

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.

Hey, friend, welcome. I am feeling particularly inspired this week and I wanted to share some thoughts about potential and mindset and the important connection between the two. It is such an exciting time of year and you know it feels especially promising given the progress against COVID, breaking out of our masks, and returning to normal activities. It feels so great, doesn't it? I especially love seeing graduation ceremonies that were postponed last year, due to COVID, finally happening, along with the 2021 ceremonies. With those celebrations, it is great to see so many new graduates who are launching into the world and their potential is truly inspiring. This idea of potential resonates so deeply with me, as I suspect it does with many of you.

The word potential is in fact, one of my very favorites. Webster's defines it as having or showing the capacity to become or develop into something in the future. This idea of potential is a common theme that runs through this podcast. Each week, we hear perspective about finding and harnessing potential. And in the process, we hear stories about how incredible women just like you have created opportunities for themselves and others, and how they've plowed through both extraordinary, as well as very ordinary challenges. Their stories are relatable and they tend to align around themes of taking charge and owning their circumstances, good, bad, or otherwise.

One of the things that I love about this idea of potential is that it also aligns so beautifully with the concept of mindset. I often reference the work of Stanford professor, Carol Dweck, related to growth versus fixed mindset. Essentially, do we show up with a mindset focused on what we can learn or a mindset focused on accepting things as they are without recognizing our potential to improve them? This idea can have a big impact on our ability to create the change that we hope to see in the world. Through the stories and lessons that are shared by so many of my guests on this podcast, we see the difference between what it looks like when we seek and create opportunities and the impact we can have based on how we choose to show up. The difference in how our mindset impacts the outcome is huge.

Now, let's be honest, even the most positive can-doers of us has those days when showing up with her growth mindset is simply more difficult than on other days. That is certainly true for me and I suspect it's true for many of you as well. But what I've learned is the incredible difference that it can make when we do, when I do. I see this play out over and over again in my own life and in some of the most compelling conversations that we've had on She Said/She Said Podcast. For me, these are often lessons that I've learned the hard way. As I think about all the new graduates, even with all that raw potential, just like generations before them, they will run into inevitable roadblocks. So, today, I want to take a bit of time and talk about five lessons that are important for realizing potential and that also help ensure that roadblocks are really more like speed bumps on the highway of success. And by success. I mean, however you choose to define it for yourself.

These lessons are informed by my own journey and by conversations that I've had on this podcast. As you might've guessed, the concepts of potential and mindset play a pretty big part. The first lesson is one that I learned even before I launched my career, don't let others define your dreams or determine your capabilities. When I was going through the college admission process, I had my heart set on attending the University of Texas at Austin. I'd been to visit a few times and I knew that it was the

place where I was meant to be. I was in the top 1% of my graduating class and ultimately graduated as valedictorian. I'm not telling you that to brag, but to explain that by graduating from a high school in Texas, at least then, that ranking allowed me admission to any state college or university in the state.

So, the admission process, no matter which university I chose, was actually a piece of cake. I didn't need an incredibly high GPA and also great SATs, which was a blessing because one of those factors was much more in my favor than the other. Around the same time, an old family friend who had attended the university, but ultimately failed out and moved back home, advised me that I simply didn't have the academic background to make it there. You see, I grew up in a small town in Rural Texas. She had attended a much larger and better resourced high school. If she couldn't make it, then she reasoned how could I. It's not crazy logic, but it overlooked one very important element. She nor anyone else could really know just how hard someone else would work to achieve their dream. To underestimate someone with a dream is almost always a mistake.

Nevertheless, my 17 year old self decided that our family friend knew more, so I listened to her. I passed up my dream school and instead, applied at a smaller and less academically rigorous university. I quickly realized that I had made a mistake and figured out what I would need to do to transfer. Now, transferring turned out to be more difficult than if I had just applied to the University of Texas in the first place, but I ultimately managed to get admitted. I won't kid you, my time at UT was tough. I did struggle. I needed tutoring. I received a few horrible grades here and there, but in the end and after a full five years, I finally graduated with a pretty decent GPA.

I continue to be incredibly proud of that accomplishment and maybe more so, because I had to struggle and work hard. The lesson here as you might've guessed, don't let anyone talk you out of what you know you can do. Even if you fail and maybe especially if you fail, that doesn't have to be the end. If you want it badly enough, you'll do what you have to do to make it and in the process, learn a great deal about yourself and what you're made of. I'm so grateful for this lesson and for the fact that I learned it so early. It also helps that I had incredibly supportive parents as well, which brings me to my second lesson. Even when you are determined to do what's needed to accomplish your goal, it's important that you surround yourself with people who believe in you, people who make you want to be better and who challenge you.

If your parents are anything like mine, they probably told you this growing up, but it's true in more ways than I likely understood when that wisdom was originally imparted on me. I've learned that it's important to not just settle for whomever lands on your doorstep, but to seek role models and mentors and strategic partners. And in the words of my podcast guest, Harris Faulkner, who joined me in episode 155, she thinks about this group as a special forces unit and talks about the importance of not being afraid to cut folks loose who aren't really with you for the entire mission. It's a beautiful way of thinking about that concept. Bottom line, aim to surround yourself with people who help do refuel you, who challenge you, and most of all, who believe in your potential. That's especially important when you're having trouble believing in yourself.

