



Weekly Issue

by Katharina Kowalewski

The abuse of power: Me too – and now?

Director, actress and award-winning producer Katharina Kowalewski is the new voice behind the "Weekly Issue". In her column, she will be discussing topics and questions about society, business, art and lifestyle. In this weekly's issue, Katharina is wondering about the consequences of sexual harassment at work taking Hollywood as a considerable example.

24. October 2017 — by Katharina Kowalewski — Photo: Stocksy/GIC

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Currently everyone in LA speaks about one thing: sexual harassment. Starting with Harvey Weinstein, who from now on will forever represent the symbol of the old Hollywood modus operandus. Many women step forward now with stories, names or the hashtag '#metoo'. It is of no surprise to me that the 'me too' is more an ongoing problem. It has become acceptable for men to try, a hand on the knee, a touch too much, a call late at night or dinner meetings.

Early on in my career, I was set to directing two documentaries for French TV, when the partner of the production company called me at 1 am after a shoot asking if he could come up to my hotel room. I was 23 and so shocked about it, that I decided to work in fashion in a female lead agency instead. I was not scared to be fired; I left, as I didn't want to work with people who have no values. I might have decided at this point that my directing career is more important, but I didn't give in and trusted that there will be another opportunity for me in a work environment that will not put me down because I'm a woman.



Foto: Stocksy/VegterFoto



Is a '#metoo' a strong enough statement?

Fact is, the fashion world also has its abuse of power, which I noticed when I started modelling and realized that basically every other photographer wants to photograph you naked – and let's not start with how many producers and directors try their chances with you when you are an actress. I ended up omitting this fact on many occasions, especially when I was with power players and people from the industry. A big producer once screamed across the table at a dinner to me: "What does Kowalski do besides being hot?" and I just didn't answer. On another occasion, at a film party, I was asked to join him at his hotel. I challenged him by making him repeat the question several times until he auto-corrected himself: "I think you want to stay here with your friends," he gave in. As if trying to clean his conscience, he ultimately pointed out another producer, warning me of his ulterior motives. The tragedy with those guys is that they always find someone else who is worse than them and think they are not so bad.



Foto: Stocksy/Lauren Light

The question is are we doing enough? Is a '#metoo' a strong enough statement? Why is it so hard to come forward with more names, disrupt the power and stop any sort of abuse? And abuse starts anytime when someone feels superior to us. That can be a producer on set that treats her crew like garbage or the supermarket supervisor being arrogant and mean towards the cleaning lady. We need more love and respect in our lives and we can start practicing it every day.

I got ice cream the other day, and the supervisor went on and on complaining and criticizing her employee over a topping. I had to interfere and say that it is unprofessional of her to speak in that tone. The

situation was humiliating, putting down, making her feel guilty, intimidated and threatened – all over a yoghurt ice cream. I could only imagine the level of stress this poor woman was going through every day.

Toxic work places can be found at every corner, and the only way to spot them is to be aware of them, not accept them as normal and leave, trusting that there are better places and speaking up for others and ourselves.



The old hierarchy thinking is completely out-dated. I only see collaborators, inspiring leaders, partners, but not a boss, mogul or dictator.

Any powerful position should come with the vow of not trying to abuse it. Though, somehow we are still far back in history governed by kings and queens, dictators and predators, we pray to them and give them even more power than they have by letting slip unacceptable human behaviour, little insults, harassments and different forms of abuse.

Let's promise each other that at the next business dinner someone touches your knee, we will speak up and say that this is absolutely not acceptable, even if you think it's not on purpose. Be sure it's second nature and that is even more dangerous as it's not normal.

This is not an individual problem, it is also a reflection of our society that brainwashes even the most intelligent ones. Why do smart women feel insecure about their looks, and why are powerful men obsessed about dating young beautiful girls? A woman in a 2017 advertisement, TV and film still needs to be sexy and beautiful, a man the powerful hero. There is no equality here. There is nothing wrong with cherishing ones own femininity and feeling beautiful, as long as this feeling is rooted in self-respect, intelligence and appreciation of your talent. If these attributes don't apply, we have a problem. Asked whether a woman prefers to be beautiful or smart, what do you think would our generation answer today, when the Kardashians lead the Instagram game by posting butts on the internet. Where Instagram has become our most influential social medium, a medium that reduces us to image driven instant communication void of depth and thought, and where girls often times get their male followers based on the amount of bikini pictures. This is the future, brands only work with people who have thousands of followers and movies get cast based on followers.



