

## 79. Navigating the Career Journey – Transcript

**Leah:** Welcome to Her Story of Success, a podcast featuring stories from influential women trailblazers and business leaders who have defined & pursued their own versions of success and fulfillment. We hope these stories, lessons learned, and celebrations inspire you to believe in yourself and enjoy your own journey a little more. I'm Leah Glover Hayes, your host and CEO of Her Story of Success Women's Business Collective.

On today's show, I'll be sharing an incredible panel discussion I had a few weeks ago in partnership with Conexion Next. Conexion Next is a network for Nashville's young professionals that provides members with professional development opportunities and volunteer initiatives focused on inclusion, diversity, advocacy, and the work of Conexion Americas. They asked me to host this panel about "Navigating the Career Journey and Building the Right Support System to Thrive," and since our panelists had so many great things to say, I wanted to share it with all of you.

Our first panelist is Erika Matallana. Erika is the Director of Communications at Amedisys, a publicly traded healthcare company that provides home health, hospice and personal care. Erika has an incredible story of moving to the U.S. from Bogotá, Colombia and building a successful 15 year career in healthcare communications. She's been honored with awards like the Lovell Ethics Advocacy Award and the Literacy David Mejia Velilla Award.

You'll also get to hear from Daniel Oppong, who is the founder of Ohana Health and an Experience Strategy Specialist at Limeade. With Ohana Health, Daniel is working to help students and recent graduates find jobs at health tech companies. They also just launched their first product, a new tech platform that connects students with job opportunities.

Finally, you'll hear from Alessandra Alegre. Alessandra was actually promoted shortly after our conversation, and she's now a Senior Manager of Special Services and Royalty Compliance at Tri Star Sports and Entertainment. Alessandra moved to Nashville from Lima, Peru to attend Belmont University. In addition to helping her company to grow and scale, she's also dedicated to giving back to the Nashville community and serves as the Chair of Professional Development for Conexion Next. I'm so excited for you to hear more about these panelists and their amazing stories. They also share some great advice about mentorship, finding your purpose and self-care.

So just welcome panelists, I'm so excited to have you, and I'd like for you to start off telling us what you love about what you do right now. So I'm going to start with you, Erika, if you would just share with us a little bit about what you love about the role that you're in now and why it's a good fit for you.

**Erika:** Sure, thank you, Leah so much. I currently serve as director of communications for the Amedisys, which is a leading provider of home health and hospice services,

and we are in pretty much every state in the United States, so we're a very large organization. But I think what I enjoy the most is the fact that I know that what I do everyday really impacts people's lives. I've worked for, you know, the healthcare industry for over a decade in different aspects of the business. And I can tell you that there is no level of the health care business that doesn't really touch that patient that, you know, at the end has a life, has a family. And, and I think that's kind of a great reminder for me every day, is what I do, even if not directly, indirectly really affects and impacts patients and families and human beings. So I think I love that about with this journey with healthcare.

**Leah:** I love that. And then Alessandra, I know that you went to school for music business, and you are still doing that now, and you do have a very important role in your job and what you're doing. So what is it that you love about your role that you're in with Tristar Sports and Entertainment?

**Alessandra:** Yeah, I think what I love the most about my role is the fact that I can see the direct impact, kind of what Erika was saying, but obviously music, the direct impact of what I do every day with all of our clients. I know that my work and me making sure that they're collecting all of the revenue, they're supposed to collect and also making sure that I'm maximizing their revenue, that allows them to have peace of mind so that they can be the best creatives they can be. And I truly believe that, you know, artists and entertainers and people in that space, they can really use their platform to make a difference in the world and to be advocates for things that are important to them. And then just a simpler answer, you know, music makes people happy, shows, I know we all miss them, but that makes people happy, and I love that.

**Leah:** Awesome. And then Daniel, what about you? So you have a few roles. Tell us about your day job and your passion that you have created.

**Daniel:** Yeah. First of all, thanks for having me, I'm glad to be here with both of you all as well. You know, I've always, I've been a really curious person and drawn to things that have a level of grandeur and impact. And so I think that, you know, throughout my career that's been true. And so my day job is with a company called Limeade, and with Limeade I'm an employee experience strategist. And so when I look at my career, it's all been focused on people, growth and strategy. And so when I think about my current role, like I'm getting to do that currently. So supporting our organization, as we grow, thinking about what are the people needs and how do we bring our people along on our growth trajectory. And then I started a company called Ohana Health and so Ohana Health makes it easier for students and health tech companies to find each other. There's an emerging population of students who are interested in health and healthcare, but they don't want to be doctors or nurses. And so I started the business to help them find opportunities at health tech companies. And I think the thing I love about entrepreneurship is it's inherently focused on solving

problems and creating value, and so I think that's the main thing that I really enjoy with my current role.

**Leah:** Yeah, I love that. I love this panel because we have an entrepreneur, Erika has moved up within corporate America and done really well. And Alessandra is in the music and entertainment industry, which is very niche on its own. So I love that I feel like we have a really good base of a conversation today.

