

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Hey, friend, welcome to She Said/She Said. Here on this podcast, I'm joining forces with topnotch guests to share life and career lessons, always with an eye toward insight, inspiration and the drivers that help us build influence. I'm Laura Cox Kaplan. I've spent three decades mastering the art of influence, whether you're starting a business, raising money for a cause, advocating for a promotion or running your own household, understanding the different levers of influence will increase your of success whatever your goals may be. Listening to She Said/She Said Podcast may just be the smartest, most efficient investment you can make in you.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Hey, friend, welcome to the podcast. This week, we're talking about the importance of developing good problem solving skills and how those skills contribute to building and sustaining influence, which of course is our big topic for this season. My guest is Lisa Gable. Lisa is an innovative business woman and globally recognized expert in problem solving. For more than three decades, Lisa has tackled challenges across government, business, nonprofits, politics, and NGOs.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

She has held leadership roles at Intel, PepsiCo, the world fair as a U.S. ambassador and many, many others. She has taken her diverse career experience and developed a methodology for problem solving that can be applied to organizations large and small, and also to our own personal and professional development. Now, interestingly, Lisa's approach brings manufacturing techniques together with diplomacy. You may be saying to yourself, "Okay, how do those two things fit together?"

Laura Cox Kaplan:

She outlines all of this in her just released Amazon best selling business book entitled Turnaround. Lisa joins us today to talk about both her journey and we dig in to this very clear eyed, straightforward method for getting you, your business or your project back on track. And her advice, I think applies whether it's your Fortune 500 company, your school board, or maybe even your small business venture. We break all of this down, which is very simple, but I think the steps that Lisa outlines are not always valued.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

And that includes a real focus on how we treat people in trouble situations when things just aren't working. Lisa also hits on a number of the levers of influence in this conversation, not just our primary topic of problem solving, but also the value of a strong network of learning to tell our stories, of valuing relationships of mentors and so much more. So stay with me, my conversation with Lisa Gable is coming up now.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Lisa, welcome back to She Said/She Said Podcast.

Lisa Gable:

Thank you so much for having me. It's so hard to imagine that it was three and a half years ago when I was starting my new job and you were so kind to bring me on. And it's thrilling to do this as I launch the book.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Well, I'm really excited to have you back for listeners who may recall, Lisa joined us in episode 33 as she was starting as the CEO of the Food Allergy Research and Education Organization. I'm tongue tied this morning. This was her latest turnaround venture. You have since I saw you last written this fantastic book also entitled Turnaround. I would love for you to really help me dig into how this idea of problem solving helps us build and sustain influence.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

That's our topic for this season is this idea of influence, and so I'd love to spend some time with you today talking about the power of problem solving. Why don't we start our conversation with that and then we'll dig into your resume a bit more.

Lisa Gable:

Well, I appreciate it. And I think right now I call it in my own world of work, swirling and twirling. We are swirling and twirling a lot right now because there's such complexity, there's so many variables. It's so unpredictable that people are really struggling with how to focus on how to move forward. And one of the first things that I learned from Craig Barrett, who was the CEO of Intel and chairman of the board and my mentor is, speak with facts. And why is that important?

Lisa Gable:

When you're sitting in a room and people arguing or they're frustrated, being able to bring everything back to the facts, to the quantitative data, getting everybody really focused on job one, what's our core competency? Evaluating each issue that you're having as it relates to very specific facts helps ground everyone. And it takes the emotion out of it because it's really all about process, it's not about people.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Lisa, you've had this incredible resume. Literally you've checked boxes across every sector that I can think of. I'd love for you to talk about your origin story a little bit, and about how you realized that you had this skill for problem solving and what was it about problem solving that really resonated with you.

Lisa Gable:

Well, I was working at the White House in presidential personnel. I'd been going to grad school at nighttime and working at the White House during the day. And my boss, Bob Tuttle, who would later be ambassador to the court of St. James and he was head of presidential personnel and to Ronald Reagan was two hours late for a meeting. And I was in charge of escorting Barbara Barrett who was up to be the deputy of the FAA. So we're sitting in the basement of the White House and I'm like 23 years old, 24 years old and I'm talking to this woman.

Lisa Gable:

And at that time, Barbara was in her 30s. She may know, she became ambassador to Finland and Secretary of the Air Force later, and launched Space Force, that's my favorite. But I'm sitting there thinking, "What do I talk to her about?" Well, we were together for two hours, two hours, and she's a very engaging person anyway. But at the end of the conversation, we talked about my master's thesis. "You're going to school at nighttime, what are you writing your thesis on?"

Lisa Gable:

And I was writing my thesis on what's called dual use technologies, technologies with military use and civilian use. And that would include semiconductors, supercomputers, things like that. And so she goes, "Gosh, sometime you've got to meet my husband. His name's Craig Barrett. He's a senior vice president at this place called Intel Corporation." And Intel at that time wasn't the huge monolithic company that it is today.

Lisa Gable:

One thing she did is she fed me. She knew I was making no money, I was going to grad school. I was paying for everything myself. I was on scholarship at grad school, but once a month, Barbara would take me on to dinner and she would feed me. That was her duty.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Love it.