Foto: Stocksy/GIC



Are these the role models for our new generation?

Women make up 50% of the population, so we can put an end to this over-sexualisation by calling it out. There is never just one person to blame but all the others that look away and allow it to happen. Me too, this too, and here too, him/her too and there too.



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Living in the Flow vs. Life Goals

The question how to organize our workdays is an everyday challenge. Writing down your goals is important to some degree, but leaving space for the unexpected is not wrong as well. She's Mercedes Lounge columnist Katharina Kowalewski shares her experiences in keeping the balance between spontaneity and strict plans.

03. November 2017

by Katharina Kowalewski

Photo: Stocksy/Lyuba Burakova



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Lately, I have been **torn between the two extremes of flow and goal setting**. Writing down your weekly, monthly, daily, quarterly and yearly goals is important to some degree, but having this flow of synchronicity, events, opportunities and spontaneous meetings is what makes life interesting.

The most successful stories are of people who allowed the flow state to take over. Steve Jobs, for instance, reported being passionate about typography before he could put it all into practice at Apple, and the Oscar-winning cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki initially wanted to be a photographer. *(I am censoring myself here wondering why I don't come up with female examples. But I am sure you know many.)*



Seeing the big picture

We have to bend and be open to life as it maybe has a bigger plan for us than we may foresee. Sticking to a plan might often mean **going up the wrong ladder with eyes closed** and the same time can be said about following your passions without any sort of responsibility and real-life adjustment. The cliché of the unhappy and unhealthy businessperson trapped in the web of corporate corruption vs. the starving artist type is not helping in the equation.

In my life I had periods where I didn't really write down goals, I was living life. I was exploring, I was just doing things and there was not really anything to plan. Then I discovered an American book called "The power of thinking big" – it was so strange to me to allow myself to dream. Self-improvement was not a thing in my circles in Germany and definitely not in the little village I grew up.

Throughout the years I have realized that **the flow state might be fun, but it is only productive if you attach it to readjusted goals**, purpose and values. Otherwise, we would all be playing around like kids.



Foto: Pexels /Natalie B.



All lined up in life?!

I was heading towards an academic career, finishing my studies, and suddenly I realized that there were maybe **dormant desires and dreams that I have not tapped into**. I started changing my perspective and following more of the unrealistic things for fun, like starting acting classes, hosting and writing for magazines. My boyfriend at that time made fun of me by saying that I never planned my serious academic life, but the creative life. It seemed like a contradiction, but there was no goal setting needed in it. Everything was logical and almost lined up for me.

It all made no sense as I was still convinced that I will end up as a professor in a university after publishing my book on Science and Communication, but **something in me was pushing me to reconsider my life goals**. I travelled the world, I worked, I tried new things, I moved from Europe to America.



Trust your instincts



Foto: Stocksy/kkgas

Life happens, we change. What we wanted yesterday, might not be what we want today. Sometimes it is hard to change, sometimes it is hard to keep the course.

