

You don't know until you go Season 2, Episode 3 – Jake Stika

Lindsay: ([00:00](#))

Hello, my name is Lindsay Recknell and this is the Hope Motivates Action podcast. Super excited to bring you season two, conversations with inspiring people, reframing the way we've traditionally thought about hope and its connection to our lives. It's my pleasure today to introduce you to Jake Stika, the co founder and executive director of Next Gen Men. I met Jake through his board chair and was immediately impressed with his compassion, intelligence and purpose-driven mission to create brave spaces to engage, educate and empower men and boys on gender and equality.

Lindsay: ([00:37](#))

If you're interested in any of the books, resources, and tools I mentioned in this episode, all the links you need can be found in the show notes of your favorite podcast player or head to the blog and pod page of my www.expertinhope.com. You'll find them all there too. My message and my work is all about using the Science of Hope to motivate action in your life because without action, hope is just a wish.

Lindsay: ([01:01](#))

Hello everyone. Thank you so much for joining us back here on the hope motivates action podcast. I am so thrilled to have founder of the not for profit Next Gen Men here with us today. I would like to introduce you to Jake Stika. Hi Jake.

Jake: ([01:19](#))

Hello. Thanks for having me on.

Lindsay: ([01:21](#))

Thank you very, very much. Really excited to have you here today. I think your story and your message is really going to resonate with the audience. I know that ever since I've learned about NextGen Men, I've just been super intrigued by some of the things that you guys are doing and I know that hope has been a huge part of where you started and where you're planning to go and I can't wait for people to hear all about it.

Jake: ([01:44](#))

Awesome. I'm really glad when people get excited about the work that we're doing. I means that we should probably keep doing it.

Lindsay: ([01:50](#))

Yes. Yes you should.

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Lindsay: [\(01:51\)](#)

For those of us who don't know who you are, you are a speaker and facilitator focused on gender based issues, everything related to the social and emotional development of young men, the health and wellbeing of men and how they interact in their communities and workplaces as far as gender equity goes. Jake was recently named one of Avenue magazine's top 40 under 40 as well as having earned recognition from Ashoka, the British council and the Canadian Center for Diversity and Inclusion. Jake has also spoken at the United Nations as part of the Canadian delegation and participated in the UN Women Safe Cities Initiative Global Forum. Whoa. You are a mover and a shaker, my friend.

Jake: [\(02:35\)](#)

Sometimes I find myself in places I shouldn't be.

Lindsay: [\(02:38\)](#)

or places that stretch you that you know. You have good stories to come out of, I imagine.

Jake: [\(02:43\)](#)

Yeah, absolutely.

Lindsay: [\(02:44\)](#)

How did you get involved with the United nations?

Jake: [\(02:46\)](#)

That's one of those things where it sounds grand and it's great in a bio, but someone at Global Affairs Canada kind of looked us up, reached out, asked if I wanted to speak. I said yes. The topic was resilient women, resilient societies, and my role kind of was discussing the role of men and boys. To that end, you know, it's a super cool experience. New York City, the United Nations, all that stuff, but it's very formulaic. It's, it's very much, you know, this person will ask you this question, you have two minutes to respond, this person will ask you this question. You have three minutes to respond. And so the best thing that you can do really is, is read prepared statements because you can't really go off the cuff and really try and connect with someone. It's, it's just this is what I want you to take away from this.

Lindsay: [\(03:33\)](#)

Interesting. I had no idea that that's what it was like

Jake: [\(03:36\)](#)

at least my experience. I mean, I'm sure that in different settings it happens different ways. But uh, that, that's what I was offered and that's what I took.

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Lindsay: [\(03:44\)](#)

Yeah, absolutely. Well, very cool experience. So someone found the NexGen men website, could you tell us a little more about what you're doing and why you started?

Jake: [\(03:53\)](#)

Yeah. So in a nutshell, Next Gen Men is redefining what it means to quote unquote be a man. And the reason I say quote unquote is because no matter what, if someone says to man up or act like the man or something to that end, despite the fact that none of us have ever taken a course on what it means to be a man, we all know what's implied by that. And it's our firm belief that those kinds of beliefs are actually quite limiting. Today we're seeing three out of four suicides are men. Men are dying on average five years earlier than women, partly due to increased risk taking behaviors, but also limited health seeking behaviors. We're seeing that men are the primary perpetrators of all forms of violence. And aside from sexual violence and domestic violence, they're actually the number one victims of all forms of violence. And then, you know, men experience increased rates of addiction, incarceration, homelessness. So to me, those are all kind of stemming from this issue of what it means to be a man. I don't think that we're having enough conversations for, with and about men or regarding gender.

