

the dots

a podcast about connecting.

Shannon Thompson 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 you're hosting Digital Strategist speaker and entrepreneur Kathleen Buczko.

Kathleen: [00:00:31] Change strategist, brand storyteller, speaker, and team builder Shannon Thompson as all of these and an inspiration to others connecting causes, connecting hearts, and connecting humanity. Shannon welcome to the Dots, thanks for joining us.

Shannon: [00:00:46] Hi Kathleen. Thank you for having me.

Kathleen: [00:00:48] Shannon tell me a little bit about your journey, your your work journey, your volunteer journey, and how you are really building a kind of a new generation of storytellers.

Shannon: [00:00:59] Sure, You know my, my journey has been a little combined. I think in terms of an entrepreneur; I've really had that spirit of needs and the kid. And then as I got into.

Kathleen: [00:01:15] OK. Tell me what was your first entrepreneurial effort as a child.

Shannon: [00:01:23] The first thing I really remember starting like my little business was selling Christmas cards door to door.

Kathleen: [00:01:28] Now there you go. That's it that's a good one.

Shannon: [00:01:30] It was, it was to earn a telephone for my bedroom. I had my own telephone.

Kathleen: [00:01:36] That was a good deal.

Shannon: [00:01:38] Yeah, it was.

Kathleen: [00:01:38] And did you get that telephone?

Shannon: [00:01:40] I sure did.

Kathleen: [00:01:41] There you go.

Shannon: [00:01:42] Yes. So.

Kathleen: [00:01:43] That was the beginning of your entrepreneurial journey.

Shannon: [00:01:46] Yeah I like seeing action gets results and I was in control of making it happen. Realize that. But fast forward. I didn't really know a lot about starting your own business so I got into corporate world. But what I ended up finding was the tech world which was the dot com startup and then falling out with two other startups. So I clearly liked getting in and building

something on the ground floor, creating ideas, and making concepts come to life. And I love that. A very driven by that so that's a lot of what my career has been. You know in a startup environment and what I started to realize is you work really really very harsh so you build these you know concepts to bring them to life. And in the end you know you learn upon and I loved it. And I really did love what I learned. And you know I can talk a little bit about that too. But really to where I'm at now, I was working really hard for someone else's vision and for their dreams and as I was climbing the ladder, so to speak, you get more of the tangibles - you know the money or stock or

Kathleen: [00:03:09] Sure.

Shannon: [00:03:09] Things like that. That it's freedom and one sense that I was losing a lot of freedom of being able to make other choices in my life and my time freedom. And you know one of those things you don't really realize how important it is you lose it.

Kathleen: [00:03:25] Yeah.

Shannon: [00:03:26] And so you know you had that push and pull of like you're climbing a ladder and it seems successful but might not be happy because you're losing the ability to have more control over the other things you do in your life. And also you mentioned causes you know I think that's partly why I started seeking out always being involved in some type of giving or causes that I cared about because I was really trying to keep my heart connected to things that matter to me and the community around me. And so I did that in parallel with my corporate life to try to manage that balance of you know purpose and profit if you will.

Kathleen: [00:04:08] I think that's a great way of putting it. I mean I think so many times you are faced as an entrepreneur in a corporate or a startup environment with how do you balance that - profit and that passion and that purpose. And how do you bring that to bear on a daily basis. I mean as you're going through that startup learning phase from the tangible results of what were you really learning? What did that give you then as a result?

Shannon: [00:04:42] You mean when I was in corporate America start ups?

Kathleen: [00:04:44] Yeah. Yeah, startups or corporate America.

Shannon: [00:04:47] Yeah, they what taught me, I mean it showed me really the ins and outs of creating a business. You know when you walk into a business that is established you can kind of take for granted that structures and systems that are in place. But when you have to create all the systems and structures and ultimately the identity of who you are it's a lot of work. In addition to maybe the product or service you're offering. Just to run a company and make it available to keep growing you know and adding more people and adding larger profits and being able to expand and serve more people. There's a lot of things that have happened to be able to do that.

Kathleen: [00:05:29] So in that, focus and that intensity, how did you find you and then how did you define you?

