



UNSTUCK: Why Irene Quevedo Wants You to Take a Chance on Yourself

To kick off this four part series, this non-profit CEO and professional coach shares the biggest obstacle her clients face when it comes to asserting what they really want, as well as the radical decision that transformed her life.

Alicia Menendez:

A few months ago, we brought you a series on leveling up to ring in this new year. And since we are halfway through this year, we thought it might be time for a refresh. A look at how to get unstuck. We're kicking things off with Irene Quevedo. She is the executive director of a successful nonprofit and a part of the [Level Up Latina](#) coaching team and podcast, which I absolutely love. While I knew that Irene had coached lots of other people through this experience, I had no idea how personal it was for her. Before we jump into it, during this series, I'm going to be doing something new. At the end of each episode, I will give you my top takeaways. So if you are like me, you can listen without taking notes. Alright, let's get unstuck.

Irene, how fun now I get to be on the other side of this with you.

Irene Quevedo: I am so excited to be here. It's always a joy to talk to you.

Menendez: Irene, I'm using the word stuck because stuck is the way that many times in my life I've come to an impasse where I have felt that I just like didn't know where to go next, or I was sort of fine doing what I was doing, but it didn't feel like enough. So I think there are lots of different words that people can use for what I'm describing as feeling stuck. How often is that feeling what you hear from your clients?

Quevedo: All the time. Stuck is our magic word too. Honestly. It's literally, everybody's go-to, they're just stuck in different things, obviously. So it's, I'm stuck in this relationship. I'm stuck in this job. I'm stuck at this point in my life where I should be doing more. I'm stuck with my health. The word stuck to me strikes me as something so simple. Just get unstuck. Right. But it isn't that simple. It's like one of the hardest things when you're just in this zone and it's like a great joy to get to the bottom of what you're really feeling and how to get out of that.

Menendez: As you said, there are all different types of stuck. I have been stuck in a relationship. I have been stuck in a job I've been stuck in unhealthy patterns. What is the form of stuck you hear the most frequently?

Quevedo: Mmm Career. I hear that a ton, a ton. You know, we're trying to level up our expectations. I'm in this great career, but it's what my parents want or expect me to be doing. And there's a lot of loyalty that can be seen as a good thing, but you're stuck in a job where you're not happy, but it's what's your mom, grandma, daddy, everybody wants you to do, it's the right

thing to do. And I have a ton of examples of this with clients and with me personally, because I'm the youngest of six. First in my family to go to college, huge tug of war there, because they didn't understand all the things I wanted to do. They thought I was just fine where I was, why do you want more? When I was gosh, six, seven years into a career that I actually really loved. This was about four years ago. I loved my career. I liked my job.

Menendez: What were you doing?

Quevedo: I was a CEO of a non-profit and I was very entry-level at this nonprofit. So to have grown up to become the CEO was huge for me. Like just to, to get there, to not look like anyone else to be the youngest CEO, to be the first Latina, it was a big deal. And I felt very stuck because while I loved the work and I loved my career, there was something deep that I desired more. And at that time it was, I wanted a break. I wanted to travel. I wanted to do something exciting. When my husband and I got married, we got knocked up girl. So we didn't have that honeymoon stage. And I think that it's something I always yearned for. I also wanted to have the marriage and wanted to have the kids. So I have these three kids. I have this amazing husband. I have this great life. And some would look at me and say, you have the dream. And yet I felt stuck. And I knew in my gut, like, that's the question that women have to ask themselves first? Like, what do you know in your gut?

My husband and I had these really deep conversations about, we didn't want to miss out on things just because we had gotten married younger than our peers, had kids faster than our peers. And we said F it we're going to travel. We're going to quit our jobs.

So, I would think that I was going to quit my job and go for it. And then I would get promoted like on, this is not the time. Or I would think that we're ready. We're going to make this plan. We've saved money and then he'd get promoted. And so we felt stuck, but all of these things were keeping us in the same, saying they were good enough. It's what we have worked for. It's what we both wanted as first gen you know, college grads. But we kept going back to it. The thing about being stuck, cause you keep going back to this feeling. You cannot get away from it. Like you're still feeling this thing that's gnawing at you. So when we finally did it, we were so prepared to quit our jobs and saved our money and thought about our route. Then we had to tell all the people in our lives and both of us being very Latino, we thought we would get, you know, supportive Latino family members and opinions. And we got the absolute opposite. For the most part. A lot of people told us we were crazy. It was wrong.

