

Bold(h)er Transcript

Discovering Your Values

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Dionne Grayson:

Every single day, we absolutely have to just pause mentally to think about it, think about what makes us happy, think about what makes us tick. And to see if there's something that we can do to help things move forward.

(music)

Lisa Bragg:

We get caught up in the day to day... the busyness of life, business, a job, family, obligations, but as Dionne Grayson -whose consulting business is named Building Your Dreams she'll tell us we need to be intentional every single day.

(music)

Lisa Bragg:

Welcome to Bold(h)er... stories of and for women who stand out... brought to you by BMO for Women. I'm Lisa Bragg...

(music)

Lisa Bragg:

So, Dionne, the name of your company, it says so much, Building Your Dreams. Tell us the pivotal or foundational moment to start that company.

Dionne Grayson:

Oh my goodness, that is a loaded question. (laughter) I'll go back to a couple of jobs that I had. There was one job, it was my second job out of college. I was managing a program with young people that was a citywide program. It very quickly became a model in the city. They would send individuals to my site to help get their sites started out. We had a lot of participation from the students in the particular school that I was working in. Unfortunately, sometimes that causes problems within a school when you have one program that's really working very well. And so, the principal at the time, she shut down the program, which is code word for terminating my position. So, I was terminated from that position and then I went to find another position.

And with that position I found an organization that really fit with my values. It was an organization that I really felt like I wanted to be a part of. The only problem was that they did not have a job opening for

something that I was interested in. The only thing that they had available was a Banquet Assistant. So, I applied for the job and I said, "If I could just get in front of the President and he can meet me, hopefully he'll feel like he has to have me." So, I met with his number two. In the middle of the meeting, she went to go get him and he said, "So, you want to be a banquet assistant here?". So, I was young at the time and I was like, "Well, yeah. I just want to get my foot in the door."

I really didn't know how to articulate what it was that I wanted to do, and so I got a phone call that same day and I was hired to be their Operations Manager. So, fast forward a couple of months, the President of the company was terminated and they terminated his entire team, with the exception of me. And so, they had me finish up some tasks that the President was working on, and then I handed in my flash drive and I was terminated.

So, I was devastated. Two terminations in a row. So, I was devastated. I did not understand why. I felt like I was doing really great work. I didn't understand why I kept being terminated in these positions. And so, I went on a 30 day fast because I needed some clarity. I needed to be quiet to figure out what my next steps were.

And I could remember looking at my resume and I said, "You don't have any staying power. You stay on jobs three to four years and then you leave." I was beating myself up saying, "What is wrong with you?". But during the fast, what I realized is, "You're always the first person in the position or people always hire you to build capacity and make things better." And I said, "You are a capacity builder and a next leveler." And so, when I came to that realization, that is when I started my business and I had clarity for what it was that I wanted to do. And once I had that clarity, I was able to go out and get contracts that I love. And I would be able to go in, tear some stuff up, level some things up, and then move on to the next contract. So, long answer, but that's how Building Your Dreams got started.

Lisa Bragg:

Beautiful story though. When it starts with, you just keep getting torn down and then you build something up from it. When you look back now, what do you think?

Dionne Grayson:

I'm very happy about the route I went with taking some time to get to know myself. I think that's very important. I think that during times like that, people really get stuck. And it was a very dark place, so I don't want to minimize that at all. So of course, financially it was challenging. So, people had to help me where I was. I didn't lose my place, which was wonderful, but I really took the time to say, "Hey, what happened? And what are your next moves?" Because I think sometimes people don't do that and they get stuck. And if I had done that and beat myself up and maybe gotten depressed or something like that, then this would not have been birthed out of what took place then.

Lisa Bragg:

Dionne, great point. Because so many of us, when things happen, we get in a panic and we think, "What is the first thing we need to do? Get another job. Get another JOB." Because that's what we know. It seems a safe place to be. But you're saying if you can in any way, shape or form, take a pause.

Dionne Grayson:

Exactly.

Lisa Bragg:

How do you do that? How do you take a mental pause?

