

## INTRO

(The following is read by Laura Colby over jazz music composed by Manual Cinema)

Hi, I'm Laura Colby and this is *The Middle Woman*, a roadmap to managing the performing arts. I'll be sharing personal anecdotes from my 30 years in the field, exploring the nitty gritty and the technicalities of this job. I'll tell you the story of how I got here and what it's taken for me to work in the industry of the performing arts.

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## EPISODE 28

LAURA COLBY: Hello, this is Laura Colby, founder and president of Elsie Management, and I'm here today speaking with Todd Wetzel regarding the balance of family, work, and life in this field of the live performing arts. We hope to share with you today information and learning and our experience as people in the field who have children and have had relationships. (Todd is still married. I am not). We hope to share with you antidotes and information that we didn't necessarily have when we entered this field somewhere in our thirties and proceeded with our lives.

So the first thing I'd like to do is have Todd Wetzel introduce himself and let us know his current title and where he's working. But also a quick summary of how you got to your position, Todd.

TODD WETZEL: Well, great to be here with you, Laura. For those of you listening I have had a privilege of working with Laura through a majority of my professional career. So it's a real pleasure to be here. I'm currently an arts presenter. I have been an arts presenter through my entire professional career. And what that means is, I work with, artists, agents, and managers to select touring professional performances to bring them to my community.

The community I work in happens to be Purdue University, which is in West Lafayette, Indiana, a greater Lafayette community of West Central Indiana. And so I serve as an assistant vice provost in the student life division at Purdue. I'm the executive director of Purdue Convocations and the Hall of Music, which is the system of venues that we have here at Purdue. So I am a presenter, meaning I run an organization that brings these performances, and I'm also a facility manager. I have technical teams and facilities that I look after along with this.

Some organizations have these enterprises all in one, and ours happen to have the presenting function and the facilities function sit side by side. It makes for an interesting administrative relationship, but I'm essentially doing the same things as a comprehensive performing arts facility that happens to be based at a major university. And so that is important part of the way I'll think about my context because well, Laura's mentioned, you know, we all started early in our career. I started at age 24 in my first real professional gig at a university, to be a part of a team to design and build a performing arts center at Valparaiso University, which is also in Indiana. Then I moved to Purdue in '97 and have been here ever since.

But really, to anyone thinking about what does it mean to be in the profession, I think you will hear a story very similar to this, from anyone, any long-timer that you dare to ask this question of or if they corner you at a bar somewhere, they'll tell you this long winded story about how they've never really known anything different. They've almost always been in the field and they can point back to stories. The same is true for me, you know, I grew up in the home of a visual artist, had an art studio in the house. So the creative practice was a part of my worldview, really. And I began music training early on learning, studying piano and then like many kids adding woodwinds and things like that in, in middle school band.

For me guitar arrived in eighth grade and electric guitar arrived very quickly afterwards. And then a whole succession of garage bands and college party band things, you know. It was all part of the experience. But when I got to university, I did declare as a music major, but in a program that we now talk about somewhat more like arts administration. At Valparaiso, which is my alma mater for undergrad, it was called "music enterprises" and it's a music degree stuffed with business and international studies or language, things like that. So that you're still a music major, but you're doing these other things.

I also happen to be the box office manager for the university theater, the business manager at the campus radio station, recording engineer for the music department, I was doing all of these other things. And then when I look backwards, I can say, Oh, my gosh. I was already in the field before I even left college because I was just interested and connected to doing the work of making arts and culture happen, whether I happen to be the one on stage or not - that was what was already happening.

So that for me is one of the salient truths. And I think of this when I'm I sit in a chair where I have the privilege of hiring people and I love seeing evidence of people who can't not do it. They're already doing it. If I hire people that are driven and have that kind of motivation, they've been doing it, whether they have the specific skills for a job in question or not, may not be as much of the issue is that I

can see the drive. The evidence of the drive, not that they just tell me they have the drive. I see demonstrated evidence of their drive and their creativity in the way in which they've created a path for themselves. That to me speaks volumes about a person's resilience, about their commitment to this work, about the fact that they really live it.

It's a really important signal. And I see that in the way when I reflect on the evidence of my path. I was at Valparaiso for seven years, came to Purdue to be a part of the fundraising team, and then two years later had the privilege of taking over the department and have been at Purdue since '97. I'm in now my fifth incarnation of my role at Purdue. I keep having other things added to my plate outside the arts, but it's just a larger administrative portfolio.

When we talk about time management, we can talk about it not just relative to me as a, human relative to arts and my work. It's to all of the other things on my plate as well. But nonetheless, the path for me is still rooted in the profession of the performing arts and what it means to create community around the work that artists can do in the live performance space or in adjacent spaces - but the role of the artists in our community and how they motivate us and inspire us.

LAURA: And from a very personal perspective, when you were in your twenties and early thirties, did you have a picture of yourself coupling up, being in a marriage and having children and growing a family? Was that part of your view? And your dreaming when you entered the field early on.

