

Meghan M Biro: On this week's episode of WorkTrends we're talking career advice with Karyn Schoenbart. Welcome to the WorkTrends podcast from Talent Culture. I'm your host, Meghan M Biro. Every week we interview interesting people who are reimagining work. Join us on Twitter every Wednesday 1:30 PM Eastern using the hashtag WorkTrends. Hey, Kev, what's the good word?

Kevin: Career advice and cold weather, although I'm sure, Meghan, you don't want to talk about the latter.

Meghan M Biro: I don't want to talk about the cold ever again. Speaking of career advice, as I look back on my own mom's career, she was one of the busiest and hardest working people around when she was working. I was a typical latchkey kid, and I think it really taught me the value of learning to navigate relationships with the world outside of my immediate family, and in many ways, surprise, surprise, I was adulting young. Mom needed to work after my parents' divorce, and she happily did it until she retired.

Meghan M Biro: Even though she was not in the business world, per se, I think many of her lessons of building rapport quickly, being a good listener and truly caring about others really rings true for me today. I observed her behaviors early on and throughout my life, and only really now do I realize she was quietly guiding the way for me. There's one word that stands out when I think about my mom and I think about the wisdom there, and that's empathy.

Kevin: Amen. Empathy is key. My mom taught me that as well, and, mercy me, do I miss her. She always gave me great advice. She was in the workforce for many years from being a police dispatcher to working in high tech communications and a few other incarnations. One of the biggest lessons that she gave to me that I apply every day is that you have to go through things, not around them. The only way to learn is to experience them head on.

Meghan M Biro: And feel the pain. You really only learn by doing and feeling, and, absolutely, mistakes are part of it. On that note, let's move over to some news, shall we?

Kevin: I found a recent article from Information Week that was talking about the importance of mentorships. Again, this is another great piece of career advice for everybody out there, whether you're finding a mentor for yourself or becoming a mentor for someone else. In a way our parents, and even more experienced peers or even less can be mentors to us.

Meghan M Biro: I think anyone can really play the role of mentor as long as they're willing, and I think that's the keyword here, to share skills, the knowledge and of course expertise. You need to be willing to put in that time.

Kevin: Absolutely. Mentors can help us find the path that we want to take in our job search. They can help give us advice when we're facing difficult choices. Again, you got to go through it, and they can help us to connect with others who can

help us face whatever we need to face. If we're further along in our careers, we also should consider being a mentor that we can help give back to those that need input on life and work and all in between, whether it be somebody in your own organization or your community, et cetera.

Kevin: One great example from the Information Week article was shared by Jill Braff, the new president of digital media company, Brit + Co. She recommended for those launching their careers that they should focus on the factors beyond the job description and salary. It's really, at the end of the day, who you're working with and who you're working for. You should focus on what you can learn from the job. I always think that's great advice, don't you agree, Meghan?

Meghan M Biro: Totally agree. I think another piece of advice is seek out more than one mentor. I think you're always going to need quality people in your life no matter what career path and level you're on. Always, by the way, reciprocate. Excited to bring on today's first guest, Karyn Schoenbart.

Meghan M Biro: Karyn Schoenbart is the CEO of global market research firm NPD Group. She's also the bestselling author of Mom BA: Essential Business Advice From One Generation to the Next. Welcome to WorkTrends, Karyn.

Karyn S.: Meghan, it's a delight to be here.

Meghan M Biro: You have lost your Long Island accent.

Karyn S.: I try.

Meghan M Biro: What happened to it? You try. It's working.

Karyn S.: Thank you.

Meghan M Biro: Talk to us. I know you're a busy woman. You are running a big organization. You're writing books. You're all over the place in a really good way. What inspired you to write a book with advice about work?

Karyn S.: Well, it started, Meghan, with my daughter Danielle when she graduated from college and she started working in advertising. She realized that she knew all these things that her peers didn't know. Here she is 21 years old, few months out of school, and people are coming to her and asking her for her advice on dealing with their boss, dealing with their clients. We were talking about it one day and we realized that she knew things that they didn't know because she had me as a live-in mentor her whole life.

