

The Power of Resilience with Brittany Cole - Transcript

Brittany: “One of the first questions we ask people is what do you do? Right, because we’re making a judgment who they are and the value that they bring to us based on what they tell you, the organization that they’re at or the level that they’re in. And we know then, or need to reframe that thinking to say, ‘Hey, like the title that I am renting right now is just that. It is temporary. It is not who I am.’ And so really having a deeper sense of, ‘I know my value. I know my worth, but it’s not tied to today showing up as a career coach showing up as an inclusive leadership development consultant. Those are the titles that I choose today, but when those change I’ll still hold my value.’”

Leah: Welcome to Her Story of Success, a podcast featuring stories from influential women trailblazers and business leaders, in hopes of inspiring you throughout your own journey of success and fulfillment. I’m your host, Leah Glover Hayes, I’m excited to be talking with my friend and mentor, Brittany Cole. Brittany is a TEDx speaker, coach, consultant and founder of Career Thrivers, which is a leadership development firm that partners with organizations to engage, develop and retain diverse talent.

Thank you Brittany so much for being with us today. Excited to have you.

Brittany: Thank you for having me.

Leah: Absolutely. You know, I started Her Story of Success as a way to really honor the women in my life that were mentoring me. Cause you and I have talked about this. We’ve both been on a journey of mentorship and being a mentor, but finding good mentors. So I really wanted to use this platform to honor the time that you give to me and to other women give to me so that you can multiply that across the globe. We have people in like Tanzania and crazy countries I’ve never heard of, that listen to this. So thank you for sharing your time.

I really want to start with where you are today and what Career Thrivers is and give you a chance to kind of share with us. And then we’ll go back to, why did you start career Thrivers and who’s it for?

Brittany: Sure. Sure. So I am a firm believer. I live by this motto that **every experience is an opportunity for continuous improvement**. So I grew up kind of with that ingrained. I’m the youngest of three, I have two older brothers, and my dad would always tell us that the biggest room in our house is the room for improvement. So we all kind of grew up with this sense of continue to develop, continue to get better, celebrate your wins, but then make sure you’re prepared for next shoutout to, uh, your series that you have. And so that has been, really my life. So when I think about, it’s always interesting to me when I’m asked this question and I think about kind of, you know, where I am now, where I’m striving to be, but more importantly, where I started, it’s like those thoughts connect and you see those patterns.

So I started out, I'm a Nashville native, as you know. Family is really important to me. And I went to undergrad at UT Knoxville. I still studied political science and communications. I was on this fierce prelaw track. I was headed to law school and was introduced to corporate America the summer before my junior year. So I started interning with Pfizer, very, very young, and absolutely loved the experience. Long story short, they offered me a full time role there the semester before I graduated undergrad. And so I'm like, 'okay, wasn't expecting this, but it looks like a really great opportunity. I've enjoyed my, you know, at the time two summers there let's do it.' And I really didn't look back.

So I spent 12 years at Pfizer doing everything from sales to sales management, to brand management, to work that today would be called diversity and inclusion work. At the time working with several of our employee resource groups or affinity groups, a women's affinity group, African-American affinity group. And through that work really aligned kind of the deeper, purpose driven work that I do, I really want it to do. And so I started as many entrepreneurs do, side hustling, while I was at Pfizer a little over five years ago, it actually started out with doing professional speaking, which I've always been a speaker teacher.

So I started out doing that professionally, but then also I was doing image consulting. Which surprises a lot of people, but then in some ways it doesn't.

Leah: Not at all. I mean, your lips match your earrings and it looks gorgeous. So, and that's the first thing I ever noticed about you is just your fashion sense and how put together you are. And I'm like, Oh my gosh, if you could help me, that would be amazing.

What did that look like when you were at Pfizer? You've really gotten what you thought was your dream job. At what point did you decide, 'I want to do my own thing'?

Brittany: Yeah. So I remember it vividly Leah. I was watching the news and I saw a company celebrating their like multimillion dollar success, that was essentially an idea that I had, like years ago, like three or four years ago that I shared with a friend around personal shopping, and bringing the whole experience of a personal shopper to the everyday woman. Like, wouldn't it be amazing if, you know, for women who don't like to shop or for women who, you know, maybe they like to shop, but they don't actually know what looks good on their body type, to help them feel that confidence when they're going into that interview to help them, you know, get to the next level in their career, to really take care of that executive presence piece on the image side, wouldn't it be amazing to bring that to the everyday woman. And I sat on that idea. I second guessed myself and I felt like, you know, I get started and I listened to people that thought, 'Personal styling? Like that's for celebrities.' And of course now, you know, you could probably name five companies that will ship you a box, that they have monetized, you know, that idea. And so I remember seeing that and in that moment, thinking, 'what would it have been like if four years ago, when I had that idea, I would've just taking the leap and just started. And just seeing where it went?'

And so I remember having that feeling and thinking, like, 'I do not want to feel this way again, like I have an idea. I want to try it.' And it's funny earlier, as a matter of fact, I have it right here. I'll show it to you. I shared this earlier today. This is my first business card.

Leah: I love it. Styled by Brit, I remember that.