Lisa Gable:

At the end of the Reagan administration, October before the election that would elect George H.W. Bush, she said, "Let me introduce you to Craig." Craig and I sit down and he hired me, brought me to Intel. What he taught me is that you can utilize manufacturing principals to solve any problem, any problem. I was troubleshooting for Craig on things like K through 12 education because there weren't CSR programs back then. I'm old, this was a long time ago. Now it's the norm. There weren't ESG programs.

Lisa Gable:

What we set up set the stage for those programs. He had me go troubleshoot issues around export controls with the CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency. And he also had me troubleshoot a major brand problem that we were having at Intel. We'd lost the rights to a trademark. We were getting ready to invest billions of dollars in the Intel Inside Program, and so they wanted to understand, what were we doing wrong? And he taught me how to use statistical process control in quality improvement processes, how you focus on increasing outputs and decreasing cost.

Lisa Gable:

And I realized in '94 that, hey, if Intel's struggling with this as they move from business to business, to business, to consumer, I bet the rest of Silicon Valley is going to have the same problem. So I quit my job, match to my parents chagrin and I went around and I started talking to people at Oracle and all these other big companies. And I said, "You're going to have this problem." And guess what? Nobody was having the problem. They're like, "Okay, great, nice to meet you."

Lisa Gable:

And so nine months out, I really thought I'd made the biggest mistake of my life. Oh my God, I left my job, I'm not making any money. I was doing weird odd jobs to make ends meet, but I was still out there pitching to everybody. I kept saying, "You're going to have this problem that Intel hedge, you're going to have the same problem. Because your systems are not going to support consumer and you have to talk directly to the consumer."

Lisa Gable:

At that nine month point, my phone started ringing off the hook and I went from having literally eating peanut butter and ramen noodles to hiring 20 consultants to work for me on various projects with some of the biggest high tech companies in the world. Each of them were running into these issues and somebody would tap somebody's shoulder in a meeting and go, "You know that lady was in here? She kept telling us what she did at Intel. Should we look at that?"

Lisa Gable:

That's what I had my epiphany that I really had something that would be applicable across all sectors.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I want you to back up for a second because there's a number of things that are super interesting about that story that you just told. But one that sticks out to me is where the confidence came from to basically quit your job and launch into something that other people weren't buying into yet. And while you're an amazing salesperson, that takes a tremendous amount of confidence to convince them, "I've got something you need, you just don't know it yet."

Lisa Gable:

Well, I'm going to back it up a little bit because it also gets into another story. I've always had... I love to solve problems and I've been able to through my life and career, identify that purple elephant in the room is wearing the pink Tutu and has sparkles on his head. Does no one else see that? But what I had to learn is how to channel my confidence as a young woman into conversation in a way that people would listen to me. And so I wouldn't be that annoying, young... I started working in the Reagan administration when I was 19, and so I had very high level jobs at an extremely young age and with that comes arrogance and not knowing when to keep your mouth shut.

Lisa Gable:

We had a situation where I had redesigned on paper using Intel's manufacturing processes, what I thought needed to be put in place for export control. I was 25 years old, had done an entire redesign and I went and I pitched it at the CIA and I said, "Here's the problem, the export control process is not going to support the advance of innovation. Other countries will step in because they'll be happy to sell to Russia and China." It was during the cold war. And so I sold it in.

Lisa Gable:

I came back to another meeting and there was a big beltway bandit at the table for the next meeting and they were getting 50 million to redesign this program using my outline in the Defense Intelligence Agencies, in the CIA. I was livid, I was so mad. I held it in because I never get mad in public, that is one thing my mother taught me. So I'm sitting there, sitting there, "Yep, it's a great idea. Boy, I love, love the idea." I'd actually published on the idea, it was in a magazine, it was in the defense magazine. It was my first big publication.

Lisa Gable:

And I remember marching into Craig's office and just telling him, "And, oh my God, that was a contract Intel could have. We could have had that contract, Craig and it was my idea and it's published in this magazine. They stole my idea." He goes, "Lisa, what do I do? I sell semiconductors, what's job for me?"

Selling semiconductors." He said, "If somebody else is going to pay somebody," he goes, "Yeah, Intel could have done this, but that's not what we do." He said, "If somebody else is going to pay for it and knock the boulders out of the way for me to sell semiconductors, I can sell millions and billions of semiconductors."

Lisa Gable:

And so I think the issue became at that point is having a really good mentor who taught me, when do you speak? When do you hold your fire? What attributes need to be part of each set of remarks that you make? And then how do you best present your information and also stay in your lane and recognize that you do have one job. And so that, that is more of the issue, which is I learned how to do that. And I was very respectful when I went into those companies and sold. I'd done my research, I'd researched what they were doing. I actually anticipated where their market was going to go.

Lisa Gable:

But I politely walked out the door when they didn't take sale, and then I kept in touch with them. But you have to learn when to hold it back and when to put it forward.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

How do you not lose momentum when you get no, no, no over and over and over again, even though you know your idea is the idea? You know eventually it's going to catch on, but how do you keep your confidence strong?

Lisa Gable:

You talk to your mentors and your friends, and what they do is they prop you back up, they dust you off and they send you back up the hill. And I think I was able to develop at least a level of respect with people that they could hear what I was saying. They didn't think I was crazy, it wasn't right for the moment. And I think that's another thing, everything in life is about timing and there are going to be these primary inflection points. And if you're lucky and I've been very fortunate in that I have been able to enter in at that inflection point, at the right time with the right solution to do the turnarounds that are talked about in the book.

