

# APT Conversation #3 With Tsholo Khalema & Jan Jennings

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

life, artists, balance, conversation, burnout, people, organize, parents, important, feel, mentioned, manage, cultivate, year, transparent, hard, happening, easier, patience, learn

## SPEAKERS

Jan, Tsholo

**Tsholo** 00:24

What's going on everybody? It's me Tsholo Khalema. And it's been more than a month since I've talked to this amazing artist.

**Jan** 00:36

Hi.

**Tsholo** 00:38

And thank you so much for being here. Again.

**Jan** 00:43

You're so welcome, honestly. I'm glad to be here. It's been a while.

**Tsholo** 00:49

Thank you so much. It's been a while since we've had a conversation. And I think today's topic will kind of cover that, you know, as to why, what the goal is, always. But what's happening underneath that. Right? As artists. Remind people again, what you do?

**Jan** 01:13

Gladly. I am a poet. I am a singer. I am a songwriter, I rap. I'm a playwright. And I have a business where I make wearable art from my business called Mango Lily. And I forgot to mention this before, but I also dabble in comedy. I'm hella funny, but - thanks for laughing! But yeah, that's who I am, and I'm really happy to be here, this - like, on our last session. Wow.

**Tsholo** 01:50

Our last session and way overdue. Last session and way overdue. And we will dive into that, you know. My name is Tsholo, like I said, I am an actor, director, and visual artist, and I'm, you know, a TPM - no,

not TPM! I am an APT, Generator, graduate, producing - and I'm, it's been a pleasure to be, you know, having these conversations with you. They've been really eye-opening. I think we're just giving them a snippet of what we actually talk about. So, which is good, you know, but I really wanted to dive into the idea of cultivating balance and avoiding burnout as artists, as humans, as parents. As all of that kind of stuff, right? And, I mean, Geez, that is the goal. But underneath it all, tell us, what what have you been up to in the last month? I know, it's been really hard to sort of organize time for us to have a conversation. Because life, right? And so what's it been like for you? And what have you been doing?

03:19

Well, I have been knee-deep in things. Being a mom also, like I took up swimming lessons. Me in my ripe age is learning how to swim. I've also been full swing into my COVID Officer job, which has been very busy, and also been dealing with some personal life things. November is the month of like, the anniversary of my mother's passing, and my late father's birthday, so it's been really hard just finding, I guess, the balance of all those things. And I'm also in a playwriting unit for Nightwood as well. Write From The Hip with the legendary Donna Michelle St. Bernard. So currently playwriting and working on poetry too, has just been - I feel like I've just been in and out of my house. Like, I wake up, I'm out of the house. And then I come back in. I feel like it's been a revolving door of just leaving the house. And so, thank you for your patience with me in making time. For me I've been really busy next - I appreciate your grace. As we know life happens but I'm glad to be here to talk to you about this topic, which is the goal right? I would love to, you know, cultivate the balance, avoid burnout. And I think I did not manage that this month at all, like, I even got sick, as well, and so did my daughter. So there was also all of those things, but I'm glad to be here. And so that's what I've been up to,

05:24

I think it's really hard to really balance all of that. And sometimes as artists, like I tend to forget that life stuff is just part of taking care of yourself. And we need to balance that, I tend to sort of push myself in the arts and sort of like, go for that hustle, like, you know, trying to find the next gig that's going to feed me or feed my family, you know, so it is hard to, to, especially with inflation right now, with food being so expensive, with living being really, really expensive. You know, um, it would be easier if things were manageable, but it's, it's really difficult, right? And so like, yeah, it's easier said than done. But yeah, me as well. Like, I've just been like, I don't even know where to start. Like, I've just been so busy in terms of like, even trying to catch up on certain things, reports that I have to write, contracts that I have to prepare for it and finish. And like, these are things that I do in my own schedule on my own time. But they also have deadlines, right? And deadlines giving me such anxiety, you know, and so it's just trying to find ways to figure out, okay, like, like, I'm still pushing myself as an artist, I still want to be seen, I don't want to be looked at as somebody who's like slacking in any way, but life does take over, right, because I'm also like a parent figure, in a young one's life. And I feel like that, that also takes up a lot of energy. And it requires a lot of time and patience as well. And sometimes I have to drop my work as an artist to help out, you know, because when you have a little one around, you know, dinners are prepped, if she's done in school, you still have to organize certain things, right? So all of that stuff sort of matters. And then managing that with elderly parents, you know, I have two parents that are older that live out of out of the city here, so managing to, you know, have funds to go and see my parents, and my, my dad, you know, broke some bones. You know, and yeah, and so it's been really, really a really hard month while managing to still, you know, host and do those kind of things. You know, I feel

like it's really, really important. And, and still manage to stay afloat and manage to stay - you know, like, I have a workshop that's starting this week. And that workshop has been in the works for a long time. But I still have to find time to prep for the workshop throughout that. Because, you know, I'm really trying to learn the skills to be in community to learn more skills within theatre. And how do you balance all of that with with self care, with, if you're, if you're in a relationship, you have to care about the relationship and make time for that. How do you care about your animals? Right? There are people that there are people that, you know, look at their animals as part of family. And so like, how do you give that time? How do you give time to your children, you know?

