

98. Lessons Learned Through Traditional Mentorship – Episode 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. I'm Leah Glover Hayes, CEO and podcast host of Her Story of Success Women's Business and Media Collective.

In today's episode, we're going to be continuing our series on the four types of mentorship – Passive Mentorship, Traditional Mentorship, Peer Mentorship, and Mentoring Others. If you missed the first episode called "The Power of Passive Mentorship," be sure to check that one out also. We talked about some of the reasons why mentorship matters, and I shared some of my favorite resources for adding passive mentorship in your life.

Today, we're going to be talking about traditional mentorship. I'm going to share some practical steps you can take to find a mentor, be a good mentee, and build a mutually beneficial relationship. I'm also going to share about some of the mentors in my life and some of the sound bites of the life-changing lessons I learned from them during this podcast.

This would be a great episode to share with a friend or colleague who is looking for mentorship in their life, and this would be a good one to post on the socials and tag the mentors that have made a difference in your life.

As we continue to talk about mentorship throughout 2021, please feel free to send me a DM on Instagram or LinkedIn or our Her Story of Success page, or you can always email me at info@herstoryofsuccess.com. Let me know what questions you have about mentorship, or if you want to share your own story that you've implemented any of the lessons you've learned in your own life, that I can share in a later podcast. For now, I hope you enjoy this episode on traditional mentorship!

When talking about traditional mentorship, I think that there is a misconception that it has to be this formal process where you meet someone and then you ask them to be your mentor. Especially in the business world, people tend to put so much pressure on finding “the right mentor.” In reality, mentorship is really just about finding people who you feel drawn to and that you want to learn from, and often mentors are people who are already in your life. I realize that may sound disheartening or frustrating, but I want to give you a couple of examples.

Think of any successful person that has shared their story. All of them can point to people in their lives growing up that helped shape them in different areas. Parents, teachers, family, friends, etc. And all of them learned different things from different people. Sara Blakey learned to fail everyday from her dad. Gary Vaynerchuk learned confidence and treating people well from his mom, and he learned about business from his dad. Serena and Venus Williams learned hard work and discipline in your craft from their dad. And Bill Gates and Oprah Winfrey both credit teachers for their confidence that led to their success. And I had mentors outside of my family, from my youth leader at church to my godparents who were my mom and dad’s best friends. I learned so many important lessons that didn’t come from my mom and dad.

So as you are searching to find your next mentor, look around your life now. Who do you admire? Who would you want to learn from? Maybe jot down a couple people that come to mind, and it doesn’t just have to be about business. You can have different mentors for specific areas of your life. When I think about the men and women I admire and look to as mentors, it’s not that I want to learn everything from one person. I have mentors that have helped me grow in my faith, Josh and I have mentors in our marriage, and I have other mentors that have taught me about different aspects of business. That’s a little bit of what you’re going to hear today. I’m going to be sharing mentors that I learned from in specific ways.

One of the incredible business mentors I’ve learned from is Sherry Deutschmann. She started LetterLogic from her basement after cashing in her 401k and grew it \$40 million before selling it. She’s now the founder of BrainTrust, where she’s helping other women grow their businesses to \$1 million in revenue and more. I met Sherry when I

was a Junior Board Member of the YWCA, and she was a big board member. I instantly felt drawn to her because she shared my lack of formal education. She's from a small town in the South and didn't have a college degree, but while working in sales, which is also my background, she realized that there was a better way to do business., which I completely related to. And she's also focused on helping others succeed, which is so important to me.

Here's a clip from my podcast interview with Sherry, where I was so inspired by the story of how she built her company.

Sherry: I worked for a company in the space that I ultimately inhabited, and I just felt like I could do it better. They just had constant customer service problems. And even though my bosses were Vanderbilt grads and had MBAs and I had a high school diploma from Newland, North Carolina, I still thought that my innate empathy would allow me to be a successful leader. And so I left that job and started a company competing with them from my basement.

I studied what I thought my previous bosses had done wrong and determined I was going to be nothing like them, and so I set out to create a company that would be very employee centric. I thought that if I took great care of the employee, that they would then take great care of the customer, the customer would remain loyal to us and would be willing to pay us more for our services, and that would help me make money. And so, you know, from day one, I created a culture that tended to the employees. And that included fair living wages, that included allowing them to bring their kids and their pets to work, helping them buy their first home, paying for all of their insurance costs, a really unique profit sharing plan, which I think was just the kicker to all of it. And just in general, treating people with respect and dignity and letting them have a voice. So that was all the really underpinnings of the foundation of LetterLogic.

