

[0:00:00]

[0:00:30]

Sheila Long: Hello everybody. Welcome to the Head of the Table podcast. My name is Sheila Long and I will be your host for today's show.

[0:01:00]

Sheila Long: I am very excited about today's guest. She is a long time friend and she's actually my sister. So I'd like to welcome our guest for today, Colleen McFarland to the podcast.

Colleen McFarland: Thank you, Sheila. It's great to be here.

Sheila Long: Yeah, no problem. Welcome. This is so wonderful to have you on.

Colleen McFarland: I'm delighted. You're so nice to have me.

Sheila Long: So Colleen was actually very instrumental and to me starting my business.

[0:01:34]

Many years ago, I was in the middle of a career reinvention. I have read this book by Pam Mitchell called the 10 Laws of Career Reinvention and it recommended in there I get a career reinvention board. So I had like six people who were on this board and they are people at different roles that basically it was to not like kind of cradle me and tell me it was okay than that to continue going down a path I wasn't happy within my career, but that I really needed to be more directed.

[0:02:09]

So Colleen was actually on my career reinvention board. So thank you for doing that, Colleen.

Colleen McFarland: You're welcome.

Sheila Long: And it was really instrumental and it helped creating MalamaDoe which now has led to this awesome podcast. So I'm so thrilled that Colleen can be on the show as our guest because now she has created something so things have just come full circle.

[0:02:36]

Colleen McFarland: They have.

Sheila Long: Yup.

Colleen McFarland: It's so true.

Sheila Long: So Colleen has written a book, it's called *Disconnected: How to Use People Data to Deliver Realness, Meaning and Belonging at Work*. So it's a truly groundbreaking -- so the book it's a truly groundbreaking book about the iGens and how they are the hardest working group of employees.

[0:03:02]

So, Colleen, can you tell us a little bit about the book and a little bit about why you decided to write it?

Colleen McFarland: Sure. No, happy to. I got an opportunity to write a book as part of a writing group and I at first was thinking that I would write a book about networking, because as you know I'm very passionate about networking. And then I got challenged by the organizer of the writing group, Professor Eric Custer to really think about what's something that I want to learn more about?

[0:03:38]

What's something that I'm curious about? Versus something that I already feel I know about. And he gave me some ideas for how to think about that and what I came back with is I really wanted to understand why young adults were struggling with loneliness more than they had in years passed and generations before.

[0:04:04]

I read an article about it in May of 2018 and it just kind of really stuck with me and I didn't understand and it didn't make sense. But I have been picking up on it with some young adults that I have bumped into in my networking workshop that I did. So I said, "You know what? I'm going to explore that because I have a few theories but I'm not really sure."

So the book looks at the intersection of young workers and the workplace and people data.

[0:04:36]

And what people data is, it's all the information that an employer has about employees. Everything from when you filled out your job application, to when you took maybe a test when you were interviewing, to your performance reviews, to your work outputs, all that information is used at work to get work done but it's also personal and tied to you.

[0:05:06]

Colleen McFarland: So I thought it would be interesting to look at that together and the results of it was this book about iGens and how technology has changed them as well as the workplace and what that means to employers.

Sheila Long: That is really great. Like I said before, it is truly a groundbreaking book and I really think everybody who has -- people who are in that iGen generation, they really should read it.

[0:05:41]

I have three kids, I didn't even realize they were in the age span of it. And it's basically what you recommend, what you were just talking about it what used to be called database marketing. And you can correct me if I'm wrong, it's now -- there's a big term called data science and then you can use artificial intelligence which helps you kind of mine this data that we have out there and then help everybody make intelligent choices about how to react with the data presented.

[0:06:15]

Sheila Long: Does that sound -- ?

Colleen McFarland: Yeah, yeah. I mean, the whole world of data is so interesting and that was another thing that happened to me around the time that I was deciding what to research and explore. I went to a talk on big data, put on by my alma mater, Marquette University.

[0:06:33]

And I had been bumping in to projects that work that we're using data for different things and I just wanted to understand it a little bit better. So I thought this talk would be a good venue for just to appreciate what are people doing with information? And what I learned there and then later in my research is that there's folks called data engineers who clean it up and make the data something you can use.

[0:07:04]

And then there's people called data scientists who organize it so that it can be used to answer questions. And then there's the business people who have the questions that they want answered. And often without having data organized, it can take days to get a question answered using data but when you have it organized, it can take seconds to see answers to your question.