TODD: Well you know, it's kind of funny. I was talking to a student about this just the other day, someone who wanted to go into this field and we were talking about the dynamic of how engineers and accountants and certain specializations in STEM fields, science, technology, engineering, and math fields have on-campus interviews, and so students in those pre professional spaces are having interviews for what will be their job somewhere during their senior year.

And then that means before they graduate, they may have all of their ducks in a row. So they have their partner already identified, they have their job already identified, and boy, let me tell you, as a senior in college. I felt completely at sea because I had none of that. I mean, and of course, varying reasons I was not going into a field that had on-campus interviews, let's say, and being abysmal at relationships at the time, then I had nothing else lined up either.

So no, I, didn't think it was going to happen, but I thought it should have right in in the sort of mental map of how your life will unfold. Of course, I thought I would have these ducks in a row, but it was the furthest thing from it. But, you know, it's

that wasn't really a view. And so I think that was the beginning of my unhealthy relationship to work because I basically would give everything to work. And as, we all know there is no end to the amount of work you could do.

LAURA: Correct.

TODD: You could always do something relative to work.

LAURA: You can, you can do this job 80 hours a day and it's, it's never done. It's just never done. There's so much to do.

For me, when I was at university and I met my, now my ex-husband had one of those life changing moments where I knew this man was the love of my life and I was going to have his babies. My mother never told me that was going to happen to me. And I was all of 18 years old. I was just absolutely ridiculous. But that happened to me. And, you know, it was in the cards and it felt inevitable. And we were married at 24. And we had a child when I was 25, there was no plan, I just figured, we'd work it out. I had no clue.

I mean, as a dancer, you did not have a child at 25. What were you, crazy? I mean, you've got a window if you're lucky. You got a 20 year window to dance. Maybe if your body doesn't explode. Thankfully my body held up. I had a very supportive husband who wanted a family and also was willing and able to support me while I had our child and continued dancing because I didn't have a revenue stream to speak of toward our marriage. So I was very lucky. I was blessed to have those circumstances and to have found that partnership with a partner who would support me, who was committed to making a family and frankly committed to us just figuring it out. How are we going to have a baby? And how was I going to keep being able to dance?

Elsie did not even exist. And then very organically, the dancing in the studio led to me becoming an administrator for several of the choreographers I worked with. And this is an earlier episodes I will not repeat myself too much, but it was very organic. I picked up work in the studio being paid by the hour to do basic company management stuff. Again, this was all pre-Elsie, that I could do in my in between time, in between class, rehearsals, performance, being a young mother. There was some income coming in, but there was also a lot of income going out to support the necessary child care.

When I formed Elsie in 1995, my son was 8 years old. He was at a very specific time in his life in school and he grew as Elsie grew organically. So, I did not come out of the gate with 22 artists who were all touring, who had international

recognition. That wasn't, you know, the circumstances for me and Elsie Management in 1995 and today, two completely different pictures.

I was very lucky in that I was able to grow the business. As my son grew, I stopped having to be the person to pick him up at three o'clock when school got out because he had after school functions. As he continued to age and mature, I was able to focus more on my company. It was a very organic growth path. Very early on my marriage ended. Suddenly I was very much a single mother with a small business and a growing child at home who I was responsible for. And so there was still a tricky balance and now I didn't have my partner to co-parent in the same way. My son and I found a way, and he's now a grown ass adult and 37 years old and has a job and pays his taxes and he votes people, so I feel like I did my job well.

One of the great advantages, of course, if you own your own business, is that you manage your own time. When I needed to be somewhere at school for him for a presentation, or I needed to take him to the doctor, or I needed to sit down with him to tutor in preparation for some SAT test, you know, I could do that because I was the boss. Your circumstances, quite different. You had a boss. And even though you are ultimately are the man in charge at Purdue Convocations, you still have a boss who you have to report to, and you're working under the behemoth that is a university with all of its rules, it's HR, it's personnel regulations. We have talked about this in past episodes that this field yes, can be all consuming, but it is also possible to construct a life within it. And we'll talk about some of the other things you and I do besides performing arts and being parents, but I'm curious from the perspective of even just time management. How do you do that when you have a big boss, who's a university Todd?

TODD: Well, I think first, acknowledging the complexity of any work environment is real, right? We all have these larger forces that are on us. And so universities have their version of these. And so, you know, I remember early on trying to figure out if my income would be adequate. And I know many people who held multiple jobs so they can chase a dream, right? So let's be clear about the financial imperatives that we all face, you know? You have to butter your bread, you have to put a roof over your head, and so you find ways to do that. Early on, yes, I had housemates and things like that to be able to navigate on the meager pay that early career things often had.

And let's face it, I didn't realize I was in a profession. I had jobs, but I didn't see them as a big through-line and it took a little while. It took going to my first professional industry conference. It was when I went to the international slash international conference and I saw all of these other people doing this work and I

could see that the work I was doing was a part of that ecology. I didn't even call it an ecology, then. I did in the presence of mind to, to think of it in that way. But I realized then that I belonged to something that was a bigger thing. There was a there, there, and I could also see that there were people who were further along in their careers, capital C careers.