Brittany: Absolutely. But oh my gosh, this is terrible, you know, aesthetically, right. I'm like, but it was the start and it, and it was the thing that has led me to where I am now. And so, I just got out there and started to do it. And then as I was working with women again, primarily image consulting, I would get questions like, 'Oh, well, now that you're here and we're in my walk-in closet, you know, can you take a look at my resume? Or can you give me some advice I need to have with my manager?' And so I thought. 'Hmm. Now this is a little bit more than what you paid me for, but sure.' But I also saw it as an opportunity to pivot into career coaching, which is what led me on this path of saying, 'Okay, within my organization, I'm doing a lot of work to help cultivate a culture of inclusion to help diverse talent thrive. I'm working with women professionals of color on the side. How can I merge these two, to have an even more expansive impact? Which is what I do with Career Thrivers.

Leah: And then what made you say, 'okay, I'm ready to leave and actually take the jump?' Did you have a milestone that you said once I hit it, then okay. Was it revenue based? Was it client based? What did that look like to say, 'Okay. I can actually leave my job.' Because that is always the scary part.

Brittany: Yes. The big question

Leah: When to jump. Right?

Brittany: Yes. So I would say it, it was a hundred percent faith based and I say that because, you know, oftentimes as women, we shy away from talking about numbers. We shy away from talking about salary, from talking about revenue, and I believe we're going to close the gap, it's important that we get comfortable saying those figures. And so I lay that context to openly share with you that I was a well into six figure earner at my organization. And so I left great brand equity. I do not have the entrepreneurship story that I hated my job or that I was really frustrated or unhappy. Things weren't perfect. But I had a long runway there. I had a very comfortable salary there. People knew me and there were, there were opportunities there for me to move and to continue to grow. I also though, had that nagging, feeling that there was more, I also saw myself doing more. I saw myself serving more people in a more expansive way beyond what I was doing.

And I was at a point in terms of the timing where we were going through an organizational restructure. So at the time that I decided to leave, I was leading a team of 12 and we were going through a restructure, which is corporate speak for layoffs were happening. And so at the time I had one young lady on my team, one woman on my team that I did have to share that news with. She was impacted, I was impacted, at the time my team didn't know. There was some other

opportunities for me to stay with the organization, but I had a choice to take a package and leave and take this leap, or to stay in what I felt like was comfort. What I felt like was a sense of security and what I knew and what I felt like was a safe move, but not one necessarily that was, you know, destined. So I really felt like this, faith based push, you know, to, to take the leap, and I did last August.

Leah: I know we, I think you and I met very soon after you took that leap and I was just in awe of you of like, 'Oh my gosh, you did it.' I think I leaped in, in August. So it was a very faith based one, as well as like, 'I don't know what I'm doing.'

But I think the thing, and this is what I want to ask. What's the thing that you've learned since taking that leap, that's giving you the most confidence? I will say when I was working with a lot of CEOs and entrepreneurs, the realization that no one actually knows what they're doing that owns a business. I mean, there, there are a few, if they'd had, they're a real entrepreneur that's had like six companies, they probably know what they're doing. But there are so many people that are figuring it out as they go. And I was like, you know, 'if someone else can, I think that I can too.' And I surround myself with people like you, that I can say, 'Hey, this is what I'm going through. What have you had similar?' So what was that thing that you've learned that has given you the most confidence as a business owner?

Brittany: Yeah, I would definitely say Leah, I had that same realization probably a bit earlier, but when I made my corporate transition from sales into marketing, so being out in the field and feeling like headquarters was this like place where people were black suits and they were like robots are walking around, and I don't know what I thought. But I had this expectation that people that are running this multibillion dollar company must be like, really bright. And then you get to the table and you're like, 'I think these people are just like me. Like I, you know, there's no difference in even sometimes the doubt even, you know, that you see.'

And so yes, absolutely 100%, having that realization that people are figuring it out, whether it's corporately and also in the entrepreneurial space. But for me, the biggest realization that yeah, I've had has been how much of our personal identity, the way that we view ourselves, the way that we value ourselves is tied to what we do. As a healthcare leader, I could walk into any room relative to, you know, to my organization, and people knew who I was. I didn't have to really, you know, they knew my work. Right. They were familiar. Yeah. I built brand equity at that organization. And so my name was associated with a certain brand with a certain like, 'Okay. Yup. If you want it done, or if you want to let yep. She's the one to do it.' And then you come out of that space or you transition into something new. And it's like, you're starting all over again. And you think that doesn't impact the way you see yourself, or sometimes we say that it shouldn't, but I recognize that it did that. I had these feelings of like imposter syndrome, these feelings of like, you know, you say, you're an entrepreneur and people are like 'Oh ok.' And I'm like 'OK I don't think they got it.' You know, it's like you have these, these instances where you find out that like, wow, not only do I have these thoughts of what I do as highly tied to who I am, but other people view your value the same way. Right? It's why we often ask the question, One of the first questions we ask people is what

do you do? Right, because we're making a judgment who they are and the value that they bring to us based on what they tell you, the organization that they're at or the level that they're in. And we know then, or need to reframe that thinking to say, 'Hey, like the title that I am renting right now is just that. It is temporary. It is not who I am.' And so really having a deeper sense of, I know my value. I know my worth, but it's not tied to today showing up as a career coach showing up as an inclusive leadership development consultant. Those are the titles that I choose today, but when those change I'll still hold my value. So that's been one of the biggest lessons, Leah, that I've, I've learned in this almost year of full time entrepreneurship.