So, I want to go ahead and talk about what is the thing that you're most proud of? I think that a lot of times we don't celebrate our successes and especially for those of us that, you know, aren't at the end of our career and we've kind of had a few years, it's so easy to look at where you still need to go and where you want to go. But I want to just take a second and look back and say, what are you really proud of that you've done or accomplished in your career? So I'll start with you Alessandra.

**Alessandra:** Yeah. I think for me moving all the way from Lima, Peru and being an international student at Belmont, I knew that I had to work really, really hard so that I could get a job in the U.S. and stay in the U.S.. You know, the legal immigration system's very complicated, and it's not easy, even if you're educated and you know, you went to school here. So for me, the fact that I was able to get a job before I even graduated and have a company that as an entry level employee, wanted to take the financial risk of sponsoring me, I'm very proud of that, and the fact that, you know, it's been, I think, five years since I graduated college and the fact that I'm still at that company and I'm still moving up within the company. I'm very proud of that.

**Leah:** That's awesome. Erika, what about you? I know you've a little bit longer of a journey, but what is something that you're very proud of on your career path and your journey to where you are today?

**Erika:** I think it's interesting that you mentioned how sometimes it's hard for us to really see what we have accomplished and kind of give ourselves credit. And I definitely am guilty of that for sure. And my husband who is seriously my best supporter and my biggest fan, he is the one who reminds me almost daily how far I've come. And I think for me, I came to this country when I was 24 years old, so I was already an adult and, you know, I didn't speak English. I had just finished school in Colombia. I'm from Colombia, South America. And I moved here, and I remember thinking, you know, when you are at that age, you think, "Oh, I can do everything anywhere." Right? Oh, I had no idea how hard it was going to be and how much work I was going to have to put into achieving my goals. But I think I'm really proud of knowing that I pretty much had to start from scratch, and work really hard to sort of, to learn the culture, the language, and being able to do what I love, which is communicate in my second language. And in doing that in corporate America, in a state like Tennessee, I know it's an accomplishment that I really take for granted a lot because I'm too hard on myself. But I think it's really an accomplishment knowing

that I've accomplished all these things with the challenges that I have had to overcome. So I'm proud of that, knowing that I've done it all through hard work and dedication.

**Leah:** I'm glad that your husband reminds you that because you do seem someone that you just put your head down and work really hard. And I love that I had both of those awards to talk about. You're not in a sales role that you get, like these fake awards all the time. Like those were legit. And I'm going to ask you about those in just a little bit.

So Daniel, you've had a awesome career journey and it's had a couple of different winding paths. So for you, what, what have you been really proud of, of yourself for your journey?

**Daniel:** Yeah, I would say probably the first thing would just be resilience and then continued curiosity. So I went to school originally to play football. And so I went to school on a football scholarship and ended up tearing my ACL within a couple of months of being there, which changed my whole trajectory as far as sports goes. And so it just put me on this path where I had to figure it out, and I think that's been true for a lot of my career. You know, I think that, um, when I moved to Nashville five years ago, I had never worked in venture capital, I had never worked in healthcare, I'd never worked in entrepreneurship. And so I took a job at a venture capital, healthcare-focused entrepreneurial fund. None of those things I'd ever done before. And I'm like, I just kind of had to figure it out. And so like when I look back, I think part of it is the resilience, and I think the other piece is just continuing to learn, to follow my curiosity, to put myself around people who are influential and are making moves that I want to kind of replicate. And so, yeah, I think that that's what I feel proud of is just putting myself in a position where I can learn, grow, evolve and continue to do so.

**Leah:** I love that. I want to talk a little bit about corporate America and entrepreneurship, because it's two different things, right? And a lot of people, I work with a lot of entrepreneurs that did work in the corporate America world, and now they're like, "Oh, I'm going to leave that and go in and start my own thing." But Erika, I love that you, it seems like you get more passionate about what you do the more that you're in it and the further up that you go. So I want to talk a little bit about what you have done to really succeed in corporate America and continue to press on? Cause I know it hasn't been easy. So what did that look like a little bit? Like, why are you really passionate about the journey that you're on in communications and healthcare for a large organization?

**Erika:** Yeah, so you're right. It hasn't been easy. Not at all. Yeah, it's funny because I hear you say "you have succeeded," and I'm like, "have I? It's been a long way." And I will tell you, corporate America is, it's a tricky place. I am not going to lie about that. You really need to learn the politics around everything, it's kind of a whole culture in

itself that you have to learn and navigate. It was very difficult in the beginning, when I came into a huge organization in healthcare, in the beginning of my career in this country, I was like, "I don't know if I'm going to make it. This is just too hard." For many reasons, especially if you think about the geographic place where we are. So it's a little better now, but it was not as diverse even 10 years ago as it is now. And even now it's not as diverse as if you go to New York or California, right? So people were not used to a little person from Colombia with an accent. And I remember thinking, "yeah, I am so out of place here." But then, you know, there were really hard days and still are very hard days. But I think what I learned is that my uniqueness really brings a lot of value into the conversation. I think that even for those who are a little hesitant about my contributions, there has to be some value in the way that I see the world, which is totally different from you or you or anybody else. And I think that's true to anybody. But for me, I think something that I've learned through working over a decade in corporate America is that you need to try to be as much yourself as you can. And that's hard, I think for all of us, regardless of your background, I think we feel like we have to kind of play some role in order to move up in the ladder, and there's some truth to that. But at the same time, something that I've learned with the years is that the more that I detach from that pressure, the easier it gets for me to just do what I have to do.

