

the dots

a podcast about connecting.

Cecilie Korst Transcript

Announcer: [00:00:04] [Music] 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: [00:00:31] Corporate escapee, Air Force veteran, and New Media CEO. Cecilie Korst has connected the dots, and (full disclosure) she is also the Executive Producer of this show. Cecilie, welcome to The Dots. Thanks.

Cecilie Korst: [00:00:45] Thanks, Kathleen.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:00:47] Time isn't linear.

Cecilie Korst: [00:00:49] No, it is not. Have you ever tried to get ready for an airplane flight. Yeah. It's not. And sometimes it goes faster, sometimes it gets slower--it's all up to whatever nexus is controlling time out there. So...

Kathleen Buczko: [00:01:04] So, your advice is always to deal with it.

Cecilie Korst: [00:01:07] Deal with it. Yeah.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:01:10] How?

Cecilie Korst: [00:01:10] Oh, wow. There are a number of different ways you can do that. Number one: forgive yourself for the mistakes that you're going to make because, holy cow you're going to make some. And everything's going to turn out OK. Yeah, absolutely.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:01:23] When you're in the midst of, "Is everything going to be OK?" how do you find your voice?

Cecilie Korst: [00:01:31] I put on my tiara and I take selfies. (Laughing) It's OK to be a magpie, too. Yeah. Like shiny things.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:01:41] Really? I mean. Yeah. So are you sitting here and you're saying it's you're advocating for, "Just try it."

Cecilie Korst: [00:01:50] Just try it. What's the worst that can happen? You have to delete it? OK, great. I've got a delete button. I know how to use it.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:01:57] Well you live in a digital world. What about those of us who live in an analog world?

Cecilie Korst: [00:02:02] Ah, "I'm sorry," is one of the best delete buttons you have. Owning your mistakes: one of the best delete buttons you have. And saying, "What can I do to fix it?"...one of the

best delete buttons you have.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:02:11] What's been your experience with how can I fix it?

Cecilie Korst: [00:02:17] (Laughing) So I chart my life and connect the dots between different parts of my career. And I'm happy to actually put this up on the podcast because that would be awesome. Yeah. So I know exactly what I've done in the past and what I gained from it what my favorite parts were to all of that. And, um, knowing what was the most fun to do and what was the least fun to do and doing that course correction between different parts of your life. Like, I tried to fix an old house--and did--it took me 14 years but, it did and it was a good experience.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:03:02] How old was the house?

Cecilie Korst: [00:03:04] 1892.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:03:05] That's an old house.

Cecilie Korst: [00:03:06] It took me 14 years to make it from, you know...to save it from the wrecking ball into something that was worth \$350,000. I bought it for \$38,500.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:03:15] That's not a bad return.

Cecilie Korst: [00:03:16] Pretty proud. Yeah.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:03:18] Good investment.

Cecilie Korst: [00:03:18] Yeah. But, going from there to--going through a bunch of different steps to working on a Pentagon team, and yes, it's all connected in some different way. Yeah, that's--it's--it's good to connect those dots. But, when you figure out where you've made a mistake, you can give yourself permission to quit and do a course correction and go back from the unfun side of that little life map to a much more fun side--sort of like, "Where do you go from there?" Well, you can throw in the towel/throw in the flag and say, "I'm out!" "Great, let's go do something else," and then forgive yourself for making that mistake and go on.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:03:58] Do you think people understand when things are fun and not fun?

Cecilie Korst: [00:04:03] I think that's a self-awareness thing that you come to usually about at the age of 32...maybe?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:04:10] 32?

Cecilie Korst: [00:04:10] 32.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:04:12] Not 30? 35?

Cecilie Korst: [00:04:14] People take people take you seriously when you're 32 and above.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:04:18] It's an interesting insight. Huh. I was always tall, so people thought I was older, maybe.

Cecilie Korst: [00:04:26] When did people start taking you seriously?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:04:29] About 12. What I find so fascinating about your map is that there is a line right in the middle of it that says, I'll say, "Muck It."

Cecilie Korst: [00:04:39] Oh, "Muck-it?" Are we not swearing?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:04:44] "Muck It, I quit everything!" And it's a very defined line. And I recognize that your map is looking backwards.

Cecilie Korst: [00:04:54] Yes. Because you can always connect the dots backwards. What was the most successful piece of your life? That! When I said "Muck It, I'm out!" "I quit everything," "I quit." I was in the Air Force. I quit work in the Air Force. I quit my marriage. I quit my job. I quit everything and just said, "Okay, it's time to hit the giant reset button."

