

Something Extra EP 035 – Claire Kellett

Lisa Nichols: On today's show we welcome Claire Kellett. Claire is an award-winning television journalist and reporter for KMOV in St. Louis, Missouri. Claire I'm so excited to have you on the show today. I know that your schedule is crazy, so thank you so much for making the time.

Claire Kellett: It is really my treat; my honor and I should be the one thanking you. Your staff has been so gracious. Your team has been so inviting and accommodating to say the least. So, I'm really looking forward today and I always like when I have the opportunity to kind of turn the table. So, I'm usually the one asking the questions. Today, I will be answering the questions.

Nichols: That's right, exactly, and I'm just so excited for our listeners to get to know you more in a personal way, so... Well, let's just jump right in. Talk to us a little bit about how, I know you're a Saint Louis girl, grew up in St. Louis. Talk to us a little bit about growing up.

Kellett: Very proud to say that and I think St. Louis really welcomes people on TV who are from St. Louis. I grew up in Webster Groves, that's where my roots are. The youngest of three and my family, have an older brother and an older sister, and was very blessed to have them pave the way for me, if you will. If you think of high school, my brother was a senior my sister was a sophomore and I was a freshman, so we're very close in age. I always had people looking out for me, and we have very supportive parents, and my parents still together to this day, always putting us first as grown adults, they're always there for us whenever we need them.

So I'm very lucky in that sense, but at the same time, we were raised in a family where nobody stood out from somebody else, we were all equal, we all had the same opportunities we were all under the same rules. And I think that was really helpful as I was navigating my way through high school, through college, and now for my career, I don't get more benefits than the next person I have to work equally as hard for what I want in my life. And proud to say that I went to Nerinx Hall High School in Webster Groves. Then after that, continued on to MSU. I knew in high school that I wanted to do journalism. I have a brother and sister as I mentioned, who are very successful in their careers, and I was Maggie's little sister and Christopher's little sister. There was a point where I wanted to be Claire. I decided that journalism was something I wanted to do. Radio was my first interest and then as I explored a little bit more TV was what I

wanted to do, so that's why I went to the University of Missouri because they obviously have an incredible journalism school.

Nichols: So did you get some early intros to radio and TV, what was it that really kind of sparked that in you do you think?

Kellett: In high school you talk about career days and you're able to go out and pick what you want to do, and to this day, if there's somebody who contacts Channel Four and says, "We have somebody who's interested in TV is it okay if they come and spend a day with you get a first hand glimpse, of what you do each and every day." And my first reaction is, absolutely, because that's how I got my foot in the door, that's what piqued my interest. It was going to a radio station and then I thought, this is really what I want to do. So through high school, in college, I helped out on newspapers and TV shows within the school and I did a lot of speech classes. I love English, I love grammar, I love writing. I mean, if I could dissect a sentence each and every day with the propositional phrases and subject-verb agreement, that kind of stuff I truly enjoy, so I immersed myself in as many opportunities like that that I could.

Nichols: And obviously, I think you like a good story to Claire, don't you?

Kellett: Yeah, a beginning, a middle, and an end. Like things to become full circle, but I like them to have an impact on people, on families.

Nichols: Yeah, absolutely, well, that's wonderful. Well, I'm thinking about your parents, and I think what you said is so important, you said really, you guys were all treated equally, you all had the same roles, no one was elevated more than another. And that's hard sometimes for parents because sometimes the children that are more like them, maybe they gravitate towards those a little bit more, but I think that that is really good tenant of a good parent is understanding that each child is very unique and treating them that way.

Kellett: Yes, because as young kids, you're vulnerable, and you perhaps recognize more than adults know that somebody's getting more attention than the next person and that's a lesson you can learn throughout life. I mean, to this day, in the newsroom, nobody gets more attention than the next person. Everybody works equally as hard. And that helped me as I was growing in my career, I have learned every aspect of my career. I used to run teleprompter. I have, taken out the camera and shot video. I have taken producing classes. I want to understand every element of my job so I can do my job better and help those around me do their job better, if

there's a producer in my ear during the show telling me I need to do this or asking me to do this, I want to understand where they're coming from, so that's why I took producing classes. I've sat in their seat before so I can... It's a help me help you kind of situation.