I still struggle a lot. I'm not going to tell you I have it all figured out, because I don't by any means, it's kind of one day at a time, but I do think that for me, it's like kind of kill them with kindness. And for me also, like, you know, my work is the best proof that I have to show that I deserve to be here and that I have something to say. Definitely it's been more work for anybody, I will tell you that, because as a person of color in corporate America, you don't have privilege that other people have. Like, for example, if I send a simple email that is three lines, I check and double check that I have no typos, which we all do because we're going so fast. But if the person with the accent, sends an email with a typo, you better believe that the judgment is going to be huge. So there's a lot of pressure. So you have to work really in a different pace, but you know, it's been great.

**Leah:** But I love that you said that even in, in corporate America, that it's so important to be yourself. I think that, you know, if there's one thing that people take away, like, I think that's something that in our pre-call like all of us have talked about is how important it is to be yourself.

I want to talk about mentorship really quickly. Cause all of you have had really important mentors in your life, but you've also understood that it doesn't mean that someone sat with you for 30 minutes to an hour, once a month to get you to where you want to go. So Alessandra, I'd like to start with you, and what has a mentorship look like for you and what's the importance that it's played for you as you've succeeded in your career?

**Alessandra:** Yeah. I think mentorship has been extremely important in my entire professional journey, and I think it gets more and more important the more I continue throughout that journey. My mentors in the entertainment industry, I was very lucky when I was at school to participate in a formal, one-on-one mentorship program with a very high level executive. So I was able to build that relationship, and, you know, once that program was over, I maintained that relationship and it's still somebody that I stay in touch with. And then my other two entertainment industry mentors came through my internship experiences. They were the two CEO/owners of the companies I interned for. And I think I just let my work speak for itself, and they saw something in me that when I left that internship, they kind of kept the door open, that "if you ever need anything, reach out." And I think what I didn't do as well with my mentors at the beginning, I think I was very vague with what the relationship was going to look like. It was more like, you know, "Hey, like I would love to catch up." That's usually what I would pitch to them as why I want to meet with them. And now in hindsight, I'm like, well, you know, we did sit for 30 minutes and what did we really talk about? So now my approach is a little bit more specific, and I'm more precise about what I really want to get out of that meeting. And of course it's always a two-way street, but I've also learned that a lot of my conversations with those mentors don't have to be full one-hour lunches. They can be a 15-minute phone call or 10-minute phone call.

**Leah:** Yeah. And I know that's something that we had talked about when we met a few years ago was, you know, and even when you were sending me an email. I'm like, "okay, let's get more specific. So if you're going to send this," so, and I think that that's important too, is being able to be specific in your ask. And even if you don't know, just give them a compliment and let them know what it is you admire about them that you would like to learn more about. Cause I know sometimes it is hard to have an agenda, cause you're like, you're wanting to absorb information. So just being able to understand what it is that you like about that person or their career. The specific thing that you want to learn a little bit more about. Daniel, what about for you what's mentorship looked like in your journey?

**Daniel:** Yeah, I mean, I think in my most recent gig, so I worked at Jumpstart Foundry, which is a healthcare focus venture fund. Similar to Erika, venture capital isn't, uh, an industry where there are a lot of minorities or people of color at all, and healthcare too. And so I think for me, I was kind of in this space where I'd never done it before, and I had a lot to learn. I was very unfamiliar with the terms with the acronyms, I mean, how many acronyms does healthcare have, right? So like all the acronyms, all the different words and things that you're supposed to say. And so I think one of the best things about the entrepreneurial space is kind of predicated on this idea of learning by doing. And I had two people, um, you know, Vic and Marcus who were the co-founders of the organization, who kind of brought me in and just gave me and allowed me to learn by doing and, and, you know, they modeled the behavior that

they wanted us to replicate. And so I got to do that. It wasn't about perfection, it was about kind of trial and error and iteration and getting back up. And, you know, I think within entrepreneurship specifically, it's thinking about like, what is the problem you're trying to solve and who is the customer you're trying to solve that for? And those are kind of the things that continue to push you forward. And so, you know, I feel fortunate, on paper, there's no reason probably that I should have gotten the position per se, but they took a risk on me as a person and invested in me and kind of allowed me to grow. And so, you know, I think that for me, having people who model the way and see kind of the intangibles, even if it doesn't necessarily look like that on paper, that was really meaningful for me.

**Leah:** I think that's important, and all three of you pretty much said, my work spoke for itself and that's why they were willing to invest into you. And I've interviewed a lot of people, and that is the common theme, is that it's not that hard to have people want to invest into you, because they see something in you that they believe in. So if you're not finding that, maybe look a little bit into the work that you're doing, and understanding too, sometimes people are looking for mentors because they're unhappy and they want to find something else. I think that might be a telltale sign that you're in the wrong either profession or, you know, like you should at least enjoy like Alessandra, she went to school for music business, and now she's doing that. So the work that she did, she loved it. So she put it into it and people liked her work and respected that.

