

the dots

a podcast about connecting.

Ann Lawrence 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: [00:00:31] Ann Lawrence, attorney, social issues advocate, an entrepreneur and is the embodiment of Why. A partner in international law firm, raising a family, launching entrepreneurial platforms, and raising awareness of women's issues. She asks and she answers. Ann welcome to the dots. Thanks for joining me.

Ann Lawrence: [00:00:50] Thank you. I'm excited to be here.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:00:52] So tell me about your journey.

Ann Lawrence: [00:00:54] Oh it's a long journey.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:00:56] Where'd you grow up?

Ann Lawrence: [00:00:57] I actually grew up in northern California which really means Sacramento California. But I I don't say that. So you can kind of maybe think I was someplace cool.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:01:05] Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:01:05] But I grew up in a family business actually which while it was.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:01:10] Which business was it?

Ann Lawrence: [00:01:12] It was recreational vehicles and trade shows.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:01:15] How cool.

Ann Lawrence: [00:01:16] So we had you know retail. We had resale. We had you know just you know just about every sort of retail operation and kind of conceptual thing about cash flow and inventory turn, that you could think of. And it was I didn't realize it at the time but it was actually really phenomenal, you know kind of way to learn that because there's something about being in the groundwater of your childhood [laughs] you know?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:01:39] Right. Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:01:40] Right. They say if you don't, you know, teach a kid religion at some point. How can they, how can they fight it? You know they're either going to, you know, never understand it or become a cult member because they.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:01:48] Right. Exactly.

Ann Lawrence: [00:01:50] They don't have any any space around it. They can't kind of see inside and outside the walls. And you know my childhood was selling everything from like you know \$2 pipe fitting to a you know \$50000 recreational vehicle, fifth wheel trailer.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:02:06] Are you kidding me?

Ann Lawrence: [00:02:07] And so I had all sorts of sales guys, right. And at the time it was all men.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:02:11] Oh yeah oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:02:12] And.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:02:13] Some could argue is still today.

Ann Lawrence: [00:02:15] It is. Walk on most of recreational vehicle dealerships today. You probably cannot see too many women into that. That was that was just where I lived right, because it was you know, both my parents worked. I mean owned the business and worked there and seven days a week you were there. You did your homework there. You hung out there and it was great. I mean you know I went off to Yale right. And you know for college and I was so excited and so proud right like at "I'm at Yale and it's really awesome". It's like actually no.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:02:41] It's not Sacramento.

Ann Lawrence: [00:02:43] It's not Sacramento and I come home from my freshman year I'm feeling very like you know Ivy League. And of course like you kind of get off the plane and my parents are like, you know "the manager at this store quit so could you like run the parts store for the summer?" [laughs] Sure.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:02:59] Yeah. Everybody else was, you know hanging out on the Hamptons.

Ann Lawrence: [00:03:03] Literally. Right? Every single one of my friends are like "I'm in the Hamptons". "I'm in Martha's Vineyard." And "I'm wherever". And you know and yet it was fun and it was awesome. And I all of a sudden had kind of six employees and all of them who were twice my age and you better figure out how all of those parts because that's kind of what it was.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:03:21] How does that how does that impact you? Right. How does that you know, it either crushes you. Right? Or it empowers you. So, obviously it empowered you.

Ann Lawrence: [00:03:29] Nichi - what does not kill you makes you stronger.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:03:31] Well there's always that. That seems to be a running, a running theme on all of The Dots as well as the use of some type of rental truck at some point in your life.

Ann Lawrence: [00:03:41] Oh nice. I'm not sure I'm not sure.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:03:42] U-haul or Penske. It goes back and forth. So yours could be the RV. So keeping in the vehicle theme.

Ann Lawrence: [00:03:49] Yes I can work with that and I can work with that. I've never owned an RV and I've actually never like spent the night. Like I've never traveled in an RV because why?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:03:58] Right. Right. Why would you? The family that does hotels because they sell RVs.

Ann Lawrence: [00:04:04] Yup. My parents were like, why would we ever, ever like take one of these camping?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:04:08] How did they end up in that business?

Ann Lawrence: [00:04:10] Oh that's a good one. So my dad's father. Right. So my grandfather, my dad's side. was you know amongst a bunch of you know Iowa farmers and moved west. And so everybody in my dad's line of business for like you know like the whole lineage was they were they were always in business. They were always entrepreneurs. Like I'm like all Lawrence's worked for themselves. You got a paycheck from a Lawrence and nobody else. But they were like very entrepreneurial and they just kind of, they did what they did. And then my grandfather came out to Los Angeles, or out of Sacramento and got this what would now be a monopoly, basically. So all you know 80 percent of all RVs have the same heating element, the same air conditioning.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:04:54] Well they call it a common platform. It's not. [laughs]

Ann Lawrence: [00:04:56] Back then it was just "hey, there's only one guy making this refrigerators for RVs".

Kathleen Buczko: [00:05:00] Right. And Bill does it really good. [laughs]

Ann Lawrence: [00:05:03] So you know it was a European company called Thetford and they didn't really want to deal with, even the dealerships and the manufacturer. So my grandfather got like at the time like kind of all of the West Coast and then they kept like paying him to to cut it down but basically he was the only person that could buy aftermarket parts. So if your refrigerator broke down.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:05:23] Perfect.