There was no point. We leave these countries and you're going to travel through them. I went to Latin America, 14 different countries. They're like, you're nuts. Your mom didn't work so hard to come here to make it right, for you to run off and think that you can just live wherever you want. So this thing about being stuck is we could have really stopped at that point, because judgment is real. Judgment is so real and judgment keeps us stuck.

I had to contest with a lot of not only planning and being smart and disciplined. Cause the thing about getting unstuck is it's not going to happen tomorrow. There's a lot of delayed gratification. My husband drove this car that was like 24 years old. At some point it didn't start anymore. He's like pushing it down the street. But it's greater goal is we're traveling for a year. I'm saving every dollar. And we had so much judgment in that. Why don't they just get a new car? People didn't know we had this greater plan about being unstuck in our careers for a little while. So there's a judgment that you'll deal with. And then there's the criticism that may hold you back. And then there's the courage that it's going to take to do

something like sit down and talk to your boss and say, it's not you, it's me. I need to travel. And beyond that courage that it's going to take, it's just going to take you following through. Cause we could have quit. Traveling wasn't always amazing. There were times that were tough. Did we fight? Yeah. Where we over each other? Yes. Five of us traveling. I mean, traveling can be stressful, but we saw it through it and it was the greatest blessing.

Menendez: How did you pinpoint what it was that was making you feel stuck? Because I think sometimes we can have the feeling. We can identify the feeling in our gut, but it's not always clear to us what it is that is making us feel that way. What the misalignment is, what are the questions you asked yourself and what are the questions you walk your clients through when they come to you with this feeling?

Quevedo: You know, my greatest question to ask my clients is always, where do you want to be in a year? And they often say not here. And so we start to explore sort of what is it about them that feels like they want something else, something more, something less, you know, it's okay to, I don't want all this. I've suddenly worked for all of this. And now I have to stuck in this high power, high intensity career. So we go through a lot of that processing. What do you really want? Where do you really want to be? And is it really what you want? Is it for somebody else? Is it to keep up with someone else's needs or desires? Why, why, why? So we ask a lot of why. For me personally, what's your energy? What's changed in your energy because some folks, I think it's very obvious when maybe they're feeling stuck because something dramatic, maybe happens. I don't necessarily get depressed or sad, but my energy changes. And I know when my energy is off, I'm feeling stuck. And my health goals, you know, in my life goals, because I am just this different person. So I want people to challenge that, are you who you want to be? And sometimes the answer is no, because you are stuck.

So we process a lot of feelings that are hard to pinpoint, because like you said, you just have this gut, this feeling, but what is it? Is it that I'm stuck? Because in some situations, as a CEO of an, you know, great organization, I've had staff that tell me that they're stuck. But a lot of times I feel are they really, are they just don't want to go there. Sometimes it's an excuse to say, you're stuck to get to the next level. I'm so loyal. Or, I really got to be here. I'm doing a great job. It's not like that traditional stuck. Career wise, you know, I've seen a lot of people where I'm like, go, go take the plunge. What are you afraid of? I think you're stuck. And you're not saying it. You're saying I'm so loyal. I'll do just fine. This is enough for me.

I've told my staff that I love and I want to keep, I see it in them. Alicia I see they are stuck for all the wrong reasons because it's safe and comfortable. And I have to kind of push them out the door.

Menendez: I think there are lots of ways that resistance can manifest. And I, I want to admit that I have I'm recently coming off a period of feeling stuck. And I knew in my heart that what I needed to do was to create more space for myself to commit to some projects that were not going to pay me immediately. And so in that way, for me, hard to prioritize, because it always feels like the thing that I am getting my paycheck for is the thing I need to do first. And for some people I think being stuck is like, I don't know that these dreams I have are possible. I don't know that that leveling up, that that dreaming is really for me. For some people like myself, the resistance comes in the form of incredible minutiae. Like, well, the babysitter only comes from nine to noon, and I just don't think she can come from eight to

nine. And so while I guess I'll put all my dreams on hold, because I don't want to have a conversation with the babysitter about whether or not she can extend her hours an hour like that. For me, it is whatever is in some ways, the most quotidian of the challenges that show up as my greatest resistance.

