

**EPISODE 9****[INTRODUCTION]**

**[00:00:07] TF:** Thanks for joining me for joining me for episode 9 of Job Search Strategies with Tiffany Franklin. Today, I'm excited to connect with some old friends, Lauren Obersteadt and Sarah Whitney Anderson of Vanderbilt University's Alumni Relations Office. We are going to dive into how to cultivate meaningful connections and to network.

Everything from if you've got an event with a 100 people, how to stand out for the right reasons, to making the best impression for one-on-one coffee chats, or how to handle career fairs and all of those events.

Lauren Obersteadt currently serves as Executive Director of Alumni Relations for Vanderbilt University. In this role, she leads engagement strategies and program development to connect alumni and students with each other and the university in meaningful ways. Lauren earned a Bachelor of Arts and English from Vanderbilt, and joined her alma mater after working in music journalism, marketing, and film TV production.

Sarah Whitney Anderson is an Assistant Director for Alumni Student Engagement at Vanderbilt University. In this role, she manages alumni career programs, and she coordinates opportunities for students and alumni to network with one another. Sarah Whitney received her bachelor's degree in Public Relations from Georgia Southern University, and a Master of Education from Clemson University, where she worked in the Career Center, helping students find their path.

My quick tip for today is to organize your networking efforts. When you're going through a job search, it can be easy just to send an email here, have a phone call there, a Zoom call, and you think you're keeping it all straight in your head. After a while, especially if you're doing a lot of applications, or taking a lot of coffee chats, or Zooms, it can really start to get confusing, and you can start to mix them up.

That way, if you put everything in a spreadsheet, just like you're doing with your applications, and the jobs that you're applying to online, put these conversations into a spreadsheet, just the date that they occurred, the person you met with, which company, or school are they affiliated with, what's their title. Sometimes it even helps just to put in a column for their LinkedIn URL, so that way, you can easily see, okay, that's who they are, that's what they've been doing.

Then when you met with them, maybe just to highlight or to a few key words about what you spoke about. Then, a column that shows that you send a thank you note afterwards and next steps. That way, it's easier to keep everything together and you can keep your follow-up on track. Maybe two months from now, you can put that in your calendar to touch base again, or maybe it's two weeks from now, depending on if they gave you a specific task to do. Hope that helps you with your organization.

[EPISODE]

**[00:02:58] TF:** Thank you so much for coming today, Lauren and Sarah Whitney. I am just thrilled you guys have been wonderful. I've known you for a while now. Happy to work with you. I appreciate that you dedicate your career to connecting with other people and thought you would be the perfect ones for this topic. Would you all please share just a little bit of an overview about your career journeys? How about we start with you, Lauren?

**[00:03:23] LO:** Sure. Well actually, I knew from about the age of five that I wanted to work in the music business in some way. Junior college, I took the plunge with some savings to stay in town for the summer. I cold-called to find my dream internship, which led to some really great posts in music journalism and film production and marketing. After a few years, I realized the lifestyle didn't really match my life goals as an adult summer camp, it seemed. I pursued higher ed and wanted to come back and make a difference at an institution that I loved. About 18 years later, I can't believe it, I've worked in several capacities of constituent engagement, communications, team leadership, and here I am today.

**[00:04:04] TF:** Wow, what a great story and knowing from that young. Whitney, could you please share a brief overview of your career journey?

**[00:04:12] SWA:** I would love to. Lauren and I are actually similar, in that I do – I wanted to be in education since I was 12. I was lucky enough to go to a public university and learn about public relations, which I thought had served me well. Learning marketing materials, how to write for university. Then I was lucky enough to go on to get my Master of Education at Clemson University and work at the Career Center. I loved helping students, partner with them learn about their career journeys and their passions and helping them hopefully, attain those goals.

I was also lucky enough to intern at Furman University and learn the influence of the alumni. I love learning about how that university might have changed, or stayed the same. Now, my job is to combine both those passions and I get to work with students and alumni.

**[00:05:00] TF:** Great. What's the best career advice that you guys have ever been given?

**[00:05:05] LO:** I'd say for me, through the years, some of it came from my parents, some came from mentors, from a very early age from my very first jobs of be yourself, work hard, people will notice, treat everyone with importance, have a really strong handshake and great eye contact. You never know who someone knows.

**[00:05:24] SWA:** I like that. Might actually come from my dad and that it's okay for your passions to change and to learn them whenever they come to you. He always talks about that he found out his career passionate at 40. He says, just to keep following your path, and it's okay to let it change and ebb and flow.

