



## How Serena Kerrigan Became the Self-Professed Queen of Confidence

The internet personality turned confidence coach and entrepreneur shares how she parlayed a brand into a business, and gets vulnerable about the limits of social media stardom and what happens when the real person and the online brand are no longer fully aligned.

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Alicia Menendez: Serena Kerrigan wasn't always the queen of confidence. In fact, it was a night where she felt dejected that inspired her to launch her brand, Serena Effing Kerrigan. We talk about the journey to confidence, parlaying her college made brand into an actual business, including her card game, Let's Effing Date, and how her mother's immigrant experience informs Serena's own appetite for risk. Now, that was the part of the conversation I was prepared for. What I did not anticipate is that Serena is at a crossroads. She's 29 years old, she's unpartnered, she's freezing her eggs, and wondering what it means for a person who preaches self-love and self-sufficiency to still want more. Serena, thank you so much for doing this.

Serena Kerrigan: Thank you so much for having me.

Menendez: Serena, you always say that confidence is a personal journey. What did your personal journey to confidence look like? Were you born the queen of confidence?

Kerrigan: I think that we're all born the queen or king of confidence. As we get older, our view of ourselves gets infected by a comment made by a relationship with a parent or a family member or friend, by not seeing ourselves presented in media, by societal expectations, or limiting beliefs of who we are. Then we begin to question our worth and spend the next years of our lives either undoing the trauma or not. So, we all are born with confidence. It's about going back to that younger 12-year-old version of yourself and giving love to that person.

Menendez: What did that infection, as you say, look like for you? Where was it that you were hearing things that made you feel less than?

Kerrigan: There was just family dynamics, and I think that everyone has those. I'm an only child. There's a lot of attention and pressure on me and I think I took a lot of things really personally growing up. I think that when I got older, I didn't have the same body type as my friends. I was curvier and I went through puberty before everyone else. I then started to feel like my self-worth was completely defined by attention from men. I used sex as a way to feel validation about myself, especially in high school and in college. I remember when I got to college, I was a new freshman and it was a very intimidating place to be in when you're entering a new school, a new environment. I remember one night, I went out with all of my dorm friends and they all made out with someone or slept with someone or went home with someone or they all had all this attention from other guys and I didn't, and I went home feeling super defeated.

I realized that if I was going to have a good time in college, then I was going to have to change something about myself because I couldn't let the potential of a thought impact my entire mood. Maybe someone wanted to make out with me, but constantly looking for the validation in others was going to be a very unhappy mode of life and I chose to fight that by creating a persona and by creating this alter ego that I kept tapping into every time I would have these moments of self-doubt, and I called her Serena Fucking Kerrigan.

Menendez: Would you describe her to me? Who was she?

Kerrigan: I mean, is. She still very much exists. But I think that I became the persona. There was no separation between Serena and SFK.

Menendez: It wasn't like Beyonce where she was Beyonce offstage and then onstage, she was Sasha Fierce.

Kerrigan: It was more like Lady Gaga who when she won the Oscar, she was billed as Lady Gaga. So, she is Lady Gaga. That's how we all know her as. So, there wasn't as much as a separation like Beyonce/Sasha Fierce. Now, I think there is, but I fully committed to the bit. I told everyone I changed my middle name legally. That was 10 years ago. I wasn't really aware of why I was creating this character, what it was doing for me, and how there was really a separation between me and the character. Now, the character has let me be more vulnerable. Now, the real test of confidence is how can you meet someone and not turn it on? How can you meet someone and just be comfortable being the soft version of yourself? That is kind of now my next journey in confidence.

Menendez: I've heard you say that as you made the decision to pivot from a brand to a company, that that just felt out of reach for you. I think for those of us who are meeting you at this point in your journey, that is surprising. Why did actually building this out seem like something that you wouldn't naturally be able to do?

Kerrigan: Because I didn't go to school for it. Because when you think of a company, you think of an office building with 500 employees and an HR department and a head a finance, and I hate math and I barely know how to do my taxes. I also didn't have that many people in my close network who did it, except for my one friend and her name's Madison Utendahl. She and I worked at Refinery29 together for three and a half years I worked there and she had quit before me to start her company. Then I remember feeling really just ... I'm very ambitious, so I could see my future and I felt like working at a company was holding me back.

I was just like, "I don't want to answer to anyone. If I want to do something, I want to just go do it. I don't want to wait for approval." So, I spoke to her and my advice for anyone who wants to do something is talk. It's all about communication. Literally, I went out to wine with her and I have a photo to this day that I send her every year because it was the conversation that gave me the confidence to leave and quit and do it. So, you need someone to be like, "No, no. I just did this and I'm going to show you the way," and she did.