Quevedo: That's why I love coaching, because we're going to see through that bullshit. If I may say that word, if I may not then I can say something else, we're going to see through that. And we're going to push you. I love that. And it doesn't have to be coaching any kind of accountability coach. For me when it comes to working out, that's when I'm going to get stuck in the minutiae, I'm going to find every which thing to freaking organize.

Menendez: All my sports bras are dirty. I just, I would love to be in peak physical condition, but ...

Quevedo: Yes, but you know, it is what it is. I don't wash my sports bras on purpose. No, the truth is I was working out. I need a freaking accountability partner. Like there's no tomorrow. What's always served me is to think like life is short. It's the cheesiest thing, but I've always moved with urgency. And that's why I have these like mini retirements. I'm going to travel for a month in summer with the kids because I know life is short. And then it gets me to focus on the bigger picture, not the minutiae.

Ofentimes, we're so stuck that there's just this mounting feeling of, I should've gotten to this six months ago, a year ago, it's out of control now. I didn't have the conversation with my partner, my boss, whatever it may be. Well, you're not going to get out of it in like a six month timeframe in six minutes. Like you were going to have to now hustle in reverse. Like, it's going to take those baby steps, which I know as women, we want to sometimes go, go, go and be urgent. And there's so much going on. But if we can have the patience to get unstuck, there's some magical stuff. That's why I like to ask my clients, where do you want to be in a year? A year feels like doable. I'm not saying five years, but it's not where you want to be in a month where we're just going to crash and burn. But others will work really well in a month time span. Like get down to who are you cause everybody's different. And what's going to work for one person to get us stuck is going to be different than another person based on your personality. And just your circumstances.

Menendez: Which is at the beginning of the year, we did a series on leveling up, which is also how I came upon Level Up Latina, my new favorite podcast. And, I think of the, when you go into a new year, there's all of this energy that comes with new beginnings. There also is this thing that happens about six months in where even if there has been sort of some incredible momentum behind that, it's easy, even with discipline and the best of intentions to stall out a little bit. If someone is at that point where they need to re-rev the engine, how do you do that?

Quevedo: What really gets me going is then the long-term vision. Then maybe you need to look a little further out because right now it's here. You're not feeling it anymore. All those little steps to that one year, you're thinking I'm burned out, I'm over it. It's like, of course we all kind of get over those new year's resolutions. But then I say to a client, or I say to a friend, I say to my husband, well, where do you want to be in five years? And then I also do some soul searching at that point for me personally. And for folks that I work with. I've had to stop and really say, what is it that is making me keep myself here?

Like, I'm all of a sudden I'm burnt out and I don't want to go further. And I've gotten this far and I'm not valuing it enough. Like, what is it about me? In my relationship with my

husband. We went to therapy some years ago and I, and it was my idea. And he's like, I don't know that we're that relationship that needs therapy. And I'm like, we need therapy. I feel we need it. I don't know that I knew the words. I'm like, give it to me as a gift. Like you're weird. He like Yelp's a therapist and we go to marriage counseling and I thought it was awesome. And in the middle of going to therapy, which is asking for help when you're stuck ask for help, right? For me, it was therapy. And it was this therapist who looked back at us and work through some stuff with us. And I was finding that I wasn't trusting my husband around money. And that was a big, huge thing. Right?

You really got to dig down to, what's the thing, roadblocking you keeping you from fully finishing this goal. And I had a process trust, my goodness, with another person and ask for help outside of me.

Menendez: I think one of the things I misunderstood about leveling up, misunderstood about getting stuck, misunderstood about reinventing myself, was that for many of us, this is a process that will happen over and over again throughout our lives. This is one of my personal questions, which is what happens when you climb to the middle of a mountain and realize that your stock and the decision is, do I give up all the climbing that I've done by climbing back down? Because I now realize I'm on the wrong mountain or do I just grit my teeth and get to the top of this mountain so that I can say, at least I've climbed one mountain.