Karyn S.: I'll give you an example. True story, when she was six years old and she and her little friend wanted to have a sleepover, I made them give a presentation on why they should have a sleepover.

Meghan M Biro: Are you serious?

Karyn S.: I am serious. After we said, "Yes, you can have a sleepover," and they kept talking, I said, "Shh. Don't sell after the close."

Meghan M Biro: Oh my gosh.

Karyn S.: She knew these things. We would drive in the car and we would play the interview game, and I would say things like, I would practice my interviewing skills and she would answer. I would say things like, "So, Danielle, tell me for what things have you been criticized?" From a very early age she just learned all of these things. She said to me when she started working, she said, "I feel like I got a mom BA. You should write a book for other people who didn't have a mother like you growing up, and share a lot of this wisdom," that she had the opportunity to learn. That was the genesis of the book. Danielle had the name. She came up with the name which was Mom BA.

Meghan M Biro: That's cool. No, not all women have moms like this. I could say my mom is full of wisdom to this day, but it wasn't business strategy. It wasn't this kind of advice. Boy, I wished I had somebody like that growing up from a business strategy point of view. Because that is important.

Karyn S.: It's kind of an insider's guide to the questions you might not have even thought to ask. It's not written from an academic point of view. It's very conversational. It's like as though you were talking to your mom about these kinds of things.

Meghan M Biro: What I find fascinating about your story is that Danielle didn't just put it aside and go, "Whatever mom. Really?" She actually embraced it. Talk to us a little bit about that process, because I know there's other moms out there going, "Wait a minute. What? How did you get from A to B here?" Let's be honest, that could also go in a completely different direction.

Karyn S.: Well, listen, she's a pretty smart cookie in her own right. Now she's out at work 10 years and she actually just got nominated to be one of the top 35 people in advertising under 35 years old. She's a pretty smart cookie. I think a lot of it was just applying these things and seeing that they worked. We would talk a lot and I didn't always just say to her, "Do this. Do that." I would say, "What do you think? What do you think?" More times than not she really did have the right answer.

Karyn S.: It's one of the things about millennials, I really hate when we generalize and say all millennials ... Because they're not. There are many of them who are hard working, who are loyal, who are willing to put in the extra effort, who are willing to volunteer and you just have to find those and really nurture them.

Meghan M Biro: What are some of the most important tips you share in the book for people who are just starting out?

Karyn S.: Well, one of them that comes up a lot, Meghan, is about networking. People who are just starting out do a lot of networking whether you're looking for a job, or you're looking to make connections for your future. A few things I would say is networking is very, very important and you don't necessarily know when it will pay itself back, and that's fine. It's the quality of the contacts versus the quantity. If you can make a few authentic connections, those can serve you well.

Karyn S.: If you're going to a networking event, which I encourage people to go to, do your homework. Find out in advance, if you can, who's going to be there. Prepare the way you would prepare for an interview. Prepare interesting questions to ask. A lot of people say I'm not comfortable with smalltalk. Well, it doesn't have to be smalltalk. It could be thoughtful talk. You can Google all sorts of interesting questions. One of my favorites to ask people is what's the most exciting thing you're working on right now either professionally or personally?

Meghan M Biro: That's a good one.

Karyn S.: There's so many like that. You can engage people in interesting conversations and use their first name when you meet them, and then follow up. One of my pet peeves is when people follow up on LinkedIn with the generic, "Let's connect."

Meghan M Biro: Don't get me started.

Karyn S.: If you care enough with me to make a connection, take the two seconds it takes to say, "Hey, Meghan, it was so nice meeting you at such and such event. I enjoyed our conversation about blank. Let's connect."

Meghan M Biro: Most of mine these days are, "Can you do me a favor? I know we've never met in person or ever." We haven't even met at all. It's like you got to give some context. You got to let people know you care about them. I think that's so lacking right now, especially when you talk about LinkedIn. The types of connection requests I'm getting these days, I mean, yes, I still value my relationships and some of which have become real on LinkedIn, but there's too much of that not getting to know people thing going on.

