

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 chain 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. Has anyone ever told you, hey, you should brag on yourself more. Does the thought of that statement make you cringe just a little? Well, join the club. It's not a natural state for most of us, but this week's guest will explain why learning to brag effectively and strategically doesn't have to be cringe inducing. In fact, she explains why learning to brag better is actually essential to achieving your goals, and you guessed it, to building influence, our topic for the season.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Meredith Fineman is my guest. She is the CEO of a leadership development and career counseling company called FinePoint. She is also the author of an aptly named book, entitled, Brag Better. Meredith wrote the book using what she learned over a decade of training individuals to use PR tactics as a catalyst for positive career change. Now, some of those tools include learning to brag better and to self promote. In this episode, Meredith and I talk about why your work won't speak for itself and why bragging effectively is so key to building influence.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

We get pretty tactical in this conversation, and Meredith shares some great tips on things like taking advantage of what she refers to as low hanging fruit in the form of opportunities that many of us miss to self-promote. We also talk about things that you should be thinking about when you're crafting your bios, and also the number of bios that you need. We talk about the value of reverse engineering your bragging strategy, and how to pick the social media platform or platforms that are best for your message, and so much more. So, stay with me. Our conversation with Meredith Fineman is coming up right now.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Meredith, welcome to She Said/She Said.

Meredith Fineman:

Thank you so much for having me.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Well, I'm delighted to have you. I really love the book, and I'm excited to get into this conversation. As a starting point, let's talk a bit about your origin story. How did you get into the work of helping people learn to do a better job of bragging on themselves and self-promoting themselves?

Meredith Fineman:

My background is in all forms of media. I've been a freelance writer for 16 years. I am a professional speaker. I ran my company, FinePoint as a PR firm. I'm now currently hyper focused on, obviously my book, Brag Better, and Brag Better bootcamps, both for individuals and for corporations. But it took me a while to get there. I started FinePoint 11 years ago at this point. I was doing more traditional PR. There was a mix of digital strategy, but digital strategy was never my strength. It was just what people want to buy in like 2010. I started to do a lot of more traditional PR pitching, what-have-you.

Meredith Fineman:

Simultaneously though, I've always built my own voice and brand. I started freelance writing 16 years ago. I threw events, I did panels, I hosted things. I just was always kind of "out there." As I was building this company, I was simultaneously becoming known in the region and online at least in the Washington region. What happened was my PR clients were people who wanted to promote themselves too, or rather build ... Yes, I was doing products and technology, consumer lifestyle business, but I started to become the go-to for individual representation.

Meredith Fineman:

I started to see a pattern, in addition into a couple of other things. Particularly for this group of entrepreneurs, which entrepreneurship, especially in like 2009, 2010 was not the insanely common ecosystem that it is now. I was noticing a couple things happening, which were very interesting to me. One was the rise of the founder as celebrity, which after 10 full years, we've seen as both a good thing and a very bad thing.

Meredith Fineman:

I think that, that will be an evolving conversation, but you can't argue that individuals, as drivers of business, whether good or bad, whatever you think about Jeff Bezos, whatever you think about Elon Musk, whatever you think about girl boss culture, it's still driven by an individual in a way that it hasn't in business previously, and that culture personality is, as I said, sometimes good, sometimes very bad, and we're seeing some of the flaws of that thinking.

Meredith Fineman:

But it was becoming a category of celebrity that never existed. So, like a CAA, a UTA would never have signed to Sheryl Sandberg before. It was very interesting commodity to me, and just sort of this new way of having redefining what a rockstar was, and also just it really being a tremendous driver of business. When I was doing the PR and then the leadership had no strategy on their own voices, I was like, you're just missing out on the money here.

Meredith Fineman:

I came at it from an unusual point in that I had done personal brand and I had done a lot of traditional media relations. Those two weren't often offered at the same time. Then I also started to notice that people did not know how to talk about themselves, as I did work on elevating individuals, and that was not changing with level of success particularly, but not only for women. My audience is the qualified quiet, people that have done the work, but don't know how to talk about it.

Meredith Fineman:

I mean, the real big scope basis of my work is that we reward the wrong voices. We reward the loud ones. I'm in the business of helping people make proverbial noise, and that's just not gonna shift. So, you have to kind of play within that system. But I was having the exact same conversations with very young people, college age, as I was with contemporaries, as I was with very senior folks, and nobody knew how to take that PR skillset and flip it on themselves. So, that was the framework that I've spent the past 10 years creating and what eventually became the Brag Better framework, and why self-promotion is essential, why your work won't speak for itself, which then the book came out in 2020, which was unpleasant, but still positive. Now I do almost exclusively speaking and training on these topics, and so that's how it came to be.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. I want to dig into some of the more tactical aspects, especially what you just said related to the "qualified quiet." How do you recommend somebody get started if they're having a real hard time figuring out how to promote their idea, their project, their business, whatever it happens to be, how do they get started? How do you take one of these qualified quiet people and create a strategy for them?