Ann Lawrence: [00:05:24] Perfect. It was genius. So my dad was like a tech geek. So when he was sort of working in the business with his dad, he was the one kind of like creating those initial skew codes before there were skew codes. Because they used to have to do like you know, manual inventory because that's what everybody did.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:05:38] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:05:39] And so he was like that kind of super early Apple adopter who was like "this is the most amazing thing. Like technology is going to take over the world". And we we're like "what?". [laughs] "I don't know?" and "we can just as easily have these four guys do it.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:05:51] Right. Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:05:52] And so we, you know, it was parts. I mean it was every part. And so you had, you know, the person off the street who wanted to fix their refrigerator themselves. You had that dealership that something broke on the way or their customer came back. So you kind of had all sorts of B to B, B to C going on and they had to figure out pricing and developing it. And then how do you stock it. Because it took weeks to get these parts.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:06:14] Right. Right. The container has to arrive.

Ann Lawrence: [00:06:16] Right. And then you had all these foreign currency issues. Right. Because you know it was really hard to figure out on such a real time basis and so.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:06:26] Was there even a real time basis. I mean you had to like call Svane in you know, Reykjavik and see how much it was then.

Ann Lawrence: [00:06:33] Yeah. And so once a year they'd fly out there and they'd set the prices.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:06:36] Wow.

Ann Lawrence: [00:06:37] And they were like - we don't want to deal with Americans and we certainly don't want to deal with like a dozen of them or 50 of them. And so.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:06:44] Much like North Korea today.

Ann Lawrence: [00:06:46] Right right. Very similar. Less dangerous though.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:06:50] True. Go ahead.

Ann Lawrence: [00:06:51] Your rockets.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:06:52] Your rockets.

Ann Lawrence: [00:06:53] And so it was it was great because we were we were sort of having to think about all those things. What are the shipping costs? And how does that work? And how do you develop that business? And then of course at some point my dad was like "I'm ready to ...". You know that's this business is going great and other family members are doing it. But I'm the only son. I'm going to go out and do more. I'm going to buy some RV dealerships, because once you've been selling RV parts,

Kathleen Buczko: [00:07:17] Sure.

Ann Lawrence: [00:07:17] That sounds like a great thing. And they started producing trade shows and you know still today. California State Fairgrounds you know once a year, you can see him producing a show because he flies up there. Even though he's retired and lives two miles from me now. He flies up there and just does it for the you know, RV dealers.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:07:32] The sheer joy of it?

Ann Lawrence: [00:07:35] The sheer joy of it. The sheer joy of it. He just he loves you know, producing trade shows. And so he goes and does it and I absolutely loves it. And frankly for my childhood now so now I've been in the parts world. Now I'm in the kind of R.V. sales world. Now you know once or twice a year we basically take over the State Fairgrounds and put a bunch of RVs there and like have a big show. Like a big you know. It was so much fun. So then you're seeing all these people right? Now how do you get people to pay 10 bucks to show up to your show?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:08:05] Right. Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:08:06] So now we're in an event mode. And we're you know, looking at commercials and doing commercials that totally flop. And then going "oh, I see that now". [laughs]

Kathleen Buczko: [00:08:17] It didn't work.

Ann Lawrence: [00:08:17] It didn't work.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:08:18] No. Oh wow.

Ann Lawrence: [00:08:19] So it was, so it was great. And frankly I mean I went, so I went to Yale and I was going to go. I knew I want to go to law school because frankly we've been involved in a lawsuit and I hated the lawyers.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:08:31] Oh. Really?

Ann Lawrence: [00:08:31] I thought they. A. I thought they were super dismissive to me. They didn't understand the business and I couldn't validate what they said. I didn't know if they were telling the truth. And they said "Well, the judge would never. And the court. And you can't. And this doesn't and that's not how the contract works". And I just was so frustrated by feeling out of control of that and feeling like I couldn't protect my father and I couldn't protect the family business. This was like you know I was 14 (years old) at the time. I'm going going to law school. I remember going to the library and like opening the book because that's what we use to do. And was like "OK, how long is law school.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:09:04] Right. Why not?

Ann Lawrence: [00:09:04] No one in my family had gone to law school.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:09:07] Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:09:07] It just wasn't, it just wasn't a thing. I was like, I'm going to college. I'm going to law school. Told my friends I was going to Yale. At that time they were like "well honey, I think it might be hard to get in there." And I was like "That's it! I'm applying there!. Nowhere else.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:09:18] Really. So you didn't apply any place else.

Ann Lawrence: [00:09:20] They made me apply one more. One other place.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:09:22] Where?

Ann Lawrence: [00:09:22] I did.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:09:23] You did.

Ann Lawrence: [00:09:23] I applied at Pepperdine.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:09:24] Your safety school.

Ann Lawrence: [00:09:25] That was my safety school. My parents were like OK. And my dad is like calling everybody he knows. That every like, you see like if she doesn't apply? Look can you still you know, can you still get in? And then I was like I'm going to law school. I'm going. I'm going to law school. But I'm not going into practice because who wants to hang out with a bunch of lawyers all the time?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:09:42] All true. Yeah. I was on the debate team as an undergrad. So everybody's a lawyer.

Ann Lawrence: [00:09:48] I know. I know it.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:09:49] Yeah absolutely. I get together to argue with them and prove that I'm not a lawyer and still can beat them.

Ann Lawrence: [00:09:54] Right. Exactly.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:09:54] It's just fun.

