

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Ready to add a big dose of positivity and empowered perspective to your day? You've come to the right place. Welcome to She Said/She Said Podcast. I'm Laura Cox Kaplan. Here, we tackle everything from imposter syndrome and confidence building to the best advice on how to lead yourself through life pivots, including the ones that knock you flat. For the past three years, I've talked to hundreds of experts about their stories. Here, you'll find their actionable advice and lessons as well as my own tools that you can put to use in your own life. Stick around, I think you'll find this investment in you well worth it. Hi friends, no matter which side of the political aisle you may sit on, there's general agreement that things must change in terms of the political rhetoric and how we treat each other. If you're struggling with what you can do personally, to make the world just a little better right now, you have come to the right place.

My guest today is the author of a terrific and incredibly well-timed new book, entitled Civility Rules! She is a veteran of the Reagan White House, who, after working on the advanced team left to start her own very successful, special events business called Practical Protocol, which she launched in 1990. Most of you, no doubt have heard of and read George Washington's Rules of Civility, for those who haven't, I urge you to check it out as well. It's a list of some 110 things that the first U.S. president assembled throughout his young life on how to behave in public and how to get along with others. Shelby was inspired by this as well as what she learned from folks like president Reagan and president Nelson Mandela, as well as from a number of other experts that she interviewed on issues of civility and protocol. I think you'll get a lot out of this conversation with Shelby. So stick around, it's coming up. Shelby, welcome to She Said/She Said Podcast.

Shelby Scarborough:

Thank you so much for having me. I'm really happy to be here.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Well, I'm delighted to have you, as I know I told you, our mutual friend, [Juanita Dougan 00:02:23] sent me a text in fact, over the weekend a couple of weeks ago and said, "You've got to talk to my friend, Shelby Scarborough. She's written this amazing book." And so I immediately downloaded the book. I was on the treadmill at the time I read half of it right on the spot. It's fantastic and incredibly well-timed. Before we get in to all of that and jump in to the heart of the book, I'd love Shelby for you to talk a little bit about yourself and tell my audience where you grew up and a little bit about your career.

Shelby Scarborough:

Sure. I grew up in Northern California, which is where I am now, but I then moved to Washington DC after I graduated from UCLA. And my first job was at the inaugural committee on the second inauguration of president Reagan. And then right after that, I was fortunate enough to be offered a job in the presidential advance office of the Reagan administration of the White House. So I got to travel all around the world, setting up events for president Reagan and learning all about sort of the idiosyncrasies of the perfection, the high level expectations that the White House requires of one in a professional position and as your first job that's a little intimidating, but it was perfect. I was not perfect. I never am. No one ever is, but the job was amazing. I then went to the state department as a protocol officer where I handled the foreign dignitaries, the guests of the president.

So I still got to go over and hang out with my buddies at the White House and see the president, but I handled the international aspect of it with a team of people. I was one of the visits officers. So that

was just really an amazing framework for some of the ways that I developed professionally, I think. I started a business right after that because my family is very entrepreneurial and I always had that itch to start my own business. So I started Practical Protocol, which carried on basically what I'd been doing at the white house and the state department, only for a non official government function.

So when president Wałęsa of Poland came in to the country, after the official visits were over, they literally handed the president over to me. And I took the rest of the trip through the country with him from a private perspective, that kind of thing, handling Nelson Mandela when he came right out of prison, he came to the United States fairly soon after he was released from prison. So I had the honor of handling part of his visit, his Washington DC part of it, and clients like that, the Pope, Pope John Paul II and lots of ministers of industry and trade, that kind of thing. So lots of foreign dignitaries visits.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. So I'm curious, we've just had the inauguration of the 46th president of the United States, Joe Biden. And I'm curious as you were watching the inauguration, which I'm sure you must have watched what your thoughts were about the advanced team doing the job for this inauguration that you did a number of years ago, what was going through your head? What were you thinking?

