

AspenIdeasToGo_ThinkPurple

📅 Wed, 3/10 11:24AM ⌚ 48:47

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

women, people, book, stories, building, companies, founder, social entrepreneurs, business, organizations, life, experiences, writing, spaces, starting, black woman, feel, support, work, community

SPEAKERS

Danielle Kristine Toussaint, Anne Mosle, Tricia Johnson

-
- T** Tricia Johnson 00:03
It's Aspen Ideas to go from the Aspen Institute. I'm Tricia Johnson. Danielle Kristine Toussaint is a joiner when she was building her business. She thinks purple, she signed up for all kinds of classes on how to create a successful venture. None of the lessons seemed to resonate and she grew frustrated.
- D** Danielle Kristine Toussaint 00:23
I was getting hung up over just truly feeling like I shouldn't have done this, like I was doing it wrong. Like someone knew something about how to run a company in business that I just like miss the class on.
- T** Tricia Johnson 00:36
She turned to her community of women for help. Not only did she get her business off the ground, she wrote a book highlighting women leaders building organizations in spaces created by men. Aspen Ideas to Go brings you compelling conversations hosted by the Aspen Institute. Today's discussion is from the Aspen Institute's Forum on Women and Girls. One in five new businesses don't make it past two years, another 45% don't survive to five years, the odds are stacked against women and founders of color. As a black social entrepreneur, Danielle Kristine Toussaint understood the playing field and wanted to level

it. She set out to capture still in progress, success stories of women leading companies and organizations. Her book, "Dare to Think Purple: A Survival Guide for Women and Social Entrepreneurship," has universal life lessons for everyone, including her five rules of daring. She talks with Anne Mosle about why it's important to surround yourself with people who inspire you, and how to commit to a practice of building confidence. Mosle co-chairs the Aspen Institute's Forum on Women and Girls. She starts us off.

A

Anne Mosle 01:46

You were really intentional Danielle in writing this book both for and about social enterprise. To kick us off, I would love to hear kind of how you define the term social enterprise, and why you think it's important to especially pay attention to women, women leaders, leading social enterprise and entrepreneurship in this moment in time.

D

Danielle Kristine Toussaint 02:12

And I'm going to get to your question, but I'm first going to stop and say thank you. It's incredible to be in this conversation with you. And also to just be here at ascend within the Aspen Institute. This book was written for women like you, and it's a celebration of women just like you. And I remember our first meeting, because what struck me was just that women in leadership roles almost can't help but take an impact focused lens, I very rarely have encountered a woman leading an organization who's not being thoughtful about what it means to be who she is, the experiences that she's bringing, and the fact that most spaces weren't designed for her and her leadership. And I think that that lends itself quite frankly, to women being folks who don't just create organizations where the bottom line is dollars and cents, but who really think about how people are impacted by the work that they're doing, and how they can shift the world and social constructs and a place towards equity and inclusion. I feel like that's something that I've naturally encountered with many of the women that I've had the pleasure of working with and who have been building their organizations and companies alongside me. And that's why it just felt natural that I wanted to tell those stories. The other part of your question, though, is about what is a social entrepreneur? And the term isn't that old. But I believe that the ethos is right, I think that we've always known that we needed to care about people in the full context of their lives, the idea that you can just have a society that's only based off of money and how you make people produce is really just not practical, because we're human, and we have more dimensions. But I think it's people who decide to build anything, an organization, a group, a new initiative, any venture, and who account for other humans, and who sent her other humans and who want to measure their success by how well they treat people in the world around them, and that they leave it better. Like you are at your core, a social entrepreneur, and I'm talking to you, in this book,

A

Anne Mosle 04:22

You've talked a little bit about the motivation, but I'd love for you to continue with the thread of motivation and share a little bit about your the five rules and, and kind of the motivation and the thought behind that with the five rules.