Quevedo: I'd quit, but I'm not a quitter, but I do think there's a lot of lessons that were learned. And I don't want your time to be in vain and to keep going up this mountain, like what you did that half a year, when you did up half that mountain, it all mattered. You're not going to just finish for the sake of finishing when you realize it's, it's, we're going to fail too. Failure is a process. We're going to figure out half way that you know, that wasn't it. At least we had a plan. At least we did part of it. So I would try to find a way to strategically realign myself, find the bridge to the other mountain that I'm really trying to get to.

Um, but some folks might see it differently. Some people love to, you know, get there, accomplish it. Hey, you know, this is it. I did another great thing, but I think there's a lot of time. And with my whole perspective that like time is running out. We have a life to live. Like it's okay to have, you know, gotten halfway there. And it's not a failure. If there is something great that you got out of it and you realize you have more clarity, you actually want to do this other thing. I think as long as you truly are finishing, cause then there's the stop and starters of the world, which will just drive me crazy. That's another freaking excuse. It's just like, I'm so loyal. I also don't finish anything I start. But there are times when you can really reflect and say, you know, this wasn't the path.

Menendez: How do you get clients that you work with to see some of these questions as questions of values, rather than questions of choosing between option A and option B.

Quevedo: We do a lot of work around, what are your values? What are your limiting beliefs? What are your passions?

Menendez: Would you be willing to share one of your limiting beliefs?

Quevedo: Oh gosh, of course I would. I talked about money earlier, right? I, as successful as I am still struggle, and I am like this cheap person, like I still fear that like all the money that I have will somehow go away. And I was raised that way. That relationship with money is a fear. So I've girl that's a lot... I just booked a vacation that I still felt guilt. It's like, what the hell is wrong with me? I've saved I have all these savings, but it's, and I'm here telling people like,

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don't be afraid to spend that money you're investing you, or, you know, make these great financial decisions. Don't be afraid of the stock market. And I'm deep down like forcing myself, not to be afraid of all these decisions.

Menendez: I think there is an experience that we've all had, which is that you go for a walk with a girlfriend. She tells you something that's happening in her life. Maybe it's that she feels stuck. And it is just so obvious to you, like the things she would need to do to fix them. And they're not always huge. Sometimes it's like, you just need to clean out your garage and everything's going to be better. Obviously, the thing that we may prescribe as the answer is not necessarily the answer. We don't know what is best for anyone, but that everything seems possible for the people we love in a way that sometimes everything does not seem possible or within reach for ourselves.

Quevedo: You know, I think it has to do with rejection. And it's a weird answer maybe, but you know, we don't have to take the rejection from them taking the plunge, right. We don't have to feel the fear from them putting themselves out there. So I see this greatness for everybody that I love and I see them complaining and they want to maybe just great people that I've worked with change jobs or break up with that guy or whatever it is. And you say, girl, do it. And yeah, and you've got this and you're gonna be fine. And there's plenty of fish in the sea.

At the end of the day, that person has to go home and feel all their insecurities and all their fears around starting over, around being the new girl in the office, about dating again, about whatever it is. But I like to come from a place of sharing with people, the rejection I have felt, and the failure I've have had, and I see you and I hear you, and that's how it manifested in my life. And it was scary. And I did these things and then I did these things wrong and a whole bunch of things, right. Maybe, but a lot wrong and try to see them where they are, where they may not be admitting to their deepest insecurities and fears around being stuck. So I just talk about mine.

Menendez: How do you assess when the thing that is keeping you stuck is internal and when it is external?

Quevedo: Hmm. I love that question. (And it's all normally both.) Yeah, yeah, yeah, no, it's all of it, but I love that work that we do with constantly answering questions, questions, questions. And the more that you're working on yourself and asking yourself about how you were brought up, what you believe to be real and true and how you see yourself and when you're answering those questions, I think you can really decipher on like, oh wait, these limiting beliefs or this insecurity about myself, is it just showing up on paper?

No matter what I do, if it's in my journal, if it's in this cheesy assignment about writing about my passions or it's something that my best friends tell me, like, if there's this common thread with those things that are limiting in your life that are keeping you stuck, then if you're willing to look at it, you're willing to do the work. However that work may be, because for some folks it's very private and it's very scary, but if you're constantly doing the work and if it's listening to the podcast, reading the books, talking to people privately, you know, just like on message boards, you can just kind of do the work.

