

**EPISODE 11****[INTRODUCTION]**

**[00:00:06] TF:** Welcome to episode 11 of Job Search Strategies with Tiffany Franklin. Today, we're going to talk about getting into and out of graduate school with Dr. Jeanne Stanley.

Dr. Jeanne Stanley is the Executive Director of Grad School Coaching, and has worked with prospective graduate students for over three decades in successfully meeting their academic goals. She works with clients in selecting and applying to graduate programs, as well as supporting students who are currently attending graduate school. Prior to founding Grad School Coaching, she was the director of two graduate programs at the University of Pennsylvania, and has been on a National Advisory Board for crediting graduate schools in counseling and clinical psychology.

Since 1994, Dr. Stanley has been on the graduate faculty of the University of Pennsylvania, and was awarded the Outstanding Educator of the Year Award from the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education. As a national trainer, consultant, and licensed psychologist, she works with colleges and universities across the United States. The result of her work and research, training and consultation services can also be found in several professional journals and book chapters. Dr. Stanley earned her PhD from the University of Pennsylvania, as well as an MEd in psychological services. She graduated from the College of Notre Dame of Maryland with a BA in Psychology.

**[INTERVIEW]**

**[00:01:33] TF:** Today, I'm so excited to have Dr. Jeanne Stanley. She has been the most significant mentor in my life. I am not over-exaggerating. When I was in grad school and transferring and it was just such a time of career turmoil for me, because I had always had stuff pretty much worked out through college in that regard. Then suddenly, when it didn't, I just didn't know what was next. I am so grateful for the help that she gave me and want to go over the advice that she has for a lot of other people.

**[00:02:06] JS:** My gosh. Tiffany, thank you for the intro.

**[00:02:08] TF:** Jeanne, could you tell us a little bit about your career journey?

**[00:02:12] JS:** Sure, Tiffany. First, thank you so much for having me on. I know what is in your head, and that you get to share it with other people is just terrific. I think my career trajectory is common in some ways and very different in others. I wasn't your typical student. I really didn't learn how to learn until about junior year of high school. That's a lot of years of more being distracted and playing in my desk, as opposed to knowing what was going on.

With a few good mentors, and really hunkering down, I took off at the second part of high school and college and really started learning how to learn and fell in love with it. That led me to college, which was great. I went to a very small college. All the professors knew me and they were all incredible mentors I could go to and talk to, for literally an hour at a time to get support.

I ended up going to a graduate school career fair at the college next to the one I went to. I picked up a Brown catalog. It was a beautiful Brown catalog. I remember looking at it at night. I leave it next to my bed. I thought, "Well, let me apply to this place. I don't really know about grad school, but I know I love learning about psychology, so let me have another year or so of that." It turned out to be the University of Pennsylvania.

I had no idea at that point, again, I was pretty naive. I ended up in it and loved it. Did my masters there. Did my doctorate there. Went away, worked in Boston, did my pre-doc, post-doc internships, and then I got a call one day saying, "Hey, would you like to come back and direct the master's program that you were in?" I was like, "That sounds really fun." That's academically where I started. After that, we can talk a little bit more as we get into it. It's knowing that, I think, we all think people going to graduate school have to have a certain pedigree, or a certain background, or certain training. That's definitely not the case. What you want to know is what you're passionate about, what brings you joy, and making sure that the graduate degree is what you need to help you get there.

**[00:04:16] TF:** That's an amazing journey. I'm just curious, what was that thing that you learned in high school that taught you, that was the defining thing that made a difference in how you learned?

**[00:04:26] JS:** It was twofold. It was definitely, I had a teacher named Mrs. Carroll who drove into us how to write. I mean, that's all we did. We would get into class and she had high standards. She taught us how and that support, if we just built off and we kept rewriting the same pieces over and over, Mrs. Carroll was definitely where I learned to learn, in her class. Then, I had this great friend that I made by the end of sophomore year,

and she really helped by teaching me how to study and she would edit my work. Then every time I'd write a paper and she'd edit it. I'd read what she changed. I started learning the basics that I just hadn't really taken in.

It's always about, I think, the support of others is how we grow, at least for me. I think that's one of the myths of graduate school, actually. You're supposed to be doing this alone. There are times when you are alone, but there's a lot of times you can support each other.

**[00:05:25] TF:** That's such great advice. I love the editing piece too. Because even, whether it's for getting into grad school or the job search with resumes and cover letters, you don't have to be alone. There are people. Editing is sometimes, I think, if you put pressure on yourself that it has to be perfect the first time you write it, you'll never start. If you just get something down that you can work with.

**[00:05:47] JS:** Gosh, that is so true. A blank tabula rasa. Blank sheet to start. Just put anything down and you can always go back and clean it up. I think for graduate school, as you – and then particularly the application process, the people who maybe have edited before for you, they may be strong, but you also might need to go to people who have a little bit more experience about what someone is looking for in a graduate school application.

It may be your sister or your mom that has been editing your work for the last umpteen years. Maybe you do need an outsider this time to get the perspective of who are you? How does that come across in your essay, your application?

