

## Something Extra EP 086 – Stephanie Winslow

**[00:00:03] Lisa Nichols:** I am thrilled to have Stephanie Winslow on the show today. Stephanie is the founder of Blind Spot Consultants, where she partners with women entrepreneurs to help them build lean processes and strategic plans that will enable them to live their best life. Well, Stephanie, I am so excited to have you here today. You and I met, I want to say was it through Greg Acheson?

**[00:01:51] Stephanie Winslow:** I know a lot of people who know you, and I reached out one day and just said, "Hey, I'm tired of knowing everyone around you, let's connect."

**[00:01:59] Nichols:** Let's get together and connect. I'm so glad that we did. Thank you so much for being in here today. I can't wait for our listeners to hear your story, and I know that you're going to be very helpful to the listening audience.

**[00:02:10] Winslow:** Thank you.

**[00:02:11] Nichols:** Growing up for you, did you grow up in St. Louis?

**[00:02:13] Winslow:** I grew up on the Illinois side in Granite City, which is a blue-collar still working town. Lived there until I was in sixth-grade. We moved to Edwardsville, and at that time we made the decision to do private school, so I was actually driving from Edwardsville to Whitfield School in Town and Country. Made a pretty long commute every day, and my brother and I drove together. My parents made a big commitment to our education. Through my senior year, we lived in Edwardsville, then my parents and I moved to the Clayton area. I've kind of bounced around. I now live in Chesterfield, so I've lived in the St. Louis area, metropolitan area-

**[00:02:55] Nichols:** The metropolitan area.

**[00:02:57] Winslow:** -for most of my life.

**[00:02:58] Nichols:** Right, okay. Your dad was the founder of, I guess your mom was involved in the business too, right? Gateway Packaging.

**[00:03:07] Winslow:** Correct.

**[00:03:08] Nichols:** Now, I believe we had something in common too, because I'm in YPO. I've been in Young Presidents' Organization since mid-2000s, I guess and your dad, right, was a YPOer?

**[00:03:18] Winslow:** Yes. YPO Gold now. [laughs]

**[00:03:21] Nichols:** I know, me too, I've graduated. Tell me a little bit about Gateway Packaging, and then I'm going to ask you a couple more questions about that.

**[00:03:29] Winslow:** Gateway Packaging started out of my parents' basement. My dad was a corrugated box salesman and my mom was an elementary school teacher. They would do their normal jobs, come home take care of us. They started the business the year that I was born, and my brother was two at the time, so they started brokering products and then eventually ended up starting their own manufacturing company printing UPC labels for private label packaging.

That business grew from the two of them, and one of my cousins was running the printing press in a little garage thing to, in 2010, we ended up selling to a private equity group and we were at 350 employees and \$75 million in sales. Our customers were Nestlé Purina. We did a lot of the major pet food brands, so if you know Beneful or the Purina One brands, we printed a lot of their paper bag packaging and did pouches.

On the human food side, a lot of the business was private label, so Gilster-Mary Lee is one of our biggest customers. Whether it's pre-formed pouches or labels or leading for little cream cheese things, we kind of touched it all, and we were known for our high-quality printing.

**[00:04:48] Nichols:** You were a baby though, right? You had just been born?

**[00:04:51] Winslow:** When they first started and they were brokering product, yes, I was a baby. They were working, burning the midnight oil, so they say.

**[00:05:00] Nichols:** Sure, and they were both involved in the business, both your mom and dad?

**[00:05:03] Winslow:** Yes.

**[00:05:04] Nichols:** Do you remember that growing up? Because that can have its challenges. I mean, Greg and I co-founded Technology Partners. We've learned to work it and stay in our swim line. Do you remember though, as a young girl, what piece of the business did your dad do versus what your mom did?