Lisa Gable:

But let me tell you, there have been many times where I tried and sold, and it fell flat on its face and people didn't like it. The irony is, I have watched throughout my career and I've actually taught myself to feel good about it, where people have taken that idea that I created that was rejected and used it elsewhere and ultimately in one case, it ended up solving all their problems. And yet when I had put it forward, it took a year. It took a year after my departure from that conversation for the idea to have its moment and people called me and they said, "Boy, your idea was really great idea. Now we're now we're all doing it."

Lisa Gable:

But you've got to feel satisfaction in that, you have to feel positive about it. You have to have pride and you have to recognize you're not always going to be the one who gets to be the center of the stage on your good idea.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

That's a really, really valuable lesson. It's a really valuable lesson. I would love for you to jump into the book a bit. It's terrific, I had a chance to read an advance copy, so I recommend that folks listening go out and get Lisa's book. It's entitled Turnaround, it's available as of this week. And it is already what? Number three on the Amazon bestseller list globally? Which is an amazing accomplishment. Congratulations, Lisa.

Lisa Gable:

Thank you.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

You do a couple of interesting things in this book. You're combining a focus on manufacturing with diplomacy, which is such an interesting combination of things. Let's dive into the book a bit. There's a four-step process that you talk about. Maybe walk us through that.

Lisa Gable:

Sure. Step number one is visualize the future. If you have a magic wand and you could wave it and the future would be where you want it to be, that's what you keep in your mind. It's where you revisit and come back to. But the reality is it's not where you are today, and so step, no number two is that you have to audit the past. You actually have to take a look and figure out, why did we start this organization? Dust off the old bylaws, dust off the old reasons, go back to original marketing materials.

Lisa Gable:

What was the core essence of the business or the organization or the activity that caused you to get it started? And how have you gone off course? Is it still viable? And audit everything that you're doing and measure it against that perfect future, because the question is whether you've created distractions, which can be very costly and if taking you down different rat holes and you may love them dearly, but they're not the core competency. Once you do that audit process and you're ranking and rating everything, you have to make hard decisions.

Lisa Gable:

And that's how you create your path from the present to the future, to that beautiful future that you've envisioned, and through ranking and rating, you have to get rid of things. And that's really hard. It's really, really hard in some cases, as I've said, you put your heart, soul, blood, sweat, and tears into something, and understanding when you have to hit the pause button on it and let it go is one of the hardest emotional decisions that anybody can make in any organization. But you have to do that because you're stuck, you're not financially sustainable. The economics of your business do not make sense.

Lisa Gable:

And once you've done that process, you've developed what I call a decision tree. And it allows you to do, if we do these things, is it a yes answer? And we do this is a no answer, we do that. That brings everybody on to the same page and it grounds everybody in how you're developing that path forward. The fourth step is you done all the work and now you're ready to go with speed, confidence, agility, and

heart. Stop questioning yourself. You did all the work, you had the answers and you've got to move forward.

Lisa Gable:

Sometimes we hear the term, you got to fly the plane while you're building it. Yep, you do. But the good news is the steps I gave you have allowed you to quality control and check and balance each of your decisions to make your forward movement possible. And where does the heart come from? What I realized through my life and it's always the hardest thing for me is every decision you make in a turnaround impacts a person. It impacts a human being, your customer, your community your employee.

Lisa Gable:

If the economics of the business don't work, then someone will lose their job. And to recognize that it's about the structure of the business, yes, that individual may have been part of the bad decision making, but the reality is, as you know, business is complicated, government programs are complicated, there are a lot of variables. And so have heart for that person. See how that you communicate with them, recognize that if you help them get another job, you may put them in a place where they can partner with you in the future.

Lisa Gable:

You actually could end up working for that per person in the future. And I'm always stunned when big companies or organizations have a restructuring and employees leave, people stop talking to them. They're not dead, they're out there, help them. Because if you help them now and they're good people who work really, really hard, then they can be part of your future. Because the world is merging in so many different ways at the moment through the advancement of technology and innovation that I don't believe you should just let relationships go.

Lisa Gable:

I believe you should continue to nurture them and and recognize that you're making a hard decision, you have to make it, but you can do it in a nice way.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Maybe give us some advice, anytime you have to let someone go, whatever the circumstances may be, it can be one of the toughest decisions that you have to make. Maybe give listeners a bit of advice on how to handle that in the kindest and most diplomatic way possible.

Lisa Gable:

Well, in one way you want to have the conversation in an almost impersonal way, and here's what I mean. You acknowledge all the good things that the person's done, but what you do is you frame the, this is where we're at within the context of the functionality and the economics of the entity that you are running. And that depersonalizes it, that helps the person to understand and actually feel better that they're not a bad person, they haven't done a bad job, but they no longer fit.

Lisa Gable:

Now, let's say that the person is not the right person for the job. Perhaps they didn't have the skillsets and someone promoted them too quickly. At that point, if you are in a good rapport, you can mention that it was unfortunate, but you recognize that maybe they hadn't had this type of training in the past. But they're really, really good at certain things, is why you hired them, is why they're in the organization. So be willing to have a conversation with them as a senior level person about how to leverage their strengths for the next opportunity.