**Jan 08:53**

All these questions!

**Tsholo 08:53**

And your parents? Those are what we're trying to figure out. And how do you cultivate balance in all of that? I'm sure there are ways, for sure.

**Jan 09:03**

Probably

**Tsholo 09:04**

I mean, I could think of a couple of things like to name off the bat, you know, I was thinking about, if you think about organizing your space, for example, I feel like those are the things that would allow life to be a little bit easier. And so it's - once your space is organized - and I believe in minimalist type of life, because then there isn't a lot to do, and that's one thing I can get out. It's just getting things out of the way. Scheduling, like writing down your schedule and things like that.

**Jan 09:46**

I feel for me, that I have to be very intentional about what I choose to do. And when I'm intentional about what I choose to do is easier to find the balance, because just because you're capable of doing something doesn't mean that you're always going to pick it to do it, if it doesn't work with the path you're trying to go on, and the other things that you have to get done, you know. So I've really been trying to work towards being intentional about the projects I choose to involve myself in, so that I can be present for that, and for all the other life things going on. And, yeah, you talked about maintaining space. And I think that's really powerful, as well, to have like a clear space to be able to think and work. I know that I mentioned prior that I do live with ADHD, and so that also can make it hard to find balance, if I get distracted. Or I'm overwhelmed by keeping up with all the the commitments that I have to honor, because my executive functioning is not top tier, as as much as I would like it to be. And so I have to write things down, I have to remember to look at the things. I have to really try and just prioritize, and know that I also need to make mandatory time for rest, I find that when I'm not doing that I'm more prone to get sick. And that's my - how I know burnout is coming for me, when I start to feel very tired, and even sometimes temperature. I can't speak for everybody. But when I know that I'm really tired, I tend to feel really hot, right? Even though it's cold, even if it's cold outside, I feel hot. And that's why I know that I'm reaching literal burnout, like I'm tired. And so I have to be very mindful of when it gets to, like, my body tells me everything that I need to know to be careful with. I'm usually not somebody who

takes naps in the day either. But if I'm starting to take a nap, I need to kind of, you know, sit myself down and see what's going on. And how can I make the load not as daunting, that I'm actually literally feeling like I want to sleep. And so it's just being intentional with what I choose to do. So that when I have to balance the other things of life, I'm able to stay motivated to do so. And also leave time for rest. And you mentioned family, and parents - I'm so sorry to hear about your dad. That cannot be easy, you know? Yeah, it's a lot to, you know, sometimes you can't be in a million places at once. And so to try and be present in all areas of your life is just like, I guess it's the dream, to be present everywhere. It's the dream. But at the same time, it's not always a reality. And I think it's really important that we are kind to ourselves during those times. Because we can't do everything. You know, as much as we'd like to, we really can't. And I think it's just being honest with ourselves that maybe there's that thing you really want to do, but you don't have enough room on your plate for right now. But that doesn't mean it can't ever happen. Like, it might come back another year. And maybe then you'll have more time and have things - things won't be the same as they were today. And that's what I'm really working on. Knowing when to add and when to not add to my plate, so that I could be the best version of myself for every area of my life.

**Tsholo 14:13**

I think that was the biggest lesson for me this year, was -I've mentioned last time that I had double-booked myself, our last conversation. And and so the - one of the biggest lessons for me was to sort of be transparent, and ask for dates from the people that I'm going to be working with. Making sure that those dates are solid so that I am always transparent with anybody else about dates surrounding that. Like, I'm not available. Those kind of things were really really helpful that helped me stay organized, and also like my email gearing my email to sort of have a - not a vacation response, but an away response.

**Jan 14:59**

I never thought of that, wow.

**Tsholo 15:01**

And that's something that I learned while doing The First Stone, was just being transparent to anybody that emails me, to understand that my email return is going to be a little slower than normal, so that there's less pressure. So I accumulated all of these things, techniques from other people, from reading articles about organization and things like that, that will help me as, as an artist who's very like, like, I also have ADHD. And so it's really difficult sometimes to keep my things organized. And so I found that being transparent with people I work with, yeah, and writing things down - all of that kind of stuff was just really helpful in how I, how I plan out my year, and it made me feel so much better, knowing that I don't have to have a heart attack, you know, about, Oh, my God -

**Jan 16:09**

Oh we don't want that, we don't want that

**Tsholo 16:10**

And what I mean by that is like that I've just literally, like, double-booked myself again, or I've inconvenienced people, and now they have to - that makes me feel bad. And I don't want to, I don't

want to feel bad, you know? And so to avoid that, there are tools that I'm picking up from other people that I'm like, that will help my anxiety, it will help organize my time. You know? I was focused on the play. I couldn't do a lot of different things. I had deadlines, then I literally have been putting them off. Because I'm like, You know what, I don't want to apologize for my existence. I don't want to apologize for you know, for, you know, like living and trying to navigate this life. But as long as I'm transparent to the people so that - people hate being like, I hate being in the dark.