**[00:05:21] Winslow:** My dad was more in charge of sales and operations, and my mom was all the admin, so back office, all the HR, keeping things organized and running the books and all the accounting stuff at the beginning. She did more of the administrative side, he was more of the face and going out and getting the business. Then once they were manufacturing, he went and bought equipment and trained people on how to actually ran printing presses himself and kind of did all the operations aspects of it. I got to see them learn and grow and develop. There were a lot of nights when we would have dinner and then go and my parents would be running the printing presses and filling orders, and my brother and I would bring our sleeping bags when we'd sleep on a wood pallet and on the sleeping bag. That's just how life was, I don't know any different.

**[00:06:10] Nichols:** Right, but you got to see firsthand how a business was run. I believe you and your brother were involved in the business stuff, right?

**[00:06:18] Winslow:** Yes.

**[00:06:18] Nichols:** Was that after college or did you go right into the business or did you do something else before you went into the family business?

**[00:06:25] Winslow:** Growing up, when you see the level of commitment and the sacrifice that individuals make, my parents made, to grow this business, to be quite honest, I was burnt out on it. No, it didn't matter if we were in the car, where we were going, there was, It was always....

**[00:06:41] Nichols:** Always business.

[laughter]

**[00:06:42] Winslow:** I was always focused on that. I really got burnt out on it, so I'm not doing that. I ended up getting my degree from Ohio Wesleyan University in Spanish and education. When I graduated from college, my husband and I ended up doing campus ministry and getting

our master's degrees in Pennsylvania at a school called Geneva College. We did that, and I taught high school Spanish for a few years. Then I really felt like it was time to come home. Talking to my parents at that time, like, "Okay, we're going to move back." My husband isn't from the area, he's from Texas and Colorado, so it was a new adventure for him, too.

His background was in computer science, mine was in Spanish and education so I ended up getting a position at my parents' company in marketing, something I always was interested in. Quickly from there, I was frustrated by the samples that we had, because I was constantly trying to get new business and promote our company, but the samples that I had were just random things that people brought in, so we thought, this is crazy. I asked too many questions and lo and behold, I ended up taking over the quality department and doing a lot of root cause analysis and that kind of thing. As my tenure there grew, I was leading continuous improvement efforts there, and so I became certified in lean manufacturing. That really was my heart's pitter-patter and-[crosstalk].

**[00:08:14] Nichols:** You loved it, didn't you? Yes, you loved it.

**[00:08:16] Winslow:** It gets in your blood. The thing about lean manufacturing and about business in general that I love is you can make a change, you can implement something, solve a problem and see the result of it. It's very tangible. Where in life [chuckles] outside of the business world, things don't always work that way. You can make changes or suggest things to people in their life, but they may or may not embrace it.

**[00:08:44] Nichols:** I bet your mom and dad loved that, because they saw that you truly you had that moxie, if you will, to improve the business and move it forward for the future. We talk about continuous improvement all the time at Technology Partners, there's always a better way to do something. You always need to be on the lookout for it. You definitely had some skill set there, I think.

**[00:09:07] Winslow:** Yes, and I think my parents too were very open about, "You're not going to have a position here just because of who you are. That "If you want to work here, we're happy to make that happen, but you little sister, you will be working." I never expected that anyway, and because I saw them work so hard, that is what I expected. When you step into a family business, there's a lot of pressure really around you to perform and to not just be a seat at the table, but to earn that seat. Some people that you work with, they're going to push your buttons and they're going to make sure that you [chuckles] are earning that seat.

**[00:09:43] Nichols:** That you're not entitled just because of your last name, right? [laughs]

**[00:09:45] Winslow:** Absolutely. Yes.

**[00:09:48] Nichols:** Where was your identity at this point, Stephanie?

**[00:09:50] Winslow:** My identity was absolutely 100% in my performance, and I became so hungry and thirsty for solving everything that came my way, and I put a lot of stock in being able to do that. Through my training, I could do that with root cause analysis and walking a problem out, and I did. Really, there wasn't anything that I ever said no to, "I'll solve it."

**[00:10:17] Nichols:** Did you always solve it, or how did you do that? Because there had to have been things that came your way that you're like, "I've never seen this before." Did you have a group of trusted advisors that you would lean into, or is Stephanie just so amazing at this that you could figure it out all on your own?