There were real paths and it didn't matter what part of the sphere it was, whether it was an artist, agent, manager, presenter, or funder, whatever. There were people doing real work, meaningful work, substantive accomplishments. And so then you realized, oh, maybe my current circumstance isn't the one that I would stay in forever. Because there are other places where I could bring my energies that might actually offer more remuneration and those other things that I want to need on my Maslow's hierarchy of needs. I think the first thing that I just have to pay tribute to is becoming a part of the ecology, plugging into the system of people doing this.

Even listening to a podcast about this is part of that discovery phase where you would learn: Oh, yeah, there are other people who do this. And there can be momentum created by a field. There are opportunities importantly created inside a field. The power of networking is real and belonging to the associations or whatever respective association or networking hubs that you can belong to has true power, and it may not pay off in the short term. It may pay off in the long term.

And so an example of a field I didn't even join, but I thought I might want to belong to the music industry manufacturing side of the business. That was where I first saw myself. I was trying to decide: the recording industry or the music product business and music product business was the first side that I started. And so I went to trade shows where buyers and sellers came together. It's called the NAM show, National Association of Music Merchants. And they have these massive major convention hall-filling expos where the buyers and sellers come together.

So local and regional music store buyers come and buy their inventory that they in turn sell in retail context to in pro music shops or mom and pop piano shops. Things like that. But it's a buyers and sellers market. So I would go and I started as a university student, my sophomore year in college, I went to a trade show and I started seeing what it meant. I met other students who were also wanting to do the same thing. Fast forward three years later, some of the students that I stayed in contact with were then working inside major instrument manufacturers or distributors. And I had a network of people who were already employed. Even though I didn't go that direction, I could see that my network-building work already had paid dividends.

I think it's an important piece, in this calculus of how do I fit in. There are bets that you can place on yourself and a big chunk of that has to do with how you put yourself out there to connect to networks and build them. No one gives you a network, you earn it, you build it with your own shoe leather, and so there are many ways to do it now. I'm practically here in a walker because I'm back before the internet was created. So you did it old fashioned ways. You wrote to people, you collected business cards, you walked into booths and introduced yourselves, stuck your hand out and said, hi, I'm so and so I'm planning to be in this field in a couple of years. Can I stay in contact with you? And then you wrote them. Longhand or typed letters to them, sent them your typewriter-created resume, you know, things like that. So those were important pieces of of the process in the performing arts that yielded benefits for me throughout my career that I've become a part of a network and you become known inside a network.

You know, oftentimes people that I still meet today in the field are people that are probably one, two, or three degrees of separation with people that I know in the field. It'll be someone who says, Oh, do you know so and so? You should meet so and so. Or you need to meet this agent, or you need to meet this artist. They're working with so and so. And the fuel and power of that energy is really a big part of it. If you want to survive that journey, you also have to build the pathway.

LAURA: Yeah, but that's the part of my experience in the field, which has been so different because I didn't do that at all. Meaning, my arrival as an administrator or management, if you will, was completely out of the studio. So my contacts were the makers, the choreographers and the other creatives making. I never worked for CAMI. I never worked for Pentacle. I never worked for Reena Shagan. I didn't learn that way. I found all those people and I ultimately did learn from them. But it was after I had already started this work via Elsie Management.

You are absolutely right. That is so critical. That community that you must build, we cannot do our work in a vacuum. And that community you must build will be there for you in the damndest times when you need them.

TODD: Well, I'll just say, I mean, If you say you didn't have a network, it just further proves why you are a force of nature in this work that you do. To anyone listening, I mean, Laura is a force of nature and highly regarded for the work that she does, the artists that she represents, and the way in which she does it.

I mean, Laura and I have worked together over 20 years. How long? 25 years? 25?

LAURA: Yeah, I really think the first engagement was with Sean Curran.

TODD: He would have been on my 2000/2001 season in '99

LAURA: In '99, yeah, and it's great to be able to talk about the work that we have programmed everything from US-based straight up contemporary dance to the wildest, tiny little puppet shows from far, far away in Perth, Australia to

TODD: International spectacle

LAURA: outdoor international spectacle to oh, you know, booking a company from your backyard in Chicago: Manual Cinema and participate in Manual Cinema's Christmas Carol.

TODD: And supporting the creation of new work with Kate Weare and Union Tanguera.

LAURA: There you go. That was an incredible thing we got to do together. Yeah, this has been actually a staggering array of work and genre, and artistry that we've been able to work together on. But also that speaks directly to your curatorial range and vision.

You're at Purdue, your job is your job, and clearly you got better at relationships, because you are married and you are still married. You did a better job at that than I did.

TODD: Maybe I have gotten better. Or I have a very, very accommodating partner.

LAURA: Again, not to be too personal, but I think it's important to tell that story. Like how someone with a very serious full time job at a university with a gigantic responsibility of programming across the season with responsibility of management of multiple spaces and buildings, staff hirings, everything you mentioned in your introduction, you know, that's a massive job you have. So how did you find your way with love and a partner and establishing a family and making that all possible?

TODD: Well, You know, you can't know what you don't know when you start, but in the same way that you, you think about the finding the passion that takes you into the field, that thing that you can't not do, there are similar aspects about why someone may be the right partner for you.