Meredith Fineman:

Yeah. Obviously, first and foremost, I would recommend my book, Brag Better. I cared a lot that it be based in tactics and frameworks that I've used and created with hundreds of clients at this point, and thousands of people I've spoken to versus anything that's based on emotions. I'm not here to tell you to be more confident. I think that's actually one of the rudest things you can say to someone. I care about what you're specifically going to do, and that's my thing.

Meredith Fineman:

But sort of stepping back and understanding that we do reward loud, it is unfair, I don't see it changing, and so you have to figure out how to be strategically loud, just at least recognizing that. Also, understanding that your work won't speak for itself, but more important, we all know someone in our industry or in our greater community who gets a lot of credit and they have done way less than you have.

Meredith Fineman:

So, when you add in the experience that you have, plus the ability to talk about it, then it's sort of an unstoppable force. All of that is to say like where to start. Recognizing it, I would say, is the first thing. There are lots of different elements of like, what are you putting out right now? What do your social media look like? Have you written things before, or is it just as simple as being able to raise your hand in a meeting, being able to write a solid quarterly review for yourself, being able to share something with a friend? It can be on the very micro level.

Meredith Fineman:

Sometimes people's bragging goals are to be on a stage or to get a book deal. And sometimes they are to properly tell their boss what they're doing, which is part of your job and be able to feel proud of that. One thing that I really reiterate and a starting point for everyone is understanding that bragging is just stating facts. I define bragging better as stating facts strategically and cohesively to advance your career. This is a means to an end.

Meredith Fineman:

I want you to do it in a way that's true to you. Again, this is just ... There's a lot, lot there, but I would say, at a baseline, this is a tool and a tactic that will get you more money, that will get you ... The attention is not for attention's sake. It's to drive your career forward, whether that is to get an internship or whether that is to get a corporate board seat. I would say starting really, really small. Being able to call a friend, or just tell yourself that, at the end of a week, of a win you had, or honestly, being able to recognize a win is something that I've even had to dial back and have conversations with people in bootcamps or people I know about. What does a win look like and what wins are important to share so that you can get what you want?

Laura Cox Kaplan:

One of the suggestions that you talk about in the book that I especially like is the importance on getting really clear on your why. Talk about why that's so important.

Meredith Fineman:

Yeah. As I said, it's not volume for volume's sake. It's not attention for attention's sake, unless that is what you want, which I don't judge, but that's like not really the people that come to me. The qualified quiet is a term I own and came up with. But it is this idea that you've done the work and sharing it is hard and difficult, which I will say you're so not alone in those feelings of anxiety and fear and disgust and confusion, that it's what I do for a living. It's why I wrote the book on it. You don't have the role models. You don't have the language as a writer.

Meredith Fineman:

That's something I'm able to bestow, and you don't have frameworks to do this. We have this for talking about our friends or talking about other people, or talking about other things. You shouldn't really know how to do these things. That's just a total misnomer. Everything I do is reverse engineered. These days, I'm running boot camps and doing speaking and training, and it's less individual client work very rarely, but I always want everything reverse engineered. So, if you're like, well, I want this promotion, I'm gunning for it with someone who is better at bragging about their work than I am, but I've done a lot more, I'm a lot more qualified, and I'm a better choice, then how are you going to reverse engineer that?

Meredith Fineman:

Okay, who are the people that need to know that, that you're better, or you're more qualified, you're more thoughtful, you've done more work? And then how are you going to show them that? So, you can pick one specific thing, but I always like to work backwards, because especially with volume and voice and PR, as I have this sort of flipped on yourself, you want to know what you want to get out of it. Because otherwise, it could just be learning to brag in a way that's not helpful to you.

Meredith Fineman:

If you want this promotion, doing a lot of thought leadership writing is not going to do anything. That's like not towards the right audience. You have to know the audience.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Absolutely. Which is one of the elements that you talk about in your book, is the importance of understanding who it is you're talking to. But before we get to that point, I'd love for you to dig in a little

bit to this notion of imposter syndrome, which even the most qualified people, people that have had tremendous success still admit to saying, or asking themselves, or sort of querying, how the heck did I get here? Am I really qualified to have this job? Am I really qualified to be talking about this? How do we get past these feelings of imposter syndrome that so many of us still carry around no matter what our accomplishments are?

