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FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT - CAREERFLUENCER PODCAST



112: Authenticity, Identity, and Transformational Leadership with Emily Hannenberg

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Welcome to the Careerfluencer podcast. This is Emily Hannenberg. I'm the Head of Strategy and a Coach at the Leadership Consortium currently based out of Sacramento, California.

I think throughout my career, and I think many people will, will feel this way, there were absolutely instances where I felt meaningfully different. Overcompensating can be a dangerous practice, gosh, people can sniff that out really fast.

Very early on I felt a call to serve others. And to do that, as a leader of teams. You know, I felt I was really physically fit. And I felt like I could be part of a physical team. And those things together really drew me to joining the military. I wanted to attend West Point. And I also applied for Army ROTC scholarships. And I was so fortunate, and really humbled to get accepted to West Point, the United States Military Academy. There's a huge build up to getting into this dream school. And you're really want to make the most of it and pay it forward. And it is, I think parts of it were harder than I expected.

It is not a normal college experience. It is no- I think everybody who who graduates from military academy, their primary degree is probably in time management, and then whatever their academic focus was, certainly is, is also what's on the degree, but the schedule is incredibly demanding and really forces you to prioritize. Part of life at the Military Academy is you know, making sure your uniform and your barracks room are in tip top shape doing inspections. On Saturday morning, you clean all night, Friday, and Saturday morning, somebody comes and inspects your room, and it feels just sort of silly, right? Like, I'm gonna be a leader in combat. Why do I care about you know, my shoes being shiny and my bed being perfectly made, and my sink being spotless and my underwear being folded perfectly in a drawer? What does this matter?

And what I found, and this is a theme that came up again and other in other training in my life, was that the discipline and attention to detail that you build with an exercise like that translates on and on and on, right. So maybe when I was deployed in Iraq, I wasn't inspecting, you know, shoes and beds and underwear drawers. I was inspecting weapon systems, I was inspecting radios, I was inspecting first aid equipment, rescue equipment, I was inspecting things that would

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have a life or death impact on the success of our team. So I guess being open to the fact that all different kinds of work and challenges, you know, can have payoffs that we don't and can't anticipate, and maybe just trusting in the process and trusting the opportunities that are with us now. And being really open to what they can teach us now and what they will be able to teach us later.

The army is a predominantly male organization, many of the teams I lead I was the only woman many of the teams I served on, I was one of very few, if not the only woman and you know, certainly the only queer woman, or one of very few queer people in those spaces. For a long time, been really excited and motivated and captivated by the idea of human capacity, the idea of what an diverse group of human beings can accomplish together. And certainly the impact that leaders can have on the members of those teams. And I think this became particularly important to me, when I became aware of my sexual orientation, I identify as a queer woman. And that was during the Age of Don't Ask, Don't Tell in the army. And so those not familiar with don't ask, don't tell it was really sort of living in the closet with super high consequences. Not that that can't be certainly a very, you know, difficult situation for anyone in any walk of life, for being, you know, against the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

To be out and gay in the army. I think what I experienced during that period of service was really this feeling of empathy, there's often pressure and even even well, meaning mentors and powerful people in our lives can coach us away from that difference, and can coach us to assimilate and coach us to behave in ways that are a little less bumpy or maybe don't bring our full selves and just make it kind of easier for everyone else. Even as like as a commander of a of 100 person unit. I was very attuned to the fact that my impact on my soldiers was limited, right? Like I had only so much of their life I touched, but the parts of their life that I touched, I wanted to be positive, I wanted them to be constructive and supportive and set conditions for them to bring all those creative ideas bring all of those different aspects of themselves to the fore.

And I think a lot of that was motivated by what I felt when I was in the closet during Don't Ask, Don't Tell. I felt scared, I felt alone, I felt like there was this whole chunk of my cognitive and

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emotional bandwidth that was being diverted to survival. And I don't want to say living alive, but certainly not being forthcoming about every aspect of my life. And all of that bandwidth was being wasted. And it was sort of a vicious cycle rather than a virtuous cycle, leaning away from what makes you different leaning away from your authentic self. What that opens you up to is folks perceiving that you are interacting with them through some sort of a veneer or a filter. And, and I think what was helpful to me, and it's hard to identify a helpful substitute in the absence of training and confidence.

But I would say, I had such deep confidence in the work that I had put in, and the training I had received, and the support network I had in my corner, I had such confidence in those support mechanisms, that it was that I was able to show up authentically in those spaces. I know that that's not easy for everybody. And I would encourage folks to find ways to build little reminders and hacks into their day to day that helped keep them in touch, whether it's a picture of family or a token, maybe a ring or a bracelet that just signifies that call to bring your authentic self, I think leaning on that support.

And that confidence was very, very helpful to me, what it allowed me to do was to bring that quiet confidence into those spaces to bring humility and vulnerability into those spaces. And through that I was able to build trust, whether it was build trust with those that I worked for with those that worked for me, those I worked alongside, and through that trust, we're able to get stuff done right trust is the foundational trust is the foundation of human progress. We can't do anything together. If we don't trust one another right?

I think too late in life, I realized the value of having sounding boards who are not my partner who are not in my work environment. And you can describe that as a coach, you can describe that as a mentor. So I think being very thoughtful about bringing coaches and mentors into your life and feeling emboldened, you know, I think a lot a lot about the impact of social norms on especially young people. And we might not even be aware of how often and how many different ways we're being bombarded with what is expected of us and what we should be doing and what the norm is.

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I would tell my younger self - Do not hesitate. Like it is so energizing to be able to pay it forward. And as someone on the receiving end, you know, my younger self, it has so much impact to be able to have, you know, a relatively objective sounding board someone to help you reflect right, we might wrestle with the imposter voice are the saboteur voice inside our own heads. Our mentors are not inhibited by that they do not hear that voice. They they see our power, they see our gifts.

And so finding ways to intentionally bring those conversations into your life I think can be a huge source of energy and confidence and certainly a great way to tap into the insight and expertise of others who are so willing to help you. Just ask!