D

Danielle Kristine Toussaint 04:39

Building She Thinks Purple put me squarely at the intersection of so many industries. I was naturally building something in an age where to tell your story, you had to engage with digital platforms and so I became very immediately interested in technology as a way of helping accelerate social impact brands and And alongside that I was working, you know, with primarily women founders and founders of color. And so there was quite a bit of conversation about how to, you know, drive solutions that were both equitable, but that really saw people and helped and help solve problems within for people. And so, a lot of times, I would find myself in these conversations were like, everyone wants to tell you how to like run your business, and you say, like, Oh, I'm going to sign up. I'm one of those people who like I signed up for everything. So I'm at all sorts of events, and accelerators and incubators. And they all felt like they were just trying to teach me, like how to be like a more disciplined person had to put systems and processes in place. And that's really helpful. But when I would get stuck, it often wasn't about those sort of technical things that I was sort of getting hung up, I was getting hung up over, just truly feeling like I shouldn't have done this, like I was doing it wrong. Like someone knew something about how to run a company in business that I just like, miss the class on. And it was talking to other women in my community that helped me to realize that it often came back to things as simple as being clear, right. So when I talk about the rules, be clear, be confident, be creative, Be courageous, build community. These are not rocket science things, every person I know who's been successful, it's come back to some version of these same rules that at the end of the day, like if you want to get anywhere, it starts with knowing where you are, and being really, really clear on where you're going, even your GPS can't help you if you don't input to address it, right. And so, a lot of times, I think, we think we know where we're going. But we haven't asked ourselves, right, really specific questions so that our clarity can help us drive it, it's like, when you're super clear on where you're going, and it matters to you that you get there, you're not as quick to give up, you recognize that there might be a detour, you may have to like, you know, adjust along the way. But you can sustain yourself on the journey, because it is something that's like, really concrete, it is something you can visualize, you can see yourself succeeding. And it goes the same way with the rules that follow, I was really surprised and to find that, you know, we talk a lot about confidence. But genetically, some people are just more disposed toward being confident than others. And that's okay. And that that whole, fake it till you make it thing like actually has scientific grounding, that you can build confidence over time through

practice, and making it an intention and surrounding yourself with other people that are confident. And that brings you to all of these other things. So I love the way that individual women's stories punctuate these points. And for every one of them, I try to be really specific around helping you see it in practice, so that it doesn't feel like something that someone else can do. But it feels like something that's within reach for any of us as long as we commit to, like the practice of it.

A

Anne Mosle 08:00

When we think about the rules and you break them down to you know, the importance of clarity, confidence, creativity, courage, and building community. And you look at them as building blocks. But then you also pull them together. And you know, as you were talking about in framing, you know, so many of us, and it comes from different experiences and perspectives as we interact with the world as been historically constructed. But that passion and purpose of heart and clarity. And when you think about those the rules of see which one did you kind of struggle most with or have kind of the creative tension when you are writing this book that you might like to share? or pull out maybe a story that animates one of those specific rules or the interplay between them?

D

Danielle Kristine Toussaint 08:49

Oh, goodness. So this whole book exercise was a test. It was a test of Do you believe what you are writing down on paper? Right? Like, do you drink your own purple kool aid? Or do you just serve this to other people? Because it sounds good. I would say there, there are dimensions on which all of them tested me. But the courage one was really specific. And in the courage chapter, I actually tell parts of my own story. Um, and the idea that when I was graduating from college, I was found myself interviewing for a job for Teach for America. And they asked me a question. In the interview, my interviewer asked me a question that I knew lost me to interview. And I felt horrible about it, because so many people that I loved and respected had come through the organization. I had made it to like the end of the process. And I felt like you just blew it because you didn't want to tell them what they needed to hear, which was the question at the time was, are you willing to go anywhere that we assign you right? And at the moment, this is not how it is now, but you needed to be like truly open to going anywhere, and I was not and I sort of said No, I only want to do this if you're gonna let me do it in Connecticut or, you know, somewhere I'm really excited to go and I just knew I'd like blew it. Um, but as I thought about what it meant right to say the truth about what I wanted and did not want, even at the risk of like not getting a job and having to tell my parents like, no, I still don't know how I'm going to pay back these student loans. I have not figured out my life yet. It really taught me that there the consequences you anticipate for telling the truth, even if it feels like it's not the

right answer are never that bad. Like, it was one of the best redirections of my entire life. Within a few months, I had like the exact job I needed to have it put me on path to do the exact work I wanted to do. And almost 10 years later, I ended up interviewing face to face with the same woman that I had told the truth to as a graduating senior. And she turned out to be you know, my boss, and mentor and friend and one of my first clients and someone who's in the book, right? It was Katie Smith Roberts and, and I just think about like how much that moment taught me. So as I was writing that story, in the midst of a pandemic, at a time where a lot was uncertain, and I really just wasn't sure if I should keep fighting for this or just like go be responsible. And because there was always that tension, like, it was a reminder to me that trusting yourself and telling your truth is always rewarding. In the end, even if it feels like it creates a loss in the initial moment. That theory these things come back and you you teach yourself how to be courageous by just being courageous in the moments when it's hard. You know,

