

the dots

a podcast about connecting.

Karen Otis 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 digital strategist, speaker, and entrepreneur, Kathleen Buczko.

Kathleen: [00:00:30] Karen Otis is an architect and author of "Be the Architect of Your Life". She brings a unique perspective on how the creative ingenuity of architecture can help you bring the dots of your life together. Karen welcome to the dots.

Karen: [00:00:44] Thank you for having me.

Kathleen: [00:00:46] Can you tell us a little bit about your journey from architect to author.

Karen: [00:00:50] Absolutely. Well I will start by saying that I've been passionate about architecture pretty much my whole life and at 16 I really made the decision that that is what my calling was and I have been doing that and still do ever since. But then my life kind of took a bit of a turn. And in 1999 I found out about my husband at the time I found out about a three or affair that he'd been having and let me tell you Kathleen my life just really you know went crumbling. I had known him since I was 11 years old. Never saw that coming. And you can imagine I'm sure listeners have been through some of these types of you know traumas. And I really scrambled to put the pieces of my life back together.

Kathleen: [00:01:37] Yeah I can see where that would be pretty devastating...

Karen: [00:01:39] Oh just horrible.

Kathleen: [00:01:40] ...especially when such a young age.

Karen: [00:01:42] Right. And having two kids, two young kids at the time, five and eight, really trying to you know keep the family together. And that wasn't going to work obviously with what was going on in his life. So at the time I tried everything to put it back together. You know I did all of the therapy work, all of the family and supportive network of friends, and nothing was quite really putting it back together for me. And I was looking outwardly for some kind of solution to you know to put the pieces back and what I found was maybe I need to look inward. And I look to what I really knew best and what I had known best and for so long was architecture and home building. And so I took the tools that I use in that. And there's so much wisdom in architecture and the design process and I took those tools which are really eight steps that I use every time I design a building. And I used it to life building and I have to tell you everything turned around from there. The results were really profound and my life became rebuilt in a way that brings me so much joy and happiness and is you know in a place today that is nothing like where it was you know the day I found out everything was falling apart. So it really did the trick for me and so today I work with others to do the same thing to take the architectural method which are those eight steps and apply them to life building to help others really build the life that they love and inspires them.

Kathleen: [00:03:17] So Karen let's explore that a little bit. The architectural method. I'm sure if anyone is like me who's out there listening they're Googling it and God knows what they could come up with in that spectrum. Tell me a little. Is that a framework? Is that a way of thinking? What does the architectural method do? I mean besides put doors on windows obviously.

Karen: [00:03:43] Right, great question. Yes, because it does seem like what in the world is architecture have to do with you know self-help and personal development. It's like an odd one it's a question I get often. So what I like to say is you know when you become an architect you get sort of a special pair of spectacles to look through. Right. And it's the way I see everything in the world and it is based on a very different way of thinking. You know Western culture is very much about looking at things analytically, logically, using a lot of our left brain thinking to make decisions and architecture isn't like that. Architecture is much more intuitive, creative, and is a lot about the right brain. And what we do in architecture is we keep the right brain as active as possible, keeping the left brain, you know our very logical side, at bay. As far as we can to make the most creative, interesting, imaginative, building or space that we can and at the very end we really bring in and merge our left brain, which is all about you know creating that set of construction documents to really make that imaginative creation into reality. So we do the same with life building. We approach it with the same method where as you are starting to think about your life in a very intuitive creative way really bringing your soul and what your soul wants into the picture. You know I really believe that our soul is tied to our intuition which is really all captured in our right brain. So if we are able to make decisions from that place, than we're really bringing our soul into our decision making process. And the result is a much happier life because if your soul is nourished, then you will be happy. But if your decisions lack your soul and what you truly deep down what you want then that's where that's where the gap happens, that's where the disconnect happens and we're not really able to find that joy.

Kathleen: [00:05:48] So that's fascinating to me.

Karen: [00:05:49] Right.

Kathleen: [00:05:52] So that's actually you're advocating - take the logic and everything they've been told to define yourself by - and set it aside, for a moment.

Karen: [00:06:04] Absolutely, yes.

Kathleen: [00:06:04] Put it at bay. Your description put it at bay and then within that framework become comfortable with listening to everything? Is that what you're saying? Be open to all of that?