I'm not going to paint a false picture of perfect harmony because it takes a lot of energy to, to make it go. But the truth is I met the woman who became my partner in life. I had just opened an art center and I was working like a crazy fool. And yet this person valued what it was that I was able to do and saw that it made me, me.

Although the very beginnings of the relationship were comical because well, first of all, we met at the YMCA while we were working out each on our own late-evening schedule. But early in the dating process, we're going out and seeing a lot of shows. And she thought, Oh, how quaint. This is all part of the dating process. Once we're, like, when we're really together, this will all kind of like tamp down.

Well, surprise, surprise. You know, it turns out this is my life. And so she and I had to have some discussion about how much she needed to participate in because her world has other things in it too. And her job is not to follow me around and her job is to also live her life and we do it in as much together, but sometimes parallel, right? Because you have to have a partner with whom you have the confidence and the space where you can say Hey, it's okay if we don't do the same thing and we'll meet up again later. It's like, Finding a good travel partner. Right. You know, sometimes you don't need to do everything side by side and you can reconvene later. And so, you know, we had to navigate towards that. And, you know, the great part is she was capable of that, and she also probably insisted on it. So I'm not saying it was all because I had the bright idea. These are parts of the navigations that happen inside successful relationships, period. But certainly with one that has both bankers hours and evenings and weekends as a part of its landscape. And so, that's a reality.

She came with me once to the annual conference in New York, which if for folks who don't know, I mean, the performing arts industry conferences have all the great things you would expect. They're full of conference proceedings during the day, talks by inspiring people. You're spending a lot of time in the buyers and sellers conversations artists and managers talking about what projects that are working on and who's on tour and you are gathering up that information to think about it as you curate your season. You're probably eating some meals together with people and talking about business. And then you're going and seeing a lot of work. You might see, in the context of an evening, you might see two, three, four, five things, depending on what it is. You could see a Broadway musical and catch the late night jazz set with a dinner before all of that. Or you could go to a quick takeout dinner with somebody and then go see five different dance showcases at different locations, and you could be traipsing all over the city or it could be any combination, right? So your evenings are full and they could be actually not just evenings. They could go into the morning. And so when you compare notes with people who have gone to academic conferences or other kinds of industry conferences where the proceedings essentially do run 9 am to 4 pm and then your evening is free to be a tourist or whatever. That's not these conferences. These conferences are full on, you probably go a couple days early to the conference, and so you have a full week of this schedule.

Well, my partner came, and she's like, I'm never coming to this again. After, after my third day of spending the day at the museums by myself, she's like, I can go to New York anytime to do that. But if I spend any time with you, you're with all of your industry people and you're just talking shop the whole time. I'm not actually there with you. I'm there just as an adjacent partner. And so, you know, she doesn't want to live inside the nitty gritty of the business and how it gets done. So that's fine. So we realized, okay, well, we'll travel and do things entirely separately from the work of the field. But she was happy to be in a theater seat with me in other contexts. But you know, I think you have to recognize what you might be subjecting a person to.

There are some partnerships that are in where people are both inside the biz. Great. It still may not be without tensions or hazards, but for us, it just turned out to be, okay, that was a really good lesson because when I'm in those spaces, I'm not there for fun. I'm there to work. And so it's pleasurable work. I love my work, but it's work and-

LAURA: Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. And I think, I think you touched on something really important to both of us, which is the capacity to schedule other trips that are not work related. Now, we might happen to stumble into a theater because that happens, but wherever we go, it seems to happen. But to plan a trip to Mexico, for example, for an immersive language week with your family, that was something you did together with your partner and your son. Amazing. I was able to take my son skiing in the west. He was great at skiing in the east, but he'd never skied powder in the west. So when he was 16 or 15, I took him to Colorado so he could have that experience of skiing in powder. These moments, I think were, really important for me and my son to have together.

And I think that is something that both you and I share is that those times just for that don't happen unless we get them into our calendars. We have to schedule them. And often we're working, you know, I'm sitting here now in October of '24 thinking about, okay, when am I really going to take time really off in the spring of '25 and mean it? I know we have plenty of colleagues who will say, I haven't had a real vacation in five years. And, you know, my first catty ass comment back is, well, whose fault is that? I mean, vacations don't show up. They just don't walk in your front door. You have to do the same thing you do for your artist and put it in a calendar.

TODD: We don't treat the creative process this way. Because a lot of us in this field have come out of some element of creative practice or maybe even maintain a creative practice and you know that you can't get something out of it without continuing to invest in it, in whatever way you need to do that regenerative work or

give it space. It requires time and energy and investment and so I keep a musical practice alive. It's mostly therapeutic. I occasionally get together and play music with friends. And it's terrific, but I actually still get time for myself to practice because it matters to me in terms of just my sense of being as a person. And sure, there are professional benefits to me working on those things. But we don't begrudge that a musician needs to go into the studio, an artist needs to go into the studio and do work. And so the permission you have to give yourself, and it's not even permission, it's a requirement for the way you survive, is invest in yourself. And this can be relative to whether you're talking about your diet. The way you take care of your own health and fitness and the way you take care of your brain and creative energies. It's no one else's job to do it for you. No one else has the incentive to do it. You have to make that space.