Meredith Fineman:

Yeah. It is deeply tied, bragging and imposter syndrome are related, in that it's a level of self-awareness that causes you to question yourself. I don't think you will ever eradicate it, but you can reframe it as I think it's actually a positive signal. Doesn't feel good, but only people who are good at their jobs are worried that they're bad at their jobs. I don't know anyone who's bad at their job that's worried that they're bad at their job.

Meredith Fineman:

Same thing. What if I brag too much? What if people think I'm obnoxious. It's very difficult if you're having those thoughts or feelings to brag "too much." Now, again, that's a very subjective scale and I argue a lot of things around that. But both of those thoughts are actually strong indicators that you are a self-aware critical thinking person. Because you're having them, it means you care. I don't think they will ever be fully eradicated, but it only happens to people who are qualified, who are good at their jobs, who have a message worth spreading.

Meredith Fineman:

As I said, on the grand scale, I care that we listen to new, different, thoughtful, truthful, qualified voices. I care that we get more diverse voices in positions of power and in varying media places, and just more representative group of voices, period. But imposter syndrome is something that I don't think anyone can totally kick, but it is a signaler that you are good at your job. I've never heard of someone having imposter syndrome who wasn't qualified to brag or wasn't good. If anything, it's kind of a signaler that you're on the right track.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. No, I think all that is entirely fair, but how do you keep it from becoming something that can stop you from moving forward? If imposter syndrome is ... The self-awareness piece, I'm completely with you, it is so incredibly important, but if the idea of continuing to question yourself and whether you deserve to be there gets in your way, how do you get past those feelings, or how do you at least recognize them for what they are, but not let them completely stop you from moving forward?

Meredith Fineman:

Yeah. I mean, I think if you do frame it as I'm having these thoughts and feelings, because I'm someone who is self-aware and thoughtful and cares and is qualified, is helpful, then you have to recruit other people often. I mean, this is not done alone, nothing is done alone, certainly bragging better is a team sport, both on your behalf and you doing so in service and on behalf of others. But you have to then pull in the right people, whether it's friends, whether it's colleagues, whether it's therapists.

Meredith Fineman:

I think that, that's super important. If you can't get past that and it is holding you back, is getting other people to help push you forward. I think that there have been times probably, I wouldn't say I have ... I mean, everyone has self-doubt, but I don't really get the imposter syndrome part. I just get, I guess, regular garden-variety set. But I think that it happens to everyone who is a critical thinker.

Meredith Fineman:

Recognizing how it's holding you back, and then, the thing is you have to try some of that stuff and then get some of the wins that you've built up, the confidence to keep going, is just something you have to continually do, whether that's getting rejected, whether that's not winning out on a project or a proposal, or a promotion. You have to just experience some of that rejection in order to just want to do it anyway and consulting some professionals too.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

One of the things you talk about in the book is the idea that many of your clients, or potential clients, as the case may be, miss out on low hanging fruit, like those little things that you can be doing to help promote yourself that a lot of people just completely dismiss as unimportant, or haven't even thought about. Maybe share with the audience some of the things that we can and should be doing that you see people fail to take advantage of.

Meredith Fineman:

Yeah, there are so many. The two biggest barriers to getting a message through, which comes from communications, communication strategy and theory is repetition and consistency. How often are you hearing a message and how consistent is it? Because humans don't listen a lot. They have to hear something many times before they retain it. Applying that layer of consistency to everything you do is important. It might feel repetitive, but it's definitely not.

Meredith Fineman:

Whether that's making sure that you have a headshot on your social media that looks like you, and is recent, and matches everywhere. Whether it's saying that you want to be booked to speak. Someone doesn't know that they can book you to speak, or if you want to be doing more podcasts, you have to say it. A lot of it is about sort of saying it. I'm trying to think of other low hanging fruit. I mean, there are many clients mine in the past that want to book up their speaking, and then there is nothing on any personal website or any social media or any of their thought leadership articles or any on their company pages that says, book me to speak.

Meredith Fineman:

It's like, I don't know that you speak. I wouldn't know. And you're not putting the photos up there that you do, do this. Like, how do they contact you and reach out to you? People aren't mind readers, but they also, they just have to be told things many, many, many times, and you just have to put it out there. For example, if I'm wanting to do more podcasts, you need to be sharing more about the podcast I've done. Let's say I've done none, you can say, book me for your podcast at, and then put an email address.

Meredith Fineman:

And maybe think about pitching yourself to some of those people and saying, this is something I do. People don't know what you want to be doing and what you've done until you tell them. We all walk around with it in our heads, but also especially, I mean, there's so many conversations about this, and figuring out how I'm going to incorporate this into the next writing project of mine about COVID and how you have to do this tenfold because you're not in the room with people. But people don't know. If you want to write more, you have to tell someone, or you have to have it listed, or you have to start pitching.

