



CHOOSE YOUR PATH, IT'S YOURS TO TAKE

In my hands I have got my hockey stick. I brought my stick as an accessory, because for me it was the ticket to help me choose my own path. But on the other hand, for a long time it was the anchor that kept at the same comfortable path for years.

Today - with my stick and my story - I want to inspire and empower you, *and* myself, to dare to choose your own path. Over-and-over again. Because it is an ongoing process to choose courage over comfort and to start doing instead of thinking. To grab the wheel to get in charge of your own life, because it's yours to take.

So to start off, I will lay down my stick and properly introduce myself.

My name is Ekki, I am 27 years old and I have been a professional field hockey athlete for the past 12 years. I have been playing at the highest level in the Netherlands for 10 years and worked my way through the national youth teams. The last 2 years of my career I have been playing professionally in Spain.

What you will hear about today is the part of my life where I moved from Amsterdam to Barcelona in 2018 to play in the Spanish league. Let me tell you a secret: *I lived my best life*. I literally used my stick as a ticket to move to another country by doing the thing I loved to do: playing field hockey.

After playing at the same club with the same teammates for years, I got out of my comfort zone and it brought me a lot. I grew as a player and a human day by day - *día a día*.

During my time in Spain I learnt that you can choose your own path,
I learnt that everyone of us has a powerful force and
I learnt that we can use that force to make the things that matter
actually happen.

To choose your own path... *Choose your own path.*

There are two approaches in life:

The first one: you wait.
The second one: you get in charge.

When you get in charge, you don't wait for things to happen. Or for others that will come and sort things out for you. When you wait, there is a big chance that what actually matters to you, will not be secured. In fact you can feel a bit like a spectator of your own movie.

When you are in charge, you become the director of your movie.

When you are in charge you are the main character.

When you are in charge you start taking actions on the things that matter to you.

You will create momentum for yourself, things will get into motion through you. You feel empowered. You lead yourself.

If I think about hockey

I think about the ball that is being knocked around the playing field. Just like that we can be knocked around in life, right? Being knocked and smashed around...

Don't be the ball. Instead be the stick that controls where the ball goes. Lead yourself.

Let's go back to my stick and story.

Let's take you with me to the summer of 2018. I had just finished a successful season with my team in the Netherlands – we actually won the Gold Cup and I recently signed another contract for two more years.

Besides that I was completing my Master thesis to graduate as a Master of Science. I lived in Amsterdam with two teammate and I was already orientating myself to the next move in my career after graduating.

“You know that feeling when things are going really well for you in life? You know right? That feeling!” Well... that, that was me. My future looked bright! There was not a cloud in the sky.

Until...

On a sunny Sunday, out of the blue, I got told by my coach that he wasn't sure about my place in the team...

“He wasn't sure?! He wasn't sure about my place in the team? Uhm ‘hello’, Gold cup?! A contract of two more years?! He wasn't sure!”

Well, let's skip the part that it was really weird because I could not have seen this coming. And also the fact that I still had a contract that we recently renewed for 2 more years. But let's switch to the part where suddenly all stable factors in my life fell apart:

“My club, my goals, my path for the near future. Since I was 6 years old such a big part of my life was within that club.”

To be honest, the first hours after my coach told me this, I was devastated.

“DID. THIS. REALLY. HAPPEN. TO. ME? This cannot be true and this is very unfair.
And... HOW. SHOULD. I. CONTINUE?”

But then, after the first emotions:

I drove to the beach with my mom and our dog, to clear up my mind. I remember the moment very well when I realized that this major setback was in fact the biggest chance I had ever got – I only had to hit it into the goal. I was in the car, almost at the beach, I saw the sky opening up and in my mind **pause and click fingers** it clicked:

No direction means the opportunity to go anywhere.

The time that I was a spectator of my movie is over, it's finally time to get in charge!
Two approaches, remember? Two approaches. Wait? Nah.. Get in charge? Yes!
As if the sky was screaming to me:

Time to get in charge, time to choose your own path, it's *yours* to take.

No more anchor to keep me at the same place. Nothing to hold me back.

I was in charge of the direction right now and I had **a golden ticket** in my hands: **my stick**.
From that moment on, I already knew that I would turn this setback into the most spectacular goal - in my favour. I knew that in 5 years, if I would reflect – I would see that the way I got in charge – would actually be the best match I had ever played.