I want to talk a little bit about overcoming challenges and adversity. Daniel you've talked about resilience and that so often we're going to face things, whether it's racism, sexism, any of those things that are so painful, but we still have to move on and figure out a way to move forward.

So I'd like to talk a little bit about anything that you've faced in that world that maybe you took a blow, and what did it look like to deal with it and then move forward, right? Cause you can't just push it aside. That's not reality. You can't just like brush it off and move forward. So I love to hear how, and I want all three of you guys to answer that, but what that looks like for you.

**Daniel:** Yeah. That's a great question. I mean, I think inherent to being human is feeling. And part of feeling is feeling pain and joy, like you can't selectively choose that. So for me, when I think about my own life, you know, like I said, I went to college to play football, tore my ACL, it was actually the second time I'd done it exactly a year to the day apart. So that was very disillusioning. And so then I'm like, I went to college with this plan and now I'm not on a plan. One thing I'll say is like, the plan is not a thing. The path isn't linear. Right? I think that's a misconception, a lot of young professionals have. Even for me, I had this idea of like, okay, I'm just going to go do the thing.

So that was one disillusioning experience. And then I ended up getting laid off from a job because we had budget cuts, similar to a lot, 30 million people around the country right now with COVID. Right. And so that was another thing that I had to try and figure out. And so I think for me, when I look at my personal path and career, it's been a matter of like, I want to create space for the reality of how something impacts me and then look at it as an opportunity to learn, grow, and evolve and apply it to whatever's next. And so, when I look at the through line from my career, what did I learn from playing football that I could apply to my next job, you know, in nonprofit? And then what I learned from nonprofit that I could apply to my next job in consulting and sales and then education and then venture and then entrepreneurship and then tech? Like for me, I'm the common denominator in all of those different instances. Right? So no matter if the environment is different, I'm still bringing my full self to work or to the job. And so I think that learning, what is true about me? I think self-awareness, for me is something that I really, really value and being able to bring that to work. I mean, I think that's one of the things that's allowed me to kind of navigate some of the complexities.

Then when you think about what's happening in the world right now, you know, I think with systemic racism, Erika mentioned that earlier, I think that that's just the reality that we face, and part of being human is feeling the reality of being a person of color and mostly white spaces. For me, that's been true my entire career, and kind of understanding that sometimes there's this expectation that I have to be twice as good. How do I navigate that? How do I own that? You know? And so I think for me, it's about being honest about what those challenges are, but looking at them as opportunities, you know, to show up, to evolve, to kind of face the challenge and see what you can do and kind of see what you're made of.

**Leah:** I love that. Erika. What about for you?

**Erika:** Yeah. I definitely agree with everything you said Daniel, and I will tell you this. We all have challenges, you know, at any level of our professional and personal lives every day. I will tell you this, the challenges of being a person of color in corporate America are no joke. You know, I think it's because there is that subtle thing, I think that's the hardest part for me. It's not nothing direct. It's more like they say because you are this, you are not getting this because that would be great, at least I'd know. Right? It's the subtle kind of silence and pain that you get from like the rejection or the, "you're not good enough for this, or I don't know about you or," you know, and they will never tell you this. It's just the comments, and sometimes you have to deal with just the unconscious biases that we all have. And I think something that I've learned through my journey as a professional in this country and as an immigrant is that I need to be more forgiving, and I need to give people the benefit of the doubt. I think we all have an opportunity to learn and to grow and to understand, now, if I know that that you know better, but you're still not doing better than I have a problem, but I really appreciate when people come to me and ask me about me.

About how I got here, my journey, because I get an opportunity to really tell you who I am, and then you can make any assumptions you want, but at least you get to hear from me what the journey has been. Uh, but I also think that I will tell you, when I just came here, maybe that was age too, but I was a crybaby. Like I remember I would cry in the bathroom in the office because I was just all frustrated, like why you don't like me? I'm so likable. Like I am amazing. It will be the kind of thing that will frustrate me, because I'm a relationship person. That's how I lead, that's how I work. For me, I have to have a good relationship with people. I need to make sure that people that I work with, I get along with, if I see any kind of weird situation, it bothers me, but I'll tell you that throughout the years I've become really more of a thick skin. I think what I learn is to just not to be down for things, but to like get back up faster. I think that's the difference. It's not that I don't get sad or frustrated, but I've been able to overcome it a little faster.

**Leah:** That's awesome. All three of you, it sounds like are in situations where there is less diversity. I know Alessandra, I wanted to hear from you because the music industry is definitely like, especially being in Nashville, and I know you're not only in country music, but there's definitely a lack of, of diversity of where you are. So have, have you experienced anything that's really, maybe hurt you or that you've seen that you've had to either overcome or learn how to move past?