Meredith Fineman:

That's what I would say, is people don't know what you've done or what you want to do, which I'd argue is a little bit more ... Well, they're both important, until you state it, and state it clearly, and state it consistently and with repetition. I mean, I have to go on a podcast and say, join a bootcamp. I have to post about it on social media. I have to write about and say, that's what I'm up to right now. I have to make it clear that I'm not taking on individual client retainers anymore. I have to say it a million times. There are many people who don't know that I've written this book, which is insane.

Meredith Fineman:

Just because of the level of promotion and the level of it being, I feel like I've just like shoved it down everyone's throat, but that's not the case. Basically 100% of the time you're sharing something, there's a different audience, unless you say it twice in the same room, but even then ... So, people need to hear things a lot of times to retain them.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

You talk about that, especially as it relates to social media, which I think for a lot of people out there who are trying to promote an idea, it literally makes them cringe, the idea that you're going to say the same thing over and over and over and over again. And yet, you're advocating that, that's precisely what you need to do. How do you do that so that you don't get stale as the person who's pitching the idea? How do you keep it fresh and interesting, even though it is somewhat repetitive?

Meredith Fineman:

Yeah. I mean, the thing is, is every time I post about the book or somewhere, you have a different audience from any other audience I've ever been on before. It's just 100% never the same audience. It's never people like, ugh, this again. It's just, you have to be careful and temperate, but you have to constantly be reintroducing yourself, you have to constantly tell people what you have to do, you have to constantly tell them what they can pay you for. I will say social media, pick one platform and do it well. I'm currently not on Twitter. I mean, I have Twitter, but I'm not ... I changed the password, and I have many times in the past year because of COVID, and I just don't like the way it makes me feel.

Meredith Fineman:

Now, if I were a journalist, I would probably have to be engaging on Twitter. You have to figure out what's going to serve you where. So, if you just care more about internal validation and rising up in your company, social media doesn't really matter as much, if at all. It's a great tool. It needs to be used in a way that feels okay to you and is successful, and not just to do it. I mean, this is not as true anymore, but way earlier on in my career, people were like, oh, we have to have a social media presence. Now that's sort of part and parcel of doing business.

Meredith Fineman:

But if your audience is not on a social media platform, if it is your boss, if it is a colleague, if it is an internship program, then you don't need to do it, frankly, at all. I'm always very, very clear that I want you to squat on all your spaces on the internet to be in control of the conversation. I mean, so much of my work is just about strategic communications around control, that you own your domain name, that you own your space on varying platforms and grab them. But it can be a great tool, but you have to see where things are coming from.

Meredith Fineman:

I wasn't really getting any business leads through Twitter. I didn't like how it made me feel. COVID, there was just ... I just didn't like it. I'm like, well, it's not making me any money and it's not fun, so I'm not going to do it right now. Then there are certain places where I should be taking more advantage, like a LinkedIn. People really poo-poo LinkedIn. It is a tremendous resource. They've poured so much money into it. When I think about the media landscape, it is one of the media ... I mean, I consider it a media platform, frankly, at this point, but rather than a social one, like a media one.

Meredith Fineman:

There's so much content, and writing, and courses. That is going to survive many, many media outlets. Yeah, there's a lot of spam on there, but I've also gotten clients. I have gotten podcast bookings. I've gotten mentors. I've gotten ... You just don't know. I think that, that's a very powerful platform that I frankly don't use enough.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

There's all of these different options, and what's so amazing to me, over the course of my own career, this is a completely new thing. For somebody who, I'm 52, and so for someone who's my age and my generation, it really is learning these tools and figuring out which ones work best for which purposes. Whereas someone who's younger, who's grown up with social media may have a very different point of view. But what I tend to see is people who are my age, who maybe don't take advantage of those opportunities.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So, to your point about picking a lane and staying with it, what's your best advice for knowing which platform will serve your purposes best, and which platform will help you reach those audiences or sort of, how do you test to know, okay, maybe it's not working, I'm not getting those business leads, but how do you know that? How do you test that?

Meredith Fineman:

Yeah. Again, it's about reverse engineering. Where is your audience and what do you want out of it? If you're a photographer, you need to be utilizing Instagram so people can see ... You need to consider the medium and the message, and that's really important. But there are opportunities all around you to promote yourself, to share your work, to get attention. It's a matter of seeing them as opportunities and not burdens.