Nichols: That is awesome advice, and I just know so many companies that start college grads at the ground floor and I do believe that that is such a great way to learn and to understand the business as you go in your career. So, that's great advice, I love that. So you graduated from MSU and then you went to Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Kellett: 2 weeks after I graduated, all my friends were staying in Columbia for the summer and here I was having a job, and I thought, "What am I doing? They're going to have so much fun, and I'm entering the real world, what is this?" I moved there it's just due north of Saint Louis about four hours from here, and I moved there all by myself, didn't know anyone didn't know a soul. Walked into this TV station where I had to meet all new people, and I was the weekend morning anchor, so my schedule was a little tough, I worked weekend mornings, you're there at two in the morning. So I made a little difficult to meet people, but I worked at a family-owned TV station. I was there for five years. They help me grow, they help me learn. I had new opportunities, and in my business people really travel across the country to new jobs, but I knew I wanted to get back to St. Louis. A lot of reporters and anchors might have two years in this city, and two years in this city, as they grow and climb the ladder. But I knew my goal and my heart was on St. Louis.

I have a big family here, my folks are here. Siblings. I knew I wanted to get back here so I made a rare movement stayed in my first job for five-and-a-half years. But they allowed me to grow and every opportunity that I had in St. Louis to come back home, I literally knocked on doors of local TV stations. And I said, "My name is Claire I'm from here, I am hungry to work, I will do what you need, please hire me. I'd love to be back in St. Louis". And I did, I made it down in my first opportunity to, I was one of two candidates and I didn't get the job I got a phone call from the news director at the time at the station and they said, "You know, we appreciate you coming and we appreciate you put your heart into this, but we've gone another way" and you hear those words, and you, you just sink in your chair. You fight back the tears and you think... Oh, I'm never going to do this, I'm never going to be able to get this.

So, I thanked him and one thing that he said to me, before I hung up, is he said, this just wasn't the right opportunity for you, but what I want you to do is every month I want you to give me a phone call, I want you to stay in touch with me and I think I might have something down the line.

At first I thought, "Oh I don't know, but after that I did, I called him every month, I loved myself first to have one day of a pity party. It was my Claire pity party day, let it all out and then I did, I called him every day and I kept in touch, I sent emails I sent notes to him, I sent in my business. It's a resume tape is more important than a piece of paper resume at a piece of paper. So I sent him clips of what I was doing anchoring and reporting, and eventually, he followed through on his promise, there that there was something else down the line, and it did work out better for me.

Nichols: And so that was KMOV. I knew that story, that the first one you didn't get, I didn't know if it was at the same station.

Kellett: And right fit, that phrase used to drive me bonkers. But I get it now and I appreciate it. And you have to trust your bosses that they are smart enough to recognize the right fit and they're not going to put you in a position or in an opportunity where you're not going to grow and you're not going to be successful.

Nichols: Well, there's a lot packed in there, too, so I mean, Claire. I'm thinking about it and like you said you gave yourself a day to have a Claire pity party, because it is a disappointment, but what do you think it was inside of you? Because I see sometimes people... Oh, wow. Sometimes if they have more of a fixed mindset they'll say, This must not be the thing for me or I must not be very good at that. What do you think it was inside of you that said No I can do this and this is what I want to do, this is my passion.

Kellett: It was trust in the person who was leading me down this direction, but it was also I had my sight set on being in St. Louis, I had my sight set on being with my family, and having an opportunity to report and anchor in my hometown. I wanted to be back in St. Louis. I love this city. I wanted to grow roots here, and I knew that's what I wanted. So I think that's what really spurred me on. I loved my time in Iowa, but I knew what I wanted and I wasn't going to let something stop me, from achieving that goal.

Nichols: That was your why, so that's awesome and we are so glad that you're back here because you're such an awesome pillar and an awesome spokesperson for our city, and I love our city too. Now, I'm not from here, but I am a St. Louisan. I love St. Louis. I love our region. I love Missouri. I want to see us succeed, and win and contribute. Certainly you can sometimes stay on the sidelines, but I don't really believe in that.

Kellett: I also think something that sticks out to is, everyday you're a student, in your job and you learn every day. I've told myself, if I feel like I've reached the max and I know everything and I can do everything and there's nothing else for me to learn then I need to do something else.

