



Leading Women podcast
Commonwealth Bank Women in Focus

Episode 9: Kristal Kinsela, Owner, Kristal Kinsela Consulting

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Interviewee: Kristal Kinsela

Featuring: Julienne Price, Executive Manager Women in Focus

Kristal Kinsela, Owner, Kristal Kinsela Consulting on being driven by her purpose to elevate the voices of Indigenous businesses and amplifying the incredible success of deadly black business women.

Julienne [00:00:02] Welcome to Leading Women, your place to share and celebrate real stories and access the tools and resources to help activate your leadership. Hi, I'm Julienne Price, Executive Manager of CommBank's Women in Focus and Leading Women is just one of the ways we support women at all stages of their business journey. So no matter where you are on your journey, we're here. Enjoy this episode as we redefine the business landscape together.

Shivani [00:00:33] Welcome to Leading Women, where we support your leadership journey. I'm your host, Shivani Gopal, and today's episode is a thought provoking yarn with a woman challenging unconscious bias and shifting narratives. Kristal Kinsela is the founding director of Kristal Kinsela Consulting and a non-executive director whose leadership journey has been an incremental to influential one. As an award winning business leader, Kristal is driven by her purpose to elevate the voices of Indigenous businesses and amplify the incredible successes of deadly black business women. Experiencing a lifetime of racism and bias, Kristal shifted anger to curiosity, inviting others into a genuine learning experience. You'll enjoy Kristal's inspiring outlook for the future and her positive never say never mode of operating that is truly infectious. Kristal, welcome to Leading Women. I am so thrilled to be joining you here in person today in studio on Gadigal land. It's so great to have you.

Kristal [00:01:45] Thanks so much for having me here, as a Jawoyn and Wiradjuri woman. I'm a visitor to this country, so I'd also like to acknowledge that we're on Gadigal country, Gadigal people of the Eora nation, I pay my respects.

Shivani [00:01:57] Thank you, Kristal, your leadership journey has been an incremental one, and then it's gone to an influential one. Can you share with us some powerful sliding doors moments in your life that have impacted your leadership journey?

Kristal [00:02:14] Well, who could ever forget if your mum turns around and says to you one day after you've been working behind a bar for five years, nobody wants to see a 40-year-old barmaid. You need to get yourself a real job. And that was a defining moment for me to decide to go to university and to undertake a Bachelor of Adult Education. And you might go, why did you choose that course? Well, actually, I chose it because my aunty had completed it. And I thought, if my aunty can do that course, I can do that course. They had an Aboriginal program running at UTS. And yes, I never thought of myself as an academic or someone who could go to university, but it was that course that opened up so much for me. It was the start of really understanding my strengths in relation to people, to working with people, to that of being a teacher by a background of trade. You know, some of the things that I learnt, there are things that I still employ today in the work that I do.

Shivani [00:03:16] I'm so glad you had that benefit of that really firm advice from your mother. It's the kind of advice that we only get from family or people who genuinely love us and genuinely are comfortable enough to say things that other people won't so that we can actually get out of our own way and do something beneficial for ourselves. Kristal, I want to talk about some of the impact of your work. You experience how

unconscious bias is a massive challenge amongst clients in your consulting firm. Now we know that awareness is the key to reducing the deep-seated prejudices we all absorb due to living in deeply unequal societies, but you've taken this to the next level. Can you share with us how you take clients on an understanding journey to navigate their professional and personal biases through connection to their own narratives?