Karyn S.: Also, the give to get. I mentor a lot of young people and I get together with them, and, like you said, what can I do for them. They very rarely ask, and people need to, "What can I do for you Karyn?" I have things that they can do for me. Hey, you can help me promote my book to your social media, whatever. They need to ask because it's that give to get. You never know, sometimes it won't pay back but many times it will.

Meghan M Biro: That's right. Let's talk about bad bosses, because there's a lot of them out there, and I know you give some really great advice to people who are suffering from bad bosses, frankly.

Karyn S.: Well, there's a whole chapter in the book on surviving your boss, so it's an important topic. I think though, Meghan, one of the things that's important is we don't always realize who's a good boss and who's a bad boss. Now, I don't mean the terrible, awful, and I don't want to get into discussions about harassment and all that, but you don't always realize in the moment. For example, when I first started working my boss was incredibly nurturing, adored me. He thought I was wonderful. It was terrific. Always gave me compliments. That was just so fantastic until it wasn't.

Karyn S.: Then he was also stifling, didn't really let me out from under his wing, didn't really let me grow. I ended up having to leave the company because I felt I couldn't grow. I go into my second job and my boss was completely hands-on, could barely give me the time of day, never gave me any feedback, but at that moment in my career that was the best thing that could have happened to me because it forced me to stand up for myself, to figure out how to become self-motivated, to figure out how to evaluate how I was doing without a lot of feedback. Looking back, who was the better boss?

Meghan M Biro: Interesting.

Karyn S.: It's kind of like point in time. The other thing I know I told my daughter is if you have a boss that you're not too keen on, you can learn from that. The more different styles of bosses you interact with and managers and leaders, the more you can start to assess, if you're going to become a leader someday, what aspects of each person you want to keep and not keep. It helps you become a much better leader in the future because you've had those experiences.

Karyn S.: If you only had one terrific boss your whole life and you model yourself after that, that's fine, but you can learn a lot from a lot of different people. Finally, if you're dealing with a difficult boss, you're developing skills on dealing with that. I'd like to say it's notches on your belt. That's another learning experience. If you look at everything as a learning experience in your career, and it doesn't mean you have to stay with somebody who's difficult for a long time. There's all sorts of strategies that I don't think it's worth getting into right now on how do you move out from under those folks, but take the opportunity to make sure you're learning every day.

Meghan M Biro: Also, when we talk about some of the younger generations, it's important to have difficulties in life and in career. It's not going to always be smooth sailing, and we learn so much from that. I think there's this tendency to go, "Everyone's working for themselves now. I want to be a gig worker and not even deal with my boss or a boss figure." Important to keep in mind that difficulties create good careers and good leaders. That's the point.

Karyn S.: Absolutely. That extends to just in general getting out of your comfort zone. If you're comfortable in your job and unless you're at a point in your life where that's really important to just be comfortable, but if you want to keep growing

you've got to push yourself and get out of that comfort zone, and get into those difficult situations because that's the only way, you know it, I know it, that's the only way you grow.

Meghan M Biro: Let's talk about people, and many of our listeners here happen to be further on in their careers. Talk to us about what you've learned about managing others and this place in people's careers.

Karyn S.: Sure. One of the things is it all starts with delegating, and everybody talks about, "I don't delegate well," et cetera. Let's talk for a moment about that. When you become a manager or when you get promoted, your very first promotion you need to start to delegate. Very often people think about it only one direction, "I need to delegate so that this person under me can learn and grow." That is true, but delegating is a much more 360 thing in my mind.

Karyn S.: You have to develop another person and they're not going to do it as good as you. Of course they're not. You've been doing the job, so we can't hang onto that, "Well, they won't do it as good as me." Number one, we have to develop that person. Number two, you become a manager now. You become someone who can learn how to teach somebody else something to do. That's part of management. The third thing that people forget, Meghan, is that if you don't do that and you keep doing that old job, that's not what the company is paying you for anymore.

Karyn S.: The company is now paying you to do something different, and so you need to rise above it and make sure that someone else is doing that first job so that you can grow and you can take on greater responsibility, which is now what you're getting paid for if you've been promoted. When you think about delegating, you think about it more 360 is one of the things I suggest to folks.