I mean I learned from everybody in our news room. I learned from the producers, every day. I learned from the interns every day I learned from our new Reporters, every day I learn from my bosses every day. You just soak up as much information as you can and you're open to that. You're not better than anybody else. We're all learning every day, we're all helping one another every day. So that's why if somebody does walk into our news room, as an intern or as a job candidate or somebody who's a job shadow, you learn from them as well, and if they're hungry to learn and you're willing to help them out as well.

Nichols: Yes, for sure, and I'm sure clear that there's been some times where you've been on air and you're like... that didn't go quite the way I wanted it to go. And you can learn from that as well, can't you? If you take the time to kind of dissect it always say You have to leave that margin in your life to go back and look at those experiences to say, Okay, what worked? Let's repeat that one. What didn't work? Okay, let's do a little adjustment. So I want to back up just one minute because I forgot to ask you, you had a great opportunity when you were in college to work in New York. Talk to us a little bit about that. How exciting was that?

Kellett: It really was. I had an internship at CNN, in New York, I worked on The Morning Show at the time and for me it was professional and personal growth. I had a lot of friends who studied abroad at that point of my life. I wasn't ready to travel that far, I wasn't ready to take that big of a leap away from my family. So for me, this was my study abroad if you will. But at the same time helping what I wanted to do professionally when I graduated from MSU so I had an internship and I lived with three other girls at a dorm right by the Statue of Liberty in the financial district, there in New York. Took the train every day up to CNN right by Central Park. But yeah, it was of those things where that was my commitment for the summer, and I learned from a lot of people I learned from a lot of the writers and I learned from the anchors who were there. And you just soak up as much information as you can, but also the personal growth in it as well. And I had my brother at the time was living in Washington DC, so if I ever got homesick, just jump on the train. Head over to him for the weekend. So those opportunities I truly believe, have helped me in my career.

AD: We're going to take a quick break and then we'll be back with Claire Kellet.

Nichols: So Claire, I know from reading about you and knowing you, you really do treasure telling stories that really make a difference in the lives of people. So talk to us a little bit how do you feel like the local news can help the community and impact the community?

Kellett: I think one of the most important things that journalists can have is empathy when you often walk into somebody's home or approach them to do an interview unfortunately, you many times, they're catching them perhaps at the highest point of their life or in a lot of cases, the lowest point of their life, you have to have that empathy, that understanding that it's going to be okay. You look to people in your life, you do on TV, when you see an anchor a reporter to let them know that things are going to be okay, we can make it through this, we're all going to do this together. So I think that's a really important thing for a journalist to have and you have to understand that people are at the same time inviting them into your lives at their vulnerable times in what they're experiencing so I think that's truly important to understand, and I think throughout St. Louis, you look for a mix of news people want to know what's going on throughout the day people also want sprinkles of positivity and encouragement and growth and development, they want to know that our city is marching forward, and everything is going to be okay and we're all going to do this together. So I think that combination of having a little bit of everything in a newscast is important.

Nichols: I would agree with that. I love it because I just feel like sometimes it really does. Maybe you're highlighting a story that I didn't know about, it might inspire something in me or it may say, "Okay this is something I want to get involved in." So it's really kind of raising that awareness for the community as well.

Kellett: You would probably be surprised at the number of stories we get from people reaching out to us whether it's phone calls to the newsroom emails, social media is a big thing. People reaching out to us through there. Like here's a great story, we can highlight and here's a great group that's doing incredible things that deserves the attention and the help and, wow, if we just sat in the newsroom and compiled a list, we would probably have 100 pages of groups and organizations and counting, that deserve that recognition.

Nichols: So where do you see leadership in journalism, heading over the next decade? What changes do you see? What do you see maybe some disruptors that are coming down the pipe?

Kellett: Journalism is changing every day from when I started to where we are now, you think about the number of platforms that people get their news. We have social media, we have apps, we have the TV, we have websites, TV, isn't appointment TV anymore, people aren't sitting down because they know the 4 o'clock news or the 5 o'clock news is on at this time. So, in journalism right now, it's really truly 24 hours a day. A lot of people get it on social media, first, and then we direct them to our newscast to get the bigger story to get the personal side of the story with the human element to that.

So I think you, as much as I don't like change, you have to be willing to change each and every day, you have to be willing to evolve, you have to go with the flow. And that has helped me professionally and personally as well. It just keeps you on your feet and keeps you moving forward.