Leah: I love that. So you recently did a TEDx talk. Congratulations. I watched it a few times, it was very good. I have a thousand questions, like completely selfishly about how you did that and all the prep work. But what I really want to get into is a little bit of the meat of your talk. And, um, I love at the end that you go over the four pieces, but you brought up this word belonging. And that's really where I want to kind of start, is when we're talking about diversity and inclusion and equity, what does it mean to have belonging and how does that fit into what HR people and companies are starting to do?

Brittany: Yeah. So I think that one of the very first things that is so critical, is to define the terms. And I like to start there whether I'm doing a talk or whether I'm in a meeting with an HR leader or CEO to say, 'Hey, let's ensure that as we're using this language, we're talking about the same thing. We mean the same thing, because oftentimes words do mean different things to different people.' So diversity is one of those words. If you said it to 10 different people, you would get 10 different answers in terms of what that word means. And simply, diversity just means difference. So right now on the screen today, we have diversity. Even though we're both women. I'm a black woman, you're a white woman. We have diversity that you can see, but then there's also diversity that you can't see relative to diversity of thinking or diversity of background and diversity of experiences. So diversity simply means difference.

Inclusion, then if you think, okay, if we're on a linear path, inclusion would be the next layer, meaning that you are intentional about incorporating that difference. Right? So a lot of the conversations today oftentimes get stuck in diversity, when the real work is about 'how are you being intentional about incorporating the difference that you do have, or the difference that you need more of, at every level of the organization?'

And then inclusion, the very next layer, or think of it as like the ideal state of that gold standard would be equity. So equity just means that you have outcomes that aren't determined by the difference that you see. Right?

So where does belonging fit into all of that? Well belonging is this sense of, just the way that it sounds, is that I feel a sense of connection to this place. And so when you think about culture, right? Any business owner will tell you, and I know a business leader that we both, uh, highly respect is Sherry Deutschmann, and she has written a whole book about the importance of culture relative to business

impact. Not culture from a feelgood perspective, the popular culture eats performance for lunch, right? So there's this idea that if you do the work, people will feel like they are connected to the space, or they will feel like they belong. And a large part of belonging is built on this concept of psychological safety. So regardless of my difference, I show up as a Black woman and I have a seat at the table, I don't feel afraid to speak up. I don't feel afraid to disagree. I don't feel afraid to share my brilliance in the room because it's valued. Right? Because I belong here and because the leaders have been intentional about including me in the conversation.

Leah: I think that's a really important word that I have only recently heard is the psychological safety. And I think it's so important and I'd love to know, are you working with individuals to help them learn how to have those conversations, or are you working with corporations to help them have a place where they feel safe? Because it looks like you do both, and so I wanted to be able to understand and selfishly like as a business owner, when you're talking, I'm hearing like what that's gonna look like for my team, because I know that we've discussed, like, hey, I woke up one day and looked at my staff and was like, 'wow, I have all white women. And I was then I was like, okay, I need to be intentional,' because there is something about the intentionality behind diversity and inclusion. Are companies checking the box or are they actually trying to provide a safe place? Pretend I have a bigger company, but what are the things I, as a leader need to make sure I'm doing and setting in place so that the people that come in feel safe to be able to have those conversations and to be able to not be afraid to challenge someone if they think something's wrong?

Brittany: Yeah. So to answer your first question, I would say in terms of the work that we do, so both. So, like you, growing business. And as I mentioned, kind of in sharing a little bit about my journey, I started out doing coaching and I still do coaching. So I'll tell you, I have a mentor who is like, 'you need to just completely give up the B to C and go strictly B to B because that's where the money is.' And I'm like, 'I hear you. And I appreciate that, but I love my coaching clients and I see the impact that, you know, working together has on, on their leadership.' On their, you know, ability to be able to foster some of the same things that I'm working with businesses on at their organization. So I still do coaching. I love it. And for as long as I can, we're doing it in some more creative ways now, whether that's masterminds or working with some business owners in like VIP intensives, where we spent a day together. I still do that work because I find it so rewarding, and you can see and feel the change. And oftentimes in some instances faster right than the B2B work. But in terms of working with organizations, I will say two things about your question.