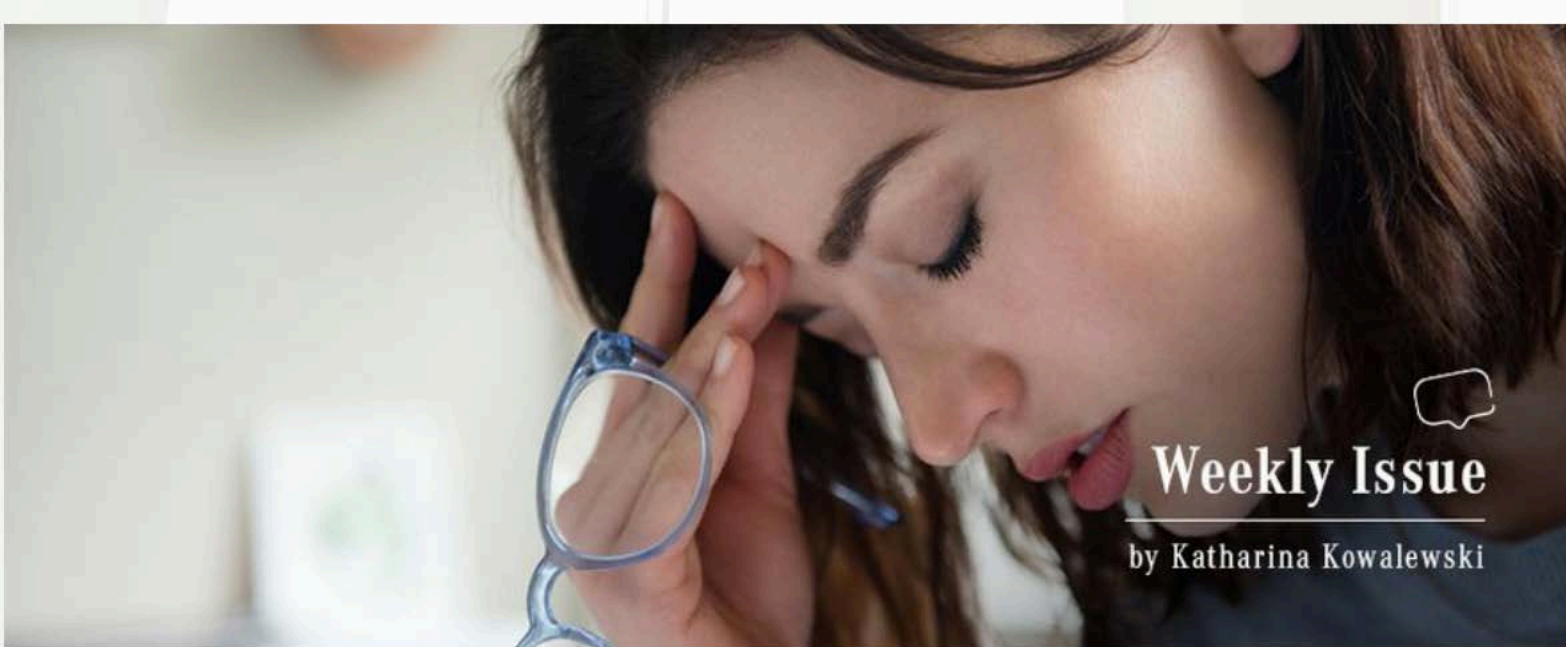
What we really want is harder than the things we don't want. It pushes us to be better, to trust our instincts, to be a beginner again, to believe in yourself when everyone else thinks you are crazy. And to enjoy the process of a life that is not written on paper, as we have to constantly rewrite and rewrite till we get to the core of our truth.

And this may mean having to do something out of responsibility, having to stop working on your dream to help someone you love, having to work harder than you did before. But it all means too, that life is a gift and we have to accept what it throws at us with grace and the bigger vision in mind. Learning that setbacks are only there to teach us a lesson.

It took me a while to not care what other people think, not having to explain my choices, and above all not to compare myself to anyone else. We are all different, maybe at the age of 70, you decide to learn something new, live your own desire. Whenever it is, just don't miss that moment in your heart to go for your dreams with your head straight and not in the clouds.

Giving up the resistance to be too much in the flow or too much on your goals is another form to stay

balanced. **In the end, the middle is the best way.** You keep the structure but you allow coincidences and magic to happen to you. Plan and work your plan, but do it with an open heart to rewrite it along the way and leave space for the unexpected. And set yourself up for a life of joy.



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The Beauty in Failure – What We Can Learn from Foundering

Director, actress and award-winning producer Katharina Kowalewski is the new voice behind the "Weekly Issue". In her column, she will be discussing topics and questions about society, business, art and lifestyle. This time, Katharina explores the (dis)advantages of failure and why it is important to go through such an experience as well.