Lindsay: [\(04:58\)](#)

Oh, I love that. I love redefining what it means to be a man. Cause you're right, it's always implicit that we think we know what that term means, but everybody interprets it differently. How do you teach what it is to be a man when everybody is coming from a different starting point, a different foundation?

Jake: [\(05:17\)](#)

Yeah, that's a good question. I actually lately have been thinking about it and I think maybe we'll have to change the language, but it's, it's more about unlearning too and undefining because when we say redefining, people are asking, well what is the definition? And I actually don't want to offer another one. I more just want to broaden it because you're right, there is a diversity of masculinities. Mine is different than, you know, someone's in Nigeria versus someone in the line of Tim Horton's, yet we're all met or identify as if that's our choice. Right.

Lindsay: [\(05:49\)](#)

So progressive, like I just, I think the work that you're doing and the thinking that you even have as as the leader of this organization, but as a human and as a man, I think it's just, it's so forward thinking. Can you tell us the foundation story, like where you came to and why you've done so much thinking around this space?

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Jake: (06:09)

Yeah. I won't claim to have known everything when we started this. It's actually going to be our fifth birthday here in November. A lot of thinking over the last five years in a little bit before that, but kind of two sides of the story. One is kind of the business side. So in 2014 I read an article, uh, by Rachel Giza, uh, in the Walrus called The Talk. And it was about another program in Calgary called Wise Guys. And they do sexual health education for junior high age boys. I myself went to Catholic school and grew up in a traditionally East European family. So at school, the story around sex ed was don't do it. And at home we didn't talk about it. And so, you know, I thought to myself, had I had a program like this when I was a kid, you know, navigating relationships and sexuality and those kinds of things, as a young man, I probably would have been better off as well as the people that I interacted with. So that was the inspiration kind of idea wise. And then at the time I'd been doing Movember for five years. Then they had a call for proposals out for new ideas to change the face of men's health in Canada. And at the time I was working at a startup, so I fancied myself entrepreneurial. So here was an idea and here was a funding opportunity. So I reached out to my best friend who had a degree in public health and was working with at risk youth and I said, Hey, do you want to pitch with me? And the two of us pitched and we got through kind of the first round and then we needed a bit more credibility. So we added in our third co-founder Jason, the three of us were able to secure a grant and somehow three knuckleheads who'd never done anything like this before, got some money.

Jake: (07:45)

So we started in in early 2015 with our youth programs. But the other side of the story kind of in behind that in 2007 my cofounder and best friend Jamal unfortunately lost his 13 year old brother to suicide and we think it was due to kind of homophobic bullying. He was also racialized youth. So kind of thinking about all the experiences that that young man had had and the loss of his life and the impact that it had on his family. Then I myself in my early twenties had had some pretty significant bouts of depression, so my own mental health issues and learning through, you know, my therapy and healing through that, how my ideas of what it meant to be a man actually hurt me and kept me from asking for help and showing vulnerability and all those things. And then just generally seeing, you know, like having dated survivors of sexual assault and a whole host of issues and and wanting to create a conversation and a platform for change.

Lindsay: (08:43)

And what a platform it is. I know you mentioned that you have your youth programming and then you have adult programming as well.

Jake: (08:50)

Yeah. So we started with youth programming five years ago. Then a couple of years in our adult peers were saying, love what you're doing, wish I had this when I was a kid and we said, well, we don't need to be kids to have these conversations. So we started monthly discussion groups, which were just recently rebranded NGM

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Circle and that's happening in Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver, Toronto, Medicine Hat, and hopefully we'll be in Grand Prairie and St John's in the new year.

Lindsay: [\(09:16\)](#)

Oh, very, very cool. One of the things that most attracted to me to the work that you guys are doing is the gender equality conversation. I really believe that we can't have the gender equality conversation with only women and to this point, I think we've almost gone too far the other way now on only including women and girls in the conversation. And I love that you guys are focused on bringing men and boys to the conversation. That's obviously something that's really important to you as well.

