

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



Episode 21

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Host: Annemarie Cross

Annemarie Cross: You're listening to Women and Leadership Podcast, episode 21.

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Hi, I'm your host Annemarie Cross. Welcome to another episode of Women in Leadership Podcast, the podcast that empowers you to reach your full potential whether you're a woman in your own business or a woman in a corporate role.

Joining me on today on the show is Alanea Kowalski. Alanea is a multinational, multilingual leadership and personal coach. She has a wicked sense of humor, an insatiable curiosity, a passion for animals, reading, theater, travel, exercise and fine wine. The exercise is needed to wear off the fine line. As someone who is always breaking rules and challenging the status quo, she wanted to share that with her client so that they could live their fullest. On today's show, Alanea is going to share why it's important to play your own game. You should never stop learning and how to be the best that you can be. So welcome to the show Alanea.

Alanea Kowalski: Thank you Annemarie. It's a pleasure to be here.

Annemarie Cross: Let's talk about the importance of playing your own game. What do you mean by playing your own game for someone that may not have really hard that term before?

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Alanea Kowalski: To me that means being your own person and having your own agenda within perhaps a bigger agenda. For example let's say you're working at a corporate role, it's also keeping your eye on the bigger picture, your career, knowing that you're responsible for making sure things happen for you not to you.

Annemarie Cross: Mm-hmm. Yes and I know that so many women in corporate and even in their own business they're sometimes saying well I feel like my clients if they're in business, I feel like I'm really reacting to my client's demands, my client's needs and not really what I'm wanting to do and similar in corporate. What things can we start to be aware of and need to ask ourselves to help us start to really recognize what is our own game so that we can then start to really see that happen within our business or within our careers and in corporate?

Alanea Kowalski: I would start because I also coach a lot of women in entrepreneurial roles and in leadership roles in corporate environments. I would start right back at the very foundations and that for me is understanding your values.

Annemarie Cross: Mm-hmm.

Alanea Kowalski: That's the basis of everything that you're going to do. You might not think about it daily but it's an inherent part of who you are, how you act, what you believe. It determines whether you're happy or fulfilled in a role so it's really being aware of who you are, what's important to you and using that as a template almost to judge things against.

Annemarie Cross: Do you find that many people can struggle with that if they've never really sat down to think about well these are the things that are really important to me. However what they can do as an initial step is to recognize and voice all of the

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things that are not, that they're not happy about, that are really causing them stress.

If someone is struggling to really define what their core values are, would you suggest that maybe they start really recognizing what's not working for them and then kind of thinking from there, well what would I like to do? What is actually important for me?

Alanea Kowalski: Absolutely. You've taken the words out of my mouth. So obviously we're on the same page but you're absolutely right because people don't often stop to think about this or not in any depth. You know, we're all running, we're busy, we're doing this and that 20 other things. So often with clients I have them do an exercise where just think about what really pisses them off. What makes you angry? What makes you jump up and down off the couch where you're watching it on the news or reading something on the internet? That's an easy way to start because your values are usually the flipside of what's making them really angry or upset.

Annemarie Cross: Mm-hmm. Sometimes in a corporation, the leadership can change and I've had it where women who have really enjoyed working in the role that they were after the changes have been made from the top down, they start to be a little bit more hesitant in coming to the workplace and it's because some of the changes made in the workplace due to the new leadership take over has really changed some of the significant core values. Is this something that you found in your work with people too? That sometimes changes within the workplace can have kind of misalignment with the core values?

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Alanea Kowalski: Yes. It's absolutely true. I've had that happen, I'm sure many of your listeners will absolutely relate to that and say yes, yes it's happened to me.

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Annemarie Cross: Mm-hmm.

Alanea Kowalski: When I'm coaching clients around this, that comes up. But it comes down to a decision at some point. You either figure out how you're going to live with it and work within it make it work for you or you make a decision to leave.

Annemarie Cross: What about someone who has had that change happen? I'll give you the example of what was happening. This particular woman, she was in customer relations or account management and she would go out to some major accounts and really nurture the relationship and obviously generate sales through that. When the management took over, they said we don't want you to spend so much time in the nurturing, in the relationship building. We just want you to sell, sell, sell which was completely against her core values about relationship building and being there for the client.

Now what if someone is recognized that like hey I can see that my core values are not being upheld or within the workplace or in the situation. How can she start to voice that? Because I mean she may not want to leave that role or she may not want to say goodbye to that client, what would be some things that you would share that could help her have conversation around that, have her voice be heard?

