

## EPISODE 2

## [INTRODUCTION]

**[0:00:08.2] TF:** Thank you so much for joining me for episode two of Job Search Strategies with Tiffany Franklin. Today, I am here to welcome Dr. Katherine Brooks who is going to talk to us about finding meaningful work and career success. Before I begin, I always like to start with a quick tip and this one is courtesy of my grandmother. She always told me back in high school to keep a running list of everything I've done.

Basically, it's the resume, but instead of making it this big production of updating it and making sure it's perfect, just keep a Word doc or however you like, if it's a Google doc, maybe notes on your phone and when you join a new club or start a new job or anything you're doing, just go ahead and add it to that document. So that way, when you are ready to do your resume again, you'll have everything at your fingertips.

Otherwise, I work with so many clients who have done amazing things, tell me "Oh, I forgot this or I forgot that." You're so busy doing things that often you don't think about writing it down. Maybe you can get in the habit of once a month, just jotting a few little notes and then later, when you do your resume, polish it up so it's as concise and impactful as possible.

## [INTERVIEW]

**[0:01:25.0] TF:** Thank you everybody for being here, I would like to welcome Dr. Katherine Brooks who is the executive director of the Career Center at Vanderbilt University. I really am excited to have you here, Dr. Brooks.

**[0:01:38.8] KB:** Thank you so much and please call me Kate.

**[0:01:40.4] TF:** Okay. Well, Kate has directed numerous career centers, not only at Vanderbilt but at Wake Forest University, the University of Texas at Austin and Dickinson College. She is a board-certified career counselor and coach and the author of several career books including *What Color is Your Parachute* 2021. *You Majored in What? Designing your Path from College to Career* and *Picture Your Career*. She also has a book, *What Color is Your Parachute: For College Students*. She writes a blog, Career Transitions for Psychology Today and has twice been designated a top 10 most visionary leader and career services by CSO Research.

I am thrilled, there are many more accolades for you and of course you have your master's degree in rehabilitation counseling and a doctorate in educational psychology. Kate, you have been a very busy person and have helped so many people throughout your career. Part of this podcast is about career journeys. I always like to start out, I touched on some of your highlights, but would you talk about it from your perspective, what your journey has been like?

**[0:02:47.2] KB:** Sure, although that could probably take the entire interview so I'll try to see if I can condense this. I had the typical summer jobs in high school and college and they just – I work at various gift shops. I grew up in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania so there were a lot of gift shops and museums and things, that's what I did and I majored in sociology, minored in art history and I wasn't really sure what to do with that. And so, since I had already worked in gift shops, I thought, maybe I'll work in retail, so that's what I did. I started working at a department store in Washington DC called Woodward & Lothrop and I ended up in their personnel office, hiring people.

It was there that I realized that I really enjoyed working with people who had disabilities. I worked with a restaurant manager, hiring for him and he like to hire people who had disabilities who might not get hired otherwise. And he taught me how to interview people and find their strengths. That really started me on a whole different career path. I then started working for the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind for a couple of years and then I went to grad school. Started running a psycho-educational clinic for children with disabilities and ultimately, ended up as a counselor at Dickinson College and then moved into career services. I've been in that field ever since.

**[0:03:59.2] TF:** Wow, that's great. It's so funny how both of us have been at Vanderbilt and both of us have been in Pennsylvania just completely different times.

**[0:04:05.3] KB:** Absolutely. You know, I think about, when I look back on it, it looks a little scattered, but the truth is, there's some themes that have always run through. One is writing, I've always loved to write and so I think that has always helped me get my jobs. I like helping others, I've always had an interest in careers and how career paths work for people and then also, an interest in counseling and psychology and that all sort of fits with everything I've done.

**[0:04:28.8] TF:** That's amazing how you've been able to bring it together to help so many people. What's the best piece of career advice you've ever received?

**[0:04:36.0] KB:** That's a really good question. I would say, one piece I got in grad school, which I love is don't ever say anything you don't want repeated. The idea that the minute you tell someone something, you do run a risk that they will tell someone else. I think you always should be careful in the workplace of what you say to people and whether you are comfortable with the fact that whatever you say might go elsewhere.

Then the other piece of advice that I have found helpful is to think of yourself as always self-employed. No matter whose name is on the paycheck, you work for yourself and you make sure that you're moving forward in your career.

**[0:05:09.7] TF:** Great pieces of advice and I think when you were talking about if you say something, that applies both in person or online.