So one, what you're often seeing now, or what you sometimes see now is this conversation around performative solutions. Right? That you bring somebody on, you do an unconscious bias workshop and you are done for the year, right? And there is countless data out there that shows that does not work. Um, there's even a lot of things out there that talks about whether or not just unconscious bias training in of itself is effective, but it's not the conversation for today. The point

is, if you want to see transformational change within your organization relative to cultivating a culture where everyone believes that they belong regardless of their difference, it takes an integrated continuous approach. So similarly to your marketing strategy, to your business operation strategy, diversity and inclusion is connected to that. It's one of the tenants of having a successful business versus being kind of this aside that, you know, you tell your people, 'Hey, go do this thing once a year. And then get back to work.' And so that's the first thing, of taking a look at the operation at your company and saying, 'how are we infusing, then if you don't have it anything, the first part would be learning and development. Right? So how are we improving our awareness and our actions around these topics?' And the awareness piece is big, because oftentimes we try to have a very, again, tactical approach to this work that is not sustainable. So what are you doing to ensure that one, you have a better understanding of yourself, either yourself as an individual or your organization. So what are the metrics? What are the measurements that you are doing to assess where you are? There are tons of tools out there to do that in this space. And then how are you developing a strategy and a plan in place so that when you go recruit diverse talent, because that's the other thing that's oftentimes a miss is that, you know, leaders will say, 'Oh, okay. Yeah, we looked around our company. We don't see any difference. Let's go get some.' And then you go and they leave. Right? You don't retain them because there's not this culture. So you've got to do, again, the work, which just means that you have an integrated learning and development approach and a strategy that's connected to your business in cultivating that inclusive culture. It's not just something that's going to happen just because you want it to.

Leah: Right. You know, when we are trying to get more information. I think doing it in the way that you already consume information is really important, right? Like the music that you listen to, or the TV shows and those types of things, and there's been so much that I've now been exposed to that I'm like, 'Oh, I never knew that that's what microaggression looked like.' Right? I'm watching this show *All American* on Netflix. And I'm learning so much from like, it's supposed to be about teenagers in high school. And I'm like, 'Oh my gosh, this, it's not just about like, read this book about this topic, it's be immersed in it, like watch a show that's written by a black person that it shows black people like in this environment.'

So I think that's something that's been very helpful for me. So I know you've got your own podcast. You do a lot of talks. What are some of the ways that you've seen change? Like for people that are wanting to become allies, wanting to learn more, what is it that you've seen kind of the biggest difference in?

Brittany: Yeah, so I think everything that you're sharing and suggesting Leah really is tied together through, another word that we throw around a lot, but it's so critical to this work and that's empathy. Right? So empathy is about taking the action to be more aware and to understand so that you're sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of other people, right? So empathy is about centering others and what you often see in conversations, especially when we're talking about racial diversity, gender as well, but particularly with racial diversity, because, one: I had a business leader share this with me the other day, we're in a conversation around some

solutions for their organizations and she made such a great point around the fact that when it comes to gender, gender is much more easily identifiable because most people have a woman that they can look to and relate to. They have a mother, a sister, an aunt. However, when you talk about race, oftentimes it's not as easily identifiable because we often associate with people from a racial standpoint who are of the same race. Right? So just that, I think, realization coupled with the fact that in our great country for the past, you know, for centuries. We have not been honest about our history, right? And so I think that foundation then sets this sense of discomfort, this sense of mistrust and the sense of censoring ourselves, when it comes to doing this work of diversity, equity, inclusion, that causes us quite frankly, oftentimes just not to do it to say, 'Oh, well, it's too hard. It's too much. It's too difficult.' Well, part of that is because we're not talking about facts. Right? We're talking about the way that we feel, or we're talking about what we think, and we're talking about our experiences versus centering the marginalized, centering those who have systemically been oppressed and understanding where they come from.

So I think with that as the context and you ask yourself, well, then how do I do that? What are the resources then that help me understand vicariously what you think, feel and have experienced. Cause I want to learn more about that. And so then I think you take the approach that you mentioned, you say, 'Hey, what is the way that I like to learn?' Because just like any other area of business, there are endless resources. So there are books. If you don't like books, there are articles. If you don't like to read, there are podcasts. If you don't want to listen, there are videos, like there are tons of resources out there about anti-racism, right when we're talking about racial diversity. So it's not just this idea that I am not racist, but that I am actively anti-racist, which sounds similar, but they are very, very distinct. And so I think in terms of actions that you can take things that you can do.

We have a curriculum around allyship that walks through six actions. So you can be more **aware** that's the, A, the first L is you can **learn**. So learning is prioritized over listening because learning suggests that you have done the due diligence to come to the conversation, to listen with more context, you've come to the conversation prepared. Right? So just think about an interview, right? I have clients that I coach for interviews, you don't show up to a job interview having not researched the organization.

Leah: No, it's very true.

There's not this assumption that you know everything about the company, but you enter with an assumption that you've done a little research before you show up the same is true when it comes to diversity, equity and inclusion. Have you done the research to understand through whatever channel you prefer, that we just listed, to come to the conversation informed and then **listen**, which is the second L. The, I is about **inclusion**. So how are you being intentional about including difference? And this isn't big. Like, this is about the small things, like culture is built from those small interactions, even in your personal life, take a look at the guest list of your child's birthday party. How many diverse families are on that guest list, right?

How many people of color are a part of your neighborhood? You know, barbecue number in it. We're not doing as much of that these days because of it. But I think when we, you know, come on the other side of all of this, how are we being intentional about including difference even in our personal spaces? And then the E is about **experiences**, because when you do incorporate that difference, you gain more breadth and depth of experiences with people that don't look like you. Which then leads to this S which is so critical in business and career, which is **sponsorship**. So you then share your power, share your access, share your privilege to help someone else get to the table. So I think those are some things that all of us, regardless of our industry or level, or whether we are an entrepreneur an employee or both, can do.