Nichols: It does well, and I always say, you've got to look at how the audience is receiving things. You've got to look at how your demographic is interacting and engaging, right? And if you don't, pivot to meet that, then we all know of so many companies out there that have refused to change. Now, they're no longer here.

Kellett: You have to cater to your audience, and we learn that every day we often have people from outside come in to teach us the best ways to do that the best ways to reach out to people, and part of that involves us opening up our personal lives. I mean, a lot of people walk a fine balance on that. You don't want to get too involved with everybody knowing your personal life, but at the same time, you want them to get to know you and who you are and what you stand for, and for them to understand that you're a human being. I've got crazy things in my life, I've got disappointments in my life, I'm experiencing what a lot of other people are experiencing and I have bad days too, everybody does sure.

Nichols: And so that's a perfect segue, what I want to talk about now, because you're a news anchor, you're doing three different episodes, you're a wife, and I'm sure your husband has his own needs, right? You've got aging parents as do I and you have a two-year-old that I'm sure has more energy than you can shake a stick at. Little Connor. As a woman, how do you balance all these things because everybody has needs and you want to meet all those needs. So how do you balance it? What are your life hacks?

Kellett: First I understand that I'm human and I'm going to make mistakes and everything's not going to go the way I want it to, and I'm just going to have to embrace that and keep moving

forward. My husband and I literally have a powow either late at night or early in the morning and our day is planned out scheduled constant text messages between the two of us, throughout the day. Okay, you've got Connor tonight. No, I'm going to pick Connor tonight. So it's those things that constant communication, which is a part of my life anyway.

Communication is what I do each and every day. I set aside time for my husband. I set aside time for my little guy, you know. So we're very lucky to have parents in town to watch Connor.... So I've read a lot of books on my little guy in one book I recently read it said feed the meter and I was like What does feed the meter mean with him? Literally, if you focus with your little guy, in the morning, we're getting ready. If I can give him five minutes of just one-on-one time I feed the meter I enjoy my five minutes with him, and then I go and get lunch is packed, and then I come back and I give them another five minutes and then I go and get ready. So if you're constantly giving him the attention that he wants, I'm learning too, I learned that from a book.

Nichols: That's great advice because really their little bucket needs to be filled up too, right? And with the two-year-old, it could be five minutes. With a teenager, it may be 1 o'clock in the morning for an hour but no, that is really awesome, advice because he's got needs too.

Kellett: And I make time for myself as well, which is equally as important because I love to run. Get all my thoughts out of my frustrations out that's my personal form of therapy, so that helps me as well.

Nichols: I also know that you're a barbecue girl, right?

Kellett: I do and my husband does incredible barbecue we've got a number of grills and burners and pits, and everything in our backyard that he loves to do. So it's a big family thing for us.

Nichols: Well, let's talk a little bit, because this is something extra so I want to make sure that we leave time to talk about something extra. Can you tell us something extra in one of your team members or possibly one of your bosses, somebody that you work with?

Kellett: Yeah, I think a really important something extra that has happened to me that I try to carry over into all of my interactions with folks on a daily basis, especially my coworkers. I had a former news director who to this day, I keep in touch with and thank him, He's actually the one who gave me my opportunity to start a channel 4. You go into a business where tens of thousands of people are watching you every day. And I will start by saying, "I chose this, I chose

this platform and this is what I wanted to do", so I walked into it with my eyes wide open. But there are people who tend to judge you and think that you should do this, or you should do that. We get emails and emails all the time about my outfits or my lipstick. How I carried on a story or how they thought I delivered a story.

Everybody has an opinion, and are entitled to that. And I'm okay with that as long it is in a constructive manner, and I respond, whether they're friendly or not friendly to each and every one of them, but my boss sat me down one day and he's like, "Don't get caught up in the day-to-day communications from other people and the day-to-day opinions from other folks who said, "I hired you to be Claire and I want you to bring Claire to the table. Don't try to mimic somebody else don't try to copy somebody else. There was a reason I thought you would be the right fit for this position. So, I really want you to work on that. And what a breath of fresh air that was. It was like all this weight had been lifted off of my shoulder and I was like because I can do this Claire thing and she's going to make mistakes, and she's going to learn from them and if I make a mistake, on air or if I am emceeing an event, and I make a mistake, then I point it out and have some fun with it. And move on. Because we're human beings.