Dionne Grayson:

So, when I was in undergrad, I trained myself to be very intentional because when I went to college, I was an average kid in high school. I wasn't honor roll and then I didn't get in trouble. So, I was one of those kids who got overlooked for a lot of different programs. And so, when I went to college, I really trained myself and took the time to really get to know myself to see what things is it that you really like. So, what kind of things illicit emotion in you? It could be something that gets you really excited or it could be those things that really make you angry.

And so, what I've learned to do is to take those emotions and see if there's something on the inside of me that I feel like I was designed to do and if there's something that I can do about it. And it's really taking time for yourself. And I think that's something that, because we get caught up in the hustle and bustle of everything that we have to do every day, but that thing, whatever that thing is that we're doing professionally, it takes up so much of our time every single day. We absolutely have to just pause mentally to think about it, think about what makes us happy, think about what makes us tick, and to see if there's something that we can do to help things move forward.

Lisa Bragg:

And so often, we kind of know what's coming. Sometimes-

Dionne Grayson:

Yeah, we do.

Lisa Bragg:

Or you get that 'Spidey-sense' or that inkling inside. Do you ever counsel people to maybe start thinking about, "What is your exit plan? What is your parachute?" Do you have any sort of language or conversation starters for people who are, "I have an inkling... I have that feeling." What do you suggest they do?

Dionne Grayson:

So, I think that when you have those feelings is when you need to prepare yourself to take action. And I think that's the most difficult part is that we're feeling a certain way. What we're in, is very comfortable. It's comfortable financially, it's comfortable because we know people. It's comfortable because there's a pattern, but we really have to put ourselves in a position where we are prepared to take action. And so sometimes, and this is something that I do, even if it's kind of putting yourself being an actor or an actress and you're practicing doing what it is that you need to do. And then it makes it a lot easier when you actually have to do it.

So, for me, sometimes when I know I have to do something that's very challenging, I'll walk around the house and just have a conversation with the person that I need to talk to. It just helps you. It helps build

courage, it helps build your confidence and it helps you to articulate what it is that you know need to do. And the reality of it is, when it's time to go, we know it and the people around us know it. Everybody around us know it. And what we're waiting on is there's a happiness, there's a fulfillment that they will receive by moving on to what's next. And there's people who are benefactors of the gift that we're not allowing to stir up in ourselves, because we're in the wrong position.

Lisa Bragg:

Fit matters. And I think during this pandemic time people are seeing... and this economic time, people are deciding that too, that "I'd rather work for somewhere that I really, really like and do something different." Are you seeing a surge of people looking for you and asking, "Can you help me really build my dream through this time?"

Dionne Grayson:

Absolutely. I think what's happening now, and I'll even say that with myself. When I was younger we were taught to go to college, find a job, work hard, get to the top at all cost. And that's what I did when I was younger. But there is a cost mentally that comes with that and physically that comes with that. And then just how you interact with those that are around you. I'll say mentally, your brain can only hold so much information. So, let's just start there. And so, there's a decline, if you will, that happens to us in our brains because we have so much information on the inside of us. But then also too, I can just think about, there's so many things that I missed out on because I was always busy. I had this reputation where whenever people would say something to me, they would say, "I know you're busy, but... I know you're busy."

I used to hate when people would say that to me, but it was the truth. I was always doing things, but I was doing exactly what it is that I was taught. And what the pandemic did for me, I did not realize this and I've had this conversation with countless people, is that it really gave me an opportunity to focus on myself and to see what it is that I really enjoyed doing. And some of the things that came out was, it wasn't planned at all. It wasn't things that I was looking for. It wasn't something that I had this big plan in place for. And then I also was able to spend some time with people that I wasn't spending time with before. Like I alluded to earlier, I missed out on my nieces and nephews growing up because I was so busy. That's the one thing, if I could change, that's one thing that I would change, is some of that that I missed out on. But now just with my family, I always make it so that I can show up for things because those things are most important.

And so now, what I'm doing is, and I encourage people to do this too, is just to take a step back, find out what is important to you and do those things and let the other things go. We have these sweet spots and that's where we should stand. Those are the things that we absolutely love to do and we're good at. And then we have the developmental areas. These are the things that we love doing, but we might not be as good as it, so we should take opportunities, so we should develop in those areas. And then there's burnout skills. Burnout skills are the things that you're probably pretty good at them and they were a steppingstone to what it is that you're doing now. But those things are exhausting to you and you should get rid of those. A lot of us do a lot of things that are burnout skills for us. And so, I really encourage people to get rid of those things that burn you out. It doesn't make any sense for you to do those anymore.