**[00:10:36] Winslow:** I would say the thing that I was good at was making the connections and knowing where to go to find the answer. I didn't always have the answer, but I could figure out who I needed to go to and talk to, what lever I needed to pull to get an answer, or to move the problem forward at least. Then, yes, being surrounded by a team of people who were incredibly knowledgeable and spending a lot of time machine-side with people who've been running the machines for 20 years, and talking to them, and getting their buy-in.

One of my favorite projects was we had a paper bag machine that we were tasked with, figuring out how we were going to run plastic on it. Paper and plastic are very different things. I'm like, "Sure." At first, I had a lot of pushback from the operators because, again, they've been doing the same thing for 20 years so they, of course, knew how hard it was going to be. We had, over a course of a couple of months, several conversations, several trials.

Then, at the end, it happened, we ended up running plastic through our paper bag machine. That whole thing just bound our teams within the bag department together, our supervisors, our quality team, because all of us were fighting toward the same goal, and we just never gave up. We never let no be the answer.

**[00:11:57] Nichols:** Wow. That is just amazing because you would have had to go out and had a big capital expenditure to buy another machine. That's what you didn't want to do, right? You wanted to be able to do both with that particular machine. Well, it's a little bit of a segue into what you're doing today because now, after you guys sold the business to this PE firm, you became the president of one of the divisions, right that you didn't sell, Flowpack?

**[00:12:22] Winslow:** Correct.

**[00:12:22] Nichols:** You did that for a number of years. Now, you're doing all kinds of different things, but one of the things is your Blind Spot Consulting company. You're going in and helping women entrepreneurs primarily, or any entrepreneur with their business?

**[00:12:37] Winslow:** I tend to work mostly with women and then also family-owned businesses because that's what I know and can help navigate the messy layers of that that sometimes exist. Honestly, my heart is for small, medium-sized companies, and that's where I go.

**[00:12:55] Nichols:** It's the lifeblood. I read a report the other day that Small Business Administration put out. Small businesses account for 44% of the economic activity in our country. We're going to take a quick break, and then we'll be right back with Stephanie Winslow.  
[music]

**[00:13:13] Ad:** Let's face it, the future is mobile. There's a good chance that you are listening to this show right now on your phone. Have you explored how you can move your business mobile too? Our mobile apps team at Technology Partners makes it their mission to move our clients into the hands of their employees and customers and change their business processes to meet the demands of their users. Let's work together and build a dynamic mobile app for your team. Go to [tpi.co/mobileapps](http://tpi.co/mobileapps) and get the conversation started about how we can help you get your new application off the ground.

**[00:13:47] Nichols:** Stephanie, I have to ask you, how did technology play into what you were doing at Gateway Packaging?

**[00:13:54] Winslow:** Technology was a big part of our every day. We ran some very large offset printing presses that were all computer-automated that has to interface with our production reports and whatnot. Technology was a big part of what we did. Then, we are moving

a lot of our systems to technology instead of having people write out their paper forms that they would've written for quality checks or whatever, a lot of that was being moved.

My husband was one of the main IT people at Gateway at the time, and he built a lot of the programs in our good old AS/400 system that we used. It was all customized based on our needs. One of the things that was awesome about that is you have the problem of what you're trying to get done, but you have to be able to communicate how that gets done and all the little steps. Technology helped us a lot.

**[00:14:52] Nichols:** Right. At some juncture, you said, "Okay, I think I'm done with this, and I feel called to do something else." Now, you're an author, you're a speaker, you're a blogger. Talk about that transition. Then, what I want you to talk about, I know *Ascent to Hope* was your first book, is that correct?