Karen: [00:06:20] Yes. So what you're doing is just as just as we do when we are designing architecture or buildings with Spirit which is what I call architecture is that we're really trying to intuitively decide. And so you need to kind of quiet your left brain thinking, allow your intuition to surface, really listen to it because for the most part we run away from it. You know we distract ourselves. We busy ourselves. We have this chatter going on in our heads all the time. So in the architectural method there's a lot of tools and techniques to allow your intuition to surface. Really listen to it. Hear what it's telling you because there's so much wisdom there and then base your decisions on that. Then pulling your left brain thinking to give you the really meticulous, you know action plan to make it happen. Because you don't want it to stay just as this imaginative creation that doesn't ever really see you know the light of day, that really become reality. You know when we do a building, it's very creative at first. It's very artistic. But then we create a set of blueprints. Right? This construction document set, almost like an instruction manual. Super meticulous. Down to the nitty gritty. What are the steps to build this? So that's really the architectural method. It's starting out creative, soulful, and then moving from that to something much more finite, concrete and and a

very clear set of action steps.

Kathleen: [00:07:54] So I, well let me put this in a context that you know my small monkey brain can understand. [laughs] And in fact when you talk about that distracted brain, that excited brain, that one looking to distraction, I call that my monkey brain. The one that's ok with reacting, reacting more than constructing.

Karen: [00:08:23] Yeah I'd like to say that reacting and creating all have the same exact letters in it but they're completely flipped around. And boy are they opposite.

Kathleen: [00:08:33] It's an anagram.

Karen: [00:08:34] Yes absolutely. And I had noticed during my you know my life falling apart. I had noticed that in my personal life while I was trying to put the pieces back together, I was all about reacting. You know whatever the ex-husband was doing, I was reacting. Whatever the new person I'm trying to date, you know I'm reacting. They don't call, I'm reacting. They call, I'm reacting. My kids, I'm reacting. But in my professional life as an architect it's all about creating. And if you can take yourself away from reacting, kind of like a pinball in a pinball machine, get away from that and start creating ... you are much more empowered. You are the architect of your life. Your driving it. Your deciding. You know you're choosing based on your own, your own opinion, your own gut feelings, as opposed to what's happening in the world being thrown at you.

Kathleen: [00:09:27] So Karen when you were going through this process and you hung on to kind of what was your core as a young woman of being an architect. Did you start with the blank page? How did you find that center? That quiet.

Karen: [00:09:43] Right. Great, great question. So I can tell you. Let me let me go into what the first step is. The first of the eight because the first step is actually probably the most important and the most profound. And I think the one that really helps people get unstuck. And so I'll give you an example in the architecture world and then in life building. So in architecture when I start the first thing I do is I go see the project. The site, right. The the location for the project and I call this the site study and I'm basically evaluating the site. What's there that is really fantastic that I want to you know build this building around? You know for example, Falling Water by Franklin Wright, gorgeous piece of property with a waterfall et cetera. And he hinged the project right on top of it of that water fall.

Kathleen: [00:10:33] Literally and figuratively.

Karen: [00:10:35] Exactly. Absolutely did. Yes. And so that's something you want to really maximize or emphasize. Right? Then there are other things on the site that you think oh wow not so great. We want to kind of you know navigate around those things and then the most important ones are the ones that you think are fixed or permanent but they really maybe aren't and they are changeable. And those are the ones that keep us stuck. So as an example, I was doing a project with a pool that had an existing pool and the homeowner wanted to keep the pool because they wanted a pool and then do a massive remodel in addition and keeping a pool where it was located even though it was completely dilapidated was just not letting the project flow. The circulation, the floor plan would not work. So I decided let me imagine moving the pool completely. Taking it out. What we thought was permanent and making it changeable. Moving it, you know rebuilding it, would have cost the same as fixing the original. And once I moved it, everything flowed. So now looking at this in terms of life building, maybe there are things in your life you really think are permanent. That you feel you are stuck with. For example a profession, let's say or relationship that is not serving you. But if you can look at those things as possibly changeable, which might cause a little

bit of inner panic for a moment. But working through that, it may be just the thing that needs to be moved to allow room for some beautiful change. So that's the first thing we do is we look at what are the things that are great and working here that you want to build your life around, that are meaningful, and significant to you. And what are the things that maybe are no longer serving you, that might be better off demolished or moved or changed.

