know exactly what I want to do, and it scares the shit out of me. My vision scares the shit out of me, and that's good, because it means I have to grow so much and I need to like leverage other people and trust other people.

But I can see now that I have one. Opportunities come, and I can see how they would have swayed me in the past, and they did sway me in the past with Fit and Thick because I was just going. And I'm grateful for that, because I learned so much about the go and flow and that I'm adaptable.

And also, I think another really important thing is don't try to talk to everyone. Because if you're trying to talk to everyone with your message, you're talking to no one, because it's all about community and relatability now. People want a tribe. People want to feel heard, they want to feel cared for, and they want to feel like they can relate to the owner or the message.

The cool thing about the name Luly is that it's nonspecific enough that if we want to come out with lifestyle products, one day we can. If we want to drop leggings, we can. I feel like it's literally limitless. It feels like a blank canvas.

And I want to write. That's really what I want to do, is write every day and start blogging, and one day write a book.

Menendez: Can't wait.

Mejia: Yeah. Thank you.

Menendez: Nicole, thank you so much.

Mejia: Thank you so much for having me.

Menendez: Thanks as always for joining us. *Latina to Latina* is Executive Produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua-Williams and me. Maria Murriel is our Sound Designer. Carolina Rodriguez is our Sound Engineer. Emma Forbes is the show's intern.

We love hearing from you. Email us at hola@latinatolatina.com. Remember to subscribe or follow us on RadioPublic, Apple podcasts, Google podcasts, or wherever you're listening, and please leave a review. It is the quickest way to help us grow as a community.

CITATION:

Menendez, Alicia, host. "Nicole Mejia Wants You to Love Yourself--All of You." *Latina to Latina*, Lantigua Williams & Co., September 23, 2019. LatinaToLatina.com

Produced by