**[00:15:12] Winslow:** That's correct.

**[00:15:13] Nichols:** What was it that inspired you to write *Ascent to Hope*?

**[00:15:16] Winslow:** At the end of 2015, beginning of 2016, I really felt that I was being called out of the business world to pause my life and really focus on writing because there was a message that people need to hear. The message is, one, they're not alone, though you may feel like you're struggling with addiction or with alcoholism in your family, you're not the only one. Actually, the statistics now are one in two families, so half of all families have an addiction issue of some sort, whether it's an opioid addiction, whether it's alcohol, gambling, you name it. If it's one person that has an issue-- If you think about the dynamic of a family, there's at least two other people that are affected, if not a whole lot of other people, so it's really a big deal. Because of the environment that I personally grew up in, it wasn't just a high-performing and entrepreneurial family, I also grew up in a pretty legalistic church environment as well. Having this perfection look on the outside of everything put together, "Just smile all the time. We're all fine," tucked in and freshly pressed, was the thought process and mentality. While I understand not wanting to air all of our dirty laundry, at the same time, we were walking through some really hard days and walking through them alone.

When I was called out of the business world to start writing, that was the story of, "I want you to tell your story, Stephanie." I had to tell the story from the perspective of we were in the middle of our journey, I didn't have a happy ending and I didn't have a tragedy, we were walking it out day

by day, really from the middle. I thought, "How can I offer hope to people from this place?" But there is hope in the middle of the mess.

That's what I really want people to know, is that if you're facing a mess, you're sitting in it, you're in the muck, surrounded by stinky pigs, or however you're feeling, that there is hope. If you're facing an addiction, one of the things that I want people to find through *Ascent to Hope* and through just hearing my story is to break down the walls of shame. I'm the one to raise my hand and say, "We're the family who did all the "right things". We did the church thing, we were hardworking, we were generous. We did all of these things, and yet here's this elephant in our family that we have to--

**[00:17:54] Nichols:** And you didn't talk about it?

**[00:17:55] Winslow:** No. For a long time, we didn't talk about it. We worked in a family business, and my brother is the one who was struggling with alcoholism. It got to the point-- I saw my dad-- He's the most courageous person that I know because I saw him have to stand in front of a company of people and say, "My son is struggling with alcohol, and he will be leaving for 30 days to go to a rehabilitation program."

**[00:18:25] Nichols:** Because Zach was in the business too, right?

**[00:18:27] Winslow:** Correct.

**[00:18:28] Nichols:** Was he in sales?

**[00:18:31] Winslow:** Yes, he wore a lot of hats, but yes, his longest stretch was in sales where he did production management. He sat in so many different seats, and he is so good at his job. I think that's the hardest part about it, is the person has so many great attributes, their heart is so good, and their character is so good, but they're struggling.

**[00:18:45] Nichols:** That's the hardest part.

**[00:18:46] Winslow:** You really want to just turn a blind eye to it, you want to pretend like it's not happening, you want to brush it off, "Oh, no, it's not really that bad," but at some point, it starts affecting your day-to-day life and their day-to-day life, and it has to be addressed and confronted at some level. There's lots of ways to do that. One of the things that we talk about, or

I talk about in *Ascent to Hope*, is the timing of an intervention, and that's the path that we chose to do with our family, and it's not right for everyone.

**[00:19:24] Nichols:** You did talk about that, though, Stephanie, and it brings up a point when you guys did decide to do the intervention and he was going to go off and go into a recovery situation. You thought that was a silver bullet, "Good. We got through that. Now, he's going to go, he's going to come back, he's going to be the old brother that I knew." That was not really the case, right?

**[00:19:48] Winslow:** Yes. I hope that this doesn't cause less hope for people, but just understanding the process of what typically happens through addiction and recovery, that there is no, like you said, silver bullet, there is no panacea. Everybody is on their own different journey. The number one thing that I have learned through all this, and for 10 years of trying to work through this and battle it, is love conquers all. As much as I want to fix and I want to save and I want to manipulate and step in and put together all of the right programs or send him to all the right things or invite him to things, if I do all of those things, and I did this, I'm talking to myself, preaching to the choir, I tried to do all of those things, but was really a void of love. It was empty because I wasn't loving him.

**[00:20:41] Nichols:** Can you talk about that a little bit? Because I think we probably have all been guilty of that. When you see the person that is maybe doing something destructive and I think Marshall is the one that really said, "Steph, where's the love?" You said that it changed you in how you approached that going forward. Can you just do a little bit deeper dive on that? Because it's easy to talk about all the things that's wrong.