Karyn S.: Then the other thing is when you're managing one person, really it's pretty easy. Even two people's pretty easy. Once you're up to three, that's when you're truly a manager. It's a very different mindset because it's not about your performance anymore. Very often you get where you are because you're good at your job or you're a good performer. As a manager it's a very big mind shift to now say it's not about how well I do, it's about how well my team does.

Karyn S.: I have to now put all my energies goal making sure that my team is successful, and what do they need to be able to grow and develop?

Meghan M Biro: Listen, you're a busy woman, as I said earlier, what's your secret to finding the blend, making it all work? I know there's no such thing as work-life balance, but what are you doing?

Karyn S.: Well, first of all, I'm happily married for over 30 years. I have two grown children. I've worked the whole time. I am on the other side of this, so I can speak about it. Oprah Winfrey once said you can have it all, but you can't have it

all at once. That's true. You can't think about every day being balanced or every week being balanced. You have to look at it in a month. How's the month going? Are you balancing your life on a monthly basis? I color code my calendar to begin with to make sure I'm getting the right amount of personal time and client time and internal time and all that.

Karyn S.: The other thing is that I was pretty good at compartmentalizing. When I was at work, my head was at work. When I'm home, I'm pretty much try to be at home. I try to be present in my present. That's hard. Now, in some ways it's easier and in some ways it's harder with us being always connected. On one hand, you can take the afternoon off, go to your kid's soccer game and be reachable by an important client, that's good. On the other hand, you could be at your kid's soccer game and be on your phone the whole time and that's bad. We've got to try to figure out how to be present in our present.

Karyn S.: I tell a lot of young moms in particular that when my kid took their first step if I wasn't there to see it, it just didn't count.

Meghan M Biro: But wait a minute.

Karyn S.: Then I say, "They're going to take a lot of steps."

Meghan M Biro: Now we have Instagram and Facebook and Snapchat and we have all these other ways in which we can see these moments unfold. Think about that.

Karyn S.: Also, they're going to take a lot of steps, and you're going to be there for them. You're going to be there for the long run. You're still the mom and you're going to be there throughout this whole life journey with your family. Then the other thing I do say, and there's a whole lot of hacks in the book too, is just outsource as much as you can afford. I know not everybody can afford the same levels of outsourcing, but today there are so many more ways of having people do things for you that are pretty affordable, you know, if you don't like cooking.

Karyn S.: There's just so many hacks that you can do, so that you can spend time doing the things you love with the people you love, and not doing things that really aren't adding any value to your life. Then the last thing, Meghan, I would just say is this whole having it all. I think each person has to really decide what having it all is for them, because it's very personal. For someone, having it all might be having a great job and traveling all around the world, and that's it. For me it was having a family and a career.

Karyn S.: Every person has to decide, and then there are still sacrifices. Listen, I didn't have any friends. I didn't watch TV. I didn't work out. It's not like you can have it "all" all. I can have a family and a career, but there were things I certainly had to give up to make time for both.

Meghan M Biro: Are you giving up more time for friends now? How is that monthly calendar looking?

Karyn S.: Well, I turned my kid's playroom into a gym when they moved out, so I've definitely gotten into the whole workout thing.

Meghan M Biro: Cool.

Karyn S.: I've got a lot more time for charitable things. I've got more time for friends, for working out. Now, my kids are friends because they're adults, and that's just delightful. We're still very close. We spend a lot of quality time together as adults, so, again, coming out on the other side. Listen, I was not perfect. There was the time where I forgot to feed them dinner. Well, you know what, they survived.

Meghan M Biro: It happens. Listen, in your book, you give advice for overcoming imposter syndrome, that feeling that everyone else knows what they're doing and you're the only one who doesn't. How can we get over that feeling?

Karyn S.: Well, first of all, when I first heard that there was something called the imposter syndrome, which is where competent people feel like they're going to be found out as a fraud, I was, "Oh my goodness. That's a thing?" I was so relieved to know that this was a thing that other people felt and it wasn't just me. Just that was like a weight lifted off my shoulders.