Menendez: There's all this scaffolding, right? There's the accountant, there's the LLC, there is making sure that any IP is squared away. But then there's the thing that you're doing. So, can you walk me through how you put together the thing so that there was some there there?

Kerrigan: That's another thing. I didn't go and I'm going to start a business. It was more like I want to create. I saw that SFK was so monumental for me and my confidence and I was like, "I can monetize this." I was following Mrs. Dow Jones at the time who her entire brand is about financial literacy and I felt like it was really niche and she just made a whole business out of it. I was like, "I can do this, but for confidence." But I didn't know what that exactly meant.

So, then the pandemic happens two weeks later after I quit my job. Perfect for me, in terms of having to be really focused and sit in an apartment completely by myself for months testing different ideas.

Menendez: Tell me, what did you test?

Kerrigan: So, I was doing a lot of confidence coaching on Zoom. I coached 150 women in 2020 ranging ages from 14 to 60. I had four zooms a day. Then I did was doing branded content at the time, but that was really my main thing. Then I felt like it was too insular. I wanted to give the wisdom to people and I felt like if I could put it on TikTok and grow an audience that way, then I could find other ways to monetize. Also, every woman who showed up to the Zoom thought that their problem was completely unique to them when I only heard the same thing over and over and over again. So, I was like, "Okay, we all have this problem. Instead of me individually talking to everyone about it, let me just make it more general and share it with the world."

So, I started going live every single day and talking to my followers because I literally was alone, I was single, and I really tapped into this idea of what are single people supposed to do during this time? Then that really forayed into a dating show that I did for three seasons on Instagram Live that I was able to completely monetize for six figures through sponsorships. Bumble sponsored an entire month of episodes of me literally going on blind dates with men on Live.

Then from that, I started a card game business because I wanted to create something that were icebreakers. I really just, every time I would go on a date with one of these suitors and I wrote down questions and questions and then I turned it into three card games. So, as you see, I didn't go in being like, "I'm going to start a company. This is my product. I need this logo and this." I just started with, "This is what I like to do." People responded to it. I did it again. But I think that the idea of having the perfect idea and then being able to make money off of it immediately, it's just not realistic and it also puts too much pressure on yourself.

Menendez: When I ask you about the origins of your confidence journey, you take me back to a time in your late teens, early 20s where you were going out into the world and a bad night was a night where you weren't being validated or getting attention from men, and that that becomes the genesis of your brand, and a lot of the brand is around dating, which I think for a lot of people is proximate to sex. So, I just wonder if there's a tension between trying to reject this notion of needing external validation for confidence, but then also anchoring the brand in the experience of dating.

Kerrigan: Absolutely. All the time. It's really funny you mentioned this because it's like I feel sometimes like I have to uphold this idea that you complete yourself and you don't need anyone and you're an independent single woman, so much to the point where I can't even be honest with my followers anymore. To be honest with you, I feel like the biggest fraud right now and the most disconnected right now than I've ever felt because I feel very torn about how much to share. I think that the internet has gotten particularly ruthless in the past year, year and a half. I just noticed a shift. Hostility is a way to get likes and I think that's not normal.

Half the things that I read, I'm like, "You would never say that to someone." But we all live for the TikTok comment section, right? If there's a video without the comments, with it turned off, it ruins the experience of the video. But as a result, there's so much more hostility on the internet. I feel very torn because I do want a partner. I just froze my eggs.

I'm 29. A lot of my friends are married, engaged, pregnant, and I wrestle between it's all going to work out, you just need yourself, focus on your work, focus on your life and what makes you happy and I want a companion and I want a partner.

I'm not to say that those can't live in the same plane, but it's difficult when you built an entire brand around just do you. I struggle with what is my place now on the internet? I don't feel this hunger that I used to. I don't know. I just don't feel that hunger for creating endless content every single day, same message, same niche. I'm kind of growing out of it.

Menendez: Which makes you the most interesting, Serena Effing Kerrigan, that I have yet to meet. The decision to use Effing in the branding, super cool, attention getting, it captured the essence of what you were trying to do. It also made it a little complicated.

Kerrigan: Continues to-

Menendez: ... as you were working with partners. Yeah.