Kristal [00:04:13] Yes, I think the best way to do this is really to kind of get people to get into this space right now. And unless you're driving, please close your eyes. I just want you to think to yourself quietly about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I want you to, you know, think of maybe an Aboriginal woman. What are those first thoughts that come into your mind when you think about an Aboriginal woman? For a lot of people, if we're being really honest, their bias comes into play. And automatically they think the deficit. We hear too often stories about domestic and family violence as it relates to Aboriginal women. We hear about poverty and disadvantage, unemployment, incarceration. Aboriginal women are highly incarcerated and it's a lot to do with the fact that they have experienced domestic family violence. But these are the images that play into people's mind immediately. Never do we honestly think about in the first instance successful, deadly, black business woman. And that's my mission is to change people's bias as it relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Shivani [00:05:45] Successful, deadly, black businesswoman. Is that what you just said? Because pow wow, that was powerful, but also was your approach to changing our bias and relooking at our narratives. What I love about what you just did there, Kristal, is there are so many ways that you can challenge biases, and most often people will do that by downright challenging it and saying, I need you to challenge these things and tackling it front on. You've done it in the most spiritual, most meditative way that you really moved me to a different part of myself. And so I really hope that all of our listeners, who weren't driving, did indeed close their eyes and take themselves through that journey that you so eloquently guided us through. I'd love to get some advice from you on this, because I think the job of challenging our biases is something that we are confronted with almost every day, whether it's with people we interact with or people that we read about or see on TV. And if we're not at this wonderful higher-self sort of moment where we're going to go, you know what, I'm going to take a step back and close my eyes, what kind of questions could we ask ourselves or ask of others to better challenge our biases?

Kristal [00:07:00] I always say, I mean, I've been on the brunt end of bias and racism and discrimination my whole life. When you grow up as an Aboriginal person, as I have, and you know, I used to get really upset, you used to wear your heart on my sleeve and be really upset. And then I went through a phase of being really angry. But where I'm at today and what I encourage others out there is to get curious and, you know, check yourself and check those around you. So when someone said to me one day at soccer when my son was playing soccer and he asked me what I did for a living, and I said, I run a business, and he went, oh my God, you run a business. You're Aboriginal and you run a business. And I was like, yes. And so instead of getting angry in that point, I got curious and I said, oh, haven't you heard of any Aboriginal business before? So it's about kind of not necessarily challenging, but asking why? Would you want to repeat that again for me so that people can then understand what they've just said? Sometimes people say things so, so quickly and offhand they haven't really thought about it. So it's about just reflecting back or mirroring back to them or asking them why. Why do you think that? But with genuine intent and curiosity around that, you know, what's led you to believe that? Has something happened in your past and your experiences? Because if we think about where unconscious bias comes from, it is determined through all of our life experiences. It's the beliefs and practices and the culture that you grew up in, in your household that influences your decision-making and how you think and feel about things. Sometimes that's directly and sometimes that's indirectly. And so it's about helping people to connect. So this one day that man at the soccer said to me, you know, he was very surprised. I said, have you grown up around any Aboriginal people? And he said, no, so his exposure was really little. He hadn't seen, the only images that he had seen of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were that off on the media and that paints a very particular picture. So it's about, okay, alright and then in that moment, you know, of that curiosity that I was able to kind of go, hey, there's an organisation called Supply Nation, maybe you should check them out. You can see there are Indigenous businesses doing lots and lots of things. Go and have a look. Then he had genuine curiosity because he wanted to know. So we really flipped that kind of a moment into a really learning moment where we both got curious with each other. But then there was some work for him to do post that.

Shivani [00:09:39] There's so much power in being centred in your approach and being human in your approach and changing that moment to a learning moment because in order to change someone's mind and to get them to learn something, they've got to feel safe enough to do so. And you have this incredible wisdom about you to go, you know what, I'm not going to be confrontational because that's going to make them defensive and not feel safe. But I'm going to be really human about this and get really curious and lean in and help them. And it sounds like you have it, through that approach, just changed his mind and challenged his biases in a natural, organic way. But you've done it for so many others. You've also just reminded me as well of the power of active listening back. So if you were to just active listening back to someone else's question and repeat it back to them, that mirror that comes up and they go, oh dear, did I really say that I might just walk back now and do something else instead. I want to take a change of tack because there are so many things that we need to explore together today, Kristal in our time. And one of them is how in the world you do all of the things because you certainly are an incredibly accomplished woman, who has done all of the things. Your professional platter is full to the brim, and you've taken the next step from making an impact to creating a legacy through three remarkable pathways, governance, authoring and business awards. I'd love to learn, how did you take the leap onto boards and then leap into writing your book, which is now at the second edition, congratulations. And then move out of your own way to shine in the award spotlight, something that so few women do.