**Jan 17:00**

Oh, that's one thing I don't like either.

**Tsholo 17:02**

Yeah. Like, I hate being confused. And I hate being in the dark, you know, because imagination starts going and you know? But it's like, why not just let people know what's up, what's up, what's good, what's happening. And so that - that always puts me at ease.

**Jan 17:18**

Um, you spoke about like, not leaving people in the dark. And I also mentioned, I have a small business. And I had quite a big sale, but I also had lots of things going on. And so I just, when I had the client, I just kept them in the loop. Because I work with clay, sometimes the clay doesn't behave. And so that means I might be making one thing like five times over just to get it right. Because it's baked and stuff. And sometimes you have air bubbles and all these things. And then I'm a parent, right? And I have I have a job. I have all these other things. But what I really found helped, was keeping my client, my customer, you know -

**Tsholo 18:01**

Informed

**Jan 18:02**

Yeah, informed, thank you - informed about what's going on. And they were really happy with the end products. I I was supposed to meet up with them. But I just ended up doing Uber Courier because of the delay. But it helped ease my anxiety by communicating and really letting them know like, Listen, I'm working on it, I have not forgotten what I'm doing for you. I just um, I'm just working on it while being a human at the same time, and thank you for being so patient with me. Because I can't really grind and hustle too hard. I'm a mom. And so my child also needs me to be present. Like, she's only six years old. You know what I'm saying? And an only child, so I am playmate, I am nurse. I am transportation. I am all these things. But I'm also artist, I am also self. And so just knowing who I am and how much my capacity can extend to, has been very helpful. A wise person always said plan backwards for things. And I find that has really helped me too. Like if I had an event I would - soon as I know about I'm like, What do I need to make this event successful? Do I need a babysitter? Do I need an outfit? Do I need to prepare? What do I need? And I start working on it as soon as I get it.

**Tsholo 19:46**

Right. That's a great idea.

**Jan 19:48**

So that when the day comes it's seamless. Because when you're leading up to a day, a lot of things can happen right before something happens. But at least you were planning ahead and even - I'm a, I'm a look queen, I love to dress up. So I'm always gonna find out what my outfit is. But I always have a ABC in case the first one doesn't work out either. And I'm really going to be intentional with what I choose to do in the new year. Can you imagine like, we're almost in 2023?

**Tsholo 20:18**

I can't believe it.

**Jan 20:19**

And so I, I found that I had to be canceling some things this year. Because they didn't align with my path. And they were taking up too much time. And so next year, that's not going to be a thing. I know what I want to go for. And I know where I need to be present. And so I'm going to do my best to not overbook myself. And trust that everything I need is taken care of. And think in abundance and not in lack, so that I attract abundance to my life.

**Tsholo 21:00**

That's really good advice.

**Jan 21:02**

Thanks. It was a mouthful, but I hope it makes sense.

**Tsholo 21:07**

I feel like yeah, I feel like there are tools that a person can do on a daily basis that can help sort of cultivate that sort of balance, work-life balance, life-life, you know, like, life like everyday life. Yeah, personal life, relationships and things like that. Making time, you know, like, scheduling phone calls with my parents, or calling them earlier in the day, because I know that they go to bed later. Those are the little things that will help you sort of balance. One of the things that my family and I are talking about is also like, creating easier things, or buying easier things that we love to cook so that we're eating healthier. And also like, we also don't have to like struggle about oh, now we have to spend all that money again, for food, like Uber food or like anything like that. Now we can just focus on like, there's a plan, you know? I don't know what that's gonna look like, but at least we're trying. Because I mean, like, plans will always save us money and time. And we need that balance, but we always can't cook. So maybe cooking and freezing things. Making chilies, things like that, is probably important, you know? So I guess it's just finding balance with everything that you do. Everything in moderation, I guess, don't overwork yourself.

**Jan 22:42**

No please don't do that. If you're listening to this, please, please try and leave room for us. Because if you don't rest, your body will make you rest in forms of getting sick. And you mentioned about like healthy meals. And I think that's really important to also avoid burnout because food is fuel. Right? And you need the right fuel to keep going. And yeah, sometimes you might be hella busy. But like, it's an

investment. So that you keep pushing to make that salad, I wish that I had us Subway salad bar installed in my kitchen counter, and it was just like, all readily done. But you know, I'm not there yet!