Karyn S.: Just knowing that a lot of people feel that way. Very competent people feel sometimes like they're going to be caught as a fraud. A few suggestions I have, and, again, there's a dozen of them in Mom BA, but one I'd say is don't compare yourself to others. You are unique.

Meghan M Biro: So easy to say, so hard to do for so many.

Karyn S.: I know. Then the other thing is if I asked people to rattle off their weaknesses and what they're working on, they can probably do that easily. I also think it's so important to focus on one's strengths and to really hone your strengths. Because what you're really good at is also going to be most likely what you love, and then if you can be even better at it, if you can be the best at it then that can help propel your career. I'm not saying we shouldn't work on our weaknesses and identify them, but we should spend just as much energy working on honing our strengths and becoming superb at certain things. Because it's more fun and makes you feel better.

Karyn S.: Then the last thing is to start what I call a fan file. I told my daughter this when she first started working, start a file and when your boss gives you a compliment or your client gives you a compliment or you work on a project you're particularly proud of, put it in this file. It serves several purposes. One is when you're feeling down you can take a look at it. It makes you feel better. If there's

an opportunity for a promotion, or a different job assignment or something, you can pull out your file and use that to help build your case as to why you would be the best person for the job.

Meghan M Biro: See, everyone out there, it's not always perfect in this career path we're all on. There's ebbs, there's flows, there's ups, there's downs. As you mentioned, your daughter, she wrote the foreword of your book. What have you learned from your daughter about work?

Karyn S.: That's a great question, Meghan. It's very interesting. We're different generations. I'm a baby boomer, she's a millennial. A lot of times people want to know what we disagree on and they want to create controversy. The truth of the matter is we agree on a lot more than we disagree on. That's where I'm saying I think that millennials sometimes get a bad rap. There still are a few things. One, I was very against people wearing jeans to work for the longest time. Once she started working and she was able to wear jeans to work every day, I realized that the world doesn't come to an end if you let people wear jeans to work.

Karyn S.: Also, the smart people won't wear jeans when it's not appropriate. They won't dress inappropriately. It's another measure of how people show up, if you will. I finally changed our policy at our company and now people can wear jeans at work.

Meghan M Biro: Nice. Good going.

Karyn S.: I like to write handwritten notes to people after I meet them, and she thinks that's kind of silly and old-fashioned. That was interesting. There are some companies nowadays where they don't even have mail, so I have to be a little bit sensitive to that. She's certainly taught me a lot about social media and how to optimize some of the social media. Of course, she grew up with that in a way that I didn't.

Meghan M Biro: Do you use social media for your personal brand or for just your life in general, or are you using it more for business?

Karyn S.: I do use it for both, so Facebook I keep as personal, although I do have a Facebook author page, so that's separate. I use LinkedIn a lot, and I actually found that I've started using LinkedIn prior to meeting with people. Let's say I'm going to a conference and I've got some meetings scheduled with CEOs of different companies. I'll reach out to them via LinkedIn ahead of the meeting instead of just doing it afterwards. This has been very effective, because I'll say, "Hey, so looking forward to meeting you at such and such a conference. Let's connect."

Karyn S.: Then very often they'll say, "I got your LinkedIn." It establishes a pre-connection connection which has been working out quite well.

Meghan M Biro: Again, you're showing people you actually care.

Karyn S.: Yeah. Then I'm on Twitter, so you can follow me on Twitter if you'd like.

Meghan M Biro: All right. No doubt about it. Let's talk a little bit about the future. What advice do you think you are going to give your grandkids about work?

Karyn S.: That's a tough one. The world is becoming very complex. We're more global. There's much more matrix management. It's not as hierarchical. People aren't going to have just one boss. They have multiple bosses, different constituents. It's more remote. Navigating that's going to be challenging. I do think it's important to try to understand what's the new technology and get on that curve. That is one of the things that helped my daughter, for example, and my son too.