A

Anne Mosle 11:40

As you just said, when you wrote this book, it had been in you forever. But you really did the discipline of writing it. In the midst of a global pandemic, a massive racial and social reckoning upheaval disruption, were just, you know, choppy waters does not come close to the kind of year plus that we've all had. And you say in the book that this this was part of writing this book was part of curating my inspiration. You know, whether what insights you have about what it took, and the motivation and the discipline, to curate your inspiration, in the midst of the world, and the year that we just experienced,

D

Danielle Kristine Toussaint 12:33

I had no thought that I would ever be able to accomplish this on my own every big thing I've ever done in my life. I've always built a community around it. And I think I learned that first because my family provided that initial community. For me, I was you know, if you there's some of the stories in this book are like the eight year old, who's throwing a retirement party for her teacher, right, like, I wasn't exactly like a normal child. But I had a whole group of people who always just gave me so much room and space and soil right to grow into what I was going to become like they could see it and they just always support it. And that hasn't shifted. Um, and so I think that for me, I always just look to the people around me, I'm very particular about who I spend my time with, I choose the places and the people that I spend my time with, because I know that we are such a reflection of who's around us. And so if you want to be someone that's really impact driven and who has, you know, a significant life, then you've got to surround yourself with the people that will help facilitate that life because you can't build it on your own in isolation on an island. You build it with others. And so it was no different in this exercise. I'm at every moment

where it felt difficult, I would have a conversation, I mean, well into my writing process, I was still scheduling chats with women who inspired me folks who I wanted to think through parts of this with and I really tested this a lot of people got to read this book and hold it in part before it was published, because it mattered to me that it felt resonant. And and so I just think that that's it's a natural way that I that I build things. But it was especially important in COVID given the amount of isolation. And I want to mention that there were so many incredible stories and progress in this book, there were folks that you meet and you know, through the pandemic, they are shifting and reimagining their organizations and their companies and their models. But I still think that the lessons are relatable and resonant because we're not talking about stuff that requires a specific context. We're talking about these universal life lessons and rules that you're going to be able to take with you no matter what it will always be a healthy practice to do these things.

A

Anne Mosle 14:56

When I read the book, it was as if you were sitting among so many incredible women from so many backgrounds. You talk a lot in the book about the importance of like building your tribe, building your community, and even how you both have done your work capturing your story and others. You built that in both with creating like, literally conferences, programs highlighting stories. And can you share a little bit about why we that was so important to you, and just maybe some of the favorite stories, or lessons from that experience of like, being with others in this storytelling, capture and amplification?

D

Danielle Kristine Toussaint 15:42

Certainly, and this is, these are like the, the questions that get you in trouble. It's like when you start naming names, you start giving your thank yous and you're gonna leave someone out, you're gonna have to read this book to get all of them. There's more than 50 women who are either interviewed and quoted in whole or part chunks throughout the book, there's just an array of voices, and they're all special to me. Um, but I think about a couple of stories that stand out. And so one of them is Nita balm, right, who's the founder of the free. And what's interesting about how I tell her story is that she was someone who was building her company while she was also in during loss. So she is the, you know, at the time that she's starting her process, the primary caregiver to her two aging parents, and she loses both of them in the span through which she brings her company from conception to launch. And she's talking about creativity, and what it means to reimagine yourself when you are faced with trying circumstances. And I think sometimes when we talk about creativity, we imagine like, you know, a brainstorm or crayons or painting, and all of that is it. But creativity is most important in our, in our imagination, it's the stories