**[00:06:29] TF:** Well, I'm excited to dive into this. One question, though, I always ask every guest at the beginning of this show is what's the best career advice you've ever been given, Jeanne?

**[00:06:39] JS:** That's a tough one. I definitely remember, it was late one evening, I was at my third or fourth year in a doctoral program. Third year, because I've pretty much finished all my coursework and my dissertation. I was going away to internship and I had two offers, and one was local. I knew the program. I'd done my practicum there. It would have been so easy just to go in it. The other was all the way up to Boston. I didn't know anybody in Boston.

He was there and he was a professor I'd never actually had in class. I was talking to him and he pretty much said, in his beautiful way of saying it, "Trust your gut. Make an informed decision. Once you have all the facts

go with you. Also, what is your gut saying?" As simple as that is, and we hear that a lot, the combination of informed decision-making plus your gut is a great combo. It changed my life, going to Boston. It was by far the best learning experience I've ever had in my life as well.

**[00:07:34] TF:** That is so funny that you say that, because that's one of the things that the students and my executive clients that I coach, I always say it's the convergence of your head, heart, and gut when making decisions. I feel it's just right along that.

**[00:07:48] JS:** That's the beauty of your counseling background. You have counseling background, Tiffany, you have the career, you have the executive coaching. You pull those together. Not everybody has those combinations.

**[00:07:59] TF:** Oh. Thanks, Jeanne. Always so positive talking to you. How did grad school coaching become one of your passions?

**[00:08:05] JS:** I'm from Baltimore originally. Let me say it as I normally would. I'm from Baltimore, hon. Baltimore, we sit around and we eat crabs, and we eat for hours. I was with a really good friend, talking, also from Baltimore. He said, "If you could do anything, what would it be?" I said, "Well, I would do the advising of academia, the support, the mentoring, but without as much of the meetings, without as much as some of the politics that go on."

Literally, I wrote on a napkin, "Grad school coaching." I put in my pocket as a map to do and literally about 10 years later, 2007, I ran across that napkin. I'd been thinking about it, but just it was like, this tells you something. You've been thinking about this forever. I went out on my own. I'd had a great, great career being in a wonderful university. I figured out how I could still stay with them and teach maybe one course, or do special programming for them. Then went out full-time to do grad school coaching, as well as I'm a psychologist, so I have a private practice work with people.

Just more the everyday life transition issues. That's what grad school coaching was born. It's the best part of the advising and supporting without. Knowing the system. I mean, I know universities, and I've also accredited many different graduate programs around the country. I've had to get inside and learn about those programs. I'm quite familiar with the process, but also how does a person support their head and their heart? There, as you said earlier, in getting in and then getting out.

**[00:09:46] TF:** That's a great story. There's something about when you write stuff on napkins. I think of stories, like, how great songs were started that way. I love that you found that 10 years later.

**[00:09:55] JS:** I literally did. It was in my sock drawer, if you must know.

**[00:09:59] TF:** It was a sign.

**[00:10:00] JS:** It was a sign.

**[00:10:03] TF:** How do you help your clients determine if graduate school is the best option for their interest in needs?

**[00:10:08] JS:** That's a great question, Tiffany. That's where I always start. What is the why? Why do you want this? Sometimes I literally get answers of, "Well, I want the word 'doctor' behind my name. I want to make a reservation at a restaurant and be able to say, Dr. Smith," and I really talk to the person. It's why the counseling background is helpful about. That probably won't be enough to help you get through the whole process. It is a long process.

You want to go to graduate school because it's going to help you get to your goal. The very first question is, whenever I work with a client, if I run into you and say, eight or 10 years at Starbucks and we're in line, and I'm like, "Oh, Hi, Tiff. How you doing? What are you doing?" You tell me what you're doing and it's your dream job. Do you need graduate school to get to that dream job? Did you need that process? Sometimes you really don't need it. Sometimes you need it for accreditation, or excuse me, licensure, or certification. Or you need it because it's what is expected in the field. That's not always the case. There has to be meaning behind that you would need it to get to where you want to get to.

**[00:11:13] TF:** Well, that was such a big thing for me too, because I remember, you helped me that year when I had transferred grad schools from a doctoral program. Then, when that was just all or nothing, there was no terminal masters with that one. Then, with Penn, and I realized that I wasn't as passionate about that first doctoral program, but the counseling, which was what the program at Penn was that I was interested in, was a masters. That was what I wanted to do.

I remember, I was struggling so much to decide, do I need to get a PhD in this? Well, let me – and I'm so grateful that you helped me with that. Then you helped guide me into the practicum and even through some networking that I didn't even know I was networking. I was just talking to people. It was accidental networking. You guided me into that first job at Drexel.

**[00:12:02] JS:** It's so true, Tiffany. I think, sometimes we drink the Kool Aid that we should go for the – we should supersize. We should go for the absolute – which of course, we get a doctorate. It's not always what we need. There are reasons you stay on. Sometimes you can learn something really well in two years and sometimes staying on for five or six years is actually too long. It's not what you needed. I just loved, for you, that you had the openness to understand that, “This isn't what I want. What do I want?” Then, being able to have the guts to move towards what you want. Even when other people are saying, “Well, of course, you would stay on with the doctoral program.” Well, no. Not if it's not what I need, or what would get me to where I want to go.