Leah: I love that, and it's continuous. To your point, like, this is not a performance, this isn't a checkbox. It's how are we looking and making sure that we're looking at that continuously? And I love that you spelled allies with that. So good job. You always do such good word iterations. I love it.

I also want to talk about this term that you used in your TEDx talk and you've, you've used a few times that is newer to me. I will say it makes me feel ashamed that it's newer to me. And that I'd never realized or recognized that folks have to do this, but code switch. I think when I learned about code switching, my immediate reaction was just like, 'Oh, man. I can't imagine having to go to work and be so conscious to, to be a certain person, use certain vernacular and then change who I am depending on the situation.' And so I would like to know as an employer, how do I make sure that the people on my team never feel that way? Is that a courageous conversation that you just say, like 'I'm working to have a very inclusive and safe place. My thought is if you're ever in a situation where you feel like you have to code switch, or you are experiencing microaggressions, like, I would love that called out because I can't change something that I don't know. But then again, I'm putting the onus on them. Do you see what I'm saying? So it's like, even in my thought process of trying to like, be a safe place, I'm still putting it back on the other person, instead of making sure that I'm doing the work to create the safe place.

Brittany: Yeah. And I would say Leah, I think, I definitely think that's why, and Deloitte has a great study on the elevated role of allyship, but it's one of the reasons why allyship is so critical. Because when you have allies in a space, again, just like you said, people that are doing the continuous work of centering other people and stepping up and speaking up when they see inequity in the workplace, that's what does it, that's what helps to take the pressure off of marginalized groups, because you have people that are willing to take part in the action. They're willing to take on some of that hardship, quite frankly, as their own right with that. And so I think when it comes to this idea of code switching, again, like code switching is highly, highly connected to culture and systemic systems of inequity. And so there is this element that I do want to acknowledge though, of code switching that we all naturally do. Right? So let's take, for instance, you know, so I love youth. I spent some time as a youth director at a church at two churches actually.

Leah: God bless you.

Brittany: Yes. I'm not doing that currently. Praise the Lord. No, I loved it. I loved it. But there's this element of code switching, right? That happens. So like when you're talking to a kindergartener, like you don't necessarily use baby talk, but like your language changes, right? I can see, you know, kneeling down in the hallway in the midst of our classroom to be on the same level as. So there, there are these things that you do to shift the way that you communicate based on who you're talking to. Any great leader does that. Right? And that's an entirely different conversation, but leadership is about what, what do I need to do as the leader of the onus is always on me as the leader to bring the best out of the person that's in front of me, not the people, because I recognize that the people are all different. So I may just shift my leadership style or my communications five different times if I have five different people in my team that communicate in five different ways, but I signed up to be the leader. So that's an aside.

But code switching though, is this deeper sense of, I'm not just shifting the way that I talk to the kindergartener or recognizing the way that I communicate with my team is different because they're different. It's this inherent belief that I cannot show up as I authentically would because it's not accepted in a space. Code switching is highly tied to not having a sense of belonging, because I believe that my authenticity is not welcomed here. So that that's really at the core of what this kind of idea of code switching is. And yeah, I mean, there are tons of, of course there are tons of parodies too. I'm thinking about a video right now. That's pretty funny on YouTube, that just kind of shows what it looks like, but it is a real thing. It is especially a real thing for black talent within a workspace.

Leah: Absolutely. I appreciate you sharing all that you have and all that you do. I really want to talk about your journey. One of the things that you did talk about in your career journey, but it was also that I learned a lot from you is your grief journey. You've had a lot of highs, a lot of amazing things happen in your career. You've seen so much success, but I know that you've also seen some hard times. So I want to talk a little bit about, what are the things things that you talk about in your own journey that have made you who you are, and that you're most proud of? When you look back over your career with all the good and all the bad, what are those things that you're like, 'This is what I'm most proud of?'

Brittany: Yeah. Wow. That's that is such a big question. So I would say with the context that you gave of challenges, and change and loss. I think one of the things that I'm most proud of and still journeying through is just being transparent about what that has meant for me and how it has changed me. One of the messages that I was really trying to bring through in, in the TEDx talk is that, when you experience loss, not just the loss of a loved one, but even the loss of a routine. Even like the routine of going into work, when you experience the loss of a job, there is some loss that is traumatizing in a way that it, it changes who you are. And so the death of my mother was that loss for me, that even though I spoke at her funeral, like only in God's strength, but spoke at her funeral even though, I, you know, have been on, you know, the stages and in front of audiences where I've shared that

experience of people are like, 'Oh my God, you're so strong,' I had to recognize and understand that. I'm different as a result of this loss, not trying to get back to who I was prior to her death, because I am a different woman because of that experience. And that is okay. Right? And so I think for me, that recognition, one of the changes as an example was that, I don't know, it's almost like, I don't want to say I had blinders on, but just like my view of the world and like what is truly a priority, and the way that I want to serve people and how I want to spend my time. I mean, it just became so clear after that experience.