Kerrigan: Always. At every step. You're not going to get into a sorority. No guy's going to want to date you. Don't put it on your resume. I did. No brand is going to work with you. Again and again and again. I just go, "The people that get it will and the people that don't didn't take the time and I don't need them in my life." I've worked with Plan B, which is pharma. I've worked with Nike, I've worked with the most major companies in the world. So, if they can get behind it, then it's not my problem. Whether it's my managers or my parents, there's always been the conversation of, "Should you just take it out? Wouldn't it be easier?" I go, "No, because it's the brand. It's the integrity behind it and I would rather stand for something than be monotonous like everyone else." But it's ironic because I see other creators grow, grow, grow, grow, grow, and I think, but I'm really making an impact. I got a DM this morning like, "You've changed my life." I'm really trying. I have card games, I have live shows. I take marketing so seriously. I really do believe I'm a trailblazer. Why doesn't everyone else see that? Where is the following that I think should match the level of work that I put into my work?

Menendez: You referenced your parents, and so I want to ask specifically about your mom. I think there is additional element of complexity when you layer in your Latinidad and the expectations that we have around what it is women are supposed to be like and look like and how it is that we are supposed to behave.

Kerrigan: I have to say I didn't have that experience. I feel like my Latinidad did the opposite, in a way. I felt like there was more of a flow. I always felt that my mom literally immigrated here. She was a doctor in Argentina and she gave up being a doctor to pursue a career in television. She already had it. She did it. She did the work. She was ready. She did her residency and then she literally left the next year and went back to school. She went to NYU Film School. So, I have the opposite relationship in that sense of it's more of the immigrant of always go after what you want and always chase for the better life. When I wanted to quit, she was the one that was like, "Do it," and my dad too. They both said that time is the value that you never get back and you spend the majority of your life working. So, do what you love and become the best at it and do the work. But that needs to be the goal and the priority. So, that's the environment I grew up in.

Menendez: So, I don't want to leave what you shared really generously without coming back to it, which is you are in this period where I think you're just figuring out what's next. You're figuring out what's next for you on your personal journey. You're figuring out what the next manifestation of the product is going to be. What is the closest you have come or what maybe, even more interestingly, is the process you use to sort through what that could

look like? You're a person who has lots of options. That is a great place to be in. Sometimes, lots of options give us paradox of choice. It actually makes it harder to choose. Do you have metrics you use for yourself? Do you have a kitchen cabinet? How do you make a decision when you're at a fork in the road?

Kerrigan: I never allowed myself to ask what was next because I always already had it next, because I've done so much that I love and I've done it really well. I let myself actually not know. But then it's plaguing me, not in a debilitating way. I'm not spiraling. I'm trying to enjoy it, that I have the luxury of being like, "What do I want to do?" That is a luxury, for sure. So, who do I go to? I talk. I think that's always communication. Talking, talking, talking. I have a writing mentor for movies. I fully believe in astrology. I have an amazing astrologist because we talk about patterns in my life and she's sees things. It's like a map of you. It really is. So, it's really helpful to know that.

Then I just ask myself, what did my younger version of myself really want to do? What made her so excited? I think that's a really good thing to come back to. I think it really does tell you a lot about yourself. What kind of person were you? I was dancing on top of my coffee tables, doing little plays with myself, making my parents watch. I was making movies at 15 about boys that broke my heart, and what do you know? I'm writing a rom-com right now. I try to just go with what would the little Serena want the older Serena to do? I don't feel lost. I don't feel confused. I just feel like there's so many different roads I can go down and which one do I want to go down?

I just really train myself to see these moments of reassessment as luxury and excitement. I'm a very positive person. Instead of being like, "Oh, my God. I'm lost. I don't know what I'm doing with my life. Everyone has it all figured out," no one does. Every creator I talk to feels like they're not where they want to be, and maybe that's everyone in life. But I specifically see that with people on social media and I think I understand why. You're watching what everyone's doing. So, if you're having a bad day and you're not feeling creative, well, there's a million other people that are. Then there's a metric literally tied to your name, a number that gives you value. I can't. I personally, I want to create art that has legacy and doesn't exist for likes. That's really what I want to do.

Menendez: Well, I'm going to be cheering for you as you do it. Serena, thank you so much for your time.

Kerrigan: Thank you so much for having me.

Menendez: Thanks for listening. *Latina to Latina* is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua and me, Alicia Menendez. Paulina Velasco is our producer. Kojin Tashiro is our lead producer. Tren Lightburn mixed this episode. We love hearing from you. Email us at [hola@latinatolatina.com](mailto:hola@latinatolatina.com), slide into our DMs on Instagram, or tweet us at @LatinatoLatina. Check out our merchandise at [latinatolatina.com/shop](https://latinatolatina.com/shop) and remember to subscribe or follow us on RadioPublic, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Goodpods, wherever you're listening right now. Every time you share the podcast, every time you leave a review, you help us to grow as a community.

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