**[00:12:43] JS:** Yes, because being in the right master's program, for me, made all the difference. Also, I think one thing that you taught me and other people along the way, even when your formal education ends and you graduate, the learning continues. It's just sometimes it's much more self-directed. I mean, especially now, I'm learning every day.

**[00:13:03] JS:** My gosh, absolutely. Part of grad school is teaching you how to learn, how to think abstractly and in more detail, and how to take in tons of information and make it concise. That process sometimes absolutely happens in a one or two-year process. A doctoral program, they're pretty specific. Or, in case of going to medical school, or dental school, or architecture school, they're longer because you're getting more precise. If anything, you're closing in and getting very detailed.

Sometimes that's helpful. Sometimes that's not what we need. That's like saying, “I have to get my cavity filled. Yeah, would you do me a favor? Would you just fill them all? Because we're here and we'll do it.” It's really too much sometimes.

**[00:13:44] TF:** That makes a lot of sense. When somebody does begin the grad school process, they can be overwhelmed, because there's just so many, if you Google it, options out there. How do you help clients search and select potential schools and programs that are right for their needs?

**[00:13:59] JS:** That's what my 11:00 client and I were talking about today. It's pretty fitting. There are I'm sure, other people that are out there, I assume, that will do the searching for you. I will never do that. I will provide you with the resources and teach you how to search based on those resources. For me, that's like if, Tiffany, if you and I went through a restaurant and you sat down and I'm like, "Okay, Tiffany will have the steak tartare and you're like, "I really wanted a pizza." It has to come from the person.

I'd help them understand what is important for them. Then also, how do you collect information about a program? It's interesting programs. People always want to judge you by the website. The faculty are rarely the people who put the websites together. Sometimes the most beautiful, amazing website doesn't mean that that's what the program is like. Then sometimes, I really remind clients this all time, a really bad website does not mean the program is not up to par. It just means that you need to collect a little bit more data. You need to see what faculty are doing.

Look at the opportunities for learning experiences. I really always say to the clients, find out, go on and see what the planned program of study is. In other words, what courses will you be taking while you're there? If you're looking at the 20 courses and 15 of them you're like, "Uh." That's not the right program for you then.

I mean, Tiff, you and I know there are always a few courses that we have to take, but they're not necessarily – they're required. If you're looking at that much and it's not speaking to you, it's not the right program. Now, I'm working with a client right now. She's going back. She's actually in her late 40s and going back to graduate school. For her, when she started the search process, it really taught her more about what she wanted. She kept listening to, and she read about these programs. Where she started, the ball moved. That's okay.

That's why I think, in some ways, the most important part is first, doing the work about finding and learning what's out there at the buffet and then getting more specific at the buffet and narrowing it down to maybe just the seafood. Then, if it wasn't the seafood, what are the best "restaurants," AKA grad schools to go to?

**[00:16:15] TF:** Are there any aggregator sites, or should people, if they're looking at the different rankings and those sites, that you recommend for your clients?

**[00:16:26] JS:** It's a good point. There's a lot of material out there, and you can get pretty lost on the internet. The thing I say about any of these sites, and we'll talk about a few in a minute, is that some of them, to be able to offer the service for free, take advertising, they take sponsors. They will say, you'll put in, say you're looking

for a graduate degree in public policy. You put in public policy, and then you'll see the first three are sponsored. That doesn't mean that they're the perfect fit for you, or that they're any better or worse than.

I really encourage people, because we're used to looking at the top three, when we look at it on say, Google. You want to go through and look through all of them; the ones that also did not pay to get ranked. Because you might find pretty far down on the chart, something that is of interest to you. I usually suggest, again, I'll give these links to you later, but something as simple as [www.gradschools.com](http://www.gradschools.com). Again, you can search for masters, doctoral programs, and so forth. Again, they have sponsors, but you'll be an informed consumer and look at the other ones, not just the sponsored programs.

**[00:17:30] TF:** That's great. We'll put them in the show notes too.

**[00:17:32] JS:** That'd be great. The rankings is a tricky thing. There are definitely – people have come to me in the old days when they would come in with the magazine of the ranking and throw it on my desk. I'd be like, “Okay. Well, you have to understand how those rankings happen.” Sometimes, absolutely, that is a great school. I've also seen a school jump from ranking of 20<sup>th</sup> to then a ranking of three in one year. What did they do in that year? Well, the graduate school itself actually changed how they did their marketing. Sometimes the people who review for those rankings are often say, deans of the university.

That one graduate school had sent out to every dean, here's our paperwork, here's our – and it was a beautiful brochure, and it made it jump that much. Sure. Look at them. I don't know if it's the most objective way of doing it, to be honest. I think it's you getting in there and doing the work to see what is the best fit for you.

**[00:18:27] TF:** Do you think there's value in people contacting the career centers for the programs to see what did the people do on the other side of the program?