that we can see and believe, even before they exist in the world around us. And that reimagination happens, particularly when we go through challenge which every founder does, but I wouldn't even have known Nita had it not been for our shared friend and my former colleague, Kelly Doss, who just decided one night to take me to dinner with her with her girlfriends. And she didn't have to do that. And in fact, I think it like caused a little challenge because she really just wanted to like be off the clock and have girlfriend time. And here I am, until but her doing that changed the trajectory of so much of my business and and just life right and because that one dinner introduced me to these incredible women, who then became a part of my story. And so I want to stop here to say, for those that are on this call, aren't trying to build a business, but are just curious about this. Sometimes, we need to know how we can help and support the social entrepreneurs in our lives, right? If someone's like, announces that they're having a baby, you know, they're going to need diapers, you know, they're gonna need wipes, you know, they're gonna probably need someone to come cook a meal. And so you're prepared to support but when someone says I'm launching my business, and I want to make a big impact in the world, sometimes we have no idea what to do in support of it. And I want to say, we like Kelly, just invite this woman to dinner, introduce her to your friends make warm, wonderful introductions on her behalf. I'm singing their praises, because people work with the ones that they you know, with the folks that they like and trust, and you can be a broker of like, and trust for a start out founder. And so like, that's the story that stands out to me. And I would say one more is, I will, I will come back to this idea of there's a brilliant woman, tech founder named Tiffany du feu. And I like tapped her to be my mentor before she even knew I existed. Because I just think she's amazing. And I remember being in an event where I shared that I had a hard time sometimes like asking for things until I felt like I could offer something of value. And she basically said to me, like, the fact that you are giving everywhere else, is what invites you to ask the universe of reciprocity is vast. And that will always stick with me. And Tiffany shows up in this book in chapter 10, lead like a woman, because I just think she's such a brilliant CEO, but she talks about the fact that we like grow into our leadership skin, and that who we are, maybe in our 20s, or 30s, may not be who we are in our 40s but we can still be authentically leading from a place of power by just simply being who we are at that time and committed to growth. So those were just like examples of where the story has like dimensions to it in terms of how we come to understand who we are and and how we participate, right, just offering affirming words, creating space for people to meet one another Sometimes that's all that someone needs, you don't have to be their first client. It's awesome if you are. But that's not always what they need from you on that particular leg of their journey,

A

Anne Mosle 20:10

I want to get to another part of the book where you talk about the cheat codes. And we

think about the cheat codes, you know, you were very intentional, again, about like words that you chose, let's dive into the cheat codes and the stories behind them. And also with the context of you said, Survival Guide, and in social entrepreneurship. And so you know, thinking about that, let's, I'm going to sort of pull out a couple, but go, you know, the directions you want to go. The one is, was really, the first one, acknowledging the playing field is not even. And I think this is just absolutely in critical, you know, just a fundamental piece as we all share the Northstar of advancing educational economic equity and opportunity, share a little bit how you talk about the playing field in the book,

D

Danielle Kristine Toussaint 20:58

You know, I just don't know of anyone who's able to solve a problem if they can't name it. I've never seen it done. So if you want to have more successful companies, led by women, people of color have every identity that intersects with womanhood, right? Like, if you want that, then you've got a first name, why that hasn't been the case. And I just feel like we waste so much time when we don't just name a thing. And I have I'm like impatient about that. I want to get to the solution. So I start by just naming it, it's not the same, right? And I'm not even suggesting that there aren't some good reasons why it's not the same, because I don't think that we all have to occupy the same spaces. One of the cases that I make in the book is that I'm not arguing that boys and girls need to occupy the same space, I'm not even making a case that partnership in marriage has to look a different way. I am saying, We've got to expand and widen our definitions of who everyone is and how we all exist, right? We've don't socialize boys, typically, in the same way that many cultures and societies socialize girls. And because we don't, we do a disservice to both. I'm actually asking us to think about how we create balance and room for both men and boys to be more and for girls and women to be more. So I think that's just a fundamental thing that I just think we don't even have the right conversations. And so then we can't do anything about it, because we haven't even started in an honest place. So for me, that was important. And a lot of folks asked me like, why do you focus on right? Did you write this book for women in social entrepreneurship? And I said, because I'm a woman in social entrepreneurship. It's the most honest place I could start. And I don't know what it is to be a man in social entrepreneurship. So why would I write the book that way? I think there are universal lessons that anyone could learn from this, because there's such a diversity in the stories. But I do think that there's a value in owning what we are authentically and adding our voices from that place to the canon of literature that we read and engage with to help us get better at the thing we want to do.

A

Anne Mosle 23:09

What insights would you share, from the stories and from your research, in your

experience, about the creative tension between being safe and being courageous? Can we address them simultaneously?

