

TRANSCRIPT: EPISODE 215

TITLE: THREE WAYS TO BUILD INFLUENCE THAT HELP YOU TO THRIVE!

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, 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 215 OPEN:

Hey friend, welcome to She Said/She Said Podcast. So last week I attended one of my very favorite annual conferences that is hosted by an organization called The Policy Circle. The organization helps members to build leadership skills, including helping them become more confident about engaging on issues in a civil, constructive, and impactful manner. How refreshing. I'm really proud to serve on the board of the organization and to support their really important mission. The theme for this year's conference was building thriving communities. I love this theme of thriving, but especially because the idea of thriving aligns so beautifully with how I have come to think about influence and how we often talk about influence on this podcast. As I reflected on this question and I looked back over more than 200 hours of conversations and content over 4 plus years, I thought specifically about the connection between influence and thriving.

Now, when I talk about influence, I think about that person who is not just influential but who is also thriving. She's thriving because she puts a premium on a few key strategies that not only improve her own life, but also the lives of those around her. It doesn't make her perfect, of course, by any stretch, but it does mean that she's consistently learning from her setbacks and she's doing it all over again with the interest of trying to improve. And then proactively, she's seeking experiences and people who leave her inspired. She doesn't just wait for inspiration to strike, she's actually going out and finding it.

She also builds and maintains her influence through those practices and habits that make her the kind of person that others gravitate to, the kind of person others want to work with and learn from, and the kind of person who is more likely to build consensus for her goals and her ideas, including frankly, building consensus with those who don't always share her views. The practices that help us build that type of influence also happen to be the practices that help us to thrive. So how do influential people really do this?

Often I think we think of those things that build influence as being the really big things, but as I've studied this question and the topic more closely, and as we talk about each week here at She Said/She Said Podcast, building influence really boils down to lots of what I would consider to be much smaller practices and habits that increase and sustain our influence over time. When we build these practices, influence follows and it tends to stay with us as we pivot, and reinvent, and evolve in our lives and careers. We tend to be happier overall and to feel calmer about the chaos that can often surround us, but over which we have less control. There are many dimensions to how we can build and sustain influence, but I've found three key areas that at least for me really stand out because they're also those areas that help us to thrive, and that's what I want to talk to you about today.

The first is curating and editing your own story. We often hear the advice to "know your value" but how do we figure out what that really means in a way that can be shared with someone else, in a way that helps us build credibility while also helping us reflect and stay grounded in who we are and what matters most to us? That means digging into our stories to understand those elements that are most important to us, that are differentiating and where our unique value most often emanates. That also means we have to potentially reframe elements of our stories, especially related to failure and setback. The goal there is to make sure that we are learning from those situations and scenarios, and understanding how they can serve us even better going forward.

There's a fabulous book that I often recommend by a Stanford professor whose name is Carol Dweck. The book is called Mindset, and I'll bet several of you have either heard of it or read it or both, and I know if you've been listening to She Said/She Said Podcast, you've heard me talk about it. The bottom line of the book relates to essentially how we look at the world. Either as an opportunity to learn and improve or as fixed and static, meaning, do you tell yourself, I'm just not good at X versus I can learn new skills that help me improve in this area? You might say to yourself, this is something I don't know much about, but I'm challenging myself to learn. It's the difference between a growth mindset versus a fixed mindset.

Mindset also has a direct bearing on how we respond when we fail. We already know that we learn a great deal more when we fail than when we succeed, but only when our mindset is focused on gleaning the value from those experiences, even and maybe especially the rougher ones. Failure is, after all, our greatest teacher, but only if we let it be. This idea of mindset actually cuts across two important dimensions in the way that I think about influence. Both the story we curate and tell ourselves, but also my second point on influence which relates to investing in yourself.