**[00:18:37] JS:** I love that question, Tiffany. You know that is a great way. It's a way that people don't think about. I always say, contact the department. More likely, the career services will have information about where are our graduates, not just one year, but three years and five years and 10 years out? Now, they don't always have that data and that's okay. Boy, when they do, it sure tells you a lot.

I mean, a program where people coming out, and by three months afterwards, 90 percent of people have employment versus 12 percent. It teaches you a lot. Tiffany, it also gives you information about what resources



beyond the school I go to for graduate school. The school is often within the university, or the program. I mean, you want to make sure that particularly for graduate school, that there's a top-notch career services center, a really strong library with amazing holdings, both in the building itself, but also online resources.

Also, for some students out there who might have different personal identities, that they have centers for African-American studies or an LGBTQ Center. When you're in grad school, you're often growing. You can't help it. You want to know that there's more than just sitting in class, that there are other places that are around there for you to learn from and be supported by.

**[00:20:01] TF:** That's a great point, Jeanne. Do you have any tips for helping people as they actually move through the application process, since it tends to be months-long?

**[00:20:11] JS:** There is a degree of organization that really pays off. The people I see that struggle most, first they start late. This is not a process. You can start late. That's like me saying to you, "Hey, Tiffany. Regardless of whether you're married or not, I think she'd be married in three weeks. That's the deadline. Now, work that out, okay?" Then you're like, "Ah."

It's a commitment to a relationship. It's, in a way, a metaphor, that you want that time to meet the person and go out on those dates. I'm not getting too weird in this metaphor, but learning about the program and they're learning about you as well. Again, back to organization, I often give clients an Excel sheet with several columns. I say, "Look, you do not need to fill out all of these columns. They're there that you can use them. You can delete the ones you do not want." You have to get a system of tracking. I also recommend that for each program that there is of interest.

I give another format that they can learn about that program, the information they get. When they call career services, they write a little note about it in there. Or if you do it, again, online, you keep your notes online, terrific. It gets a little confusing when you're looking at 12 programs and you say, "Now, which one had the externship in public health in a rural hospital?" It gets hard. Taking a couple notes, keeping those notes together, really, the organization pays off.

**[00:21:40] TF:** I have people do the same thing for the job search. With all the students and clients I work with, I say that it's almost like using a data analytics approach for yourself, where basically you show what effort you're doing, and then see what's working, grant that jobs you hear much more quickly, versus waiting months

and months. I love the metaphor with dating too, because I think the job search is so much like that. The interviews are like the dates, as you reveal yourself little by little. Learn about them and things on paper aren't always what they appear.

**[00:22:11] JS:** Isn't that true? There's similar processes. It's why I do a lot of career coaching as well, because there's similar processes. They're unique parts, as you know about. Not only as I lovingly say, my job is to help you get in, but to also help you get out. Getting in is part of it. Then learning why you're there and then leaving. It's like, okay, I had to fly a lot for work. I do a lot of trainings, but I didn't like flying, Tiffany. This is not my favorite. I did it a lot. Taking off, then we level out, we fly. Then we land. All three of those parts are important. They're just as important, to take off as the landing.

When people think about grad school, you get in, that's it. No, it's just as important about what you do while you're there, when you're in the air. Then when you're landing and pulling into the gate.

**[00:23:01] TF:** Well, and it's interesting you say that, because the program I went through, the master's at Penn, it was a one year accelerated program. I know when I was working in Penn Career Services with a lot of the engineers and most of them were in two-year masters, but sometimes it was a one year, where practically they just get there, and then already start thinking about the job search. That's, I think, something too, for people depending on the length of their graduate program, how soon they have to start thinking about the career and the getting out part.

**[00:23:31] JS:** Absolutely. We moved to an orientation, the week we do orientation in that program, bringing in career services the third day.

**[00:23:41] TF:** Oh, wow.

**[00:23:42] JS:** Yes. There's people that will support you. We also brought in the Learning Resource Center people and they would give a little presentation. Then you knew who you would contact over there. Because you need to be thinking, that's back to my first question, what do you want to do and why? Why do you want this degree? What do you want to do with it? Where are we going? For people looking for grad schools, or finishing school, oh, it's a lot of money and a lot of time and a lot of effort.

I rather you work somewhere where you're getting paid and you're learning about what works for you and what doesn't, what you do like and what you don't like, instead of paying a lot of money, or a lot of time and effort for a degree that well, you wish you'd looked around a little bit more and figured out what you wanted first.

**[00:24:26] TF:** I know, I wished I had done that with my first year with transferring grad schools. It was funny, because at the time, I jokingly would say, "Oh, it was the last year." Then I realized sometimes figuring out what you don't want is just as valuable, although having to move cities and go through all that. It made me be so much more purposeful for the rest of my career. It's not to say that every move I made was oh, this is exactly what it should be. Just, I think you've learned so much each time.

**[00:24:55] JS:** It's so true. Again, back to the dating metaphor. You go out with someone and you realize certain people that don't match with you. Then you realize what you're looking for, what you like in a person, you want humor, you want the comfort. Then, whatever those variables are, that's the same thing when you're looking for graduate program. Grad programs can have really different personalities and different feels to, because you think about it. They're based on personalities of people that are there.

