**The Knowledge Entrepreneur Show**

**Episode 146 | Kim Jones | Kim Jones Alliance, LLC**

**Jag**

Hi Kim, good morning. Welcome to the Knowledge Entrepreneur show. Thank you so much for taking time out for this.

**Kim Jones**

Thank you so much, Jag, for having me. It's a pleasure to be here today.

**Jag**

Likewise! Kim, my first question, I did try and read up as much as possible about you on the internet. You've got a website, this is the right tip that I got. But I want to ask you, is this what you planned growing up? How did you get into coaching?

**Kim Jones**

The short answer is no. It's actually interesting. I don't think I really learned about coaching as a viable career option until I was an executive myself in my corporate job. So my background is that I worked in corporate for 25 years. Over that time, I was in a number of different functions and elevated all the way up to the C-suite working for a Farmers Insurance company and heading up their personal lines, an IT function. And that was a very challenging job.

We were doing a major systems re-platform from legacy mainframe technology onto modern architecture. And as part of that, I was building teams, processes, systems to support a major transformation. And in that transition, when I took on this large role, I was afforded the wonderful opportunity to work with my own executive coach. And it was funny at the time when I was working with my coach, I thought that it was amazing. You mean, this is a job you can do? It never occurred to me that by having those thoughts, maybe that was a clue that might be something that I would be interested in pursuing myself.

And it was several years from there before I actually left my corporate role. And even when I left, I didn't plan to become an entrepreneur. I didn't plan to become a coach. I thought I would end up going back to a different role for a different kind of company because quite frankly, I was a bit burned out by that time. I'd been working, as I mentioned, for 25 years. I always had those 24-7 jobs. There were lots of politics, lots of expectations were very high. I was navigating as a woman in a male-dominated field, so I had to deal with biases. That made my job a little bit more challenging than some of my male counterparts.

So all of those things together caused me to say, in the beginning of 2017, that I wanted to make a change and do something different. So I left that job and took a few years off. I actually decided to go back to school and get a degree in cultural anthropology because I wanted to really study systems of power in companies and organizational cultures. And so I took three years to do that. And during that time, I made a promise to myself that I was going to let go of work and just be a student, and that I would come back to it and decide what I was going to do.

After that, I decided to go into consulting and launched my consulting business, which was going to be focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion at the beginning of 2020. That is something I'm very passionate about, but I never really felt connected to that work. So as I was launching that business, I was experiencing some resistance to it and a lack of feeling, a deep connection to it. So I set that aside when Covid hit and thought that I needed to take a pause. And it just came to me one day, a friend of mine mentioned that she was thinking about becoming a coach. And it was like the connection was made of my executive coach that I had in the past. Actually I had two coaches. They were amazing. They made such an impact on my career and it was something that I decided to explore.

And from there, it was very quick for me to start a business and to develop a full set of clients that I now am privileged to serve. And I believe that the reason it happened so quickly is because it was so aligned with what felt like my values, what I wanted to contribute, especially to women in tech leadership, who are navigating the kinds of challenges that I navigated and serving now as a teacher and a guide, as well as a coach, as they make their way up through the corporate ranks and elevate their own careers.

**Jag**

Awesome, Kim. Thank you for that quick run through of the events from the past. I'm just going to go back to this situation when you said that you had taken up executive coaching, it was provided to you. I'm not really sure what happened there. I just want to go back to that situation and as someone who received executive coaching, what actually happened and how did that help you at that point?

**Kim Jones**

Interestingly, it happened for me. I was in this very high, highly visible, high pressure job. It was an $850 million program. We had resources of over a thousand all over the world, a combination of employees, contractors, staff augmentation. And all of that complexity was part of what I was looking to navigate. At that, about several years into it, our corporate CIO, Chief Information Officer, left suddenly. And they tapped on me to serve in the interim position while I had this massive job happening. And I told them that I didn't feel like I had the resources to really step into that larger role. And that's when they suggested that I get an executive coach. And so it was partly to support me in the work that I was already doing, but also to help me develop the kinds of skills that I would need in that interim role.

So it was amazing because I thought the coaching was going to be a lot centered on the work itself, but it ended up being a lot about exploring my values, the impact that I wanted to make in the world, that in the work that I do. It was about helping me define what my professional brand was so that I could lean into that and really play in the areas where I had significant strengths versus trying to compensate for things that I wasn't naturally good at or try to do too many things.