[0:07:34]

So it's really powerful, it's really amazing, I've seen it being used with improving the customer experience and I've experienced it as a customer being out buying something and having something suggested to me. In the book, I tell a story about how I went to order a book for my then 10th grader for his class and Amazon told me that I already had the book which I thought was amazing.

[0:08:07]

So that is like a perfect example of big data being used to help customers.

So what I was wondering is, was big data being used to help the employee experience? And what I found out is that it's not being used very much there yet. But I do think that it will be because this youngest generation and you're right, they're called iGen by many.

[0:08:33]

They were born between 1995 and 2012. So they started -- if they went to college and graduated in four years and entered the workforce in 2017. So they're fairly new to the workforce and they're different than Millennials and that they don't remember a time before the internet. They grew up with computers and always -- computers in their hands, iPhones and they're used to just having it be part of how they get information.

[0:09:04]

So when they come to work, they think that the workplace is going to be the same as their personal life and when it's not because the employee experience isn't a priority where companies invest their money to make it better, the digital employee experience, they're disappointed and it kind of leaves a bad impression on them, so that's one point. But the bigger point about why you want to think about improving your employees' digital experience, especially for these young folks is that they need connection, they need to be a part of something.

[0:09:46]

Then the workplace is a great place to be a part of something. Because at work you really get opportunities to learn and grow and achieve and feel good and that happens if you stick around.

[0:10:02]

It doesn't happen in the same way if you jump from company to company, job to job every 18 months, two years. There's something really cool about being at a place for a while and growing and developing.

So that is an important thing to young people to be able to work digitally and to be able to work in a smart way that matches their personal experience.

[0:10:30]

Does that make sense?

Sheila Long: Yes, definitely. So Millennials are 26 to 40 years of age, so that's iGen -- because I have a nine-and-a-half-year-old. So I think it's age 7 to 25.

Colleen McFarland: Okay.

Sheila Long: So for our listeners out there, if you have kids in this age, this is who she's talking about. And I just think it's really neat that she took the time to really research this and help us better understand our kids and better parent our children too.

[0:11:03]

Sheila Long: But why do you think employers should be paying attention to this difference?

Colleen McFarland: Well, in addition to the employee digital experience, the other thing that's important for employers to know is that managers need to manage differently. And I call it really kind of remake the manager job. Whereas Millennials, who's a generation above, were looking more for managers to be cheerleaders for them and help them advance quickly.

[0:11:35]

The iGen is more looking for a manager to reassure them and to coach and help them develop skills, they're looking for safety and security in the workplace. They want to learn new skills and they need to be reassured that they're learning the right skills for example.

[0:12:04]

So how this matches, and bear with me a little bit because it's somewhat complex, I'm going to back up a little bit, is because the iGens grew up with technology, they spend a lot of time online as preteens and teenagers, interacting with people digitally, and they didn't spend as much time as older - - as generations before them in what they call in real life, IRL, with people in the physical world.

[0:12:37]

And they didn't have as much time developing those soft skills that come with relationships that are lasting. You know, the ups and downs that you have with friendships. So as a result, they're not as secure with their social skills in person. So when they come to work, managers need to know that, that they're going to need to be pushed more to speak up in meetings and to state their point of view even when it's contrary to others.

[0:13:11]

To participate verbally in settings with groups of people will be something that they need to get comfortable with and need to -- when that behavior is happening, they need to have it reinforced because they may back off if they face controversy because they're not used to it.

[0:13:32]

Sheila Long: That is just -- it really ties in to what we're doing at MalamaDoe actually.

Colleen McFarland: Is that right?

Sheila Long: It does. So we have -- I'm constantly being asked to join women's networking groups. So a year-and-a-half ago, I had -- I made a list, there were 210 of them in Milwaukee, they range from having events right at the primetime of family time like weekday nights or Saturday mornings, which are impossible, right?

[0:14:05]

Colleen McFarland: Yeah.

Sheila Long: So I couldn't join any of those and then the other groups were like \$500 a year which is fine for a few but there were 80. So I analyzed those groups through UWM, Lubar Entrepreneurship Center, they helped me with that, and we defined that the groups that would work for our market of women was groups that really celebrated the self-aware, compassionate woman who cared about her community.