**[00:05:39] TF:** Great career advice. For you guys, your job is all about forging genuine connections. The networking part of the job search is intimidating for many people. How do you take those first steps to establish meaningful connections with someone when you just meet them?

**[00:05:54] LO:** I mean, for me, I would say that actually being a journalist taught me a lot about building rapport and trust very quickly with people. Being genuine and someone taught me once, being interesting and interested are really important. People can tell when you're not genuinely curious about them, and that you have an agenda that you're walking in with. I would say, it's good to have your elevator pitch, but not to the point that you're not open to listening to who you're talking to and being able to flex and go in different directions by truly listening to their answers.

I also learned early on that I'm a shy networker. I realized, I do not work well, if I have to walk into a room, walk up to you and tell you why I should be important to you. I always told friends over the years, "But I kill in a buffet line." I've learned that if you're shy like me, and you want to build rapport quickly, be as natural as possible and put yourself physically in a place where people naturally would walk by you and you can say, "Hello, how are you? Can you believe this rain?" Start with a natural intro like that and see where it leads. Seems small, but it's made all the difference.

**[00:07:07] SWA:** This is pretty cool. Because Lauren, and I did not go over any of these questions together. My very first thing was making a natural, a genuine connection and just loving on the human. That's very neat. I love meeting new people. I'm an extrovert. It just gives me joy to learn someone new to find common ground between that person and myself. I found, it's really not super hard to find a common ground when at the basic instincts, we're all human. There's always something underlying that you can connect on.

When I am connecting for my job, when I'm talking to alumni, it's very easy to just use the school that we both have a connection to, whether it's literally just the food at the commons, or to eat at the common area, a favorite restaurant in town, or even a sporting event. It's a very easy way to just talk about something that I care about and that I want to know. Then it just feeds from there.

**[00:08:05] TF:** That's a great point. Because I know when I lived in Philadelphia, and I would see somebody who I had no idea who they were, but they had a Vanderbilt sweatshirt on, I would go up and say hi. I didn't care how crazy it sound. Usually, they were so nice about it. Then we started talking about Sacco or something.

**[00:08:21] LO:** Oh, exactly. Well, and I was going to say, same thing, that it feeds into that notion that if you're nervous about networking, don't think about it as only networking at a networking event, as Sarah when you just said, and you said, some of my best networking was done at a Vanderbilt basketball game. If you take that pressure off of yourself and you're just meeting people for the joy of meeting them and you never know where it leads, then that's an incredible direction to take.

**[00:08:47] TF:** Lauren, you got to tell us a little bit more about that basketball game.

**[00:08:50] LO:** That's how I got my job at Vanderbilt.

**[00:08:52] SWA:** I did not do that story Tell us.

**[00:08:54] LO:** Yes. Well, my best friend from Vanderbilt and I, he let me tag along with his season tickets. I had been trying to get into Vanderbilt for a really long time. I applied to several jobs. I never heard a single thing. Then his brother and sister-in-law sat behind us and happened to know that I was interested. He took my resume. Gave it to the right person and that's how I got my job. It's pretty incredible.

**[00:09:21] TF:** Well, that's perfect, a job all about networking and you got it through networking.

**[00:09:25] LO:** I also got an internship option through the line at Sparro in a really good food court. There's definitely something when I don't feel the pressure, that it works out better for me.

**[00:09:37] TF:** Awesome. How about you, Sarah Whitney? How'd you get your job at Vanderbilt? Did you just apply, or was that through networking?

**[00:09:43] SWA:** I also have a touch of networking with mine. I went to a conference in the fall. Even before that, Nashville was on my radar. Any school in Nashville, being that this is two hours from where I grew up. I had lots of friends here and Nashville is always the hot commodity in high school, where we would go get our prom dresses and have sporting events up. Just always was a dream. Luckily, when I went to a conference, I met a girl that worked with Vanderbilt. When I found this position, I emailed her. Was a quick introduction of, "Do you remember me maybe in November? Thank you for sharing your card with me. Any chance you have any connection with alumni? Would you mind sharing my resume, cover letter, so and so?" Luckily, I heard from Lauren about two weeks later.

**[00:10:24] TF:** That's great. Actually, that is such a perfect segue, because my next question is, when you are emailing people, and you're reaching out to someone for the first time, say they're another alum from your school, or somebody that someone said, you should reach out to. What are things you include in that email, so you're not being too much, but yet you are connecting enough?