Shelby Scarborough:

Well, we have these traditions and certainly when I was young and starting out in this, you tend to think that's the way it always is, but it's an evolving process. So obviously with COVID and some of the other security concerns that we had, it had a very different look and feel. There were not that massive hoards of humanity there to witness it. And that's a little sad to me because that's such a hallmark of our society to be able to witness the peaceful transition of power and to participate in that, we're a participatory government and that's an important thing, but understandably, this time there had to be adjustments to that. And I think that's part of the job that we would have done was to adjust.

During the Reagan administration and the second inauguration, inauguration day was really bitter cold, and we had to change the plan for the parade and would take it indoors. Well, that decision was made the night before. So everybody was scrambling to readjust. And that's what you have to do. You have to be quick on your feet and professional and make it go like there was no problem or no changes and make it look graceful as you go, but be able to change on a dime.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, absolutely. Let's talk a bit about the book that you have written based on your own personal experience, as well as lessons that you've learned from president Reagan, president Mandela, along with a host of many, many others. When did you realize that you needed to write this book? And again, I've talked about the name of the book in the intro, it's called Civility Rules!, which is so perfect. Little double entendre there. Talk about when you realized you needed to write this book, because this has been in the works for a while as I understand it.

Shelby Scarborough:

It has been. Probably 10 years ago, I started talking to my friends, Peter and Cheryl Barnes, who write children's books that are most known for, Woodrow, the White House Mouse and Nat, Nat, the Nantucket Cat. They've written all the mouse books around civic education. And I wanted to write a children's book about George Washington's Rules of Civility. And over time, as I gathered information on it and started to really dig deeper into the subject, it evolved into to what now exists as Civility Rules!,

an adult book about looking at the deeper values of civility and looking at it as more than manners, a much more comprehensive values-based approach to character and development and what we can do on our own to be a part of the solution for civility.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, absolutely. You've organized the book based on five core principles. Maybe walk us through how you identified those five and kind of how you structured the book.

Shelby Scarborough:

Sure. Using a good old Excel spreadsheet in the early days. I took the George Washington's Rules of Civility, which is in public domain anybody can look it up on the internet or find it in the back of my book and it's 110 rules and some of them are humorous. I mean, some of them sound a little out of date, but when you really analyze the details of them, like "Thou shall not stand so close to a man. So as to [inaudible 00:08:51] a man with one spittle." Well, that sounds a little humorous, but in the days of COVID it's all the more relevant. And we understand what that means, even if the English is a bit archaic.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Shelby Scarborough:

So I sort of dissected each one of the rules and I categorized them and they basically all boiled down to one of these five values basically, trust, respect and honor, humility. We have a common courtesy, courtesy. I see courtesy, when I look at all of these rules as sort of the bridge to the humanity, to connecting people together, it's manners, but it's more than manners. It's basically putting someone else first, that kind of thing. So when you take those rules and I put them in these buckets, and then I decided to write about each of those characteristics in greater detail and use examples from history and also my own personal experience and some quotes here and there that might underscore the point.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

You had an opportunity to interview a number of different folks that are leaders in civility and protocol, and having held these significant role in our country's history. You talked to a number of these individuals personally, as well as worked with several of them as I mentioned before, who are no longer with us, but sort of lessons that you learned, maybe talk a bit about a couple of lessons that you learned, or a couple of pieces of advice that really stick with you that you've included in the book.

Shelby Scarborough:

One that just popped into my head was when I was with president Walesa of Poland. And we were on a ferry in New York Harbor steaming over to Ellis Island. So part of his visit, we were going to go and visit where all of the Polish immigrants came through Ellis Island and really understand a little bit of the history of Polish Americans. And the statue of Liberty was behind us and it was windy and loud. And so I was sort of crouching down trying to explain to him and his wife what they were going to be doing next. And it seems so simple. This is just such a logistic thing. It's not really significant, except that if you think about it, I'll use it as an analogy of other things, which is that he tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Look at me."

Because I was in fact looking at the interpreter and just that one thing really stuck with me and resonated with me that we need to look our adversaries and our friends in the eye. We need to show common humanity. We need to address the person we're talking to. We need to respect that they are a human being in and of themselves. And that we are part of the process of working together in humanity to accomplish something. So all I was trying to do is brief him about what we were trying to do, but if you look at it symbolically, it was a very important lesson.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Maybe let's talk about this idea of the actions that individuals can take, and the role that personal responsibility plays as it relates to civility, because it's so easy to say, well, that person was not nice to me, or that person called me a name, or that person said something horrible on social media, about me. Talk about the role of personal responsibility as it relates to your view of how each of us can take a responsibility for changing the current narrative and dynamic in this country.