And so for me, it was less about like, 'I'm really comfortable here. I have great benefits here. These are amazing, brilliant people. I have to stay in. The C suite is on my radar at this organization.' Or, and it's not that it's always an either or, but for me it was, 'Or I can do the work that I know is aligned with the purpose that is embedded on the inside of me. I can, I can live in my space of mastery and not just visit it sometimes.' Because I was familiar with that feeling of purpose. Like, you know, when you're operating in your purpose, there's like this deep sense of fulfillment that you have in seeing other people go far beyond what they even imagined. And so like, that's what excites me. And so I would see that as a side hustler, not all the time, but sometimes, I'm like, 'what would it look like if that was my everyday, all day?' And of course, you know, it's a journey to get there, but for me it was about, 'okay, I'm making a really hard, really uncomfortable, uh, decision that in black and white, August 19th of last year did not make sense.' We're catching up though. Okay? But you know, I'm making this decision with that context in mind because my reference and frame of the world is different now, and of how I want to contribute to the world is different.

And so I would say that's probably, you know, one of the decisions that I'm, I'm most proud of because it was, it wasn't an easy decision. It would have been easier to stay, to say, 'I'll take that job. I'll do that for a little bit. And then see where that leads me.' You know, it was comfortable, you know, for all of the reasons that people said, say 'I would have done that,' but, I'm proud of that. Proud that I did it, proud of the, you know, the work that I get to do.

And I'm proud of also just centering family. I definitely had some experiences where I've said no to, one in particular, really big promotion to move to New York. We ended up moving to New York from Chattanooga in 2017, but I had an invitation to do it in 2014 and it was about seven weeks prior to my wedding and my husband, Joe had gotten a full ride to Emory to go back to business school. And as an architect, you don't see many architects with an MBA, but that was his, you know, desire. So it's like, 'okay, are we going to get married and then you're going to move to Atlanta and I move to New York? I don't think so.' You know, so I had to turn down that role and, and that was another moment that was proud of on the other side of it, it was traumatic going through it. Cause a lot of people were like, 'what in the world? Like you don't pass up an opportunity to work on the Viagra brand.' It was the, consumer marketing role on Viagra. But it, it did not fit our personal, you know, lifestyle Just like with any job process, you get all the details, you know, shortly after the interview, and I had to turn down that opportunity and it was hard. Oh my gosh. I didn't turn down a role at a job down the street, I still

worked there. It was very traumatic, but it was in line with what you know, with what I believed, with who I am and with centering my family first. And so those are just kind of two things that I would say from a personal stand point that I'm really proud of, that on the other side of those really hard moments, I found a lot of joy and fulfillment.

Leah: What was the conversation with your husband, when you said I'm going to leave an over six figure job to go do this thing? Cause it's probably very similar to the conversation I had with my husband. So I know a lot of times we talk about, you know, starting our own businesses and doing this. There's a real conversation that has to happen. There's a real thing about, is your spouse or partner supportive or are they not, and how do you continue forward either way? Right? Like, are they a hundred percent supportive, but what does that support look like? And then how did that go for you?

Brittany: Yeah. So when he shared about getting into to Emory, yeah, I had a lot of resentment in our first year of marriage and I know I don't want to take the podcast conversation down a different path. But it's interesting that you ask that question because I, I can see us really changing the lives of married couples. We have a lot of stories that we could share, I'll just say that. But yes, our first year of marriage was really rocky because of that decision. Like I have a book coming out that talks about, just my journey with grief and the recognition that, that experience me saying no to that job opportunities and saying yes to my marriage, I grieved for a year. And I didn't recognize that I was grieving until about a year later. That's what that was like that, that's why, but yeah, I grieved the loss of that opportunity and I would have never used that language. I didn't use that language then until I recognized that that's what was happening.

So yes, that was very different than his response to 2019. And really, you know, having a conversation sitting down and saying, 'Hey, you know, I've really been in prayer about this. I know we've had tons of conversations about it. I know that, you know, my thought was that I would at least be here for another, I don't know, 10 years.' Like I really had this picture in my mind of, I would continue to grow my business. You know, a book was on my vision board. If you will. I had all of these things that I had planned to do, I just saw them in tandem with moving up in corporate. And so I kind of saw this picture of myself, of, you know, still being a corporate leader, but also having this growing business on the side that at some point I would need to, I would have a team, but I would really have the option to say, 'Okay, like, what do you want to do, Brittany?' And so I, you know, I share with people like I'm a woman of faith, and I really believe that God aligned that situation in such a way that I was literally pushed to the edge of the cliff and the decision to jump was on me. Just the way, everything played out and the way that things happened, I was not expecting that I would be on a list of layoffs, of people that were going to be laid off. I was also though I have to say this to their credit, not expecting to understand the value that they saw in me in their effort to get me off that list. And so it was now, you know, 'Well, Britney, the ball's in your court. What do you want to do?' And I, you know, I, would've never thought I would've had that decision to make, but I, but I did. And so we talked to about it, we prayed a

lot about it. We ran the numbers on it. Like we, you know, we did all of the things that I have to say, like Joe was 110% supportive, like 'do it.' I was the one, you know, so it's just interesting to see that shift in our marriage. And I think, and I just share that to say, like, if you're in that space, you know, of our 2014, like, just to see even the growth in our relationship to where at one point it was like, 'This is not going to work, you know, like, no, I don't think you should take that opportunity,' to like, 'Yes, what are you waiting on?' You know, even to see that shift just speaks to just the growth of our marriage and our relationship, but he was very supportive of me leaving and thought I kind of even dragged my feet on, you know, getting to the decision he's like, 'Uh, yeah, duh. You're doing this.' So yeah, I definitely appreciate his support in making the leap.