[0:14:36]

And so it really reminds me a lot about what you're saying here with the iGen because you mentioned that psychological safety in your book and they're really interested in having it be like a safe place where people feel secure and where it's okay to be vulnerable and that's a lot what we do here with women because we really -- I really stress safety.

[0:15:03]

Everyone who uses our space, they have their headshot on our website and it's a place where you can just be vulnerable. So it really piqued my interest, especially -- you were talking a lot about how they needed to be bulletproof and they tend to be perfectionists and I'm just laughing because I'm constantly having to explain that because women tend to dot their Is and cross their Ts more than men and they want everything to be perfect, that they're not broken.

[0:15:37]

That's something that another group I work with, the Doyen Group, that's one of their main things is that women are not broken but it's okay that we want to do everything right. So I've heard people saying that women don't have enough confidence, that there's a confidence gap that we're trying to be perfect but I wanted to hear your thoughts on that.

[0:16:00]

Women who are -- our market tends to be over the age of 35 versus like iGen market.

Colleen McFarland: Yeah, the need to be perfect research that I did around younger adults was around being prepared for uncertainty. So I kind of tie it to being risk averse, being -- wanting to be ready for anything that happens because in their lifetime, they've seen a lot of things happen that weren't expected and guess what, we're living through one of those right now with COVID-19.

[0:16:39]

So when you think about it, this is not something anybody expected and how can you prepare for unexpected things is a question a lot of people I'm sure are going to continue to ask themselves after this but being a perfectionist when it's in excess, like too much, is when you actually think you can control things that can't be controlled.

[0:17:08]

And that can become limiting to you. You have to, in order to be healthy, be okay knowing that you're going to be able to handle things that come your way that you didn't expect and a lot of people will call that resilience that you know what, you're going to fall down just like you did last year and you're going to get up and you're going to be okay.

[0:17:33]

It's going to hurt for a while, you're going to learn from it but you're going to be okay. And the theory behind why young adults struggle with resilience is that they haven't had the life experiences of having hard relationship problems in their teen years because they don't date, they haven't done that as much as generations before them did.

[0:18:01]

They haven't had their heart broken a few times or had disappointments with friendships and realize that the world doesn't end when you have a disappointment with the friendship, that you actually get through it and you're okay and you learn from it and you keep trying. So that's the caution with

folks who want to be perfect, is they think that being perfect makes them bulletproof and they can handle anything.

[0:18:31]

But what really makes you able to handle anything is knowing that when you fall down, you can get back up and there's a lot of people there willing to help and support you when you do fall down and need to get up and those are your good friends and that's part of what everybody needs, is close friendships, two or three is enough, really. Some people don't even have that.

[0:19:00]

That's what the loneliness data was showing, that there's a lot of people out there who don't have anybody that they think they can talk to and that's a vulnerability. So investing time in relationships in your personal life is important. When you go to work, a manager [inaudible 0:19:19] how to do that and help you learn that skill at work as well and I do think people are searching for that, they're searching for a place to belong and a place to work hard for, helping it with its mission that's doing something good that they believe in.

[0:19:36]

So however your company can help new employees see that we've got that, you know? This is a great place to work, we value our customers, we value our employees. You come work here, you'll be part of our family. I think that type of an employer will be attractive to young people and they'll stick around if the environment's right.

[0:20:05]

Sheila Long: That is just wonderful. I mean what a great service you're providing to all these employers and all these really hardworking people that are going to join your companies.

Colleen McFarland: Yeah. No, I hope so. What impresses me is -- you know I have two sons of this generation, is their earnestness. They really are smart and hardworking and data consumers.

[0:20:31]

They consume and read and know so much because they just -- that's just how they communicate and how they learn. So when they come to work, they can offer a lot if the workplace is smart enough to engage them in a way that makes them want to be a part of it and that's the tricky part because how you engage them first is you need to meet them where they are. And where they're most comfortable is digitally interacting.



[0:21:04]

So using networking tools at work like Yammer which is like Facebook for the workplace is a great way to interact and get to know your younger workers and for them to interact and get to know others and it's also frankly just an awesome tool if you have people dispersed across geographies and in different time zones, how do you connect people that are spread apart not only by age but by miles and oceans?

[0:21:36]

You can do it through digital communication but it needs to be purposeful and the small informal banter that has happened and still happens in the hallways, in the lunch room, the elevator can also happen digitally but we have to get comfortable doing it.