This positive mindset about dealing with a setback, is actually something that sport taught me very well. There is this amazing phenomenon in sport that's called a *tackle back*. When you lose the ball, there is a split second in which you make the decision:

“You either stop playing, give up and you accept the fact that you lost the ball.
Or you just go for it with nothing to lose to get the ball back. No more thinking, just doing.”

And that... That was exactly what I did.

So what followed was a super intense ‘tackle back’ week. I was getting in charge of my life now, but where to start? And where to go? I had no specific plan yet – the only plan I had, was that what I would do, would turn my life upside down and for the better.

In the meantime of finishing my Master thesis - that I had to submit that same week - I called some mentor figures in the hockey world. One of the people I called was Santi Freixa. One of the best players of the world, from Spain, who had moved to the Netherlands years ago and was the coach of a Dutch team.

I told him what happened, but I also told him about my plan to turn this in to an opportunity. I told him that for a long time, somewhere in the back of my mind I knew there was much more to experience, much more to discover. That the comfort of my club had also worked like an anchor that kept me from developing myself in a broader way. That the world was so big, I was so young and I still had so many places to go.

Now it was his time **pause and click fingers** to click:

She has the opportunity to go anywhere.

And with that, he became a key figure for me and my story.

The day before, he had been called by the coach of one of the greatest clubs in the history of Spain. The coach had told him that to build his team, the missing piece of the puzzle was an experienced player, in the centre of the field. Guess who that was...

Santi joined the dots and everything fell into place.

The next day I met the coach, who surprisingly happened to be in The Netherlands. A week later I signed the contract, moved to Barcelona and actually my second life started.

Because I had learned that you get two lives:

“the second starts when you realize you have got only one.”

For me, my second life started when I stopped waiting and started to be the one who was in charge. From then, I started leading myself.

I went from speaking no Spanish and knowing no one, to talking with everyone, making lifetime long friends and building a life.

With this story my goal is not to make you all become a professional hockey player – don't be afraid - and move to Barcelona. **My goal is to inspire you all to pick the second life.** The life where you stop waiting and you start getting in charge of your own path.

“This can be in really small things, like finding adventure in day-to-day life. But also in bigger things, like the story I just told. Sometimes dare to be unorthodox.

Ask yourself: “how can I do this differently?” Be openminded. Once in a while try to pause and take time to reflect, ask yourself questions like: “are the things that I am busy with right now, still things I really want to do?”

Why is this so important to learn at a young age?

In my job right now - I train people and organisations to do their best work - speak to a lot of people about how they experience work. One thing that amazes me over-and-over again, is that a lot of people are not happy with what they do.

At some point they realise that they just followed the traditional path of picking the study and job that would be the ‘moving escalator’ for smart people. It wasn't based on a conscious decision made by themselves. But more because their surrounding expected it from them.

So choose courage over comfort!

Do and try new things that seem interesting. Get rid of stagnating thoughts. Instead, focus on the ones that will move you forward:

Excitement, **E**xperimenting, **E**xploring.

Stepping out of your comfort zone and learning who you are...

And become your own best friend.

One of the very valuable things I have learned from living in Spain, is that everywhere I go, not matter where it is or who I am with:

I belong to myself.

And that, that is something very powerful.

And something I wish to everyone of you.

I would like to return to my stick now.

The thing that helped me choose my own path.

That helped me make the move to Spain.

And I wonder... What will *your stick moment* be?

Whatever it is, all the choices you make around choosing your own path are okay.

There is no right or wrong. As long as there is an intention, as long as you make a conscious decision.

After 2 years in Spain, I consciously decided to move back to Amsterdam.

My dream job came on my path, which allows me to use all the valuable skills and experiences I accrued along the way. Another **stick moment** pointing me in a *new direction*.

I became a Productivity Ninja at Think Productive. Which means that with our trainings we inspire and equip people and organisations worldwide to do their best work: to make space for what really matters.

So here I am living in Amsterdam again.

But still, when I can, I go back to Barcelona. And every time when I have got that ticket for Amsterdam to Barcelona in my hands, I get reminded... I get reminded that you always have a choice:

“You either wait, or you get in charge of your life and you set out actions to choose your own path.”

You may forget everything I told today. However, if you only remember this for the rest of your life:

Don't wait... Recognize the **hockey stick moments** in your lives.

And choose. **Choose your own path, it's yours to take.**



The official TEDx video will be soon available online at www.ted.com and the official YouTube channel of TED (21,3 million subscribers).

#IdeasWorthSpreading

TED