Jake: [\(09:44\)](#)

Yeah, absolutely. I mean like somehow some way, whether it be mass media marketing or workplace initiatives, gender has become synonymous with women and girls. And those who are super progressive, think of it with like trans and non-binary folks. But we're rarely talking about men and boys in terms of the gender conversation. And we need to have that robust conversation that includes everyone because it really is a spectrum of identity and experience. And if we're talking about equity and balance, I think we've made great strides getting women into science, technology, engineering, math, leadership, politics. But where's the efforts to get more men into caregiving roles, right? Like I think about the aging population that we have right now and we are going to need men in nursing. We're gonna need men in caregiving roles. So I think that we are not having that conversation and you know, um, through feminist history, I think that we've had a brilliant conversation for, with and about women in terms of their roles and identities in society. But we've been missing that parallel conversation.

Lindsay: [\(10:46\)](#)

How do you get men and boys involved in the conversation to feel like they have a seat at the table and that they can expand their definition of what it means to be a man and be able to share their feelings and thoughts if they haven't been taught. How do you progress that conversation and make it comfortable for men and boys to speak?

Jake: [\(11:05\)](#)

I think a lot of it is reframing it because we've framed the conversation to be one sided. There's lots of men and boys that are like, that's great, you know, you need that, but there's nothing in it for me. But if we can reframe it, because at the end of the day, all of us human beings have a fundamental question of what's in it for me. And so if we can talk about men and boys lived experiences and frame it within that gender conversation, then we're bringing them to the table in a really meaningful way. And the unfortunate reality, this is an imperfect metaphor, but it's the best one I've got. If we think about patriarchy as a stream and for some reason the female fish have to swim against the current and the male fish gets to go with the current women and girls are

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constantly going to be questioning, you know, what the hell kind of water are we swimming in?

Jake: ([11:50](#))

Whereas for men and boys, why would we ever question it? For the most, it takes us where we want to go, but at some point whether we're competing with another fish or we find still water or we get fished out, then we start to question and unfortunately what that looks like in our lives is, you know, a job loss, a divorce, a mental health issue. These are all really traumatic events and that's really when we look around at the water and I think that we mean to create soft landing places for men and boys as they experienced that trauma because we're seeing the alternative of organizations and movements taking advantage of vulnerable men who are in a really high emotional state.

Lindsay: ([12:31](#))

Oh yeah. I really like your analogy. I'm sort of working it through in my head because sometimes they will hear people say, you know, there's an international women's day, but why isn't there an international men's day? And many will respond back. Yeah. Right. November 19th and some people will respond back, well, you get 364 other days of the year. The women get one day of the year. What do you say to people like that other than, well, there is an international men's day.

Jake: ([13:00](#))

Yeah. I mean like there's a point there obviously a patriarchy, disproportionately benefits men and boys, but to those people who talk about, you know, you get 364 other days of the year, I think that it's not necessarily helpful to create that us and them dialogue, nor is it helpful for the men to ask, well, why do we get one? Right. I think that we're all better off if we can reframe how this systemic issue is patriarchy and how that actually harms everyone. Right. Because with the statistics that I listed earlier, I wouldn't say that it's exactly working for us, men either.

Lindsay: ([13:33](#))

Yeah, exactly. Right. So we like to be actionable here on the podcast. Like is there some specific tips or tools you can give us, you know, if we're in a situation where that kind of a conversation is coming up that we can help to reframe the conversation.

Jake: ([13:50](#))

It's a broad question because the situations can be so different. It looks nice, but I think it's really just approaching it with curiosity rather than kind of getting triggered and going down a certain rabbit hole and you know, painting with broad brush strokes, but really just digging in and asking why do you think that way or how has your life been because of this? And through that, having empathy is a big part of it because we're all human. We all have different lived experiences. You know, when I think of abuse, I think of hurt people hurt people. So

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there's something probably in this person's background, I think, you know, to do these things you have to be courageous. And then at the root, at the end of the day, we're, we're seeking equity. We're not seeking a win. We're seeking a way to get along better together. And that framework is actually Next Gen Men's four values - curiosity, empathy, courage and equity.