Ann Lawrence: [00:09:55] It's fun. So I mean I do like the arguing part of being a lawyer.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:09:58] Yeah. Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:09:59] But didn't want to practice. And of course you know you kind of get into law school and you realize well, it is actually sort of an apprenticeship, sort of training thing. Like law school teaches you theories and concepts but doesn't really teach you the practice of law. It's probably why they call it practice. And then there's something.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:10:18] And how many lawyers end up quote unquote 'going into practicing' going "Oh my God. I hate this.

Ann Lawrence: [00:10:24] A lot.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:10:25] Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:10:25] A lot.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:10:25] Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:10:26] And everyone says it's really because most people go to law school, a significant number of people go to law school, go to law school because they don't know what else to do. Or you know they don't want to become a doctor. And you know mom and dad are pushing them to do something. So you know a lot of people in there that are just a little bit lost. And then really dislike it. I was one of those embarrassing people that was like "Oh my god. This is awesome!".

Kathleen Buczko: [00:10:48] You are the: got all the books, carrying it, I love this. Really?

Ann Lawrence: [00:10:52] The school part was OK.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:10:53] Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:10:54] So you know the way it works is like after you've done two years you spend a summer somewhere.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:10:59] Right. Did you do a law practice did you do a club ship.

Ann Lawrence: [00:11:02] I did a you know big law firm in New York City. And I mean you know I'm so clueless. I didn't realize they pay you. [laughs] They pay you.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:11:11] And they pay you well.

Ann Lawrence: [00:11:12] Well, for like the summer. They pay you like the equivalent of if you were a full time associate, like weekly. And literally what they showed at the time like was like your weekly salary. I thought that was the whole summer. I was like, 'Oh I've got to get some money from my parents'. And you know and like.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:11:26] Yeah because New York is really expensive versus Sacramento and I'd be making a commission if I went home right. [laughs]

Ann Lawrence: [00:11:30] Seriously, right I could sell. And so you know but of course that's what you do. But I was like: A. they pay you for this thing, kind of on day five of being there and of course I was at one those New York firms. It was like have your passport ready and a bag packed. And day five they were like, "get on a plane Argentina." And I was like "Yes!". And then from there on it was like just here you are sitting with CEOs. I'm like, I'm in my 20s and I'm sitting with the CEO and he's listening to me. Because I'm drafting risk factors about his bond offering. But he's listening to me about cash flow and inventory turn and questions I have about his business. And if I have a question, I look at this equally young person from Goldman Sachs who has an Excel spreadsheet and a math major and he'll then dig into the answers and my questions and model things out. And I was thinking. You guys are going to pay me? I would pay you to do this.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:12:25] To do this.

Ann Lawrence: [00:12:25] Right?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:12:26] Yeah because it's fun.

Ann Lawrence: [00:12:27] Cause I've been thinking about my family business for so long. And frankly at the dinner table when I had a good idea or what I considered to be a good idea, you can see my dad like see a three year old say it.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:12:36] Right. [Charlie Brown adults voices] Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:12:38] That's sweet honey. That's cute. So all the ideas that I had.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:12:41] Go out and sell some more RV's for us. Would you?

Ann Lawrence: [00:12:44] Yeah. You'll get it someday. When you get there. When you know. That school of learning is cool but you'll never find a husband there.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:12:51] No no you don't want to do that.

Ann Lawrence: [00:12:54] So. So I mean you know and they were incredibly supportive actually which just kind of what I totally love about. They were like, whatever you want to do. Right.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:13:01] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:13:01] You know. You be you. You want to go to college? Great. You don't want to go to college? Great. You know. But.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:13:07] How many siblings do you have?

Ann Lawrence: [00:13:08] One.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:13:09] Ok.

Ann Lawrence: [00:13:09] Older brother.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:13:11] Ok. Is he in the family business now?

Ann Lawrence: [00:13:12] He's not.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:13:13] Ok.

Ann Lawrence: [00:13:13] He was for a short while and then he was like, yeah no.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:13:15] Ok.

Ann Lawrence: [00:13:16] I'm out.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:13:16] Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:13:17] So that was that was that was a childhood. And then I just kept practicing law and I just kept staying at law firm life.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:13:27] What about life, law firm life, did you like?

Ann Lawrence: [00:13:30] I love that you got to see so many companies. I realized kind of my special snowflakes skill. I think everybody has a special snowflake skill. What I love is the data points. I love seeing what company A through Z did. And then you know seeing Company Number 53 and saying let me extrapolate across for you and drop it here so that we can talk about what you know and I can compress all of this other data. And and I love you know, synchronizing that data and sort of seeing the inefficiencies and seeing the problems and being able to figure things out.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:14:10] What was your undergrad degree in?

Ann Lawrence: [00:14:12] Political Science.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:14:14] OK. Very standard law school.

Ann Lawrence: [00:14:16] Very.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:14:16] You had every intent of going to law school.

Ann Lawrence: [00:14:19] Oh absolutely.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:14:20] Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:14:20] That was it. I'd done it you know.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:14:22] Because you talk about data and light up about data like a math major.

Ann Lawrence: [00:14:26] I love numbers. I mean that's what I love about law firms is that they've turned into businesses. And what's valuable and value add is being able to walk in and talk about profitability whereas kind of the old school law firm model was like not thinking that way. And then you see a bunch of them kind of blow up. And a couple people go to jail and.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:14:47] Yeah. Right. All the trailing affects. Right. Exactly.

