



# SUPER FRAUEN

Aya Jaff

The self-taught  
programmer and superstar  
of the German tech scene.

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# Podcast Transcript

- [00:00 – 01:19]** It's a Monday morning, just before eight, it's raining and cold. Aya stands in the schoolyard and freezes as she reads a note on the blackboard: "First and second period are cancelled", the note reads. "Oh no", Aya thinks. She clenches her jaw, her hand making a fist in the pocket of her jacket. She would have preferred to have stayed in her warm bed and sleep in this morning, but instead she is now standing around pointlessly with her classmates, waiting for school to finally begin — once again. "There are apps for everything", Aya thinks to herself at the time, "why are our timetables only available on paper, and not digitally on our phones? If that existed, then we wouldn't have to stand here and freeze."
- [01:20 – 02:18]** At this time, Aya is 15 years old. She is not the best student — sometimes her teachers don't even notice that she's there. She rarely speaks up in class. "I was afraid to give the wrong answer" she recalls. Her teachers tell her not to pick a computer science course, because her maths grades aren't particularly good. Nevertheless, Aya dreams of an app that can tell her when she actually has to go to school, allowing her to stay in bed for a little longer in the morning. What a fantastic idea! "Maybe I can use YouTube to learn the things that I can't in class." She spends her evenings sitting in front of the computer, googling tutorials that help her to learn about programming. Full of fascination, she lets herself fall into the world of codes, numerical sequences and algorithms.
- [02:20 – 02:30]** **Aya's first idea was to create a digital timetable for students. What sort of app would you like to design? And how could this app help people in their everyday lives?**
- [02:32 – 03:20]** Other girls her age learn Spanish, French or English. Aya already speaks Java, Ruby and PHP. Never heard of them? Those are some of the most well-known programming languages used by coders to build apps, websites and computer games. In this new world filled with programming languages and algorithms, Aya quickly develops more ideas beyond her digital timetable. Soon she invents a game where people can invest imaginary money into the stock market, using simple, cool language and allowing people to learn something about trading and the economy in a way that is fun. This stock exchange game becomes a great success in Germany.
- [03:21 – 04:13]** Aya used to be shy and doubtful, but now she feels strong, and her many new ideas give her self-confidence. Her parents also notice this. They have always been an inspiration for their daughter: in 1995, her mother and father left their home in northern Iraq due to the civil war. They left behind their home and careers as academics, and fled to Germany with Aya and her sister. A new start for the family — her mother worked on the checkout at a supermarket and her father became a taxi operator. Aya's parents have shown their daughters that a new start can also be a positive experience. Even when you start again from nothing.



- [04:14 – 05:09]** Aya's passion becomes learning how to do the things she cannot yet do, mostly through YouTube videos. She also reads a lot — predominantly about inspirational people, such as Bill and Melinda Gates, Benjamin Franklin or Henry Ford. Ford once said: "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got." This quote from Ford helps Aya to work on new ideas, even when they are complicated. Her trick: she does not say negative things to herself. She focusses on the positive and is a fan of positive affirmations. For example, she never says "I will never be good at maths." Instead, she says to herself "I am not yet that good at maths." This makes her strong.
- [05:11 – 05:27]** **Sometimes things can be so tricky that you think: "Oh no, I can't do that, I'll never be able to accomplish it." What things are like that for you? Like Aya, can you come up with some positive affirmations that can help build your confidence?**
- [05:28 – 05:55]** After finishing school, Aya begins a computer science degree — and finds it completely boring, as she only spends her time at university sitting alone in front of books and screens. She dreams of the time when she and her team members would work late into the night, designing the stock market app, exchanging ideas, searching for solutions, making mistakes and then starting again from scratch — those times were better.
- [05:56 – 06:53]** One day, the boredom comes to an end: as one the few female computer science students at her university, Aya receives a scholarship to study at Draper University in America. The university's founder, Tim Draper, earns millions of dollars in Silicon Valley, and works with Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg. At his university, he likes to give "heroes of tomorrow" — young, eager people who can change the world with vision and intelligent technology — a chance. The university has a futuristic design. Students can always write their ideas all over the walls. "I will fail and fail again until I succeed", reads one of the principles the students learn here on their first day of classes.
- [06:54 – 07:25]** Aya speaks with Tim Draper about her visions for the future. He is so impressed by the young woman, that he helps her get a job at Hyperloop, a company in Germany. Hyperloop works on developing a system that uses tubes to transport things, goods and passengers in capsules — travelling at a speed ten times higher than regular trains. For several months, Aya is involved in this exciting project for the future.



- [07:26 – 08:32]** Nonetheless, she has many ideas in her head and would like to continue learning more. She leaves Hyperloop. She starts several IT projects, some are successful, others are not. Still, Aya never loses her motivation and often begins new projects. She organises programming clubs, holds TED Talks and writes a best-selling book for people who want to understand how the stock market and economy work. But this is not enough for Aya. She continues to read up on the topics she wants to learn more about: what is happening in China, Africa or Iraq? What does the Fridays for Future movement mean for the world? What can the digital sector do for the environment? For everything she reads, she creates mind maps. She speaks with mentors and searches for ideas on how technology or apps can solve problems for people — or make their everyday lives easier.
- [08:33 – 08:55]** A major German newspaper once called her “Mrs. Code”, as there are so few women out there who understand the tech world as well as Aya. She is constantly astounded and cannot really believe the hype there is around her. She finds: “When programming, people can start cool projects with minimal work — without having to be a genie.”
- [08:56 – 09:37]** She always discusses her ideas for the first time with her parents over dinner. Because nobody knows better than her mother and father that you can build something, even if all you have is a suitcase. “Just do what you enjoy”, they always say to her. “Even if one day you lose everything and have to start again from scratch, you can be happy.” Making mistakes? Failing? That’s all okay. More than okay — it lets you grow.

**[09:38 – 09:52]** **Aya is a superwoman, a star in the tech scene, and finds that it is important to make mistakes! Only then can you learn and grow. Do you agree? Have you ever made mistakes that ended up being helpful?**

#### PODCAST EPISODE

“Aya Jaff — The self-taught programmer and superstar of the German tech scene.”

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