Lindsay: [\(14:40\)](#)

Very cool. So if I want to encourage someone to come to an MGM circle, for example, and they say like, well, that's all fine and dandy for those guys, but there's nothing in it for me how, like how can I encourage someone to go?

Jake: [\(14:57\)](#)

There's the like real basic question of how do you know till you go?

Lindsay: [\(15:01\)](#)

Yeah. Yeah.

Jake: [\(15:02\)](#)

But I think like MGM circle is great because it's a space for likeminded people to come together and have these conversations. But realistically we have MGM circles in our everyday lives as well too. As long as we're creating space for, for conversations around what it means to be a man. That's your own NGM circle. And I think that, you know, if you're trying to invite someone out to the event, then you're already a person like that in their life.

Lindsay: [\(15:25\)](#)

I liked what you said, you don't know until you go, how do you know it's not for you until you show up. And then once you do, if it's still not for you, okay, fine. But at least you tried it.

Jake: [\(15:34\)](#)

Exactly.

Lindsay: [\(15:35\)](#)

I appreciate that. So what's your hope for the future for NGM, for NextGen men and this conversation? Like if you could in your action on an expected outcome, what would that look like?

Jake: [\(15:48\)](#)

Yeah, you know, obviously there's the classic nonprofit, you know, we hear so many startup stories, but nobody really talks about the glamorous lives of nonprofits as they start. But you know, we have our own sustainability and scalability questions that remain unanswered and we're working towards that, but kind of bigger picture.

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Yeah, I've been reflecting on it and I really think that we're the marketing arm for men and feminism and so if we're successful in normalizing that this is a space for men and boys to be a part of the conversation to talk about gender, I think that we'll be successful as an organization.

Lindsay: [\(16:26\)](#)

Very cool. I like that a lot. Very open minded. Like you say, you know your four pillars, but generosity and compassion and curiosity. I like that a lot. If I was to ask you what your definition of hope is, how would you answer?

Jake: [\(16:41\)](#)

I think it's kind of semantics to some extent. There's two ways that I'm thinking about it. One is in the sense of purpose, I think if you have purpose, you have hope, right? Because you're working towards something, which kind of speaks to the answer that I just gave. But I also think about, you know, someone had asked me what gives me hope not too long ago and it's the 12 to 14 year old boys that we work with. Because when I was that age, I went to Catholic school. So there was nobody out in my school. I didn't understand what a trans person was. And I've never heard of feminism. These boys know all of those things. And so if we can continue to give them permission to be curious and to stay open, I think we'll have a much better society when they're the ones holding balance of power. And so I think that's what gives me hope.

Lindsay: [\(17:33\)](#)

Hmm. Yeah. Very cool. And I bet you recognize hope in them also.

Jake: [\(17:37\)](#)

Absolutely. I mean, it's really funny when you're talking with a 12 to 14 year old boy and you're talking about power. They don't feel like they have any power. Their parents tell them what to do, their teachers tell them what to do, but we're trying have a conversation that they will have power at some point and they want that power. But they also see the consequences, uh, in broader society of unchecked power. And it's been very normalized because we've done such great work for women and girls that they're their peers and they're equals, right? I think the major drop-off starts happening, you know, after entry-level positions. So there's a lot of upstream work, but you know, if these young men can carry that banner up throughout that and then, you know, take their own paternity leave, that creates those opportunities for equity later on.

Lindsay: [\(18:22\)](#)

So cool that you're having these youth programming and teaching these kids, you know, about power and equity and some of those other things. What do you do to equip them to have conversations at home, for example, where maybe their parents weren't taught those conversations or they're not aligned with what they're learning at school? I find like in our generation, kind of our kids are lucky. They're having these

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conversations. Like you say, you know, they know all about feminism and equity. Our parents don't necessarily know, have interest or they're still embarrassed. There's still the stigma to talk about that kind of thing. So yeah. How do you equip them to have those conversations?

Jake: [\(19:00\)](#)

We can't do anything about the home life sometimes that just is what it is. But when we run through our framework of our youth program, we start with the pillar of self. And when they're in that position and that home, people are telling them what to do at the school and people are telling them what to do. They're trying to conform to whatever the popular group is at school. I think youth lose a sense of self. And so what we really try to do is really empower that and normalize that. We're all different. That's okay. And so I think if we can give them a better sense of self, then they're better prepared to have that conversation at home and understand that just because my family holds this view doesn't mean that I have to. I can be my own person. That's really, I think the biggest impact that we can have in that.

