

Something Extra EP 003 – Cheryl Bachelder

LISA NICHOLS: Today I will be sitting down with Cheryl Bachelder. Cheryl is the former CEO of Popeye's and author of Dare to Serve. How to drive superior results by serving others. Cheryl! I'm so excited to have you here today on the show. I've come to admire you and respect you and just love you as a mentor but also a friend. I'm excited to have you here.

CHERYL BACHELDER: Thank you, Lisa. It's a pleasure to be here.

LISA: Let's jump right in, I want our listeners to hear a little bit about your upbringing. Just whatever you want to talk about. Your family and growing up.

CHERYL: I'm so glad you asked that. It's such a central part of my development. I was very close to my parents, my grandparents, my cousins. It's just always been a centerpiece of my life. Very influential. Probably the most single influential in my life was my father. My father was a business executive. He grew up with the team of people that founded Silicon Valley. He was kind of a manufacturing guy that helped them figure out how to make first transistors and integrated circuits and then the chip. He was my business role model in my life. Our dinner tables were basically lessons in leadership. He would never would have said it that way but he came home every night, sat around the table, and told us about his day. What I remember most is that he told us how he made decisions. He didn't teach us marketing, accounting or skills. But he really talked about the values of how you conduct yourself in business. I think that's what was so central to his children. They're 4 of us. I'm the oldest. All 4 of us ended up running some kind of company or business in different industries healthcare, software, water engineering, fast food. All doing something different, but at the heart of it, all being leaders, values-based leaders.

LISA: Do they encourage you guys to ask questions? Did you ask questions of him when he would talk about these things?

CHERYL: Yes. Absolutely. He talked freely and openly about the lessons. I remember one in particular one night, he was pacing the floor and sweaty and looked very unhappy. I asked him what was wrong he said, "Tomorrow I have to close a factory." He said, "I'm just sick to my stomach. There are 200 families impacted." I've carried that with me my whole life, if you have to make a difficult decision like that for the sake of the business surviving, right? You have to do

that sometimes. You should be sick at your stomach because it's going to impact lives and so. He just taught lesson after lesson like that.

LISA: So incredible. Thank you for sharing that. Talk to us a little bit about your education, what took you from here to there? How did you get into the quick food service/business? I know you were P&G (Procter and Gamble) and Nabisco, and you've had several things that you did prior to that.

CHERYL: My field when I came out of college was brand management. I really wanted to particularly transform tired brands that really became my focus. I got that by starting at P&G. Working on 100 year old brands. You had to constantly renew them and bring the energy back and bring relevance back for the customers. That was the field that caught my eye and my attention that I thought was fun. That included product innovation which I thought was fun. A series of career moves gave me the opportunity to really learn how to do that. The early stages of your career, you're really soaking in a lot of experience and learning to become proficient in your field. You're also carrying around the journal and watching how leaders act, behave, conduct themselves, and make an impact on business. What works, what doesn't? When I'm asked who my mentors were, frankly in the early stages, my mentors were my journal book. I was one of the early women in business. There weren't a lot of women to mentor me. I have often said, the men were scared to mentor me. They didn't know how to do that. I was kind of figuring it out myself and just keeping track of what I thought was great leadership and what I thought was not so great.

LISA: You started journaling, you would observe and journal from kind of Day 1?

CHERYL: Yes, I've been a journaler since college. It's also really interesting to go back and read some of those early learnings and refresh where the lessons came from. I encourage, not everybody loves to write, but I do love to write and that's been a great tool for me to capture learnings along the way.

LISA: Maybe some of those lessons are in your latest book?

CHERYL: They are. You kind of get old enough. You hone in on the lessons you think are most valuable. That would be true. I've become a proponent of servant leadership. That's what I care most about. That's my passion.

LISA: I know that you were at KFC. Can you talk about us that time? You left there and then went to Popeye's. Can you walk us through that journey Cheryl?