**[00:25:21] TF:** Now, I've heard sometimes it's good advice to reach out to current graduate students of a program, especially if you're in a multi-year doctoral program, and maybe you're at the point where you've got an interview. Do you have any advice regarding that?

**[00:25:35] JS:** I do. I mean, sometimes they will literally have grad assistants who are in a master's or doctoral program, who are there to talk to you. Usually, they're pretty honest. I know they're being as part of their assistantship. I think it's always helpful to hear from people who are there. For me, I also encourage if there's any way you can find people in the graduate program, that maybe aren't used to talking to somebody that you talk to them as well.

Now, let's be real. You can talk to someone who absolutely loves anything, but if they're having a bad day, anything can look bad. You don't want to make a decision based on talking to one person. That's a huge mistake. I've seen people do like, well, they didn't like it. Well, they didn't like the commute. Well, I'm living on campus. Okay, so then. You want to find out the specifics of the pros and cons and neutral parts, but consider the source. Consider what they want and what they're looking for. Is it similar to you or different?

**[00:26:34] TF:** That is such great advice. Jeanne. What I tell a lot of my executive clients, too, and students when they're doing informational interviews for jobs, where that's why you talk to a lot of people, because you don't know how well-suited they are to their job. It's like Amazon reviews. Sometimes you don't know if the top ones are going to be their friends, or the bottom ones. They just don't like anybody. Look at the ones in the middle and look for patterns.

**[00:26:57] JS:** That's exactly what I did, too. I love that you talk about informational interviews, because that's the same thing. You want to be doing informational interviews for not only people who are in graduate programs, but those who are out maybe one or two years. I have someone who just – she applied to law school. She just got into eight law schools, which is terrific. She applied to nine, she has gotten into eight so far. She's waiting to hear about the other.

Then she started. She's glad that had called this down. She started talking to her parents' friends. Parents' friends are in law, and but they're in their 40s and 50s, and 60s. What they thought about a program can be very different. Programs change. They're talking about, "Well, this is my experience and my friends who went to X school," but that was 30 years ago. You want to find more recent people. Even sometimes 10 years. Whole programs can shift in that time period.

One other way to learn about programs, and it's something that people use for their career searching all the time is something like LinkedIn, where you have this connection or community and people that you can see now, who are the current students in a program. You can search by Boston College, such and such a program. Who's in it? Then reach out to them. It's not a stalky way, because it's LinkedIn. You can reach out in-person, decide whether to respond or not. A lot of my clients the last few years have found great success, being able to talk to someone currently in the program, or recently a graduate, that they would not have known about before, other than something like a tool, such as LinkedIn.

**[00:28:34] TF:** Jeanne, that's such great advice. One thing I wanted to turn to now, as many people are just overwhelmed when it comes to the personal statements, because they find it the hardest part of the process. What are some of the best personal statements you've ever read? What set those apart and how do you guide clients through the stage of the application?

**[00:28:52] JS:** It's funny you said that. About a month ago, probably of my many years of doing this, read the best personal statement I've ever read. I've read a lot in my time. It's that combination of, first of all, following

what they asked for in a personal statement. Tiffany, you get this. So many people will just start writing and not even look at the prompts, what they were asked to address. I see that all the time. I will say to a person, take literally copy-paste what the questions are that that program wants. Put them as the headers and then start filling that in.

You can always go back and take out those headers. Make sure you're asking the questions. People get lost. It's overwhelming, I know to write. If you started with breaking it down into, okay, this is what they want. They tell you what they want. The other part, if someone says they want a 500-word essay, and you write a 900-word essay, because it's going to explain who you are better. First of all, it's probably not even going to be read, because you can't even follow the instructions that they set to you. They're wondering how well you're going to do in a graduate program.

If they say, whatever the limit is, they're not joking. People all the time will be like, "Well, can I make it a little bit longer?" Why would you want to do that, if that's what they asked for? Why would you even risk that? A lot of this is becoming more automated in some ways, looking at some of the basics. We've seen this a lot with, for better for worse, standardized testing becomes – it's okay, can be a cut off in some ways.

You want to make sure that you're not getting – that when you're being reviewed, you're following – so everybody comes out equally. It's not fair, say, Tiffany gets to write 900 words, but I only get to write 500 words.

**[00:30:37] TF:** That's a great point, Jeanne. Plus, they want to see how concise you can be. Because that's a valuable thing across industries.

**[00:30:45] JS:** You also want who you are to come across in it. The job is not to recite your resume. Those are usually the worst ones I read. I could have just said, why don't you just put the bullet points back? Because that's your entire resume. That's not what they're asking. They want to know, why here, why now is often the basis of the question. Why here? Why do you want to go to this program? Why now? What do you want to do with it? Are we the right place to help you get there?

**[00:31:09] TF:** Jeanne, with the personal statements, how personal should you get? Should people really go into depth and stuff? Or at what point does it become cringey and make it uncomfortable and TMI? When I ask this question, know the spirit in which I'm saying this, that everybody has challenges in their lives. When I work

with students and clients in interviews, a lot of times they have very big extenuating circumstances, but how to talk about that in a way where it doesn't sound like it's ready for a therapy session, but yet, it also acknowledges that important thing in their life.