Lisa Bragg:

"I know you're busy, but..." Is quite a signal to all of us...

Dionne Grayson:

I hate that.

Lisa Bragg:

Yeah. Then so what do you do?

Dionne Grayson:

Yeah. I hate when people say that to me.

Lisa Bragg:

Why? Why?

Dionne Grayson:

I think because of the... Well, I used to be that way. I did and I get it. It was all facts. But I've transitioned so much, and I think that people were so accustomed to me being, and then they see all the stuff that I'm doing too. But I work very different, and I do have time just ask and then I reach out as well. And so, I guess for me personally, it's like that's the old, that's how I used to be. I'm still taking care of business, working a whole lot smarter than I used to. Still getting things accomplished, but just doing things a whole lot smarter. So, I think I take it personally because I really don't want people to see me that way anymore. It's part of an old Dionne that I've gotten rid of.

Lisa Bragg:

Yeah, it's an old culture where it's just like, "I have to look busy so I look valuable to the world."

Dionne Grayson:

Right. Exactly.

Lisa Bragg:

Yeah, it's not helpful.

Dionne Grayson:

Exactly.

Lisa Bragg:

I think too, because then it doesn't allow us to say, "I'm open for these opportunities that are really suited to me and I should be doing these opportunities." When everyone thinks we're busy, then you know what? "Oh, she's too busy." So, we ignore that.

Dionne Grayson:

Right. And we really were trained that way. If you think about when we went to college, what we were told to do. And even if all of our classes... You work really hard, you get this house and get to the top and network with all these people, get in this circle. We're taught to do that. And nobody talks about the burnout that comes with that. There's a lot of burnout with trying to keep up with all these circles and all these groups and fitting in this group and going to this training, getting this certification. It's exhausting. It's exhausting and so, I think that it really takes away from you figuring out who you are, what makes you tick, what makes you happy, and how you should move forward in the space that you know were designed to do.

Lisa Bragg:

Ooh, you knew that you were designed to do. How does someone stop and say, "I need to start looking for more of my purpose and my passion," instead of just being on that hamster wheel that we were taught to be on and that we keep telling other people to be on too. Maybe indirectly, because they want to know our path and we tell them all the things we did and so they think wrongly, that's the only way to go too. How do we stop and really help our passion along?

Dionne Grayson:

This is going to sound so cliché, but I think you just do it. A lot of times people don't do it because of fear. Fear about what happens if it doesn't work. But then there's a fear of what happens if it does? "What happens if I am successful, what are people going to think about me? What are they going to think about me doing this in this space? Because nobody knows that I'm passionate about this or nobody knows that I can do this." But I encourage people, you have to take the time just like you take time to do things for other people. You have to take the time to do it yourself. And so, I know it sounds cliché and it sounds really simple, but just take out some time as I mentioned earlier and just really look at yourself introspectively. Look at, "What elicits some type of emotion in me or what is something that I'm doing privately that nobody knows about."

A lot of us have these secret gifts that are tucked away at home, whether it's in our office, in our bedrooms, we're making stuff, we're cooking stuff, we're singing stuff, we're saying stuff, that it hasn't been introduced to the world yet. There's so many people who have that and it's time to make an introduction so that people know what it is that you do. And so, I think it's just really taking out the time and being brave and bold enough and just do it. And do what fear is saying that you can't. Fear is very paralyzing. Fear will have you conjuring up things in your imagination that aren't real. Fear will have you tripping over stuff that isn't even real. So, whatever fear is telling you that you can't do, know that you can. Know that it is just that. It's just your imagination and do the exact opposite of what it says.

