

Kirsty Ferguson

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Welcome everyone, my name is Tanya pill and I'm interviewing Kirsty and Ferguson today She's the author and global interview skills coach from interview chicks. So I'm an executive TV producer and you will know some of the brands that I've worked on such as Nike, Microsoft, and RMA, which is a big insurance brand here in Australia. I've known Kirsty for 20 years more than 20 years now. And I work with her to produce the online courses. So I was part of her two year long journey to develop the book The Urbino, chameleon, and the things that make you you can become your superpower and it's now selling in over 20 countries which is really exciting. So little did Kersey know back in December 2019, when she finally published her book, that it was just what job seekers would need during this pandemic. So we're going to discuss three core things today. First one is human skills, why they are just as important as qualifications and experience, and why most superpowers lay in the small stuff you do every single day. And the theme behind her book, be no chameleon, and then knowing a second item, knowing and being able to articulate your How is a lesson because he teaches every single day to entry level candidates. And then as the third item, why, after 20 years in her business, she still draws on the training and the lessons she's learned from her airline pilots and how they got the job.



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I'm really excited to be here, Tanya and talking to all the graduates in the us today.



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And let me ask you the first question, Kirsty. So back in 2001, when you kicked off your first business, what was the catalyst? or What was your Why? To quote Simon? Sinek?



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Well, Simon Sinek don't wait. Yeah, so my why was I thought about all this stuff I wished somebody had told me when I was an entry level candidate, somewhere from 16 to 24. So that was one of my biggest why's and the other thing realization that I had was that it's really, it's really obvious that if you don't know what you have to offer, then how is anybody else going to know? So those two things really drove me to start the business. And that last one has become our tagline. And you'll see that all over the interview chicks website. If you don't know what you have to offer, How will anyone else? And look, it's it's a really consistent problem for entry level job seekers. They come to me and they say pretty much the same thing every time. They say, How do I talk about myself? without feeling like a complete weirdo? In Australia, we call it a muppet. But I don't know if Americans use that word so that you probably think that's a small furry animal off to a TV program. But how do I talk about myself without feeling totally, totally uncomfortable? So that was a problem that I set out to solve when I started that business back in 2001.



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Oh, and Kirsty so in simple terms, it comes down to self knowledge, right?



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It absolutely does. And self knowledge helps us to talk about ourselves much more specifically. So how most people talk about themselves is that they talk in very general overview or opinion based language. So what we do when we're preparing for interviews is we we bring that self knowledge into the fore by talking about ourselves more specifically using facts, and maybe quantifying facts so that they're evidential, because after all, an employer doesn't know you. So if you use that sort of broad language, that opinion based language, then they have to take your word for it. And they coward, because they don't know you.



04:24

Yeah, now and that makes that makes complete sense. So and, actually, let me throw you the next question. So of course, I've read your book. There'll be no chameleon, I've got a

year that you recently replaced the term soft skills with human skills. So can you explain why this change? Remember, he's



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a super huge fan of Eric Mosley and I know that you are as well. Now he has founded an organization that is called human centric and they basically are bringing the the what we used to call soft skills. into as much relevance for employers as qualifications or experience. So I'm a huge, huge fan of that. So instead of using soft skills, because soft skills are not soft, oh, by the way, no, yeah, they're absolutely essential. And I think using the term soft skills, takes away from how important they are. And in fact, they're one of the top three hiring criteria for all employers. So that's why we use human skills. Now, he went from soft skills to people skills, and then we've got to human skills because you hire the whole person. Don't if you don't, you just don't hire those qualifications that are stepping into the workforce. So this whole movement around being a human centric, is one of the great things to come out of the pandemic, don't you agree? 100% 100%? And, look, I'll just add to that, because when I started the business, one of the founding values that we had, or that I had, was that people came first. And a lot of people said to me, Well, what does that mean, in business? What does that mean? Well, it means that if anybody that I work with a client, or a staff member, or colleague, or a consultant, if they had a sick child at home, then you go home, no questions asked, you are at home with that child, if you have a parent that is needing support, or, and you have to go and do that thing, you do that, first, you take care of the human needs of your family, and yourself first. And that was a change that I wanted to see in business way back in 2001. And that's what this human centric movement is doing, especially during the pandemic, where we've seen how important is to put those human skills first.



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Yeah. And it's, it's very much about you as a whole person. It's not like you leave your kids at home, when you go to work mentally, they're still in the back of your mind, and you still got to make sure you get out on time. And it's all got to work together.