**[00:31:49] JS:** Oh, I love that question. Indeed, I've read some that have just made me extremely uncomfortable, or literally called person and talked to them and saying, "I think this is a time to get some support," when I was in programs before. I mean, this is the first time to meeting you. It's like going back to the date metaphor, and on a first date, saying, "Hey, let me tell you about my medical issues and my mental health issues." It sounds almost overwhelming. You do want to talk about that last period of time, or maybe a GPA, a huge drop that there was a medical condition that since it's been dealt with, or that you had a learning difference that since, as soon as you figured out how to deal with that learning difference, will get support. You've done amazing. In some ways, you could look at it as a way to highlight who you are.

**[00:32:34] TF:** Your resiliency.

**[00:32:36] JS:** Absolutely. Absolutely. I see that a lot with – we've gotten so much better about learning about different ways people learn and process information. We want people to, of all different ways of learning be able to go to graduate programs. Schools got much better about having accommodations. It's okay. It's useful. It's helpful. It's not a big deal. You want people to be able to – you might say, "Once I had my learning accommodation." Or you might not even bring that up "on the first date" in the letter recommendation, if you don't need to. You bring it up later.

**[00:33:09] TF:** How can candidates best prepare for graduate school admissions interviews? How did these differ from their preparation from internship and job interviews?

**[00:33:19] JS:** Great questions. I always say, when you leave your apartment, your house that morning of the interview, the second your foot hits outside that door, anybody could be giving information back to the interviewers. This sounds crazy, I know. First of all, it's the attitude you go out with. You want to be leaving in a very positive way.

I once was on an elevator, going up to run a bunch of interviews that day. Someone got on the elevator and was so horribly rude to me. I said, "Well, where are you going?" "No, I'm going to third floor. I'm going to get interviewed for a graduate program. Now, what do you do here?" I said, "I'm going to be the one interviewing

you.” You could just see them processing, “How much did I just treat this person lower than life?” It happened to be that I was out working out that morning before I went.

I came in. I had my good clothes with me in a bag, but I was dressed in jeans. They just figured I was in the cleaning services. Everybody's important. I can't tell you how many times people like the guards would give us feedback about, “Hey, you had those interviews today. I really liked this person, because they were so kind to me, and they didn't need to be.” Or administrative assistant. Everybody is fair game for giving feedback about you.

**[00:34:36] TF:** That's a great point, especially the same with job interviews, too.

**[00:34:39] JS:** Oh, God. It is true. Again, that headset you leave the house with. I know you're nervous for any of these. You want to be putting your best foot forward. Sometimes, you literally have to be working through that anxiety and that overwhelming amount of energy in a positive way.

**[00:34:57] TF:** Then, how do you think these differ from internship and job interviews?

**[00:35:03] JS:** Knowing again, what is the goal? Getting into graduate school is different than getting a job. In some way, I will tell you the similarity for both. It's a two-way street. We think of applying for a job, we're lucky if they interview us, or if we're applying to grad school, they're just lucky to interview us. You are also interviewing them. You are picking up data, too. It's like the nonverbals. You go in and you go to a job interview and people look miserable. People are just hurt.

You go, “Wow, is this the work environment I want to be in? I'm not sure. Let me keep learning. Maybe that was just this group of people. Upstairs, is it different? Is it or is it not?” You're collecting up data as much.

Again, the difference is both about is it a goodness of fit? They're different in that what will be the outcome? Think about it. For graduate school, not always, but often, you're paying them to learn when you apply for a job. You're not paying them to work. They're paying you. You want to make sure that this is indeed the place that is the best fit for you. If you get four offers, where did you feel comfortable? Where did you feel it's going to be not even uncomfortable, necessarily, but where it's going to be the best learning opportunity for you?

That's certainly different than when you go to a job interview and you get two jobs. You still think, "What is my best fit, but I'm not paying them."

**[00:36:26] TF:** Well, and that's such great advice, because that's what happened to me. It was funny. On the day I went to interview for that PhD program that I ended up transferring from, it was an eight-hour interview, and I was talking to people, like 45 minutes this one, this professor 45 minutes, that one, and then some of the grad students at lunch. My grandparents were with me. I was in New Orleans. I came down the steps and my grandmother said, "You didn't like it, did you?" I said, "Well, I think I was just tired."

Then later on, I remember being a senior at Vandy, and looking at – I'd applied to seven programs and I got into four of them. I was crying, because I just didn't know. On paper, that was the PhD program I got into, but then I had just applied to it randomly. The others were more all counseling programs. I didn't listen to my gut. It's funny how when you're talking about really knowing if that's a good fit for you, that was exactly my experience, but I didn't listen to myself.

**[00:37:24] JS:** I love that you give that example. It's one, I think that so many students can learn from of all different ages, that it's for anything. It's not always the best and the shiniest, or the longest. It's what is the best fit for you.