That's a mantra that I have for myself, is that I never say no to something because of fear. If I'm afraid to do something, that's an indication to me that I need to say yes. Because I don't want it to set hold on me, because I know what it's like to be paralyzed with fear. Me and fear were very good friends for years and so, I do not want to experience that paralyzing feeling anymore. Now if I can't do something, that's one thing, but I know me and if I'm scared to do it and I know that I can, I do it. And if I commit to it, I know that I'm going to keep my word and do it. That's the only way that you're going to abolish that fear feeling, is just by jumping on and doing it anyway,

Lisa Bragg:

You have to jump. You have to jump. And know that you have friends around or people around who have your back when you do these jumps too. But it's that fear of just, "I'm going to do it, I'm going to hit send. I'm going to 1, 2, 3, or 3, 2, 1 and do it. I'm going to go for it."

Dionne Grayson:

You just made a very good point. The group that you have around you, you want to make sure you have an accountability group and those friends that are around you that you can talk to and have those interesting conversations with. I can just recall one of my girlfriends, I called her last week because I was in a bind. I needed to hire somebody for something. And what I used to do is I would interview somebody and I would hire somebody because I was in desperate need, whether they were qualified or not. And I cannot tell you how many times I bumped my head with that. And so, I did it again and I called one of my friends and I was like, "Guess what I did? I interviewed, I was in desperate need and I didn't hire the person. I'm so proud of myself." So, you need to have people like that that you can have conversations with and discuss those wins who are a part of your developments. But you need to surround yourself with those type of people so that you can have those kind of conversations.

Lisa Bragg:

We do because we are having one dialogue in our own heads and we don't talk to ourselves enough, but we don't see all the sides of it. And when you have people around you, a community, a mastermind, your girlfriends, your friends in general, that can give you some solid advice. And also call you on something when you've said it too many times and they can say, "You've brought that up a few times, you should act on that too." The board of advisors. How big is your board of advisors?

Dionne Grayson:

I have different people for different reasons, but the people who I talk to consistently about my development areas, it's probably around three individuals that I reach out to on a regular basis and they do the same with me. And just do a call and say, just what you just said. I had somebody last week say, "I know you don't remember saying this to me, but you probably should do it because you keep bringing it up." So, you need to have people in your circle that are like that. And so, that's just an indication. So, looking at what you're passionate about. I kept talking about this thing and I'm thinking, "It's my first time sharing this information." It's like, "This is your third time sharing this with me. You probably should start taking action around this." So, I think it's important to just make sure that you not only have those individuals, but make sure that you're taking advantage of the time that you have with them.

Lisa Bragg:

I've been accused of being too passionate because I know you're very passionate and your business is about having passion and following your Building Your Dreams. What do you say when someone says that, "Oh, you're too passionate." I think we need more passion in this world. What do you think?

Dionne Grayson:

I kind of feel sorry for the individual who said it because what I'm going to think is they're not passionate enough. And there's something that they see in you that they wish they had, but they're not necessarily going to admit it. They're not going to admit it. And so, honestly that's kind of heartbreaking that

somebody would even be comfortable enough to open up their mouths and say that because to me that's just a demonstration of what's going on with them. I don't think you can be too passionate about what it is that you're doing. When you're passionate about something, it elicits action. That stirring up on the inside of you is what causes you to act and causes you to do what is on the inside of you. Whatever that thing is, whatever you feel you are designed to do.

Lisa Bragg:

How about those people who it's very Pollyanna-esque of us very optimistic to say, "Do what you love, follow your passion and your dreams." Where some people just say, "I have to work for money. There is no doubt in my mind." Do you have any advice for them to be able to tease out staying in their job but finding the love, finding the joy, within where they are?

Dionne Grayson:

This is what I've learned with that because there's the entrepreneur conversation and then there's the 9 to 5 conversation. And there's room for both and both are necessary. And so, I was talking to a person who has a traditional full-time job and she asked me, she said, "I've been thinking about entrepreneurship but it's so scary to me to be an entrepreneur. And you don't know where your money is coming from. You have no idea where it's coming from." And I said, "Well, it's insecure to me that you depend on one company to pay your salary. That's scary to me." And so, both works. I think it really depends on the individual.

I do think though, when you do have people who are working full-time jobs, I encourage them to look at their full-time job differently and use it to help fuel whatever their dream is. And so, if you have something on the side that you're working on that you want to be bigger, take advantage of opportunities on your job, that are going to help you develop some muscles and some skills in your leadership toolbox that will help you be effective in whatever it is that you're doing on the side. Still do your job. I'm not telling you to do something that's outside of the scope of work that you're doing there. But if there are projects that you can take on, that'll help you build a skill set for what it is that you're doing in your personal business, take those things on.