Karyn S.: My daughter graduated from college right when digital media was hitting, and so in advertising she's in digital media. There's no one in the world, she's working 10 years, there's no one out there no matter how old they are who has more experience in digital media than she does because it's new. If you can find out when you start to be in college what's the next trend, what's the next technology and jump on those bandwagons early on in your career, that could be very helpful.

Karyn S.: Certainly for women, anything in science and math and technology, people are really looking for women right now with those backgrounds because they're recognizing how much it's underrepresented. Those would be some of the things to think about.

Meghan M Biro: What have you learned since writing the book?

Karyn S.: Well, it was a labor of love. I did not have a bucket list item to write a book. It really just flowed out of me, and it's been a great experience. Once you get on the speaking circuit, particularly for women's events, there's such a hunger for role models and just I've been to many women's events where there are other women on the panel such as myself just telling our stories.

Karyn S.: It does seem that young people, women, but also men really need those role models to see, "Hey, if she could do it, I could do it. Hey, look, you don't have to be perfect. Hey, you don't have to have an MBA to be successful. Maybe I didn't get a good start in life, but that doesn't necessarily mean that I can't be anything I want to be." I think that there's a hunger out there for role models and for people to hear stories, and for me it's just a pleasure to be able to interact with young people and pay it forward a little bit. It's been a really wonderful experience.

Meghan M Biro: Karyn, thank you for being you and stopping by today.

Karyn S.: Meghan, it's been a pleasure. Thank you for having me.

Meghan M Biro: Now that we've heard from Karyn, here's some sage from my end for the next generation at work. Spend time with people. Move away from your screen and build and learn from relationships. I learned so much in my career, and I still do just from seeing people in person. Do not, and I repeat, do not work in a role you're not passionate about for an extended time. Everybody deserves to be happy. I think you want to learn from it and move on. You want to build your brand. You want to start a website, and most importantly you want to be true to yourself along the way.

Meghan M Biro: I think sometimes we get caught up in what other people think a little bit too much. Remember that one, right? Travel as often as your wallet and your lifestyle allows. I think there's so much richness there and adventure, and be kind and empathetic to others. You just never know when you will walk the same path as those you judge or maybe are critical of. I think it's human nature to do so.

Kevin: Agree. Those are great Meghan. I got a little quick story for you and then I'll share a few of my own. Last Christmas we got our girls Monopoly, the cheaters' edition. I don't know if you've ever heard of this game.

Meghan M Biro: Nice.

Kevin: They really wanted it and we got it for them, and it was a lot of fun. When we played it the first time, my wife cheated three times in the first 10 minutes, and so I gave her a really bad time about that. The lesson that we gave our children, our two girls was the fact that even though fun is fun, honesty, integrity are critical aspects of life and need to be embodied on a regular basis. Thank goodness my eldest told us that cheating was hard. That was a good thing to know there.

Kevin: Here's some other quick recommendations for the next generation, be bold and push yourself to learn and know that failure is the only option to learn. Don't be afraid to ask for help. This is another way to enrich your professional and personal networks, and just your relationships you have in life. Always build and nurture those networks and relationships and meet people in person whenever you can, which ties into that whole travel aspect too that you mentioned earlier.

Kevin: Then if you're in the running for a job, this is specific to a job, even if they don't offer a job simulation, ask the employer for one or at least ask for scenarios that you may face in the job if they're not presenting that to you, especially when you make it to the final interview stage. I think that's a big recommendation on getting a reality check on the job for you and them.

Kevin: Just like the advice I mentioned earlier from the news, it's really, again, about who you're working with and who you're working for and you should always focus on what you can learn from that job.

Meghan M Biro: Love the job simulation angle, Kevin. I think it's so important because in the end it's really about who you're working for and who you're working with. Good stuff.

Meghan M Biro: Thanks for listening to WorkTrends from Talent Culture. Join us every Wednesday at 1:30 PM Eastern for a live Twitter chat with our podcast guest. To learn more about guests featured on today's show, visit the show notes for this episode at talentculture.com, and help us spread the word. Subscribe to WorkTrends wherever you listen to podcasts. Leave us a rating, review in iTunes, share WorkTrends with your co-workers, your friends. Look forward to it. See you next time.