And then we worked on how to fill in those areas around me where I didn't have natural strengths. It helped me to see some of the systemic challenges that I was facing, whether that was gender bias or politics that I might be taking personally to see it more in a systemic point of view. Not in a personal way, but part of a landscape that we all navigate as executives and corporate workers.

In the end, the combination of me doing the jobs that I did, which were at very senior executive levels, plus getting my own coaching, were the ingredients that I used to transition into doing the coaching work. All those experiences served me very well to make that transition very quickly once I decided that I wanted to do coaching myself.

**Jag**

It turned out probably a little counterintuitive for the organization that offered you executive coaching, but because it not only helped you with some clarity about your role in the company, but also I think it served your larger purpose in your personal life and goals as well. But having said that I want to go back to this question, Kim.

You spoke about facing challenges and biases as a woman in a male-dominated workplace, and then comes executive coaching for a whole different reason. How did you navigate that challenge, the gender challenge, before the executive coaching and after the executive coaching?

**Kim Jones**

It's a great question. I would say that gender bias has always been a part of what I, and most women, especially those of us who are in male-dominated spaces like leadership, face.

So I should mention that I came up through leadership not in tech. I came up on the business side. I was previously in operations, finance and risk management. And I’ve always done large transformational program work. So when I was on the business side, I was doing mergers, acquisitions, consolidations of operations, offshoring, nearshoring, relocations, things like that. And a lot of my projects had major systems components to it. And I naturally gravitated towards that. I felt like I spoke that language of translating between business and IT very well. I partnered very well with my IT counterparts.

And our projects were going in more successfully than many because we had forged those strong relationships and I was able to advocate for my IT folks on the business side, which was the reason why I was tapped to go over to IT and lead. At an executive level or at a leadership level initially, running IT teams that I had never actually done the work. So I not only faced the bias of being a woman, but I also faced the bias of never having been in tech roles myself.

And there's quite a few people in IT who will say that someone with my background really isn't qualified to lead at that level. I think what was so stark about transferring from business leadership to IT leadership, is that in business, you're still navigating gender bias, but it's significantly less than what I experienced going over into IT because the representation of women is so much lower in IT than operations, for example. And also because of the fact that I was navigating a very different path to leadership. So those two things caused me to immediately feel the impact of bias in a more significant way. And I think in tech, what you have is a lot of stereotypes and biases that are based on the idea of what a good tech worker looks like, which isn't female, which doesn't look like somebody like me.

What would happen regularly is I would show up in a lot of settings and I would have to justify decisions more. I would be challenged a lot more on things like budgets and proposals that I was making. I felt like I didn't have equal access to networks. I felt like I didn't have equal access to sponsors, mentorship and opportunities. And so part of what being on the business side afforded me was the opportunity to see that what was happening in the IT role was not necessarily personal to me, that because I had a different experience on the business side, I started to really question whether or not this was part of the systems that hold women back in IT and make it quite honestly inhospitable environment for many women and the statistics show that many women leave, 50% of women leave tech by the midpoint of their careers and 66% of them cite unfair practices as reasons for that.

So I kind of knew that going in and I think what the coaching really helped me to do was to clarify how I wanted to manage that environment. So rather than just getting frustrated with it, and quite honestly, that frustration would sometimes come through in how I was approaching the work, I was guided more in the direction of understanding the playing field that I was on, and how I wanted to navigate that playing field. What options did I have to navigate? How could I work within the systems to affect change? So that's really where the coaching became very useful, it shifted me out of the thinking that I had to fight harder and work more to achieve the same.

There are some strategic and sensible things that I can do that can help me. So examples of that would be things like partnering with men and other people, not just men, but people of influence, who saw the value of what I was bringing, and have them supporting me in some of the things that I was doing. So doing more socialization of the work that I was doing would be one example of a strategy that I would use going forward, that helped me navigate those environments better.

**Jag**

Wow, okay. The couple of examples that you gave here, Kim, was the result of the coaching. Is that right? Wow, okay. So far, what I've heard people say the outcomes of coaching are understanding yourself and making changes internally rather than externally.

**Kim Jones**

Uh huh. Yes. Yes.

**Jag**

Expecting something outside, but the strategies that you came up with… I've always wondered if coaching can't, you know… some they say that coaches are not supposed to give answers, they don't usually, they only question you and then they help you get out information, but if you know coaching helped you figure out those strategies that you just said, partnering with people of influence and then getting them to support you, it's more like politics. I'm sorry, I don't mean to be coming from a negative way, but it also seems to be very productive and very positive as well. And this is the first time I'm coming across this kind of an outcome from a coaching point of view.

