

She Said/She Said Podcast With Laura Cox Kaplan
Episode 210 "How To Find Your Passion, And A Career You Will Love!"
With Guest: Andrea Koppel

Transcript

Episode 210 "How to Find Your Passion, And a Career You Will Love!"
Part 1 of 2

SHOW OPEN:

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 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 of 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.

EPISODE INTRODUCTION:

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Hey friend,

Welcome to She Said/She Said Podcast. Where each week we're talking about career and influence.

This week we're talking about identifying your passion and how the advice so many of us have been given -- going all the way back to when we started our careers and even when we were picking a college major -- might actually be all wrong.

My guest this week is Andrea Koppel, journalist turned tech entrepreneur, college career coach and educator. She's someone who knows about finding your passion over and over and over again.

I say it that way, because we do evolve. Our tastes change, our priorities change, our preferences can change -- and so can what we are passionate about.

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While our brains are wired to essentially resist change, it happens whether our brains are fully on board or not.

I know in my own life when I made the decision to pivot from a corporate career into teaching and speaking and podcasting and doing more to help others develop in their careers, it was a new passion for me. And while I loved it, there were also dimensions of my old life and my old career that I still missed. Understanding -- maybe even expecting -- that we may have conflicting emotions when we embrace a new passion or make a career or life pivot -- is important. But it's not a topic that we always hear about. Sometimes our more change resistant brains might need some time to catch up -- And to get comfortable with all that's required as we pursue something new.

Learning this and giving ourselves some additional grace as we make these transitions, can be incredibly important for not only managing self doubt, but also for building our confidence -- the confidence we really need to double down on our new passion. Those things are also incredibly important for building and sustaining our influence as we evolve, grow and change.

Andrea Koppel shares some great advice and perspective on this topic that I think you'll really appreciate. While her current professional focus is on college students -- and there is a lot in this episode that is directly useful for those who are contemplating that first career move. Her advice for how she's learned to pivot is useful for anyone at any stage who is looking to make a career change or pivot.

Specifically, how to take your existing skills and your interests and distill those into your next career. Essentially her advice on embracing and using transferable skills.

You'll learn in this episode why Andrea thinks that the advice to " just go with your passion is all wrong." and the counter advice she gives both college students and others who are much more tenured in life.

You'll hear her best advice for how to really tap into your inner voice and your intuition. And how to fight the fear that might be preventing us from listening to that inner voice in the first place.

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Then, next week in part 2 of my conversation with Andrea, we'll talk about failure -- Recovering from it, and using it. Andrea has some great stories particularly about slogging through after getting fired from CNN. Failure is a great teacher -- as we often talk about -- but that doesn't mean when it happens in such a visible way that it's pleasant.

As I mentioned, the conversation with Andrea Koppel will post in two shorter episodes -- episode 210 today and episode 211 next week. Based on your previous feedback last spring, you liked this approach. So I'll continue to do that when I think it makes sense. You can tell me if you like a different approach.

In the meantime, I'm really you're here ... and I'm happy to share today's conversation with Andrea with you... it's coming up right now....

CONVERSATION:

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Andrea, welcome to She Said/She Said.

Andrea Koppel:

I am thrilled to be here, Laura. Thank you so much for inviting me.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

You are so welcome. I am thrilled to have you. We have been trying to get this on the books and I've been looking forward to it for several months. So I'm really excited. Let's start by talking about your current initiative, College to career.

Andrea Koppel:

Thank you. Yes. Well, the College to Career Academy is a digital online offering that I have just piloted, actually the first product, the first course at the University of Maryland, this spring and the spring of 2022. And the first course is the college to career clarity course. So I help juniors and seniors who are stuck, anxious, overwhelmed, absolutely just bewildered about how to turn their degree, their major into a career, and I like to tell them careers, that they'll love.