Kristal [00:11:24] Yes, it's been quite a journey, most definitely, I mean, boards was something that I kind of fell in, an opportunity came up for the very first board I went on, which was back in 2011. They wanted to have an Aboriginal person on this board in particular. It was the Uniting Board of New South Wales ACT. It was a sub board that sat underneath that which focused on children and families and someone from my community just put my name forward and I said, look, I don't have any board experience, I don't know what this is about. And they said, don't worry, we'll sponsor you. And they sponsored me to do the Australian Institute of Company Directors course and I was a part of that board and had a coach and mentor to support me and then it just went from there. I think having that first bit of exposure opens up other opportunities. I went on to a board of a credit union, which was a very tough and unique experience because if you think about the financial sector and it's a credit union but around the table, there were only two women. It was a room full of men. There was probably about 25 to 30 years age difference between myself and these white old men. And I was almost scared to have to have a voice in that. I thought is my voice even relevant in that kind of space? But it taught me a lot. I got to watch those sorts of dynamics. I chose my moments, when to interject my independent thought and from my viewpoint as an Aboriginal woman, a young woman as well. And yes, opportunities have just flown since then, which has been really great.

Shivani [00:13:07] It sounds like you're in a room where you absolutely deserve to be, but at the same time you look around and you are the minority of a minority. How did you manage your own sense of inner talk, self-critique, imposter syndrome, any of those things in those moments?

Kristal [00:13:26] I just, I mean, I think, I just really kept backing myself and just said, you know, I'm here for a reason. They've wanted me. And I almost said to myself, you know, they need to be careful what they've asked for. So you want that young voice at the table, you want that diversity, then this is what you're going to get. And I think it's just a self-belief. I know what I know. This is the platform and utilising that.

Shivani [00:13:52] Now, we've had some really cracking conversations earlier, just before we actually started recording this podcast about your incredible journey, the why and how that you just managed to do it all, writing a book when your son was just born. Can you take our audiences through what motivated you to keep pushing on and then how you did it?

Kristal [00:14:17] Well, the book idea came about in 2016, and it was after meeting somebody who sent me a book called How to Bake a Book. And so that planted the seed. She said, this lady, Diane Burgess, is her name. She said, I believe you've got a book in you. And she sent me her book and she said, this will help you. But yes, I had a baby a bit years ago and I was running a really successful business at the time and we're at the height of the growth and the success. And I think my business partners at the time were a little disappointed that I decided to get pregnant and to try to take time out of the business was really difficult. And all that we could afford to do at that time because I needed to be in the business was three months and I went through lots and lots of thought processes around gosh, of, you know, is this the right decision to have a baby? You know, I'd had a 12 year gap because I've got teenage children and just thinking about what's this

three months going to look like and I've got to come back and I need to bounce back. And I just felt this this incredible pressure. There was this pressure that. What's going to happen in these three months? Are people going to forget about me? Am I not going to be relevant anymore? And I became really scared. And then, you know, I'm at home in these three months going, well, maybe this is the time. Maybe I can come back with the biggest bang, if I get this book done. And there's a trade show happening next year in May, let's just do it. And once I lock in to something, I'm locked down, I'm solid and I will make it happen. And I started back in business. My son was three months old. It was January 2019 and I'm back full time in business, travelling, breastfeeding, my baby came everywhere with me for five months and in those first three months, on top of working, running a household, got kids, everything going on. I just worked day and night writing this book.

Shivani [00:16:24] You know, Kristal, I think you've touched on a nerve that so many mothers feel and an experience, and that is, am I going to lose my relevance during this time of, you know, being off work and taking care of my child, which is a time of abundance of love. But yet there's other things going on in your life at once. Of course, you made that time really count for you. But what advice would you have going back if you could go and speak to that younger self?

Kristal [00:16:56] You can do anything you want to do, honestly. And I don't think I would change anything because I already feel complete in the sense that I'm okay with living the life that I'm living. And it's very different to how I was brought up and how my mum's view and others' view is of, you know, that of a mother, that of the working mum at that time. So I would just say to myself, you know, good on you, it's okay, you can pave a very different path and other people don't have to get it because it's not their journey, it's yours.

Shivani [00:17:32] You said something really impactful that lasted with me just before we started the recording, and I want to share it for the benefit of our audiences. Different is okay, and I am living a different life to the one that I was brought up with and that's okay.