27. November 2017 — by Katharina Kowalewski — Photo: Stocksy/Jamie Grill Atlas



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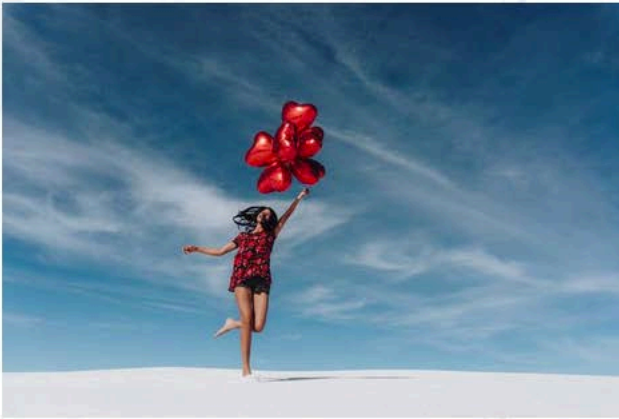
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In my meditation sessions, my teacher always begins by saying that “there is no failure, no success”. This may seem very much like a utopian vision, but the more you think about it the more you will be able to acknowledge the good things failure can bring to us. **Now I want to bring it to the next level by asking all of us if there might be a kind of beauty in failing.**

First off, I am not trying to romanticise the hardship of hitting rock bottom. Seeing your business fail or even worse might douse you into the feeling that you wasted your life. But everything holds a lesson and **when we are down the only way out is up.** In our society the common obsession with success and perfection have made us all slaves of our own visions. We become filled up with the desire for success and when something goes wrong, we have trouble dealing with it.



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I think we first need to **replace the word success with happiness** – as in fact all we strive for is joy and love in life, meaning and purpose. What we usually go after is from one “not good enough” feeling to the other. But what if we’d look at all our professional career as the cherry on the iceberg – no matter if we succeed or not. It was all play and fun, almost like a game where you cannot lose. If we are healthy, have a roof over our heads and three meals a day things are great. Yes, they should even be considered as downright terrific, as most people in this world don’t even have that. So taking success and failure too seriously is a direct result of not counting the blessings we already have.



It's time for a change

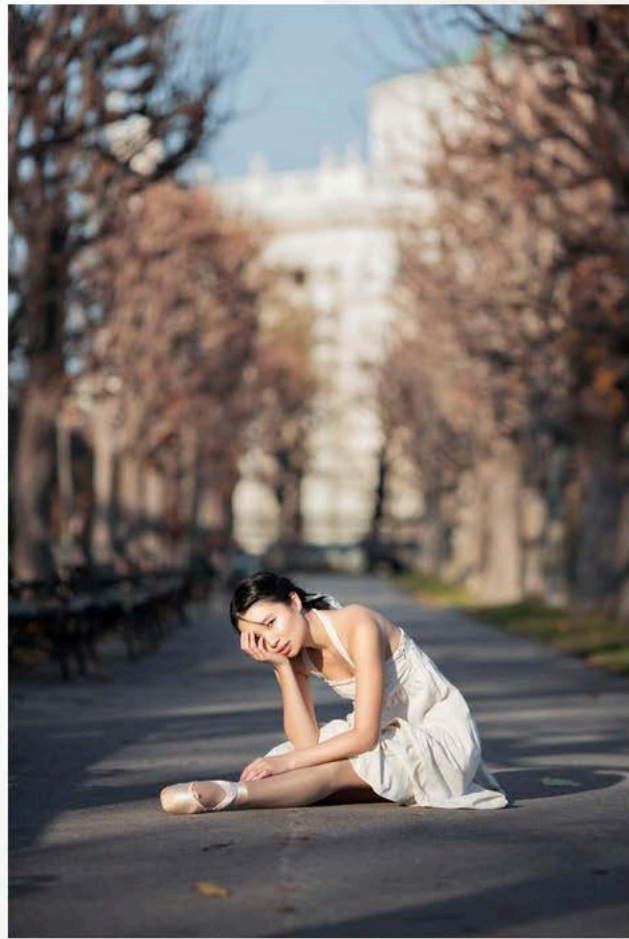
We are so **afraid of failure** that sometimes we never even start. We never leave our comfort zone, change direction, follow our dreams and desires. But don't forget that you can always fail at something you hate, so why not give all your energy to something you might as well enjoy?

In fact even failing at a job you did out of a need for security may lead to a deep cut, one that affects you more than failing at something you are passionate about. You sold out to the reasonable. You suffered every day for something you didn't even like – and then you don't receive any reward for it.