D

Danielle Kristine Toussaint 23:25

I say yes, you can do both. I think you have to right, like what kept me from starting a company right out of college was that there are basic human safety concerns. I was first generation to attend an elite school and take on the type of debt that comes with that experience, right when you're not someone who's from generational wealth, and my family is Caribbean. And there's a whole set of cultural expectations that just come with that where you are not, they didn't make all the sacrifices they made for you to like, blow it. So that sort of weight of knowing that there was like expectation others had done so much to make me possible. Like I didn't want to mess that up. I didn't want to fail. And so there has to be there had to be like ways that I approached this work that may have differed from someone who had a very different set of experiences, but it might still require courage of both of us, even if it may not be the same level of courage or the courage that it might take is different. So I'm never going to recommend, for instance, there is a really, really great piece of advice that was given by Deborah Omen who's the founder of wealthy you and she is a financial coach for women. And we I invited her to purple cod to be on the panel that talked about ways that women can fund their companies. And the advice she gave that day was like if you've been in business for two years, you have not found a way to be profitable, and everything is pointing to it is going to like quit right now. Get a job. Go back to your plant and try again. She didn't say don't ever do it. But she says, quit right now. Go make money and come back. There's no reason that you should have to, like murder yourself out for this. And that was not like the advice I was hearing from anyone very few people talk about the need to sometimes balance your safety net, and building that safety net with being bold and courageous and doing big things. They are not mutually exclusive. And in fact, I would say they are interdependent. Your safety allows you to be creative, the security you have in your life, is what permits you to take calculated risks in pursuit of your bigger goal. And I think particularly if you don't have, you know, certain advantages and privileges in this world, you need to think about how you take care of yourself in the work.

A

Anne Mosle 25:47

Yeah, another one of your cheat codes is about kissing perfectionism goodbye. And that, you know, perfectionism as we really leaning into naming, you know, white supremacy, culture. As you know, often we're taught from the beginning, like strive towards perfection, you just sort of name that myth, and you know, false mantra and love to hear what that means. His perfectionism means how you express it in the book, and what that means to

you. And for everybody in this conversation,

D

Danielle Kristine Toussaint 26:21

It truly just means allowing yourself to be human, like starting from a place where you honor your own humanity, it is inhumane, to continue to perpetuate this idea that you can be perfect that anything can be perfect. It's it's out of reach. And so then you're just like submitting yourself to perpetual suffering. And that is going to take a lot of your time and energy, which I argue are like the two most precious things. And so if you waste time trying to aspire to a standard that you're not going to reach, you're just going to create a cycle of discouragement. And you're not going to be able to really learn from the setbacks, you're not going to learn from the times that you fail, you're just going to internalize them. And you're going to, you're going to, you're just going to get in your own way. And so I think, and that was the point of that chapter. And it's something that it was, what I noticed was that it came up over and over and over again, and women who were like highly successful, highly capable, many of the women who had grown their companies to seven figures, and more, were still the people that were suffering from this, or at least could name that it was something that they had to overcome. So I thought, well, that's the other thing, right? Like, I'm a recovering perfectionist, and I just own my messiness and keep it moving. Right. Like I just call myself out when it's happening. I'm like, why are you procrastinating? Oh, because you're trying to be perfect. Cut that out. And yeah, let's do it. And like, it really helps to just forgive myself that it's something that I held as a standard, I just know where it comes from. And then I just, I just move on, I try to just accomplish, what's the next thing that I can do to get me out of that paralysis?

A

Anne Mosle 27:57

Well, and that feeds right into another one of your cheat codes: being mission driven. A martyr, those words are liberating and wildly insightful.

D

Danielle Kristine Toussaint 28:08

A lot of people will tell you things like, oh, when you find that thing that you would do for free every day, right? Like make that your life's work. And I would say, if you find the thing you want to do for free, it's called a hobby. And you should do that on your spare time. And you should not make that your life's work. Because that's a sure way for you to hate that thing. You have to make money if you are running an enterprise, right? Like if you're a nonprofit founder, you have to get people to invest in you. And you will have to figure out how to generate revenue. If you are in a for profit, you have to sell product or service and get people to pay for it. And so I think it's really important to not confuse a mission and a