Ann Lawrence: [00:14:50] And then people are paying attention to it. And that's something that I really do love and I love looking at the business of law and thinking about how that should evolve. And the reason why I'm, and I've been at D-La about seven years, what I started practicing in ninety nine, so been there awhile. I've been there seven years. Been practicing you know.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:15:08] A long time.

Ann Lawrence: [00:15:09] A long time and trying not to say it because it might age me.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:15:12] No. I's not my original hair color.

Ann Lawrence: [00:15:15] Right. [laughs] It's mine.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:15:15] You win, you win. [laughs]

Ann Lawrence: [00:15:17] Not for much longer, graying by the day.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:15:20] Yes exactly.

Ann Lawrence: [00:15:22] But what I loved about you know D-La. which is the largest you know, one of the largest and one of the top five large law firms in the world well over 4000 lawyers. What I loved about it was it wasn't old. It was basically a bunch of law firms came together, merges and said "We'd like to create a law firm that acts like a business and recognizes that some law things and some work that lawyers do can be somewhat commoditized. And we should be able to charge appropriately for that". But then there's also this strategic, you know concierge understanding of the law that is worth a lot more. And we want to capture that too. And everything in between. As opposed to just being like we do trademarks or we do this.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:16:09] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:16:10] What does your company need? And that's why I was really excited when we started going to these these sectors, with business specialties. So I was like that's what you need. I mean it's like it's like you know, the movie Top Gun.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:16:21] Yeah. Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:16:22] I would say like.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:16:23] You just dated it yourself.

Ann Lawrence: [00:16:24] I know.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:16:25] Right there.

Ann Lawrence: [00:16:26] I know. Darn it I was so close.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:16:26] You were so close. So close.

Ann Lawrence: [00:16:27] I was really young. But they said you know, with all this technology our folks are losing their dogfighting skills. Their ability to just get in, engage and understand this scenario. And I think that happened to the law that after kind of the dot com burst in '01 everyone realized that if we want to keep raising our rates we better get really specialized. So Jane does this credit facility over and over and over again and she does it excellently. And Joe does this bond deal excellently and frankly you need it because the market is changing.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:17:01] It's important.

Ann Lawrence: [00:17:01] Right. Right. And if you're going to paying someone a thousand bucks an hour, you want it to, you want them to know it. But now if that person is specialized and if that person is specialized who's actually advising their boards?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:17:11] Right. Who's bringing the dots together. Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:17:13] Exactly.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:17:14] Right. It is really about how do you weave that narrative together. Whether it's on your personal life or whether organizationally.

Ann Lawrence: [00:17:21] Yeah.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:17:21] You know we talk about a lot, you know we want to have people who have seen the movie before.

Ann Lawrence: [00:17:26] Yeah.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:17:27] Right. But a movie isn't a single frame.

Ann Lawrence: [00:17:30] Exactly.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:17:30] Right? There's a beginning. A middle and an end. And how do you manage through that beginning, middle, and end? Because they're distinctly different and have different requirements. But it's important to have seen the whole movie.

Ann Lawrence: [00:17:42] Yeah and not to be first impressioning it.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:17:44] Yeah. No exactly.

Ann Lawrence: [00:17:46] That's exactly right.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:17:47] So how do you become a mother in the midst of a high flying law career?

Ann Lawrence: [00:17:54] Mostly thanks to my husband because I was you know.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:17:58] Not an uncommon thing.

Ann Lawrence: [00:17:59] Right. Oh it's fine. And listen he is, you know, office man and partner

of another large law firm. We met first day of law school. Embarrassingly enough. Got married the day after the bar exam. So all our friends could do it before, be there and enjoy it before their bar.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:18:17] That is so very movie like.

Ann Lawrence: [00:18:22] There you go. And he's a litigator and I'm transactional. So we you know, we don't practice in any way in the same space but we can kind of appreciate our lives. But when we got married I said to him I said "listen I never want to have kids.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:18:37] Really?

Ann Lawrence: [00:18:37] And and he's a guy so he's like "OK.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:18:41] Ok.

Ann Lawrence: [00:18:41] And I was like so. Like I wanted it in a prenup. As if you could do that?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:18:44] Right. [laughs]

Ann Lawrence: [00:18:46] You can't divorce me and you can't get mad at me later. Because you know when you first get married you think.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:18:51] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:18:51] You can like contract those things. Certainly new lawyers thought we could contract those things.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:18:55] I bet you did. Yeah. I'm here to tell you it doesn't work way. But it's ok.

Ann Lawrence: [00:18:58] It turns out, right? Thankfully. [laughs] And so you know.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:19:04] Wait. Did your uterus have to sign the contract to or?

Ann Lawrence: [00:19:07] I didn't really think about that.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:19:08] Just checking.

Ann Lawrence: [00:19:09] Right.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:19:09] Because what instrument would you use.

Ann Lawrence: [00:19:12] To like enforce that?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:19:13] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:19:13] I know it was you know it was. I'm not saying it was well thought out. [laughs]

Kathleen Buczko: [00:19:17] [laughs] Yale undergrad just saying OK. Go ahead. Go ahead.

Ann Lawrence: [00:19:21] There we were in Manhattan and it's you know it's interesting. So my

mom had polio as a kid.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:19:25] OK.

