

the dots

a podcast about connecting.

Katie Paine Transcript

Announcer: [00:00:04] Welcome to The Dots, a podcast about connecting. The Dots is a series of conversations with artists, community leaders, entrepreneurs, and change makers who talk about how they connect the dots and bring things together for their communities, companies, and themselves for a better life. And now your host: Digital Strategist, speaker, and entrepreneur, Kathleen Buczko.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:00:32] Katherine Delahaye Paine, welcome to The Dots. CEO of Paine Publishing. She's a groundbreaking communications leader, political activist, and what I love, Sailor. She loves the life she leads. Hey welcome, Katie.

Katie Paine: [00:00:45] Thank you. I'm very pleased to be here. Now there's a hash tag! Hash tag: I love the life I've made. It's a song, too.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:00:55] Well I think that you are the personification of loving the life you lead. You started in a lot of different places, but tell me a little bit about the journey. Let's start with your mom and dad.

Katie Paine: [00:01:07] That's probably had a little bit to do with the jury. My mother was editor of Harper's Bazaar and my father was publisher of Fortune Magazine and back in those days fortune and fashion sort of you know anything having to do with fashion was frivolous, unbusinesslike-- didn't matter. My mother and I didn't get along very well. It sort of followed in that trend and I didn't think it was very important.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:01:34] There's something about CEOs not getting along with their mothers that makes them really successful.

Katie Paine: [00:01:39] I think that's probably pretty true. But, what was really sort of more significant was everybody in my family was a journalist. So, of course that's what I grew up to want to be doing except for the fact that everybody else on the planet wanted to be a journalist after seeing "All the President's Men," so there weren't a lot of jobs so I ended up in Silicon Valley working in marketing and the quintessential Silicon Valley job wanted ad the opening was listed as "Marketing Assistant, knowledge of the English language helpful." So given the fact that I could write an English sentence, I got the job and that was the start of my marketing career in Silicon Valley.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:02:23] That was quite an illustrious career if I remember correctly--you were there at some of the beginnings.

Katie Paine: [00:02:28] I was. I was in the beginning of actually the telecom revolution after, I can't remember what FCC ruling it was, but it sort of freed up the telecom business. And I went from there to Fujitsu and was marketing 64K DRAMS back in the day and something called GATR RAIDs. I knew nothing about any of it but had to learn all of that. And that's actually where I learned a lot about analyzing media because nobody told me what we should be advertising or being in, so I had to figure that out by myself. And then I got bored with that because there was no supply to market. So, I answered an ad at Hewlett-Packard and I got to go over to their new personal

computer group where we launched a few things called the LaserJet and the first portable computer and a few other things. And then left there and...it's just interesting and I kind of was forefront. My motto is, "You're never wrong, you're just early," but I went from there over into data security for a weird little company called Nema (?) and then got recruited by Lotus Development, which at that time was for largest software company on Earth...bigger than Microsoft even, because it had Lotus 1-2-3 and I was there for about a year. And then realized that I was probably genetically unemployable. I had just done nothing but fight with CEOs most of my life for what I felt was the right thing and they thought was the wrong. And so I quit and started my little measurement company called the Delahaye Group.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:04:23] Genetically unemployable?

Katie Paine: [00:04:25] Genetically unemployable and my mentor in life was a wonderful man, he is still around--my Godsend--and I called him up when I was trying to figure out what to do and he said, "You're just like me. You're genetically unemployable. You are bound to start your own company." I said, "Okay." And I put the phone down and I went and started my own company and that was 30 some-odd years ago.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:04:50] You know just before we started we were talking about what NPR said today which is in the last 20 years there are fewer CEOs than there's ever been in the U.S. history, and I find it interesting because I think more and more people are coming to the realization that they're genetically unemployable. But, that's not spurring them to be a CEO, so what's really motivated you to stay in that lane?