Leah: I love it. I think for me, it's been fun to see him be proud of me as I hit those milestones. I think that's really been fun. And I'm sure. I mean, yeah, like, did he high five you? What was the celebration when you found out that you got the TEDx? Because I know that something that was on your list, but you didn't know that it was going to come that soon. And I don't usually ask this, but I do think it's important as we talk about us being successful. I am always going to talk about women being successful and powerful, and we are so amazing, but whether it's a spouse or a girlfriend or a sister or a cousin, I just think it's so important that we recognize the people in our lives that do support us, that help sustain us. But I do like to recognize the folks that do cheer us on and support us and remind us, cause I'm sure that you get insecure too. I have those days where I'm like, 'what am I going to do? I'm failing at everything.' And he's like, 'look how far you've come.' So when you got your, your TEDx, how did he show up for you? Like what does support look like from him?

Brittany: Yeah. So I used to call my mom, my chief cheerleader. Joe is definitely, you know, the chief executive officer of the cheerleading squad. Like he is the person that even if you don't see him, like, please know, he's somewhere like clicking my slides forward, or like, you know, like making sure the setup is right. It's funny, before I rebranded to Career Thrivers, he used to call himself the business team. He would have the Excel sheet up, like, okay. Like what, like literally anything and everything, um, in terms of just support that I may need or don't even think that I need.

So, yeah, like he was so supportive about the TEDx talk. Like, as you all know, we're in the midst of a pandemic. And so a lot about that TEDx talk was not the way the things normally happen. I had about three days to prepare that talk and he was amazing over that time period. I'm a speaker coach with TEDx Nashville. So because of that connection, I had access to things like, you know, the rug that you saw, but like the letters. So this is totally a Her Story of Success exclusive, I don't know that I've shared this with anybody, but my husband had the letters made for my backdrop, because the TEDx letters for TEDx Nashville were on their last leg. And, um, they were in midst of needing to order some. And so I'm like, 'okay, I could do the talk with like, uh, you know, a virtual background, like, you know, just much like this, but I'm like, I want the letters. I want the experience.' I don't know how he did it or how he made it happen, but he's an architect and architects

know people that do amazingly creative things. And so, yeah, he got the letters done in three days. He was like, 'I'll take care of the background. You take care of the talk,' and I'm like, 'I got it. I can do that.' So he's awesome.

Leah: I think we need to acknowledge what a big deal that is. Most people that do a TEDx talk, don't they have almost a year to prepare? So in some cases, y'all like, I want you to think about this. Literally people get a year to prepare for TEDx and you had three days, so you are an amazing speaker. And one of the things that I learned, you touched on it a little bit already, but the way that you redefined resiliency, like blew my mind. And it's funny because I feel like it's one of those things that, we've heard this word a lot of times, but the way that you described redefining it really, really kind of spoke to me. So I'd love for you to talk a little bit about, you know, realizing that resiliency needed to be redefined and how you redefine it.

Brittany: Yeah. Yeah. So I'll, I'll definitely say, check out at TEDx talk to get the full scope. about redefining resilience or getting real with resilience. Real is an acronym for four ways to redefine resilience. But really the whole concept really kind of came through, like I shared just my journey with grief and, you know, really what I like to call, um, thriving through the loss of my mom and, and recognizing that we culturally, and I think this is when I say culturally, I mean, just as people as Americans, we are in love with success and we are in love with not only with success, but with what success looks like. And I think because of that, we often have this expectation that when people endure hardship, we are immediately on the heels of that hardship, looking for how they turn that into a success. Right? We romanticize this feeling of, 'Oh, they went through something really bad, but they bounced back.' Right? And so we often define resilience then through this lens of how fast did you bounce back from that loss? How did you turn that, you know, negative into a positive? Not recognizing all of the social, emotional work that's tied to even understanding the new place that you're in, before you even talk about like, what's next.