Kathleen Buczko: [00:05:19] So, so many people come up against that reset button. And it's terrifying.

Cecilie Korst: [00:05:24] Right.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:05:24] It's to the core undeniably terrifying.

Cecilie Korst: [00:05:28] Oh, absolutely. It was like--your life and jumping off a cliff. It was. That's what it felt like but, it was something I needed to do.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:05:37] How? Everybody knows that they needed to do it. And they have that terror right there. How did you jump?

Cecilie Korst: [00:05:46] Wow. How did I jump... I think it was... There were so many things that were just coming together all the same time. Both of my parents had died. My, then husband was just being a total jerk. And the house was almost done. My little sister was getting a divorce and I said, "Come move in with me!" and I went...and then the next sentence was to my husband going, "And by the way you're out of the door so, pack your bags." So that was when I really quit everything. That was the final...that's it. I'm done. We're going to figure it out. I had inherited a bunch of money from my mother and I went, "You know what? We can sail for a little while. We've got, what, Four years of clear sailing. We can live for four years without me doing anything," and I can support my sister and her two kids in this giant house that's almost finished and we're... "Yay. Great. Let's do that. Let's hit the giant reset button and figure out what's next." And we really did. We sat out on the porch with bottles of wine figuring out what was next. Where do we want to go? And my little sister said, "I always liked Los Angeles." I went, "Done!" I hired a moving company and we left.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:07:02] Wow.

Cecilie Korst: [00:07:03] Yeah, "Let's start over somewhere new!"

Kathleen Buczko: [00:07:05] Yeah. So what role did your family play in all of this? How did you get there? How did you have the kind of strength to understand that you could hit the reset button?

Cecilie Korst: [00:07:14] Family? What family?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:07:15] That's what I'm saying. Where did that come from?

Cecilie Korst: [00:07:18] No, that's internal. That was part of the reset button was going, "OK I've

always been able to rely on my own, myself, my gumption," and I think that's...that's just...that's in the program.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:07:36] What I've always found fascinating about you, was a distinct inability to get wound around the chain.

Cecilie Korst: [00:07:48] Because it's not worth it...

Kathleen Buczko: [00:07:51] And that always has been interesting to me about that and you've always said, "It's not worth it." But so many of us spend the time getting wrapped around the chain--not being definitional in what we want to accomplish; not being specific with who or what our charter needs to be.

Cecilie Korst: [00:08:14] Okay. And quite honestly I've quit a number of jobs for bosses that tend to get wound around the axle and can't define a goal and can't make their lives work as simply as possible because they're always getting hyped up about how so-and-so is trying to show me up. But, yeah, so I think the best way to do that is just remove the extraneous B.S. that you don't want to deal with. And I can make a very--this is a very simple analogy. I used to get upset about the gardeners not cutting the grass right. They cut it too short. I told them multiple times: "This is not cool. Get your clippers away from my plants. Stop it. Just mow and blow and mow it tall." And they couldn't seem to get it right. And after week five, you know what? This is a stressor that I don't need. You're fired. Thank you very much. I bought a lawnmower. I have a, you know my backyard is the size of three parking spaces. For 100 bucks...

Kathleen Buczko: [00:09:16] Very traditional Los Angeles backyard.

Cecilie Korst: [00:09:19] It is. But for a hundred bucks, I'm, you know, not paying 200 dollars a month to have these bozos come in and piss me off every month. It's the pissing me off part that was more stressful than the actual... you know the grass is going to grow back. It's just grass. But I think that being able to get rid of any of those little stressors in your life helps you to focus on your goals and on your daily 'what you need to do' to attain those goals.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:09:48] So you were at Ball State University.

Cecilie Korst: [00:09:50] I was.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:09:52] And in the heart of Muncie, Indiana and landscape architecture is your calling.

Cecilie Korst: [00:10:02] According to the Meyers-Briggs. Yes. I was supposed to be a Navy Officer (sorry Air Force, but you know, you got me) and and or landscape architect and, gee whiz, I did sort-of both of those. So I was, you know military officer/landscape architect but, gosh I don't really... Remember that whole, "I'm quitting everything" part? Yeah I quit all of that.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:10:29] I just find it fascinating that you're a student in Muncie, Indiana and you decide to go into the Air Force when you're... Is it because the test said you should?