Because it's free training for you, that you can volunteer for. Nobody's going to tell you no. And then it will help you build some skills that will be necessary for your personal business and continue to work on it. One thing that I say is every day just do a little bit. It's like chopping down a big tree and before you know it, the tree will be chopped down, but just every day just do a little bit towards working on your business and then if it's your desire to do that second part full-time before it, you'll be in a position where you'll need to make a decision.

(music)

Lisa Bragg:

We often think about values because I think that's really where this comes down to is really following your values. It seems like when I talk about values to people, it seems like so out there for them, how do you help people ground themselves in values?

Dionne Grayson:

Values for me, are kinda that... it's that inner gyroscope that keeps you focused on what it is that you're doing every day. And it's something that people don't necessarily talk about and they don't think it necessarily ties to what they're doing professionally, if that makes sense. But I mean a lot of it is just being honest with yourself. But being honest with yourself and even those things that just seem that are pie in the sky, be honest with yourself to see these are the types of things that you need to have in place in order for you to be successful. I'm a co-founder of a nonprofit organization called Lead to Change here in Milwaukee. And what we do is we partner with young people who are high school juniors and seniors and we take them through a group career coaching experience for about 11 months.

And what they do is they take a deep dive into getting to know themselves as individuals. Values is a part of that. And so, we have activities that we navigate them through because we help them to see whatever your values are, it needs to translate to what it is that you do in your career. And this is something that happens every year with our young people, is that you'll have a young person who says, "I value family. I want to make sure that I'm spending time with my family. I really want a 9 to 5 job. I don't want a job that's going to call me on the weekends, it's going to take a lot of my time. I really don't like working with people because I'm really an introvert." But then when you look on their career side, they'll say, "I want to be an ER surgeon or I want to be in hotel hospitality and management."

Probably not in alignment with your values. And so, what we're really doing through the program is teaching them how to get to know yourself first and this is how we do the program. And then you look at careers to make sure that the careers are in alignment with who you are as an individual. That is a real thing. You can really find things that are in alignment and companies that are in alignment with who you are as an individual, so that you can be happy and what it is that you're doing every day. So, our hope with that is, and we have some demonstrated proof of that, is that we are partnering with young people so that they can make decisions, lifelong decisions where they're really happy and enjoying what it is that they're doing every day.

Lisa Bragg:

That is so great, that they can design their lives when they're young and even make up something. So, if a job doesn't exist, we can all make up jobs nowadays in this world that we live in. But to give the students a gift of designing their lives at a young age. Is there an epiphany story or something that gives you goosebumps still when you think back to hearing the stories of the students you've helped and served?

Dionne Grayson:

Let me see. There are many that I can think of. I think about when I first got started in my career with working with young people. This was actually my first job out of college. And there were two young ladies that I hired. When I was hired, they told me I had to raise the money for my position. The money wasn't there. So, I learned how to fundraise really quick. And so, I had enough money to hire staff, but I could only afford to hire two high school students. And so, I hired these two young ladies. They were working eight hours a week and so they were helping me manage this youth program. I remember one time I had to go out of town for a conference because of some funding that I received.

I was very nervous about giving them these tasks because these were real life tasks that I was doing as a director. And they kept telling me, "I got it, we got it, don't worry about it, we got it." And so I said, "Call me anytime. If you have any questions about anything, call me." So, the whole time I was gone, I did not

hear from them at all, which made me really nervous. And so, when I came back, I sat down with these two young ladies and I asked, and I braced myself for what they were going to tell me. When I tell you they handled it. They took care of business. And I was like, "Should I be intimidated that two 10th graders are doing my job?" But I took a step back and I said, "You're onto something. You're onto something."

And so, that pivotal experience really changed, it shaped how I engaged young people. And so, what I've found in my career with working with young people is that they want to be a part of something that's real. They want real live experience that's going to help them get to their next. And so all throughout my career, and both of them are doing very well. One of them has started a family foundation. Both of them are doing well in irrespective careers. And so, it shaped how I do things. And as an organization, we not only train them, but we put them in rooms with people, so that they can meet people to connect them to what their next is. But then we give them real live responsibility as well, which is what they desire.