Leah: When I learned about Sherry's story, I found it really inspirational, but I also had specific questions I wanted to ask her and things I wanted to learn more about. I think what's really important to keep in mind when you're asking someone to be your mentor is that successful people do want to give back, but most of them have

already done a lot of work to provide value, information and resources. Whether they've written a book, done podcast interviews or given a Ted Talk, it's our job as mentees to do our homework and engage with the resources they've already provided.

Once you've done that, then you can go to that person with specific questions based on what you've learned. For example, I reached out to Sherry and said, "Here are the things I've learned about you, and here's the conversation I'd love to have with you if you would be willing to allow me to buy you a cup of coffee or lunch." From there I was able to connect with her one-on-one, and we both got more out of it because I came prepared.

One of the things that I've learned from Sherry and one of her mentors, Michael Bertram, is that when you're looking for a mentor, it is important to be specific, because they are busy, they don't have a lot of time, and they also want to make sure they're going to be a good mentor for you. So if you have some specific questions that you're like, "Hey, this is the thing that I want to learn," they actually might not be the best in that one area, but they would be willing to introduce you to someone else that does have experience in that one area. So it's great, because you've already started building a relationship with this person that you've (1) honored by saying, "I learned about you, I've read about you, here's what I admire." Everyone loves to hear that, but then if the thing that you want to learn, they have someone else that would be better? Oh my gosh, that's incredible, because now you have more people that you can learn from. So I think that it's great to be specific and let them say, "yes that's something I can help you with," or "no, but here's someone else." I think that's really powerful.

So even though it's so important to have a clear goal in mind when seeking a mentor, you should also stay open to the idea that you might learn something different from them than what you thought you wanted to know.

A great example of that is my relationship with Marcie Allen. When I first met Marcie when she was a guest on this podcast, and when we sat down with her, I thought I was going to learn all about business, because Marcie is the founder of MAC

Presents, which is a music sponsorship company, and she is very good at brand partnerships, which is what I wanted to learn about. So in my first conversation, the thing that actually completely changed my life was the way she talked about her schedule. She taught me that you have to take the time to be and take care of yourself before you can be a great CEO, and she shared some of the keys to finding peace of mind even when you're busy.

Here's some of what Marcie had to say about building her schedule in a way that works for her:

Marcie: I love this story, but I remember calling my husband and saying, "I got hired. I'm doing The Rolling Stones tour sponsorships," and he was like, "That's great, but are you going to miss the Parent Teacher Conference at Harding Academy?" And I said, "No, I'll be home." But that's good. You need that. I tell people, "You can have all the money, you can have all the success, you can have all the, you know, artist relationships, music industry relationships, awards, but you can't cuddle up with that at night. Like, that really doesn't mean anything unless you can share it with someone. And my husband builds houses. You know, he's a general contractor. He owns Van Mol Restoration here in Nashville, and we don't talk about my work. You know, I love to talk about his work because it gets my mind off of it. So, I think that, to answer your question on what I do to remain at peace even though I'm flying back and forth every other week and even though I'm running a company and being a stepmom and being a wife and being an adjunct professor and, you know, running MAC Presents, it's just finding that quiet time for yourself. It is, you know – in the mornings we don't start – we don't open it until 10:30. So, I'll get up in the morning and that's really my time. I call my friends, I call my aunt, I call my sister and I use that as me time. Like, my assistant knows no meetings before 11:00 AM, and some people may be like, "Aw, you're slack." No, I'm up at seven. I'm rolling calls. But they might be rolling personal calls, calling my girlfriends to check in on them. And also, you drop everything when one of your friends needs you. You know, unfortunately, there's been a lot of my friends that have gone through divorces lately. I think it's just that age that we're all at. And we call it our tribe, and our tribe circles around whoever needs us. They did it for me, and now I'm doing it for my friends. And there's no deal or

conference or concert that is more important than me being there for one of my friends because they were there for me.