**Kim Jones**

Yeah, it is something that I do share with my clients. When I say that I'm a coach, I say that I'm also a consultant coach, which means that my first approach is always to partner with my clients and help them navigate their own solutions by asking questions and sharing perspectives and giving them perhaps additional ways of thinking about things, challenging them.

At the same time, because I have the experience, there's also a mentor component or consulting component that I can offer to clients. So I'll often ask them if they want me to suggest what to do in this situation? Sometimes they ask me that. And first we would talk about how they see it.

Typically I ask what are their challenges? What options do they have? What way forward do they want to take? And then I will also ask them like, or they will ask me, what would they do in this situation? And that's where I put on my consulting or education hat.

The other thing that happened when I got my degree, was really understanding those systems of power that exist within organizations. I went and did my master's in cultural anthropology after leaving the corporate world. So now I bring in an educational component to help people understand how the norms, that we experience in our broader culture, often get hold of in organizations.

So those can be everything related to gender bias, but can also be norms around things that are happening outside of the workplace. So it's about understanding what those systems look like, so that clients have the information that they can then use to make their own decisions about how they want to navigate.

I'll give you a great example. We know, for example, that women who act in very assertive ways, consistent with how their male counterparts might act, will actually be judged negatively for that. A lot of times women will come to me and say that they are being or acting just like their counterparts, but it's affecting them and my effectiveness at work. Then we talk about the double bind of the gender bias where women are expected to be likable and nice, and then leaders are expected to be competent and assertive and things like that. And those things are at opposite ends and a woman might be acting as a leader, but that goes against what's expected for her gender.

So she's being assertive rather than nice and less accommodating and things like that. That can actually affect her effectiveness because it creates less likeability for her. So what we do is in coaching, for example, I might educate what a double bind looks like and then say to them, okay, given this information, how is it that you want to respond? You can continue to act assertively and be less effective or you can be assertive in a way that we know works for women.

So women can get their point of view across effectively when they do it in ways like asking a question, for example. So rather than saying, I think we should do it this way, it could be more like, hey, have we thought about doing it this way? Some people will tell you not to do that because it can diminish your power. That's actually not true.

There's actually a great study that Adam Grant did and published earlier, actually it was late last year in the New York Times about the fact that when women use accommodating language, it doesn't diminish their power and it actually makes them more effective. So those would be examples of where the educational consulting piece could come in just to inform clients about a broader spectrum of what they can consider in making a decision.

And then the question for them is, where do you feel most comfortable? Do you want to continue to be assertive in the way that you are and navigate the fact that might make you come up with some things around your likeability, or do you want to adopt some of these strategies that will allow you to be more effective, but may feel less authentic to who you are and how you want to show up? And we talk about what those options could look like.

**Jag**

Wow. Okay. Great stuff, Kim. I mean, a lot of new things that I'm hearing today. But before I proceed, I want to go back to when I interrupted you when you're about to add your thoughts to the point.

When I was saying, executive coaching came to you, but then coaching as it is cannot be split or objectively separated between professional and personal because it's so intertwined. And when your organization helps you with that executive coaching, it may or may not entirely be effective because you also may have a lot going on about what you want to do personally and change paths. Like you almost did, I'm not sure how long you were with the organization after the coaching stint happened. If you had to, if you wanted to add your thoughts, please do it. I'm so sorry I interrupted you back there.

**Kim Jones**

Oh, no, you didn't actually. But yeah, just a couple of points on that. The coaching was not the thing that caused me to leave my position. We actually mentioned that I was in an interim CIO position. They actually decided to hire someone from the outside. And so when that happened, I was given a broader scope, and was given a promotion to senior vice president at the time with a new person coming in.

When that new person came in, I think there was a natural tension around the fact that there was a big part of the organization that was under me and he was a new person coming in who had, I'm sure, his own ideas about how he wanted the department structure and he was a little bit inhibited in that.

We worked together for about a year and a half when I actually told him that I was thinking about moving on and that would give him the freedom also to build the team according to his vision.

So it actually ended up being a very amicable way to move out into something different, but it was really in being in that new structure, where I was already feeling burnt out prior to that, that sort of pushed me to say, you know what, I think it's time for a new start for me and for Farmers Insurance and for the CIO that they had hired.

So it wasn't the executive coaching, but I will say that I used a lot of what I learned about myself in the executive coaching to think about what I was going to be doing next. So that was extremely helpful.