ministry from a mission driven enterprise, right? Like it is ministry if you just want to do it for free in service of others. And I know that very well, like faith is very important in my life. And there are absolutely things that I commit to on a weekly and monthly basis that I would never dare charge for. But that is not my business. And so I think it's just really important to figure out what's the financial model that will allow you to be successful so you can actually achieve the mission that you set out for. A great example of this and why this had to be in the book was because quite frankly, while this was something that a lot of women felt like sort of trapped too. I found that with black women, there was something that we learned along the way that just says Work, work, work, work, work. And don't leave time for yourself, don't care for yourself, almost, you know, be out of breath at all times. And it's it's never said that that's the expectation but somehow we internalize the weight of a guilt that if we're not constantly churning, then we're not being valuable. We're not doing our job. And Halima Nash is well One of the women whose stories I tell in that chapter because she gave herself a sabbatical in the middle of COVID, before starting her venture after leaving her previous organization, and when I asked her like, you know, well, how did that go? And like, how did you even get the idea, she was just like, my body had been telling me that I needed to rest for a long time. But it just came to a head. And at that moment, once I took that time, I like, wanted to share back with as many people as possible, and she's running an organization that, you know, connects Gen Z talent to see sweet opportunities. And she said, I want to leave a better example, for the kids, the young women of color, who I am helping to mentor and train, I want them to see that my life is not just full of hustle, but it's also full of me caring for myself, and and pouring back into myself, and they can't believe that is a part of success unless they see it in me. And so I had to show it to them. And then the last thing I'll say is like, you know, I also talked to folks in the medical community like is this really just a phenomenon that like, affects women of color differently. But my good friend, Dr. Koon, behinds Marie, who like has done work in epidemiology and research, she literally shared with me that like there are, there's so much science that demonstrates the connection between like this chronic and toxic stress, and why so many communities of color over index on highly preventable diseases like heart disease, and other things like this. And so she's sort of saying, like, if you love yourself, you will not do anything that martyrs you out, you will care for yourself on more than just Sundays, you will stop, you will rest, you will pace yourself, because you are of no service to your mission dead, like you have to be here to be to be doing good work. And so like, to me, that was the importance of putting this in conversation with all of what it takes to survive this thing called social entrepreneurship.



Anne Mosle 32:04

When we talk about, you know, not an even playing field, and also just, you know, the burdens and just the inequity of both impacts of conditions in the world, and weights that

women of color, we'd love to hear for you to share with our community here. What specific advice do you have, or insights from the book for women entrepreneurs of color,

D

Danielle Kristine Toussaint 32:30

It was really interesting. I got to speak with a woman named Cheyenne Bautista. And she gave me the perspective of just not just being a black woman, but being Afro Latina. And just this idea that every degree of sort of challenge or any degree that that you met, that's further from what is most privileged in society is like another lens that you get for helping you solve creative problems and complex, you know, challenges, right. And so I would say, think about the things that make you unique and special that differentiate you that in some places may even feel like they marginalize and look at them as opportunities for you to see the world in a unique and different way. And therefore to almost like, cut to solutions faster. I have always seen it as an incredible superpower, right? Like everything that makes me different from a group means that I have something that I can offer that mate that would be missing. Otherwise, I also feel like, being a black woman gives me hyper visibility. And I would say, to be completely honest, I use that to my advantage. I don't know a lot of people who ever forget meeting me. And that's on purpose, right? Like you were gonna know I was there, I might have been like, you know, the most obviously different person in the room. So I'm going to make it mean something right? Like, you're going to hear my voice, you're going to hear my perspective, I'm going to own my narrative, because that is money right? In the end, right? Like your ability to remember me and connect me is adding value means that in the future that can be converted into an opportunity. That's for my business. That's for others that I know. And then the last thing that I would say is, keep a list, right? Like whenever you have the opportunity to step forward in service of your mission. Remember that lots of people are solving problems on behalf of the same populations that you are, they're just coming at it differently. So someone who's working on a health technology solution needs to be talking to someone that's working on a community banking solution needs to be talking to the person that's working on education, because most likely if you map the populations that they're trying to serve the same people. And so I would say keep a list of all the people that you meet along the way. And when you have the opportunity put other people of color women of color folks forward so that you can create pathways of opportunity. Again, you can be the broker of like and trust, right. If people like you and trust you, they are far more likely to take your recommendation for who to work with. And so I would say never forget that that's a very powerful thing. And sometimes I think it's underutilized. We talked about wanting spaces to be more inclusive and diverse. But ask yourself, what have you personally done to shift that dynamic? And I don't mean, talk about it, write a blog about it or be mad about it. I mean, what have you done, that is a meaningful action to help bring other people into the spaces that you occupy, and to leverage your reputation and

trust to broker that, I think that would be my advice, because that's where I have seen my network do that for me in powerful ways that continue to like, have these reciprocal effects. And so I think that's the place to double down. Amen. Um,

A

Anne Mosle 35:46

So a question came in from Lisa, who is working with young women in marginalized communities in Tanzania. And she was on love to hear your advice for young women, aspiring young women, who are first generation female entrepreneurs, what advice do you have for young women in Tanzania, or just even taking that global frame?