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So So how do you separate work at home? You can't. And that's the



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point exactly why it's like, I'm a mom of teens, and you can't separate the two, it has to work together.



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And so on page 142 of the book, there is an exercise on understanding how you are being perceived by others. And why is it so important to understand that and to know that an investigator?



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Well, in job interviews, that first impression has a big impact. And if you are doing something in your life, that is creating the right impression, then you are representing yourself in the right way. But what if you're doing something that you don't even realize, is forming a different impression with people, that means you're not in control of what those people are finding out about you because they're making assumptions based on something that you're doing that you don't realize. So, to get control of perception, I designed this really simple exercise that anybody can do at any time in their life. And it's really powerful, it actually doesn't matter whether you're a graduate entry level, or whether you're, you're, you're a 20 year experienced as a as we are. So that so the, the process is, it's really about emotional intelligence, isn't it? When you know that you do something that's working for you continue to do it, when you know that you're doing something that's not working for you, you can manage that you can do it differently. So then this exercise, it's really, it's really interesting. In fact, it's the most talked about exercise in the book when people would speak to me, when I when I'm speaking at events, and they say, look, it was just so it was just so illuminating. So what the exercise is just basically is, I want you to talk to four different people, a couple, you know, maybe one from a sporting arena, one from that you went to school with a couple from work, even a family member and I want you to say to them, that I want you to give me some really constructive feedback. Now, this is not open slammer. So I don't want you to choose people that again, this is an opportunity to go hell for leather or what I don't like about you. It is nothing opportunity. So be very careful who you decide to ask to do this. This exercise is about finding out how people can be perceiving you so that you can adjust the things that you need to adjust. So by what you're asking the four things that they think you're really good at, and that they see that you do it, you do really, really Well, and then I want you to ask them for things that they feel that aren't so great, or that you could improve or that how they see you in a way that is not as as positive. So again, not

opensever, but just how are they perceiving you, when you, when you put that exercise together, you'll see a lot of consistency between the four people that you've spoken to from all of these different arenas, but where you will also see certain areas that are highlighted, that you didn't realize that you may not have realized about the way that you were communicating. For example, when I when I was an entry level, job seeker and my first job, I remember a manager saying to me that I was really blunt, I would Excuse me. But what I think I'm, you know, quite empathetic when I communicate, but I was very direct, because I, I am quite a busy person, I like to do things in a hurry, and I like to get lots done. And to some people that came across as blood, the minute that I knew that I was able to put in a management technique, so that I could be perceived in the way that I wanted to be perceived, because I didn't want to be perceived that way. So this exercise will help you highlight all of those things. And when you're going to a job interview, you are you will feel more in control of the perception that you are building, and of how you want people to view you that you're possibly going to be working with very soon.



11:43

So good. See, we've just covered the first section of human skills and self knowledge. So I think it's time to jump into section number two, which is knowing your health. So let's dive into how you work and and your how. So if you asked me how to define how I work, I really struggle because I just do stuff, like I just get on with it. And I don't really analyze how I do it. So why is that so important?



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And look, everybody just does what do me and does what they do? Does that make sense? You just get on with it and you do it, you've done your training, you think now I'm doing the job. But it's really important because our behavior is one of the top three hiring criteria for any employer worldwide. Top three. So if you don't know how you work, and you can't articulate that, to somebody who doesn't know you, then they don't know how you're going to behave within their organization. So how you work is right up there with what you do, what your qualifications are on what your experiences. And, look, it's going to keep you in the room. Alright, so let's say your qualifications, your experience, get you in the room by your resume. And you're how you work in your behavior. That's what keeps them there. Because they're sitting there going, do I want to work with this person? Is this person going to fit my team? Okay. And the other thing that I really like about your hell is that it's super specific to you, other people that are going for the job can have your similar qualifications or similar experience, but they can't work exactly the same way that you work. So that makes you really unique. And it step makes you stand out that and that is

really underrated. When people consider how they prepare for their job interviews. So a lot of the time it's the deciding factor.



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Yeah, it is it is. So what are the some of the key traps to be aware of when you are defining your health?



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Well, I like to say stay away from airy, fairy fluffy language. Right. And, again, we come back to that sort of opinion based language or things where you say, I believe, or I feel, I would, again, very emotion based on what I don't want you to take emotion out of your personality, the information that you get across has to be much more factual. So I want it to be practical. I want it to be factual. And I want it to be evidential now to make an evidential, one of the really great tricks.