**Jag**

Got it, Kim. I'm going to come back to the topic that we just discussed about adopting strategies for women that may not feel authentic for them. But before that, I want to touch upon your transition from your corporate role, where you've worked for a salary, and then moving on, taking a three-year break to do a course on cultural anthropology. I hope I didn't change that. And how I mean, how easy or difficult it is, because you just spoke about how difficult it is already for women in male dominated industries and such.

**Kim Jones**

You got it.

**Jag**

The worst thing that can happen to any woman, especially in that phase, is taking a break because that also doesn't necessarily show positively for the future of career growth or whatever it is. So how easy or difficult was the decision for you to make about that and how did you kind of settle into coaching? If you can just walk us through this.

**Kim Jones**

Yeah. Yeah, At that time I said casually to my boss that it would be a good time for me to move on and we agreed on that, but it was one of the most difficult decisions I have ever made in my life. And partly because, Jag, like you mentioned, I had stories in my mind about what happens if I leave the workforce, then I won't be able to get back in.

And now that's becoming less and less true post-Covid because during Covid, many people took breaks. You remember the great resignation. We had 25% of the workforce leaving their jobs each year during Covid, for actually the first two years during Covid and partially through the third year. And many of them did not have other jobs to go to.

They were just burnt out, they were caregiving. Maybe they had an epiphany that they weren't spending their life in environments that were serving them and they wanted to take a break and try something different.

So more and more it's become acceptable or it isn't becoming a negative thing if a person has a career break on their resume.

At the time that I left, Covid hadn't happened yet. I left in 2017. And so I was very concerned about how I'm going to get back into the workforce. And I think even the bigger challenge for me was the fact that my identity was so wrapped up in who I was as a professional. Financially I was fine, I knew I could take a very long break, but there was a part of me that felt almost like my entire worth was tied to my work.

And so I remember that first Friday after I left my job, that was a payday. And I was thinking like, there's no paycheck coming into my bank account. I remember thinking that it feels like I can't even explain my life if I don't have a paycheck coming in.

And that was when it really occurred to me, there was an insight that this transition was less about the external factors, like whether I can find another job or would I be ok financially, and more internally related to my identity - who am I without a job?

And then when I decided to start my own business, who am I as a quote unquote coach? Because in my mind it seemed that anyone can be a coach. You can call yourself a coach and coach without having credentials and things like that. It's a profession that has a pretty low barrier to entry.

Now, obviously, there are all different levels of experience and coaching. But in my mind, I was coming from being a very senior level executive and a Fortune 250 company with all of that carried with it, to “I'm going to be a coach”. And in my mind, it felt very much like there was resistance to that being okay for me, even though it's what I wanted to do.

It took me a while to even update my LinkedIn profile and say that I'm now coaching because I had this idea that people who knew me were gonna be thinking that “wow, she's really sold out” or “whatever happened to Kim”? Even though I knew it was what I wanted to do.

So I had to do a lot of internal work around letting go of the expectations I had of myself and how I thought others would view me, to step into something that was really meaningful and fulfilling for me and to build a new identity as someone who's contributing to the world in a way that feels meaningful for me rather than living up to what external standards of success looks like.

And that's been very important for me in the work that I do with my clients because oftentimes I've come across these same challenges that people have, thinking that they can't do this instead of that because what will people think? What will my network think? I've invested so much of my life into this, I can't give up, it's gonna mean I’m quitting. So those I would say were probably the bigger challenges of me making the transition.

**Jag**

Got it. And moving on to the times that you put yourself out there as a coach, how easy or difficult was finding your first client? Did your connections and network, as being a part of a Fortune 250 company, in the position that you were, did that help? Did you consciously leverage that?

**Kim Jones**

Yes, yes, it helped very much. As a matter of fact, I've been very fortunate that a lot of my businesses come from referrals from people that are in my network.

My first client actually came from a program that I am teaching at. So this is a program where we teach women in tech skills to reach the CIO level. These are director level women and above. And me as a former CIO and other CIOs volunteered their time to teach on different aspects of IT leadership. I taught a course on culture. The woman who runs the program actually sent me my very first client as soon as she heard that I was coaching. And I had other people on my network doing the same thing.

It was very scary, though, because I have never had to go out and get business for anything. I've always had corporate jobs and so the idea of going out there marketing myself and positioning myself and my business to the world is very scary because I thought about what happens if they don't want what I have to offer?