Kathleen: [00:12:23] That is the single most terrifying step a human being could take.

Karen: [00:12:28] Oh isn't it? I know. Absolutely terrifying.

[00:12:31] And and I've been through that myself. I've had a collection of friends and colleagues through the years, who in moving forward have not been supporters and we talk about it internally as you know on my team. Who's on team Kathleen. Right? Who is on Team Karen and being brutally honest, just like a coach would be as part of that team. You know there are great people who can be a part of a team and they may never play first base and they may never hit a home run, but they provide a glue or a continuity to a team.

Karen: [00:13:11] Yes.

Kathleen: [00:13:12] And it's difficult to look at that team in total and make the choice that an individual member can't be there because the team is impeded from going forward.

Karen: [00:13:26] Absolutely.

Kathleen: [00:13:26] And that's totally incredibly difficult to do. But I love the analogy of looking at a site because it's about.

Karen: [00:13:36] Our site is really our life as it is right now. That's your site. Right.

Kathleen: [00:13:41] Exactly. Right. And who will who and what do you want as part of that environment. That that beauty. What gives you joy. What gives you energy. What gives you the ability to go forward. Who's on your team?

Karen: [00:13:56] Right. Absolutely.

Kathleen: [00:13:58] So Karen when faced with a challenge you looked inward to your greatest skill. How would you, as people assess their site and begin to make those definitions and challenges and changes, how would you see the way forward? What would you tell them to begin to listen to as they're looking across that landscape?

Karen: [00:14:24] Right. So I would first tell them to to use some of the tools that I talk about, which for example one is creating their wish list. And what people often do is take other people's wishes for them and adopt them as their own wishes and that's an important thing to distinguish from. So you know because you cannot build a life that is fulfilling and happy and meaningful for yourself if it's based on what someone else wants for you.

Kathleen: [00:14:52] It's like remember that in Runaway Bride?

Karen: [00:14:55] Oh Yes. [laughs]

Kathleen: [00:14:56] How do you like your eggs?

Karen: [00:14:57] How do you like your eggs? Exactly!

Kathleen: [00:14:58] It's an incredible example. You know you always like the eggs ...

Karen: [00:15:01] He has to figure out how SHE liked her eggs.

Kathleen: [00:15:03] Right. Exactly.

Karen: [00:15:04] It's so true. And I tell people, for example in architecture, there are people who you know are building that home purely for resale. Even though they're going to live in it and attempt to enjoy that home for years. You know resale super important. It's always an investment etcetera. But I tell them if you're just building this for resale then it's for someone else's wishes not yours. And it can't be your dream home, if you're doing that. So the same thing in life. You know I would tell people that they need to kind of dig deep and figure out what their wishes are. With their intuition and soul are saying and there's certainly lots of techniques to do that. I actually have a series of meditations for each of these steps. Baby steps and so it's really about you know quieting the monkey voice, right the chatter and listening to your intuition. To start to create your own vision that really really is aligned with the way your soul is and what your passion and purpose are. And once you have that then the remainder of the steps are all about putting that vision. You know strengthening that vision. Putting it forward and taking the steps to make it happen. So then decisions become actually quite easy which is the same thing that happens in architecture. I always say when once I have a strong project, I've done viewed with this creativity and this vision, the decisions become easy because it's all about: am I enhancing that vision? Or am I detracting from it? And same with our lives. Once you have this vision, which architectural method helps you get to. Once you have this vision that is all yours, then decisions in your life are all about: Am I getting closer and enhancing my vision? Or am I steering away from it and detracting from it.

AD: [00:16:52] 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 Chapelure Media dotcom to find out more.

Kathleen: [00:17:06] So for everybody out there who is now at this point Googled the architectural method. It's not about all the frameworks and the names of the people who will be coming up as the leaders in architecture. It is really about a way of thinking. Right?

Karen: [00:17:25] Absolutely. And that way of thinking. And it's a way of modeling your life.