[0:21:58]

Those of us who are of a different generation, we just got to be comfortable going there because that's where the younger workers are and that's where we can engage them and inspire them to also come and interact with us in the real life.

Sheila Long:

Okay, great. So is there -- you talk in the epilogue of your book about James Couzens and how he was a bulldog leader a hundred years ago. So can you tell us a little bit about who he was and why you brought him up?

[0:22:30]

Colleen McFarland: Sure. When I was doing the research and trying to really understand how technology had so dramatically changed so many things about life for younger people, I thought, "Well, what else has really dramatically changed life?" And I thought and I thought and I thought and thought about television and I thought, "Well, that's not exactly what I'm thinking about. Well, what like dramatically changed?"

[0:23:02]

And I thought about the automobile, so I did some digging and learned that back when automobiles first came out which makes complete sense if you think about it. But again, we don't remember a time before automobiles, right? Just like this younger generation doesn't remember a time before the computer. But before there were automobiles, there were -- there was nothing like a stop sign. There were no drivers' licenses and there was no speed limit.

[0:23:32]

So the first drivers were racing around wherever they wanted and often, they would barrel through cities where people congregated on the streets because that's where you hang out. There weren't as many parks and things like that. So people congregated, socialized on the streets and they could hear the horses coming.

[0:24:00]

So they had plenty of time to get off the street when the horse came but when cars came, they would literally run people over.

Sheila Long: Wow.

Colleen McFarland: Yeah. It got so bad that, you know, hundreds of people were dying. And the mothers of these children who were dying -- a lot of them are children playing in the streets were up in arms and started marching in parades. It's just fascinating to read about it. So in doing that research, I learned about James Couzens who had been a General Motor's executive.

[0:24:33]

So, he'd made his money from automobiles, was retired and could have just gone off and lived a very easy life not having to worry about much. But instead, he decided to become a public servant in Detroit and take on -- get bringing order to the chaos there.

[0:24:56]

Getting people to understand what stop signs were -- put stop signs up, understand them, make -- come up with driver's license, make no parking zones. Like all these things that we just take for granted.

Sheila Long: Yeah.

Colleen McFarland: Yeah, he had done a lot and he's like a typical awesome change leader. He had get -- bring people together and form a coalition, say, listen, this can't go on no longer. We need to bring order. He had lots of people who didn't like what he had to say, so he had to be really tough and handle the criticism.

[0:25:33]

And plow ahead by getting the support of others and make it happen. And in a short span of time, dramatically changed how traffic was handled in Detroit and the death count went way down and Detroit become a role model for the rest of the world for how to handle cars in urban areas. So I think he -- is the kind of leader that we need now for all of the technology brilliance that's going on.

[0:26:05]

Because there is a lot of brilliance going on but some of it can -- and has been harmful to people. And we need at least some self-regulation between tech leaders to come together and say, you know what? Let's all put our hand in the fire here and agree that we're not going to do things that we know hurt people. And we're going to call each other out if we do.

[0:26:30]

At a minimum that needs to go on because I do -- the research that I did around the smartphone makes it very clear that the apps that were first out there and were pretty -- I don't know. Pretty much just like viewing apps had features added to them that intentionally were design to make people spend more time on the apps and by making them addicting and it really worked.

[0:26:58]

I mean, it got people who were just spending maybe an hour or two on an app to spend more like six, eight, ten hours a day on an app. And when they're not doing that, when they're on the app all the time, they're not doing other things. And the most vulnerable are the young people and that's why they -- many of them developed so differently because they weren't spending time doing things that would develop their brains and their skills differently because they were spending time on these addictive apps.

[0:27:32]

Sheila Long: Wow. It just really makes you look at -- look at cellphones and just computer time differently. And it really gives you kind of like [inaudible 0.27.44] as to like why you need to really monitor what people -- especially, you know, people under the age of 25 are doing in the computer and kind of like how they're feeling.

[0:27:58]

But I feel like James Couzens -- I think his first name is James, right?

Colleen McFarland: Yup.

Sheila Long: What he did -- he was like really uniquely positioned to do it.

Colleen McFarland: Right.

Sheila Long: It's kind of like, what I'm doing at MalamaDoe like I'm a woman. I always tell, like I've had 11 interns actually and they come in and I just tell them, I can do this because I'm a woman. I can walk in rooms and have conversations that

are very difficult for men to have but I can -- you can -- if you kind of have a nice background and that you can.