14:20

And I think it's really what you just said, is really, really important, and really good to stress that rather than saying, This is how I feel I will do it. What you're telling us is, say this is how I would handle it, or this is how I have handled it in the past. That's what you're saying. Right? The facts are important. Yeah,



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exactly. Stay in the first person and walk through your example in the first person rather than looking down on it and giving me a summary or an analysis or an overview, because that's not your behavior is it? Know what you think of what you did, rather than actually what you do? Did. So I was just alluding to before that when you quantify things, it helps us have a greater understanding of your experience. So every time you're choosing to talk about something I want you to think carefully quantify that in any way, whether it's a percentage, or an estimate, or the number of people that you work with, or how quickly you got it in on time. You know, if you've ever been before, under budget, or before the time deadline, if you quantify things, it makes them much more tangible, and much more practical.



15:48

The other really, really big tip here, when you're talking about your Hell is most people think they have to go and save the world. Now, I don't know about you, but I haven't saved the world recently. Especially not right now new. Definitely not right now. Not in the middle of a pandemic. So if you thinking I've got to choose to talk about things, when I've saved the world, then you're not going to find anything. It's just too hard. So I want you to think a little bit more day to day, what have I done day to day to show somebody how I behave in this situation, because that's what I'm going to do when I come into their environment, into their culture into their workplace. So day to day stuff, is where you find your behavior where employers find your behavior. And quite often, it's where you find your superpowers. And again, when when I ask people to talk about their superpowers, they're looking for something really, really big. And that stops him from finding it. So one of my superpowers superpowers, as you know, Tanya, is naming dog breeds. So I can go to any dog park. And pretty much if it's a purebred, I don't always get the mixed breeds. Correct. There's a particular breed, I can pretty much say that is a dog who and what they happen to be in Nova Scotia duck tolling retriever, and people think, Why is that a superpower when it comes to work? Let me tell you, I've got at least one job in my lifetime, because I was able to talk to a person about their interest in dogs, and I was introduced to a new employer through like connections from other people that are new with.



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So how your work lays in those things you automatically do in each aspect of your life. Right? And how important is that to employers? Well,



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number one, you have to be able to articulate it. And that's why we have to define it because employers are looking at two key criteria. And that is, what can you do when you're sitting in front of them at an interview? What can this person achieve tangibly for my business? number one, and number two, does this person fit into my team in my culture, now, that is where your hell comes in. Because if you can't articulate how you work, they don't they can't see automatically how you fit into their team and their culture. Now, one of the biggest things that we have faced during the pandemic is the change in the way that we work. And it is made your house even more important and even more valuable. We have got employers are having to manage teams and remote workforces manage them via video link or manage them via telephone or whatever by they go to do it from a remote perspective. So if they know how somebody works, they can adjust how

they manage that person. But if they don't know how that person works, or they haven't had that discussion with them, it makes it really much harder to know what's going to motivate that person from a remote or from a distance work environment. So number one, you have to be able to articulate your health, so your employer knows what it is because there helps them to manage you. So you're giving them the information they need to manage you really, really well.



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So, so just to get a quick, quick example. I'm someone who likes to work independently. But if I have any questions, I will let you know. So in a very tangible way, you could set that up with your employer and say, Look, give me the brief for this particular job or for this particular project. And give me a couple of hours to work it out. And then let me check in with you to make sure that my approach of how I'm going to tackle these is the correct approach and that way you really build a rapport with your employer without feeling disconnected. If you're working from home. That's what you're saying. Right is very practical based information.



19:52

Absolutely. It's very, very practical. So for you and I we work remotely a lot of the time as well. And I'm a very big picture person. I like to fly by the seat of my pants and you like more detail. And to be far more organized than I might seem to be. So because we know that we cater to how we work together really, really well. So articulating Your hair is extremely important. One of the ways that I asked people to discuss their hair is right up front in their resume over a process that I asked you to go away and think about the way that you work in three different categories. And those categories are leadership and management, project, methodology, and communication. And I asked you to write how you work under those three categories. And from those three categories, we massage that into probably a four or five point health statement, or what series of statements around that. And if you put that on your resume, that's something that you can use throughout your discussions with an employer to create consistency around what you're talking about.



21:00

So I know we're talking to graduates today, right? But the importance of knowing your How will impact every single career choice you make, right? So can you give us some examples of that?