Katie Paine: [00:05:14] Well, I mean I think that there's sort of these two things I embrace the genetically unemployable. I think was more true is there just isn't a job that suits me. You know, it was basically that the idea of going to another corporation and being, you know, I mean I'd done well moving up the ladder from marketing assistant to corporate communications manager to VP CorpComm and all the rest of those things. And I remember being at Lotus and somebody from somewhere called me up and I said I had a job that my parents always expected me to have. And then about six months later I was like, well that's nice except I hate it and I put on about 20 pounds eating my way--attempting to find happiness. I was miserable. And I thought, you know, this is such a if I was brought up and raised and educated to have and I hate going to work every day. And so then I thought, "Well, that's interesting." And then, there was an opportunity--I mean to be perfectly honest they were offering packages to reduce the staff because they weren't having a good quarter and I just took it. And I said, "I bet you that I'm not the only communications person that is constantly searching for a way to measure the effectiveness of what they were doing. I'm either in the world's most incompetent communications manager or else everybody is having the same problem." And in that sort of major "Ah-ha" moment, I just sent a presentation to the agency and the senior leadership as part of a whole next year's communications planning thing. And I had done an analysis to say, you know, "Gosh, what had worked? We'd done all this stuff to get our messages out...what was effective?"

Katie Paine: [00:07:10] I had somebody read 1400 articles that mentioned Lotus and I had them read for key messages and whether they left people more likely to buy the product. And I threw it all into an Excel spreadsheet, (well, probably a Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheet at that point) and looked at it and said, "Hmm. Isn't this interesting. And here it is!" And the head of our agency, who's name I'm not going to remember at the moment but he was wonderful man, who is now the head of the agency-- now Hill+Knowlton. (And if I weren't so jet-lagged, I'd remember his name.) Anyway he looked at the report that I was doing and he said, "Anybody who isn't using a tool like this by the year 2000 doesn't deserve to be in business." And said, "Thank you very much, I think I'm going to leave and start my own company doing nothing but this."

Kathleen Buczko: [00:08:06] Yeah. So you found the problem, you experienced a problem, and you sought to solve the problem. But being a CEO is not easy.

Katie Paine: [00:08:20] Well my philosophy is, "You're never wrong you're just early," and the truth is is the fact that there were lots of things that I was right about I just the timing was a little off. You know the fact that you know there were moments when you can't make payroll when there are moments when all of a sudden there's a recession and all the clients go away, and you realize, "Wait a minute. I know I'm still right. There's got to be business out there and you just kind of keep on going.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:08:53] What keeps you going?

Katie Paine: [00:08:56] I think the fear of having to work for somebody.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:08:59] (Laughing.)

Katie Paine: [00:09:00] Having sold my company twice. Try this employee business again? And I thought, "This is just miserable. Doesn't matter who I sell it to or work for or whatever." I mean there are people that I think I would like to work for? Eh, not so much. I like to work with them but actually working for certain people is a challenge and it is...I don't know whether it's because I have these ideas and I'm convinced that they're right and other people don't listen to me or they don't see the wisdom in what I have to say. I think that is really what keeps me going. Oh my God. I, you know, just punching a clock and doing an ordinary job? I just can't do it.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:09:48] [Sponsorship] Speaking of people who get it done, this broadcast is brought to you by Chapelure Media: digital media, analytics, strategy, marketing, creative products, training. They do all that. Visit chapeluremedia.com to find out more. [End Sponsorship]

Kathleen Buczko: [00:10:03] I think there's also the function of kind of being the curse of being a consultant, right?

Katie Paine: [00:10:11] Yes.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:10:11] You can recognize kind of the landscape, the dots as they might say. And in recognizing those dots, you try and pass that wisdom along, but it isn't always well-heard.

Katie Paine: [00:10:25] But, it's a lot better heard as a consultant than it is as an employee. That's the big lesson I learned was the fact that if I can go in there with--it does help to have gray hair--but if I can get in there...

Kathleen Buczko: [00:10:42] I'm doing everything possible to avoid that, sorry.

Katie Paine: [00:10:45] (Laughing) Me too, but you know, the wrinkles whatever. You know all the expertise in whatever... They do listen to you more as a consultant.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:10:57] Well that's a challenge, right? But if you have impeccably smooth skin and dark hair, but experience to share? I mean--and this will date probably both of us--I go back to sitting with the CEO of Sega America which I don't believe exists in its current incarnation, and he was amazed that I could hold a video game controller and not look at it when I played the game.