Ann Lawrence: [00:19:26] And you never know it now and they did these crazy surgeries on her and she's great but they told her she'd never be able to have kids. And when they told her that at a young age she felt like she was ruined and damage and she is so type B. I mean she's the sweetest person. The most amazing person and yet you could tell that it impacted her.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:19:46] Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:19:47] And she said to me literally from the time, you want to have kids? Have kids. You don't want to have kids? Don't have kids. Like it is. It is. And that wasn't a common thing to say back then.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:19:55] Not at all. No, not at all.

Ann Lawrence: [00:19:57] That she's like you will never hear me say I want grandkids. You will never hear those words. Not because I don't but because it's your choice. And it's a huge commitment.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:20:05] Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:20:06] And so while that kind of went over my head right at those moments I can look back at it now and say it gave me the freedom to say "yeah, I'm just going to just go run my career". But then somewhere, about you know nine plus years into our, both our careers and our marriage, I literally just kind of turned this corner. And whatever biological clock was there was like, now. There should be a child. So I set my husband down and I said "I'm really sorry".

Kathleen Buczko: [00:20:34] You remember that one little. We need to renegotiate it.

Ann Lawrence: [00:20:39] Yeah. Now I really want to have a kid. I don't feel like I'm going to be a complete human being. I can't even explain it because I thought I was fully baked by the time I hit my 30s.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:20:49] Sure.

Ann Lawrence: [00:20:50] And I said you know I can't explain it but I don't I don't and I know that that's unfair to you. But at this point like your my top choice to be the dad.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:21:01] There you go.

Ann Lawrence: [00:21:01] I want it to be you but it's not, it's not debatable. Right? If you come back and you say you don't want to be a dad like that's cool. But I don't know if I would be a whole person or not be telling you the truth if I'd say "OK great let's move on". It's not a debate. I felt so bad. I felt so conflicted.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:21:20] Yeah yeah. It's a huge deal.

Ann Lawrence: [00:21:23] Yeah!

Kathleen Buczko: [00:21:23] It's not, it's not pedestrian.

Ann Lawrence: [00:21:25] And I don't want you to say it to make me happy because it's a two person deal.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:21:31] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:21:32] Like I'm not saying I want to have a kid and you can just keep living your life because at that point you know our jobs caused us to travel a lot and we didn't care. Right? If I was in New York for a deal and it happened to be Thanksgiving. Great. Fly out.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:21:46] Ok.

Ann Lawrence: [00:21:46] Hop on a plane. You can work out of your office in New York and no one knows the difference and who cares and it's great.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:21:51] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:21:52] So we had all that flexibility and I was certainly just completely changing the game and I said. "You know, you're a guy and I'm going to give you a few months". Like we are going to have this conversation. We're having this dinner. I'm telling you this and then I'm going to revisit it in three to six months.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:22:08] OK.

Ann Lawrence: [00:22:09] I'll let you back process that.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:22:10] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:22:11] Another benefit of being married a decade.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:22:13] Right. Yeah. You know what the timing is.

Ann Lawrence: [00:22:15] And you know your spouse and you know how he's going to think about it. And you know at the time of course we've got other friends having kids. Most of our friends actually had already had kids.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:22:25] Right. Yeah. Ten years in. Absolutely.

Ann Lawrence: [00:22:27] And you know when someone else is.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:22:28] Because they had all married teachers.

Ann Lawrence: [00:22:30] Yeah right [laughs]

Kathleen Buczko: [00:22:30] Just going to say.

Ann Lawrence: [00:22:32] Right. They're kind of off doing you know, that thing. And we didn't really have any understanding and nor had we honestly to some degree paid any attention. Right. Because once all your friends have kids, you just go wherever they go, and bring them with them. You see and the kids are sleeping and you're having dinner at their house and you don't really notice.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:22:49] No no. They don't carry on conversations for a while so you kind of just wait until that. Oh wow you're smart.

Ann Lawrence: [00:22:55] You're smart and. And you know sure our friend seem tired and exhausted but again.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:23:01] Early law careers. Same thing.

Ann Lawrence: [00:23:03] Same thing.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:23:03] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:23:03] So it seemed like it worked. And now we're two kids later so get an eight year old boy and a five year old girl. And I joke that, no he's lucky we didn't have kids sooner because I wouldn't have stopped. Like I just.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:23:18] Just you're into it.

Ann Lawrence: [00:23:19] I am into it. I would have had 10.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:23:21] Really?

Ann Lawrence: [00:23:22] Yeah.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:23:23] Wow.

Ann Lawrence: [00:23:24] I just, there was nothing more fabulous to me than being pregnant. There's nothing more fabulous to me than giving birth.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:23:32] Wow.

Ann Lawrence: [00:23:33] I would just go back in like wash, rinse, and repeat it.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:23:37] Really? Because those are the two most terrifying things I've done, has been pregnancy and birth.

Ann Lawrence: [00:23:45] Interesting.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:23:46] Terrifying. Absolutely great with the humans once rejected. I call pregnancy the only host parasite relationship that you're not treated for antibiotics.

Ann Lawrence: [00:23:59] But it's like it's so amazing. There's a human being.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:24:04] Yeah a tape worm. Same thing.

Ann Lawrence: [00:24:08] But it's going to grow up to be something good.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:24:09] You hope. Oh yeah I know that's fascinating.

Ann Lawrence: [00:24:15] I was literally I mean it was like whatever the dopamine, I mean whatever the chemicals for me. Both

Kathleen Buczko: [00:24:22] Yeah. Because you're probably tiny. I'm a bigger girl so I needed more. It didn't produce.