So there was also that. It's like you're putting yourself out in the world in a different way and then there's that feeling of what it will feel like if it's not received in the way that I want.

Luckily, I didn't have to go through too much of that again because I had such a great network to help support me in getting my business off the ground and up and running. But now I'm actually building an academy for women in tech to help them elevate to positions of leadership. And so I'm back out there, putting this out into the world and seeing what happens with it.

So that's another thing that I love so much about having my own business is that I get to reinvent it all of the time. Because I think in addition to a coach, I'm actually truly a teacher at heart. And so a lot of the things that I continue to bring in are more in the teaching and consulting aspect of the work that I do like this academy that I'm launching.

**Jag**

Got it, Kim. Going back to the point you made about women having to adopt strategies that may not feel authentic to them, how easy or difficult is it as a coach to drive this across?

**Kim Jones**

It's a lot easier than you would probably think because a lot of times when women understand the playing field that they are operating on, it feels empowering for them to have choices and strategies that they can use. When I was experiencing the challenges that I had, I would often get frustrated and feel like it wasn't fair and it can feel very helpless and disempowering to be saying to yourself that I'm doing the same things that other leaders are doing and it's not effective.

And I believe it's because of these factors, like gender, lack of having a technical background, and other similar kinds of things are at play. That can feel very helpless. But then when you work and see that here's the way the systems actually work, and here are strategies you can use to navigate within those systems.

Even if the client doesn't necessarily feel comfortable adopting some of those strategies, that's always their choice, at least they know that they exist, and they understand a little bit better what they're up against. And it can give them that sense of empowerment versus feeling helpless. That there's something they can do to affect the course of their career.

**Jag**

Can you share a couple of examples where some of the strategies were not very comfortable for your clients? What do you think is the root cause? Because we all look for validation. Sometimes we don't know what we think as a solution is right or wrong. And then we want a little bit of validation, and coaches can help there. Now, when a coach offers strategies and that's not very comfortable, how is it? If you can start with a couple of examples and share why you think what's the root cause behind them feeling uncomfortable about it.

**Kim Jones**

So when you say the root cause behind them feeling uncomfortable, are you talking about what part of being uncomfortable is? What do you mean by that?

**Jag**

Why do they think those strategies are not really for them? Or why does it take them away from their authenticity in their perception?

**Kim Jones**

Yeah. Okay, I see. I'll give you a great example. I had a client who had a boss who was a woman. And by the way, it's worth saying that biases play out with both men and women because we're both conditioned under the same norms and expectations and biases and things like that.

So this person was in finance, and she had a boss who was very dismissive, giving her a lot of hard time. And if my client had questions and needed help from her, her boss would almost act like she was being imposed upon and that my client was asking a stupid question. And it was causing my client to disengage from her boss.

And this may not even be an example of gender bias, but my client had experienced that this boss did not behave in the same way when she was dealing with men.

Whatever the case may be, she was having issues with working effectively with her boss. So I asked her, are there any women that you have seen that work well with your boss? And she said, yes, as a matter of fact, I have a counterpart and she will go in and she'll say things like,”hey, this is probably a stupid question, but or, you know what, I really don't know what I'm doing in this case, can you help me out”?

So she was coming in from the angle of diminishing herself a little bit in that. But when she started her statements that way, the boss was actually much more responsive to her and was able to get in there and help her resolve things and she got what she needed to do her job effectively.

So I asked my client, you know, ok, so let's talk about that as a potential strategy. You've seen it work with this other person, doesn't necessarily mean it's gonna work with you, but is that a strategy that you think could be a viable way of working with your boss? And her first reaction was, that does not feel authentic to me. For me to say “hey, this is probably a stupid question”, does not feel authentic.

And I said, okay, yeah, great. So that's perfectly within your decision, absolutely if that's really important to you, then absolutely, don't do anything that makes you feel like you're not living within your values. But let's talk about the fact that the approach you're using now is causing you to move away from a strong interaction with your boss. It's probably not going to help. You're pulling back so you may not be as effective or successful in your role.

So those might be the trade-offs if you're authentic, but you're also not as able to be effective. So, just think about where you wanna be on that. And she said, you know what, I'm gonna do an experiment. I'm gonna go out there and I'm going to go to her with this approach. And she did it. She went and said, “hey, this is probably a stupid question” and got a completely different reaction from her boss. And it allowed her to actually connect with her boss and get what she needed to do her job well.