Shelby Scarborough:

Certainly. When I wrote the book, I went back and added that chapter at the end, I wrote it at the end because as I wrote it, I knew that the theme of personal responsibility was going to be woven throughout. But at the end, it really just hit me that I needed to address it head on, that this was something so important as far as what I was trying to convey in the book that we needed to not blame other people for their incivility, but we needed to look specifically at our own. There's an old phrase in our business, it's control your controllables. So what can you control? I can't control anybody else's behavior, but I might be able to have an influence on it by mine. And we've seen positive examples of that and negative examples of that in recent times.

So we can see directly that how we respond and how we offer ourselves up, how a good popular phrase is, how we show up is really important in that process. And there's no going forward if we don't own the process ourselves. It's just about pointing fingers and telling other people how to behave. And that's not my intention in this book. I'm not trying to tell other people how to behave. I'm trying to share what I feel is important for my own practice of civility. And if someone finds that appealing to them, then I hope they might, and that they can use some of the tactics and the techniques and the thought processes there to help them on their journey.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right. That whole reciprocal nature of civility also comes through in this book, I think really beautifully. Talk about some of the memories that you have, if you will, of president Reagan and how he engaged in just those little efforts that made a big difference to others.

Shelby Scarborough:

I talk a lot sometimes in speeches about how I call it my after use story, that he always held the door for everybody, or technically he didn't as president because people held doors for him, but he was just gentlemen that way and let other people go before him, et cetera, and so when I would go get on an elevator with him, he would say, "After you." And I would say, "Oh no, after you Mr. President." Because I was supposed to be the last one in and the first one out so that he could know where he was going, and eventually secret service would just say, just get in the elevator. And my friend and colleague, Joanne Drake, who's now chief of staff up at the Reagan library has the same story. And she spent many, many more days with him personally than I ever did, but it's just his consistency of courtesy to another human being.

I know there's another story where he saw someone, I was not there, but he saw someone kind of get jostled a bit during a presentation on the steps of the White House when they were doing some... I think it was a football team and he made his personal assistant, Jim Kuhn go out and find that person off the bus before they left and made him bring them back into the oval office so he could personally apologize because he thought the secret service had jostled him. It turns out that they didn't, but he thought that and it meant so much to him to correct that error, that he made sure that happened and it was the Olympic team. So the Olympian put his own gold medal on president Reagan. And there is a picture of that interaction. But I think it shows his ultimate humanity and care for the individual as much as the country as a whole.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right. Where do you think that comes from for someone like president Reagan? There have been obviously many, many individuals, including many that you talk to and reference in this book who lived their lives really along the lines of these five principles that you talk about related to civility. But when we think about as parents raising children that will grow up to be civil individuals, talk a little bit about what's missing. What are people not doing that they used to do?

Shelby Scarborough:

To be really direct I think there's a little bit of the self-centered nature in our culture these days. I really believe that a philosophy of giving and putting someone else first of thinking about your colleague or the comfort and convenience and the respect. Showing the respect for your neighbor, your friend, your colleague, your president, all of those kinds of things, your government systems, even though I believe the government is for the people by the people and of the people, we therefore we need to treat ourselves with respect from that perspective, right? So it's about having a giving nature and a giving spirit and a service heart, and so encouraging children and I'm not a parent, but I've been around a lot of children and have many children in my life to see that the ones who show that generosity of spirit are really the happier people ultimately, and you know what? Life is short. And if we can have a little bit more joy by being civil to one another, why not?

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, absolutely. It goes to this notion in addition to raising children that will be civil to each other, but also learning how to disagree agreeably. You don't have to agree with someone else to disagree with them and what feels like it's almost a lost art form. Maybe provide listeners with some advice based on what you've put in the book about how to do that at a time when our country and our politics, even within parties, people are very divided. Talk about how you recommend people have conversations that can head in a difficult direction.