Ann Lawrence: [00:24:28] Boys or, I have a boy and a girl and I thought maybe be totally different. It didn't. It didn't matter.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:24:32] Wow.

Ann Lawrence: [00:24:33] It's a total. It was a total high for me.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:24:35] Where as I am totally into the motherhood thing. The pregnancy thing. No.

Ann Lawrence: [00:24:41] It's like.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:24:42] And could, to this moment, reproduce. Which is terrifying. Absolutely terrifying. I consider it spectrally.

Ann Lawrence: [00:24:50] Once a week. I like joke with my husband or try to bribe him in some way for another child. Like at least once a week. And you know and he like, do you think that'll ever end? And I don't, like it will.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:25:01] It will.

Ann Lawrence: [00:25:01] Obviously.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:25:01] I will say it. Or at least I've heard rumor of it. I have not crossed that threshold but I've heard rumor of it.

Ann Lawrence: [00:25:07] But see I'm about productivity and efficiency and think every day you're pregnant, you are like doing this double time.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:25:14] Double time. It's double time every day. I've never really thought about that that way.

Ann Lawrence: [00:25:17] If I don't have to do anything else that day, I have done something amazing. I've like built a finger.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:25:20] Right. Exactly. Exactly. Which the other side can't do.

Ann Lawrence: [00:25:24] Right.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:25:26] So let's talk about that advocacy of women.

Ann Lawrence: [00:25:29] You know. So my first child born in 2009 was a boy but I will say that like the dawning realization at that moment of motherhood and I liken it to saying you know, it's like black and white to color that you.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:25:45] OK.

Ann Lawrence: [00:25:45] You go into the hospital having not parented and it's like the moment of birth to me. I felt like the world went from black and white to color.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:25:54] Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:25:54] The nuance, the understanding my place in the universe, raison d'être.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:26:02] Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:26:02] Whatever you want to say. And and oddly enough and for whatever reason. Medial in that moment I started to have some affinity with other women.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:26:16] Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:26:16] And I realized something I hadn't realized which was I had not avoided women, but for sure doing you know, high yield bond deals with Goldman Sachs and Letham and all these people for all these years. You know and I've said this before to others. It took me a long time to realize that when people told you, you're not like other women, that's an insult. It's not a compliment.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:26:40] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:26:41] And I was always then striving for that cookie. That you know, oh you work hard. Not you know of course not like other women.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:26:50] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:26:50] You know you don't you don't care. You don't have that sensitivity or you're willing to pull that all night or whatever it is that I was willing to do that separated me and gave me the gold star and made me cool. And in some ways was you know, that client or that firm explaining to themselves why they didn't have other women on the team. Oh it doesn't bother you that.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:27:12] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:27:13] You know.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:27:13] Justifying the behavior that they've you know been misogynist forever.

Ann Lawrence: [00:27:17] Yeah it doesn't bother you that clients hit on you.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:27:19] Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:27:20] I mean it does. I mean you're right. I guess I don't care because I grew up with a bunch of the sales guys.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:27:25] Right the RV sales guy. Really not any different.

Ann Lawrence: [00:27:28] Yeah he's got more money and a nicer suit.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:27:31] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:27:32] And and again being in that place, I was thankful to be there. And like I

was thankful to be there so I wasn't going to be offended. And I thought I was changing things.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:27:45] Because you were there.

Ann Lawrence: [00:27:46] Because I was there.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:27:47] Right. Just because you were there.

Ann Lawrence: [00:27:48] Because when I graduated from law school it was 50/50 men and women have been for a couple of years and everyone fed us this story that it was all about to even out. It had been a pipeline problem.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:27:58] Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:27:58] Don't worry.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:28:00] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:28:00] If you do good and you do well, you maybe you have to work a little bit harder but you're paving the path.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:28:05] Right. Exactly.

Ann Lawrence: [00:28:06] And somewhere in there and it was a conflation of things and in fact when my son was like two or three months old and I'm thinking I've no time for anything. Let's just be clear. And I didn't take a leave because you know you're you know you have to like call yourself disabled.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:28:22] Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:28:22] And I was offended by that. So I refuse to turn in the paperwork. So I said I'm not disabled. I had a kid. I wasn't disabled. And if a client calls me.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:28:32] A man would be disabled. Hence the need for the form.

Ann Lawrence: [00:28:36] Hence the need for the one that was clearly not created by someone who created and had a kid. I think. I was like so what you're saying is I don't have any malpractice insurance. So if a client calls me and asks me something and I happen to be on some theoretical leave. They're going to call me anyway because they don't care. They're going to text me anyway they are going to do with they're going to do. And I give an answer and I get sued, like malpractice insurance? That's not cool for me. So I will choose not to be disabled. And will chose not to take leave. I will work at home.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:29:04] I'll see you on Monday.

Ann Lawrence: [00:29:05] Yeah. Or I'll you know have a messenger, messenger some stuff on Monday. Like, whatever.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:29:09] Right. Exactly.

Ann Lawrence: [00:29:10] Now the benefit of that was I was you know a decade in my career by then.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:29:13] Exactly.