Lindsay: [\(19:45\)](#)

And then what about for the older generation, the generation older than we are? Is there any conversations or any things that we can do for that generation? Like I know in my personal family, I'm very lucky. We have a lot of those conversations with both my mom and my dad. I know that we are a unique situation that not every family is like ours or even in the church at school in the workplace. How can you have those conversations?

Jake: [\(20:10\)](#)

Yeah, so we are having those conversations. We also have a workplace initiative, so we have youth, community and workplaces. That's kind of our social enterprise and where we earn some revenue and work with companies like Deloitte, Salesforce, RBC. So, not necessarily small fish, but the reason it's not the small fish is because they're feeling pressure from their shareholders and different stakeholders and from the market. And you know, they need to put forth gender equity. They need to put forth diversity inclusion and, and there's really no going backwards. You know, there's certain factions that say, Oh, let's go back to the good old days, but there's no slowing this train down. And so they're trying to get ahead of it. They don't do it perfectly and they don't do it always the best way. And sometimes I joke, will I change an old white dad's mind? No, but if you pay me to try, I will and then take that money and invested it in a 12 year old. But that being said, you know, there are some really tremendous leaders out there and I think, but we do a better job as society in not calling out or shaming or you know, vilifying, the worst case scenario, but rather praising, upholding, celebrating those that are doing it well and voting with our capitalist, dollars. Then we're going to be in charge of creating the world we want to be in.

Lindsay: [\(21:27\)](#)

How do you keep your own motivation going? How do you keep your own hope going?

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Jake: ([21:31](#))

Sheer stubbornness. No, I've always just been that type the, you know, go down with the ship type and both my cofounders have taken steps back when one's a board member, one's reduced his hours. I was hard iterating through that. But you know, organizations, movements, they have their own life cycles too. Everything changes every few years and you know, weathering that and learning and investing. And I also just think once you see it, you can't unsee it. And so you know, to like hang up my cap and do something totally different would just feel wrong. And so its the success of, you know, meeting folks like you and how excited someone gets about the work that that gives you a little bit of energy till the next one.

Lindsay: ([22:15](#))

I always like to say that entrepreneurship is the most awesome and the most awful job on the planet. You're always chasing that next thing you know is going to be so good. But when you're in that Valley. Yeah, that Valley is awful.

Jake: ([22:30](#))

I believe they call it the trough of sorrow.

Lindsay: ([22:32](#))

Yes. The trough of sorrow. What do they call the mountain peak? Is that a thing.

Jake: ([22:37](#))

I don't think we get to slow down and celebrate.

Lindsay: ([22:41](#))

You'll let me know when you get there. Yeah. Oh that's awesome. The people that listen to this podcast, we really like to learn about action and what it takes to do hard things because you are doing hard things every single day. Do you have any ideas or any, you know, top three tips you can give us on how you keep moving forward?

Jake: ([23:05](#))

The only difference between people who move forward and people who don't is the fact that the other people move forward and it sounds overly simplistic to say that, but the hard things get easier the more you do them. They don't get easier by you know, reading a book or a blog post or a podcast or something like that. Not to diminish the value of this podcast. It's always nice to have that motivation then you know, I, I do those things. I read those books but it is that action and each time you do that action it's kind of like going to the gym. The muscles get stronger and you know you just push more weight after. That's kind of the simplistic answer. If

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folks want something that I lean on that that I think helps. I'm a big fan of the philosophy of stoicism. I think that when it comes to masculinity and stoicism it gets kind of a bit of a bad rap because it comes off as on emotional or unfeeling.

Jake: (23:57)

But you know it's actually a reco Roman philosophy, lots of famous philosophers, Epic to the Seneca, Marcus Aurelius and kind of the three main tenants of that are first to see things as they actually are not through a trigger or a projection or a lens. That step is so hard in and of itself, but you know, being able to take that step back and try and remove those glasses is important. Second is take action towards things that actually matter. And so you know, if you're dealt a bad hand of cards then is flipping the table and yelling at everyone going to make it better. Probably not. You regroup and you play again. And then the last is knowing what is and what isn't in your control. And so if you show up, you give 110% then you know and it doesn't go your way. Then there was nothing more you could have done. But you know, if you show up and you say, well I only gave it 75 then. Yeah, like look at that and be like, how do you give a hundred or 110

Lindsay: (24:56)

Hmm. Very cool. Do you have mentors? Like I feel like you're well educated and you have really great ideas. Do you have mentors that you've learned this stuff from?