Shannon: [00:05:41] How did I find myself, professionally. My voice?

Kathleen: [00:05:44] Yeah yeah.

Shannon: [00:05:47] That's a great question. I think, you I know I can tend to be kind of a jump in and get it done person.

Kathleen: [00:05:54] Very Midwestern roots.

Shannon: [00:05:56] Yes and you know, knowing I'll figure it out and I think that's a helpful trait. Again in terms of resilience, like you know you can figure it out but I certainly was in a sea of corporateness of a level that I didn't recognize. So you know to find my voice it took a lot of you know learning and pushing back and observing. You know I watched a lot, and listened a lot, and listened to my gut a lot. I think that helped to guide me and I looked for models of other women, other strong women to see like how did they navigate this and just try to find that advice. And you know sadly there wasn't a ton of it. There's a lot more now. But at the time there wasn't as many. But I, I would just search cling for any model that I could just to learn more how to navigate the playing field. And that taught me a lot. That that helps me realize what I what I wanted. And the balance that kind of goes back to the balance of what you talked about, figuring out that not all businesses are created equal. So, just like people and businesses have a lifeblood of their own that have different values and different missions. And so, you often want to know you are aligning with people that you'll agree with and then I don't think I think I underestimated that in the beginning. I didn't really realize that that could make a really big difference in your overall, you know fulfillment. You know it's not just business is business, its like oh there is more to this because you spend a lot of time with the people you work with. So being in the same like mine is really helps you get there faster and use your energy towards the mission as it should be.

Kathleen: [00:07:49] Sure.

Shannon: [00:07:51] Rather than managing a lot of politics.

Kathleen: [00:07:53] Well and how do you how did you separate that. You know early on in your career and you're looking for that mentor/mentors how did how did you how did you how did you go about that?

Shannon: [00:08:06] I think it was really elegant at first.[laughs]

Kathleen: [00:08:10] No one's had an elegant story Shannon so its fine.

Shannon: [00:08:13] In the beginning it was just like oh crap like you know I'm outnumbered or you know in all candor of the industries I've been in I've been more male dominant. So it was harder to find women like in the same companies. And also that that sometimes there's even competition I found within the women in the company which is super unfortunate. But you know I just again started reaching out to other people and other businesses and networking because I was also new to Los Angeles so you know I needed to make that network anyway. And little by little I started figuring that out because I would meet people in different industries. And I started seeing their worst trends in different industries. And now nobody wants to stereotype because obviously there's lots of variations of gray but it helps me see that okay, it's a good a good place to start that you can see a pull from certain industries have certain personality traits or certain types of people and that could be a starting point at least to gauge where I might be a good fit or not a good fit for me.

AD: [00:09:23] 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 dot com to find out more.

Kathleen: [00:09:38] So as you are going through that, call it discernment process, what industries were drawn to and and why?

Shannon: [00:09:50] Well you know I loved working with nonprofit. I loved working with for

profit companies that were 'cause oriented' because you know my mindset is a win-win type of mentality. And a lot of times I was aligned with people that were a little more oriented and if we win that means someone has to lose you know. And I liked this new model like Toms shoes for instance but one of the pioneers in that. But there are several that have followed and where you can have a purpose in your business and you can have profit. You can be serving people and having success. They don't have to be mutually exclusive. And that could be in the nonprofit world or the for profit world. I also love you know just personal development aspect because you know mindfulness stuff in business like bringing that more into business because I think it helps productivity. I think it helps because if you know when people are happier and they're more connected to who they are and able to do that in the workplace you get better results, you get better retention, you know all the things that are just good business, but it's just a good practice for life.

Kathleen: [00:11:04] So good business is more than just action gets results?

Shannon: [00:11:09] Yes I believe so.

Kathleen: [00:11:12] It is? TELL ME MORE about that.