Meredith Fineman:

A lot of people are like, oh, I feel like I have to build this up on social media, but do you, or is that just external pressure or is that just something you think you have to do? I do a lot of also counseling on the booking industry. I also do some writing a book proposals with people, I collaborated on a book that came out in 2018. I bill myself as a writer and entrepreneur. So many people are dissuaded from having a book idea because yes, the industry cares a lot about numbers. Yes, they care a lot about social media, but just in like a group thing, I have a friend who is great, and someone told her she had to have X amount of followers.

Meredith Fineman:

That's just not true. If you have a powerful network, there are many ways to do things. I think we've all seen a lot with social media too, in what it can do and what it doesn't do. For example, I absolutely should be taking advantage of book talk, which is ... TikTok is now a huge driver of books. I don't have TikTok because it's too powerful and it's everything I love, and I will never do any work if I have it. But it's like, what are you going to take advantage of? Where is your audience, and where are you going to find them?

Meredith Fineman:

That's really important. But doing social media for social media's sake is just a terrible time suck and just a waste of time. Looking at it, I was just thinking of a friend, who's like, if you've been on Twitter for six years and it hasn't served you at all, it's not going to start serving you now. Having more of a critical eye of where you're spending your time and where you are using that message, but it could be a tremendous resource.

Meredith Fineman:

You want to try it out. But if it's something you've been doing for five years and it hasn't yielded clients, or it doesn't make you feel good or ... There are lots of conversations also about how these platforms now make you feel. It's like, well, what are they? Are they propelling you forward? Are they holding you back? But where can you sort of find these opportunities and use them? But also, I think people are finally having more critical lie towards all the platforms than they were before.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, no, I think you're exactly right. I also think too, thinking about the platforms from the standpoint of how they make you feel also what you're putting on them, right? Recognizing that if you're on them and you're feeling bad and you're not actually promoting content that is positive, that's uplifting, that makes you feel better, and that potentially would make other people feel better, it's a cycle. And it's not a passive thing.

Meredith Fineman:

No, I mean-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I spend a lot of time on social media. I really ...

Meredith Fineman:

Yeah. I mean, I think that you don't have to uplift everyone else. If you build a platform based on like restaurant reviews or something ... It has to serve a purpose or be fun. If it's not serving a purpose and it's not fun, then there's no point. Because it's really just more noise. I'm not advocating that there be more noise. I'm helping people navigate, getting a message through in a noisy system. But there is a tremendous amount of noise. I never want to just add to that pile of noise.

Meredith Fineman:

I want people to get what they want. I want people to advance their careers, and I want these tools to be actual tools. It's very easy to get sucked into them and just spend a lot of time on them, but if it's not where your audience is, if it's not getting you what you want, then you can promote yourself in many other places. I mean, a lot of this might just be internally inside your company. A lot of this might just be with your friend group. A lot of this might be at conferences, if, and when we ever go back to them, maybe it's on podcasts, maybe it's with writing, maybe it's other spaces.

Meredith Fineman:

Promoting yourself doesn't just have to be online. It's obviously very online right now, especially, as we figure out sort of the new work blend and normal. One thing I'm talking a lot about is how you have to really do double duty now, bragging in-person and bragging online, because you have to be very careful of like who in your ... As we go back to flex work, which I think will continue for at least 10 years, who's in the room and who's not in the room. And if you've bragged to someone in the room, that's great, but who's not in the room, and have you told them also?

Meredith Fineman:

Really keeping track of that and having to do double duty as, if you work from home, for example, okay, you're not in that particular room, how can you tell those people what you're doing? How can you be really explicit about it? The pillars that bragging better are to be proud, loud and strategic. Loud doesn't mean the volume of your voice, it means that consistency and repetition, but the fourth pillar I added, starting in March, March 13th, 2020 was explicit, which nobody has time right now for you to just beat around the bush or not be very forthright and clear, and queuing up an email to the people that matter and say, Hey, I want to make sure I'm communicating my wins to you. What's the best way to do that?

Meredith Fineman:

Sometimes also people are primed to receive your brags over the phone. Maybe it's over a video chat, maybe it is in print. Those are other channels that go way beyond social media.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Another one strikes me because it's something that everyone has to have, and that is your bio, and you talk about the importance of really leveraging that bio. What are some of the tips and tricks, frankly, that our audience could take away from this conversation as it relates to their bio and making it more impactful and more distinctive and more memorable?

Meredith Fineman:

Yeah. I would, first of all, just say having one. It's something people don't do. Having a running document so you're not reinventing the wheel. One thing when you have to give your bio all the time is you're costly .... First of all, you're just straight up wasting time rewriting it over and over and over again.