Cecilie Korst: [00:10:37] That was a consideration.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:10:39] Really?

Cecilie Korst: [00:10:39] Yeah. But the fact of the matter was I was taking 24 credit hours a

semester and I burned out, not surprisingly. And I said, "I've got to take a year off. What do I do?" And a friend of mine says, "You know you should really join the Air Force Reserve because it might actually give you some discipline which you probably need." So, yes. I did take his advice and went away, took a year off did the Air Force thing and then came back and you know, finished my Air Force career 22 years later. But yes some of the best advice I ever took.

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Kathleen Buczko: [00:11:30] You briefly said you worked for a shaped-building in Washington D.C.

Cecilie Korst: [00:11:35] I DID work in that funky-shaped building in Washington D.C.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:11:39] But you had also had several other sub-careers when you were part of the military. Looking at your career it seems like it was almost entirely based on leading and building systems.

Cecilie Korst: [00:11:55] Yes and fixing broken things.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:11:57] So how have you applied that in your next phase? After "Muck It."

Cecilie Korst: [00:12:05] So connecting the dots from-- I started out in the Air Force as a crew chief, so I was an aircraft mechanic.

Cecilie Korst: [00:12:13] OK.

Cecilie Korst: [00:12:14] Yeah, I made A-10s fly.

Cecilie Korst: [00:12:17] Awesome.

Cecilie Korst: [00:12:17] Yeah, it was really cool!

Cecilie Korst: [00:12:18] Was it hard for little wings to go?

Cecilie Korst: [00:12:22] (Laughing) No, the hardest thing is like, you know, putting an integrated drive generator into an engine.. but, thats very technical. So, yeah, fixing aircraft--fixing things--and it was fun, and it was...but you know ambition got in the way of that. So I needed to become an officer, so I became a communications officer. Really fun. The Internet was just really taking hold. We had to install nodes and I had a degree in landscape architecture so I went, "Hmm, I need to talk to the civil engineers about this, which led me--connecting the dots--to a civil engineering job in the Air Force, which was really nice and its an interesting marriage of career fields so now I know about the networks and I know about civil engineering. Well, where do we put her? Well, she also knows about talking to people and communicating with the troops (because I also in the meantime worked for a bunch of commanders as an executive officer which is basically, for lack of a better term, professional assistant, but you end up talking to everybody in that in that unit)...so they put me on a Pentagon team and said, "We need you to talk about quality and six sigma and making sure things work." Not that I don't have experience in all that, because I do. But, yeah it was sort of the marriage of all career fields because we had to talk about networks, and design, and civil engineering and, and, and... aircraft maintenance. So it was, it was a good combination. I was very bad at it.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:13:56] Why do you think you are very bad at it?

Cecilie Korst: [00:13:58] Well, because when somebody comes up with an idea that doesn't make any sense, I have a tendency to say so. "Well that's stupid. Who came up with that idea?" and the General at the other end of the conference table raises his hand and then you have a problem. So I think the fact that I was having a lot of trouble with the Air Force is a large company, a large sort of, for lack of a better term corporate entity. And I know that we've tossed around the concept of what was it? "Genetically unemployable?" I'm surprised I lasted 22 years!

Kathleen Buczko: [00:14:35] It's actually it's something that's come up a couple of times in the show, as you know, being and oftentimes the other end of the line, of people who literally have gone through every level of working with organizations large and small, name brands and clearly directed brands like an Air Force.

Cecilie Korst: [00:14:58] Directed...(laughing.)

Kathleen Buczko: [00:15:00] And have really come to the realization that there is something deep... deeply rooted within themselves that makes them genetically unemployable and yet, they are some of the most high performing, contributing people in our economy or society.

Cecilie Korst: [00:15:15] I hope I'm high performing and contributing. "Let's make the Internet prettier! Oh, pretty things. Let's be a magpie."

Kathleen Buczko: [00:15:23] So. Well I mean being a magpie and being a you know a pageant queen-- that part of your life has always 'stuck out' for lack of a better term.

Cecilie Korst: [00:15:34] Well, because it won't go away.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:15:36] Why pageants?