Lisa Gable:

And if you feel comfortable doing so, I always write a letter of recommendation for the person. And then we end the conversation by talking about, "What do you want me to highlight? What would be your expert world scenario? What would you really like to do?" And then we talk about, "Well, where did you do that at this place and what are the results that you had?" And I write very personalized letters, that means a lot because it allows the person to walk out with their head held high, and it allows the restructuring to take the emotional burden or the questioning that might go on off the shoulders of that person who is now a job seeker.

Lisa Gable:

And I also will make phone calls for people. In one restructure I did, I made a lot of phone calls, hooked people up, but it's interesting. Some employees want that type of assistance and other people are done with it and they're ready to depart, and that's fine. You shake their hand and off they go.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Most of all, showing that extreme sensitivity in those circumstances and really being differential to the employee who is faced with a transition. Let's talk a bit about, Lisa also within the bucket of people and your people strategy. You come into these organizations or situations where something is broken, there's a big problem, you come in to fix it. Maybe some of the people who have been in charge have already left the circumstances. But inevitably you'll still have team members who are there on the ground who were part of executing that problematic strategy.

Lisa Gable:

Yes.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Talk about the challenge of getting an existing team on board when you are trying to pivot in a really big way. This can be super tough to get buy in for a new idea and take everybody on that journey with you. Give us some advice on how the best ways are to do that.

Lisa Gable:

And they may not stay on that journey with you. That's the harsh reality of life, is that you go in, you clearly define what you are doing in the turnaround. The best advice I was given is you walk in the door with a script and you tell them the truth, you're transparent. If you know already that you're going to have to do a restructuring and layoffs will be required, you tell people that you've been hired to do that. Secondly, you then walk them through what the steps are that you'll be taking to reach the decisions that you're making and how you plan to interact with them.

Lisa Gable:

And I work on having a highly... I do shuttle diplomacy. I bring each person in if I'm capable of it or if my middle managers are capable of doing so, it depends on the number of people. You bring them in, you talk to them individually, you ask them about what they think went wrong. And that's where you start to identify the people who may see the problem and actually be within the same framework you are about how to solve that problem and the people who just don't get it, who literally just do not understand.

Lisa Gable:

I have a phrase that I use in the book and I created it when I was in the world's fair. I love this phrase, which is you have bad apples and the bad bananas. The bad apples are people that they're in the bowl, they're in your group and everybody they touch, it's so apparent. You can see that they're corrupting the ability of the group to function in a good way moving towards the future. And that's an easier task to solve because at that point, you put a performance improvement, if it's an attitude issue, you talk to them about it.

Lisa Gable:

But if you realize that the way in which they operate is actually causing everybody to trip, you can't pass the baton to the next person, if they move the box in front of your way and you have to trip over the box. But then there's this other place to call the bad bananas, and what I learned is that an apple turns another apple bad if it's next to it, but a banana can be anywhere in your house. And if a banana goes bad, the fruit bowl will become corrupted.

Lisa Gable:

And those are the harder ones to find because you get the groups to together, you're moving forward, you got Group A, Group B, Group C, and then it's like, "What's going on? I don't understand." And there are people, they're insurrectionists, there's gorilla warfare. It could be that type of individual, or it could be the type of person that's passive aggressive, and so, as a result, it's discombobulating to everyone at else. A little harder to identify, you have to be very cognizant.

Lisa Gable:

And then there are people who just do the whisper campaigns, and we all hear about the leaks. Those bad bananas, you got to get rid of those bad bananas, they just have to go.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

How do you find them though?

Lisa Gable:

Well, you start talking to people, you have HR talk to people, you talk to people. You really start studying what's going on in the dynamic and you narrow it down and you narrow it down. I use executive coaches sometimes who come in and they can be a second eyes and ears because you have them mentoring your people and all of a sudden they're noticing that everybody is leaving in a really great mood, and then they're all returning in a really bad mood. But you have to follow it back to the source.

Lisa Gable:

And that's where I think one thing I do, which a lot of people don't, I talk about the underlying cause of the problem. And I learned that, it's a medical term, you talk about the underlying cause of the disease. It's not always apparent, you have got to pull pieces apart, pull the pieces apart. At Intel, we had, the first time I discovered it is Craig used to make me call the 800 number and he really used to make me search down the source of the problem.

Lisa Gable:

So we were having problems with the Germans. They were all angry at us and I couldn't figure out why. I was telling them about the changes we were making, we were sending them the information. We would then do phone calls because Zoom didn't exist back then, and they're still mad and I'm like, "What is wrong?" So I fly over to Germany and we're talking and they go, "Well, we never got X, Y and Z." I was like, "How did you not get it? I sent it to you six months ago." And then I checked and I said, "I sent it to you again."

Lisa Gable:

So I go down in the mail room in Frankfurt, Germany and I start opening all the doors and I start opening the boxes with the mail guy. Well guess what, everything we have been sending them was sitting in the mail room. And the problem was the mail room, the problem wasn't the brand strategy, the problem wasn't the materials that we had developed, the problem wasn't that they weren't on board and they wanted to help. The problem was they never saw the information that they needed and therefore they were confused.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So you really have to pull it apart and look at each individual piece to figure out what's missing.