**[00:21:11] Winslow:** I think one of the things or the part that you were talking about this, I see this day, and then actually that was just from a tide commercial I heard. It just sparked in my mind like, "Oh my goodness, that is how I am viewing my flesh and blood as. I see the alcoholism. I don't see him." Once that happened for me and my eyes were open to that, I started thinking, "Oh my goodness, I have been doing so many things wrong." I really started to love him.

Marshall actually caught me in a moment of you do crazy things through trying to fix and save people, but I was digging through my brother's office one day and playing the detective role, trying to find evidence that there was a problem. Marshall happened to walk by. The good thing, I guess, about family businesses is, you can never hide, never run. Anyway, so he just said to

me, "You're looking for evidence, but the evidence is it going to stop the problem and it isn't going to stop him? He's going to do what he's going to do, but you have a choice and you can either choose to love him in spite of the choices that he's making, or you can go to war with him. It's really your choice." That was hard to hear.

**[00:22:25] Nichols:** You probably weren't happy at first with Marshall's assessment of the situation but when you thought about it, it's like, "Wow, how would I feel?"

**[00:22:34] Winslow:** Yep. I spent many days with boxing gloves on that I wanted to fight everything and everyone because I felt so out of control that this one thing had no solution that I could do anyway. It wasn't up to me.

**[00:22:46] Nichols:** You speak on this now, right Stephanie, and this isn't your last book. You have a brand new book that just came out that I've recently downloaded on my Kindle. It's *From the Shop Floor to the Boardroom*. Can you tell us a little bit about that book and if someone were to buy that book, what would they find?

**[00:23:04] Winslow:** *From the Shop Floor to the Boardroom* is an effort to help people understand their faith in their work don't have to be in separate buckets, that we're actually invited to bring faith and work together and that when we do, we actually will thrive better in our work environment because our whole self is now invested. *From the Shop Floor to the Boardroom* is an eight-week devotional that covers different topics. It's five days a week for the eight weeks, but it's offering wisdom for everyday business issues that arise.

*From the Shop Floor to the Boardroom* is my journey that I did a lot of work on the shop floor and then got to also sit in boardroom meetings and with the executive leadership team and doesn't matter what seat I was sitting or who I was communicating with, it was all about my character and all about my heart and what I brought to the table. The wisdom I think is found there. That's what that book is about. It's really just quick hits 60 seconds a day and trying to just spur thought and get your mind focused.

**[00:24:12] Nichols:** Everybody should go get it. This is Something Extra. I said, who is somebody in your life that's been impactful to you, and what was there something extra? You talk about Marshall. Tell us about Marshall. You've already touched on it a little bit, but I want you to crystallize it a little more.

**[00:24:28] Winslow:** Marshall is a unique individual in that he is an IT guy. Technology is his thing. He understands the technical sides of what he does very well, but he is very much a people person and a communicator.

**[00:24:46] Nichols:** Which is sometimes you don't find both of those things, right?

**[00:24:49] Winslow:** Yes. I describe him as a translator because when I worked with him, there were times when we were developing programming and whatnot, where I was made to feel like not very smart because I didn't know the IT language-

**[00:25:04] Nichols:** Sure.

**[00:25:05] Winslow:** -or even really know what questions to ask, but he never made us feel that way. Creating a program from scratch from nothing is very hard and so having to navigate all of those steps, he was very good about knowing what questions to ask. He would spend time out on the shop floor talking to people and trying to understand their process and how, if I make this change, how is it going to impact down here, and really being that translator between what needed to happen on the floor, what needed to happen in the program, and then the work that his team needed to do on the back end and creating the programs.

**[00:25:44] Nichols:** There's a lot of really great IT people, Steph, that say, you got to spend time where the work is being done, Gemba, I think it is.