LAURA: Exactly, and we're pretty miserable people if we don't find that balance.

TODD: That's right, that's right. One of the things I learned as an administrator is I, I fill my schedule, my schedule, there are never blank spaces, like on my work day, there's never a blank space. Because I schedule, of course, meetings and appointments, but I also schedule work for what I'm trying to get done. This is a block for this. This is a block for that. And then I also know what nights are workout nights or physical activity nights or friend nights.

My schedule has stuff on it because if I don't do it, other things just sort of take over. And I would rather have come out of a weekend that was chock full of things and feel rejuvenated because I did all of the things that I really wanted as opposed to having, Oh, I have this wide open expanse without anything on it. How relaxing would that be? Well, I feel like I'm not a couch-sitter anyway. So for me, just chilling out on the couch is not how I recharge. I am usually doing other things, and I feel recharged.

It started out as a discipline, because I didn't believe it at first, in my thirties, that it would work. But now I've been doing it for so long and the sort of, the big aha for me is as my administrative load, because this is a question you asked earlier, that I didn't fully answer, how do you deal with having a lot of bigger bosses and demands, and I schedule administrative time for myself to do the work that is on my plate. And so I map that out and I try to put it in times when I'm fresh so I can get it done more quickly. I would rather get the thing off my head than have it lingering. And so the actual act of sitting down and looking ahead one, two, three weeks ahead and being really fine-grained then about what I'm doing, because by then travel has been laid-in all the all the public events are, of course, are all laid-in when the donor events are, you know, I have days all over my weeks that say these are holds for fundraising, you know, like this might be a development lunch

and I asked my development team to let me know whether that one comes together or not. Otherwise, I will repurpose the time.

I build the mechanics of my job requirements of my responsibilities onto the schedule, so that's that's very real. Before I started using, you know, a computer based calendar, this was all by hand on on paper in a day timer, which is essentially a fancy kind of calendar. So I live and die by the calendar. Because I've scheduled time for myself on there. When I have it, I really do give it to myself. Some people are using their phone at the gym because they're keeping track of their workouts at the gym rate. I don't begrudge anyone that, but for me, the gym is phone free time. It means I don't have a device in my hand and it's just me in my body doing what I need to do for my body and for my mind, and so I love that. And so I protect it with a vengeance.

LAURA: So you made a comment. You said, I didn't believe in "it" in my thirties that it is the scheduling of things,

TODD: Right.

LAURA: Okay. Interesting.

TODD: I wasn't disciplined about it because I just was willing to let there not be a boundary.

LAURA: Right.

TODD: I just let work overrun. I mean, I was opening an art center. I was working 100 hour weeks. There were there was no option.

LAURA: Right? You found a way because that isn't sustainable. You found a way as you matured, you figured out a way literally to schedule things so that, as the work grew, as your responsibilities grew, it became a necessity to ensure that you would have time for yourself, time for your partner, time for your son.

TODD: Right I mean, there are chapters in life, right? There, there-

LAURA: Yes.

TODD: I had a chapter where I had bumbled out of some relationships and so work was a great antidote. It was therapeutic.

LAURA: Absolutely.

TODD: And I was opening an art center and that probably was why, let's say, probably why the relationship failed. Because I was unavailable mentally, emotionally, physically, and I was doing these other things. So yeah, that probably had something to do with it and nonetheless, I could give that energy. But then once the fire hose of responsibility of opening the doors. The curtain goes up as the metaphor, right? For us, the curtain going up metaphor was getting the building up and running so that we could we have a proper teaching learning performance platform for the university and all that stuff had to get done. But once it got opened and we started to normalize operations and started to get a little more help in the enterprise, I could dial things back. Well, that's also when I had a little more space and that's when I met my partner. And yeah, then you realize, Oh, I really do want to go out to that French restaurant tonight and I'm going to have to like, arrange my schedule so that I can do that. It's not a show night. I don't need to be at work till eight o'clock.

LAURA: You mentioned the importance of your musical practice. And for me, when I stopped dancing, the motor inside of me still running on high, and the physical practice I then found was long distance cycling on road bikes. And this was very much prompted by organized AIDS rides. In the nineties to raise money, for AIDS research and these rides would be week long ride. I had a bike. It wasn't a great bike, but I thought, oh, I can do this. I can ride my bike across Montana with 5000 people. Sure. And the chain fell off every 10 miles.

When that ride was over, I was hooked. I'd had such a blast and I bought a much better bike that the chain stayed on the gears. And cycling became my new physical habit. And I would get up at 5:30 and six every morning and go into Prospect Park and do my hour of laps. And then I'd spend my weekends riding with the New York Cycle Club and learning how to pace line and learning all these techniques that I didn't know.

As a classically trained dancer, it was just magic to me. I was like, I get to sit and just paddle? What? How easy is this? You know, it was great. And so I I get to get my physical ya ya's out. It wasn't full body movement. No, but it sure was fun. And the best part was I was with other people who actually weren't in my field. And I met other people and wow. To your point of networking again, the world is full of the most incredible people and you will meet them in the damndest ways. And I have met some extraordinary individuals on my bike.