**[00:10:46] LO:** Well, I would say, again, this seems really basic, but I don't see it enough anymore in candidates and folks reaching out for informational interviews, to actually be specific as to why you're reaching out to them, whether they're a subject matter expert, you have a mutual connection, you read an article they wrote. I reached out to someone recently that I followed on Instagram. Thought I'd never do that. She wrote me back from the UK. It was great. She's a great life coach

I show a lot of upfront gratitude. Everyone is really busy. It's an enormous honor for someone to take time to connect, potentially help you on your life journey for information or for advice. It goes without saying that perhaps, don't reach out by saying that you're interested in a job immediately and looking for openings in their company, but that you're interested in them as a person and their journey. Same thing. I feel this also flows over into cover letters. I see so many cover letters in the last five years, where the cover letter says nothing

about why they're interested in the company itself, showing any notion of the mission and how it fits. It's just all about the candidate themselves. This is my recommendation for both.

**[00:11:54] TF:** Quick follow-up on that, Lauren. When is the time that somebody has been networking, when they can actually mention, do you have a job? Because that's the thing I know as a career coach, so many people, they want to ask it too early and it basically shuts the conversation down. When would you see would be a good time in that relationship, where maybe they can bridge that?

**[00:12:14] LO:** I would say, once you're able to say, have a 30-minute coffee, or a 30-minute connection and you talk about what their journey has been, what your journey has been, what your interests are, how you might be thinking of a change. Or if you're right out of school, and Sarah Whitney can speak to this really well, as well. She helps students and alumni. I just think that at that point, towards maybe halfway through the conversation, it could come up. "This is what I'm interested in."

Not to open with that, because with that specific company, because something could come up in that conversation. Again, you never know who someone knows. You may decide by the end of that conversation, that a new passion that came up, a new company was a direction that was better for you. You don't want to pigeonhole yourself by just saying, "Hi, I'm here for a job in your specific company. How can you help me?" That's a lot of pressure on someone as well, because they feel like, you're asking them to be an HR advocate. Whereas, if you're just asking them for advice, they may send you to a great friend at another company that's perfect. It may have nothing to do with their company in the end.

**[00:13:24] TF:** Then, Sarah Whitney, if you want to speak about the new grads and some of that networking, because I know you are helping them all the time with that. Yeah.

**[00:13:31] SWA:** Yeah. I think one of the main things I tell them is you do want to try to show who you are in that email. I am saying, start off with again, I'm Sarah Whitney Anderson, and this is who I am. Rather than having to figure out, go to the bottom of the email, if you are emailing. I do say, to go ahead and get to the purpose of the email early. I think that gratefulness comment is very accurate that Lauren mentioned, so that they're not having to dig in, it's the third paragraph, as to why aren't we having this conversation? "Thank you for telling me how wonderful I am. Why are you emailing me?"

Then I always like to tell them to find the balance of fluff and positivity. I don't want them to just put in a whole bunch of comments that aren't really fruitful, or helpful, but fillers. Also, showing who are they and that they are grateful for this experience. They are excited about the future, or this opportunity, whatever that looks like.

Adding a little snippet. I love alliteration, so I love to sign my emails with a adjective that also describes the day. Have a wonderful Wednesday. Have a terrific Tuesday. That is something that brings positivity to me, and hopefully, that they would really be like, "Oh, that's cute. That's whimsical. She must be a fun person." I think that small little something that shows them who I am, but it's not going to overwhelm them and take away from too much of the conversation.

**[00:14:55] TF:** Well, such great tips from you guys. I appreciate that. Another thing that I'll often tell them too is, it's very easy for you to type a quick question, but the answer to that could be paragraphs. Just be very aware. Oftentimes, I will see if people maybe would have five or 10 minutes to talk on the phone at their convenience, or to meet for coffee somewhere near them. Versus here's two questions, just answer them, and then the likelihood that you'll hear back from them. Quick question for you. Now, as far as follow-up, how can a job seeker find the balance between an appropriate amount of follow-up and too much?

**[00:15:34] SWA:** I've been told it's the rule of two. The first email allows you for that first initial interaction. The second email serves as a reminder to them. After that rule of two, they're clearly showing either they haven't gotten the email, there just isn't follow up. I would say, the rule of two and move on. There's other people at that company. There's other ways to connect, especially, I would say, maybe you've LinkedIn message them twice. Then, I think it might be okay to even move on to an email, or some other form of communication, but keep it to that rule of two of only two interactions per LinkedIn and two forms of communication. One, LinkedIn, one email.