Lisa Gable:

Absolutely.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So fascinating. Lisa, how do you apply this? You've worked in really large organizations, you've worked on campaigns. You mentioned the world fair, and I'd love for you to talk about that as well. You have such a fascinating and just gold-plated resume, but these are tactics and techniques that have worked for organizations that are really big and organizations that are really small. And I think presumably also work as it relates to our own personal development in thinking about things that maybe we're not doing.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Maybe talk about rightsizing this strategy for dealing with personal improvement, as well as organizational problem solving.

Lisa Gable:

It's interesting. A friend of mine, he has a phrase that he uses and I just love it. He goes, "Lisa, you eat an elephant the same way you eat a cupcake, one bite at a time."

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love that.

Lisa Gable:

And so when I'm counseling my daughter, for example, and she's getting overwhelmed by work and grad school, we'll just take it down to three bites, I go, "Helen, everyday..." She's going to kill me if she sees this. "Every day, you have to do one thing, just one thing. We're going to do three bites this week. These are your three bites, they're your priorities. This is why you've got to get these three things done. Nothing else matters. Nothing else matters. You can't clean your apartment this week because you've got so much going on, but you still need to do these three things. Then just focus on those three things."

Lisa Gable:

To me, it's almost a mental process of moving stuff off the table. I literally have a very... I'm very visual in how I problem solve, so I have this mental mechanism where I see all this stuff piled on the table. It's like, "Okay, we got that one off the table, we got that one off the table, we got that present wrapped." We took it to the post office, we didn't just wrap it and leave it on the table, that's what my husband does. In life, it doesn't matter. I worked with a friend on her state Senate campaign and I walked in the door 90 days before the campaign. And I just said, "Stop doing everything you're doing. What's the most important thing? Get out the vote, fundraising." And those were the most important things.

Lisa Gable:

"So stop doing all the big events because they suck up time and they don't reach that many people. If it's not going to raise you the money, then don't do it. It doesn't matter that you did X, Y, and Z and you showed up for these four coffees, because the reality is we're at crunch time right now." And so it's truly about get out the vote and there are certain mechanisms that have proven within politics to get out votes. And the fundraising, you've got to raise the money. That's got to be the focus. Pick up the phone and call 10 donors today.

Lisa Gable:

It's one bite at a time and they all hate it, they hate it massively. As we know, politicians hate doing those phone calls, but that's what you have to do in life. Whether it's my daughter and her three bites for the week or if it's because you're running the campaign. I still bring it down to what's job one, what's job two, what's job three? What's going to kill me if I don't do these three things?

Laura Cox Kaplan:

And really hyper-focusing on those three things. Yeah, it's really great advice. I know your dad was an extraordinary human being and he was one of your role models, you talk about him in the book. Maybe talk a little bit about what you learned from him.

Lisa Gable:

My father passed away two years ago and that was what's made me start thinking about the book. And I was going to do the book on leadership and character and then my publisher said, "Turnaround is going to be very practical information that people will desperately need." But when my father passed away, I found a letter from him, and in that letter, what he talked about is to challenge your crisis, challenge your crisis. And his ultimate point was that some of his biggest stumbling blocks had been his biggest stepping stones.

Lisa Gable:

So his never give up attitude was something that I appreciated and his big heart. My dad, he was a person who was born in a humble environment. His mother passed away when he was seven and his siblings were 20 years older than he was. And his dad sent him off to Canada for boarding school, not because he was a wealthy person and boarding school was part of their dynamic, but because he literally didn't have the capacity to take care of seven kids. And he was an engineer, so he was working full time and my dad went off to boarding school at the age of seven.

Lisa Gable:

And I think what my dad learned is that he didn't go after the new shiny pennies. What he looked for is the people who had certain characteristics and they may not be the perfect people. There actually might be something that's seriously flawed with one way in which they work, but they are so capable in this particular area that if you help grow that capability and you help them reduce the impact of the negative element in their life, then that can be your strongest ally, worker, executive.

Lisa Gable:

And so I've tried to follow his process. We all get and we admire, again, we live in Washington, the person who comes in and they're super charismatic. And of course, everybody loves them because they're good looking and they're suave, and they're sophisticated. But the reality is it's the tortoise and the hare. Sometimes it's the person that's not as sexy, plodding along that has that interesting attribute. And when you're working your way through any problem in life, you want the people who can fix the problem at that point in time. Those are the people that you want to grow.

Lisa Gable:

And so I just have admired his heart, his compassion. He also helped people recognize when they weren't going to get promoted and help them become okay with that. Not everybody's going to be the CEO, and so you have to find other outlets for ways in which you gain your self-esteem, if it's not specifically in your job at that point in time. And so that was another piece that he would bring into every conversation.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, that's really beautiful. We are focusing, as we talked about at the beginning of this conversation about this concept of influence and the types of drivers or leavers that help make a person or enable a person to build and sustain influence. I'd love for you to talk about what influence means to you and how you see this problem solving piece and influence fit together.

Lisa Gable:

Well, what I tell people is that in every step of life, you want to leave a deliverable, because the deliverables that you leave at each step demonstrate your impact on the world around you. Doesn't matter what that deliverable it is. It may be that you've mentored a young person who came from a boys and girls club in a hard background and you wrote them letters of recommendation to get them into college, and then you help them with their internships. And then you later read the letters of recommendation for their first fellowship or to get them into graduate school.