**Alessandra:** I think for me, you know, as a person in the U.S. on a work visa in general, it was always very important for me to feel like I had earned my place here. And I think that in a way, kind of created a lot of pressure on myself to achieve and achieve and achieve, and being in the entertainment industry, the entertainment industry is just so competitive, and everybody wants to work in music, and you know, I remember going to these events, and what I experienced wasn't so much because my background as an immigrant in the U.S., but it was more because I was going to these events and I was working, you know, already a Tristar in accounting basically. And I would have these interactions with people where I'd be introducing myself and talking to them, and they wouldn't really engage with me in conversation. I'd tell them where they work and they'd just, "Oh, you know, you don't work at a record label. You don't work at these more creative roles, so I don't have time for you" kind of thing. And you know, that was a struggle, just figuring out, kind of building my own confidence to show up to these rooms and know exactly what I bring to the table. And of course, Tristar has an amazing roster of clients too. So it was kind of ironic that these people, just because they saw business management, they didn't know what it was, kind of let go of the opportunity of interacting with me, cause we have an amazing roster of clients, but I think that allowed me to really do some deep dive on myself on "what do I bring to the table and why am I in these rooms?" And just kind of be more self confident.

**Leah:** Yeah. And now you have also moved up and you are now managing people. So I want to talk a little bit about what that looks like for you, as you know, you're still very

young in this industry. So what has that meant to you? Being able to continue to succeed and get promoted? What was that like becoming a manager for the first time?

**Alessandra:** Yeah. I started at the company, you know, before it completely blew up and, and kind of, we got this crazy roster of clients, and it was an opportunity where there was that need for somebody to be managing the processes and the day to day deliverables. I think the greatest challenge in that is that I moved up and over people that were already in more senior positions than me. And of course being so young, I mean, almost everybody I worked with were older than me. So having to navigate that and having to kind of create that respect with the people that report directly to you while also navigating kind of the personal aspect of, you know, just being friends with the people that you work with, that was definitely, definitely a challenge. And I think too, patience was very hard for me and, you know, I was so overwhelmed with my day to day deliverables and work that, I think in a way I sometimes didn't give enough attention to my direct reports as I showed up. And that's kind of like a note to self, like next time kind of how I want to approach it and how I would want it to be different.

**Leah:** Erika, you have obviously moved up pretty far, now you are a director for a company. What did it look like to work for an organization for over 10 years and then to decide to move? What did that process look like? And how did you maybe gain the confidence needed to ask for what you wanted when it comes to pay and what you wanted in a role?

**Erika:** That's a great question. And I do have to say, until the day I die, that the experience in, I will mention the company because I still have a lot of love for HCA Healthcare. HCA gave me the opportunity that I never thought in my life I was going to have. There was a lot of frustration on my part about many things, but I think that's not necessarily about HCA, it's about my journey. I was getting a little impatient about the pace in which my journey was moving, but I will tell you that making that move was one of the hardest decisions that I've ever made in my life, because I loved the company, I loved the people that I worked with, but I also knew that I was too comfortable. And being too comfortable doesn't allow you to grow. And that was a hard decision, but I knew I had to make it. When I considered Amedisys to move, it felt just right for me, because it was a position in which I was moving up, but if it was going to give me a good opportunity for making that transition in an easier way, you know. I do believe that we have to be self aware enough to know that even if I get an offer tomorrow to become a senior vice president, I wouldn't take it, because even if I could do it, do I really feel 100% prepared for that journey? I think people tend to believe that they are ready just because you see all the title and this and that. And I will tell you that my previous boss, my boss and colleague, and mentor Sherri Neal, shout out to her. She made me cry many times. I'll tell you. But what I learned from that woman is crazy because she made me really tough. And I remember she saying

to me, "Erika, I know you think I'm really hard on you, but it's because I know you have so much potential that I really want to talk you out." And she did. I will tell you. But one of the things that I learned through that journey is that I need to be, part of being developed and part of being a great leader is knowing your weaknesses and where you need to grow. I think it's very important, it's a lesson that I learned is that I need to be able to say, "you know what, maybe I need to grow a little bit more into this." And in my new role is being a journey because it's learning everything from scratch. And, you know, after being in that company for 10 years, I knew everything. Everybody knew me. And that was a really great, but then, it was not great at the same time because I was not growing. So this was uncomfortable and, you know, getting to know people, this is a company that is very spread out. So I don't have the same one-on-one contact that I used to have with my colleagues before in, then add to that COVID and everything else that has been difficult because I'm all about relationships and it's difficult to establish relationships when you only interact with people virtually, even before COVID. So that's how that has been a journey, but it's been wonderful. It took, it took a lot of courage, but it was worth it.

**Leah:** Yeah. Um, Daniel, one of the things that you and I have talked about, cause we've networked together, this importance of building your network. And I definitely Alessandra, I want to ask you this too, but what has that looked like for you on your path, building your network and why is that so important and valuable to you?