Shannon: [00:11:16] Well I think you know good business is something that is there to serve your clients or your you know your ideal audience. So when you're having that kind of more servant heart approach to how you are approaching your clients they feel that. And you now that's a lot of what I worked with when I know now about storytelling and identity when you're coming from that place to help people it's a better connection, it's a more meaningful connection, for both the business and the client. And it's a sustainable relationship it's something that naturally wants to keep growing and stay together/ work together because you're both having a positive experience. And I just believe in that as a ripple effect all if your intention is to do good you know you attract other people that want to you know either support that mission or be a part of it and together you know everybody's elevated and it just creates this ripple effect that goes on and I think that's powerful beyond measure.

Kathleen: [00:12:25] We talk a lot on this show about corporate escapees and almost universally those corporate escapees talk about being in one place at like one time out of necessity. But from that necessity trying to remain true to themselves. Tell me a little bit about how you remain true to yourself in an environment that may not be your preferred environment.

Shannon: [00:13:11] Well I think you have to have a good health care plan in place. You know for me I realize that the approaches that a lot of management had around me were not the same style that I wanted to use on my team or, and it started to be really taxing. So you know I have to push back in and say like I'm not comfortable handling it that way. And ultimately it pay it pays off even though it does create some conflict along the way. But if it helps you know. We we're talking earlier about learning about people you're working with. If you do stay true to yourself. You know maybe you are planting seeds of that along the way just to learn about people around you. But if you give in to that it feels awful and even just even the seeds of keeping that integrity helps keep you anchored. That's one thing I think when I think of self-care, like what is it that helps you take center and grounded? If you're in an environment that doesn't really support your approach to things, I think building alliances, finding other people in your company that also share that, those values that you know you have to support internally to is important.

Kathleen: [00:14:49] Like Survivor or you know. [laughs]

Shannon: [00:14:53] I know it's sounds awful. You know?

Kathleen: [00:14:56] Are we going to get voted off the island at the end of this effort or?

Shannon: [00:14:59] Well, you kind of I think when you feel outnumbered you can start to doubt yourself. Right? Like am I the only one that thinks that this is a really horrible way to approach this acquisition or you know whatever the project at hand is is anybody else having conviction about how wrong this is. Or maybe perhaps they're teetering on lying like and having a better approach to this. So I think building alliances, maybe it is survival if you have to stay there you know for a time maybe until you get your exit strategy or maybe you know that's not your plan and you just need to stay there. But you have to find people that also reflect some of those views or I think you're so isolated and ultimately will struggle with doubting your views and maybe that could tempt you to cave in more on things that you don't want to.

Kathleen: [00:15:56] Do you think, go ahead.

Shannon: [00:15:56] Strategy you know strategy is the one thing that I tell other women especially I think men grow up with them kind of innately how they you know they're the old boys club they say. But I think it happens that they're like oh you know here's my grandson, here's my so-and-so, introduced me to your club, meet this person, let me help you with that internship. And women are newer in the workforce and I don't think we have been in those strategies as long or enough to even teach each other like that. We're still in that learning phase a lot. And you know finally have women that have been doing it that want to have to learn from, but it's still newer compared to the men in the corporate world so it seems more tactical but I think it's just because it's newer for us. But they're not bad things to have because it protects you from you know toxic thing and it helps to be your stronger self professionally and otherwise.

Kathleen: [00:16:58] I know you come from a long line of athletes. Your dad was a coach. your brothers coach, your nephew is a top performing football player, and I think in that environment from someone who doesn't come from that type of background you would think you had gotten all of those skills from that old boys network growing up around you. In that environment., what did you take out of it and how did that make you better or worse at kind of that corporate lifestyle?

Shannon: [00:17:32] If I'm understanding you I did. The ironic thing is I don't think I connected what I had learned growing up from a coach in those strategies to corporate America until later in the game. Probably like somewhere midway it resonated with me when I was trying not to lose myself from driving on the 405.

Kathleen: [00:17:56] Yeah.