Lisa Gable:

You are leaving a deliverable at every step of the way and your impact on the world with this human being is that you've taken someone from an underserved population community and you've helped them be successful. But that's what it takes in life. And so your influence is not just doing something and being one and done. It's not one and done. You have to make a longterm commitment. If you see big problems in the world, we're talking a lot about diversity, equity, inclusion and what I talk about is access to care.

Lisa Gable:

And people get all excited, and they start wearing their t-shirts, and they show up at marches. But what they forget is that the policy changes we need to make at the local level, they're not sexy, they're not exciting. It may be extended hours in a medical facility so that somebody can get there after work. It might be a way that you can help people... Alzheimer's did an amazing job on this, where they were focused on black women and they did a deal with Uber, where Uber would pick them up from their home so that the family knew that person was getting to where they needed to go.

Lisa Gable:

Because maybe some family members didn't have the capacity to leave their job to always take mom or dad into the doctor's office. And so it's not exciting, it's not exciting, but there are real barriers that exist and so your influence is, how do you solve very specific problems? They're creating that higher level frustration in society. And that's for me, the number one thing that I can do as part of what's unique about Lisa Gable.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Lisa, let's talk about the impact that you hope this book will have on others.

Lisa Gable:

I wrote the book really from a place of passion. I want to focus. I just announced that I'll be retiring from FARE, in my late 50s, I'll be retiring from FARE. And what I want to do, and one reason why I put so much effort into marketing this book is I want to use it as a mechanism for affiliating with an academic institution. And I'm in conversations with many of them, and what I'd like to focus on this leadership and character. I am very concerned right now about our country. I'm concerned about young people getting frustrated and turned off no matter where they are.

Lisa Gable:

They might be a rising leader in their 20s or their early 30s. They might be in college right now. There's feeling like they don't have control, and I really want to give people back the control through the steps and processes, and the confidence to know that the mantle of leadership can be assumed by anyone. We saw that during COVID, it was the truck driver, it was the lady at the grocery store who worked there. It was the first responder, or maybe it was the physician's assistant because she has a lot more time to talk to the patients than the doctor and the nurse do when and medical institutions overwhelmed.

Lisa Gable:

So anyone, we learned this in the military. One of my favorite movies is When We Were Soldiers. And you may remember the scene where the helicopter, he lands the helicopter, first guy gets off and he

goes, "Boom, you're dead. Next guy, boom, you're dead. Next guy, boom, you're dead." And all of a sudden, it's the private, he's just killed off the first lieutenant, the sergeant. And it's the private, he's like, "What are you going to do? There are 4,000 Vietnamese around this, what are you going to do?"

Lisa Gable:

I want people to understand that they can do it. We have it within us, we live in a great country. We have so much flexibility in our lives that other people do not have. And it doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, you have the capacity to solve a problem and make a difference in the community that you live in.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love that. Lisa, what about advice that you would give your younger self? If you could go back and talk to 19-year-old Lisa at the White House or 22 or 23-year-old Lisa at Intel, what advice would you give her?

Lisa Gable:

I talk about this, that people when they're overwhelmed, stop the self-flagellation. Stop it. Stop the self-recrimination. We all make mistakes, we all do things wrong, we don't have to be perfect all of the time. And instead, focus on clearing your mind at the clutter and just making a decision about what you need to do next. And that was always difficult for me. I was an over performer, and oh my God, if I made one mistake, if I got one bad grade, it didn't matter, I would totally collapse.

Lisa Gable:

And my parents would just reinforce the fact, stop the self-flagellation. You've done these other 10 things really, really, really well and okay, fine. We can't be perfect in all the categories, we can't be the winner in all categories. We don't know everything nor should we be expected to. Instead, be transparent, say, "That I don't understand. That does not make any sense to me." And then have other people in the room explain it to you.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

And really, it sounds like also turning to your mentors and your support system to help remind you of that.

Lisa Gable:

Absolutely. They are the best ones. One of my staff members says that the best news about Lisa Gable as a boss is she'll push you and push you and push you. And then she'll pick you up, and she'll give you a big hug, and she'll dust you off, and then she sends you out again. That's what mentors need to do and that's what we as parents do, and we need to be ready to do that. Just don't push people too hard, you do need to stop and give them a hug occasionally.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

How about advice on picking mentors? You've had some amazing ones. You mentioned Barbara Barrett and her husband, Craig, who was the CEO of Intel and you've had many, many others. Maybe talk about advice for finding those mentors and really leveraging that into a real relationship.

Lisa Gable:

There are two types of mentors. There are the people that you find at the beginning of your career, at a certain stage of your career, really probably into your 30s that you admire and that they have done things that are similar to what you'd like to do. And so you develop a relationship with that person. You don't have to talk to them all the time. In fact, they are not expecting you to, but they don't mind if you reenter their life. And I have people I've been mentoring for 20 years that literally, I may not hear from two years. Then they show back up and we have a conversation, and we put them on the next path.

Lisa Gable:

And then there's a moment time mentors. I don't know everything. I didn't know anything about writing a book. I didn't know anything about publishing and marketing a book. So I, all of a sudden found my mentors to be the 28-year-old and the 26-year-old that are doing this book launch campaign for me. They know a lot more than I do, and so they're my mentors in this process. And so there are two ways, you might find it in the workplace for that moment in time.