**[00:16:15] LO:** I know we're talking about people that you're reaching out to, cold-emailing, or you have a warm lead from a friend, or mutual connection, or a specific reason to email them. I also think it's important to think about following up with your mentors, and you are probably getting to this also already in your thought stream, Tiffany. I think a lot of times, as we move through our careers, we start to get nervous that, "Wait a minute. I've lost touch with someone. How can I naturally get back in touch with them?"

I'm here to say that I've kept my mentors for 20 years now. It doesn't matter how much time passes. It's great to cultivate thinking about that flipping through your phone every four months, six months. If it's been a year

and a half, because I don't even know what time it is in COVID. I mean, all the days blend together. One of my favorite friends was my first boss and my mentor 20 years ago, and she used to walk around the office and do happy checks. Every once in a while, I text her, "I'm doing a happy check." You know this. Sarah Whitney tells people all the time. I mean, if it's a professor, don't worry that it's been a little while. It's the beginning of school year. Think of those natural times to get back in touch with people. Then they'll be relevant to you when you want your grad school recommendations, or thinking about industry advice. I just say, don't worry about the time that's passed. Think about that cultivation. If you've made a really genuine connection with someone, they'll be excited to hear from you, no matter how much time has passed.

**[00:17:42] TF:** Thank you for all the great advice. When you do get those, maybe it's an in-person when we can get back to that safely, or Zoom meetings with your contacts, what are some tactical things in terms of what to wear, what to prepare, topics, questions to ask, so people can make the best impression possible?

**[00:18:01] SWA:** As far as what to wear, I always lean towards more casual and not necessarily in actual dressing, but maybe not immediately putting on your brightest color in all print. That comes from someone who loves animal print and hot pink. I don't want to be known from that networking interaction as the girl in hot pink leopard. Leaning towards maybe some casual colors, but something that hopefully, you stand out because of your conversation.

One thing that I was thinking about was for an in-person networking, or interview something, I'm going to focus a little bit more time on what I'm going to wear. What will make me feel confident? What will make me feel professional, something that I'm not going to play with my hair, play with the buttons. Again, I'm going to feel confident. As this COVID world and more Zooms have happened, I find myself not focusing as much on what I'm going to wear, because you're going to see mainly my face and my shoulders.

I want more about them to see my emotion coming through the screen. I want them to see that I am passionate about this topic we're meeting over. I want them to feel that genuine connection that I know we have a screen and we're having to meet through. I want them to get to know who I am. This is something I've been actually contemplating, that I think you have to work a little bit harder on showing that human connection when you are zooming, or even a phone call, networking versus in person.

**[00:19:26] LO:** I completely agree. I would say, I am a nerd for a notepad. When I think about preparing – Sarah Whitney is way more fashionable than I am. I do completely think about – I mean, again, these hours



blend in together. Chances are you're running from meeting to meeting to meeting. Then you're trying to set this important time aside for your professional development, or your job search.

For me, I need to take a note to myself every day to do this. To schedule 10 minutes before you're going to have the call, do clear your brain of your last meeting. Or, whatever has been happening in your day up into that point. That way, you can be mindful and focus on that connection. I also have a post-it note. Sarah Whitney knows I have – we both love color and I have a rainbow full of post-it notes. The colors mean nothing, it's just that day.

To me, I want to do a brain dump about what I want to get out of it. I want to do a brain dump of the questions that I have to ask. I put them right on my laptop, so I don't have to look down, or look through things. Then, I've become really good at taking notes without dropping my eyes. I always have a notepad near me, so a lot of paper products, but they make me really comfortable. Then I don't lose any of the magic that we're talking about.

**[00:20:49] SWA:** I hear you with the post-it notes. I love the rainbow color ones too. I have a wall that's in front of my desk, because with the window and the glare work the best for me. I'll put some of the post-its on the wall right with the camera, so my eyes will stay. I think, pen jokingly when I left, they're like, "Oh, my gosh. We're going to save money on post-its now."

**[00:21:11] TF:** I hear you. Thank you for that. Can you describe with these meetings in person? Do you think there is a difference though, if you're an investment banker, or a consultant, or somebody where the industry is wearing suits all day, versus if it's a more creative type person, would that adjust anything and getting prepared for these meetings?

