

TITLE: How to grow your network as YOU grow! Episode 182 with Laura Cox Kaplan

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Laura Cox Kaplan:

Building influence is something anyone can learn. It's an investment you can make in yourself and it can hold the keys to achieving your dreams and having the life and impact you want to have. I'm Laura Cox Kaplan. I've learned a lot over three decades about building and sustaining influence and how using it and using it effectively can make a big, big difference in your life and career. Here on She Said / She Said podcast, we're digging into the different dimensions that help us build and sustain influence. If you thought being an influencer was just for social media, think again. Whether you're starting a business, raising money for a cause, negotiating a promotion, running your household, or trying to connect with those who don't share your views, understanding and using the different dimensions of influence will increase your chances, success, whatever your goals may be. Listening to She Said / She Said podcast is a smart, efficient investment you can make in you. I'm really glad you're here and I'm excited we're on this journey together.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Hey friend,

I've been thinking a lot about networking, and the importance of investing time to not only build our personal and professional networks, but to maintain them. And equally as important is the need to curate our networks and evolve them -- as we grow and evolve in our lives and careers.

The topic of networking and how important it is as we evolve has been top of mind for me for a couple of reasons.

First, blooming, growing and evolving is the theme for our collaborative series with The Southern Coterie. We rolled out the first episode in our series last week with Episode 181 and my conversation with the amazing designer Lela Rose. If you missed that episode be sure to check it out. Lela is terrific and shares such great advice on building a culture that's based on treating others well -- certainly an important element needed to build both a strong network, and influence.

The second reason I've been thinking about networking ... is because I've had opportunity to speak to a few groups in person and I'm reminded of how important it is to push yourself to continually refresh your network.

And as I reflected, it led me to think about the people we surround ourselves with as we grow.....our networks.

If you are contemplating a big career or life shift, one thing you should take a good hard look at is your network.

Chances are you've already built a network for yourself. You probably have a few different buckets of people that you interact with and get feedback from on different topics regularly -- You have your BFFs, your mom friends, your mentor(s), and maybe a personal board of advisers that you've collected and curated along the way. I love using the word collected here -- because it should feel like a wonderful assortment of people who represent different parts of you -- different interests and different times in your life.

If you decide to make a big shift or dramatic departure in where and how you are spending your time, however, it will likely require that you grow, evolve and curate your network even further to make sure it keeps pace with where you want to go.

I often ask guests on this podcast a question that's related to this topic because it's something that I struggled with a bit when I left my corporate job, and I've heard from many others who have had similar experiences. Sometimes the people around you can have trouble with the change you're trying to make. It doesn't just impact you.

Growth and change are an education process not just for you, but also -- potentially--- for people in your existing networks -- including often friends and family -- as well.

When I decided to leave my corporate job, I had been working in public policy and public affairs in one capacity or another for most of my career. A typical career trajectory for someone like me -- with my particular background and experience -- would have been to go to another GR role. Or maybe run an association. But neither of those things felt quite right either.

When I asked folks in my network for input, I got great advice and ideas on what my next role or next step might be. Much of the advice was wisely focused on roles that would best help me leverage the experiences I had already had. There is tremendous wisdom in that advice. Trouble is -- it wasn't what I wanted to do.

What I wanted to do was spend time each week sharing and crowdsourcing great stories, advice and perspective on the best ways to build and sustain influence..... and to talk about what I had learned and how these skills can be incredibly helpful for getting what you want out of your life and career.

At the time I decided to make this career shift, I didn't actually know anyone who was doing quite what I wanted to do,, in quite the way I wanted to do it.

And frankly there were some headwinds -- not the kind where someone stands in the way, but rather the kind where I was the headwind in my own way. What I mean by that is -- the more times I tried to explain what I wanted to do the more frustrated and insecure I became because my vision was still not

entirely clear to me ... therefore it was hard to explain. The discomfort I felt around that was really hard. I also had some guilt around leaving a perfectly good job, in a perfectly good firm -- one that I had loved and devoted lots of time and energy to. Even though..... I knew making this shift was something I needed to do.

Sallie Holder who is a career coach and author of a book called "Hitting Rock Middle" recently shared a new term with me that helps explain this. She'll be joining me next week in episode 183. Sallie calls what I was experiencing "the expertise trap," It's where you get stuck trying to make your past experiences fit neatly and logically together to pave the way for your next role or job.

In reality It may only be in hindsight that you'll clearly see how the pieces fit together. They will. But sometimes you have to first take the big risk, hold onto a healthy dose of faith, and gain some tolerance for uncertainty before you can see how it will all fall into place.

The reason why the expertise trap can be difficult when you are trying to make a shift is that often you're also dealing with a certain degree of uncertainty and self doubt about the course you're on. --- because, let's face it, that's normal. And if you're anything like me, there may be some serious second guessing going on even if your gut tells you you're on the right track.