Shannon: [00:17:56] Going like why? I should be so on top of the world right now with everything I'm doing well why do I feel this disconnect? And I started asking myself you know what are the pillars that make me feel me? And food, faith, and basketball are three of the words that popped out. And you know food had to do with community. Faith you know my spiritual growth. And in that in basketball and that seems funny to me. But that's when I made the connection that oh my gosh my dad has really taught me a lot of these things. It was just all through the voice and strategy of sports. And that started helping me I wanna say "tackle" this but kind of approach it in that way where you know like oh I saw my mindsets different, if your team mindset you know you learn how to use all your skills fits together for the greater good. Everybody is excited when they win the state championship. If you're kind of a ball hog you know and want to do everything yourself like you take those opportunities from other people for you to be the showboat and it's like OK well how did we handle that? You know back then and it seems simplistic but the lessons were so transferable and made it easier for me to navigate once I made that connection.

Kathleen: [00:19:10] I think that that's an incredible point of insight. And so you now knowing that about yourself today what what motivates you at this point? What keeps you going? Is it still food, faith, and basketball?

Shannon: [00:19:24] Yeah. Really. And you know if I can break that down a little more you know it's family and community. It's my friendships and love. You know love meaning that you know I put that in service. You know with giving back because I've been given a lot. It's feels really great to have had experience of people teaching me. And then you know I want to be able to help other women and girls too with what I've learned so maybe can shorten their learning curve. You know family and connection and to me is so important because it really does elevate us all. And you know just seeing that when people talk about karma or you reap what you sow. I think it's really true. Lived long enough to see evidence of that time and time again so that that motivates me a lot to give back, to help others. You know like we're all trying to grow in and get further ahead in our reason we're here on the planet and that motivates me a lot to be able to help other people achieve that to team growing myself so I can also be a better steward of the thing I've been given and just continue that that reach and ability to be of service. You know now in my business just as much my volunteer efforts.

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Kathleen: [00:21:45] Your journey has not been without bumps. I know that, but what advice would you give someone who is faced with challenges or something that you wouldn't expect?

Shannon: [00:22:03] When are faced with challenges, I have had a few of those. I do think that you know we talk about knowing who you are, knowing what you value, those are really fundamental pillars in helping me stay grounded when challenges arise. Because you are going to meet people who are going to disagree with me or challenge you and maybe try to you know take things away from you. You might have losses with people you love. You know like I lost my father early on and one of the greatest gifts he gave me was just knowing my core worth and value and even if he get in into like a new terrain that you're not certain about. That's ok, you just go back to that core - know who you are, listen to yourself, and just keep taking one step at a time and every little step as long as you're stepping you're going to get there. And even a higher level at some point you'll be able to see it that you just know sometimes doesn't feel that way, but connect back to your core, surround yourself with people that see you and support you and just keep going.

Kathleen: [00:23:25] Shannon you've done a lot. You've been in corporate America you've told stories for countless others. What's next for you?

Shannon: [00:23:36] Well I'm in a really fun building mode. So I want to keep building more of what I'm doing. I've enjoyed being out of corporate America where it's open to work with all different kinds of entrepreneurs and businesses. So that's a really fun challenge and building that so I can you know help and serve more people like we talk about. Building a family. Building community. All those things you know that big identity shift to leave from corporate America and when that was so much of my time and focused to now create a life that has room for all of it and it

takes putting those structures back in place in a different way but so worth it when you can work with like minded people like yourself and work with clients that are also motivated by you know we talked about purpose driven profit. You know that gets me really excited. The more businesses that you can talk to about that way that they think it has to be one or the other. And I really love getting to do that work with people to help them think we can do both and watch that light like come on. But I'm really into that that building phase right now and I'm really having a lot of fun.

Kathleen: [00:25:07] It sounds like a lot of fun and not bad for a kid who started selling Christmas cards door to door.

Shannon: [00:25:14] Yeah [laughs] Yup, yup.

Kathleen: [00:25:15] Yeah it really is about food, faith, and basketball and purpose driven success. Thank you. Thank you Shannon.

Shannon: [00:25:25] Thank you Kathleen.

Kathleen: [00:25:25] Thank you for sharing that and connecting the dots for us.

Shannon: [00:25:31] Thank you. And I wish everybody out there that is looking to connect those dots like I said to keep stepping in. You do eventually do that so. Thanks for having me. Giving me an opportunity to share.

Kathleen: [00:25:44] Good job coach.

Shannon: [00:25:47] Thank you.

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