Katie Paine: [00:11:26] (Laughing.)

Kathleen Buczko: [00:11:26] I never looked at it but, his generation had always had to look at the controller because it wasn't something that was part of who they were. And so I think that, you know, certainly it does help to have some you know snow on the roof as people like to say or wrinkles around the eyes. It does beg the difference of how do you bring together the knowledge of an entire tribe, not just parts of it. And so, when you look at that how would you--what advice from your pinnacle as a CEO, Katie, would you give to someone? You are genetically unemployable, working that job, sitting there, working for someone who may be a really nice person but you just can't stand it? What would be the advice?

Katie Paine: [00:12:27] I think the advice is that if you find...find that niche: that one thing that you really, truly have to love doing. I mean I think that's the other aspect of what I do is, I really love opening an Excel spreadsheet and creating pivot tables and drilling down into data and finding the "Ah-ha" moment. And that's basically what I've been doing for 30 years and I really, truly still love it and I love helping people get to that point of, 'I know I need to measure something else but, I don't know what it is.' And getting them from that point to, "Yes you are absolutely correct. What we really need is an engagement metric or something," and getting everybody on the same page. You've got to love... You've got to wake up in the morning and look forward to talking to the people you have to talk to, and doing the work you have to do. And it's not all going to be... you know going to love all of it equally, but if you wake up in the morning and you know, as you're sort of imagining your day, there are aspects to it that still get you really excited, you can keep on doing that forever. You know, then it doesn't feel like work. And I have to tell you that to this day, as many ups and downs as I've had in 30 years of being a CEO and all of that, I don't think, except for when I was working for other people, there's never been a moment that I've never seen a day that I haven't had something work-related that I look forward to.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:14:28] So I also know that one part of your life is being a political advocate for certain points of view.

Katie Paine: [00:14:37] Absolutely. Yes.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:14:38] And how has that played as part of your overall journey?

Katie Paine: [00:14:43] Interesting that you say that, having just spent two weeks in Europe kind of answering that question in various places. I know I think it has generally been something that is far more separate. So there's the political thing and then there's the sailing and gardening thing and I'm a huge believer in the value of being a consultant, is that when I need to I can stop what I'm doing and go dig in the dirt or get on a sailboat because the weather is perfect. The political stuff is very different for me. The political stuff is transcendent. You know it transcends the fun day-to-day stuff. It transcends the client work and everything else because I'm truly passionate about the way I think the world should be. And so I took off a big chunk of the fall and did work-work at odd hours and then went and knocked on doors in Durham, New Hampshire trying to convince people to get out there and vote for you know days at a time and spent my weekends doing that. And just because doing something political is so much better than engaging in arguments on Facebook or just reading Facebook or the New York Times or The Washington Post and getting super depressed. You know, everybody that was hopeful, shall we say in October, and depressed after November 8th. You know, my attitude is, "Do something it." And doing something makes me feel better.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:16:48] Do you think your drive to do something about it certainly has something to do with the travels that you made? I know that you got the fortunate opportunity when you were a young lady to travel across the world with your father. And how does that inform you?

Katie Paine: [00:17:09] I think it has to do with the parents that I had that even though they were you know they were Republicans and you know I grew up as a Democrat. But I think it was just that they had a sense of what was right--the way the world should be and that you should talk about it and debate it. I mean I'll never forget in the summer of 1968, I was a teenager really enjoying, for the first time, teenage friends particularly of the opposite sex and having the first close relationships and just doing the teenage thing and going out and partying every night and whatever. And my father got furious at me because he was sitting there watching the 1968 Democratic Convention explosion and he was furious at me for going out and staying home and watching it with him. And I remember feeling guilty for not staying in, and yet your friends going to the party and he's staying there. But you know it lingered. And the fact that politics mattered and that, you know, Uncle Jim Chamberlain was the quote-unquote mayor of Durham, while he wasn't. He was on the town council but he was doing something and you could make that connection. I mean, I don't know why when somebody asked me when I was seven, "What do you want to be when you grow up," and I said, "I want to be Governor of New Hampshire." And I have since realized that being Governor of New Hampshire is most thankless job in the world. I did run for...