Now, I realize not everyone is blessed with supportive parents and if that's the case for you, find other people who are. Now, a somewhat related point, if you have doubters and let's face it, we all do, try to limit their impact. Don't allow yourself to internalize their negative energy. And related to my earlier example, don't let them make decisions that only you can really make for yourself. This is also true as you build teams, as you decide which organizations you want to work for and with, and when you're tasked with creating an organizational culture yourself. It's also true as you pick a life partner or a partner in business, who's with you? Do they compliment your skill sets and bring attributes to the table that make you, the organization, or the project better?

Do they help you think more broadly and with a greater chance for conquering problems? Do they bring a different point of view? Having supporters who also bring a different perspective can make both of you smarter. My third lesson relates to fear and the importance of recognizing fear for what it actually is. Our brains are wired to alert us to danger, but they don't necessarily differentiate between actual danger and taking a risk or trying something new. Many of us feel fear or discomfort every time we face something that we haven't tried before. Everything from more minor things like giving a speech or asking for a promotion to much bigger things like changing jobs or careers or moving across the country.

Fear is not necessarily a signal that you shouldn't take action, but instead, it's your brain telling you, "Hey, this is something new." When you recalibrate how you think about and process what that little voice is saying inside your head and you learn to recognize what really is and isn't fear, then that can become a powerful tool. Learning to use this tool requires that you become fully conscious of which fears to heed and which to use as fuel, and it takes practice to learn the difference. One of my favorite sayings is turn fear into fuel by redefining it as excitement. Meaning, you literally tell yourself in those moments when it's something you know you must do, that it's not fear you feel, but instead, excitement. I have yet to give a speech or a presentation, and oftentimes on the podcast, when I don't do this myself.

I loved that my friend, Dana Perino said the same thing when she joined me on this podcast in episode 146. She also talks about this concept in her terrific book, which is entitled Everything Will be Okay. By the way, her book is a great addition for your summer reading list. Another trick related to fear is one that I learned from Tim Ferris. He's the author of The 4-Hour Workweek and Tools of Titans, among other thought provoking titles. And he hosts a terrific podcast called Tribe of Mentors. I often use an idea he coined called fear setting. I use it in courses and in workshops that I teach. It's inspired by Tim and it requires that you dial into what you're really afraid of and that you ask yourself, what's the worst thing that could happen.

Now, I like to take it a step further and ask myself, what might I learn from that bad outcome? Again, reinforcing for myself that idea of a growth mindset that we talked about earlier. I find it super helpful to have thought about in advance, the downside or a setback as a potential upside. It's a great way to process risks and also to develop a dataset that can lead you to action. Now, one small note of caution here, too much thinking can lead to paralysis. So, it's important to think about this as a tool and a tool that's aimed at actually moving you forward. Again, it relates back to this idea of mindset. Mindset really is everything. How you show up in the world and how you face and think about challenges is critical, both to your future success, however you define it, and also to your future happiness.

It gives you agency and power over your emotions. It enables you to lead yourself, which is essential if you want to effectively lead others. When you face a setback, are you thinking about what you've learned and how you'll apply it, or are you giving up? When you face someone who gives you constructive or difficult feedback on your performance, are you accepting it as a chance to get better and to learn, or are you internalizing it and saying to yourself, "I'll never be good enough?" Mindset matters. It creates the condition necessary for learning and for turning less desirable situations into something much more positive. It can literally shape the impact that you have on the world.

And finally, and I think this is a big one, recognize that you're part of something that's bigger than you. This idea helps me focus on those little things that I can do every single day to try to make the world just a little bit better, even if that's just a 1% improvement day over day. That idea helps me align content for this podcast and for my other efforts that are focused on helping others to reach their potential. One of my earlier podcast guests was a woman named Janine Driver and she reinforced why this idea of the 1% rule really works. It works because it's manageable. We can't always get 20% or 50%

improvement, but we can always get 1% day over day. And if we aim for 1% every single day, it becomes a habit. And that habit helps to motivate us to push for another point of improvement and another and another and another. And before you know it, it all adds up.

This idea can have a direct bearing on how we treat others as well. It's harder to be mean or to respond in a less kind way when we pause for a second and think about the bigger picture. How might our treatment of someone else impact the greater good? How might that come back to us or to those we love? What if we aim that same 1% rule at being just a little kinder and more empathetic every single day? What would happen if we put 1% more positive energy out into the world and onto social media every single day. Now, none of us is perfect, certainly not me, but if we each aim for a 1% improvement and showing some others some grace and space, it adds up and it can go a long way.

It's funny, even as my own personal definition of success has evolved along with my life and career, these five lessons in one form or another have continued to serve me well. And I see a huge difference in those instances, in which I don't embrace them. I hope you'll find some value in these five things too. They work, whether you're just launching as a new graduate, whether you're navigating a big shift in your profession or your career, or pulling yourself back up and dusting off after a setback. I've used these lessons over and over to guide me through decisions and to navigate the tricky stuff. I'd love to hear what tools are in your toolkit and how you develop them based on your own lessons, and most importantly, how your own tools help you plow through when the going gets tough.

For those who launched into your careers a few years ago, what still works for you? And for those just launching, what are your biggest struggles right now? I'd really love to hear. Until then, have a great start to your week. I hope you found this little investment in you well worth it. Please be sure to let me know. Friend, if you're enjoying, She Said/She Said Podcast, I would love to hear from you. You can reach me via the contact link on the website at [shesaidshesaidpodcast.com](http://shesaidshesaidpodcast.com) or on any of the social media platforms. I'm at Laura Cox Kaplan on Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. As always, I'm grateful that you spent some time with me today. I hope you found this little investment in you well worth it. I'll see you next week. Take care.