**[0:05:18.1] KB:** Absolutely. Social media will follow you forever and certainly emails, you know? If you expect someone to keep something secret in an email; you really have to think long and hard before you put things in email.

**[0:05:30.9] TF:** One of the things that I am so excited to talk to you today is how you've been working on *What Color Is Your Parachute? 2021* and this is a classic that so many of us have read. What are the main ways that you have modernized this career classic?

**[0:05:45.3] KB:** Well, the good news is there's a new addition every year. In the past, people have been upgrading it, you know? Obviously, Richard Bolles worked on it every year until he passed away and then some other people I guess took over and then I started looking at it back in 2020 and really, my goal was to reshape it, keep the intent and the spirit of what Richard Bolles was writing.

Finding ways to modernizing it to a certain extent with new stories, new emphasis. For instance, chapter three was rewritten a lot in terms of how we deal with challenges, whatever those challenges might be. And that had to include things like legal updates and making sure we were covering a broader spectrum of people who might be challenged by various, either discrimination or maybe just stereotyping or misunderstanding of their situation.

We also with again, in consultation with the editors, Richard Bolles was a minister and so there was a certain religious element to a lot of the book and he had a lot of writings about that and we made an editorial decision

to put that all at the back of the book, under a separate chapter just devoted to Richard, not with my name on it. Because those really were his religious beliefs and what he wanted to say and it's very important I think that that be kept with the book because that is him.

At the same time, it was an element we felt could be moved away from the crux of the book. Also, the nice thing about career advice is it tends to be what we call evergreen. It stays the same, it will always be good to write a thank you note, whether that's the 1960s and you're saying write a thank you note or whether it's now and you're saying send a thank you email, it's always good to thank people. A lot of the advice kind of stays the same, it's just we put a new spin on how you do it.

**[0:07:32.0] TF:** Fantastic. Now, when were you writing this and how did the events of 2020 impact some of your content?

**[0:07:39.7] KB:** That's an entire story in and of itself, I was writing it in early, late, yeah, I guess it was late 2019, the very end of 2019 and then beginning of 2020. As you know, things just changed rapidly. The same thing happened because I was simultaneously writing the book for college students and on my first go around of edits was all about the wonderful job market and how great it was going to be and how wonderful it was and then all of a sudden, February came along and it was like, "Oh, maybe it's not quite so good." And then March hit and everything just kind of fell apart. So yes, it was a lot of editing and looking at how things changed. And I live here in Nashville, Tennessee, where as you can imagine, my city has suffered greatly with this, with the heavy emphasis on entertainment, tourism, hospitality.

Many of the industries in Nashville had a negative impact as they did across the country. On the other hand, things like grocery stores, companies like Amazon, broadcasters like Netflix and other streaming services, they are having a great year. It really just depends what field you're in, it's the impact but it does make it hard to write a book.

**[0:08:51.5] TF:** I can only imagine. Given today's challenge in job market and the shifting economic landscape, what steps should someone take if they have just been laid off, whether they're in their first job, mid-career or if they're executive level?

**[0:09:07.0] KB:** I like the way you phrase this question because the advice is strikingly similar, whether they're, as you said, in their first job or all the way up to an executive level, I think the first thing is taking stock of your

money situation and certainly, if you're currently employed, squirrel away as much money as you can, because even if you can only afford to save \$20 a week or \$10 a week, if there's a way you can economize and save because in any kind of job market, money in your savings is your safety net.

The longer you have money in savings, the more freedom you have to pursue a lot of options. That is the first thing I would say in terms of advice, making sure you're continuing to save money. Then, if you have suddenly been laid off, no matter what level you're at, the first thing to do is to pause and reflect. We have a thing in the book called 'The Flower Exercise' and you should really take stock and take the time to do that Flower Exercise, focus first on you and then look at the job market.

When get laid off, you immediately go to indeed.com or something like that and you start right away looking for jobs and if you plan to stay in the exact same field and do exactly what you were doing before, that might work for you but for the most part, I think it's better to stop, take stock for a few days and then move forward with your search.

**[0:10:23.7] TF:** Okay, great advice. For those who have not read "*What Color Is Your Parachute?*" how can this book help them with their job search?

**[0:10:33.7] KB:** I think it helps on several levels, I think first, there's this understanding that you're not alone. This book has sold, I forget whether it's like 10 million or more like a hundred million copies, I forget, it's just sold multi-million copies and there is a reason for that. People are always looking for jobs.