Now, investing in yourself is one of my official taglines for She Said/She Said Podcast because that's really what She Said/She Said Podcast is all about. It's an opportunity for you, my listener, to make a deliberate investment in yourself. Each week I'm giving my audience a half an hour to 40 minutes of time to reflect with me and often with a guest on some dimension of influence. I take you on a tour of the guest's story or maybe encourage you to join me as we dig into some potentially less obvious dimensions, or an example of influence that maybe you might not have thought about. Like today's focus on how it can help us to thrive and how it can make a real difference in our lives. I think about this dimension as an investment because it aligns with how I learned to think about my career.

When I was just starting out, both the communications and policy work that I was doing was focused on banking and finance and then later, accounting and auditing. My mother was also a banker before she retired, so the idea of accrued capital or an asset that increases in value over time has always been fundamental to how I've understood both the world and my own career. I think of it as one of those

threads that essentially connects various parts of my own story as it's evolved and unfolded over time. But I also think of it like planting seeds and then cultivating them. Over time, they grow into something that is often truly magical. The same can be said of the investments that you make in yourself.

We are better equipped to invest in others when we first devoted the time and energy to both understand and to work on fine tuning our own talents, and to also understand and curate our story. It's like putting the airplane oxygen mask on first so that you have the strength needed to help others. I like to say it that way because sometimes when we say invest in ourselves, it can sound selfish when in fact it's actually the opposite. I love this quote from renowned bestselling author, Robin Sharma to this point. He said, "Investing in yourself is the best investment you will ever make. It will not only improve your life. It will improve the lives of all of those around you."

And then of course, a few months ago, Kari Kampakis, the fabulous mom, blogger and author, joined me on She Said/She Said Podcast in episode 188. Kari was rolling out her latest book, which is called More Than a Mom. Now Kari's work is based in Judeo-Christian teachings, but she cuts through the babble in a way that is consistently clear eyed, non-judgmental, and that speaks to so many of us who are working so hard to get it right, especially where our children are concerned. Now, in Kari's latest book, she reiterates that in order to raise healthy kids and to help them to thrive, means that we have to first invest in our own mental health and growth. We have to be healthy before we can truly raise healthy kids.

Creating a habit of investing in yourself also helps you become a lifelong learner. That matters because the curiosity and inquiry that accompanies the lifelong learner is actually a component of vitality. It helps us connect with others and it helps us continue to challenge ourselves in ways that help us continue to grow. A great example of this comes from Dr. Samantha Boardman, who is a clinical instructor in psychiatry and the author of a book called Everyday Vitality. I highly recommend the book. It's terrific. And Dr. Boardman joined me on the podcast back in episode 205. One of her really critical points in the book is that expanded thinking and attention that comes from challenging ourselves to learn new things, of investing in ourselves in ways that help us build additional skills, actually encourages problem solving and action. And action tends to boost our mood, it helps us feel happier, certainly than if we just focus on what we're thinking. Now, while what we're thinking and how we're thinking also matters, her point is that doing and investing, and learning and growing can have an even bigger and a longer term impact.

Investing in yourself also means working on ourselves potentially, and taking responsibility for our development, and figuring out our biggest strengths as well as our weaknesses, and then making conscious decisions about which of those things to double down on and which of those things we might want to work on. It also means proactively seeking those sources and challenges that can teach and inspire you and really looking for those things.

Another powerful element of this second dimension of influence as an investment is building influence by investing in relationships and investing in ways that help us really connect with others. Our relationships and the investments that we make in others is such a critical part of any personal influence strategy. A great friend of mine is the head of global sustainability at Goldman Sachs. She is one of my favorite people, and if you know her, you probably agree. Her name is Dina Powell McCormick and she actually joined me here on the podcast in episode 158. Dina exhibits the power of generosity and of investing in others so clearly as a component of her own influence. I often use her as an example of someone who embodies this spirit of investing in others in a way that not only makes the other person's life richer, but also her own.