So in five hours, I've really distilled it down, five hours, seven lessons that they can take at their own pace at 2:00 AM, as we know, most college students are up doing their schoolwork then. 2:00 AM or 2:00 PM, I am there on their screen, but I am not there in the room with them. And my vision is to take this course to college career centers around the country, because this is one of the biggest pain points that students have. They self-identify by their major, which

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is the way higher ed is organized. So I don't know what you majored in school, Laura. I majored in poly sci. Somebody's a psych major, a history major, an English major. And they tend to think with blinders on. What I say is you are not going to be stuck in the tiny house that is your major. And so through this course, I help them to take inventory of all of the amazing hard skills, the technical skills and the soft skills, those interpersonal skills that they've been honing inside and outside the classroom, and I show them how those align with different job functions, whether it's in a communications job function, marketing, finance, project management, IT, on and on and on. And then I show them how their interests, where they spend their free time. Whether it's a side hustle, part-time job, it could be something they've been doing in the classroom, how those interests are crosscutting into a whole ton of industries.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Andrea Koppel:

And then their job function can be found in any of those industries. So as one of my recent grads told me, I see now that the world is my oyster. So that is what I want to do, Laura. I have a mission to empower one million college students to turn their degrees into careers they'll love. That is what the College to Career Academy is all about.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love that. Now the College to Career Academy has actually grown out of a couple two or three different initiatives that you undertook, right? And I'm not sure about the order of these things, but you started a fabulous podcast called...

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Time4Coffee.

Andrea Koppel:

Time, the number four, coffee, which is shorthand for, "Hey, Laura Cox Kaplan, do you have time to grab a cup of coffee so I can ask you about what you do in your job and how you built your amazing career?"

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love that. And your target audience is largely college students or maybe-

Andrea Koppel:

And young professionals.

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Laura Cox Kaplan:

And young professionals. Those who are just launching. But I would argue too, I mean, there's a lot of the content I have binge listened to your podcast, which is fantastic. I urge everybody to check it out. I'll include a link in the show notes for Andrea's podcast as well, but there's also a lot that is beneficial to somebody who may be thinking about a big career pivot or reinvention, which we talk about a lot on this podcast. You are an expert in that field as well. You've had a number of different iterations career wise.

I'd love for you to maybe talk a bit about how this work came about. You've talked about your mission and your purpose and your passion right now, but this is not your first mission, purpose or passion. In fact, it might be maybe your third or fourth iteration. Let's talk about how you got here because it's a really interesting story.

Andrea Koppel:

Oh my gosh, can I just tell you I have chills right now and my eyes are welling up because this is a question that is so close to my heart and I'm welling up with tears because I didn't realize what was happening until recently.

So I won't go all the way back. I'll just go back six years. I was in my third industry as an executive at a global humanitarian and development organization called Mercy Corps. I was vice president of global engagement and policy. And I had begun to meditate, Laura. I had always kind of tried it. I would go to a whatever kind of a spa and they'd have a meditation or-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Andrea Koppel:

I'd get pulled into some workshop that would have a meditation, but it never really clicked with me until I discovered this woman, Emily Fletcher. Her brand of meditation that she has created kind of pulled from here and there called Ziva Meditation. And she's, if not the first, one of the first to take meditation online not in a virtual Zoom setting, but as a recorded course. So similar to what I'm doing with the College to Career Academy, a hundred percent asynchronous. And I went through the 15 lessons in Emily's meditation and it was like Eureka.

Oh, I finally get it. It's not about clearing my mind of all thoughts and just saying "ohm." Thoughts are as involuntary as our heart beating. You can't stop your heart from beating. You can't stop your brain from thinking. So you use the meditation that she offers you in the course. There's one of three. Excuse me, the mantra, which is a mind vehicle. You pick whichever of the three resonates with you and you just keep coming back to the mantra and you do this for 20 minutes.

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What I didn't realize, Laura, because all of us, everybody has heard of meditation and it's all like, "Oh, it's all about reducing anxiety, eliminating stress." But it's the why. It's about more than just eliminating stress or eliminating anxiety to eradicate that from our lives. It is so that we can get out of our intellect, out of our brains that are going in a million different directions, and drop into our hearts; drop into our guts. Another way of putting it is to listen to our intuition.