[0:28:31]

So, him being from the auto industry and being able to like say that, that's -- it's Detroit like where the cars were probably all being made.

Colleen McFarland: Right.

Sheila Long: And so it will be really great if you could get a leader in the technology industry to really -- like someone who really has a lot of clout to just take ownership.

Colleen McFarland: Exactly. That's exactly what we need. We need a tech bulldog leader who can get the attention of not only other tech leaders but who's also charismatic and can help individuals stop and take a look at how their they're interacting with technology.

[0:29:10]

You know, the same way James Couzens was able to speak to pedestrians. And, you know, to walk in the pedestrian zone, you know, pay attention to the stop lights. We need someone charismatic as well as someone who's respected by the people in the tech industry. Completely agree.

[0:29:30]

Sheila Long: Well, great. Well, thanks a lot for all of your work.

Colleen McFarland: You're welcome.

Sheila Long: We had -- you had -- we had you on the show last time with our mom actually.

Colleen McFarland: Yes.

Sheila Long: So we got that Mother's Day. Yeah, so do you have a story about your mom that can inspire others?

Colleen McFarland: Sure. I have so many stories about my mom. I shared one in that podcast. Let me think if I can come up with another one. Well, here's one about being a mother.

[0:29:58]

When I was first a mother, my -- after my first child was born, Daniel, I struggled with how little I could get done outside of taking care of him. Because taking care of a baby is so much work and it's wonderful work but I

was used to, you know, getting 10, 15 things done a day off of my to-do-list and that was frustrating for me that I couldn't accomplish as much as I wanted to.

[0:30:29]

And I don't know exactly what I said to mom about it but I said something and she said to me, Colleen, you are a mother and your job is to take care of this child. And other things can wait and what you just need to learn to do during these next few months, is to lower your standards. I thought that was so funny. She's like, you can keep trying to think that you can get all of these other things done but you will lose your mind.

[0:30:59]

You need to be more realistic about what you can -- you know, what else you can do besides take care of your precious baby during these first few months of his life and I just thought that it was created by someone [inaudible 0.31.13] I'm feeling a little bit overwhelmed with kind of back to what we were talking about that perfectionist thing. You know, trying to get everything done. I'll remind myself of mom saying that lower your standards.

Sheila Long: That's --

Colleen McFarland: It's just not something you expect, you know, someone, your mother to say to you.

[0:31:32]

So the fact that she said it to me really struck a chord and I've remembered it a number of times.

Sheila Long: She also was uniquely positioned. She was your mom telling you.

Colleen McFarland: Yes.

Sheila Long: Right?

Colleen McFarland: Right.

Sheila Long: All right. Well, where can our listeners get in touch with you?

Colleen McFarland: Oh, sure. You can get in touch with me through my website about the book. It's my name, so it's easy to remember.

[0:32:00]

Colleen McFarland: ColleenMcFarland and then it's dot US, like the United States. So that's the easiest way to get a hold of me. Can I tell them where to get the book?

Sheila Long: Absolutely.

Colleen McFarland: All right.

Sheila Long: Let's review the name of the book too.

Colleen McFarland: The book is called, *Disconnected: How to Use People Data to find Realness, Meaning, and Belonging at Work*. But really, all you need to remember is *Disconnected* and my last name, McFarland, M-C-F-A-R, like far, land, McFarland and go to Amazon.

[0:32:36]

Go to Amazon, you type *Disconnected*, McFarland, you can get the eBook for 99 cents through May. So, that's a really easy way to check it out and if you want to buy a paperback, that's out there too. But I'd be delighted if you check out the book and if you think someone else would be interested in learning more about young adults, about data and about the workplace, and wellness, encourage them to check it out too.

[0:33:10]

Sheila Long: Okay. All right. Well, thank you so much for being on the show. We really appreciate it.

Colleen McFarland: Thank you for having me, Sheila. I really appreciate it.

Sheila Long: And thanks to all of our listeners for tuning in. And please feel free to look us up at MalamaDoe, M-A-L-A-M-A-D-O-E dot com. If you're interesting -- interested in pivoting in your career or looking to be more inspired, please listen to more of our podcast.

[0:33:35]

Sheila Long: Thanks, everyone.

Colleen McFarland: Thanks, everybody.

Sheila Long: Thanks to everybody for listening to the Head of the Table podcast. Please feel free to look for us wherever you find your podcast. Let your friends know as well. Thanks, everyone.

[0:34:02]