**[00:25:52] Winslow:** Yes. That's right.

**[00:25:53] Nichols:** you go to where the work is being done. Edward Devrees was just on the show recently and he said the same thing. He said, your IT people need to go to whatever Panera is a client. For instance, he said, "Go to the cafe and see how they're working." If you are that type of person that seriously is that translator, that's really what we need. We need this consultant mindset that understands the business, sees the business and then sees how technology can enable what's being done or make it more efficient operationally. It sounds like that's Marshall.

**[00:26:31] Winslow:** Yes. I think another benefit of working in a privately held family-owned business is you get the opportunity to see a lot of things. His understanding of the business in

general, of how the accounting system works, and how the quality system works, and how the production system works, just every aspect of it, how they interact.

**[00:26:51] Nichols:** How they interact with one another.

**[00:26:53] Winslow:** Yes.

**[00:26:54] Nichols:** It's really important. Is there a time in your leadership journey Steph, where there was a mistake?

**[00:27:02] Winslow:** I tend to be a vision person. Actually, Marshall says I live in the future and in the past. I reflect a lot, but I also like to look in the future a lot. As I'm visioning for going forward, I sometimes get sidetracked. Not that they're not valuable or good things such as they take away from what I'm supposed to be doing. I let the urgent or what feels urgent or exciting takeover what's really important. My leadership, I whipsawed in my earlier years because I did allow those shiny things to take over. When I started recognizing that, "Oh, I need to get focused."

This is one of the things that I help clients do now is come up with their vision statements and strategic plans and core values because the core values become that set of rules. That if it doesn't align with these things, then the answer is no. Of course, over time, those things can be adjusted and whatnot but it's really a quick check to say, "Is this venture I want to go off on over here in alignment with who I say that I am and what I want to be."

**[00:28:13] Nichols:** That is what you help businesses with today.

**[00:28:15] Winslow:** Correct.

**[00:28:16] Nichols:** Very good. Because I think probably a lot of people struggle with that very thing that we were just talking about. What do you believe is something extra that every leader needs to have?

**[00:28:25] Winslow:** From what I've seen, and I think back a lot to my mom and dad, because they're the best people that I know in terms of leadership and what they did, it's really humility and knowing where your blessing is coming from, not taking the people around you for granted. My dad, even when the business was the size that it was, at the 350 people and \$75 million in

sales, that he would go out on the plant floor and look people in the eye, shake their hands. He knew their names, "Thank you for the work that you're doing."

It was those moments and also walking through the plant and seeing him pick up trash and knowing what is valuable and it's in the little things. If I'm being a good steward of the little things, then the big things take care of themselves. I think leadership within humility and recognizing that it's the people around you that help you become who you are and grow.

**[00:29:22] Nichols:** The organization does not operate without the people and just having an appreciation for those people in gratitude for the people that are helping the business. We've already talked about this a little bit, but do you have three books now, Stephanie?

**[00:29:37] Winslow:** They're actually four.

**[00:29:38] Nichols:** There's four. I did not realize that. What are the books and can you find them on Kindles or?

**[00:29:44] Winslow:** You can find them on Amazon book retailers, you can find them on my website, which is [stephaniewinslow.com](http://stephaniewinslow.com). If you just search for my name on Amazon, it'll come up there too. *Ascent To Hope* was the first book and since then I've written a companion, small group leader guide.

**[00:30:01] Nichols:** Oh good.

**[00:30:01] Winslow:** The vision for that is, whether it's in churches or wherever, you can walk through it with a small group and really dig deep and it's about a lot of personal reflection. Get ready for the ride on that one. Then *From the Shop Floor to the Board Room* is a devotion book and then I have another devotion book called *Ascent to Know Him*. It is about the attributes of God and really what I was taught as I was asked to step away from what I was very comfortable doing, into a place of writing and feeling like my identity was just stripped and I had to be rebuilt. This is what I learned and upon that journey.

**[00:30:42] Nichols:** Very good. Well, again, thank you so much for being here today. This has just been so delightful and I want to continue our conversation offline, but for now, we need to say goodbye and thank you again for being here.

**[00:30:54] Winslow:** Thank you so much.

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