Shelby Scarborough:

There's some really simple techniques, so to speak. Communication is communication. So things like listening to learn and learn to listen, really hearing what the questions are or what the opinions might be. I think if we are trying to present to someone else, instead of offering opinions, perhaps we offer open-ended questions with a genuine curiosity. I send things to my best friend, she and I are on the opposite side of politics. And so we've been friends since we were 14 and that's not going anywhere, but we have our times when we disagree on things and that's okay, that should be okay. But it's how we talk to each other that's important about it, that we respect that the other person has a different perspective and that we don't just assume everybody's going to agree with us.

So if I'm offering up a conversation, I might send her something in the internet that I saw. And I'd say, "I'd like to hear your viewpoint on that." That's my earnest and honest way of saying, "I don't know whether to believe this, whether it seems reasonable or not. I would like to have a discussion about it from your perspective." Rather than, "Can you believe this?" Starting out with an opinion already formed, even though you might have it, we all do, but it's just how we approach the conversation I think that opens up the possibility of a greater positive dialogue.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. I love that. That's really well said. One of the core themes in the book relates to humility, which I know you've said is one of your favorites. One of the things that jumped out at me that I think sometimes can be confusing to people and where there's a gender element associated with this is this idea of humility and lack of power. Like if you're too humble, you potentially lose power. And I think this can be a really difficult balancing act for women in particular. Give me your thoughts on that.

Shelby Scarborough:

Yeah, I still think it's a difficult process that maybe 20 years ago or 30 years ago when I started my career, it was even harder because if we didn't speak up, we didn't get heard a lot. Again, I referenced Jim Kuhn who was president Reagan's personal aid. We did a project after the White House one time, and I'd write a note or I whisper into his ear and he turned to me and he said, "These are your ideas. You need to speak up and say them out loud. Go ahead." But I was trying to respect the fact that I was partnering with him. It was his client and I was trying to go with the protocol that I felt was respectful of him and not to jump ahead and to do part of the process, but I love the fact that he actually called it out and asked me to step up to the plate.

So I think whether it's women or men or anything, you just have to have a good sense of what's going on at the time and not have it be about ego. I think there's a fine balancing act as men and women put our egos behind us and not have to be the voice in the room to make sure you're the voice in the room, but think about what we have to say and what we have to offer and be thoughtful about it and be confident in it when we do it. And that's going to carry a lot more weight long-term than anything else. If we're trying to just make sure that we're heard, I think that ultimately backfires.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

That's a really, really good point. And it's so counter to oftentimes advice that young women are given when they are given a seat at the table and are urged to speak up. And she legitimately may not have anything to say, and yet will feel this pressure to say something anyway. And I think it's getting that balance right and understanding it's not just about talking for talking sake, but actually having something to say and something to contribute that keeps the conversation moving along. I think it's such a good point. Talk a bit about the connection between happiness and civility. We are a very unhappy culture and society at the moment, which I think is so incredibly sad. Do you see a connection between happiness and civility?

Shelby Scarborough:

I definitely do. I talk about joy and civility being two sides of the same coin. And my next book is about joy. It's called The Joy Journey and I haven't finished it yet because I chose to finish the Civility Rules book, but-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Thank goodness you did. They are both really important, But I'm happy you started with this one.

Shelby Scarborough:

[inaudible 00:23:13]. And my middle name is Joy. And so, it sort of resonated with me when I came home from Washington almost 10 years ago now to help my family with some health issues and some business issues and to sort of step back into working with my family on the family business. And it was just a very trying time. And so I just found at that point that I needed to find my own joy and I needed to help my parents in particular find joy in their day when there were things that tend to rob you of it if you let it do it.

So when I look at civility and joy, I say, without joy, civility is kind of hard because if you're grumpy and upset and angry and blaming others, or just not looking at life through a rosier lens, it's really hard to be nice to someone else or even to yourself for that matter. And we sometimes our own worst enemies that way. So it becomes self perpetuating then. And if you're not civil, where's the joy? So to me, it's all the same thing. It all wraps up into one big message for me in my life and hopefully it's a message that resonates beyond me.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right. It's like that old adage, when you think you're going to feel better, if you snark right back at the person who's snarked at you and maybe for a nanosecond, you do feel better. And then you don't. And it's that idea of maybe stopping for a second and recognizing that person's probably having an even crappier day than you are and showing empathy in that moment can be really, really powerful. And you talked about this in the book.