The network that Dina has built is second to none and is largely based on making that authentic connection with another person. She is undoubtedly incredibly bright and talented, but I would argue that her greatest gift and talent is her ability to invest in others in ways that are important and valuable to both parties and that build a real and lasting connection.

I would also cite Susan McPherson who wrote a terrific book last year called *The Lost Art of Connecting: The Gather, Ask, Do Method for Building Meaningful Relationships*. She joined me in episode 191. One of Susan's secrets for building a powerful connection is preparation, actually investing time in learning something about the other person in advance to increase the potential that a connection will develop into a relationship. It's a really beautiful thing.

Now, from the third element for building and sustaining the type of influence that enables you to thrive is practicing or engaging with intentional persistence. Now, what I mean by that is when you know in your heart that you're meant to do something, even if you don't know exactly all of the parameters of what the end game of that thing may be, aim for doing over just thinking. And use the process that you go through to fine tune your idea and to learn. Doing also has the added benefit of building your confidence as you develop more mastery as you go. You will absolutely know more about whatever it is that you're trying to accomplish because you will have seen it firsthand.

I find this piece of advice often the most difficult to follow because I am not the most patient person. It's one of the many things that I'm always working on. But when I am patient or at least patient enough to be persistent, I do see the results, and I hear that from my guest on this podcast as well. As I think about examples from the podcast, I see this point illustrated most clearly in those stories that relate to failure and setback. But also when a guest has stayed focused on that bigger goal, that spark in her heart continues to fuel her and it reminds her she's supposed to do something. Even if that's something is still a little unclear. That requires, of course, a healthy dose of faith, and I would say courage because for normal people, trusting your gut isn't for the fearless. It's for those who feel the fear and do whatever it is anyway, because they know in their heart that they're supposed to.

A really great example of this is from one of my favorite stories from this podcast way back in episode 63 in my very first season. Brittany Underwood, who is the founder of Social Impact Jewelry Company, Akola, which is based in Dallas, Texas, joined me. When Brittany was in college at Southern Methodist University, she went off on a mission trip to Uganda. She was so impacted and moved by the poverty and the plight of the women there that she vowed to do something to help them. She returned home, she raised money for an orphanage, and just as they were getting ready to open the doors with TV cameras rolling, and all of this amazing press that she was receiving for this incredible accomplishment, she realized in that moment that an orphanage offered no economic sustainability.

So through tears, she pulled the plug uncertain of what to do next. She went back to school, she studied economic investment and sustainability programs, and came up with a model that resulted in the creation of Akola. Today, Akola now teaches the women in that Ugandan community a marketable skill, it enables them to earn a living wage, it taught them how to invest in their communities and it enabled them to support their families. What struck me and stuck with me all these years later is how difficult it was for Brittany to admit failure and to be willing to start all over, even though the ultimate outcome was a better one for all involved. She couldn't have known in that moment how everything would turn out, but she trusted her gut. And she leaned into her failure and she learned from it and she went right back at it again.

EPISODE CLOSE:

Curating your story, investing in yourself, which also means investing in others, and practicing intentional persistence are three critical components for continuing to build and sustain influence and for helping you to thrive. I'd love to know what you think about these dimensions and any others that you have found particularly helpful in your own journey. I'd also love to hear your feedback on this or any of our She Said/She Said Podcast episodes so be sure to hop on and leave a review wherever you're listening to this podcast. Or you can go to my website at shesaidshesaidpodcast.com and share your thoughts on the contact me form there.

Also on the website, that is the best place to find the full show notes, which include links to the past episodes that I mention here in episode 215, as well as a link to The Policy Circle where you can learn a bit more if you're interested. I've also included links to the various books that I mentioned in this episode, as well as a full free downloadable transcript of this entire episode. Again, just go to shesaidshesaidpodcast.com to find those things under the link for episode 215. Friend, thanks again for joining me today. I hope you found this investment in yourself worthwhile. Until next week, you take care and I'll talk to you soon.

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