Cecilie Korst: [00:15:38] Because, "Ooh, pretty!" That's why. Because I think I like looking pretty (and I don't know how many girls don't like looking pretty but you know that's their prerogative). I'm not going to judge, but I like pretty things: "pretty-shiny". Ooh! And it might be...pretty-shiny might be a new app. It might be a new web site but pretty-shiny is also like, "Ooh look at how those earrings look. Ooh that's pretty." So but I'm always going to carry that magpie sort of pretty-shiny object from a design standpoint throughout everything that I do because I think really good design is pretty-shiny.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:16:18] Really?

Cecilie Korst: [00:16:18] Does that make any sense? Did I just make any sense?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:16:21] You did you did make some sense. I find I find the competitive aspects of pageants...personally, I find it weird.

Cecilie Korst: [00:16:33] Oh. Don't think I'm not competitive. "Oh, that web site sucks." "Whose idea was that, General?"

Kathleen Buczko: [00:16:37] You know I believe it. So that's why I find that...I know you're very competitive. So, how how did you how did you rationalize or regulate your competitive nature in all of these different environments, because you know the concept of, to be quite honest as we sit here

today, 'blind service' as seems to be expected now in our current political climate, it's something that the Air Force does really well.

Cecilie Korst: [00:17:07] Yeah.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:17:08] Yet I know you to be a very vocal and decisive individual, "Hey, General, that's really not a great idea."

Cecilie Korst: [00:17:17] That's the nice way to put it.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:17:20] How do you reconcile those two parts of yourself in service to something like the Air Force or in pursuit of something like a pageant crown? How do you come to that rationalization and/or how do you harness that energy to be successful?

Cecilie Korst: [00:17:37] Oh, I don't harness the energy and I don't harness the competition, either. The competitive nature can also be with yourself. Can I do this better the next time? How/where did I make mistakes? Where am I going to do this better? And actually that goes all the way back to being a teenager and riding horses. How can I make this horse better? How can I do that jump better? How can I do this dressage test better? How can I make this ride perfect? How can I make this relationship with this horse be seamless? And that is the competitive nature. How can I make this code on this web site better at the next web site or how can I improve it with the next iteration? So it's not necessarily a competition with other people but sometimes with yourself and can you make that better.

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Kathleen Buczko: [00:19:22] So, you know we've talked to a lot of different people on this show so far, and one thing that seems to kind of unite all of them is they've faced some level of challenge. Tell me about the advice you would give someone if they're facing a challenge.

Cecilie Korst: [00:19:44] First of all, let go of trying to control it. It, being the universe and the influences on your life, and deal with it... but forgive yourself for the mistakes. Just forgive yourself. It's OK. It's going to be OK and rid yourself of stressors, of course. But there are three questions that I really like to ask a lot of times--and I wake up every day and look at my schedule which is part digital and part analog, quite honestly. And I ask, "OK so what's the best thing for me to do right away, today? What's the first thing I should do? What's the best thing to do right now?" and quite honestly that came from a book by Barbara Scher called "Live the life You Love." It's a great book I recommend it to everybody. And I think she does also executive coaching. Not positive. So, what's the best thing for me to do right now to achieve any goal? What what's your next goal? So figure that out. What do you want to be when you grow up? Or what do you want to be next year? So that's cool. The goal question on that is, "Is this going to be fun?" So if you're... for me fun is the most important thing to have. It's beyond any possession.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:20:58] Wait a minute--Beyond any possession?

Cecilie Korst: [00:21:02] Yeah.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:21:03] Really?

Cecilie Korst: [00:21:04] Yeah. I mean sure, the tiara is nice but are you having fun with it? If you're not having fun with it put it on the dog. The dog will have fun with it.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:21:12] So it's not cars, it's not houses.

Cecilie Korst: [00:21:14] No and I believe me, I love my car.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:21:16] It's a great car.

Cecilie Korst: [00:21:19] It's a great car, but really, I have the car because it's fun.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:21:24] When did you come to that realization, was that before "Mucking It" or after?

Cecilie Korst: [00:21:30] That was before "Mucking It," but I wasn't applying it.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:21:36] So would you say it was safe to...and we'll get to your third question...I don't want to derail you. It's a good question. It's safe to say that before "Mucking It" you were still trying to live up to someone else's standards.

Cecilie Korst: [00:21:52] Soooooo trying to do that. Yeah absolutely. I had... I got married I had made a commitment to this man. I made a commitment to my degree that I got. I made a commitment to finishing this house. I made a commitment to the Air Force. I made a ton of commitments that I honestly, in the end, just decided, "Wow, this is SO not fun." This is not worth it. So that's when, I mean, when everything came together and it was... it could have been a mushroom cloud I guess. But I don't think... it was just in my head. I'm not sure.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:22:24] I think that most of those have been tracked so it might have just been in your head. But I understand the analogy.