**[00:21:31] SWA:** Yeah, especially with Zoom. If you're going to be working for a more traditional company, I think it's best to stick to the suit, stick to the more traditional interview where. I also think though, companies are doing a great job with letting you know what they expect from these Zoom calls. If you are talking to a new startup tech company, they might not even touch clothing, because that's not even on their brain at all. That doesn't matter to them, whatsoever. I think it's good to keep in mind, but I don't think it's a make it or break it something right now. Again, the song is that shoulder and up from your head is always showing you're present.

**[00:22:08] TF:** Perfect. This is both for Zoom and in-person. Can you guys describe the social cues you pick up from other people and how that affects your networking strategy, in terms of if you're talking at a big networking function and you're in a group, when to know when to wrap it up?

**[00:22:25] LO:** I mean, when someone starts looking around, you want to give people the opportunity to make several connections. You don't want to take up all of their time. If you can have a good close of making sure that you get that action point, and that you'd love to follow up with them that it was really great to meet them and say, "Can I find you on LinkedIn? Do you have a card?" I don't know, if people be exchanging cards now, post-COVID. I sure hope we get back to something like that. I mean, reading that body language of knowing when it's time to wrap up that you're not taking up all of their time is important to me.

**[00:22:56] SWA:** I totally agree. I will never forget one of the first student events I went, it's something where our students rotate around and have some free-form of networking. It was the second time I would ring a bell, and all of a sudden, these students knew the timing, that they were like, "Okay, it's been 20 minutes." All of a sudden, all these eyes were on me. Like, "You better ring that bell." It was very warning to me of "Okay, I need to learn of when to figure out the cues of the room." Also, maybe we need to make sure that our students are knowing. You can't always just make eye contact with the host and know that things will change immediately on what you need.

**[00:23:33] LO:** Whitney's done an amazing job at trying to explain to students as well. She'll create these cheat sheets of here are the 40 alumni who are here in the room and they're different industries. I think you're really good, as Sarah Whitney is saying, you may decide you want to make a beeline for this person, because they're in an industry, or a company you care about, but think about working the room and you never know who you could meet.

Then, I would say in the beginning, they would come up to Sarah Whitney and some of her first events and say, "Great, this was really wonderful. Could you just go ahead and send me all of the emails for all of the alumni who were here?" It's like, they didn't want to do any of the work to make that action step. Sarah Whitney's done a really great job now at the beginning of the event, empowering everyone to know that it is on them to go ahead and do that.

**[00:24:20] TF:** Well, that's a great segue. Sarah Whitney, would you mind walking us through some of those empowering tips? We were at an event, what would you tell people to do?

**[00:24:29] SWA:** Sure. One of my favorite things is working with the first years. Obviously, I don't know about you all, but I didn't do a ton of networking in high school. Freshmen, and when you get to college, that is networking 101. I did. I loved when students come in and be like, "I want to talk to this person. I plan to solve cancer." I'm like, "That's amazing. I really hope you do that, because I'm tired of thinking about it." How are you with chemistry? "Oh, not so good." Okay, let me introduce you to this wonderful non-profit that works with healthcare, and just going ahead and opening their eyes at the beginning of there are wonderful alumni here, and they all have this wonderful connection with you, of that they went to the school. They know how it works. They graduated. They got to have new connections.

I think just opening their eyes of the true purpose of a networking event. It's not always to meet that one person, but to widen their scope, so that they have a coaching team behind them of that they have people to go ahead and start, what's the whole purpose of having a LinkedIn when you're a freshman? To go ahead and start adding those alumni, not just your friends in your current history class. These people that can be behind you from the beginning, known you since your freshman year to help you.

I also just think, broadening their eyes of this is not a single interaction opportunity. Ask all kinds of questions. Don't just ask what kind of internship opportunities do you have? This isn't one singular transaction, but what kind of professors should I be getting to know? What kind of opportunities that you didn't know about, that I could get involved in? I think just broadening that scope of what networking can really allow. It's not just for jobs and internships.

**[00:26:10] TF:** That is such a great point. That's one thing I'll often tell people when they're networking, if they're talking to somebody in a career that they want to be in. Maybe even ask them, what do now that you wish you knew then when you were back in school at this point, or some of the things. Great tactical tips.

Going back, Lauren, you had briefly alluded to being a little bit shy. What advice do you have for someone who is hesitant to reach out to someone new, because they are shy? Now, you talked about the tips for the events, standing near food and other things. What are things when you're actually doing the email outreach?