Ann Lawrence: [00:29:14] So I had my client and I had my stuff so wouldn't have worked had I been concerned frankly about fertility. Right because like here I'm you know now 35. I mean I didn't care because I didn't think about it and didn't even dawn on me to have a kid until you know 33 or something. So I wasn't listening to all of this. I think much more current noise. Noise isn't the right word but all of this pushing about you know you better have your kids super fast or.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:29:41] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:29:41] You could lose it. Which is important. Because not everybody can have a kid at 50.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:29:46] No. Exactly.

Ann Lawrence: [00:29:47] But balanced with you also going to have to you have to get to the place where you're ready to have kids. Turns out there are like a lot of work.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:29:56] Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:29:56] They need a lot.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:29:57] Yeah yeah. My husband I had the exact opposite experience right. So we had our first one in graduate school. So our oldest we joked had like four onesies and a cavalcade of graduate assistants between the University of Chicago and University of Southern California, that were his nannies. It was like, "oh here's a backpack, Ian will walk around with you". Because you know Ian was eight and you know we were graduates doing the you know, he was doing his Ph.D. I was doing business school. It was an interesting experience and then you fast forward 10 years later. So there's 10 years top to bottom between my kids and the 15 year old is like what do you mean we're not 1k fliers anymore on United. You mean they don't hold the plane anymore for us. Yeah. Are you going to travel more dad, because I really liked when they did that. And it's such an amazing difference between those two human beings.

Ann Lawrence: [00:31:01] I can relate because we're definitely, I mean by the time our kids showed up, we stay in the hotels we stay in. We you know, we travel. In both instances I would typically take them. When I had one kid I would take the kid, take my mom, or take the nanny and you know just pay the difference. Right. And say if you need me there, that's fine.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:31:26] Here's the baggage.

Ann Lawrence: [00:31:26] Yeah. Here's the baggage. I'm not making you pay for it but I'm willing to make less. You know I'm willing to pay for that. And again that's a first world problem to have.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:31:34] Absolutely.

Ann Lawrence: [00:31:35] But for me it was like, it's that or I'm not going to work.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:31:38] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:31:39] Because I'm not going to be away from mine I'm month old. I'm not going to you know, a night's fine or whatever. That I feel OK with that. You know obviously I feel

like my husband is a good father. But it's not about his parenting skills. It's like more than two or three nights for me.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:31:55] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:31:55] It's I miss them. I'm not going to be good. I'm not going to be productive for you.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:31:59] Right.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:31:59] I'm not going to be able to walk in and solve your problem or be creative if all I'm thinking about is when's the next flight. And can I get home. Because you know that's just not going to, it's just not going to happen.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:32:10] And I think that that's a dynamic that women face. Right. You know it doesn't matter kind of where you sit on the food chain. But it's a split brain and organizations and governments and everything markets, need to begin to assess that. That do you choose to shut off this level of productivity for our organization, our community, our world. Because you're of your own inability to adapt.

Ann Lawrence: [00:32:38] What is productivity?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:32:40] Yeah.

Ann Lawrence: [00:32:40] I mean that and efficiency and time and how do you make that work. And and that's some of the most interesting stuff that I've been working on is been engaged by a number of big companies to come in and really look at, how is your work-life and impacting your life-life. And that's everything from like how much productivity is really happening you know in corporate America today? The latest studies show it's like 17 minutes in a day. Max.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:33:16] Oh I can see that.

Ann Lawrence: [00:33:17] Switching conference calls that don't make any sense. Multiple calls stacked on top of each other. Your problem for a call and then you don't have any time after that call goes to the next call. And so the more you look at the neuroscience of what this is. The more you kind of see what's not working. And why we're all sticking to this old school model of you've got to be in the office and I need you here in New York and you're gonna do this and you got to do that without looking at the productivity and the deliverables.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:33:45] Mm hmm.

Ann Lawrence: [00:33:46] And I think for everyone, for every parent because to me it's like now listen I don't I don't think parenting is 50/50 in the sense that I just don't think kids look at their parents in the same way. And that's not gender specific to me that's just, your children will bond with each human in a different way and they need different things. And you know I always say you should parent the kid that you have not the kid that you want.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:34:13] Yeah. Well absolutely.

Ann Lawrence: [00:34:14] People read books and I make my kid happy by doing this and I'm going to make my kid less shy by doing this. And I'm going to ... Well no, not really.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:34:22] Right. No. Exactly.

Ann Lawrence: [00:34:24] And if you like music that doesn't mean your kid does. And screaming at them every night to play violin for three years isn't going to make them love music or play violin.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:34:35] Or play the violin well. No exactly. Exactly.

Ann Lawrence: [00:34:38] And so you know to me we just we don't have any flexibility or freedom as as parents to create that those roles. And as people in the work force to create those roles and I think that is a big part of what's what's frankly pushing women out of the workforce partially because their jobs are more at risk. I'm more likely to get ostracized than my husband. We've been doing the same big law firm jobs for a really long time. And generally speaking his job is more secure. So if one of us, doesn't matter you know that we're equivalently paid essentially.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:35:17] Equivalently educated and all of the equivalents are there.

Ann Lawrence: [00:35:21] Right. What matters is when you're thinking about feeding your family, whose job is the most stable if one of us is going to stop working.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:35:29] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:35:30] And listen for us kind of from the outset because of course you know the minute someone could tell I was pregnant are you coming back to work right.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:35:39] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:35:39] When? Tomorrow? Like yeah, I'll be there. [laughs] And and and no one asked you know my husband that. So. So you could see already that that fissure and that pressure. Because of course once you have the child you're like, you're right, I don't want to come back and hang out with you guys that much.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:35:55] Right right. I would really rather work right here on this other little human.

