

## Transcription - Nick Jonsson Part 1

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. Today we are joined by Nick Jonsson and he's speaking with us from Singapore. Nick has got some very interesting topics and ideas to talk to us about along the lines of those that we talked to Nick Gorman about a couple of years ago. Let us first of all let Nick give a bit of an introduction to himself.

Well thank you so much, Kim, for the warm welcome. Indeed, it's a beautiful morning here in Singapore, great to be with you. So I was born in Sweden, but I actually moved Australia when I was 22, I lived there 5-6 years, I studied and played a bit of golf and then I have had a wonderful career in Southeast Asia where I lived and worked for 15 years. I worked my way up the ranks but I also realized that the higher up I go, perhaps, I became a little bit lonely. In the end I had a bit of a crash and I went through a divorce, I moved country, resigned from my job and I had a break down basically during this time and that's why I'm here today. I want to share with you my learnings and how I came out of this.

Thanks for that Nick. I'm interested in that very brief summary to our minds, it's a bit of a loner's journey so that you left essentially everything that you knew behind you at a very early age and came halfway across the world. Is there an element of you wanting to make your mark and find out who you are that comes into this journey? And then discovering that you've gone so far down that path that you haven't looked at the whole you in terms of what kind of support you as an individual might need not as a career thing.

Yes Kim. I think it lies a lot in what you are saying and I've seen it in quite a lot of people. Going back a few years, being a bit of a rebellious teenager, you know, I didn't get along well with my father when I had my first girlfriend, he didn't really like her. I then started to resent my dad about that and we had some conflict and as soon as I had money enough I moved outside to my own apartment in the city at the age of 17. So I had that rebellion in me that I wanted more, I wanted a way and it was my way or no way. So that stubbornness indeed was there in the early traits and moving to Australia, of course, was as far away as I could get from Sweden.

Is it with you still, the stubbornness? I have calmed down a lot since I had, should I say a break down and a mental health crisis in 2015 to 18, to the point where I have not left a job, I'm married to the same person, I have not moved apartment even. You know, I'm trying to have everything as stable as possible.

Nick, did you find that, although you talk about the stubbornness, it actually also helped you finding your own identity and taking on the challenge of travel and living in another country? I think it was selfishness. And indeed, our society is quite set up that we can get ahead if we are selfish. People are stepping on each other and elbowing their way up to the top. If we look at the schools, you get awarded for the highest grades, we get put on the pedestal, get all the certificates. We get all the recognition and of course that recognition is addictive. It fuels even more selfishness. And that was basically what I fell into, but I found that there's a different way.

It's just not the way that I want to live. It doesn't lead to happiness internally and it's not sustainable. You've done a lot of work more recently with people who are going through that same journey, do you find that they all have to come to a crisis point or are there opportunities to recognize the warning signs?

Well, it depends some people are open to coaching and and so on and I think it comes with age and experience as well. I think it's very difficult with someone who's younger, who's not willing to look at their own side of the street, is not willing to admit their own fault and not even want to hear about it. I saw myself perhaps being like that in my younger years, in my career. Yeah, I think it comes with age. You don't have to go through all the challenges that I did for a few years that nearly cost my life but sadly actually, I do see in many many high-performing senior executives. It is only when they hit rock bottom, or have a crisis in their life and it doesn't have to be a mental health crisis. Crisis can be an illness, a sickness, an external event, a family member that passed away. Something needs to happen externally for people to perhaps deflate their ego and become little bit more humble and receptive to this. So there's always a trigger of some kind that brings on the moment of truth? Yes, it seems like that.

You've said that the triggers can often be a range of things. Are you seeing in the people that you are with that it is more an external thing than it is an internal thing? In the people that I'm working with, a lot are senior executives. What I see is these people are working around the clock and don't get enough time for sleeping, enough exercise. Perhaps not eating enough, don't get enough time for the family. Not enough time for themselves. So you're constantly starting to have that guilty feeling with yourself that you never enough for anything, no matter what you do, there will always be disappointment. You will always disappoint yourself or your family members or your boss and then perhaps, also here in Singapore, many are regional or global directors, flying around the world, one day in India, next day in Australia then Vietnam, you know. So they also

falling short here the whole time traveling and perhaps a lot of entertainment, going out with a lot of alcohol is involved and so on. And there's just not enough time for everything in the day. So a lot of guilt builds up and with that fall into some addictions, such as alcohol addiction, which has been big during the pandemic when people have also worked from home and isolate themselves. Everyone is looking for some way perhaps of coping with all of this and it just becomes a downward spiral. So I would say it's multiple factors that can be stress at work or perhaps resignation from work or could be getting terminated from work, there's a merger acquisition, something happens. But let's say that you have a crisis at work then because you have neglected your family then maybe you end up in a divorce as well and with that perhaps your health also is not good. I always say it's almost like an airplane. There is never one reason why an airplane crashes, it tends to be three types of factors. And it's the same with human beings.

In the greater scheme of things, do you see that it is an issue more for men than for women? I see it in both. When I wrote my book on the topic, I interviewed men and women and I see it in both. Perhaps the women that I interviewed were keeping it even more secret, more silent because of the stigma. But what I did find out that, in general, it seems like women have a few close friends who they dare to be vulnerable with, who they speak with and who they share how they are feeling. While men, including myself, have some wonderful friends, who are thought of as close friends, who I would see sometimes perhaps almost every day, we go and watch TV together, watch sports, go to the bar, have a great time but we never had, perhaps, really deep talk. While on the other hand, as I said, it seemed like most women had that. But I have found extreme suffering from loneliness in women as well.

Do you find that it's culturally prevalent? Yes, in Singapore where I'm based, I can certainly see that the westerners are more open than the Asian cultures where it's very much a stigma even to talk about anything such as loneliness or addiction. It something that you very much are trying to do everything you can to avoid talking about.

So you've taken on a huge task. How did you make it happen? I had my own crisis from the end of 2015 to 2018 and I managed to turn my way out of this by getting the right support and being blessed with a few people surrounding me who put me on the right path. Then in 2019, I had spent one year into recovery, my life was great again, I was remarried and I was really in a good happy place but I had not shared with anyone. I had still kept it pretty secret on the outside that I had gone through a crisis and everyone on the outside thought that things

were good. No one really understood, perhaps my parents, but no, none of my friends. Really, they didn't know what was going on at the inside. In 2019 a friend and colleague of mine in Singapore, someone I'd been working with died of suicide. And that triggered me to speak up about my own challenges that I've had. And I decided immediately to set up a fund to raise money for the cause and donations and awareness for a suicide prevention agency here in Singapore.

On that topic, do you see that suicide is more prevalent in that group? That they see that's the only answer? Yes it is and it was extremely challenging to talk about it in Singapore because suicide was illegal or just to talk about, report about it was a crime until 2019. Now it's decriminalised. Now it is better, they can be supportive, we can have conversations legally about this.

We're going to take a break now in our discussion with Nick Jonsson. Join us for Part 2 where we explore a little bit further, the steps that Nick took to overcome his own mental health crisis. For now I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.