Lisa Bragg:

People want those responsibilities, and they want to know in the end that they've done a good job and served, and we want to be seen and heard. And I think people forget that because we're always onto our next emergency or next goal. And we don't take the time to acknowledge that the people around us are doing a great job.

Dionne Grayson:

And I think too, part of that is slowing down and I have to do that to myself often because sometimes I'll look at the culture of some of the groups that I'm working with and if I'm leading it, it's reflective of some things that I'm doing. And sometimes there'll be a hustle and bustle. The emails will be real short going back between... not rude but short. And so, I was like, "Let me take a pause because I am engaging with everyone like I'm busy, so everybody else is doing the same thing."

And I just did this the other day. I said, "Let me take a pause. Let me take my time typing this email and talk to them in complete sentences and just acknowledge when somebody does good and not always be in such a hurry." That's something I have to do often. I have to just stop, take a pause and make sure that I'm paying attention to everybody that is around me so that we can have a rich experience. Because I don't want to be accused again, of being too busy to do anything. And I don't want to project that on anyone else either. And I think that's very important.

Lisa Bragg:

Yeah, taking that breath and making those emails and making sure you're communicating in the way that your whole team will understand. As the leader we are, you have to breathe.

Dionne Grayson:

Yes.

Lisa Bragg:

I think that's part of it is when we breathe, then things actually happen. And that could be actually breathing or taking a breath on your emails.

Dionne Grayson:

Yes.

Lisa Bragg:

So, you actually don't hit something with three exclamation marks and send it out to somebody.

Dionne Grayson:

Right.

(music)

Lisa Bragg:

Now, you are also an author. Tell us about the series of books you're writing.

Dionne Grayson:

I am. The first book I wrote was called... It's not the first book I wanted to write. I wanted to write my children's books first. You know how something's stirring on the inside of you? You know you're supposed to do it? But I really didn't know what direction to go. I didn't know what age group I was going to do. So, I have all these notes of different characters and all this different stuff that I wanted to do, but I was really forcing it. And so, I had to take a pause back so that I could really learn what it is that I was supposed to do. So, the first book I wrote is called *The Making: Trust God to Be the Chairman of Your Boardroom*. And I so enjoyed writing that book. I participated in an author lab and what I do, I'm a person of faith. And so, I pray about things and when I really have something pressing, I'll fast and just take some time to get answers.

And so, what I did was I looked at the life of David in the Bible and just looked at some leadership tenants from him and just looked at how we can use him as an example of how to make decisions in business. One, for example, is use your own tools. When he fought up against the giant Goliath, King Saul, told him to, "Use this armor." The armor was too heavy for David. David wasn't accustomed to using that armor. He had his own way of doing things, which was a smooth stone and a sling. And so, just like with us in business, sometimes people try to put things on us that are not necessarily how we do things, or we might try to model others and do things how they do it. And so, then we become imposters and people don't really get what we were designed to do it, how we were designed to do it.

And so, I think it's important that we use the tools that were given to us so that we can be successful and be authentic to who we are in business. So, I just have five tenants and then I just use stories in my career about what happened when I listened to that inner voice. And then what happened when I didn't. When I went against what I knew my instinct was and some of the mistakes that I made. So, I really enjoyed that project. And so, it really did put me in the mindset of being able to listen and pay attention to my instincts. And then with the children's books, I worked really hard to try to conjure up something in my own strength. And I honestly woke up one morning and I was talking to my sister on the phone and I jumped off the phone with her and I was like, "I got to go." I got the manuscript, I dreamed the manuscript.

I dreamed it, and I wrote it in my little green notebook and it ended up being a series. And so, it's something that I'm very proud of. There's 10 books. All of the main characters are kids of colour. And I did that intentionally because less than 10% of children's books have kids of colour as the main characters. All of the books read the same. That was on purpose as well. It's just a different character with a different gift and a different career. The whole intention is to partner with young people as they're learning to read. If you can just imagine if you have children, that you know repetition is a very powerful learning tool. And if you can imagine kids reading through these books and the words are looking very familiar, they get very excited. Even the colour selected was very intentional. I love when I'm at a trade show or somewhere where I'm selling books and you see these kids. They're walking past and they get mesmerized by the colours and they're tugging at their mom like, "Mom. Mom. Books. Books."