D

Danielle Kristine Toussaint 36:12

That's beautiful. Um, here's one of the things I would say, it is not easy to necessarily jump out there and take on all of what's required to run something that's brand new, but you practice entrepreneurship by being an innovator often within the spaces that give you room to play. And I've always welcomed both, I don't actually believe that every person has to be running their own organization to be entrepreneurial. I was higher number five, at the first organization that I worked for out of college, while I was in college, I helped one of my friends, you know, sort of build out the partnerships for the first digital magazine on our college campus. And it was always in spaces where I had like a frame and some safety and resources that I was able to play and learn what entrepreneurship was by launching maybe just a new initiative or a new project or helping to advance a new approach to doing work. So I would encourage these young women to start right now practicing what they will need when they are completely on their own running their own companies, by finding other entrepreneurs that they can learn from and with and support. Because the more you do that preparatory stuff early on, the better equipped you'll be when you actually are writing something of your own from scratch.

A

Anne Mosle 37:36

You know, what would you suggest suggest for organizations that are set up to actually support entrepreneurs? Sounds like logical to given they all work, but not always? Does intended impact align? So for those organizations who want to support or odd women, women of color social entrepreneurs, what advice do you have for them in their practice?

D

Danielle Kristine Toussaint 38:01

So, a shameless plug, read books written by folks who've gone through that experience. So like, read my book, but also read the dozens of other books that are being written by folks

of color, and women who are in this so that you understand our experiences, and you begin to see that we are just like you in many ways, and meet all the same things. Plus, there are barriers sometimes that we have to navigate, that would be blind spots for you. And so I think it's that combination of really listening to people and hearing from them, and letting their stories help you shape better programs, events, experiences, right? Like, also, it should be impossible, right? It literally should be impossible at this point for you to host events, or to have facilitators of your programs that do not reflect the experiences in the broadest sense of the communities that you want to work and partner with. Because that, to me is just like, it's a basic thing that allows us to trust whether or not we're in a space that's really for us and designed to facilitate us. Or if this is just a performative action, we can tell the difference immediately. And so I would just say like that will also help you to build the type of programming that attracts the folks you really want to work with.

A

Anne Mosle 39:16

What criteria did you use for which stories that you chose to highlight and which women entrepreneurs?

D

Danielle Kristine Toussaint 39:25

I wish I had some great science to this. I started where I was, I started with the women around me, I've had the privilege of being part of incredible women networks, elevate network, tide risers, the crew, these are just like incredible spaces where I met the women and I could see what they were building and they were encouraging to me and I thought, you know what, if this is making a difference for me, this is exactly what other folks are building. I love reading books about Oprah just as much as the next one. I love me some Rene Brown, I really do. But I also feel like I needed to talk to people that were more proximate to me, and the things that I was going through. And those are the women right around me. So this book did not have like this, like, you know, there was no formula, these were just I started where I was with the women who were inspiring me. And with each one, I was put on, in some cases to another. And there were other points of connection in my network. And, and that's how we got here. If I were writing this book, again, in five years, or 10 years, I'm sure the list would grow. The stories would shift, but it would still be, I believe, a book about the women that we're building with me.

A

Anne Mosle 40:39

There has been an awakening over social entrepreneurship. And you know, and you talk about the entrepreneurial state of mind, are you seeing any new investment opportunities

opening up for female social entrepreneurs and also, especially for women of color social entrepreneurs?

D

Danielle Kristine Toussaint 40:59

Absolutely. I want to also say that what I'm seeing happen a lot is that many of the companies so I think about like jasmine, Kiana I think about black and green. These are companies that are sustainable companies, Jasmine Canna, is a sustainable shoe company. And they have literally started to think about how their entire production cycle can actually create energy, rather than, you know, do like with a lot of other fashion does, which is just like create pollution. black and green is this, you know, sort of digital marketplace of green products. They're both companies led by black women, but they're solving both a social problem through who they facilitate commerce solutions for as well as how they do business. Right. And they are, these are both companies, right that, you know, I have it at different points been able to raise money, I think about B Arthur, who's running a company called the difference, which is making mental health services available for the masses using Alexa, and in partnership with Amazon to just sort of create the solutions, I am having a hard time quite frankly, finding black women running companies who are not also doing something that social impact driven. And to me, that's not a surprise, I think it's much more in our DNA than we sometimes recognize. And so I would say, just pay attention to diverse founders, more likely than not. They are also social entrepreneurs. And if you look in their business model, whether they're leading with it explicitly, it's probably just baked into how they do business. And so it's just a plug that the more you diversify, who you work with, the better. I also think about Aaron Perkins, who is just an amazing founder, who is initially running a creative agency. And who pivoted to start looking at accessibility in design, and is now you know, advising companies on how to make your websites, their experiences, everything they do, accessible to people with various abilities, or disabilities. And I think this is a great example. She's not a black woman founder. She's a woman founder. she's experiencing her life just because she's deaf the way that she does, and she's building solutions based off of her unique perspective. So again, look for the intersections, everything that intersects with womanhood, whether it's race, class, identity, ability, like these are opportunities for innovation. And I see founders doing it every day.