CHERYL: Yeah. It wasn't that quick. I went to KFC, what I would describe is that OMG I got the big job. I was going to be a president of the largest quick service restaurant in the world because it's global. Very big company. While I didn't run all the restaurants in the world, I was the US president. I was responsible for the brand identity and really determining how it would be setup for success. So honored and privileged to be offered that job. So excited. The company had a stated culture of being very customer first, people first. I thought, wow this is my shot. This is where it's all going to come together, right? God had a different idea. It was actually where the wheels came off my bus. I was promoted to soon. One lesson I learned from that is get yourself ready for the big opportunity and sometimes that means, taking left turns in your career to learn other skills. In my case, operations and finance, and talent. Become a well-rounded person before you're given the big opportunity. In the next 18 months, we had lots of business pressure and challenges. We were tacked on multiple fronts, competitors, PR event, just lots of negative energy came at the business. I did not have the skill to turn it around fast enough in a public company environment fast. It has to be fast, 2 years in, I got fired. I now brag about that, I didn't at the time. I now say, that was really the turning the point in my leadership journey because success doesn't teach you very much Lisa. You can look back at your success and that's nice but have a colossal failure, and you write down some serious stuff in that journal. It shapes you. I actually reflected on that failure for 3 or 4 year before I joined Popeye's. I joined them bored. I didn't start as their CEO. I didn't think I'd ever be a CEO again. I thought that chapter was over. The lessons learned at KFC were the essence of my success at Popeye's. I want to remind people that if you're going to transition's difficulty. If you just got fired, lost a job, under a different circumstance. You don't understand today why that happened. At some point in the future, you're going to go, OMG that was my preparation. That made me who I am for the opportunity that's now in front of me. All the joy and experience and success at Popeye's, stems from a colossal failure.

LISA: I love that! You kind of call it your wilderness, right?

CHERYL: Yes! The years after the KFC were wandering in the wilderness. Why do I feel so terrible? How do I get my confidence back? What is God really intend for me to do now. All those things were mysteries until I processed it.

LISA: If there's one of our listeners that this is completely resonating with. What would be the first step? Certainly, you're going to feel sadness, you're going to feel a sense of loss. It's not to discount those emotions. Those emotions are real.

CHERYL: Any loss whether it's a person or a job, anything that's important in your life. Any loss, you're going to go through a grieving process. It's not going to be sequential. They always say that about grieving loss of a family member. It's not sequential that you'll be angry for a while. And then you'll be like, Oh I am sad. Or Oh I am scared. You're going to wobble back and forth in those stages. Take them and expect them. Don't be surprised. Expect them, allow it. One of my good friends said, after a job loss for a year, do nothing but take in the grief and the loss and the change and process. Don't commit to your next thing until you've really gone through a true understanding of what that was all about. Give it time, sometimes you have to jump right back into another job because you need a job. You could still give it mental time for processing, your quiet time.

LISA: I think that's a hard lesson to learn. Sometimes, there is a preparation mode. I have often said, God knew that I wasn't really ready for whatever that was. He had some work to do on me and in me before he could work through me.

CHERYL: Exactly! Usually, the thing I've discovered in my trials. God's trying to bring you to the end of yourself, your plans, your ideas, your control 'freak; things. I'm a type A person. I've got all kinds of control freak on me. Through trials, God literally brings you to your knees so that he can do the work. He can show you the path of the opportunity. Then really exciting things start to happen.

LISA: I love that. Tell me a little bit about your dad. I know your dad was a huge influencer in your thinking. Are there other people in your life that really influenced your thinking along the way and are part of your story in who you are today?

CHERYL: It's really fun to look back. I was an avid reader. I was always reading about leadership. What makes great leadership? Whether it's an autobiography or biography or whether observation. I had the opportunity when I worked for Tom Monaghan at Domino's pizza. He took us to meet Bill Pollard and the ServiceMaster team in Memphis. Bill is the one of the most famous servant leaders CEOs in the last 50 years. The marble mission of the company was to glorify God by serving others. It was right in the lobby when you walked in. They had incredible training and development of their leaders. Hugely influential day in my life. Just

captured my attention. He wrote a great book called the Soul of Business. One of his colleagues at that time was Max De Pree, at Hurman Miller in Michigan, who runs a very large successful office furnishing company. He wrote the Art of Leadership. Those 2 men who were very public with their values based leadership at that point in time were hugely influential and they weren't many other people writing about it. There're only a couple. I kind of took on that mantle. I want to be more like them and I made an intentional decision to work for Tom Monaghan because of that. I had worked for a lot of wild and crazy successful people but they were kind of wild and crazy and their values weren't so strong. Their character traits weren't so strong. I wanted to work for a values based leader and Tom Monaghan is well known. He is a devout catholic man, He has deeply rooted principles. He is a quiet understated man. He's not a boisterous outgoing type and I studied under him for 4 years until he sold Domino's and concluded his career. Here's a guy who came from an orphanage. Started a pizza parlor when he was in college. Gave up on college and built more pizza parlors and ended up with over 10000 the world today. Just an incredible impact that he had. There was a 'how' he did it. So I studied under him almost as an apprentice for a time. That too is very shaping to my career.

LISA: I'm just thinking about that. I want to study him more, coming from an orphanage. What shaped him? Do you know?