Shelby Scarborough:

It can, and it's not always a natural process for us. It is a practice, we do need to practice. I know I need to practice it. And it's an important step in really breaking through in being able to have a civil conversation with just about anybody.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. How about calling people out when someone's really uncivil? How do you do that without it becoming an argument?

Shelby Scarborough:

So this is really tricky because as somebody who doesn't like confrontation in general, I'm not really somebody who wants to fight. There are people who do.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Shelby Scarborough:

So it becomes very, very important, I think to stay present, to really take a pause and think about what the next sentence might be, and really ask myself if I need to correct somebody, why do I feel the need to school somebody else in their civility? I think really ultimately is I just need to stay the course and try to be as civil as possible all the way through it. That doesn't mean not setting your standards and your boundaries if somebody is literally trampling on you. I mean, I think you can easily say I'm not really

comfortable with how you're speaking to me, or I really am not comfortable with this conversation or the direction that it's going. I'd like to take a pause and take a step back. Can we rewind? Can we take a break? Can we come back to this at another time? Can we look at this from a different perspective?

But I don't find it super helpful when people are telling other people what to do. We have a kind of a policy in a group that I belong to called the Entrepreneurs' Organization. So we have a way of talking to one another and we don't give advice, which would fall under the category of schooling, someone on their civility or incivility. And the reason we don't give advice is because basically, especially entrepreneurs, who likes to be told what to do? So why would it be okay for me to tell you what to do if I don't want to be told what to do?

So this is tricky and we just need to take some time to learn how to navigate through that. And I know that with this current generation, very smart young people, when they see things like injustice and I really don't like injustice it bothers me a lot, but we have to wonder when are we the arbiter of that? Right. Are there other ways to process through the issues that we're dealing with today, than by being the one who has to stand up and say, "You're wrong." Because you know what? We could be wrong too. And nobody's got the corner on absolute knowledge.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right. We mentioned this earlier in this conversation we're on the heels of the inauguration of a new president. President Joe Biden has just given his inaugural address, I'd love for you to provide your reactions to how he did on the civility scale.

Shelby Scarborough:

Yes. He mentioned ending an uncivil war and a lot of what he talked about are the things that are in my book. So I was kind of chuckling because I thought, "Boy, if I came out with a book after his speech, people would think I plagiarized it." It was comforting for me to know that there was a resonance there that maybe I felt pretty good about where I'm landing on this subject. And also he felt it an important subject to address in his inaugural speech, that this was something that he wanted to make sure he mentioned to the country and to try to move forward and look ahead. And I hope that's the approach that he governs by and not just a speech.

It was a very poignant and moving speech. And as well, I was really touched by the Poet Laureate who spoke so eloquently and said something... I don't have it in front of me, but something for us to be the light, we have to be brave enough to also be the light. And it was the last [inaudible 00:29:19] of her poem. And I think that resonated almost the most with me because it is about civility, ultimately that we have to be brave enough to stay the course and be the light, even in the face of darkness or what we perceive as darkness.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right. Very, very well said. She was incredibly inspiring today. We've talked a little bit about interpersonal interactions as it relates to civility and how to disagree more agreeably. Let's talk about how that plays out on social media. Social media gets a really bad rap. These platforms are blamed for all the bad things that have happened in the world for better or worse. I tend to think there's an element of personal responsibility here, which is what I would love for you to talk a little bit about that advice that you have for people in expressing points of view on social platforms.

Shelby Scarborough:

Yeah. We have to think of it as we're sitting across the table from somebody and saying what we're saying. So it's not anonymous, it lives forever. Teaching our young people that what we put out there is important, that our voices should and could be heard, but we do have a personal responsibility not to yell fire in a crowded theater and really understanding the difference between the ability and the right to free speech, which I, 100% promote and agree with.