So six years ago, I started meditating and I wasn't doing the twice a day, which is what I do now. I was only doing once a day, but I guess I did it enough that I was able to drop into my heart. And my heart and my intuition was telling me that I needed to step off the fast track career woman pedal to the metal and become a full time stay at home mom so that I could deepen my relationship with my only child who was then 13 years old. And that's what I did in June of 2017.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Wow.

Andrea Koppel:

And it was as a result of doing that and, yes, it was scary, but I also had the benefit of a husband who has a salary. It's not like he's in finance or we're like, "Oh yeah, no problem. Andrea's salary goes away." No. I picked up the responsibilities that we had, somebody who was a housekeeper working here. So I was busy cooking, cleaning, running errands, doing all that stuff, walking the dog. And for the first time, Laura, I finally had what's known as radical head space to plug in my AirPods. I don't think AirPods existed then. I think it was just the old fashioned wired headphones.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Andrea Koppel:

Plug those in and start binging podcasts. And around the same time, I had young people of all different ages reaching out to me for career advice.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Because you'd have this incredible career. I mean, you still have an incredible career, but you had been on-air talent at CNN for 13 years. You had had a string of corporate jobs after that. I mean, you had had this amazing career experience. So, obviously, they're tapping into you for your incredible wisdom.

Andrea Koppel:

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Multiple industries, 20 years in journalism, two years in, I guess, cause oriented public relations, and then seven years in the nonprofit world in two different capacities. PS, I never studied any of the industries that I went into. Never studied them. This is transferable skills. Because we get locked into this, but I majored in marketing. I majored in poly sci. How could I go into cause oriented PR, right? You learn it on the job.

So while I was bingeing podcast and I had all of these young people reaching out to me for career advice, I thought, "Gosh, this is so inefficient because I keep having to reinvent the wheel every time somebody asks me for career advice. Where's the podcast where someone could go to get career advice from a Laura Cox Kaplan or an Andrea Koppel or a Joe Schmo to learn more about what they do and get their insights, their takeaways, their lessons learned?" And I'm not saying that it didn't exist, I just couldn't find it.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Andrea Koppel:

There were plenty of shows around entrepreneurial ventures, but I couldn't find one that was sort of a smattering of all of the above. And that's what I decided to create. So in February of 2018, I incorporated Time4Coffee LLC and I started interviewing people. And then the podcast launched in August of 2018. I am coming up on my 1000th episode.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

That's amazing.

Andrea Koppel:

I will just say this caveat. I have interviewed well over 300 guests. Then what I do, because my audience doesn't always want to listen to a 40, 50, 60 minute interview, I break them up into what I call K-Cups, keeping with the coffee theme. And those are shorter clips of longer episodes. So that's why it's almost a thousand episodes, but I absolutely love it.

And as a result, Laura, of starting Time4Coffee and interviewing all of these amazing people from the C-suite to the recent high school graduate, who decided not to go to college, but instead to go into mortgage financing, I began to see the crosscutting themes in how our careers really unfold and how and why conventional career advice that you and I got when we were coming up, that many of us are still giving our kids, is not fit for purpose. It's not relevant and maybe it wasn't ever relevant. One of which is to tell a 20 something, especially a junior or senior or somebody who's just graduated, to just follow their passion.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

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Andrea Koppel:

Because I don't know if you can remember back that far. I can. When I was that age, my passion was the cute guy in class. It wasn't I want to be an ed tech entrepreneur or I want to be a journalist. It wasn't.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Andrea Koppel:

It absolutely wasn't. So instead, what I tell the young people I coach is to just follow their interests. That's a low bar.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Andrea Koppel:

Everyone has an interest. Because the truth is, Laura, it doesn't matter where we start our careers. It doesn't matter. And it doesn't matter where we are in our career journey. There is always time to pivot.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Mm-hmm. Absolutely. Okay. Where to break this down? I mean, there's so much in that and I have so many questions for you. One that immediately jumped into my head was this topic. And I hear this from so many people who come on the podcast or women who are... they're pivoting or they're reinventing in some respect. One of the challenges is getting in touch with and quieting that voice in your head that's like, "What the heck are you doing?" And sometimes it's the voice in your head that's the loudest. And sometimes it's this echo chamber of maybe the people around you who have the best of intentions, but can't necessarily internalize your new passion or your new interest, whatever that may be. And they love you and they don't want to see you fail, but at the same time you're getting this message from somewhere, right? There's something that's saying to you, "This is what I need to do." Talk about that part of your journey. You mentioned your husband and your son. Certainly, they were happy to have more of you, I imagine. But at the same time, now you're starting to reinvent this, what is becoming a business, a new business, a new venture. Talk about how people reacted, your family, your friends, your professional colleagues in particular.

Andrea Koppel:

Girl, been there, done that. Let me tell you. I remember telling my parents in the winter of 2017 that I was going to tell my CEO at Mercy Corps that I wanted to resign five months from then.

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And my parents were like, "Are you crazy? You're 53 years old. You're just going to quit this great job to be a stay at home mom? Are you nuts?"

So you just framed that so beautifully because those around us, those in our inner circle, they're coming from a place of love and concern. It's all the best of intentions, but it is also coming from a very primitive part of their brains called the amygdala. And that's the part of our brains when we were cavemen and women in those cute little Barney Rubble Fred Flintstone outfits. And it was basically helping us to not become the Tyrannosaurus Rex's lunch or dinner, right? So fight flight fear, ah, run.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Andrea Koppel:

So our body's filled with cortisol and fear is a huge motivator and we get the hell outta dodge. News alert, this is no longer the ice age. The T-Rex fortunately is long gone and yet we are so over stimulated. So many of us, and I put myself in that category as well, we live or allow ourselves to live in a place in which we're flooded emotionally. And that's why I meditate twice a day because I no longer am as reactive and I understand when stand when I feel that emotion of fear, that's just a signal that my brain is giving me. It's just a heads up this is new. This is maybe territory you have not ventured before. It's not, "Oh my God, the world is coming to an end."

So, fortunately, I pushed back on my parents. I did get the glazed eye look from friends when I told them I was starting a podcast to help level the playing field for college students so that they could get on-demand career advice and they're like, "Isn't that what an Informational Coffee is?" And I'm like, "It is, but not everybody knows you. Not everybody is comfortable picking up the phone or emailing, let alone DMing you on LinkedIn, to ask you for your time." And PS, this was two years before the start of the pandemic.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Andrea Koppel:

When those in-person coffees went out the window, so suddenly having a virtual library that people can go to get career advice on-demand, maybe not so stupid, maybe not so waste of time-ish...

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Your timing was impeccable.

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Andrea Koppel:

It's because when you tune out the noise, when you drop into your heart, your gut, which is your intuition, that is the universe's message to you that your dharma, D-H-A-R-M-A, your purpose is right out there.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Mm-hmm.

Andrea Koppel:

And I have since done a huge amount of reading. In fact, I've got some of the books right here. This is Deepak Chopra's "Creating Affluence". I've just read his latest book called "Abundance", which is incredible. I just finished reading this other amazing book called "The Untethered Soul" by Michael Singer, a number one New York Times best selling book. And really, what these books unpack is that everything, my coffee cup, this microphone, my headphones, the pictures behind you, including ourselves, we're all energy, we're all particles. And when you allow yourself to block out that unhelpful background buzz, if you really want to find your purpose, listen to yourself. And that goes to the 18 year old to the 20 year old. They know.

And, Laura, I can give you an example in my own life. I studied poly sci, Asian studies and Chinese, because I thought I wanted to be an American diplomat. That's where my interest was when I went off to college. My senior year, I sat for the foreign service exam. I didn't know you were supposed to study and I failed it. And there I was like, "Holy crap. What am I going to do now?"