Change is hard and it's messy. Anyone who tells you it's a picnic to reinvent yourself is -- in my humble opinion-- full of it.

Reinvention is not for the faint of heart, but if it's something that you feel in your gut needs to happen, stick with it. Your patience and dedication to finding your way will pay off.

You may be wondering how all of this relates to building your network ...

Here's the thing your existing network may have a hard time seeing you in a role that's dramatically different from the ones you've had. If that's the case, you will likely need to supplement your network and broaden it to include folks who might be better able to see possibilities because they don't know you quite as well.

My initial inspiration for this podcast came from a newer friend in my network who didn't --- at the time -- know me as well. And that gave her the ability to see potential in ways that enabled her to give me fresh advice and perspective.

The thing is....You don't need to replace your existing network, but you likely do need to think about how to broaden it to get the kind of perspectives that are in part more directly focused on the path in front you v. the path you've been on.

And it requires that you be both strategic as well as really open to pushing yourself to branch out.

It also gives you a chance to engage and utilize your existing network differently --

Here's what I mean by that....

Look at your existing network, and look for any connections that they have with people you aren't already connected to -- people who can give you different perspectives on rebranding yourself and charting your path. Use the capital you've built with your existing contacts and network to grow your relationship base.

But there are a few best practices to help you maximize your time -- and -- more importantly the other person's time. These tips will also increase the chances that your request for help will also help you build a relationship with that person ...

1. I think it should go without saying that you want to do your homework before reaching out for help -- always always always consider the source. What's on her or his plate, what do they care about that you could add some value to, and how can you think about repaying them for their time..... All things you should think through proactively... it reinforces that you respect and care about that person beyond just wanting their opinion.
2. Make your request personal -- be specific about why you are asking this person for help.
3. Ask for something specific -- not brain picking -- but rather why you are reaching out.
4. REMEMBER THAT ONCE THE MEETING OR CONVERSATION HAS ENDED...YOU ARE NOT DONE.
 - a. Afterward, send a thank you. An email is fine, but a personal handwritten note is always a welcome and appreciated and often a differentiating gesture. And if a person was superhelpful -- send a little something -- a bottle of wine, or some little something that says you value the person and her or his contribution to you.
5. Follow up -- don't miss a chance to further invest in the relationship but circle back and let the person know how it's going. How you used their advice. Or maybe ask another specific follow up question.
6. Continually Look for ways that you can add more value to the person who was willing to help you.

Remember that relationships and strong networks are built on mutual respect -- it's also one of the most important components to building and sustaining influence. And it's the fastest way I can think of to create a real and lasting connection.

In the end my favorite mantra applies -- You GET WHAT YOU GIVE. It's a great reminder and rule of thumb that we get what we invest in others.

There's another dimension of this that's also very important especially if you get squeamish asking for help.

There's some great science that supports how asking someone for advice helps you strengthen and solidify a relationship. It's called the Ben Franklin effect -- and it's based on something Ben Franklin did to build relationships with those who didn't necessarily share his point of view.

By asking for someone's help, especially their advice and input and their opinion, you are validating their expertise and telling them you care about what they think. Talk about a great way to create a connection.

My wonderful friend Sylvie Legere, the founder of a group called The Policy Circle that I am involved with has written a terrific new book called "Trust Your Voice." She's also rolling out a great podcast to dig a bit deeper into the topics in the book. We recently sat down for a conversation on her podcast and talked about the topic of networking. I'll share a link to our conversation on her podcast once it's available.

Sylvie describes networking as an "ecosystem." I love that because it's a nice visual way to think about how your network can evolve and grow. One of the other dimensions that Sylvie talks about in her book is "Vulnerability" and the need to embrace a bit of vulnerability to grow our networks. It can be uncomfortable to reach out to someone and ask for something. That's especially true if you were raised like I was and put a real premium on self sufficiency. Don't get me wrong, I'm grateful for that and I value it. But there's a balance to be struck. Allowing yourself to be vulnerable --- When we ask for help, admit that we don't know, tell someone we need something That's often where a more powerful connection with another person can occur.

And it's a great way to further expand and to deepen your network and your relationships.

I'd love to know what suggestions you have for building your network, what works well for you..... and also what challenges you've encountered as you consider a potential career or life pivot.

NEXT WEEK.... Next week, we'll continue our collaboration series with The Southern C. As I mentioned earlier I'll be welcoming career coach and author Sallie Holder whose terrific book "Hitting Rock Middle" should absolutely be on your reading list, especially if you feel stuck in your career and are contemplating a big shift. It's a great read, but be sure to join me for the conversation with Sallie as well.

Friend, thanks so much for listening. I hope you found this investment of your time worthwhile, and I would love to hear from you. Please reach out and share your feedback and your thoughts with me. You can find me on social media -- insta, fb, linked in and twitter at [laura cox kaplan](#), or via the contact link on our website [she said/she said podcast.com](#)

Have a great rest of your week. Take care, and I'll talk to you soon.

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