Unfortunately. I got hit by a car in 2011 and I got a very serious neck injury and so I had to tone down the cycling. And this is the part where I had been riding with a person who kept telling me, go to yoga, go to yoga, go to yoga. And after getting

hit by that car, I thought, man, maybe, you know, and I'm like, yoga, shmoga, I can, I'm a dancer, I can stretch. You know, and then I had a choreographer who said to me, you know, there's a yoga studio a block out your front door with an phenomenal teacher. You should really go. And off I went, and now slowly, yoga took over my cycling practice.

This practice is specifically Iyengar yoga. So for me, my practice in Iyengar yoga, my experience has been, it's taking my deteriorating dancer body apart and putting it back together in the nicest way. And I feel so good when I'm able to practice two or three times a week, and frankly, as I head now further into my sixties. Thank you. It is my future. And it keeps me sane, BKS Iyengar said that the practice of yoga is to still the fluctuations of the mind and in the highly pressured jobs you and I have, because these are wild circumstances we work under. Ain't nothing stable about none of this work, right?

I have found yoga, an incredible, calming practice. It's really been huge for me. I've been practicing now 18 years and, now my vacations are one week yoga retreats, where I go to a beach. I get to practice with my Iyengar teacher, with great people I love, at a beautiful setting, go swimming, and yes, I really do not work. And my staff is amazing. They know if they call me, there's a theater on fire. Or something truly horrible has happened, and they really need me. They know how important that time is to me. and that's not something that just showed up. That was something that we worked to and got to. Because running a small business is no joke. And working for 20 something artists who have huge expectations, and then there's my ambitions for them. I have huge ambitions for the artists I work for. The pressure is no joke.

So how do we sleep at night? How do we maintain our health, our optimum health so that we can function as good humans, and not be snappy and not be bitchy and not bark? You know, how do we be the gentle kind spirit in the room that can take a belly breath? And, you know, I don't mean to sound too crunchy granola but when the world is blowing up with impossible wars and gigantic hurricanes and pandemics, how do you find the peace to be able to function and remain a leader because you have a team, I have a team. They are looking to us to not lose our shit and they're looking to us to be able to lead in these moments of incredible crisis.

I know the data is there. Any kind of practice that you can develop as a human outside of your work job is going to save you. And for those of us who are seated all day, let alone on our phones, hunched over all day, you have got to counter gravity, and you have got to counter those postures. So if for you, that's a 10 minute walk around the block every day. All right, great. That's fantastic. For me, it is absolutely the asanas and the poses and the pranayama and all the good stuff

that yoga is bringing to me. Oh, and it's also still riding my bike. I get to ride my bike to work and home every day. It's not that far, but I'm still riding my bike. And it's still fantastic. If I can't ride my bike, I'm walking. And that's great. So I know that you too found long distance cycling and you too have had yoga in your life, but I'd love for our listeners to hear about how you have incorporated those physical practices into your life.

TODD: Sure. I played multiple sports as a kid, but I grew up in St Louis, which is a soccer city. So soccer was a big through line in my life. And it also helped because, I'm not six feet something. Basketball wasn't you know, in my future and I'm not a big American football sized dude. So in, into my 30s, I was still playing soccer, pickup soccer on a regular basis. And I had a great time with that. But as I got into my 40s, it was clear that the current students and grad students they're functionally gazelles and jackrabbits compared to me, and I had to start playing a different game. I had to play smarter instead of harder, but I realized that I needed to make a change.

I started distance running in the second half of my 40s, and I gave myself a marathon for my 50th birthday, and the part that really started getting set in motion with that is doing something with my body that was good for my body. And didn't have as much deterioration on, on the joints because I learned how to run healthfully and with a good stride. I worked really hard. I read a lot and studied what it would mean to become a better runner.

The addiction for me in running came from the meditative benefit. And the meditative benefit didn't start to like quit running with music. I'm telling you as a musician what I used to always run with my buds in and I was, I was always listening to something that would help me run pace. And then later I started to say, Oh, you know what? I can use this as research time. I can put a playlist of all the other things that I need to listen to. And then I realized my pace was all over the place. And I'm like, Dude, this is your personal time. This isn't work time.

And then one day, this was pre major iPhone era. My iPod wasn't charged. So I just went running without it. And I had a really great run and I said, Huh, well, wonder what that was about. I realized I was actually really listening to my body and my stride got better. My pace got better. And then the meditative benefit - that sort of zen like disappearance that happens - when, you know, you have these moments where all of a sudden you look down and you go, Oh, my gosh, I'm running because I had completely like separated from what was happening. And I was having these beautiful runs. I was breaking the wall and it was really phenomenal. That was a really great experience. I had a bike, a road bike that I had gotten as a college graduation present. I would be having occasional rides.

But I had heard about, the Trans Am rides, the rides across the U. S. And these other big statewide rides and I decided I wanted to see if I could fit one of those in. So I started doing more cycling and decided to set as my next target because I wanted to put something out there, not because I needed to be motivated to do it, but I just like a challenge.