Alanea Kowalski: It would be talking about her successes. In most corporate environments unless you're very close to your boss and you've known that person a long time, it's best

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to start with some statistics or numbers or something that says hey look at my successes. They've been built because of these relationships.

Annemarie Cross: Yes.

Alanea Kowalski: Let me show you the deals I've signed, the longevity of the contract relationships, the referrals perhaps from clients. So go through and look at the win-wins but tie them to numbers successes, percentages because that's the way you're initially going to get the attention of your boss or the new management.

Annemarie Cross: Mm-hmm.

Alanea Kowalski: Remembering that they don't know you so you may say on the softer side, clients like me, we have great relationships, we work well together but really if someone doesn't know you, that doesn't mean anything. So you have to show how that works, how that translates into the bottom line.

Annemarie Cross: What you've just shared there I think is gold because how many women that I've spoken to have said You know I worked really hard, I always get everything done and I'm supposed to and even exceed my goals and it's not fair. I really should have got that promotion or I really should have got that pay rise. But what you've just said when you position yourself where you're going for a pay rise or a promotion, you really need to show results that you're developing. You know just hard work and people like me that's not deep enough. The results really need to speak for themselves and have that conversation around that for sure.

What sort of results have you seen once people recognize their key values and it does align there? I would have had the conversation and things flow a lot more

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smoothly. What sort of successes have you seen occur because of that? Because it really is incredible isn't it?

Alanea Kowalski: It becomes and I don't like to use the word alignment because sometimes it's overused. But I think this is a place where it's the truth.

Annemarie Cross: Yes.

Alanea Kowalski: When your values align with what's happening in the business, and your results things become easy. When your values are misaligned in your business environment, you find that you're struggling. Every day is a challenge. Maybe you don't want to get up to go to work, but however that shows up. But you always feel like you're swimming against the current. When things fall into place, things become easy. Results happen, you move on, you get clients, you get contracts, whatever it is in your business because you're working within your values framework.

Annemarie Cross: yeah. Thank you for sharing that because I think that that is something that is absolutely true. I mean years ago when I was working in my career consultancy, if someone was unhappy, something had changed, they didn't know what it was, when we had a look at their values, we could see that something had changed and their values were no longer being supported or particularly if someone was loves success, love challenges and all of a sudden they were in a role that was very process oriented and you couldn't really think outside the box with creativity that this person may have loved really felt stifled. So I think that this is so important particularly when we do want to start to play our own game.

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Let's dive and talk a little bit more about never stop learning. This is so important isn't it in today's workplace and in business?

Alanea Kowalski: It's been one of my guiding principles since I was a tiny, tiny child. My mother said, the first word I ever said was why? I would drive her crazy because one why would lead to the next why and why that and why that and so on.

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But it's this need to keep learning because it's good for your brain. You can see all of the statistics around neuroscience and research and learning keeps your brain agile and young. But it also keeps us fresh to make sure we never fall into a single perspective.

Annemarie Cross: Mm-hmm.

Alanea Kowalski: That we're always able to look at something from many different approaches and determine what's the best decision to make. If you don't have information you don't have knowledge and that's both historical knowledge and knowledge that you're leaning going forward with things like social media and so on.

But it keeps you fresh. It keeps you relevant. Also I think that's the most important thing. Some of the clients I work with are people who are in their 50s and they've had a very successful career and there's a danger of resting on your laurels. Of saying hey I've done really well. I'm making a lot of money. I'm at a senior level position and often I will challenge them on that. Well what are you learning? And that's a tough question because it sets them back and I say well what do you mean?

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Annemarie Cross: Mm-hmm.

Alanea Kowalski: It's around you don't know it all. You never ever know it all.

Annemarie Cross: You know I think also too that learning can be an expansion of an awareness or of a strength.

Alanea Kowalski: Yes.

Annemarie Cross: There are so many and I'm a lifelong learner myself. I mean someone said the other day on the show - the day I stopped learning is the day that I close my eyes and I'll never open them again. So because there are so many exciting things to learn and apply within business and within life.

So I think people need to be aware of it don't they and here's the greatest inhibitor that I think towards anybody taking an opportunity to learn that I can't learn new things or you can't teach a...we've got a saying here in Australia, you can't teach a dog new tricks. That is a mindset that has definitely got to stop you from learning and expanding your awareness yes?