And then you might be leaving things out. So, opening up a running document, Google document, Word document, and updating ... Putting a reminder, maybe once a quarter or every two months to update it, keeping track of your wins in real time.

Meredith Fineman:

What does that mean? That means taking 15 minutes on a Friday and also having a running document of like, I did X and Y and Z. It's much easier to do it in real time, even though it's annoying than it is to think back because you're going to forget some stuff. I talk a lot about bios because they are an original bragging spot, which means that people expect you to brag in them. We don't have a lot of those places. You have annual reviews, biannual reviews, gunning for a promotion. That's an original brag spot.

Meredith Fineman:

You have your resume. That's an original brag spot. You have your bio, which is an original brag spot, which means ... The book is split into, why this issue matters, what to do about it, and how it then affects other people and/or how they feel about it. People are going to have feelings about your bragging. It's an act of vulnerability to talk positively about your work without apologizing, particularly as a woman, but not only as a woman. That is something that people are going to have a lot of judgments about.

Meredith Fineman:

A lot of this is about how you're just going to deal with them anyway, and people are going to have their judgements anyway. Is this going to the right people so that they can reward you? But what I'll say is, obviously, I want you to do this anyway, but so these are spots where people have fewer judgements because they expect to see the awards, they expect to see all your wins. The bio is something people have been reading, I don't know, forever.

Meredith Fineman:

What does that mean? Everyone needs to have a long, short and two line bio and they're all derivative of each other. A long bio is everything. It's a whole page long. Short bio, let's say a paragraph or two, two line bio, two lines, which more than anything, is an exercise in condensing what you do. I think it's a really important exercise to do. It's very difficult. But can you do it in two lines or two sentences? Is really key. Then, when someone asks you for your bio constantly and you send them that short bio paragraph, let's say, it's always the same thing. You're not leaving things out.

Meredith Fineman:

I mean, I'm even guilty of these things. A good friend of mine who is an amazing publicist, Aliza Licht, who has a great podcast called Leave Your Mark. And she wrote a great book called Leave Your Mark. I sent her my bio for her podcast episode, which was just huge reach, whatever, I left out the book. I wasn't paying attention. And she pointed it out luckily. Anyone else who either wasn't a publicist or was lazier wouldn't care. But that's the danger. That's the danger if you don't have the stuff ready, you're wasting your own time, you're wasting other people's time.

Meredith Fineman:

Also, what a profound waste. She has a huge following. I'm trying to sell books. I'm trying to get more book deals. It's a missed opportunity. That is my bio tirade.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. I love it. I love it. Because there are so many people who are ... There are always a lot of people who are pivoting jobs, and I think women in particular go through a lot of different life pivots for a host of different reasons. But especially because of the last year, people are really rethinking what they're doing. So, there's a lot of people who are looking at okay, how do I take what I've done, and maybe a series of ... To me, they're interesting jobs, maybe the other people, they might be a little boring. How do you take these divergent jobs or positions that you've had and string them together in a way that makes sense and tells a compelling story?

Meredith Fineman:

This I can't do without having spoken to the actual person, but there's always a through line. There's always an umbrella. There is always spin. So, in public relations, they talk about spin. It's how you're framing something. Well, I've on something. You say that was a soft launch. This is the hard ... You kind of make it up. Publicists are wildly talented and very actually underappreciated. But what I'll say is, it's about finding the right spin. I always use this example because I still hear it constantly.

Meredith Fineman:

People come to me insecure that they've only worked at one place for 15 years, to which I say, well, you could say, I've only worked at one place for 15 years, or you could say, I have a depth of experience and knowledge of a company that is very rare these days. Most people hop around, they don't stay loyal to a company. I am unusual. I am unique in that I have spent 15 years delving in and really understanding the ins and outs of a major organization.

Meredith Fineman:

People come to me insecure that they have hopped around with jobs and they could say, oh, nothing ever sticks, and I hop around, or you could say I wanted a wealth of experience so that I could take all of the aspects of the jobs I've had and learn to be a better, more well-rounded worker. Those are two examples of how you ... I give those two because they're the same thing. People are insecure that they have had a lot of jobs, people are insecure that they've only had one ... Those are the ways that you can frame it, and that's how you do it on both sides, and that's true of sort of like anything.

Meredith Fineman:

But that's always a key example because that's a really common insecurity. Another one is people who are young that come to me. I don't say I don't have things to brag about, this is my first job. It's like, well, you only have what you have. You have a fresh perspective. You have more energy than other people, probably. You're bright eyed and bushy tailed, which is great for a company. They want you to work hard. But also, you've had leadership positions, maybe in college or in high school.