In good economies, in bad economies, no matter what, people are looking. You are not alone and it can feel that way, but it's not and I think that's one of the first things this book does is it reassures you that you're not alone. What I like about this book, have always liked about it is I believe that Richard Bolles genuinely cared about the reader and he spoke to them. He kind of had a folksy conversational style that says, "I'm with you, I've been there."

I try to keep that spirit within each of the chapters and I added a chapter on sort of the emotional aspects of the search and how to get through the search. And then also the chapter on how you face a job market when you have personal challenges. I think that all of those things are helpful and make this book kind of a kind introduction to the process. We have a process in there, there's a very clear schedule to follow, very clear ideas of what to do with the search but there's also that very humanitarian focus on "We get where you are."

**[0:11:53.8] TF:** I appreciated that emphasis on wellness because if someone is not in a good state, then they won't be putting forth their best self. Who would you say is the target audience for the 2021 edition of *What Color is Your Parachute?*

**[0:12:07.8] KB:** Well, the audience is designed to be everyone. This book was always written – Richard Bolles was very sensitive — this all started in the '70s when he was a minister in I believe Episcopalian church and he was – in the '70s, there were some challenges with the job market and he realized that many of his parishioners and others were out of work and so he started running some workshops I think in the basement of his church and that's kind of where this was all evolved from, yeah.

**[0:12:33.4] TF:** Wow, I never knew that.

**[0:12:35.9] KB:** Yeah, because of that, he really had a soft spot for every job seeker. This book was never intended to be just for college grads or professionals or anyone in particular, it was meant to be for anybody who needed a job. We try to keep that focus, we know that the readership of the job through the marketing work, that Ten Speed Press has done, we know that a lot of the readers are college educated and are in professional positions but not everyone is.

The book was really written for everyone, from somebody just graduating from high school who is not planning to go to college, might be looking at a trade career or other kinds of jobs, to people who are at the other end of the spectrum and maybe are getting ready to step down from their work and look for a part-time opportunity or something that might do in retirement. It's really the spectrum from beginning to end of career paths, as well as people such as ex-military or people who are transitioning out of their career into a whole new career field.

**[0:13:34.6] TF:** Yeah, I was really struck by it. It seemed like so many different people he was serving with that advice and with your advice. Now, you mentioned the Flower Exercise that both had introduced. Could you talk about that in your updates and how this would benefit someone in the midst of their search?

**[0:13:52.3] KB:** Well, the 'Flower Exercise', it really is the heart and soul of the book, it is this main exercise that was developed many years ago when the book was first written and it has just lasted, because it is I think such a solid way to think about the job search and it goes back to what I was saying earlier about you start with yourself and not the job market. If you think of a flower having several petals, what you do is you work with

each petal one at a time to find out where you are on that particular petal and then ultimately, you create this flower, which explains everything.

There is a petal for people, and the type of people you want to work with. There is a petal for working conditions, what kind of surroundings you want to have. There is one for your transferable skills, what are the skills you have that could be applied. There's another petal for what do you know, what kind of knowledge do you have. There is a petal for geography and where do you want to live. There is a petal for salary, how much do you hope to earn. There is a petal for your purpose in life sort of what's the bigger picture, what's important and then there are exercises for each of those areas and at the end, when you've done this whole flower, you distill it down to one page that says everything about you and everything about the place where you want to work.

I really like the way you can take this a day at a time, you could do one petal each day. You can give yourself a marathon weekend and do the whole thing in a weekend if you want. It's very flexible but what it does is it puts the emphasis back on you and what you want not immediately on what's in the job market.

**[0:15:29.3] TF:** That sounds so helpful and also it sounds like one of those things that while you're inherently the same person, you could revisit this and take it again at different stages in your life where you may have different things that are important to your different skills that you're bringing that you didn't have when you took it in the past.

**[0:15:46.7] KB:** That's excellent, that's great advice because I suspect someone might pick up the book and say, "Oh yeah, they had this five years ago or ten years ago, I already did that." I think you're very wise in asking that. I think that people should revisit this flower on a regular basis.

**[0:16:05.4] TF:** Now, one question I have. You had mentioned that you're also writing this book, the edition coming out in April 2021 for college students and I'll have links to all of this in the show notes for our listeners so they can go to the one that's out right now and then your other books as well. What would you say are the main differences beyond obviously it's for college students but how did you reshape your advice for that edition?