Kristal [00:17:48] It is, most definitely, I mean, I'm just a little Aboriginal girl that grew up in the western suburbs in a housing commission with a single mother. But now I live this extraordinary life where I'm busy, I'm on planes. My little fella who's four years old would have been on probably more planes than most average adults. And it's crazy, but it's okay. And I don't care if other people don't get it because it's not their journey. And I'm doing what makes me happy and fulfills the purpose that I have for myself and the impact that I want to create.

Shivani [00:18:25] Let's talk about impact because of course you are the winner of many industry awards and I hear that you are a finalist in the Telstra Best of Business Awards, congratulations. Why do you think it's so important that women take part in awards like this and hold that platform as their own?

Kristal [00:18:47] I think it's important to celebrate your successes and to mark moments in time on your journey and to get recognition for what you've been able to achieve. It's really funny because it might have been, oh, four or five years ago, but I sat down thinking about some of the goals and some of the things that I wanted to achieve. And I actually created a list of awards that I wanted to win. And this Telstra award is one that I haven't received yet. So, you know, but I've been ticking them off of this list. And what's really interesting is that I was nominated without even my knowledge. And so it's almost like it was it's quite serendipitous that it's happening and that I've made it to the New South Wales State finals because it's something that I wrote four or five years ago that I wanted to achieve. Look, I think, you know, don't be shy or shame, we say in black fella way, we say, don't be shame. Don't be ashamed to put yourself out there. You know, you are you, you're unique. And why shouldn't you celebrate your success?

Shivani [00:19:57] Because you deserve it, if people can't already hear it, I'm sure they can now, Kristal, your positive never say never mode of operating is truly infectious, and I'm certainly feeling the vibe of that. I want to take a look at what else is out there. You wrote this list previously around the awards that you want to win, and it sounds like the future had those plans for you. So now let's together take a look into your crystal ball.

Kristal [00:20:23] It's always really difficult when people say, think about the future, because I'm living in this moment right now and I'm really, really comfortable and enjoying what I'm doing. But last year I started a YouTube series called Meet the Mob. And, you know, for me, the future is continuing to elevate the voice and promote the success of Indigenous businesses. And I know that my Meet the Mob series and my YouTube

channel, there's something that's going to simmer from there. I also see a lot of international stuff going to happen. I've been spending a lot of time overseas and bringing back those international perspectives back into Australia, but also seeing what we've got to offer and being able to help other First Nations people around the world in relation to economic development to me that's really important. So yes, watch this space.

Shivani [00:21:20] It sounds like your crystal ball doesn't just have plans for you, but it plans for creating a legacy for others as well. And to also view and enjoy and be entertained, I will certainly be tuning in as well to your YouTube channel. Kristal, at Leading Women, we're committed to activating women's leadership, what tool would you like to leave for us all in our Leadership Toolkit to take us to the next level?

Kristal [00:21:45] I'd like to share with you a cultural practice called dadirri, and I encourage everyone to have a look on YouTube. There's one in particular that's by the Miriam Rose Foundation. So dadirri is a cultural practice of deep listening and it's something that I really like to call upon because, you know, I think you said earlier around active listening, you know, how deep do we actually listen? How present are we? And so dadirri is all about being with oneself, listening intently, being present. It's about breathing. It's about connecting. It's about your full awareness and opening up. And so it's a practice we need to start with ourselves and listen to ourselves. How much time do we stop and breathe and listen to ourselves and what our body and our minds are telling us? But then also, it's a practice that we can employ when we are with others.

Shivani [00:22:49] That's great advice and of course we will have a link to dadirri in our show notes but for those who are curious right now, the spelling of dadirri, please.

Kristal [00:22:58] Yes, it's d-a-d-i-r-r-i.

Shivani [00:23:01] Wonderful, thank you so much for sharing that Kristal and more, Kristal Kinsela, it was incredible to have you today at Leading Women. Thanks for joining us.

Kristal [00:23:10] Thanks so much for having me.

Julienne [00:23:12] Thanks for listening to Leading Women, where we can all activate and redefine the business landscape. So now it's over to you, access the links, tips and tools discussed in this episode at womeninfoocus.com.au and subscribe to leading women so you don't miss an episode. Leave a review, spread the word and let's commit to keeping the conversation going at [#leadingwomensaus](https://twitter.com/leadingwomensaus)

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