**Daniel:** Yeah, I think for any person, I mean, both professionally and personally, there's a reality of like the five people that are closest to you might have the biggest impact. I think that's one thing that's just true of your life, it can look like a reflection of those folks. And I also think that like, one of the things about the digital world is people are literally just an email away or a LinkedIn message away. Like the way that I got my job at Jumpstart, I went to Gonzaga for graduate school. And so I looked at the alumni page, researched all the alumni and I was like, okay, this guy lives in Nashville, I'm going to email him. I don't know what I want to do yet, but I know I like these things emailed him. He put me in touch with Vic and Marcus, just kind of a intro, and I didn't know what the conversation was going to be about, but I'm like, okay, like I'll just talk to them. I'll show up, I'll have a conversation and we'll just see where it goes. And it turned into one of the most impactful professional experiences of my life. And I think about, again, part of it is just the intention. And when you recognize someone in a particular space, like that's how you and I met, we met through the entrepreneur center, crossed paths, oh, she's interesting. I'll just chat her up, send her a follow up email and then here we are sitting here. Right? So yeah, I think for me, it's a matter of like intentionality and just being proactive and having the conversation. Like when I moved to Nashville, I probably talked to 10 to 15 different people or organizations before I found a gig, and I just had to be intentional about doing that. And so that's been one of the most impactful things for me, even my current job, my day job was similar through networking. I met the chief people officer at an event,

and then fast forward, two years later, I'm working at the company. So I don't know. You never know when those things are going to come in handy or be valuable. And if nothing else, like the world is full of like amazing and interesting people, and being intentional about just connecting with them when there's opportunity, I mean, people are more willing to engage and connect than maybe you think, so I think sometimes you just have to reach out and ask about it.

**Leah:** Absolutely. I think that's something that I found on my journey is that, and one of the things Alessandra and I'm talking about when, you know, when you're asking somebody to, to meet with you, people want to help others that are doing good work. Right? So when you think about like the mentors that are helping you or the people that you're networking with, they want to help you because there's also this little thing in the back of their head that it's like, "Hmm, if they're awesome and they're achieving, and then this young professional that's growing and moving. If I help them now, whenever they get to where they're going, this might be beneficial for me later." Right? I think there's always that thought in the back of people's heads. And I think that's important to remember, like, so that's what has given me confidence when I reach out to someone I'm like, I'm wanting them to know that like, "This is going to be worth your time because I'm going somewhere and I'm going to remember you when I get there."

But Alessandra, what's it meant for you because you are in such a niche industry. What does it mean for you, and what's, it looked like for you to, to build your network, and was it easy or did you have to work at it and have challenges?

**Alessandra:** No, I think for me, the beginning of it was very challenging. I was very shy and you know, English is not my first language. So the whole concept of like small talk and interacting with people, that was just, that was new to me, you know? And I had to figure that out, but at the same time, I came here with a goal in mind and I knew, you know, the moment you start music business school, they tell you, it's about who you know. So I knew the importance of networking and I wasn't going to let my own insecurity kind of hold me back from achieving my goals. So I had to figure out ways to kind of trick the system into working for me. So, you know, I wasn't the kind of person to go to a panel and introduce myself to the speaker. I was never going to do that, but I knew how to get their email and I knew how to reach out to them and tell them, "Hey, I saw you at this event, would love to grab coffee," and 95% of the time, they'd be like, "yes, of course. Sure." It doesn't matter if I didn't meet them and actually introduce myself at the event. So I did a lot of that. And, you know, like Daniel said, intentionality was very important. At the end of the year, I kind of had a running list of all the people I had met that year, especially people that were already working in the entertainment industry and, you know, little by little, you start building those relationships, and all of a sudden, you're networking with your own peers, you're networking with people that are a little bit higher than you, and then you also start networking down with people that you know, are younger than you in school, and you

start building those relationships. One of my favorite things is to see people that I kind of identified as high potentials when I was a senior and they were like freshmen or sophomores, and now they have like way cooler jobs than I could even dream of having, you know, and I love that. And I love that maybe in a way, I was part of those journeys.

**Leah:** Oh, that's beautiful. That's something that's so important is no matter how young you are, you can still mentor others. And, like, you totally made the point that I was going to make that, like, it comes back to help you, right? Like, you've done so much. I mean, I've known you for like five years, and you've always been giving back, you've always been volunteering. I know that it's helped you on your journey, cause people see that you're a giver and you're a doer. Um, Erika, I wanted to see as you're like working hard and you have to outwork everyone. Have you gotten to the place where you're able to, to say no to things or tasks or assignments that you know that you don't have time to do? Because one thing we, especially if we're trying to achieve and prove ourselves, we're just going to take on anything that's given to us. Have you learned how to say no? Or what has the process of saying no looked like for you and your journey?

**Erika:** I love that question, because this is actually the perfect moment for me to talk about that, because I've learned now better, and people don't like it. Right? It's really hard for me to say no, because like you said, I'm so used to just, "go do it, do it, do it." But now I realize that if I want to continue to move up in my career, I have to be more selective on the kind of projects and tasks that I want to take on. Unfortunately, you know, those who are, you know, familiar with PR, PR is all about perception is reality. And if you see yourself as the tactical doer of the group, you are not going to be seen as that strategist, that person who lead. And I think for me, going back to when I made this transition from HCA to Amedisys, is because I grew up in HCA. So I think even me knowing that I was ready to move up. You always are seen as really, I like to call it the little sister. Right? So they don't see you as the mature professional that you have become, because they still see you as that person that came through the doors ten years ago. It was the same thing, even for me personally, to see myself as that person who is now ready to take into bigger, more challenging tasks. So I still have to get better at it, but I think I'm more conscious about saying no, and it's not pretty, it doesn't get easier or maybe it will at some point, but not right now. So, but I'm learning to be better at that for sure. In my personal level as well, not just professionally. I think that as we grow up, we're like "okay. I cannot just say yes to every happy hour every night. I just can't. I have to kind of get myself a little bit of free time."