**[0:16:28.8] KB:** Well, with college students because they are starting out, I mean one of the reasons I choose to stay in college career services for so many years in my career is I just love that aspect of their lives that so

many possibilities await them. You know, there's so many different things they can do and while we all have possibilities in front of us, I think when you look at someone who's 21-years-old or 22-years-old, you kind of go, "Wow." You know there is just a lot of time and opportunity out there and so with the students, you know I have separate chapters for things like internships, so that there's a whole chapter on internships.

There is a whole chapter on doing gap experiences, so ways to think about your future that might be more open to someone in college than someone else and that's not to say that all of those opportunities aren't available for somebody in their 40s let's say but if you're in your 40s it's more likely that if you're in college you're doing it part-time. You probably already have a job or you're retraining for a new job. So, it's a little bit different perspective and you probably have a family or there may be other obligations that you're tied into that somebody at age 21 is not. It is just a different, a little different perspective because it is traditionally a different age group.

**[0:17:47.5] TF:** That makes a lot of sense and it's funny because those are the very same reasons that drew me to college career services for so many years. It was just so exciting, the inherent optimism on college campuses and seeing all of the possibilities for the students.

**[0:18:02.0] KB:** Right and that is actually very overwhelming at times for college students. I don't know that they always share yours and my perspective on that. Sometimes they feel a little overwhelmed by all of those choices and this fear of making a mistake and that sort of thing and so again, that's another reason why it is so much fun to work with them.

**[0:18:18.1] TF:** Great and that is another thing the book can help them with. Pivoting a little bit, what are the main mistakes that people at all stages in their job search make in their interviews and tips for correcting those, especially now that Zoom interviews are so pervasive?

**[0:18:33.3] KB:** Right. Well, I think again, some evergreen advice that you're going to find pretty much in every book and that is you should always be prepared for an interview. You need to do your research and have questions ready. I think employers can spot very quickly when someone hasn't done their homework and ask them questions that could be easily answered on the website. I one time had a person interview for a position at a school that I was working at and the person worked on the same campus, just in another capacity and when I asked the person if they had questions for me, the first question they asked was, "Where are you located?"



I remember thinking, "Well, I think you could look that up on the web or you could just walk across campus and find out where we're located." You want to be careful that your questions are good and one way to make sure you have good questions is to personalize them. Think about the position and you can ask questions of the interviewer of things like for a person who is hired into this position, what should they focus on first and see what the person says and maybe the interviewer will say something like, "Well, they should focus on building a team."

Okay, that's a great chance for you to then step in and explain how you helped build a team at a previous position, so having some questions ready and having some stories ready to be able to tell can be extremely helpful. Because stories are flexible and a story which tells your strengths can be used to answer a lot of questions. That's sort of what I would call generic career advice or interview advice, but when you get into the actual Zoom interview or that capacity, there you need to really be thinking about things like what is in my background.

You know, have I got a blank wall or is there a lot of clutter in the background? You want to make sure that the camera is on you. It should be on you and the viewer should not be distracted by what's in your background. You also want to double and triple check that your environment is going to be silent, so shutting off your cellphone, shutting off other software that's open on your computer that might ping or make a sound every time an email arrives or whatever.

Also making sure that your door is closed, family members have been warned, you've got a sign on the door that says, "Do not enter." Whatever you can do to keep it quiet. Also making sure that you regularly look at the camera. The tendency is when you're doing an interview you look down particularly if you have notes on your desk or resume is on your desk and you can end up doing your interview looking down at your desk, which won't make great eye contact.

You want to maybe get an easel or something you can use to hold your materials up to the eye level, to the same level as your camera. So that you can easily look at the camera. And I think also that's another thing of just making sure you do have your resume and notes nearby just in case you need to refer to that for any reason. But those will be the basic things I would suggest.

**[0:21:19.4] TF:** Fantastic and those are all really great things. I know I've even taped stuff up to the wall on the other side of my computer just to make sure it will keep my eyes up. One thing when you were talking about

the success stories, I found working with clients that not only as they prepare those success stories just to prepare them for the interview, but also it helps their confidence because some of them, you know people have done so many great things but they haven't taken the time to be able to articulate those.

**[0:21:47.5] KB:** Yeah, I think that's true and that's why I love story and storytelling and that is a major part in both *What Color Is Your Parachute? 2021*, as well as in the college edition is preparing stories to tell employers.