Kathleen Buczko: [00:19:03] Especially for a Democrat, if I believe that's possible.

Katie Paine: [00:19:06] We actually just elected the first Republican in 14 years. But you know they've they have to run every two years; it's a miserable thing and they don't have a whole lot of power relative to the rest of the state. But, I sort of thought in my innocence of childhood that I wanted to get elected to things. Then I briefly entertained the thought of running for Congress and didn't because a much more qualified woman wanted to run, and then I watched her just get destroyed. And yeah, the first thing anybody asked me was, "How much money can you raise?" And I was like, "What do I believe in?" Maybe I'm an axe murderer in my dreams or something. No, it was just about how much money I could go on and raise and I thought, "This is not the idealistic vision I had for my life." I wanted to change things and make things better and you know, I think that's the thing that, you know when I talk about passion is in finding the things that you really love doing. I honestly think that Barack Obama got up every morning and and truly wanted to change things and make things better. And seeing that kind of idealistic view of the world kind of gets destroyed or were put back or whatever blocked--I'm not saying that anybody anybody is President does accomplish some things but watching that as an adult and realizing how frustrating it is I think that--I think that's probably why I want to knock on doors and do things today. Because, I think I have this inkling that people who are crazy enough to want to do that they need our support.

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Kathleen Buczko: [00:22:06] I think that's the power of trying to change things right? If you really want to try and change something, they need to have a network. They need to have a village. You know, the transformative power of the election of Barack Obama did not necessarily transform the country or did it right? Did this kind of new generation or new incarnation of our political set become what it is because of that blind-eyed altruism of existence that we looked at, you know, 10

years ago with Barack Obama? Is that what the Europeans are saying?

Katie Paine: [00:22:51] Well I think what the Europeans are saying is, and I think this is-- this goes back to my history major. I was an Asian Studies and History major and the pendulum swings. And I think what the Europeans said to me over the last two weeks was, "Thank you. You forced the pendulum swing back in the other direction." I mean they truly believe that watching Trump do what he does, made them not elect the Trump equivalent in the Netherlands and Austria. Now what happens in France... But they really said, "I think we watched you guys and said we don't want to go through that, we'll do something else."

Kathleen Buczko: [00:23:36] So you spent a majority of your career measuring things. How do you measure the next swing?

Katie Paine: [00:23:40] Probably by the number of people who show up and do that. I mean, I think the biggest sign that things are going to shift again is how many people are signing up to run for office and I can't remember where I heard it or what the statistic was but, it was some Democratic committee that basically said, 'Look if we'd be lucky to get you know five people to run for an office and we've got like 200 that are expressing interest right now.' So I think if nothing else, if all kinds of people decide for whatever reason that they really, truly want to run for office, yahoo! More people involved is good. You know, one of the reasons why I love politics in New Hampshire is because we have the third largest legislative body in the English speaking world.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:24:48] How is that possible?

Katie Paine: [00:24:49] Because we have one elected representative for every two thousand people, roughly.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:24:55] Wow. Imagine if they had done that in California. We would have our own country. I think that could be good. All right.

Katie Paine: [00:25:08] Very good. But anyway it works right? I mean, because in some ways it's very similar to Canada where they have "Ridings." And the reason they call them "Ridings" is because you will be elected by the people that you could ride to see and visit in a day on horseback.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:25:29] Okay.

Katie Paine: [00:25:30] Isn't that wonderful idea?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:25:30] I think that that puts you certainly engaged with your constituency.

Katie Paine: [00:25:35] That's exactly it. So people in New Hampshire are so totally-- they have to be engaged in their constituency because they cannot get elected by money alone. They have to actually go have tea with people or coffee the people and sign up to talk to people. And I think it's a great system and, you know, the notion of a New Hampshire primary and we used to joke that the presidential candidates were so present in our lives. I think there's one shoveling my driveway right now. Really, you'd go to a bar and--I'll never forget going to a bar and it was--who was it? It was the Massachusetts Congressman who died of cancer. Great guy. Yeah. I mean he was just sitting at the next table with Ken Burns.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:26:29] Of course.