At least if we fail at something we chose deliberately, the love for it will pull you up again and again and again. Giving up is not an option. There often is no plan B in place and even if you have to change direction, retreat or do something else for a while, your passion will, like gravity, get you back in the game.

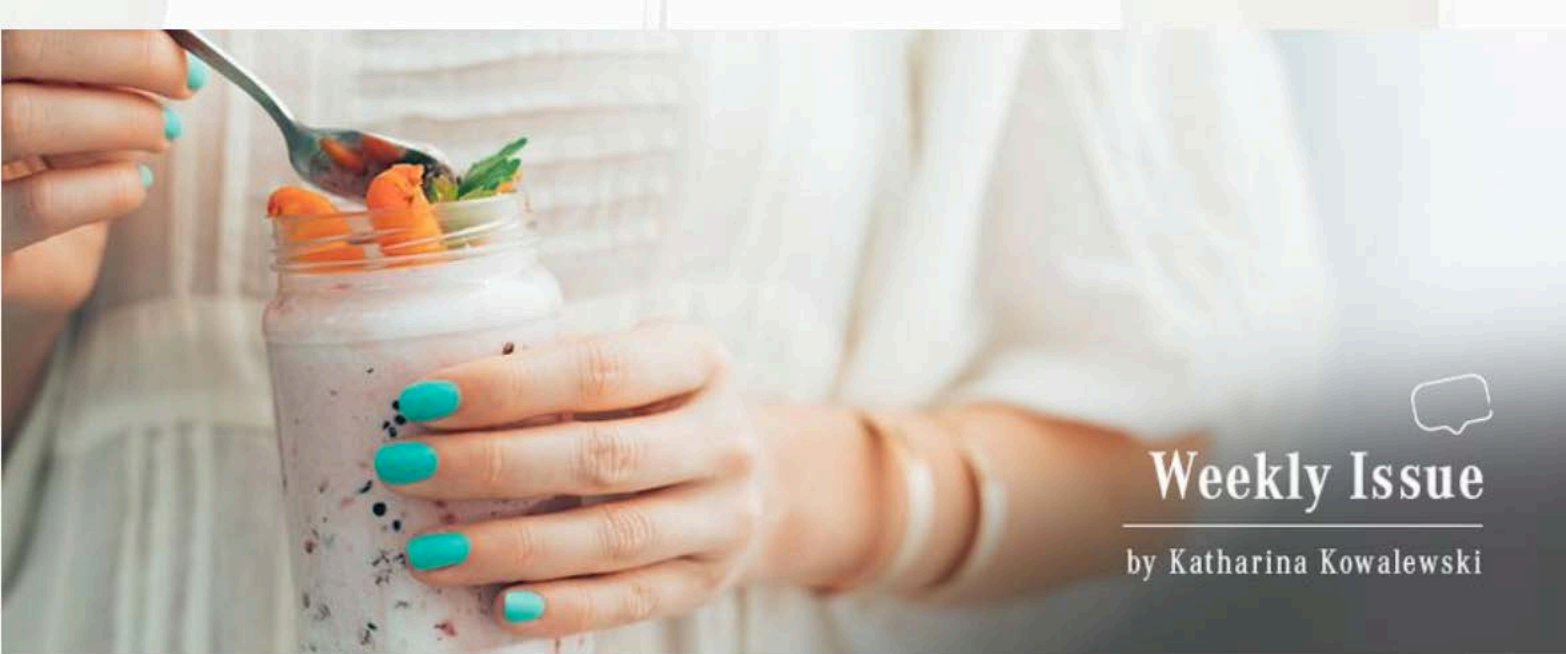
Princess Diana used to say “I am much closer to the people at the bottom than on the top“. When someone falls from a great height, at least one thing is for sure: it’s a humbling experience. Suddenly the biggest arrogance melts away and after an initial shock we realize that we are ok. The people who stand by your side don’t care what you have achieved, but who you are.