**[0:22:00.3] TF:** Fantastic. I wanted to talk a little bit about your blog for Psychology Today where you write about career transitions. If someone is miserable in their current role, what are steps they can take to make a career leap in a tight market while still meeting their financial responsibilities?

**[0:22:16.9] KB:** Well, I like again the phrasing of that question because I think it's important to keep those financial responsibilities in mind. The tendency is if you're not happy in your current role is to just say, "This is enough, I'm leaving." And the problem is you really need to make sure you have the funds to be able to do that. I think Suze Orman, if I'm not mistaken recommends at least six months of your current salary, your current take home pay in your bank account and I think you want to have at least that for an emergency fund.

If you don't have that and even if you do have that unless the job is somehow so miserable or so damaging to you in some way or another, it would be best to keep it while you look around. That's where you start, you can do the Flower Exercise and see what might be better for you. You can start researching those careers, dabble, look around. I've always wanted to be a writer, but I didn't want to be just relying on writing for my income.

I wanted a stable job, an income, which allowed me the flexibility to write whatever I wanted to write and so I started writing seriously and getting an editor and getting an agent back when I was at the University of Texas. I think that that allowed me to slowly build up a career as a writer and get known out there to get other opportunities that allows me to then have more flexibility in leaving.

**[0:23:36.8] TF:** In your first book, you majored in what designing your path from college to career. You talk about how your major is just the starting point for designing a meaningful future. Are there any updates you would add to that advice in light of COVID-19 and all of the shifts of the past year?

**[0:23:53.9] KB:** Yeah. Well, I think one of the things people didn't always get from my book, I talked about wondering, wise wonderings, but it was very much wise. I am a huge liberal arts advocate. I think it is a terrific area to major in. I think any of those majors are wonderful because of what they teach you but at the same time, they are not necessarily pre-professional degrees or career planning degrees. They are designed to make you a broader, better person.

I always said about a liberal arts education, we don't make the banker, but we make the banker better. We have a way of improving one's role within whatever role they choose and so I think you have to think about that and add on to the liberal arts degree special technical skills or business skills or depending on what you're interested in, add on additional knowledge and skills beyond the major and try out careers.

That's the fun thing about the undergraduate time is in you do have the time to do internships and figure out what you like. And you get a chance to take classes and build up your knowledge. I think just taking advantage of that flexibility and always keeping in mind that technology is changing everything, so you want to look at whatever career field you're interested in, definitely look at what is the technology doing in that field. And how do I take advantage of that. How can I be a leader in that area?

**[0:25:16.2] TF:** It sounds like really taking control of your professional development from the time you're in college and beyond then.

**[0:25:22.2] KB:** Absolutely. Again, you're always self-employed.

**[0:25:25.1] TF:** I love that. Any final pieces of advice for our listeners?

**[0:25:29.1] KB:** You know, I was thinking about what would be sort of a philosophy that I might give to the group. I think for your listeners, one of my favorite pieces of advice comes from the late Dr. Wayne Dyer and he used to talk about when you look at a job opportunity, he said there are two things to keep in mind and he said the first thing anybody is going to ask is, "What's in it for me?" Because that is sort of why we go into work.

You know, we look for work as a form of self-expression. We look at work as a way for identity, we look at it as a paycheck, of course. We look at it as maybe a stepping stone and a process, so what will this job get me. Then the other side of the coin is to say, "How can I serve?" So that whenever role you're in, you are serving someone. Someone is benefiting from you doing whatever that labor might be and therefore, thinking about

how can I do the best at this, how can I broaden this, how can I reach out, how can I serve the organization I work for, the people I work for, my clients, my customers, my colleagues, how can I make what I am doing even bigger? I think having those two things in mind with whatever career you look at is a great way to focus on it.

**[0:26:45.2] TF:** Well, thank you so much Kate for being here. I appreciate your time and this has been so great to hear your perspective both on the process and how you've modernized the book and also all the things that you have been doing from psychology today and your other books and it just really seems like everything has come full circle for you.

**[0:27:06.5] KB:** Well, thank you so much. I greatly appreciated being asked to do this interview.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[0:27:11.0] TF:** Thank you so much. I really appreciate you and hope you will join us for the next episode. If you would like a career strategy session or you need help with career exploration or your resume, go to [tjfcareercoach.com](http://tjfcareercoach.com), where you can book an appointment with me or you can find additional episodes of this podcast to help you in your search.

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