**[00:26:44] LO:** Start it. I feel old in talking about making phone calls, but I can think back to a project that I did in one of my first jobs, where I was clearing the rights to produce a CD. I had no idea what I was doing. I felt pretty prepared from the happy check boss, but I was calling some pretty intimidating people at 22-years-old. I literally just started dialing the phone before I was ready.

Just start before you're ready and then you have to rise to the occasion. I do that now with email. You just have to start, because if you're paralyzed by analysis, it's never going to happen. When you're shy, you just have to get yourself over that hump. The idea too, that you're supposed to do at least one thing a day that scares you and once you do that, and realize you've gotten past it, as I get shy right now, then it's like you're building up equity in that. It really helps you and you can take the next leap a little bit easier.

**[00:27:47] TF:** Sounds like a good thing for everybody, and especially entrepreneurs, too, where you're figuring it out every day. Can you guys think of a time when someone was really great at networking? What was it that impressed you about how that person presented themselves?

**[00:28:02] SWA:** For me, it was they just had no agenda. It was like a butterfly just bouncing around. That they were a friend to all. I went up to this person later. It was like, "You must know everyone here." It's like, "No, this is my first event. I just wanted to meet people." I mean, I was amazed at just how kind he was, that he found very easy ways to connect with that person. I will say, I think he is one of those just born with an intuition of people. I totally understand. I do not think I am a natural networker, that I do have to put forth an effort. It's from my passionate loving people that makes it easier.

I just loved watching him, that there was no agenda. He had all kinds of crazy questions. He was fine with, when he was in a group making the group laugh, or standing back and listening to that person. He could read the group of who is networking with about where he could fill in, where he could help that group.

**[00:28:56] LO:** It's like, we're talking about the same person, but I'm positive, it's different people, because the one I'm thinking of is a friend that he's the consummate connector. He does it in such a genuine, caring way. He's just got this colorful energy about him, that he lives in Nashville and in LA. Whenever he's back in Nashville, he sets up shop pre-COVID, in this huge coffee shop that's really popular in town called Fido. He sits there like the Godfather and takes meetings all throughout the day.

You're sitting there, and you know that people are literally waiting behind you to connect with him. He doesn't care. It's like Bill Clinton. As you always hear, he's focused on you. He's focused on your projects. He's asking you how your family's doing. He's wanting to talk about your latest writing project, and wants to talk about non-profit things. It's just really amazing. It comes down to that interested and interesting piece. Again, just being curious with being completely genuine. He's also an incredible character. I think he's also Dr. Doolittle, because I've seen pictures where he has a hummingbird resting in his hand. I mean, who can do that? They're

just magical people like that. They're very inspiring, but they're quick to let you know, you're not supposed to clone them. You find your own path and connection with people.

**[00:30:13] TF:** I love the visuals on that one. I love Fido. I miss that place. What are the things that people should avoid when networking?

**[00:30:21] SWA:** This question was tough. Because I think there's the obvious answers of don't be chewing loudly and being obnoxious with maybe things around you. Then, maybe back to the – don't immediately just like, "I need a job. I need something from you." That is going back to that transaction. I think also with networking, sometimes you just have to try things and know it's not always going to be easy. There's only so many times I can talk about the weather. I know that it's a safe answer, but there's sometimes just not a whole lot left to say. Sometimes I will throw in a joke and it might fall flat. I'm not a super funny person, but you know what? It was worth trying. I don't know that there's a ton of things that you should avoid, besides just the obvious manners.

**[00:31:16] LO:** Yeah, I agree. The manners and then not coming in with a foregone conclusion, and a really agenda script.

**[00:31:23] TF:** One thing for me, this isn't necessarily something to – well, I guess it is to avoid. I try to avoid putting too much pressure on myself. I think if I look at it like, none of these people in this room are going to get me my job. You know what? I'm going to connect with hopefully, some great people. I'm going to learn something.

**[00:32:19] LO:** I agree. It's so hard if you're in the job search mode to feel intense about it. If you can think, if you can get out of that space and think holistically, you never know what you're going to get out of something. I mean, someone could talk to you about a book that changes your life that you just never knew about. I personally find, I love travel. It's very life giving. I have found a lot of people who give really great advice about places where they've scuba dived around the world, or just really interesting places they've traveled. Now I have new things on my bucket list. Again, it's not just all about the job. I know, the job is incredibly important. Again, you never know, where this will lead for life experience overall, too.

**[00:33:00] TF:** Cool. I know we've touched on this a little bit before about the networking events with lots of people. What I found, some people even if they're a bit shy, they can be great one-on-one and they're fine with

the coffee shop meetings. Then when it comes to competing with five or six other people, like say, a career fair, sometimes people are those networking events, people talk to five at once. How can you strike that balance, where you're not a shrinking violet, but you're also not taking over and being obnoxious?