Menendez: So once someone has done the soul searching has, as you said, listened to the podcast, read the books, gone the message boards. And you think you're circling around clarity about what it is that is making you feel stuck. In my case, the most recent episode of it was simply not feeling that I had the time and the space to pursue some of my more creative endeavors. Then what?

Quevedo: Then that's when you don't quit, then that's when you keep going. And you have to set yourself up to have these small steps towards that goal. Everyone, I think has enough energy and enough excitement and enthusiasm and that newness to start. And then we are all going to naturally get to the place—we have to give ourselves grace—where we want to quit. Or we want to say, that's it. I'm done. I'm just going to be stuck here forever. No, it's those little things you determined to do for me. It's my openness with money. If it's investing every week and even if I'm uncomfortable with it, I have to stick to it. Right.

For someone else showing up at the gym, for someone else not returning that douchebag's text message, because you said you were not going to get back with that guy and you were done, and this is the year you were out of that relationship. When we are gnawing back at that sabotage to stay stuck, whether we realize it or not, whether it's conscious or not, it's like just stick to the little things. And that is the promised land to me. It's always been the promise land to me, just if it's that twice a week, that I'm going to work out, but I'm going to work out and keep showing up for that. I know it's easier said than done, but the little things don't overwhelm you, the little things are the ones that are really going to become the big things.

Menendez: Here's my last question for you, which is obviously you are living in the ethos of leveling up. What do you see as the relationship between getting unstuck and leveling up your life?

Quevedo: You know what I really think the secret to it all is just your mindset, who you are as a person and changing your identity. Oftentimes, I'm finding that a lot of my clients are stuck in a place because they've always told themselves that that's where they were going to be, or they can't really have that next thing on the other side of unstuck. And so, we have to work on the mindset that may be keeping you from getting there. And that could be you believing that you are worthy of that enough, capable enough, strong enough.

We aren't there because we continue to hold ourselves back. And so it starts here growing what we believe about ourselves. To really continue to stick to it. Because even that consistency I talked about is about you believing that you're the kind of person that sticks to it. That doesn't quit. That keeps your word with yourself first. And if you never have, you really have to evolve your mindset. And it seems so simple. And yet that's where a lot of my clients have a lot of breakthroughs. And over the course of a year, it's changed what they think is possible, what they think about themselves and the narrative they tell themselves that is keeping them stuck. So in order to level up, it's like, what am I really believing? What can I believe better about myself and about my limits to actually change my habits and my everyday actions.

Menendez: Here's some of my takeaways from my conversation with Irene. Sit with these powerful questions. What do you know in your gut? What do you know to be true? What is your gut telling you about what you have and what it is you want? Now, I'm gonna ask it another way. What do you really want? Not what does your family want for you, what does your best friend want for you, what do you want for yourself? What is that thing that feels a little scarier, a little embarrassing to say aloud? Say it. Very often our answer to this question is

informed by other people's expectations. Keep asking it until you get to something that is yours and yours alone.

Now, I loved this from Irene and I found it really helpful, which is that if a five-year plan or a 10-year plan feels overwhelming, ask what it is that you want in the next year? Where do you want to be from today? What do you want your life to look like? I hope these episodes help a little bit but Irene makes a point that I want to underscore, which is it's OK to ask for help, you should. If you have the resources, ask for that help from a coach, ask for that help from a therapist. If you do not, check out a podcast like Irene's. Level Up Latina that goes deeper into some of these concepts. And finally, and I hope it brings you comfort, feeling stuck is a totally normal relatable experience. You are a unique and beautiful snowflake. How you experience being stuck is specific to you. But the experience of being stuck is really common and you are not alone.

Thanks for listening. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua-Williams and me, Alicia Menendez. Sarah McClure and Paulina Velasco are our senior producers. Our lead producer is Cedric Wilson. Kojin Tashiro is our associate sound designer. Stephen Colon mixed this episode. Manuela Bedoya is our social media editor and ad ops lead. We love hearing from you. Email us at hola@latinatolatina.com. Slide into our DMs on Instagram, or tweet us @LatinaToLatina. Remember to subscribe or follow us on RadioPublic, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Goodpods, wherever you're listening right now. Remember, every time you share the podcast or you leave a review, you help us to grow as a community.

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