Nichols: Yeah, so will you say something, will you say? Oh wow that was really a dumb thing for me to say.

Kellett: Absolutely. Or like a sneeze or a cough something comes out, you're like, "Why did I just say that?" You address the elephant in the room? It makes you more endearing, it makes you more engaging, and makes your more real.

Nichols: I think people are dying for authenticity with people. It is not a perfect life. It's not a perfect life, but it takes a lot of courage on your part, to be vulnerable with that, and especially you do have a platform and people are watching you. So I didn't really think about that but I bet you do, I bet you get emails. Some of them are probably nice and some of them are like, why I didn't like the way you did your hair today, or what not. Social media is such a big thing right now, right? And what breaks my heart is so much cyberbullying that's going on with young people, and we see this, and it's tragic. But what would you say to and I'm going to point out girls because I think girls can sometimes not be so nice, right, and I see this. What would you say to those young girls when you get those comments on social media about your outfit, or... you don't have the right body type, or what not, what would you say to them?

Kellett: First, you have to recognize and acknowledge their feelings like, it does hurt, it is painful, it's harsh. First, you start there and just let them know that those feelings that they're experiencing, are very normal and we all do, no matter what age you are. I still feel those kind of feelings. I think another thing to understand is the fact that a lot of times when people attack, if you will, or go after somebody else, it's because they're dealing with things as well, their self-confidence might not be as high as the next person and perhaps there's a reason that they're going after you is because they see something in you that they want. So in a way, it's a reverse complement.

A lot of times they're going at or they want to be you, or they want your skills, your abilities, your talents. So if you're able to recognize that I think that helps brush it off your shoulders a bit, but it's also important to know that what you see online is people's way of hiding, it's often not what they would say to your face. And I carry that over into my job. I mean, if I get those emails or those social media posts a lot of times, I know that if somebody was standing in front of me, they would not say that and maybe they're trying to let some anger out, or they're trying to deal with something in their life too.

Nichols: And just recognizing that and go into it like you said before with your eyes wide open and know that that is the case. And it's hard, it's hard, especially a very young girl to not take things personally, but just realizing that you have worth and you're enough. I think women especially sometimes think I'm not enough.

Kellett: And surround yourself with people who say that message. And who lift you up and who are there for you when you need them. Let yourself open up a little bit in online social media. We post things that we have this perfect life and things work out. Like if you walked into my bedroom right now, you're like, "This is where Claire lives?" There's toys everywhere there's pillows everywhere but that's my life and it's not perfect, but I love it.

Nichols: Okay, so tell us this, what do you think is the something extra that every leader needs? And I can pre-suppose what you're going to say, but I want you to say it.

Kellett: The ability to get to know everybody on your team and the ability to recognize that as an individual, they are going to contribute to the entire pot and they're going to make your business, your company, your organization, move forward and you're going to learn from them each and every day, and you're going to acknowledge their strengths, help their weaknesses, and at the same time, push them to keep moving forward. And I think something that is very important to

me in the newsroom for my producers and the photographers that I work with and my bosses. I like to get to know them on a personal level. I like to understand their life and their families and their struggles and if you have that kind of connection with people you work at... And oftentimes, in a newsroom things get very crazy and you're under tight deadlines, and very tense situations.

I think having that understanding of who a person is and when you approach those crazy chaotic situations, it helps both of you and there's just something to be said for working in a friendly, encouraging environment, that's the type of environment that I recognize that I thrive in, so I may get a priority to make that environment for where I work, no matter where that is.

Nichols: What just kind of reminds me, Claire of a family. You know your family. Hopefully you do. You understand their likes, their preferences, their dislikes you understand who they are as people, and why wouldn't we do that with our teammates? Because I think the more I always say the more we understand about ourselves, the better we do but I also believe the more you can understand about the people that you're working with, the better you do, because if I understand this about you, then I know, Okay, this is the best communication style with Claire or with Brian or with Daniel or whomever it is.

Kellett: And then leaving little notes for them, that's a big thing, that I like to do. If they're going through something in their life. Or there's a holiday coming up, it doesn't cost a lot of money, it's just a little card on their desk. Hey, I'm thinking about you. Or you would be surprised at how many people react and blossom to that kind of recognition. When I was trying to get a job at channel 4, I think they were sick of my cards piling up on their desk, so that, I mean, we get so caught up in email, and we get so caught up in text messages, but what happened to snail mail?