Ann Lawrence: [00:35:59] This little human is really awesome and loves me and you guys are just annoying and you know.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:36:03] yeah, all true.

Ann Lawrence: [00:36:04] So when you hit that inflection point and you're looking around and you're also trying to protect your family. Of course it leans towards the guy who probably by that point is making more money or you know it just it's it's just statistics right.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:36:18] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:36:19] Men make more money for working less. They just do.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:36:21] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:36:22] And we can think about why and we can talk about why but.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:36:24] So how do our organizations, how do communities change that?

Ann Lawrence: [00:36:29] I think.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:36:30] Right 51 percent of the population?

Ann Lawrence: [00:36:32] Unconscious bias is huge. When you start to unpack some of that. And another thing I do love about D-La is that because we're taking a business approach to it. And frankly Amazon did this as well when they looked at their diversity program that you got to make it work for business.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:36:54] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:36:54] Right. Like if it's a sticker and a cocktail party it's just going to be a budget line item.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:36:59] Right. Exactly.

Ann Lawrence: [00:37:00] But when you can prove that diversity is going to drive your bottom line and it's going to you know, get you market share as a law firm then people start to pay attention. And they start to actually as opposed to paying lip service to it, try to solve the problem. And another thing that that came out when I started talking to people about it. Because I realized that when I was talking to a men about it and I had to give to our global partnership at one point, so about seven hundred and fifty partners. These are my colleagues of which in the room about 90 percent are men. Because even though that's not the dynamic when you have a meeting the women are back oftentimes back in the business center. They don't even come to the presentations because they're they've got to you know a different level set. So we're less likely to to do the business development even amongst inside of our own firm. And so there I was you know tasked with talking about how you know diversity can you know drive revenue and how you use that to build client relationships. And and I struggle. So I was like you know A. thanks for giving me this topic because yes I felt passionate about it. Yes it's what I've been working on. But like it's it's possibly going to hit like a lead balloon right.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:38:17] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:38:17] When when everybody else is kind of talking and all the amazing ways you can drive relationships. Right. Someone is talking about like all the you know all the great reports they've done in the speaking engagements and they're talking about parachuting and I'm talking about like how diversity drives business.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:38:31] Yeah. And suddenly changing the world.

Ann Lawrence: [00:38:35] Right. Went out without saying you're going to have to give up a piece of the pie to do it right. Let's talk about how we grow the pie.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:38:42] Exactly. Just make the pie bigger.

Ann Lawrence: [00:38:44] Let's make the pie bigger because our pie can be bigger. Our law firm pie can be bigger. Our whatever pie can get bigger. And so I was I literally even up last night of the I don't think you know I'm talking our chief marketing officer I'm like I legitimately I don't have a fear of speaking that's not my issue. I have a fear of getting like you know totally got the tomatoes being thrown. or whatever bread.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:39:06] Some type of cartoon happening as we do this.

Ann Lawrence: [00:39:10] As we do this because I know I'm going to feel the energy of the crowd by if I like totally annoy everybody. And so what I finally kind of decided at that 3:00 a.m. hour was like you know how do I how do we talk about it from that perspective. And and and really take the position of saying this is good for everyone and we need to stop saying that you know, gosh it's that guy in the corner that's to blame and and it's men, and someone's going to have to give something up. and all this negativity. I said. Can we just for a second strip the negativity out of the conversation let's just talk about the solution. I actually don't care why we're here. I don't care what the problem is and I don't care why. Because there's probably a million reasons why. the layers of the onion and we spend so much time looking back to figure out.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:40:01] How did we get here?

Ann Lawrence: [00:40:02] How did we get here? Because we think that's part of the solution. I just don't think it is because I think every time you look back you're going to be looking back and you saying well you know someone did this and you're trying to blame something. You blame religion and you can blame politics. You can always blame someone for something as opposed to saying why don't we just find the people that want to charge the hill and do something awesome and great. Let's all get together and go do that. And I said so all I'm asking is that when you're getting that group pf people together to go charge up that hill, open yourself up to who that's going to be with you. Who do you want to charge the hill with? Just charge a couple of hills with some people who you know, you haven't.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:40:47] Charged with.

Ann Lawrence: [00:40:47] Charged with.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:40:48] Right. Exactly.

Ann Lawrence: [00:40:49] Just just just go out there and do it in and and see what happens. Because part of it is when you when you when you segregate and you cut people out and you don't like then we don't know. Like like I it took me a lot longer to figure out kind of what the politics of the firm were than my husband, because I wasn't included in some of those conversations. And I wasn't going to lunch or playing golf with those because we just you know the dynamics in the relationships didn't evolve that way. And so for me that that was a key and it totally changed the way I look at it and the way I try to approach every situation now from from like how do we move this this conversation forward because we're flatlined. We're not making any progress. The law is flatlined for women partners. There's zero progress. It's not like hey you know. So that's why I get so frustrated when people talk about you know pipeline and stem, and pipeline. Are you telling me girls didn't know how to do math.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:41:52] Right.

Ann Lawrence: [00:41:53] It's offensive.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:41:54] No it's true. It's all true. And thank you. From the RV business to changing the law and giving women a new and different voice and God you could be the mother of everyone. Thanks for joining The Dots.

Ann Lawrence: [00:42:10] Thank you.

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