Smile, risk to be ridiculous and a nobody, but still believe in yourself and your own value as no one can take that away from you. We should all become better at failing not at succeeding as **every successful person will tell you how they failed**, what challenges they faced, how they almost gave up, the moment they lost. Failing builds character and stamina, and if you want to persist you are to take the **good days and the bad days like waves**. The better you get at failing the more beauty you will see in it. In fact every situation as challenging as it is, has a **key to the next level**, and the key is finding the positive aspect about it. That friend that helped you through a hard time, the family member that offered to sell the family house to save your business, the partner that held you for hours and told you that everything will be ok. If we can find love in failing we might as well see it as a success to understand what life is about. The most important is to get up like a baby that learns to walk – it won’t stop even if it falls 100 times and it won’t stop believing that it will succeed.



© Stocksy/Maja Topcagic

So let’s make those things we always wanted to do in our lives and give them some chance to fail. And who knows: maybe we start see some beauty in the process where we realize that there are no things as losing or winning – but **how much fun you had along the way and whom you played with**. (Like the good game Ludo that is also called “Mensch Ärgere Dich nicht” – “Human, don’t get angry” in German.)



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You are what you eat

Director, actress and award-winning producer Katharina Kowalewski is the voice behind the "Weekly Issue". In her column, she discusses topics and questions about society, business, art and lifestyle. This week's issue is about food, its (viral) trends and how they affect us personally.

03. January 2018 — by Katharina Kowalewski — Photo: Stocksy/Lumina



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Nowadays everyone is a **foodie** – or rather an Instagram foodie. I was one for a while as well, but now all I crave for are healthy vegan restaurants and cooking at home. When it comes to eating healthy, I follow the **mantra “don’t bring the evil home”**. That’s why I don’t have coffee, sugar, dairy, meat, fish or alcohol at home. But I haven’t been eating at home recently anyway – which made me start to reconsider my food choices by going from dinner to dinner and holiday party to holiday party. December makes you contemplate about many things. I came to the conclusion that my home rule might not have been that good after all.

I spent the last few days watching documentaries on Netflix to find out more about the subject, but they don't really make you relax: there are **films on sugar, wheat, meat, dairy and alcohol**. And strangely enough they are rather convincing, leaving you with the impression that we live in a very dangerous time. The sobering result of every film is basically that everything is bad for us – even worse than we thought. I bet if we dug deeper, even too much fruit and certain vegetables would be bad.

In the documentary “What the Health?” – produced by Joaquin Phoenix – the culprit for diseases like diabetes is **meat**. It shows that dietary recommendations even from seemingly independent organisations are sponsored by exactly the food industries that they are regulating. So daily diet recommendations, research and science might be the result of heavy lobbying. MDs speak out that they don't really learn much about nutrition during their studies and if you ask different nutritionists you might get several approaches.



© Stocksy/Trinette Reed



“I understand that if I smoke a cigarette I know what I get. But is sugar equally dangerous?”



© Stocksy/Lucas Ottone

I even watched the most classic documentary “**May I be Frank**” directed by the restaurant manager of **Café Gratitude**, a raw, organic and vegan café in San Francisco. The story is about 54-year-old Frank Ferrante, an obese and pre-diabetic man who additionally struggles with depression. In only 42 days, Frank's life changes by consuming plant-based food, finest organic ingredients and fresh juices from Café Gratitude. The changes speak for themselves. Frank looks like a different person, changes his personality and starts loving himself.

After watching the documentary, I opted for a plant-based, sugar free diet as my personal experiment. I have

been a vegetarian since I was 12. Over the past years I gave in, had plenty of fish and – first accidentally, then occasionally – I even tried meat. The Paleo trend made me think I am missing out on Protein, and by moving to the States I got tempted by all sorts of protein bar snacks advocating their health benefits, tasting like sugar but ultimately being processed.



It was worth the try – so I went vegan.

All I have now is confusion. The at-home me and eating-alone me wants vegan food whereas my social side wants to be part of the big party by trying what my friends cook and offer, and not be a boring vegan. I remember that in all the vegan stores in Paris the clients sometimes looked pale and unhealthy. In L.A. this is not the case. They are glowing. But that is maybe because of the sun.

A few days later I was the main issue of the next party, being vegan amidst holiday celebrations was not the best timing. But then my friend Elisabeth, a young neuroscientist, told me she started studying the relationship between food and both our health and mood. Convinced that the last scientific paper from 2006 is the solution, she gives her friends green juice and ginger or takes them to the sauna when they feel down.