**[00:33:29] SWA:** I'll never forget the first time I went to a career fair. I mean, this is my very first interaction with a career fair. This woman, she goes, "Name five negative attributes about yourself." Now also, if you know me, I do not dwell on the negativity. If anything, I just suppress it. That was a little terrifying. I stalled. I couldn't think of something and she just moved on to the next person next to me, and I just was immediately cast away.

It can be overwhelming, but it's worth it in the end. Also, I've been through grad school interviews that much felt like the Hunger Games, not lying. You're sitting in chairs and people are like, "Well, what are you interviewing for right now? Are you competition, or are you not? You have to give yourself grace. You can't immediately know that – Honestly, this is going to sound probably silly, but it sounds like dating. You have to go into it. You don't know if you're going to get your partner out of these interactions. There are going to be a lot of different people out there. There's a lot of fish in the sea.

Those interactions are worth it, because you're never going to know about that job. You have to put yourself out there to learn. I learned a lot about myself in that conversation of I do need to be better on the fly, about talking about myself, but you cannot go into it thinking it is the Hunger Games. It might feel like it, but don't embrace that mentality and go into it thinking, "Who am I going to meet? Who could lead me to the next best thing?"

I loved working career fairs later. I love talking to employers and I met great friends. That all the employers were really – they loved working well together. They would talk and say, "You know what? Suzy Q was great, but I don't think she's a sales mentality. You should go talk to this company that we know this person. We were at this school together." It was cool to see that they realize, "You know what? She might not have even talked to that company." Those hard, large networking opportunities are not always fun, but don't feed into the mentality. Also, you never know what could come out of it.

**[00:35:42] LO:** That's great. Yes, you just took me back 25 years to my group, Anderson consulting interview, which I've tried to suppress. I think that was a whole different situation, where I never knew from the career center that that was going to be a meet and greet, big group meeting. I literally walked down into the basement of the Career Center, because that's where this was at the time.

You're in a dungeon with eight people that you didn't know. Actually, the interviewer from Anderson had no eye contact. You think, "Oh, this is going to be really intense." You don't think about what happens on the other side, when that person makes you uncomfortable, because they actually have no handshake, or eye contact, or anything to really make a really good connection.

Sometimes it's just not going to go that great. I would say in general, when you talked about career fairs and such and I know, people on your podcast are a full range in their career journey. That physically, just making yourself part of the conversation by nicely sidling up, not being intrusive, but making sure that you're physically there, then you become part of the conversation. Anybody who has any heart at all will maybe open up a tiny bit to let you in, and then just waiting for an opportunity not to pounce into the conversation, but to thoughtfully think about opportunities to interject and introduce yourself. That's my best idea.

**[00:37:06] TF:** Those are great points. I have a story too from my first career fair. It was senior year and I was debating what do I do. I think that's September. There was one. I had never been to one before. I had my suit. I went, I looked around and I thought, "I don't think there's anything for psychology majors." I stayed five minutes. I left and I applied to grad school. I was very grateful in my grad program that they had a practicum as part of it at Penn. Then I was able to through my mentor, who actually, Jeannie Stanley, she's going to be another podcast guest, and talk all about that.

I think the one point that comes out of this, hang in there with those early experiences, because we all have whether it's an interview, a fair, or something where you're like, "Wow, that did not go the way I had planned in my head."

**[00:37:56] SWA:** It's character building. Yeah.

**[00:37:57] TF:** It is. You always learn from that, too. Turning a little bit to LinkedIn, what are tips for you? How do you guys use LinkedIn as part of your networking?

**[00:38:10] LO:** Oh, this is all Sarah Whitney.

**[00:38:13] SWA:** It has grown and grown. I remember for a class, I was told to make a LinkedIn. I just was like, "This feels not helpful. This feels a lot. I don't even know why would I connect with these random people. Why are random people connecting with me? I have so many questions." Now, it's one of the first things I check. I

love seeing people from all walks of life to see where they are. I've loved helping friends that they have even right now, the little 'We're hiring' mark on their profile and be able to say, "Hey, actually, I just talked to an alum, or a friend, or saw this opportunity. I think you would be great for it be." Just being that connector piece.