Cecilie Korst: [00:22:29] Right. Right. Did you hear a tremor in the Force in Muncie, Indiana?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:22:32] But your third question is I think always pivotal is, "Is this making me better?"

Cecilie Korst: [00:22:40] Yeah. "Is this making me a better person?" Does this experience make me a better person? And you can apply that to a movie you see, a concert you go, to a museum you go to... Is this meal making me happy? Is this making me a better person? Am I happier for this?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:23:00] So you would recommend that you look at your life, find what makes you happy by having fun or what ever drives you.

Cecilie Korst: [00:23:11] I recommend that people get to know themselves really well.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:23:15] How? Lots of therapy?

Cecilie Korst: [00:23:16] Myers-Briggs... Therapy works. Yeah absolutely. Meyers-Briggs is good.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:23:20] Really?

Cecilie Korst: [00:23:21] Yeah. It really is.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:23:22] Now I have found that over the years my Myers-Briggs test has changed.

Cecilie Korst: [00:23:28] And it should.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:23:29] Really?

Cecilie Korst: [00:23:30] Yeah. Because you're going to grow and evolve. You're not going to be the same person you were 23.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:23:37] Well, that stinks.

Cecilie Korst: [00:23:37] I'm sorry. No. Believe me I wish my butt looked like I was 23 still.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:23:41] Well don't we all?

Cecilie Korst: [00:23:42] Yeah. But the other there's another book that I recommend It's called "Strength's Finder" and "Strengths Finder 2.0" actually has a web page that goes with it that's sort of a test like Meyers-Briggs but it is.. it's really good and you can identify your strengths and then if you want to go back through your resume and identify all those little dots backwards in the past you can figure out what each of those did for you. What was so joyous about the really good experiences and the bad experience was probably don't have any of your strengths associated with them. Believe me, my tour at that funny Puzzle Palace in Washington D.C. had no strengths attached to it. None, whatsoever.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:24:24] Why did you accept it?

Cecilie Korst: [00:24:26] Because it's the Pentagon and a friend of mine who is a General Officer asked me to and I said OK. Because he said, "I really need you." Turns out, hmmm, not so much.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:24:36] Wow. OK. You know I think when you begin to look at people's lives they also fill the role with their family despite the fact that you are always very independent. Are you the leader of your family/the caretaker of your family?

Cecilie Korst: [00:24:56] Yeah. So, my grandmother who is still alive she's ninety-four has always been the matriarch. But as she's gotten older, everybody has turned to me. So, yeah evidently I'm the next. I'm the next one. The next one in charge--I really don't want to be in charge. I'm really good not being in charge of this crazy clan. Don't get me wrong--really smart, intelligent people, every single one of them. But don't call me from Switzerland and tell me you've got a problem, because I'm not going to be able to fix it. (laughing)

Kathleen Buczko: [00:25:32] So connecting the dots for you is what?

Cecilie Korst: [00:25:36] It's a way to move forward and identify future goals by looking back and connecting all those dots and seeing what brought me pleasure and then so, going forward it's sort of like where do we want to take Chapelure Media? Where do we want to take this company? We want to do podcasts. Absolutely. Probably be more than more than just this one. We do have an old

one that's sort of on hiatus. We'll get back on track. We really will. But more web sites. There's going to be e-commerce because I can't wait to dive into that world--more than we already have. Of course. And I'd like to become an agency for speakers. I really would, I think that'd be really cool.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:26:16] So what's next for you personally, as opposed to what you just teed up for your company?

Cecilie Korst: [00:26:21] Yeah because, the elevator pitch, right? So personally, a little while ago my boyfriend/pseudo husband (we're not actually married) said I'm going to retire and I want to travel more and that's when I went "Well shoot, I guess we better start a company because I got to be able to travel more and believe me, corporate America is not going to do that for me." So probably more travel. I'm working on a retirement project that is a series of coffee table books from pictures I take when we're abroad on vacation...but diving, just taking that all in, and experiencing life. I was here to... I was put on this earth to experience life. That's what my mother told me. Which evidently she got from a psychic so, I'm in.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:27:16] And with that thank you for joining us on this amazing ride. And thank you for connecting the dots.

Cecilie Korst: [00:27:23] Thanks.

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