A

Anne Mosle 43:22

You've been working, as you talked about the beginning, in social enterprise and nonprofit leadership. And I think a lot of us are like, you know, even though we're nonprofit innovation, like social innovation, like, what have been your insights around, does the financial model, Is it broken? Is it right? Like, what are your insights around literally the

financial model of social enterprise and, and for leaders like running ventures, be they for profit or not for profit? Technically,

D

Danielle Kristine Toussaint 43:51

Lots of people in my sort of generation of folks that were starting companies around the same time, I think about like, you know, Dr. rashanna, novellus, who's like boots, really one of the leading FinTech companies, for women, providing accessible working capital, low cost loans that are not predatory. And she's a social entrepreneur. And I think about why she does the work she does. And I think it's because we know that there is something broken about how capital flows right, and to whom it flows, and who we allow to be owners and who we expect to just be consumers. Right. And so, yes, there's some work to be done there. But I would say that if I look at the leading companies, most of them, especially in this past year, have had to pivot. The mortgage Family Foundation, partnered up with sparks and honey in New York City to do a report that looked at the future of giving. But what they really discovered in my opinion is just the future of business, right like business and giving are becoming one big companies and their CEOs are recognizing that they have to be mission driven because people care about what their standard in the world, and if they're doing good or bad, and smaller companies have to be more enterprise, sort of oriented. And not just think about charity donations, but actually think about a model where people see shared value and invest in them, and work and partner. And so these worlds are starting to blur. And I think we have this sort of rising generation of social entrepreneurs to think for it, who aren't willing to just live in nonprofit organizations the way they've been, and who see another way through business to incentivize people to do good. And the companies that see us coming and are quickly getting it together, because they recognize that their models are antiquated. And so I think it's a convergence. And I don't know that I don't know what the future looks like. But I'm a lot more excited about the types of organizations that I'm seeing being built now that are hybrid, that just account for social impact, not as a nice to have are just a marketing soundbite, but that are baking it into how they do business.

A

Anne Mosle 45:59

You know, one thing that I love about books, as the piece about I always love to read the acknowledgments, and also the dedications because sometimes they take give you a window into the story behind the story. You know, I think the power of love is something that we can never underestimate. And you dedicated this book to your husband whole journey, and just wanted to give space for you to just share a little bit of that story of whether his love and partnership with you or the you know, kind of the writing process. But you know, any chance for you to share any kind of like close out words on this.



Danielle Kristine Toussaint 46:37

I will never pass up that opportunity. (Danielle's husband) is a big part of this is dedicated to him because he's the person that's been quarantined with me watching this whole thing happen. And he's also like, the person who, you know, supported the decision we made I was we were newlyweds. I was married literally less than a year when I said, Hey, I think I'm gonna quit my full time job and start a company. And that's not a small thing. And so maybe that's the last piece of advice that I'll say is just that everywhere in my life where there is success in partnership, right? There are men that are in these stories. My husband's a big part of the story. My dad and my brother and my uncles, these, these are men that have supported me, my mentors, many of them are men. And so there is no book to dare to think purple. There's no me without the contribution and support of men. And I think that sometimes that gets sort of swept under in our wanting to elevate and not give anyone else credit for who a woman is. But to me, I never feel like it's inappropriate to just show gratitude. So yes, it's a big part of it. That dedication is real and who we choose as partners, I believe makes all the difference in what is possible in our lives. So I always encourage women just choose choose very wisely. I feel very fortunate in this way.



Anne Mosle 47:52

Thank you.



Tricia Johnson 47:58

Danielle Kristine Toussaint as founder and chief storyteller at She Thinks Purple, a woman-powered creative agency. She's also the Morgridge Communicator in Residence for Ascend at the Aspen Institute. Anne Mosle is a vice president at the Aspen Institute and leads Ascend. Their conversation was a kickoff to Women's History Month by the Institute's Forum on Women and Girls. Make sure to subscribe to Aspen Ideas to go wherever you listen to podcasts. Follow Aspen Ideas year round on social media at Aspen Ideas. Today's show is produced by Marci Krivonen and me. Our music is by Wonderly. I'm Tricia Johnson. Thanks for joining me.