Jake: (25:04)

I do have mentors. Not necessarily about like the philosophy or those kinds of things. Different people I lean on for different things. I have someone to go see about marketing and I, my head leaves spinning every time. I have someone I go see who's done this kind of difficult gender-based work before and had 11 years in that field. And so you know, I think it is really important to identify those people that you can learn different things from, but a lot of it is also just internal reflection and growth and seeking out those sources of knowledge and applying them.

Lindsay: (25:37)

What is your favorite book that you would recommend anybody to read that would help them to better understand the work you're trying to do?

Jake: (25:46)

Man's Search for Meaning. Well, I think that that's a great one. Victor Frankl,

Lindsay: (25:50)

I read that one. I like it a lot.

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Jake: ([25:52](#))

Yeah, but not necessarily about this work, but if you want to know more about the work that Next Gen Men is doing, I highly recommend *The Will to Change* by Bell Hooks. That's a great book about men and feminism.

Lindsay: ([26:04](#))

Very, very cool. Definitely look up all of those resources. *Man's Search for Meaning*. I loved, loved, loved that book. That was one of the first books I read when I started doing this work and hope is just to understand motivation and action and how a person holds on in the horrible conditions that he lived through that he survived through. And then what he did with it when he came up the other side. Incredible.

Jake: ([26:29](#))

That book is the foundation of hope.

Lindsay: ([26:31](#))

Oh man, you're not...it totally is. You're, you are not kidding. Yeah. For listeners, I'll put the links into the show notes of the podcast as well. For sure. All right. I always like to end the podcast by asking my guests one last question. What gives you hope?

Jake: ([26:49](#))

I feel like I answered that earlier through the 12 to 14 year old boys, but I think, you know, if I can build on that a little bit, what gives me hope is that the social zeitgeists is changing, right? We had the #metoo movement. We had the Gillette ad. We have a lot of these things that are inviting men into the conversation. And uh, like I said, there's no going back. And so for us I think it's important to step in and, and acknowledge that we have a role to play and, and um, you know, learn from those who've been doing this work before us and try to apply those learnings to our own lives.

Lindsay: ([27:24](#))

That is awesome. Thank you so, so much. This has been such a great way to know a little bit more about you and Next Gen Men specifically and I know if people would like to get more involved in NextGen Men, how can they get involved? Actually maybe you should talk more about that.

Jake: ([27:40](#))

for sure. Definitely check out our website. We've just updated it. www.nexgenmen.ca and follow along on social media. We have Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, all @NexGenMen.

Lindsay: ([27:54](#))

Awesome. And I know International Men's day is on November 19th. Did I get that date right? And you are

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doing a screening of a cool new movie looking forward to being there for that as well.

Jake: ([28:06](#))

Awesome. I'm looking forward to seeing you there in person.

Lindsay: ([28:08](#))

Awesome. Thanks Jake. Really appreciate your time and we'll talk to you again soon.

Jake: ([28:12](#))

Thank you.

LINDSAY: ([30:26](#))

Thanks so much for listening to another episode of the [Hope Motivates Action](#) podcast. These conversations have been so inspiring and motivating to so many people, and it's my absolute pleasure to produce them for you.

This show thrives on your feedback, so if you find value in this podcast, it goes a really long way. If you'll give me a [five star rating on Apple podcasts](#), the next step in your journey to action your hope is to check out my virtual mastermind program, the flagship series, which is called **Hope for Caregivers**. These are 12-week group accountability programs designed to support those of us who are caregiving for others, likely at the expense of ourselves and our own personal goals.

As with all the tools and resources we discussed on the show, you can find links to this program in the show notes on your favorite podcast player or on my [Expert in Hope](#). Also, when you're visiting the website, check out the [Shop page](#) where you can take Hope home. This show is all about making hope tangible and practical because without action, hope is just a wish.