Meredith Fineman:

Even though they were in college or high school, you still did them. They still showcase varying things about you. But what people don't understand, especially young people getting into some of their first jobs is that the older workers are actually terrified of them. They're terrified of the more senior people, but the more senior people are terrified of people with more energy, more knowledge of new platforms, and that are going to take their jobs. It goes both ways. So, everyone is upset all the time is what I'm saying.

Meredith Fineman:

But all of this stuff goes both ways. Where a young person is insecure and sees someone who's so senior, who's had all these leadership positions as they have nothing to say, and then that senior leader person says, oh my God, this person's going to take my job and knows maybe new platforms better, understands what people want, or is more flexible in their view of life. Everyone is always having those conversations in their own heads.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. When you begin to put yourself out there and really have your work, whether it's a book, whether it's a podcast, whether it's whatever it happens to be, you're inviting vulnerability, right? You are making yourself vulnerable. You're also inviting comments from others, which you want, which helps you fine tune what you're doing. But comments can also be a bit distracting at times, because not everybody who makes comments are making constructive comments that are designed to help you learn and grow, shall we say. Let's talk a little bit about how you advise clients to deal with commentary and comments that are not particularly constructive.

Meredith Fineman:

Sure. Well, it's never going to be as bad. First of all, I've been called many different things. I just care that people say it behind my back so that I don't have to deal with it, but it's also been said in front of my face, or online, and I remember those instead of the heaps of praise for the book or for my speeches or all the things I work so hard on. It's like, let me fixate on the one negative thing and think about it forever. And that is my own work.

Meredith Fineman:

But people are going to have their opinions. Again, this is a means to an end. I'm arguing that you brag better anyway, because it advances your career. So, there is, and a lot of times people are going to have judgements because they can't do these things. It's way easier for someone to say that I'm very obnoxious than it is for them to say, oh, I see her continually putting herself out there and coming up with these new ideas and doing X and Y and Z.

Meredith Fineman:

I can't do that, and that makes me very insecure and that to be very anxious. So, instead, I'm just gonna say nasty things about her. That's what's happening in that person's mind. And yeah, it's an act of vulnerability, which is why people don't do it. I mean, yes, you don't have the frameworks which I've built, which is in brag better. Books are expensive, get it from your local library. I've written about a lot of this stuff for almost a decade. You can find it online.

Meredith Fineman:

It's an act of vulnerability and you don't have the right tools, so I'm giving you the tools, but the vulnerability piece is scary and hard. I think at this point, I'm just kind of like numb to it. But it's still hard and scary. The worst period is when you're done with your book and then you're waiting for it to come out, I'm like, what if it's bad? What if it's bad? What if it's just bad? Everyone has those thoughts and feelings, and that was a big putting yourself out there moment.

Meredith Fineman:

But it's really easy to take shots at someone who's decided to put herself out there, whether that be with a book, whether that be with raising your hand, whether that be with running a big project. So, people are going to have their judgements, but what I care about is the people who are in charge of getting you to the next level, whether it's your boss, whether it's someone who's going to hire you for a job, whether it's someone who's going to hire your company for a project, that you impress those people and you are bragging to the right people so that you can get what you want.

Meredith Fineman:

Again, it's a means to an end, and everything else is just noise. But I mean, it's very easy to latch onto the negative stuff, especially if you're a thoughtful, critical person of yourself. You don't really need anyone else's criticism, but it might be there, but it's truly never as bad as you think it is, or will be, or like the crazy ... It's ever as bad as the mean things you say to yourself.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right. You talk about an exercise in the book that you've used with clients that I'd love. I'd love if you talk for a moment about that and share a little bit of, sort of the how to not take these comments so personally, or sort of how to deal with the fears of putting yourself out there.

Meredith Fineman:

Yeah. I talk about something called the nightmare question, which is like, it's basically, what's the meanest thing you've ever said to yourself, and what would happen if someone asked you that? Which usually would be categorically insane. I usually do some variation of like, who do you think you are? Your stuff is so schlocky and bad, like you wrote this book that nobody likes. What do you think you're doing? Which would be categorically insane for someone to say to me, but in the depths of the depths in the dark night of the soul, that's what I'm saying to myself.

Meredith Fineman:

In bringing it into the light, which I've done this with clients, maybe it's, your dad is incredibly successful and you can never come close, so why are you, even bother trying? Or it's, you mess this thing up once and it haunts you. How do you know you're not going to do that over and over again? I mean, what's the crazy ... But being able to answer that question in a PR form, whereas, if someone asked me what I just said about myself, I would say, I work really hard. I'm really proud of what I've done. I've put a lot out there of myself, of my work, and that's just the best I can do, and I do that every day, and that's all I can ask for.