Katie Paine: [00:26:29] Yes. Yes. That's the way you know them. So you kind of can't get away

with too much when you--and this is this goes back to the whole bowling alone theory. Robert Putnam says the reason why certain cities and towns in Italy recover faster after World War Two was because of the number of bowling leagues and churches. People who have to see each other at church tend not to screw each other over.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:27:11] Well, there is power in knowing who your neighbor is.

Katie Paine: [00:27:15] That's exactly it. Is a very interesting comment. Not relevant to anything else but kind of interesting.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:27:22] I would say it's very relevant. Two things: one that someone of political have-to could be running the free world in the next eight years assuming that our friend gets re-elected is now shoveling your driveway and it's April so we won't talk about global warming until the next time you're on, but also that there is power in building that tribe and building that network and knowing who you're doing business with. And doing that in a dis-intermediated society, right?

Katie Paine: [00:27:53] Yes. Well, the really interesting comment that somebody made...we were having a conversation...I was talking about the fact that I had not done you know thousands of doors in Durham, New Hampshire and there's one woman who was from Romania and had gone on a Fulbright Scholarship to Ball State [University] and one of her programs or whatever was knocking on doors and talking to people about climate change. And she said, "It was extraordinary. The people answered the door. And they talked to me. In Romania, we would never do that." And then you realize that when somebody, a stranger knocks on your door in Romania, for decades, it probably meant you were about to be arrested and taken away. And that was probably the most profound, or many profound moments in talking to people in Slovenia and Romania and places like that. But that was probably the most profound because it really shows you that we have a society where it is expected for you to go knocking on doors and talking to your neighbors and things like that. And that's part of the political process. And, if this whole indivisible movement has any lasting impact, it will be because of that. It will be because we have a free society that makes it okay to go talk to your neighbors and show up and not just protest in the streets but, actually have conversations.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:29:36] So Katie, you've pioneered markets, you've created new standards, you've lent your voice to the political dynamic here in the country. What's next?

Katie Paine: [00:29:48] Ha, ha! (Laughing) I think it's sort of now back to sustainability. I think the one-- the things that I have learned is that I love doing all of these things. I just want to be able to do them when I'm a hundred and ten. So you know, kind of making sure I'm healthy enough to do that, making sure that the world allows me to do that, and making sure that my business allows me to do that... I'm not that far from the water and I don't want, you know, I don't want the tide to come in and sweep away my house. If I had to put a word on it, it's like just... I don't need to go out there and climb Mt. Everest or publish another book or any of those things that other people might have on their bucket list. I just want to wake up every day and know that I can pay my taxes, and that the farm's going to fall down and get taken away, or any of those things. And that I can live my life in balance with the world and my friends and with love to my family and all of those things. You know, that my hopes and dreams are not scaled back but they are so much more local and manageable now, I think. If I can get out there and plant a garden and dig in the dirt when I'm 75 I will be very happy.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:31:25] Won't we all!

Katie Paine: [00:31:26] Yes. I mean, there's a wonderful book about cold dirt on her hands and it's a book of women of a certain age and their gardens and there's a woman who's like 90 on a tractor. And I'm like, that is me. I want to be on the tractor when I'm 90.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:31:46] I don't know if I want to be on the tractor but, perhaps a nice Maserati would be good.

Katie Paine: [00:31:51] Well, I want to be on the tractor!

Kathleen Buczko: [00:31:53] There you go.

Katie Paine: [00:31:54] Riding my bulldozer on a fine spring day.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:31:59] We all have our dedication to motorized vehicles.

Katie Paine: [00:32:03] Yes. (Laughing)

Kathleen Buczko: [00:32:04] Katie, thank you so much for sharing your story, your insight, your voice, and thank you so much for kicking off The Dots.

Katie Paine: [00:32:14] Well, you're welcome. I'm very honored to be to be doing this and I think it's a great venture. So good luck and and let's hope we inspire people.

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