Lisa Gable:

And what we do at FARE is that we assign everyone to workplace mentor. So when you're new to the organization, and I learned this at PepsiCo, you get assigned a mentor and they're not above you. In fact, sometimes they might be even lower than you are in the titles, but they are your Sherpa. They are your guide, they're the person you talk to about, why in the world did they stuff this way? And so I think companies would do well to facilitate that type of relationship because it also flattens the organization from a peer perspective where people feel confident and comfortable, in recognizing that everybody actually has value and that they actually have good ideas, even if perhaps their title is not higher than your title.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love that. Another interesting story that you talk about in the book is when you were tapped to run the world fair. I'd love for you to tell us that story and talk about how you weave that into the book.

Lisa Gable:

I was in Dina Pal's office, she was head of present Interpersonnel and she said, "We need somebody to be head of the world's fair. It's going to be starting in six months and we need someone who's worked in Japan." I'm like, "I've done that, worked in Japan."

Laura Cox Kaplan:

And Lisa just to backtrack for a second, because I don't know if people know this, but the person who runs the world fair is actually a political appointee for an administration, right?

Lisa Gable:

They're political appointee for an administration, but the actual activity, as of my time period of running it is NGO that is formed and makes a bid within government to get the contract. But the person who is the fiduciary governance head is a political appointee. I went through the process and she asked a couple of other questions and I'm like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, that's me." And she said, "Well, they've got to be a really good fundraiser." And I'm like, "Yep, can do that." And they need...

Lisa Gable:

It would be nice if we had a relationship with Howard Baker who was a former Senator, that was the ambassador to Japan. He was my brother-in-law's godfather, I'm like, "Yep, checked it, it's very effective, this is awesome." What no one told me, and I don't believe that people at the White House even knew is that nobody told me you don't get paid. And the reason you don't get paid and that you can't use any government resources is that my predecessor in 1998 had gone to the fair and had a massive FBI investigation.

Lisa Gable:

And the world's fair for the 175 years of history has always had bad economics, it's actually not designed very well. And so it's a pain point for every single government that's involved. It was always a great frustration within the State Department because of good people who would be impacted by cost overruns and legal challenges and it was pain point for the Senate. So there was a decision made, "We're going to privatize the world's fair, no government monies can be used."

Lisa Gable:

Well, some people took that to the extreme. So there were a couple of examples. I was on my way to the airport and I am literally getting on the plane to Japan, I got this phone call from the State Department. "We've been looking at the rules and no one will be able to pay for your trip." "All right. I'm on the plane and when I land, I'm going to be signing a bilateral agreement with the foreign country." "Yep. Sorry, nobody can pay for it." And they were over-correcting on what would be considered government support and they weren't going to let the NGO pay for it.

Lisa Gable:

My husband and I paid for it. I paid for the first trip to Japan and staying in Tokyo, which was the number two most expensive city in the world that is a point out of our own pocket. Later, I did get reimbursed for it, but that was the nature of everything, is people were over-correcting throughout the way. And the funniest story is that like in every post office, in every government building, you have a picture of the president, that's just normal. So we needed our picture, "nope, can't give you a picture of the president?" I said, "I really don't think..." "Yeah, it's owned by the government."

Lisa Gable:

So I call up my friends at the White House, this was under George W. Bush, and somebody is like, "We got a picture in the closet. Do you want it?" I'm like, "Yes." Literally, my chief of staff takes a cab over to the White House, stands at the gate. They hand her the picture, photograph of the president of the United States. The two of us take it on the airplane with us and we hang it on the wall. So there were all these crazy things, and if anyone wants to learn about the economics of the world's fair, there's a book called Devil in the White City, it's about a serial killer [crosstalk 00:46:52]

Laura Cox Kaplan:

All right. It's amazing.

Lisa Gable:

... at the world's fair. Yes, it tells you all of the issues around the economics. What I'm proud to say is that we focused, and this is where job one came in. We made a decision, what's the number one thing we can do? We have to raise money. Okay, that is a must because we can't go in the hole. Everybody

who went before us, everybody who came after us had huge financial problems, huge lawsuits, I'm not doing that.

Lisa Gable:

I am not going to get an Inspector General report. I've always been a goody two-shoes, my FBI clearance system take a very short period of time, not having that. So what do we do to raise money that will also help us fulfill the obligations of the fair? There's diplomatic efforts at the fair with 200 other countries, as well as your host country, and then there's the economic development side of the fair. And so we focused on Toyota who Dr. Toyota was the co-chair. He was the honorary chair of Toyota Motor company and head of the family.

Lisa Gable:

Toyota was using his role to basically make Toyota the number one car company in the world, which it became during the time we were there and they were setting up manufacturing plants in the U.S. And so we went to the governors and we said, "Okay, let's focus on two things. We're going to focus on how we get a manufacturing site in your home, how we get the supply chain, computerate design, the paint companies." I learned more about car paint than I ever wanted to know, the tire companies, "How do we get those in your states?"