So for me, that showed up, you know, in my work and my personal life of me saying, 'Hey, Brittany, you need to give yourself some grace, like this isn't about you having grit and being able to like right back to it and, you know, act like you aren't phased by this. Like, my mom was my. Best friend, like, you know, even Joe will tell you, one of the things that's characteristics of pharmaceutical sales, really any sales industry is, you know, this idea of the top sales people typically get to go on a trip and I'll never forget. I won my first, came in like number two in the country and the trip was Maui. So there's all expenses pay like five star red carpet experience to Maui. And at the time Joe and I, we were dating. So he was like, Oh, this is amazing. And I just knew in the back of his mind, he thought that he and I were going, I took my mom. 'You have not put a ring on this finger. My mom and I are going on this trip,' and, we have so many beautiful memories or, you know, I have so many beautiful memories now of that trip and all of like, I loved traveling with her. Like we did so much traveling together, which I'm so grateful for now, but all of those moments and all of those things, you know, it's like, you don't bounce back from that, you know? Um, and so really just recognizing that, 'Hey,

I've got to give myself grace through this. And that doesn't mean that I'm not resilient, but it does mean I have a real recognition of what it means to be resilient in that I'm extrapolating the learnings from this loss, from this transition, from this hard time and applying them to journey forward in a new way. I'm not trying to look back and get to where I was. I'm creating a new path out of what I've been given as I journey forward.' So, uh, that's what I mean by that.

Leah: And I was so excited for you to share that because I think it's so important right now, you know, there's so much talk about the new normal or getting back to whatever. And the reality is I just feel like, and maybe it's my own circle, but I feel like that that talk is the most critical thing most of us can listen to right now is that resiliency, whether you lost a job or you're changing the way that you work, or, you know, you might have been laid off or you might have, have had to lay off people, that it's not about going back. It is about going forward, and with the recognition that it's going to be different, and allowing grace for yourself and for others. So I'm excited for everyone to watch your talk.

And we'll have it in our show notes when it, when this does air, but I do want to allow you to tell everyone where they can find you. And then I want to give you a minute to think about how you define success today. And I know the last question you always ask your people is, um, how are they thriving or what does thriving mean to you. So I would like for you to answer that and you can, because I love your podcast and I'm a fan too, so I'm a fan too. So I would love for you to tell everybody where they can find you and what success and thriving means for you.

Brittany: Yeah. So you can definitely catch me, Leah, you mentioned the podcast. So Career Thrivers Podcast. Right now, we are releasing an episode once a week, but that will be the place that we are sure to drop my book release, which is coming soon. So *Thrive Through It* is coming. And so I'm really excited to share that with you. So make sure you connect with us there. You can also connect with us at careerthrivers.com. And if you click the podcast tab on, on our website, we have a vault. So typically with several of the episodes, I also will share resources. So like, one is top of mind, I was talking about it yesterday, there's an episode on taking your thoughts captive on the importance of mindset and how the stories we tell ourselves and the way that we think. And there is a PDF download that's in the vault. So you just drop in your email address and you can access that. And then I am on all social media at Brittany N. Cole. So you can find me at Brittany N Cole, on Instagram, and then you can also follow Career Thrivers on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter as well.

Leah: And how do you define success today?

Brittany: Yeah, so success today is about creating a space for joy and fulfillment. Every day, I walk downstairs with the mindset of 'how am I going to create joy and fulfillment today. And that is success.' And right now in this season, that looks like helping clients go from barely surviving in their career to boldly thriving. I'm helping them own their personal brand as a way to do that. And helping organizations cultivate a culture where all of their talent believes that they belong. That brings me so much joy and so much fulfillment. And so that is what

I'm doing these days and, oh, you asked me to answer my own typical question. I love it. What does thriving mean to me? So similarly, so to me, thriving is not about accomplishment. Let me say that again, thriving isn't about accomplishment. So we don't thrive because in my mind, because we hit this arbitrary goal number, revenue, number of subscribers, whatever the case may be. For me, thriving is about how are you taking lessons that you are learning along the journey? Whether you are going through a transition right now, you're in the midst of a crossroads or you're experiencing some kind of loss. How do you take those learnings to help you and other people around you better? To me, that is what thriving is about. And all of that, I believe, especially if you take those learnings and you don't just hoard them, but you share them with other people, um, that leads to those tangible successes that you want to see, or those achievements that you may want to see. So that's what thriving is all about to me.

Leah: I love that. Well, you have brought me joy and fulfillment today by being my guests because I absolutely adore it. Everything about you. I just appreciate you being my mentor, being a mentor to my friends, and I'm just grateful that you've been a part of my journey thus far. And I look forward to all the things that we're going to continue to do together. Her Story of Success and Career Thrivers are friends and I'm excited for the future. So thank you, Brittany. I hope you have an amazing day. Bye Brittany.

For today's non-profit spotlight, I want to tell you about **Girl Unknown**. Girl Unknown is an incredible organization started by my friend Alexis Hughes-Williams. They work to provide proper hygiene and education for disadvantaged girls all over the United States, and they also hold educational events and programs to spread awareness about women's issues and highlight some of the amazing things women are achieving all around the world. You can donate to help provide girls and women with scholarships, business grants and books at girlunknown.org.

Thank you for joining us today. If you enjoyed this episode, please rate and review us on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify or wherever you listen to podcasts. We'd also love to hear what you took away from this episode, so leave a comment on our Instagram or LinkedIn letting us know what you learned from Lucinda's incredible story.

The Her Story of Success podcast is produced by women and for women. Our Executive Producer is Claire Bidigare-Curtis, and our Production Coordinator is Bronte Lebo. And I'm your host, Leah Glover Hayes. Talk to you soon!