And the Peace Corps came to recruit on campus and I was like, "You know what? I wanted an adventure, I wanted to live overseas, and I like that service orientation of the Peace Corps. Maybe I'll apply to go to Nepal." Because that was the closest I could get to China, kind of a weird logic. And I did get accepted.

And a month before I was supposed to leave, some guy who was painting my parents' house back in the summer of 1985 says, "Oh, Andrea's going to be going to Nepal. My buddy works at the Peace Corps and he just mentioned that..." And this is a trigger alert. I'm just letting people know that this may be emotionally uncomfortable for some, but there had been a number of rapes of women, Peace Corps volunteers, in Nepal. And I called them because back in the day there was no worldwide web and they confirmed this. So there, my new plan B went sideways.

This is the magic of the universe. I know you're like, "Andrea, I thought she was like so grounded. She's totally woo woo." But let me just tell you, a friend of my parents who lived in China happened to be in the U.S. at this time in August of 1985. And he had just come from New York to Maryland where I lived at the time and he was like, "Oh, Andrea doesn't have a job?" I just met this woman, Virginia Kamsky, who was one of the first business people to start bringing about joint ventures between Chinese state-owned enterprises and Western

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businesses. And guess what, Laura? Her little twist on her business model was that she only hired young women who spoke Mandarin Chinese.

Laura Cox Kaplan:
How about that?

Andrea Koppel:
Oh, and PS, she was hiring.

Laura Cox Kaplan:
That's amazing.

Andrea Koppel:
And while I wasn't interested in business, my parents encouraged me to interview for the job because a bird in the hand is better than nothing. I interviewed and there I was in October of 1985 on a plane by myself, flying to Beijing for a job that I wasn't particularly psyched about. But it was as a result of going to China that I discovered that my passion was journalism because all of my friends outside of work were journalists. And as the daughter of a very famous journalist, Ted Koppel, and the oldest of four kids, I was damned if I was going to be following my dad into his profession. But there I was thousands of miles away from my father's shadow, listening to other journalists talk about what they were doing, the stories they were covering. And then I realized, oh, I had been news director of my college radio station. I had really loved doing that, but I had thought extracurriculars were just what you did for fun.

So, you see. This is why I tell the young people I coach it doesn't matter where you start because the magic of life takes over. Sometimes it's fairy dust magic like what I experienced. I'd also say there was a little [inaudible 00:28:26]. I don't want to go so far as to say it was black magic, but failed the foreign service exam, Peace Corps go sideways, end up taking this random job in an industry that I had no interest in, but it was all those steps that led me to discover my love of journalism. So even when you get hit as so many students did and adults by a coronavirus pandemic curve ball, look for the magic in that opportunity. Look for what the message is. That's out there for you because there are opportunities both in the curve balls and in the fairy dust.

Laura Cox Kaplan:
Yeah. I love that story.

END OF EPISODE 210 PART 2 OF 2 PART CONVERSATION WITH ANDREA KOPPEL

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EPISODE CLOSE

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Friend, thanks for joining us today. You'll find the links we mentioned in this episode in the show notes for Episode 210. In particular, I've included links to Andrea's terrific podcast Time 4 Coffee, and her website where you can find out more about her online courses.

You'll also find a full, free transcript of this episode in the show note as well.

Next week, we'll continue our conversation with Andrea and pick up right where we left off and will jump into the failure -- how to learn from it and how to survive it especially when it happens in such a visible way as it did for andrea.

As always I hope you found today's conversation a good investment in you. And I'd love to hear your thoughts. How have you thought about your own passions and when you've pursued them, how have you dealt with any self-doubt or moments when your confidence left you. I'd love to hear.

You can reach me via the contact link on the website which you will find in the show notes. But you can also reach me on instagram, facebook, linked in and twitter. You'll find me at Laura Cox Kaplan. You take care, and I'll talk to you next week. She Said/She Said Podcast is a weekly production of She Said/She Said Media.

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