**Tsholo 23:31**

See wealthy people that have like, have chefs that cook for them. Those people are able to, you know, have that that life balance. But for us artists that are like, you know, having to manage hustling and being seen in your career, constantly trying to stay afloat, as well as managing your, you know, everyday life, your personal life, your personal relationship with your children, your parents, and so forth, and your friends and your partners - It's like, It's like tough, right?

**Jan 24:05**

It is tough

**Tsholo 24:05**

And so, and also having self care, that's a whole other different relationship -

**Jan 24:09**

With self

**Tsholo 24:10**

With self, right? And checking in with yourself. When do you have time to do that, with with all of this, like, inflation and things like that happening. You know? Like, prices of apartments or living is like, skyrocketing. You know, it's just hard.

**Jan 24:30**

And it's also hard not to feel down, but I really feel like, if you have at least one or two good people in your life that you can go to and talk to about these things, it can help to have that sense of community. Because yeah, if you think about all the things it can be very disheartening, but I don't think the main point of our conversation is to like be a downer, but to be realistic and say that like, you know, it's a lot. But you - we just try. You know? And that's all we can do is try, as humans, you know. We're wired to survive, but we want to flourish. And so that comes with sacrifice sometimes. Yeah

**Tsholo 25:20**

Right. Right. Sacrifice and still wanting to learn. And still taking those online classes. Like all the conversation with that, how important online things are with digital, so that you can help

**Jan 25:33**

Thank god for digital creation!

**Tsholo 25:35**

Yeah! So that you can balance the things while you're at home, while you're, while you're with your kids, or your family, you can still do the work, you know. And so those kind of things are really, really important. And those are also part of adapting to evolving health and safety and mental health care now

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**Jan 25:42**

Come on now! Tie it all in!

**Tsholo 25:51**

- for all kinds of things. So I feel like all of those conversations that we had, on on like, being recorded right now, or outside of us being recorded, just candid conversation about art and balance, and things like that. I think those are really, really important. And I'm glad that we've had an opportunity to sit down for all three sessions. I wish we could have had more. But like we said, time, time time time. We just finished hosting a Blackout Night -

**Jan 26:33**

Yeah, we did!

**Tsholo 26:35**

- the other day. And again, that's also time. We're constantly doing stuff. But I'm an individual artist as well as you are, so I know you have your own journey. And I - and I can't imagine what that journey is like coming into theatre in 2021. You know, and you are the type of artist that we should be talking to, you know? Finding out how we can do things a little bit differently. Finding out what you need as an artist who is like coming into theatre, but who's always been an artist. With lack of opportunity, you know, there's so much - right? There's so much we could learn from more artists like yourself, that are doing multidisciplinary work outside of theater, but that are doing rap that are doing storytelling in different ways. So thank you so much for for being here. And for your patience and all of that.

**Jan 27:40**

Oh, my pleasure. And yeah, honestly, if you know where to send me to, you know, have more opportunities to learn, I would love that - I'm the new kid on the block. But I'm not new to the world of art. And so I really appreciate you mentioning that. And I honestly enjoyed our conversations. And it's, it's pretty great to work with you in the arts world, and you truly are a great person. And so thank you for sharing your wealth of knowledge with me in these conversations. And thank you for listening to what I also have to say, I really appreciate that. And I hope that even though this is the last one for this, I really hope to have more conversations with you. Because it was a really enriching experience, and I really just wish you the best in all the things you are doing right now, and all the things that you will do. I just want to wish you the best in that, and thank you for this opportunity to speak with you on behalf of Generator.

**Tsholo 28:46**

Amazing. Where can people find you?

**Jan 28:49**

There's one place you can find me and it's always on Instagram, at I Am J River. And I forgot to mention last time that, but if you click the link in my bio, I have a podcast. And you can find me on Spotify there.

**Tsholo 29:04**



Yeah, what's your podcast called?

**Jan** 29:07

I almost forgot what my own podcast was called! Real Talk with J River. You know,

**Tsholo** 29:14

That's amazing. I've listened to it. And it's really, really exciting. I have you on my podcast as well, One Shot of T -

**Jan** 29:15

Yeah Yeah. Yes.

**Tsholo** 29:22

- and it's always a pleasure to talk to you. There's so much insight between the both of us. I learn a lot from you. So -

**Jan** 29:31

Thank you!

**Tsholo** 29:32

- thank you so much again for joining me on this adventure.

**Jan** 29:37

Truly, you're one of my favorite artists to work with. I will give you that.

**Tsholo** 29:41

Aww. Gushing.

**Jan** 29:43

Uh-oh!

**Tsholo** 29:45

Till next time.

**Jan** 29:47

Take care.

**Tsholo** 29:48

Bye

**Jan** 29:49

Bye