Kathleen: [00:17:30] And then in that way of thinking and in modeling your life or your environment or how you want to play. It is intuitive and soul full as soulful as you've said, but where does that creativity and the ingenuity come into it? You know you've listened to yourself. You've set your monkey brain aside and you've listened to yourself and you think you've found your passion. You know candidly some of us are not as lucky as you to have found their calling at 16 years old and felt...

Karen: [00:18:07] Right.

Kathleen: [00:18:08] Comfortable with it. Right? You know I look to my own just narrowing my choices as a career set. And the and the machinations and different channels that I've gone through, It is certainly about being a creative right? So that one thing builds on the other. So how does that creative ingenuity really come into play?

Karen: [00:18:32] So it's important first of all to know that this isn't like a once in a life time thing

that you do. Right. Sometimes we need to revisit this often. It might be that we're at a different point in our life and what we want might have changed. So you know I've actually recently done this myself and realized wow I'm really interested and involved in this whole personal development field and really helping people you know uplift their lives. And that became a new direction for me. Where I found new fulfillment and a new kind of purpose and passion alongside with the architectures. That's the first thing is I'd say that this is something you need to visit and do often. Sometimes people jump into it from like an internal ache of "Gosh I'm not happy. This isn't what I thought my life would be like. I'm feeling a bit disappointed." Or midlife crisis or it's from some event like a divorce or being laid off a job etcetera. But once you define what it is that is aching and what you might need to fix that, then it's a matter of really looking at it creatively - meaning don't go for the quick easy answer because oftentimes those are not the most powerful and most meaningful and productive answers. Just like when I sit down to design a building. If I were to sit down and just design it all out in a matter of a half an hour that is not going to be my best work. That is not going to be creative and ingenious and powerful.

Kathleen: [00:20:04] And especially since I live in an earthquake zone and I appreciate the 30 minute expiration on the planning of the building not being the best work that you could possibly do so.

Karen: [00:20:14] Exactly.

Kathleen: [00:20:15] Certainly recognizable.

Karen: [00:20:16] Right. So it's a matter of allowing yourself doing the steps that allow things to gel in your mind a bit. To really push the envelope a bit. To really question things that will bring out a much more creative answer. And then it is a matter of finding the best way to get there. And sometimes that can bring some other creative answers. You know this this works really well for people either looking for a career to do something with their time that is meaningful and wonderful and you know 1 out of 3 people consider themselves very happy and that's it. That's epidemic that we're dealing with. so,

Kathleen: [00:20:55] That's terrifying.

Karen: [00:20:57] It's horrible.

Kathleen: [00:20:57] So 2/3 of the people that you see every day are just going through the motions.

Karen: [00:21:02] Just going through the motions. So once you get this creative type of thinking you can see you can live in this me of mediocrity or you can just really elevate your life and it works great for like I said a career it also works great for someone looking for their life partner. That kind of love. And you know compassion and just that that soulful connection with someone. This works really well too because in this creativity you start to also look at what are the patterns you're doing that come naturally to you that aren't serving you. And that's where this creativity really shows up because you start looking for different answers, creative answers, not the ones that are familiar. And you know that you really use to because obviously if those were working great you wouldn't be at this place of disappointment.

Kathleen: [00:21:54] Sure. Right. So how do you go from that seeking portion, to that creativity and allowing that openness to actually taking action? I mean it's so clear Karen that you clearly found your voice, but that was so rooted in in your framework. As you're going through this framework how do you not get stuck?

Karen: [00:22:19] So what you do is first you start out with you know doing all these other steps you get to the point of where you finally kind of are able to allow your your intuition to surface. Showing you what your passion and purpose are. And then I am a huge fan of a vision board. I think that in doing so you really start to see an image that embodies that vision or that life that you want. So once you do that. And it's interesting because the vision boards I've done in my life and I did one with my daughter years ago too. She did her own and we accomplished all of those. Sort of, you don't even realize it but you do because once you put those, make them something that you're going to look at and think about. It really does bring it to reality. So you create a vision that you're going to really go after. And then from that you start to really explore. So for example let's say this is a new career choice. You know, who already has that career? How could you you know meet them. Talk to them. You know really educate yourself on what it is they did to get there. What are the pros and cons of that career? This is where you're transitioning from imaginative creativity to something more concrete. Like construction documents, right. To something where you're putting an action plan, with timeline and you know completion dates and and that's how we take something that is really creative but make it really happen. Because too many of us stick, we kind of stay. We get stuck in that.