And I thought, you know, I couldn't quite ever imagine riding across in this case, Iowa, because there's the oldest, largest bike ride is called RAGBRAI, the Register's Annual Great Bike Ride Across Iowa. And I threw that out there as a target, and I trained and did it, and, but along the way it became clear as I was racking up the mileage, I, I should probably get a better bike. And I did do that, and it changed the game for me. So but nonetheless, though, the part of it was I found community. I still have the benefit of the exercise. I schedule my rides on my calendar. And so that was really important.

During COVID, which is when like many of us, we had cabin fever. My wife and I started doing yoga practice on, you know, from online providers and it turned into a really meaningful part of a surviving COVID and having a little sanity. But we couldn't go to the gym in the same way. And I found, though, that between cycling and running and yoga, and then when the gym reopened weightlifting, that yoga was a thing that really facilitated all of the others in a powerful way because certainly cycling and running, you're working with just a limited plane of motion, sort of repetitive motion. And then, of course, you are sitting as what you mentioned in a chair a lot and hunched over devices. So yoga helps you unpack these things.

We, we train ourselves to do things. Well, we're training ourselves by virtue of how you spend your time. So you're training yourself to sit a lot and you're training yourself to hold this funky little slab in your hand with your neck bent. And so undoing that training, is really valuable.

For me, when I think about the physical benefit, I'm in my late fifties and again no one else is going to lose weight for me. No one else is going to exercise for me. No one else is going to give me the mental clarity that exercise brings for me. I have to be in charge of that. And it's actually in a, in a way, it's a really lovely way to have a control function because there's so many things in work and in work life that are out of control by giving yourself permission to be in control of these things for your life activating them and seeing them happen is a very restorative act for yourself.

And so I, I can't I agree completely with you about the power of it. And you have to find the things that fit for you. But I would say the things, if there are activities that offer you some sort of meditative space, If you don't get it through, say, another

kind of practice, like a faith practice or some other thing, it's really powerful. I can't tell you how many times, I'm in a meeting and yogic breathing is what allows me to not lose my composure and do the response I need to do. I can apply the lessons in so many other ways and that and I'm not even talking about the philosophical aspects of yoga. I'm talking about the physiological benefits of something like this.

LAURA: Yeah, and certainly that was not something I had any awareness of in my 30s. Even my 40s, no awareness of and, you know, this is the part also where I can hear my sister saying, not everybody's an athlete like you. You and I both have similar experiences in our bodies as athletes. And and staying active in that motor I referenced earlier, we both share in that and yes, not everybody has that. And that's why I referenced something as simple as walking around the block. Or some kind of standing meditation, Tai Chi practice. There's even yoga in chairs, people, This is, this is not a competition. This is about finding something that works for you and whatever condition your body is in, because every single body is different and what's worked for me and for Todd is not necessarily what's going to work for you, but the message here is find something. Find something that will bring that centering and sense of self, but also provide all those health benefits and mental benefits that you are definitely going to need in this field, which throws a lot of curveballs your way on a daily basis, right?

Like, there's not a day I don't learn something new.

TODD: The other big piece in the mix is what you put into your body and you know, you might have a role that has you in a lot of hospitality contacts, hosting donors, hosting receptions connecting with folks socially, because part of the networking function and you know, as I said earlier, no one can make the choices for you and your body other than you. And you have the freedom to make choices that matter. I mean, I know that if I eat something that is carb intensive, that the natural body response is to crash. So I'm going to go for a walk after dinner. Or do maybe that's when I go to the gym. So I don't just turn into a lump. You know, so there are all kinds of choices that one makes and, you know there's a wide array of conversations that that can point to, but nutrition, food, and how you treat your body is a, is a big piece in this.

LAURA: I was going to add that, especially at conference, we have to really remind ourselves because it is, as Todd described, it's an 18 hour thing. thing. And part of those 18 hours includes a lot of social time with your pals. And there's a typically a lot of alcohol and a lot of snacky fried, salty, crunchy food that is not going to be helpful to you the next day. And it really, It's all about the pacing. You got to pace yourself and you have to be careful as you work your way through that week. What are you going to do on when you arrive on Monday? What are you going to do on

Tuesday and Wednesday? It's going to make sure you actually make it to Saturday. That you don't wreck yourself. You don't trash yourself. You only have one body. It can only take so much. And every 10 years you age, I tell you, it doesn't get any easier.

TODD: Right? Well, our last conference, here's a specific example. We were four days on the ground and I scheduled two workouts into my conference schedule. So that meant I wasn't accepting breakfast meetings. And I, I got both of those workouts because it gives me the energy. And so that meant I had, I added energy. It also meant that I protected sleep and sleep is of course, part of of this as well. It sounds so simple, but again, no one can do it for you.

LAURA: Right. I'm so glad you keep saying that. That's really good.

TODD: One of the things I'd like to hear you talk about since we both have this responsibility. And that is, we're responsible for other people's livelihoods. People count on us to make good judgment to get the deal to get the gift to make it happen. Right. And so how do you wear that responsibility? Where do you place it? in your mental space? How do you draw energy from it? How do you avoid the paralysis of it? How do you, how do you cope with that?