Nichols: I love the hand written note. And I say all the time, it's somewhat of a lost art, but for anyone that's interviewing with us out in the audience, that's always one of my vetting points. I'll say. Did they send me a hand written thank you, because it just shows me the care and the concern and the attention to detail.

Kellett: Yeah, the commitment that they're going to have, the desire that they want to be a part of your team.

Nichols: Absolutely very good. Claire, I want to talk about anything that you would want to pitch and we've kind of talked about this a little bit, but the way that you and I met is through dancing

with the St Louis stars, that benefits independent center and I didn't realize you were a dancer and then you've exceeded, that event for how long?

Kellett: Since 2011. So, we're going on eight or nine years now. It's a fun event. And it's one of those things where it's like every year in January, my husband and I know that that's what we're going to be and it's a great time. People are getting out. It's literally what the title is. Local St Louisans getting out on the dance floor with a professional dance partner like you see it on TV. But more importantly, it raises awareness for an organization that I think a lot of people don't know about it, and we're just starting to break the eyes on people realizing the importance of talking about mental illness. It's one of those phrases where unfortunately it's been hush-hush.

We shouldn't talk about mental illness outside of our home, but I guarantee if you start to have a conversation like that you would be amazed at the number of families who are affected by... And on a daily basis, dealing with mental illness. So independent center, their doors always open, just stop by and go for a tour and have a conversation and realize the efforts that they're making for folks who have severe and persistent mental illness, to get out in the community to get a job, to feel like they have value and worth and that they're contributing because that's what we all want to do, we want to feel like we're contributing to something.

Nichols: It's a basic human need to feel like you are making a contribution. So it's no different. I completely agree with you and I'm so glad that the story is changing, it really is. I think they're moving the needle. This event does a lot to move a needle. I mean it sells out every year, it's always at the Ritz Carlton. Sells out and I think they're doing a lot to change the story, but I always say, it's just like having another disease but it's a disease in the brain. And so, why wouldn't we talk about it? People need hope, people need support and that as much as in any other disease that you might have.

Kellett: And you saw first hand with your daughter Ally, as a dancer or this past January, how much fun it is. And she went out on the dance floor, and she just rocked it, she nailed it. I mean, everybody was standing when she was dancing. But more importantly, what I saw behind the scenes, it's just that enthusiasm that contagious energy and positivity that Ally has on everybody. This is a competition. But to her, it really wasn't... Every other dancer got a lock and a high five and a hug and I thought we all should do that. We're all working for the same goal here to raise money and awareness for independent center.

Nichols: And you know, she was just herself, she was so comfortable in her skin. And I'm like, "If we can all just have a little bit of that, what a better world it would be".

Kellett: And they always need dancers.

Nichols: They do. And so, that's what we want to talk about. So they're already planning for 2020, and that is one of the hardest things is finding people that will number one have the courage and the confidence to put themselves out there in that way. But then secondly, it is a time commitment.

Kellett: It is a time commitment because you are paired up with a professional dance partner who is also volunteering so they're giving their time for Independent Center and you perhaps have weekly or maybe bi-weekly practices at a professional dance studio in town. So there is the time commitment there, but there's also something so rewarding about pushing yourself outside your comfort zone. Not many people are going to get out there and wear an outfit that they wouldn't wear normally in public and for ladies dancing in heels and getting out there, but wow, what a feeling it is after you do that, and you put yourself out there and then you realize people are standing up and clapping for me right now. This is a great... But all for independent center too. And it goes back to that and I guarantee you talk to any past dancer and they would say 100% go after it.

Nichols: Well, very good. So if you are interested, and obviously there is the time commitment, there's also a fundraising aspect to this, but if you're interested contact the Independent Center. Abby Berger would be a really good person for you to ask for when you contact the Independent Center. We hope to see you there. Yeah, in January 2020 on the dance floor.

Claire, thank you so much, this has just been my pleasure to have you on today. It's been so much fun.

Kellett: It really has, it's been an honor, I think you and I could probably talk for the next five days, straight.

Nichols: I think you're right. Well, thanks for being on the show.