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Absolutely. I you know, I deal a lot with airline pilots and firefighters and Defence Force top guns. The other week, I had an astronaut. But what that really stands out was a wonderful female doctor. And she wanted to transition to back to a surgical rotation. And she had a lot of self judgment going on in her in her career. And she'd done some amazing, amazing things. And she had sort of what we call imposter syndrome, I suppose I suppose I couldn't, I couldn't believe it, because she was so accomplished. But when we went back, and we figured out who, how, and how she approached all of those things that she'd achieved in life so far, that imposter syndrome, she had a lightbulb moment, that imposter syndrome, which just went sort of sideways. And she went well. I now know how I've gone about all of these, and I have a statement to support it. So when I'm in front of the medical board in this hospital, so I want to go back and do a surgical rotation. I know how I'm going to perform in that surgery, right surgical rotation, I have the language to give it to them. And that for her was an absolute lightbulb moment. But why wait until you're in your 40 or 50, to discover your hell when you can do it now, as a graduate hitting enter the workforce and use it right throughout your life.



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All right, slowly, but surely, we've entered into section number three. And so cursed, you have coached a lot of high performance candidates over your 20 years plus career into jobs. Are there any lessons from those interview skills coaching sessions that apply to everyone, especially the graduates watching today?



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Absolutely. And again, it comes back to I wish I had known this stuff when I was a graduate. Or the first one is growth, progression. And improvement can only come when we push past our limitations. So big phrase that I use get comfortable with being uncomfortable. And I've learned that one from defense for stop guns, they use that all the time. One of the other things is your character is your most valuable attribute, your character, how you work, who you are in the workplace, how you treat people, all of those things that we've been talking about today in your hell. So that's your more, it's more valuable than your qualifications.



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Because we can train people on most things, but we can't give them character. We can't

give them those high standards, they have to come with those. What I absolutely love is the debrief and Defense Force use a debrief all the time, doesn't matter whether the project you've done has worked or it hasn't worked. Every time debrief on it, discuss it take the lessons, everything can always be improved. So a business school that I use is have to everything that we do we debrief, debrief, debrief and packet.



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Yeah. And I think what you're saying there is take the lessons without being defensive. Take the lesson and take them on board and learn from them without going, Oh, that's not me either. I haven't done anything wrong. It's actually what could I do better? That's what you're saying. Right?



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Absolutely. Having an open mind to being trainable is again, one of those top hiring criteria, isn't it? So if you're trainable, it means that you take on new information easily that you have an open mind. So right riders are people who are defensive, much harder to train because they're more important in staying where they are. And being right, then going, Oh, that's interesting. I haven't thought of that before, I'm going to think about it differently, we're going to take that information away. So yeah, very, very big lessons that I've learned there. And let's face it, it really doesn't matter in life, whether you're right all the time, or you're wrong all the time, as long as you are making decisions, then that will create change. And change creates action and action creates a new or developing situation. So that makes movement and if you're moving, you're growing, you're changing, you're finding new experiences, and something will happen. And one of the big lessons that I talked to entry level candidates about is that, so what if you choose the wrong career paths? So what if you choose the wrong job as your first job, you can always change your mind, you do not have to be in that job for life, I think we have globally, it's five different career paths and 17 different jobs for the average person. So you can always change your mind. And that is the most empowering tool in the world. Make a decision, whether it be right or wrong. If it's wrong, change your mind. Try something out if it's right, fantastic. But most of us don't get it right the first time do we know



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we absolutely don't. And I think looking back now, for both of us looking back now at our careers, every single job that we had from 1617 onwards, led to where we are today. And we got things out of that that you are using today. So there is actually no such thing as

making the wrong decision, because it will help open another door. That's what you're saying as well, right?



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Absolutely. Absolutely. So make a decision, let's key, you must make a decision. Otherwise nothing in life is going to change. But then be prepared to say I was wrong. That didn't work for me, I'm going to try something else. There's one final thing that I wanted to end with. And this is another value that I've had throughout my career and I know that you have to turn your is that people will remember how you make them feel. Now I didn't I didn't make that. That's a reality of life, and about interpersonal relationships. So they will remember how you make them feel before they remember your name for who remember what job you've got, before they remember anything else. So if you know your hell, if you've worked on your human skills, then you will relate to people on that feeling and being level much more readily. But you got to be relating them not by talking about feeling and being by talking about evidence and facts and letting people make up their own minds about how great you're going to be for their organization.