**Leah:** Yeah. Cause every time we say yes to something, you might be saying no to something more important. So I love that.

Well, we have about few more minutes and I want to give you all a chance to talk about out your season next. So we had an anonymous person ask for Alessandra, but I'm gonna ask all of you, so I'll let her go first. What is your next goal that you are trying to accomplish personally or professionally? What's next for you?

**Alessandra:** Yeah, I think honestly, especially right now with the entertainment industry, the way it is, and, you know, with all the crazy pandemic, we're all going through and touring halted and all that, I'm really excited to be in music in general. I'm really excited to see how technology is going to really, you know, make different things happen. And I'm excited to be a part of that within my own company as well. Right now I have the opportunity at work to kind of reframe the way my department operates and how we do things and automate things, and I'm very excited to be a part of that. I think honestly, this whole crazy year has made me kind of really put things in perspective. I've just lived for so many years with these checklists of all these goals and all these things I needed to accomplish, and all these timelines for accomplishing set goals, that I really got exhausted and just, you know, not sustainable. And I think I'm at a point where right now, like my priority to continue to grow at my company and with my career and build my team at my department and kind of spearhead that process, while at the same time, really like focusing on from a personal standpoint, the other things in my life that are also very important.

**Leah:** I love that. What about for you, Erika?

**Erika:** You know, I've learned that making a lot of plans usually is not a great idea. I know that I want to continue to succeed to move up, but not just for the sake of it, right? Not just because of the promotions or the titles. It's really, because I want to be a model for people like me. I lacked that as a young, Latina professional, or when I was a younger Latina professional.

**Leah:** You're still young.

**Erika:** Yeah. Thank you. I really wanted someone I could look up to and admire and say, you know, if she did it, I can do that as well. I will tell you that a lot of days when I feel defeated, that is what keeps me going, because I feel like it's an unspoken responsibility that I have on my shoulders, is to make sure that I pave the path for the next generation of women of color, really in general and my children, even though I have two boys. I want them to look back one day and say, "you know, if my mom was able to accomplish all these things, goodness, I have to be able to just as much, if not more." I want them to be proud of, you know, like I want to make it worth the fact that I don't always have all the time in the world to spend with them, at least I want to make sure that it's worth it. You know? So that's what really matters to me. I want to make sure that every day I wake up knowing that I'm doing something exceptional, not just earning a paycheck.

**Leah:** Yes. You are exceptional. So just so you know. Daniel, what about you? I mean, you have your own company, so I'm sure it has something to do with that, but what does your kind of vision and your future look like? Or what are you hoping for?

**Daniel:** Yeah, I liked, Alessandra, I liked your point earlier about how COVID has just created space to kind of reflect and think about how we're existing in the world right now, right? I think it's been a very, probably unexpected, but in a way necessary pause for a lot of people. And so like when I zoom out and I think about my career and my life in general, what I know is I want to create a life that I love and build things I believe in with people that I enjoy. And if I do that, at the end of my life, I'll have lived a good life. And so I think in the meantime, what that means, COVID's been interesting because it kind of canceled a lot of the things that we would rush around and go do, and that would preoccupy our minds and our time. And so I found myself with a lot of extra energy and, and just capacity to create. And so specifically what that means, so Ohana Health, it's been kind of more on the staffing recruiting side, but we're in the process, we'll launch a product our first, tech enabled product in September. So I'm excited about that. It's hilarious, because if you had asked me. Five years ago, if I'd ever run a product company, it'd be like no chance, like not even in the cards. And here we are.

**Leah:** Why is that?

**Daniel:** Just because I didn't see that as my path. Like I think I had a full way that I was going to go, and then I didn't even know it was an option. I think part of it was like lack of exposure, lack of opportunity, lack of awareness. And here I am, and I think it's been a matter of following my curiosity. So I'll say that's one thing. And then, um, a couple of other things, I started a conversation series called "It's Not Just Black and White," specifically around the conversation with race and anti-racism, because I think it's been a very binary conversation and not dimensional. And so my intention was I wanted to humanize the conversation. And so that's a project that I've been working on, which has been fun. And then another little side thing with a friend specifically under the workaround anti-racism work. And so I think for me, it's just been a matter of like, I want to continue to follow my curiosity, create things that are interesting, and do it with good people.

So if I do that and I mean, who knows what it'll be five years from now, we'll see, but

**Leah:** I love it. How do we find the conversations? How do we find that?

**Daniel:** Yeah, I can send you a link. So I have, um, I'm in the process, I have a friend who's building the website right now. And so having a collection of different pieces that I can send.