**[00:37:40] TF:** Yeah. Then it was night and day, because then when I came to Penn, and the grad school of education and the counseling program, it just from day one, I mean, we worked so incredibly hard. I learned a lot. It was a very intense year. Intense in the best way. From, I loved what I was learning and the people and what I was doing. It challenged me in exactly the way I need it to be challenged and to grow.

**[00:38:04] JS:** That's terrific. It's like a car. Tiffany, the car you might like, might not be the car I like. We have to test drive and see what is best fit for us. Along that line, I really encourage students after they've been admitted. You don't want to necessarily do this ahead of time, read a lot of work. If you get a minute to – understand the two programs, as to go get permission to sit in on a few classes. Now, not every school will let you, because sometimes we're talking about confidential information, or they're not set up that way. It might be a seminar group of three people, so it wouldn't work.



If it's a class of 20, or 30, and you get in there, and you see how the students – what is this experience like? Again, not just one professor, but two or three, feeling it. You know pretty quickly if that is a match for you or not.

**[00:38:54] TF:** That's great. Such good advice, Jeanne. When do you think current graduate students should begin looking for a job?

**[00:39:02] JS:** Go ahead, Tiffany. What do you think?

**[00:39:05] TF:** Well, I like to say at the beginning. I mean, it depends how long the program is. I jokingly say sometimes, it's almost like your job search is like a background app. It's just a part of your program. Then you'll look at the industry that you want to go into, because that's when all of the dates will of when you apply will be different by industry. If you have an idea about that, then you know when the intense time of when it's not a background app, it's very much the forefront.

**[00:39:34] JS:** I love it. I know you're interviewing all of us, but I also know you know so much. I thought I just have to call you out and say, like share with, because you get this. I love that running in the background. It's so true. For me, whether I'm at Starbucks talking to the person sitting next to me, which I tend to do, or I'm in line at a party, I like to ask people and find out what they're doing, to see also what resonates for me and learning about that.

Now, then they're like, well, talk so I can learn about me. More like, wow. In more recent years, I really like writing more. It was okay before, but I'm really getting into it more. I think as you grow and develop and particularly in your career, it helps to keep having these conversations with people you know well, but people you don't know so well. Because that's often where we figure out our next steps.

**[00:40:25] TF:** It's funny you say that, because I think it's a hazard of the day job being a career coach, or well, the all the time job for me now these days. I love hearing people's career stories, because I think one of the things that dispels the myth that it should be linear. Sure, there are a few people from the time they were three, they knew they wanted to be doctors. That's rare. Most people, it's twists and turns. Sometimes it folds back upon itself as these new industries and career paths are coming about and they meet people and serendipity. There's just so many factors in there.

**[00:40:59] JS:** Oh, it's so true. Best laid plans of mice and men, or people. We're taught it's linear, aren't we? We're taught even in high school, take this inventory and it's going to tell you what you're supposed to be. Not I'm ever taking it. I was supposed to sell musical instruments. That's what it sounds like. You see, have you ever got called up to the office? I got called and I'm like, "Wow, am I in trouble?" They said, "Well, you did this career inventory and nothing came up. We're sorry. You need to take it again." Then it was like, "Well, okay. Musical instruments. Really?"

It just meant that I hadn't been enough time in the slow cooker, in the crock pot, whatever you're calling it, that I needed just some more time to cook and figure out what's out there and what really spoke to me. That's not linear process as you beautifully said.

**[00:41:47] TF:** Well, you bring up a thing for me. I feel like in culture today, it feels like, if you're not a child prodigy, or hitting it big when you're 22, you missed the boat. I've loved some of those articles about people who didn't have their great achievement, or big thing until they were in their 50s, or 60s. It just shows that there's always – if we believe in ourselves and we're committed to keep learning and exploring and trying things, that it's never too late.

**[00:42:18] JS:** So true. From when I would do admissions for graduate programs, for me, I was always looking for people who didn't have the traditional trajectory. That didn't, for example, and I did counting programs, so didn't have the psychology background. I can tell you, the people who made it into the doctoral programs are often people that didn't have that background, because they had to – They came in not thinking it had to be a certain way. Best students have had to be English students. I had one from a culinary institute.

Again, backgrounds that had nothing to do with psychology. They would question and they would ask. They didn't just assume that they should know it. That's a great way to go into any graduate program. Don't think wow, just because I don't have the "pedigree." There are a lot of people that go back to medical school, that I had a student a few years ago that was not her undergraduate major. She had to go back and do a lot of undergraduate coursework in her 30s, because that's what she wanted. She wasn't even applying to her early 40s. That was her passion. She loves it. She's in medical school and having a fantastic time.

**[00:43:26] TF:** What a cool story. What's your advice for current graduate students feeling overwhelmed, while completing their dissertation or thesis?

**[00:43:35] JS:** We could do a whole show on that easily, because –

**[00:43:37] TF:** I'll have you back.

**[00:43:39] JS:** Terrific. I'll come back. By just in a nutshell, wow, so many things I want to say about this. I would say, one of most important things for getting out is your committee, that you have put thought into your committee. Sometimes even in a doctoral program, you sometimes end up changing advisors. Those happen on a regular basis, but sometimes your interests have changed, or they have changed what they're studying.