Kathleen: [00:23:56] Exactly.

Karen: [00:23:57] We've got this great vision that we get, we go nowhere with it.

Kathleen: [00:24:00] Yeah. I got the vision. I got the board. I did it on Pinterest. I can carry it in my pocket.

Karen: [00:24:05] Right. Right. It's a matter of now saying "all right". When for example when I give a set of plans to a contractor to build that house, it's like an instruction manual. Right. It's like it's like the Ikea directions.

Kathleen: [00:24:18] Right, yeah. No I think that's very true that we oftentimes you know what the root of really the dots is talking about is how people have made these dramatic transitions in their lives and why. Why do some of us stop with the vision board? And the dynamic Pinterest characterizations. And why do some of us go forward and have this broad spectrum of engagement and fun and fulfillment?

Karen: [00:24:47] Right. I think it's two reasons. Honestly I think and this is what we try to you know counteract these two issues that hold you back. One is it's work, right? It's definitely work to create those action steps and take them. You know it's not like it happens overnight. Or it's super easy. It's not. It takes some work. If you want to do a different career and there's some classes to be taken or some people that talk to and figure out. You know, it's some work. The second thing which I think is the bigger issue is that people are afraid. You know we're really comfortable with what is familiar to us and what is not feels scary, uncomfortable and we're fearful of it. But what's important to realize is that that can be just just the thing just the catalyst that you need to create something new. If you were to stay in what's comfortable and familiar, no change is going to happen. You know you're going to be settling or sticking to that mediocrity. Do you want to make that leap to something amazing? You know you have to leap into that discomfort and know that you're going to get go through it and get out the other end of it. But it takes that and most people I think are more comfortable just looking at the vision board but not really taking the next step.

Kathleen: [00:26:05] Yeah, I agree.

Karen: [00:26:06] And that would be like creating a beautiful building on paper but never seeing it

built.

Kathleen: [00:26:11] Right. It's just a drawing. It's not some place you're going to live.

Karen: [00:26:16] Right.

Kathleen: [00:26:17] So quiet that monkey brain.

Karen: [00:26:21] Yes.

Kathleen: [00:26:22] Allow yourself the chance to really be creative and explore and investigate. Assess the site as you would qualify it. And then don't be afraid to do something hard.

Karen: [00:26:38] Right. Right. And be really specific with yourself you know be firm, specific, nitty gritty. Write down that action list down to every little thing that needs to happen for you to get you know to make your dream reality.

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Kathleen: [00:27:47] So Karen, for you what's next?

Karen: [00:27:50] Well for me what's next. It's been amazing because I still I still love into the architecture every single day and it's been a phenomenal ride. But also right now I'm doing a ton of speaking engagements, working individually with people and groups. Really. and that has been so rewarding to see other people see their vision become a reality. And so I'm I'm constantly meeting with audiences or workshops and helping people do the exact same thing and it's been incredible because to see their joy when they get there. I mean I can't even describe it. It's it's like you know it's like handing them their dream home. You know and seeing their joy and how they're now living out their life. There's no bigger reward than that.

Kathleen: [00:28:37] So Karen I want to thank you for joining us on the dots and giving us an amazing look at your site and approach to life and rebuilding our lives. That is so amazingly rooted in what we see every single day. And as part of that I understand you've got a special offer for our listeners and that if they go to life inspired blueprint dotcom and we'll have that up on our Website tagged at the end of this broadcast. They can begin to map their new life and their ideas and create their own new blueprint.

Karen: [00:29:20] Right. And I always say, you know, we've only got this one life to live and don't delay it because the sooner you can get to what I call that life inspired, you know, longer you'll be able to live in that wonderful place. So jump onto that life inspired blueprint and you'll be able to start your site study by tonight.

Kathleen: [00:29:38] That's awesome. And thank you Karen so much for sharing your story and your incredible ability to re tool yourself. And thank you for offering a blueprint for our listeners.

Karen: [00:29:51] Thank you so much for having me. It's been a real pleasure.

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