Meredith Fineman:

To have a calculated PR response, it really helps alleviate a lot of some of that anxiety. As I always say, my publisher won't let me either refund people or give them money if someone actually asks you your nightmare question, but it's like, nobody's going to actually ask that of you. It's never happened in the history of ever. Because usually, it would be something like categorically insane, whether it's, let's say you were to fall out with a founder. If you were to fall out with your co-founder, how are you ever going to work with someone again? That's crazy. It's not crazy. It's a irrational anxiety driven thought, but nobody's going to ask that of you because it's never the nightmare question you cook up. It's not possible.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love that. I think that's incredibly good advice. Because we are looking at this concept of influence in all of its different dimensions, I'd love it if you would share what influence means to you. How do you define it for yourself?

Meredith Fineman:

Well, there's pure influence, which is ... Well, not pure influence, but there's influencers, which is interesting. There are things that influence and inform me. I like to think that I prefer to take positive influence. But influences, the driver of ideas, putting positive things out into the world. For me, what it means to me and my work is that I hope that people feel better about what they've done. I hope they feel proud of themselves, which a lot of what ... That I think about it, is a lot of projection too.

Meredith Fineman:

But that they feel empowered, which is a tricky word, but they feel empowered by the tactics that I espouse to share their work. Because also what's really important is you never know who is watching or listening. I've gotten lovely messages from many people all over the globe, whether it's from a speech or whether it's from my book, but those are just the people that reach out to me. When you share your work and show that we can have a culture of healthy pride and influence that onto other people rather, you help inspire someone who probably won't tell you that.

Meredith Fineman:

There's the famous saying, you can't be what you can't see, but when someone who is thoughtful and qualified without apology shares her work, it's very inspirational and you just don't know who's watching or listening, and there's definitely at least one person who's not going to tell you, but is going to say, well, if she did that, maybe I can do that, or she said that, maybe I can say that. That's what's really powerful. That's what's really important. I also care that, playing with the word influence, that our influences come from more thoughtful places.

Meredith Fineman:

When I talk about the inverse relationship between volume and merit and that we reward loud, I want everyone to be influenced by voices that have done the work, by people that are showing up for themselves and others, by people who are modeling great behaviors and great ... Modeling things like truth and caring, and overall responsibility. I mean, it's a grand notion, but I do think that I care about getting the qualified quiet voices into the mix so that other people can be influenced by them, but also, so that it can influence a healthier dialogue and society in general.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love that. Okay. If you could go back and give 24-year-old Meredith, Meredith who was just launching her career, a single piece of advice on bragging or anything else, what would it be?

Meredith Fineman:

I don't think it would be on bragging. Maybe it would be, please don't buy designer handbags, at least not yet. I think it would be that. Otherwise, I don't know. I mean, I started my company with \$2,500 in my bank account thinking that was a ton ... Only, I was dumb and brave and young and privileged, and so I was able to do what I was doing and continue doing it, and just figure it out. I think that being

careful of who you glamorize and who you pay attention to, particularly in the startup world, nothing as ever as it seems.

Meredith Fineman:

People are not as great as their shiny personas might be and you don't need to be around those people you think are "cool" because they're probably not. I guess that's what I would say. Then bragging-wise or professionally, I'm mostly just thinking of technical financial things I should have put in place, but again, I don't think I'll ever get that young dumbness back that allowed me to start that business and really throw caution to the wind and have no concept of anything, is actually a great tool sometimes.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, absolutely. Meredith, it's been a pleasure. The book is called Brag Better. I urge folks to check it out. Really grateful for the time you spent with us today.

Meredith Fineman:

Thank you. And yes, I'm epically findable online. [Meredithfineman.com](http://Meredithfineman.com) has more about the book, has more about signing up for bootcamps, has more about booking me to speak. Thank you so much for having me. I'm looking forward to continuing this conversation.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

That sounds great. Thank you so much. Appreciate it. Hey friend, thanks so much for joining us today. I hope you found great value in Meredith's perspective on self-promotion. So many great tips and so many things that we often overlook when crafting something as simple as our bio. All of these tips can add up to a big boost as we think about building and sustaining influence. Frankly, it would be nice if folks automatically knew what we were working on, but that's very unlikely. If you want to keep moving up and getting more and more opportunities, finding ways to share those wins and not in an obnoxious way is an important part of your strategy.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Be sure to check out the show notes for today's episode, episode 163. We have expanded and reorganized those notes a bit to make them more useful to you, and I'd love to know what you think. Most of all, I hope you found today's conversation a good and valuable investment in you, and I'd love to hear your thought. You can reach me via the links in the show notes. With that, take care, and I'll talk to you again next week.