**Leah:** Awesome. Very cool. So the last question I always ask folks is, and I want to give you all a few minutes to think about it and say it, but I mean, my podcast is called Her

Story of Success. And it's not the success, like you jump over people to get to what you want. To me, success is about loving your life and enjoying it. And it's about success and fulfillment, but I love that everybody gets to define their own version.

Actually, I had another question, sorry, Sheila Holman said, how do you each engage in self-care and balance the grind without losing the present? So maybe answer both of those. So what do you do for self-care? And then how do you define success in this season? So Alessandra you're on my top corner, so I'll start with you.

**Alessandra:** So for self-care, um, and I'm kind of an extreme person, I'm all or nothing. So when I, you know, the whole self-care thing started, I went a little overboard. So I was doing the meditation, the reading, the affirmations, the working, I mean, it was exhausting. Now I try to more balanced approach for self care. Exercising is very, very important to me and eating right is very, very important to me. It's crazy how much of a difference in just how much more I can work and how much more effective I am working when I'm taking care of that. And I do still meditate, but not as obsessively as I used to.

And then to answer the question of, of success in this season, before COVID, I had to go through the Nashville tornado, and I was one of the buildings that got hit in Germantown, and that just changed my whole perspective in life. I was in a season where I was trying to go to business school and I was studying for the GMAT, and I was miserable and I hated every minute of it. And I'm the kind of person that, I like to do hard things, but I always have been able to find joy in the hard things. And this was just miserable. And so when that happened, it really put me in a position where I had to reevaluate. Okay, why am I doing what I'm doing? What is my purpose, you know, and how do I define success? Whereas before my definition of success was making more money, getting promotions, checking boxes. Now, I think I'm kind of approaching my life a little bit more as a marathon as opposed to little sprints with quick rewards. So yeah, I think that's my definition of success is enjoying what you do every day, having a reason why you do what you do, and knowing that you're impacting people. One of my favorite quotes, I think it was Pastor John Gray that said this. I can't remember, but he said, you know, success for me, or "I measure my success by the success of those that come in contact with me." And that's, I think more than ever kind of how I'm defining it.

**Leah:** I love that. What about for you Erika?

**Erika:** To be honest, well, let's start with the self-care. I'm horrible at that. I have to be honest. I have two kids under the age of 13. So you understand it's hard to really practice self-care. But what I do try to do is to say no, that's my new self-care practice.

Do I need to have a social gathering every weekend? No, I don't. Can I just spend the whole day in my PJ's watching TV and eating fast food? That I call self-care. That's

self-care right there. So I don't see self-care as going to the gym, no, that sounds like torture, but, you know, it's more like I need to be able to feel like I can just chill, which I'm not really good at. So that's one.

In terms of the question about what I, in this season, what I see as success is really balance. That's when I see success, when I can feel like I'm performing at least average in all the different responsibilities that I have in my life, I feel accomplished, I feel successful. When I feel like, okay, I was able to take the kids to school, everybody's alive, my boss is happy. I'm okay. My mom is not yelling at me on the phone in Colombian style, so it's all good.

**Leah:** 100%. I love it. Daniel?

**Daniel:** Yeah. As far as the self-care question, I think it's a really important one. And I think for me, what that looks like, it's a lot of mindfulness around what gives me energy. Right? I think personally, I think energy is a more valuable currency than time. I think sometimes we get really, really concerned about time. We can never get time back. And so why do we kind of panic about it? But energy is a renewable resource. So if I give my energy to things that give me energy, then I can live more energized. And so I think that's a paradigm shift that I've had that's allowed me to say, these things in my life are giving me energy. So I want to continue giving my energy to it. And that's a form of self-care, whether it's relationships or work or hobbies or interests. I'm with Alessandra, I go to the gym, but I also, with Erika, I like to veg and just chill too. So best of both worlds there.

And as far as success, you know, I think as a young professional, I had this idea of who I needed to be and where I needed to go. And so I ran really hard towards the target. And I got to that point, this like illusionary pinnacle, and realized success for me is more about how I want to feel. Right? Like I think you can accomplish all of these things on the right outside and not feel present, not feel engaged, not feel supported, feel really alone in whatever you achieved. And so for me, I'm like, I want to feel authentic and I want to feel present. I want to feel energized. I want to feel honest. I want to feel like my work matters. And so, if I'm connected with how I want to feel. That's, that's how I define success. Do I feel the way that I want to when it's all said and done?

**Leah:** I love that. Well, we are just about out of time, so thank you all panelists for being amazing and giving us your time and energy tonight so that we can inspire the next generation of amazing leaders.

I think we're going to try to put the link to Conexión Next, and I would appreciate if you follow Her Story of Success, it's just [herstoryofsuccess.com](http://herstoryofsuccess.com). And Conexión Next is an awesome organization that we are working with today. So thank you so much. I just

appreciate you all being on. So thank you all so much and make sure to connect with Conexion Next.

Y'all have a great night. Thanks so much.

**Erika:** Thank you. Bye.

**Daniel:** Thank you, Leah.

**Leah:** Bye.

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