In the end I think **we all know what is right**. It is not only about the food, it is about the amounts, our attitude and the way we feel. If we eat to feel better emotionally than we have a problem, because eating won't fix our feelings and only creates guilt. One day we all have to make a choice: do we use food to feel better or to be healthy? It's the old game between instant and delayed gratifications. But if we are not compensating for any bad feelings and lack of love with food we might get in touch with our bodies and know how to eat intuitively.



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Why We Should Start Loving Our Bodies

Director, actress and award-winning producer Katharina Kowalewski is the new voice behind the "Weekly Issue". In her column, she will be discussing topics and questions about society, business, art and lifestyle. In this weekly's issue, Katharina analyses the perception of different body images and how they affect us.

13. November 2017 — by Katharina Kowalewski — Photo: Stocksy/Guille Faingold



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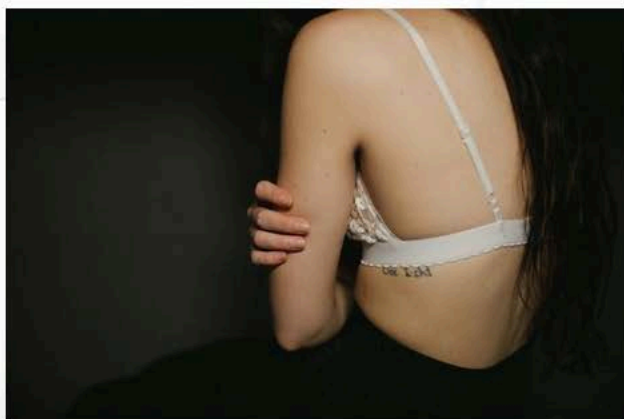
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Let's talk about a topic that affects all of us no matter which industry we are in. It's about how we see and treat our bodies. Shouldn't it be crucial to feel at peace with ourselves and inhabit our bodies with love, self-care and a healthy approach?

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Just the other day at the Polish Film Festival in Hollywood, I spoke to a woman, who has a foundation supported by Tom Hanks, which helps suicidal teenagers. The first thing she mentioned to me that young girls kill themselves because they weigh too much.

This touched me deeply. Not too long ago, one of my family members – a young boy of 21 years stopped eating after a long-held sports addiction and became seriously depressed and anorexic.

extremes and avoid judging others by the way they look and instead rather focus on who they are? Why are we trained to always look for what is wrong with us instead of recognizing and appreciating what is right? If we end up focussing on superficial values we outshine our inner richness. And something has to be done about it. And change starts with each of us.



The Body – A Battlefield of Extremes

I would like to speak about the phenomenon that in the recent discussion about body and body types one thing seems to come too short: the emphasis on balance. This may be my plea for the “normal”. I believe “normal” is great and necessary in the effort to stop building stories and distorting our views. Media has the tendency to offer extremes, but what teenagers need is to have role models who are not overly obsessed showing off their abs, or curves or to fit into a size zero.

What we currently see in fashion is either super skinny or plus-size – sometimes also strong or fit (which often comes along with an unhealthy sports addiction). But whoever has a healthy bodyweight remains unmentioned. I know many plus-size models, who make themselves look bigger on pictures and put on weight simply because their “normal” body types wouldn’t get them jobs, and they will never be skinny no matter how hard they try. Advertising, film and fashion put people in categories that have nothing to do with reality.

Why do we work with clichés? In Germany, there was the first plus-size model TV show as a juxtaposition to Heidi Klum’s Germany’s Next Topmodel (GNTM). But what if most of the viewers are neither skinny nor plus-size? Besides this, it’s remarkable that the biggest entertainment we come up with is around professions that deal with the human body.

How come there are women who have been on a diet their entire life, fighting against who they are? What makes us so insecure to be “normal” and unable to accept this? We speak of all shapes, and all that comes to our minds are models and their voluptuous frames. Let’s face it! Because we don’t see anything else. It’s that simple!