So all of the colors, everything was very intentional. So of course, it's about gifts that connects to different careers because kids have special gifts too. Not just prodigies, but we see kids who have a bend towards certain things. And I think it's up to us as parents and guardians and mentors to help cultivate whatever that thing is on the inside of them. So it wasn't something that I planned to be honest with you. It was just a desire that I had and I was afraid to do it because you get the, "Who do you think you are? You don't know anything about children's books." And so, I got some mentors around me, some people who knew what they were talking about. I sat up under them and learned. And I have a 10-book series and I have it in English and in Spanish. It's called the *Children's Gift Series*. I haven't given birth to any kids, so these are my kids. So, it's something that I'm very proud of and I enjoyed the work that goes along with it.

I didn't realize it would be a part-time job, being an author. And then the last book that I did was a goal setting journal. It's called *By Design: Your 12 Week Goal Setting Journal*. It was another thing as I was finishing the children's book, it was bubbling up on the inside of me. And it was funny, I was calling my friends and I was like, "I'm really good at getting stuff done and I'm going to put this on paper." And they were like, "Well, yeah." And it was a realization for me. And they were like, "Yeah, that's kind of what you do." And so, I put that in writing as a journal that a lot of young people, young and old, take that as well. So, it's something new. And I'm just kind of sitting right here for a little while and just really working at it. And have some projects going on secretly that will become public soon, that I'm really excited about with the series.

Lisa Bragg:

So, many great tips in there too. It's like don't ignore what's bubbling up inside of you. And Dionne, you're really helping people build their dreams. So thank you.

(music)

Lisa Bragg:

On Bold(h)er, we always ask these three questions. Tell us a time when you were bold?

Dionne Grayson:

There was a time where the program that I designed, Dream, Explore, Build, I started working on it when I was in graduate school. I practiced it for nine years at a local university. The curriculum that I used today, I always wanted the curriculum to be citywide, and there was a person who I needed to meet with to help me do that. And I did. And I received funding from the Mayor to take the program citywide years ago. So, that was a time. I was terrified. Let me just start there. But I did it. And he took his time to listen to me and my initial funding came directly from the Mayor.

Lisa Bragg:

When do you wish you were bolder?

Dionne Grayson:

Oh my gosh. I think sometimes, and I know it's a process, so I definitely don't want to take away from the process, but when I was younger, I was terrified of everything. Terrified of everything. And so, I think that I would find myself, if I'm looking back, I would find myself in the middle of situations because I wasn't bold, if that makes sense. And so, sometimes you need to speak up and sometimes you not saying things, causes problems. And I really had to learn that the hard way that I would be in the midst of things. I wouldn't say anything because I was terrified. I wasn't brave enough to be bold. And so, I had to learn to speak up about certain things because I would find myself in trouble and really putting myself in position where people wouldn't trust me. And it wasn't that I wasn't trustworthy, I was just afraid.

Lisa Bragg:

And what would you say to your 20-year-old self?

Dionne Grayson:

I think that when I look at my twenties, I would say that, "I'm very proud of you." Although, I was very insecure. Extremely insecure, and I really took the time to... And I didn't even realize what I was doing until years later, but I really took some time to get to know myself and I really took some time to figure out what is that I wanted to do. And I really did. I was the first person in my family to go to college and so there wasn't a whole lot of... there wasn't really honestly anyone around me to... There was support there, but as far as helping with a path, I just didn't have it. I didn't have it. I went to college because I knew it was the next logical step, but I really didn't even honestly understand what I was getting myself into. But I knew that I had to get serious. And so, I would tell her that I'm very proud of her.

(music)

Lisa Bragg:

Thanks Dionne Grayson of Building Your Dreams. You've been listening to Bold(h)er stories of and for women who stand out. Brought to you by BMO for Women. I'm Lisa Bragg.

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Thanks for joining us.