Lisa Gable:

And so we worked with 19 governors. We signed agreements, we did all the pre-work before we walked into the fair. So when the governor got to the fair, all the work had been done. Thank God for the U.S. Foreign and Commercial Service and my friends at Commerce and the contract was ready. And we did signing ceremonies and the other thing we did is that we did tourism. And so we would do... The fair is a cultural event, but I needed to have that culture paid for. That was one of the primary issues, I needed somebody else to pay for it.

Lisa Gable:

So we featured the state's cultural activities every single week and they paid for it, they observed costs, so we didn't have to absorb that cost, kept our costs low. And even there's a big party, it's called National Day in 200 countries, everybody gets a day and they have a big party, and they all go off and have these very fancy meals with five-course dinners. I couldn't afford to do that because I didn't have any money, and it wasn't the type of thing our sponsors were paying for.

Lisa Gable:

So we thought, "Okay, what can we do? What can we do? Think outside the box." We knew the Japanese loved baseball, so we got Tommy Lasorda who was head of the LA Dodgers, their coach, to come out to Japan. And Ambassador Schieffer at that time had owned a baseball team, and so we did it all about baseball. And I made a decision where the other dinners were very elite and were really focused on a small core people. We opened it to everybody. We had the USC Marching Band, Big Bird happened to be in town because Sesame Street was doing their deal with the Japanese.

Lisa Gable:

We got Big Bird to come down and we had all of the family and kids at the pavilion. We had baseball movies running and the music, and we had hotdog, and beer, and popcorn, and peanuts. It was super cheap, everybody came, and I think it was probably the most popular party.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Wow. That's amazing. What a great story and what a great experience. Lisa, one of the things that you do incredibly well is the idea of packaging your different experiences, both your wins, your successes, as well as your mistakes, and your losses into a narrative that then helps you move and transition to the next opportunity. Talk about advice for our listeners for how you do that.

Lisa Gable:

What you have to think about is your core competency. I talk a lot about the core competency of the organization, in the case of fair, it's research. But you as an individual have a core competency, you are really, really good at certain things and there are other things you're not so good at. And so if you focus on that narrative, for me, it was taking manufacturing techniques and applying them to solving problems. That was the theme that went through my crazy resume, and when people looked at my resume, then they understood it. They're like, "Oh, that makes sense. You've always worked with manufacturers, you've always been a problem solver."

Lisa Gable:

So think about what is the essence of you and what are you really good at? And then focus on improving what you're really good at. Make it what makes you special, make it what makes you stand out in the crowd. Talk about it as the primary point of what you've done and accomplished in your academic career, in your business career, in your volunteer experience, tell the story of you. And the second thing is, remember, you don't have to be good at everything. No one expects you to.

Lisa Gable:

And I will say the mistakes that I've made in life is when I thought I had to check a box. I always thought that it would be a criteria to be seen as successful if I only did that one job and I wasn't good at that one job. It was a wake up call, but it wasn't the right fit for me. I wasn't happy it, I wasn't where I was the best, I didn't want to spend three years doing it. So focus on what you're really good at because it's your life. And we get so hung up and checking the boxes and having the right titles that we sometimes forget that you can actually say no.

Lisa Gable:

And if you say no for the reasons based on the fact that you know that you actually will be happier doing the things that you're good at doing and seeing a level of success through the results that you are bringing, then go down that path.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

It's great advice. Really great advice. Okay, you've had these amazing roles, you've written this book, you will be transitioning out of the Food Allergy Research & Education organization soon. What's next?

Lisa Gable:

Well, like I said, what's next is affiliating with an academic institution, being able to write another book. I do want to focus the next book on leadership and character because I've known so many amazing leaders in so many different sectors, and they share similar characteristics, which I'd love to amplify. And secondarily is speaking engagements and I will continue to keep my hand in what I call food as medicine.

Lisa Gable:

I have been fortunate over the last 15 years through a work that I did on obesity and work that I'm doing with food allergies in being part of bringing together the intersection of agriculture, consumer product goods, pharma, and biotech and technology, to ensure that people can use their diets in a manner that actually helps them solve for a medical risk that they have. So those are the three things.

Lisa Gable:

And then my husband and I were going to with my sister, go see polar bears, and we're going to go down to Chile, so we're going to do fun things, but I really want the flexibility to pursue my passion projects.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love it. The book is called Turnaround, I will include a link where listeners can buy the book in the show notes for this episode, episode 164. Lisa Gable, thank you so much for being here today.

Lisa Gable:

Oh, thanks for having me and congratulations on your amazing success with this podcast.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Thank you. I really appreciate it. Appreciate your friendship as well.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Hey friend, thanks so much for joining us. You'll find a link to Lisa's full bio and her book, Turnaround in the show notes for today's episode, episode 164. I loved so many aspects of Lisa's story and advice, but I especially loved Lisa's perspective on having a deliverable and some way that she tries to improve the world by helping others and sharing what she's learned. That is such a big part of her story and it really comes through in how she thinks about the human side of turnarounds that she's led and been involved with.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

This idea of paying it forward is also a big part of the She Said/She Said Podcast. Each of my guests each week share tremendous knowledge and perspective in ways that all of us can benefit from what she's learned. I love that and I hope that you do too. Most of all, I hope that you've found today's conversation and frankly, all of our She Said/She Said Podcast conversations to be a good investment in you. Take care and I'll talk to you again next week.