Foto: Stocksy/Studio Firma



In The End, It's All About You

Frankly, I am tired of this black and white thinking. I am tired of the overemphasis of the visual in our society. I don't care about the way you look, I rather care about how kind and loving you are, to yourself and to others. And this is what gives you a glow, a healthy body and a positive attitude towards life. If you decide to work out or to live healthy, do it with the emphasis to appreciate and love yourself, not because you think you are not good enough, not pretty enough and you need to start to starve yourself to look like someone else.



Foto: Pexels/Public Domain Pictures

Whenever I tried a diet, I ended up putting all weight back on. In my view, the right way to a healthy body is to take care of ourselves by giving our body the good nourishment, exercise and love it deserves. I don't own a scale, and I haven't measured myself in a long time as it reminds me of this very short period in my life, when I was in modelling agencies and they would measure everything. And this just didn't feel right to me. There is no magic pill to self-love. All it takes is the courage to accept ourselves the way we are – at this very moment. Without comparison, without judgement without the focus on what we don't like.

If we are looking at it with the knowledge that there are more of us out there who are convinced that we can redefine our society's definition of 'attractiveness' and 'beauty'. Then the body does no longer have to be an issue. We can just make peace with it.

A photograph of two Black women with curly hair, wearing mustard-colored turtlenecks, in a meeting. One woman is holding a yellow highlighter and pointing at it. The background is a blurred office setting.

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New Year's Resolutions: reflecting the (almost) past year

Whenever a year passes, many people's thoughts are occupied with what happened and what they experienced during that year. Between retrospective, and new year resolutions we start once again to think about where we stand in life and what vision we have for the next year. The closer we get to the new year, the stronger our resolve is to change things – to change ourselves for the better, come next year. Katharina Kowalewski reflects on these questions.

18. December 2017

by Katharina Kowalewski

Photo: Stocksy/Victor Torres



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I can already tell you that most of the people I know are resolved that they will, in 2018, join a gym, eat broccoli every day, and not touch alcohol or cigarettes – their plan is to finally become the best versions of themselves. Admittedly, it is my plan too. Yet, those radical resolutions are usually no fun at all in the long term. January is cold and full of hope. Many go ahead and even make it through the whole month, only to get back to the old habits for the rest of the year. Those who opt to get in shape (those are many: January has the highest number of people joining a gym) will drop out long before summer (80% are out by May), with the majority dropping out as soon as February.

It's like going on a diet only to yoyo back. The "new me" might need something more than just New Year's

Resolutions. In terms of tools to support such decisions to change a lifestyle, let's use a simple one that cannot easily be tossed in the bin: a vision board. It can help us focus on what we want instead of what we lack.



Searching for inspiration, not making plans

Coming from the world of fashion, a vision board is a super fun item that can be transformed easily into an ideal life-planning tool. When I was younger, I used to spend hours cutting out images of my favourite outfits, things that inspired me, quotes that I liked. I just wanted to keep them all in one place for inspiration. I once even created a whole wallpaper with those cut outs. What happened after was almost magical: I seemed to attract those things into my life.

By taking the time to cut out, focus, create, I somehow registered that these were the things I liked. Months later, when I went back to what I had collected earlier, I noticed that my closet was filled with looks like those I had cut out, even though I never consciously went shopping for them.

Success coach Jack Canfield claims that he once found an old vision board with his dream house pictured on it and he ended up living there five years later. There is a real science these days about how to create a vision board that works. What makes most sense is to create a balance between all areas of your life: home, career, love, wellbeing, travel, and life purpose. Whether you believe in Law of Attraction theories or not – this is, at the very last, a fun exercise.



Dreaming of tomorrow

While creating your vision board, you place no emphasis on the how, why or your current situation. The goal is to really create an aspirational tool rather than thinking about how to “fix” something. Not concentrating on what is lacking but appreciating what is to come is the way to go. Instead of looking back at a past we cannot change, we should be looking forward to what is to come, because that is what will get us motivated for the next year, the next step, and the next goal.

All you need is a stack of 2017 magazines and a pair of scissors. Cut out all quotes and images that speak to you. The vision board is just for you, so you can hide it and make it your personal little secret. By the end of 2018, let's revisit those boards and see how much of it actually happened. Who knows, maybe you will have gone on that perfect vacation, met that exciting person, or found the home you've been dreaming of without even trying too hard. What do you think – should we give it a try and replace resolutions with vision boards?



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