Leah: Hearing how Marcie talked about her family and her schedule made me realize just how great she was a person and as a leader. So after I interviewed on the podcast, I made it a point to tell her how much I appreciated and valued her and that I wanted to learn more from her. It turned out that she was already looking for someone like me to start investing into, all I had to do was ask. I know that sometimes it can feel very intimidating to ask someone to mentor you, but most successful leaders and people genuinely want to give back. You might be surprised who agrees to mentor you, so it's always worth it to ask.

Now, you do need to be strategic about how you get introduced to that person, especially if it's someone who is incredibly successful and already has a lot on her plate. I realized this when I first met Pat Shea. She was the CEO of the YWCA at the time, and I'll never forget the first time I heard her speak. I realized that she was the leader that I wanted to be. We were both visionaries who are good at surrounding ourselves with people who can get the job done. But she also has an incredible story of starting at the YWCA when they were deeply in debt and growing the organization to have a multi-million dollar budget and several new programs all fully funded.

So I knew I wanted her to be my mentor, but I needed to get into a position where I could ask Pat to be my mentor. So I took the long road and became a volunteer at the YWCA. If she's the leader there, she obviously wants people to help her and that care about her mission. Then I became a junior board member so that I would actually get access to her in a natural setting. I got to meet her and get to know her a little bit. Eventually I joined an event committee where I was working with her, and after that did I ask her for a one-on-one meeting, because I felt like I had done the work to get to know what was important to her, actually volunteer for the organization that she led, so that I had so much more to sit down and provide to her. Because one of the things that your mentors will want, is they want this time to be valuable. Yes, they want to give back to you, but what I learned is that your mentors also want to learn from you. So think about this. For Pat, I was also giving her valuable information because I had volunteered with the program, I was a junior board

member, and I had a line of sight into her organization that she didn't have. So what was incredible was that this was a mutually beneficial discussion. I got to learn about leadership and surrounding yourself with the right people, growing an idea, developing, not just followers but other leaders, and she got to learn a little bit more from someone that had a different viewpoint about what makes it easy to be a junior board member, what makes it easy to be a volunteer, and what feedback I had that they could do better. So the whole process for me took about two years, but by the time I asked her to meet with me, she already knew who I was and saw that I cared about her mission of making Nashville a safer place for women and girls.

Ad: This podcast is sponsored in part by Piccolo Marketing, providing outsourced marketing professionals for business owners. Piccolo Marketing was started by fellow woman entrepreneur, Anna-Vija McClain, and they have become our go-to resource when it comes to comprehensive marketing strategies and execution. So Anna-Vija created Piccolo Marketing Mentor for people like me, as the outsourced VP of marketing to chief marketing officer, depending on the size and needs of your company. How we use them is more like a VP of marketing, and the thing I struggled with is the processes and checklists, the project management of marketing. I felt like I was wearing a lot of hats and juggling a lot of things, so she helps us with the both long and short term marketing strategies, and then providing my team a roadmap and insights that we can go and execute on. Piccolo Marketing Mentor has helped thousands of business owners just like you and me develop our strategies to improve our marketing machine, which is how we get qualified leads and make sales. So to learn more about Piccolo Marketing Mentor, you can visit them online at piccolomarketing.com

Leah: Pat is an expert at casting a vision and then inspiring other people to get involved. I was also inspired by the way she left when she realized it was time for her season there to end. I later had the opportunity to interview Pat for the podcast, and it's one of my favorite conversations I've had. Here's some of what she had to say about the importance of building a tribe to fulfill your mission.

Pat: I have learned that you have a problem and you figure out what your solution is. And then when you know the solution, you have to build a community that supports

the solution. So in the case of the shelter in the net deficit, we knew the problem, that was easy, it was the deficit. We knew the solution, we had to pay it off. But you had to create the vision that allowed people to join, and then you look for people for whom that's their passion. I have never convinced anybody to join something that wasn't theirs to begin with. If there's something that the world needs done, there are people that will support it. My job was to provide support, provide some resources, information, knowledge, tools, but then kind of get out of their way. And why that matters is, I left the YW two-and-a-half years ago, and under Sharon Roberson's leadership, it's doing more today than ever. And if it had been about me and my relationships and my knowledge, it would've died when I left, but it is not about me, it's about that community.