CHERYL: Certainly. It was life changing for him to be orphaned. There's some very difficult aspects of it. He loves wrestling to this day. He often says it's because I got beat up so much he's a small stature man. He's very physical fit, he was a marine. He runs every day. He's probably going to live to be a hundred and 120 because he's so healthy. A lot of his mindset came from a rough start. That's different frankly with mine. I had a lot of blessings in my youth in my family in that whether you get blessings or challenge, you can turn that into convictions of how you lead. Tom was incredibly convicted about character. The only way you could get truly fired and taken out that day, from Domino's Pizza, was a character flaw or a integrity flaw. He just had 0 tolerance. I think as he should. He was clear about it. He set clear expectations, no one should be surprised. He lived it, out loud.

LISA: I'm glad he invested in you because you are who you are today because of those people. We're going to take a quick break and we'll be back with Cheryl Bachelder.

LISA: So Cheryl, there's a lot of lies that people are hearing today. That are really pervasive in our culture. Lies from outside voices, sometimes the lies that we tell ourselves. Is there a lie out there that you kind of want to talk to our listening audience about?

CHERYL: The one that I think is very pervasive is not feeling good about ourselves. Letting external voices define who we are, tell us if we're good enough. All those voices that talk outside or in our head are powerful voices. I have found in developing leaders that as long you're letting those voices speak over, you won't become your fullest potential as a leader. Here's why, you've been designed for something great. I believe every person is designed for something great. Every person has a purpose. It takes us a while sometimes to figure that out. Where it is, How to apply ourselves to it. It is there, and it is real. It is between you and your designer. The creator. It is not between you and your neighbor, your colleague or your friend. I can't tell you in the early stages of my life, how many people told me that I what I was doing was a bad idea. It was not a good idea to be a working mother. Many people told me that. Many people told me, it's not an idea to take this particular career step. It wasn't an idea early on to get married. That would you take you way off track. You would have to follow his career. All of these messages and all they did was conflict with my calling. I really encourage men and women to pursue this question of how are you designed? What are the strengths you've been given, The values that have sort of developed in you, The experiences your life has put in you that make you perfectly designed for what. I call it purpose and principles. When you figure that out and start living that out, all those other voices get quieter. I say that specifically for women. For some reason, we as women are a little bit more likely to listen to the voices. I don't know why that is but we do. It trips us up, it takes away from our God given gifts, and our abilities to share them.

LISA: That's a perfect segue. This is called something extra. I too believe that everyone was perfectly designed. Everyone has something extra to give the world. You're not given something extra for yourself. That's the thing. You're given that something extra so you can give it away. Can you think of possibly a leader that had something extra that you want to talk about or was there even somebody on your team? What was that something extra that really made them special?

CHERYL: You know, In our culture, we tend to celebrate huge persona leaders. The trait that I love is the mother Teresa trait. She had such a tender heart for the people she served. Everything she did was for their benefit. Not for her. She suffered on their behalf. She is bigger than life and I too am overwhelmed. I will never be her. What a lesson we can take from that. When I look inside the company's that I've worked in. I'll tell you the people that I really treasure

are those who quietly serve. Honestly, they're often introverts. They often don't run around, look at me! At Popeye's we had this woman in employee benefits, who took every call of every person in the company who needed help with their benefits. It was a huge undertaking and the questions were hard and she was often in the midst of family difficulties or health circumstances, sensitive times. She just served and served and served and I'll tell you what. The day she retired from the company, everybody wept, everybody stopped and said how will we function. I have a favorite verse from Isaiah that says God has the whole world in his hand and we are grasshoppers. It's the grasshoppers that really have it together. That have said, God has an inordinately great plan. I have an important role in it. I am to quietly serve on His behalf to make things happen that he intends. That's what I describe in this person in the HR team. Where I saw that I gave out for years a grasshopper award. You get a little button with an ugly grasshopper on it. I always said, we're not ugly insects. We're beautifully designed. Isn't it a beautiful thing where we quietly serve?

LISA: Well it reminds me of one of your favorite verses in Philippians!

CHERYL: Count others more significant than ourselves. Just do nothing out of self-conceit. Be humble and serve others. It's a daily thing. It's on my outlook calendar on the top of every day. It's literally the reminder. I teach servant leadership. I never teach that it's easy or that you get there. It's very aspirational. That means every day you get up and say, please Lord, help me think of these other people and not my own needs. I'm tired, grumpy, annoyed, I've got things I want done. No, reframe, how am I going into this day and serving where all the team that's been given to me to care for today. Hard to do. Only aspirational but that verse keeps me going.

LISA: That's now going to be my verse.

CHERYL: We can share it.

LISA: You said as a leader, it's important to love your people. Right? Can you tell that story just a little bit. When you went to Popeye's.

CHERYL: Love is not a word we use very often in business. In fact, most people kind of go bleh!

LISA: Unless you are southwest airlines!