And I'm a little fearful we're going to lose it because of incivility and at the same time, having the responsibility to step back and not rile things up unnecessarily. So if I say things like loser, or get a life or go back where you... I mean, those are just unhelpful, uninspiring and they don't do anything. They definitely do let somebody aggression out, but I just would love to see more conscious effort and teachings on that to say, think before you speak, this is the oldest adage we have ever had. And why can't we use that with social media? Because we're too in the habit of being too to presence and to in the moment and not stepping back a little bit.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right. Talk about how someone should respond when somebody says, you're a loser, go back where you came from, you're this, you're that, whatever. If you're the person who's trying to take the high road and not start a fight, what's your advice for how to respond to that type of thing, and also sort of the emotional control component that oftentimes, not oftentimes that really always underpins all of this because your blood pressure goes up, you get upset, that's what causes this reaction in the first place. But maybe talk a little bit about that?

Shelby Scarborough:

Exactly. The popular aspects of mindfulness right now, the terminology take a deep breath, step back, the old adage of write it out and put it under your pillow and read it and then probably tear it up. We don't need to respond. We don't. And I fall prey to that as well. I was almost going to say, fall victim, and that's completely counter to what I tried to talk about, which is I'm not a victim. And if I engage in it, shame on me, it's my responsibility to do my part. So I found haters out there trashing the concept of civility. And I think it's kind of interesting because I've just said haters and trashing, so let's just rephrase it, right? There are people who don't think that civility is the right way to go, and they are entitled to their viewpoint.

And I disagree and I respectfully disagree and I wrote a lot about it and I've thought a lot about it, and they can still disagree with me, but I just feel strongly about what I've spent some time practicing and learning at the same time not everybody's going to agree with us on everything and we don't have to engage. We just can step back and not engage. But I do think that this is really important point because there was a light bulb for me that went on that civility is really important in democracy, because if we can only have one voice in the room, we don't have a democracy. And just the actions and the activities of the last few weeks with Twitter and all of the big tech companies taking conservative voices off. And believe me, I understand again, the knee-jerk reaction to want to solve a problem quickly, but that's not the point here.

Democracy is not quick. Democracy requires patience and fortitude and strength of character. And cutting off a voice that we disagree with is censorship in the name of civility is not civility. It's censorship. So there's real distinctions there. And I struggle with this because when you see the torrent of terrible stuff out there on social media, it's really hard to say, "Oh, it should be able to be stated." But just know what I look at is 50% of the country agrees with the opposite of what you hate.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Shelby Scarborough:

So who is the arbiter? And we're in a very interesting time right now. And this discussion needs to be loud and proud and deep and wide because if we allow the country to just lose its ability to talk to one another, which is through technology these days, we are in a world of hurt.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. All the more reason why your book is so well timed and such a great read, it really takes us back to core principles. And I think it's such an important reminder of the way in which we should think about respect for each other and empathy for each other. And this notion of humility. It's a reasonably quick read, not a terribly long book. I highly recommend it. Put it on your nightstand, downloaded on your Kindle. It really is worthwhile. Shelby, I know could spend lots and lots of time together. I loved this conversation. It's incredibly well-timed as I said before, and I am grateful that you wrote the book and I'm grateful that you spent some time with us today.

Shelby Scarborough:

Thank you so much. And I know we have so many mutual friends and I was looking through all of the people you've interviewed and I'm honored to be among them now. Thank you.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Thank you. I really, really appreciate it. Friends to learn more about my guests today, Shelby Scarborough and her terrific book, Civility Rules! Check out the show notes for this episode, episode 136. And if you're enjoying, She Said/She Said Podcast, I hope you'll let me know. Send me an email, direct message me, contact me on the website. You can reach me through all of those different venues. I love your feedback. And I love hearing from you. I also love it when folks leave us a review on iTunes. So if you're so inclined, hit the review button, give us five stars if you don't mind. And a few nice words, it's really, really helpful. It helps others find this podcast who are looking for this kind of constructive, thoughtful, positive, and hopefully uplifting content that we provide every week. I am so grateful that you have chosen to spend your time with us today. I hope you found this investment in you, well worth it.