Alanea Kowalski: Yes. Yes, definitely and my answer to that is start small. If you have that mindset start small. Start with something manageable. Small chunks, a new book perhaps, a new magazine that you don't normally read in a month. So try something. Just take little steps because if you say I'm...you know there's an old saying also and I don't know who to attribute it to but it's around you can't go from good to great in one step. You go from good to better incrementally until you get to great.

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Annemarie Cross: I think when we start to doubt ourselves and we start to compare ourselves to what other...you know, people are doing at their levels, that can really take us out of staying, sticking with it, staying there and continuing to learn. I think as we continue to build on our growth, give you an example. Towards the end of last year, I really started to recognize, I loved photography. Now I was nowhere near developing great photos not what I do now but I learned. I started to learn. I started to absorb anything I could get. You know enrolled in some online courses and very slowly but surely I learned different techniques and from there other techniques.

Now when I look back on some of my old photos, I think yayayay. It was a slow process. So absolutely and sometimes when you look back to where you've started, you recognize how far you'd come in that learning journey. Is that what you found too?

Alanea Kowalski: Oh absolutely. It's just I just finished a course on script writing. And it was exactly the same thing. I decided I would like to do it because it's totally different from anything I've done. So I jumped into it and it was really, really tough because it's not the kind of writing I'm used to doing. But by the end of the program, we finished a complete television pilot.

Annemarie Cross: Wow.

Alanea Kowalski: You go wow exactly but then you say wow this was great. It was fun. I did it a step at a time. I didn't expect that I'm going to create this script that's going to be brilliant in the first pass.

Annemarie Cross: Yes.

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Alanea Kowalski: But it was amazing in terms of learning opportunities. So yes, exactly. You know online courses things like moocs make it so easy to test the waters with in a nonthreatening way.

Annemarie Cross: Absolutely. I have to agree with what you were saying earlier in that people who really don't embrace ongoing learning and it doesn't need to be a whole new degree or anything like that. We're talking about skillsets that you can use and really support you in your day to day other work. People who really don't want to grow they are really limiting themselves aren't they particularly when you think of all the new technologies which are forever being added to the list of the things that we can leverage in our business and in our career.

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It really does limit them doesn't it?

Alanea Kowalski: Absolutely limits them. I couldn't agree more. It's something that I really push, I'm known to be a bit of a pain in this regard in my close circle, family friends and so on always saying to people why don't you try this, what if you did this?

Annemarie Cross: Yes.

Alanea Kowalski: I know I get people saying oh Alana, stop. Leave me alone and I've already...I'm truly passionate about it. So I think it's so, so important. I couldn't agree with you more.

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Annemarie Cross: Yes. So start small. Start to take one step and then the next step and the next step and before you know it, it's certainly something that you'd be able to leverage that new skill, that new strength.

Let's talk a little bit about being the best you can be.

Alanea Kowalski: It's a term that many years ago I was in corporate. I had a mentor. He at that time I think I was with a company about two years so I was mid-20s and he was one of the sort of...we used to call him the triumvirate, the senior leaders in the company. For some reason, he liked to mentor some of the younger folks. He would open up his personal library and he would just it was amazing. He would spend time just chatting with us about business and what he had learned and so on.

When I moved on, I got a big promotion and he gave me a book as a little gift and in the book he wrote that term. I wish that you will be the best you can be. It's always stayed with me. It's always you know just it's such an important phrase. It seems so simple that it was always around do more, learn more, take chances, strive, push the envelope, whatever you want to call it. Everybody has their favorite phrase. You know, disrupt the status quo but don't settle.

Annemarie Cross: Mm-hmm. I think that's important and it's incredible that you had someone there who recognized the best in you and supported you and mentored you to do that. People who are perhaps lacking in self-confidence and doubt around their strengths and it's going to support them in being the best that they can be, what would you say has been something that a mentor or a maybe it's a book that you've read but something that has really supported you in saying you know

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what, I can be the best I can be and have that level of confidence that allowed you to continue to learn and expand your strength?

Alanea Kowalski: Hmm, that's a tough one. I can't pinpoint a book but I think I would go back to just starting to read at a very early age and opening up my horizons to what's out there, what's possible. I would also, I guess go back to my mother saying well what's the worst that could happen if you try this.

Annemarie Cross: Yeah. Yeah.

Alanea Kowalski: you know, or if you have a failure or a crisis, how important is that going to be in two weeks? When you have that perspective, you go you know what, that's true. What if this doesn't work or what is the worst that could happen. How can I deal with it and when you get that mindset then you go okay so I'll try it.