CHERYL: There you go! A friend of mine says, love is not a feeling, it's an action word. I think it's the way we should think about it in the business world. Are we acting lovingly towards the people we've been asked to serve? At Popeye's, we had 300 franchise owners who had invested there whole families and everything they owned into building our restaurants and serving our guests, and yet, we were not serving them well. The business results have been terrible. We talked about them terribly. We said, they're annoying, They're always yelling at us, they're mean, they're emotional. We had all these adjectives for them that were not loving. When they came in the room, we didn't act loving towards them. We didn't listen well. We didn't respect their investment. We didn't ask for their ideas and solutions. Until we really made loving them our priority, we couldn't serve them very well. Always that required laying down our own interests and needs. One time I asked a franchisee, when we do a good job leading you, what do we do? What are we doing as a bad job? They said, that's easy. Bad job, you show up with your PowerPoint presentation, You tell us what to do. Good job? You come to the meeting with a white piece of paper, and you say, what's on your mind? He said nothing could demonstrate more interest and respect and care for us than saying what's on your mind?

LISA: That's an awesome lesson. Tell me about another something extra that you feel like every leader needs.

CHERYL: The one that comes to mind for me is to be a curious continuous learner. I always say, when you stop learning, you stop leading. Because learning is the fuel that makes us better and better as leaders. I think the only bad news about leadership is if you start really growing yourself, you won't be able to grow the next generation of leaders. I want to be and I want you to be someone constantly pursuing a curious learning journey to become a better and better version of the leader you're designed to be. That means reading, Listening to speakers, and Podcasts. It means challenging yourselves in an area that's uncomfortable. Those are probably the best ways to learn is to step out of your comfort zone. I remember, one of my bosses said that I need to take a zigzag in my career to go deep and learn another functional area. I can remember right now the fear when he said that. I'm a marketing person. I just want to do marketing. I did product innovation and finance where the 2 areas. To be honest, I never would've become a CEO without multiple disciplines. You never will have all the disciplines but you need to have a few. That willingness to say okay, I'm never going to be great at operations and finance and will never be my favorite things. But I got to be competent to serve.

LISA: How specifically did you do that? Did you find a mentor? To learn more about finance, did you raise your hand and say you want to be in that department. How did you do that?

CHERYL: My HR leader at Popeye's that 80% is on the job, which I believe. I say first and foremost, look for a project or an assignment that takes you out of your confident zone and gives you pupil to learn from. I took lots of assignments other people didn't want. That's one way to do it. They were usually brands that people thought were dead and maybe they were near death. Like bizal fabric bleach. Who would have thunk? I was on that for 2 years and wasn't sure I could turn it around. Take the hardest job. Take the risk. The other piece of it that would always remind me off, mentoring. Learning from others. If you don't have a mentoring program, create your own. Go ask someone, I could ask all the time, If I mentor sometime, and I'll say, I can't mentor you for 6 months but if you create an agenda we can do 1 session and I'll give you everything I got. Most leaders are willing to share. 10% is conference, podcasts, reading. That fills in gaps. Shows you the opportunities. I did do some rigorous training in finance because it's essential and I didn't ever want to lack both the knowledge and the language to be effective in that area and that's school. I went back to school.

LISA: So you took some classes, that's good advice. I hear that a lot too. How do I find a mentor? I don't have a mentor. Sometimes, people can't read your mind. That's why you need to ask. I need a mentor in this area, would you mentor me? The worst thing that can happen they say no I don't have the time, but most the time, they will give you something.

CHERYL: If you don't insist on a large block of time, and if you come prepared, my number 1 expectation for someone that wants to be mentored is to come prepared. Have your 3 questions, really know what you're looking to learn. Give them to the mentor ahead of time to think about so that they can be prepared.

LISA: That's great advice too. Cheryl, I want to give you opportunity to talk about what's on your heart. And what's exciting and coming up. You just had something that went live. I want you to tell our listeners a little bit about that and how they can plug in.

CHERYL: I am excited that we just published the second edition of the book, Dare to Serve: How to drive superior results by serving others. It tells the story of a Popeye's transformation using the servant leadership principles. We also have created a new resource, it's an online master course in servant leadership. The number one thing I get asked by my readers is please give us more concrete help. Putting this to work in our business situations. We've created a 5 week course that does just that. Every week, we talk about ways to put this to work right where you sit with your teams as we go to work today. I encourage you to look into that. Our publisher

is Berrett Koehler. My website is cherylbacheldr.com. If that's too hard to spell, it's just serving performs on google. And all the resources are right there for you to join in. I would love for you to become a part of our movement.

LISA: Awesome, very good! Thank you so much, my friend. I'm excited for our listeners to get to experience you.

CHERYL: My pleasure. Thank you.

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