LAURA: Right. How do I sleep at night? Because when I put Elsie together in '95, again, I could not have imagined my day at work today 28 years ago. I could not have seen this. I know you've heard me say this on so many occasions. I consider the work I get to do in representation of the artists I get to work for a huge privilege and honor. So to me, that's my grounding and platform is that this is really an honor that many of these culture bearers have given to me. Honestly, it's like a religious practice for me and in terms of that faith I have in them and the faith they have in me. It's a huge responsibility and it's a great honor.

And then I have been incredibly blessed to have the most amazing employees. Anna Amadei, who's in her 16th year working for me and is very much my partner as my vice president. I feel again, so blessed and privileged to have her by my side in that very firm way. And it pains me that I don't get to pay her more - and we have found other ways to give her things that she wants in her life. She's had 2 children, she gets upwards of 3 to 4 weeks of vacation a year. There's a lot of compromise from your typical boss who would insist that you be glued to your desk from 9 am to 6 pm every day, no departures. She's got two kids that she's having to deliver here, there, everywhere, all week after school hours, and it's fine. This is an agreement that she and I made together This is a very specific work culture that we managed to create.

My contracts manager, Jimena Alviar just came back after working from her home in Colombia. She needed to go be with her family and she said, I'm not asking for vacation. Can I go work from Columbia? And my answer, of course, is yes. I mean, we have the technology even before COVID that was happening with my staff. So I find I do what I can as a boss to provide alternatives and compromises that maintain a happy staff.

And when it comes to the artists we represent, my team are bringing in artists and those artists have made huge changes and have been artists that I never would have had access to or found on my own. So I've have benefited from that. They're not just here as staff. They are as invested in this roster as I am. So they feel the responsibility of the work we do for our artists as powerfully and as strongly as I do. I don't feel all the weight on my back. I feel it is somewhat distributed.

But you're absolutely right. There's no getting around the fact that, I am responsible for their livelihood. And as a team, this is the part of the teamwork we do that is so extraordinary. When we get to sit and vision and dream. And ask what is out there? And what is it that we want more of? And what are we hearing and oh, did you see those big inflatables? Well, we've got to go get them somehow because they're going to bring something to our roster to join our outdoor spectacle. I mean, we get to do that together. I think those and being in a theater and experiencing a new show that we have been part of from paper, from just words on a paper to actual bodies in space on stage, seeing the new work that we got to be a part of. And also discovery, those are our best moments together. And I feel that's where the responsibility and the seriousness of our work is very much shared across the team. And so now I volley it back to you. How do you do it?

TODD: Well, you're, you're pointing towards the fact that, like, we talked about, I talked about earlier, getting the right kinds of people connected to the organization. People who say I couldn't not do this is probably the similar way to say it, right. So you've got people who are on deck for this adventure. And so, yes, that makes the, the ask easier. But the hard part is still knowing that the buck stops on your desk in terms of what you do or don't do organizationally. And while I work in a larger complex context, I don't have free reign on everything, but there's no one else at the university who's doing what we do. And so we're the subject matter experts. If we need to design a different future or a new path, we're the ones that have to make it clear that this is a viable approach. You can bring consultants in and get other third party advice, of course, but you're still charting the path for the success of the organization. And I think that responsibility. Early on in your career, you wear it differently than later, and so I have the benefit right now, and this wouldn't have been apparent early.

This is kind of like the power of the network and what it can yield. The other thing that I didn't realize is that I've built this thing, and so forgive me for saying it so clinically, but I've built some brand equity. I have built the capacity of our organization to accomplish certain things. I've created my own wind at my back if you will, and that rolls with me, so that if I say to a community, Hey, we want to do this project, we need your support, and we want you to come, people go, Oh, A, we know they can do it. B, this is going to be good and that when they tackle things like this, it's going to be an amazing experience, we want to be on board. People can capture the vision, right? So you have to articulate it clearly, all of the mechanics, right? But you've built that brand equity. And so I think for you, certainly that's there.

You probably have twice as many people who want to be on your roster as people that you might choose to pursue. But the point is, They know that you're an expert in this area, and they know that that brand equity would serve them well, and so you have the benefit now of your accumulated work serving you, and so that eases some of the overarching stress or anxiety that might exist on, like, am I doing the right thing?

Well, you add your perspective, right? You add your experience, and you draw from that to give you the confidence that I don't have to lose sleep. I might need to make sure I get something done in a particular way, but I don't have to lose sleep because I understand that the capacity is there. Or if I have to tackle a challenge, I might know how to do it now. Or at least I know who to ask, that kind of a thing.

LAURA: Thank you, Todd, for joining me today in this conversation. It's been lovely to trip through the memories, but also to talk about some very practical things.

TODD: Absolutely. I think one of the fun parts here is knowing that a number of these stories have had intersections for us personally along the way. And so that's been fun.

LAURA: Well, thank you.

Well, listeners, you know what I'm going to say. Go see a show. Just go see a show. You gotta go see a show. Live performance, people. It is somewhere in your backyard. Find it. Go see it. Discover an artist you may never have experienced before. And please drop me a line and let me know what it was like for you. You know where to find me. Until next time.

(Fade out with jazz music by Manual Cinema)