Annemarie Cross: Mm-hmm. I think that that is absolutely important mindset to have because how many of us again we're talking about you should never stop learning if we expect to be excellent or great before we even give ourselves the opportunity to develop that skill. We're going to take ourselves out of the running and similar in this self-confidence or promotion or whatever it is, allowing ourselves to grow to be the best.

If we consider that oh, to get there I'm not allowed to make a mistake or I'm not allowed to try I just have to be. That really sets us up to not to try and to strive for whatever it is that we're wanting to achieve. So certainly wise words there. Alanea, what would be one last word of encouragement that you would like to leave with people today?

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Alanea Kowalski: Be yourself which I know is trite. But understand who you are and then make choices based on that. Sometimes we are hamstrung because in this day and age, we have too many choices. So when we're trying to make a decision, we're running around and we're stuck because we don't know which one to make. So understand yourself and then make a decision and move forward.

Annemarie Cross: yeah.

Alanea Kowalski: Because you're never going to make that one perfect decision. If you sit and wait to try to find the one perfect decision, things will change and you will never be able to do that.

Annemarie Cross: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I love that. I mean within that of course too is give yourself permission to be you. You know that the best you and how many times do we try and be someone else or like someone else because we admire them or be the best that you can be, play your own game and of course never stop learning, all of those wise words that you shared today. Alanea, how can people get in contact with you?

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Alanea Kowalski: You can get in contact with me via my website, which is AlaneaCobalski.com. I'm assuming you probably will have this on the bottom of the podcast somewhere.

Annemarie Cross: We will. We certainly will.

Alanea Kowalski: Okay.

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Annemarie Cross: We'll share that but go ahead and for those people who are listening via iTunes that may not have internet or the website access, what is the website so that they can click through?

Alanea Kowalski: It's AlaneaKowalski.com. So A-L-A-N-E-A-K-O-W-A-L-S-K-I.com. Or AlaneaKowalski@gmail.com.

Annemarie Cross: Fantastic and yes

Alanea Kowalski: Probably.

Annemarie Cross: We will have all of those data on the show notes. To go the show notes, it's Annemarietcross.com/podcast21. While you're over there, checking out all the ways that you can connect with Alanea, we want you to do join the conversation. From listening to Alanea today, what is the biggest a-ha? I know you would have had many but what is the biggest a-ha that you've had from what she shared today and what action step are you going to take within the next 24 hours that will either allow you start playing your own game? Something that maybe you've been putting off learning anything. You know what I'm going to enroll in that program or whatever it might be or maybe you've given yourself permission to be you so that you can then continue to be the best that you can be. Leave a comment in the comment area in the show notes Annemarietcross.com/podcast21. We cannot wait to read that. Thank you so much for coming on the show Alanea.

Alanea Kowalski: It was my pleasure Annemarie.

Annemarie Cross: Today's inspirational tip is brought by our sponsor Communicate Your Brand, Get Noticed, Hired, and Paid Your Worth. Are you service based woman in business?

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You are your brand. Be mindful of all communications, actions and interactions because they all speak to who you are and will impact the number of people who want to get to know you more and how you can help them. So ask yourself, what conversations am I participating in online, what images am I sharing across the social media, how am I communicating and more importantly, what am I saying whether I'm in person or I'm online? Remember, your ideal client maybe watching you so you are always leaving an impression. Make sure it is the right message that you are communicating.

Now if you are a service based woman in business who's passionate about your business but you're just not getting clients who pay you what you're worth because you struggle to capture and communicate what makes you unique, and why clients should hire you. This is an area I specialize in. I would love to support you so why not register for one of my complimentary business breakthrough strategy sessions that we can pinpoint where they gaps are and help you move forward to communicate your brand in a powerful, memorable way?

So to register for a breakthrough session, go to Annemarietcross.com/breakthroughsession,
Annemarietcross.com/breakthroughsession.

Now that brings us to the end of another show. I do hope that you'll join me again next week. Remember to subscribe to our iTunes channel. The link Annemarietcross.com/podcastitunes. By subscribing to our channel, means that you're going to be the very first person to learn about our new episodes and be inspired and empowered each week just like I know you were today listening to Alanea. That link again is Annemarietcross.com/podcastitunes. While you're over

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there, leave a comment and a rating that helps us get our message out to other incredible women in leadership. So make it a great week. See you again next week. Bye Alanea.

Alanea Kowalski: Bye Annemarie. Thank you.

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[00:24:11] End of Audio