Leah: I've loved learning from Pat, Marcie, Sherry and other mentors in my life, and I wanted to take this opportunity to give a little bit of guidance to anyone listening who wants to find a mentor but doesn't know where to start. Maybe you work at a company where there aren't many people you look up to, or maybe you're an entrepreneur and don't really know what you need to know next or where to start.

So if you're thinking about mentorship, the first step is to really get to know yourself. What skills do you have? What are you looking to learn? Are there people already in your life or network who might be able to introduce you to a mentor or be a mentor themselves?

Once you've started to answer some of those questions, do a little research. Look at the people you admire in your industry and find other people that follow them online. If you are in college or early in your career, there are likely mentorship programs at your school or local chamber of commerce or women's groups. But mentorship is not always about being young and finding someone older and wiser. Some of my current mentors are younger than me, but they have more experience or skill in an area that I'm looking to grow.

So once you find the person that you want to be mentored by, make sure you do a little homework. And your conversation, whether it be honestly on LinkedIn direct message or Instagram, or you find your email, start out by saying "here is what I

admire about you. This is what I'd like to learn. May I buy you a cup of coffee or lunch?" And I know you're thinking, "Leah, we're in COVID world. That might not happen. Or they might not live by me." Here's what I have done and recently someone did for me. They actually reached out and had something delivered to me. So you can either have a \$5 Starbucks card or a local coffee shop gift card sent to them, or you can just send a gift card online. That's the perfect thing to do, because then you're asking for a Zoom meeting. And Zoom is a really good way to go, honestly even when the world opens back up. One of the things I've found is that if it is someone who's very very busy, asking for no more than 20-30 minutes for your first meeting is very important, and being able to keep it to that time frame. In this world there's a lot of things coming at us, especially if someone is a mom or taking care of their parents. You just never know what someone is going through. So be very specific, tell them what you admire about them, tell them what you want to learn from them, only ask for 20-30 minutes of your time and be respectful of that. At the end you will want to have a follow up process. So already know that you're going to send them a thank you, you're going to be taking notes of what you've learned so that you can follow up with them. And then ask them, is it OK if I follow up with you? Or if there's something specific that they give you guidance on, and you need to go and do something that they've suggested, that's when you can also ask them, "Would you mind after I do this thing that you've suggested that I follow up with you and let you know how it goes?" That's really important, if someone does give you guidance, or especially if they make an introduction for you to someone else, it's very important to let someone know what the result was. So let's say Sherry introduced me to Pat, because there was something specific that I wanted to learn that maybe wasn't her skillset but it was Pat's. So after I get that introduction to Pat and have that meeting, it's my job to then follow up with Sherry, to say "Sherry, thank you so much for this introduction, this is when we met and this was the result of that meeting, and I'm so grateful to you for making that happen. Please let me know if there's anything I can do for you." Always offer for you to help them with something. And you need to come knowing a couple of those things that you might do. For example, what are the organizations that they're already a part of? Is there something in their lives that they care about? One way to honor someone that really doesn't need anything from you is to make a donation or volunteer for an organization that's important to them. So

before you go into that meeting, understand what it is that you can do to give back. I hope that that's helpful.

So I really believe that mentorship is something every person can benefit from, and there are also different mentors for different seasons of your life. If you're looking for more ways to build a community of business women and leaders, I hope you know that Her Story of Success is a great place to start. We're always working to find new ways to connect women with all four types of our mentorship. You can follow us on the socials @HerStoryofSuccess, sign up for our email newsletter at our website, herstoryofsuccess.com, so you can be the first to know about some of the amazing events, and other content we plan to provide throughout the year.. I'm honored and excited to be a part of your journey to find mentorship and inspiration that will help you get to the next step of your journey of success and fulfillment.

So reach out to us and let us know what you took away from this episode, or if you have some guidance for women that would be helpful. So let me know! I'd love to share that on our blog or our socials. You can email us, again, at info@herstoryofsuccess.com, and we'll see you soon.

Thanks for tuning in! At Her Story of Success, we are on a mission to help women-business owners, leaders and professionals build your tribe and reach your next level of success by connecting you to one another, equipping you with resources and empowering you along your journey. We would love for you to be a part of our tribe and further this mission by sharing this podcast with a friend or co-worker you want to help succeed. And you can stay up to date with all of our episodes, blogs and events by signing up for our newsletter at Herstoryofsuccess.com.

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!