I think it's great to see how industries are changing. That's a great spot for us to share information. I love LinkedIn groups, and I love being part of these different groups, so that we have the ability to have these conversations, depending on whatever that group is for. That's super helpful. I love asking questions about it. If there's something that I want to find out and don't know, and don't know where to start, and I just really don't want to do, just a blank Google search. I immediately have these groups that I can turn to and be like, "Hey, this is something I'm looking at. Has someone done something like this? Do you have people that you've reached out to do something like this? What examples are out there?" So much.

I will say, I'm much more likely to add someone to my LinkedIn when they have a message. That's something that I've tried to do is anytime I connect with someone, throw in something with a, "Hello, my name is Sarah Whitney. I work at Vanderbilt. So do you. Saw this connection. Saw something." It just adds that little bit more of a piece, because especially since I went to a public school, there's tons of alumni from my school. That's just saying that we went to the same school. Well, what else is there? Not to say that you have to be as choosy as your friends on Facebook or whatnot. I like to see a little bit more of a connection and what is the purpose behind our connection?

**[00:40:15] TF:** Great, thank you. How can alumni, whether they have graduated last year, or they've been out for 20 plus years, make the most of their school's alumni services? What about the online database that you guys have?

**[00:40:30] LO:** Sarah Whitney and I spend a lot of time on LinkedIn. We do have upgraded accounts, caveat. We do use the alumni finder program a lot. It's moved around. I think right now, it's still on the school homepage. I can't recommend that enough. It's fantastic. Then, what we do is we tell alumni students to toggle back and forth right now, because our online community has blind emails for a reason, because people were getting spammed a lot.

You can either in-message through LinkedIn, or through the online community. There's more of a chance, of course, that your business information is going to be updated on LinkedIn. I find it's a really good place to toggle back and forth. Then in the online community, you can find out that they wrote for the school newspaper



like you did, or they were in club rugby like you were. Making those connections, whether it's in that blind email, or in the LinkedIn message, like Sarah Whitney said, of, "Hey, I met you at an event. I've looked you up. Here's where I see that we're similar, and we'd love to connect with you more." I think that's really important.

Then, as we talked about in the beginning with chapter events, those are incredible networking events. I mean, we have specific networking events. Anything that you want to be part of, wherever your school is, there is a chapter, or there are online ways to do networking. To also pay it forward and mentor students as well.

**[00:41:57] TF:** Such good advice. Well, I am so grateful to you guys for being on here. Before we completely wrap up, what are the parting pieces of advice you have for our audience?

**[00:42:09] SWA:** There's so much I want to say.

**[00:42:14] LO:** Well, we're happy to listen.

**[00:42:15] SWA:** I would say, just don't be afraid to put yourself out there. You never know what a networking opportunity, what a person sitting next to you on the bus can lend offer. Just don't be afraid to put yourself out there. Shoot for the stars for whatever position you want. The worst they can say is no and you just keep moving on.

**[00:42:34] TF:** I agree.

**[00:42:36] LO:** Yeah. You got to believe in yourself. I mean, I've switched industries a few times. You might think, how in the world will people notice my transferable skills? Or what was I doing back then that would possibly be useful now? I'm using my journalism skills literally right now more than I have in years. You just have to believe that everything is leading to something. You can't tell what it is. It doesn't mean that there isn't some journey where there's a culmination of all of your incredible skills and experiences that you can be using.

Whether that's in your "day job," or a passion that you have, starting a company on the side, or for me, writing projects and such. I mean, your life is more than just the many hours that you spend in your work. If you love it, your work becomes your passion. I completely say, believe in yourself. If it feels incredibly overwhelming, especially to someone new in their career, I like to say, just find your next lily pad and just go step by step by

step. Don't think about where you need to be in 10 years, because you may have a completely different dream by then.

**[00:43:45] TF:** I love the visuals from y'all. This was great. Well thank you so much for taking all your time out of your schedule. I think you have given so much wonderful advice and I appreciate y'all coming on the show.

**[00:43:55] SWA:** Anytime.

**[00:43:55] LO:** Thanks, Tiffany.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[00:43:58] TF:** Thank you so much for joining us today. I really appreciate you. Please be sure to go check out my website at [tjfcareercoach.com](http://tjfcareercoach.com), where you can find all the latest episodes, show notes, links to the resources we discussed. If you would like to make a career coaching appointment with me, or get your resume critiqued, there's ways to sign up for that. I hope you will subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, iHeart Radio, or wherever you get your favorite podcasts.

Stay tuned for our next episode, finding a job at a startup with Tarek Pertew.

[END]