You have to make sure that your chairperson is someone who you feel like you can have connection and work with. It doesn't have to be your BFF at all. Some of that, they care about the topic that you're doing. That also, the other people in your committee, that they all play nicely in the sandbox together. I've gotten a lot of clients over the years who've come in and “I go to XY University, I've been ABD for four years. I can't even get my committee. They dislike each other immensely.” All these other factors start influencing. Sometimes we have to go back and really literally rebuild the committee.

**[00:44:39] TF:** How can they politically do that? Because I know that's got to be a very delicate thing, even though it can just change everything for them.

**[00:44:46] JS:** We talk a lot about how do you yourself, how do you talk about difficult topics? How do you approach that with someone? How do you get them to help understand why this is important to you? What is necessary? This will work in that. It's tricky, for sure and it's not something you just want to go into the office willy-nilly and do. It can be the difference of getting your doctorate or not.

For me the point is about prevention. When you start on that first day, who are the different faculty? Some programs won't even let you choose an advisor till second year, until you've met the people. Others say, you're coming in, you're starting with this person and you're ending with this person.

It's one of those factors you might even think about when you're even selecting a doctoral program. Is it possible that you are allowed to transfer not only to different advisor, but maybe with even another section of a school?

**[00:45:40] TF:** That's great advice. We'll definitely have to have you back to talk more about that. If you're not transferring, but just general like, what are some strategies for managing that whole working relationship with your advisor, dissertation chair and committee, if it's someone you will stay with?

**[00:45:54] JS:** I've seen people make the mistake of, "I was avoiding their advisor. Well, they're too busy. I can't interrupt them." You need a working relationship. You need to be on their radar. If you're not on their radar, they might not think of you for opportunities, like scholarships, or be part of articles, or opportunities of TA and growing along that time.

Making sure that you attend office hours, if they don't have office hours that you make those office hours, that you set it with that person. Sometimes, professors are really busy, extremely overworked. You want to make sure that you're respectful, but that you have a right to have some time to meet with them.

When I was a student, I had advisor who would leave May 15<sup>th</sup>, and you could not contact that person till they got back on September, usually 1<sup>st</sup>. I knew that. I knew that person. I front-loaded. I said, "Okay, it's September 2<sup>nd</sup>. I'm going to give you what – figure out where your parking space is again." Joking aside, I was in their office right away and saying, "Okay, what are we going to get done? We have nine months. Let's get this done."

I finished my coursework and my dissertation all in three years. Now, I had the masters before that. I knew what needed to be done and thought about it, where other people were there for five or six years. I did that, because I would go in and meet with them and say, "Okay, what is coming up? Let's think ahead. Use a plan program of study. You need to take this required course. The second year, I already know that Dr. Smith is going to be on sabbatical. My advisor has helped me figure that out. I need to take this year, even though it might be out of order, so I'm not adding an additional year on to my program.

**[00:47:40] TF:** That's such great advice. It's just the strategy, it seems like, from the beginning.

**[00:47:44] JS:** It is. There's a skills that we definitely learn along the way. I guess, to close this out is that, I see too many times of graduate students do not necessarily use their voice. It's important that people know what you're working toward, that you know what you're working towards, so you can make it clear to others. Then use your voice to keep moving towards that goal.

**[00:48:08] TF:** When we began this show, I asked the best career advice you've ever been given. What would you say is the best advice you can give to current graduate students to help them on the getting outside?

**[00:48:20] JS:** Be wise. Collect your data. Talk to people who have had your advisor before, who have it right now, who have had it currently and who had your advisor 10 years ago. Go to the library. Look at dissertations that the person has chaired before. Start getting a sense of their style. Then have open conversations with your advisor about what is your style? Also, what is mine?

For me, people going last minute, that's very difficult. It's hard for me to go last minute. I have people give me their work, so that there's time for me to go back and ask questions and process with them for them to have rewriting time. You want to get to know each person's style, as well as for them to know your style as well.

**[00:49:06] TF:** Sounds great. Well, I am so grateful to you for coming on the show and sharing so much of your time. I learn so much every time we connect. I appreciate you continuing to mentor me, especially as I take this next step with the podcast.

**[00:49:21] JS:** Tiffany, I call you now for mentoring. In your career work, few people out there do and I just love that you did this podcast to share this information. It's terrific. I wish you the best. To all those out there thinking about graduate school, again, think about the why and then what is the best fit for you. Thank you so much for having me.

**[00:49:40] TF:** Thanks, Jeanne.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[00:49:43] TF:** Stay tuned for our next episode, creating your dream job with Courtney Whitmore. Thank you so much for joining us today. I really appreciate you. Please be sure to go to my website [tjfcareercoach.com](http://tjfcareercoach.com). If you'd like additional information on every episode, I have detailed show notes that include a bio for my guest, links to the resources we discussed, detailed transcripts with timestamps by each question. If you're in a hurry, you can jump to that specific item you would like to learn more about. Thank you so much. I hope you'll join us next time.

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