Does that mean she's gonna do that every single time? No. Does that mean that she's gonna do it even the next time? Maybe not, but it gave her one more tool in her tool belt.

And what we really talked about is you don't have to do this in every situation at all. You can apply your situational judgment to say, in this case, I'm gonna choose to do this thing that feels inauthentic to me because it's going to allow me to do my job, be effective, rise, get the position that I want, be promoted, like all the things that I want. I'm going to adopt these strategies.

But then in other situations where that's not required of me, then of course I'm going to do the thing that feels most authentic to me. So I think that would be a great example of where there was a positive effect from just understanding the options and choosing within them.

**Jag**

Yeah, an amazing example. Thank you for that, Kim. Just mind-boggling, really. Very simple and seems like the kind of impact it can have is really big.

**Kim Jones**

And it's really hard though, because we don't want to have to go and say that this is probably a stupid question. That's the thing that makes it hard is that it doesn't feel good that we have to do things that don't make sense to us, our values, and maybe that we see other people not having to do. But it can be very powerful. And then we understand that this is the thing that could cause us to rise and reach the potential we want to reach. And then we can pull other people up behind us who are challenged with those same things because we can be the kinds of leaders we want for ourselves in those roles.

**Jag**

Yeah, wow. I mean, for me it was mind-boggling because the person doesn't have to go through the diminishing part, where one doesn't have to put themselves low to get some output. That's one thing, but I was under the assumption that it is only going to be more detrimental, I was not going to be productive, but the response is what really surprised me.

So if somebody volunteers to do that to themselves, then the person could respond in a different way, very interesting! And Kim, you also spoke about how you were in a general business role and then you got into the tech role and then you saw the gender bias even more pronounced there. So are gender biases different in intensities, and do they vary from industry to industry and why is it?

The reason I am surprised, I'm asking… this is tech, it is supposed to be a more advanced sort of domain… At least, I'm not sure what is the reality, but people tend to think that people in tech are way more advanced, more progressive and stuff like that. So when you say that gender bias is more pronounced in tech, it's a bit surprising.

**Kim Jones**

Interesting. Yeah, it's actually a well-documented problem in the industry. Even today only 25 to 35% of roles in tech are occupied by women. We are significantly underrepresented in most companies. It's not true for every company. That's the average. Depends on the company, depends on the role. You see that level of underrepresentation in any industry and tech is not the only one.

We see that in many senior level leadership roles. You see it in the financial industry, like Wall Street, et cetera. You see those kinds of dynamics. When you have that level of under-representation, there are more challenges from a bias perspective. If it's about 50-50 in terms of representation, then it tends not to be as pronounced. And so there's lots of data and research and studies on why that is the case.

But in the case of tech industry, which I think is probably an area we're both more familiar with, a lot of this comes from the idea that technical skills are more innately present in men than women. It comes from the idea that innovators and people who are creative are men. So there's a very strong male stereotype with innovation.

If I were to say to you, “hey, Jag, who do you think of as innovative”? You're likely to think of people like Steve Jobs, Elon Musk, the list goes on with men. Most people won't even come up with the single name of a woman. But we know that women and men are innovative in equal proportion. They both come up with ideas at the same rate. They both are creative at the same levels.

When women bring innovation to the table, it's more likely to be attributed to luck or colleagues or dismissed. Whereas when men bring innovation to the table, their ideas are more likely to be adopted and things like that. So that's an example of what plays out in tech all of the time.

We know innovation is an incredibly important aspect of many tech roles. And when we don't see women as being innovative, that can actually work against them in the roles because they have a harder time promoting their ideas, they have a harder time being taken seriously as innovators, and they don't have the support structures around them to really help them navigate some of those biases and challenges.

So yes, you're right that tech is considered to be progressive, but the idea is that it's a meritocracy, which you will hear a lot of.

There's a great book by Emily Chang, who's a Bloomberg reporter. She wrote a book several years ago called “Brotopia”, which is all about the Bro Culture, the male dominant cultures that exist in tech. And she called it a mirror talker, rather than a merit talker, meaning that when we say it's merit based, a lot of times what men are doing in these cultures, these founders, for example, is they're hiring people that are like them.

So they look at it as a merit, but they're not really fully appreciating some of the skills that people in more diverse groups can bring to the table. They tend to bring in their college roommates or people they worked with in other companies that tend to be of their same demographic. And then they call it merit, but in fact, it's a preference that we all have to work with people who are similar to us to maybe overlook other experiences and qualifications, which can again work against women who are in these male dominant industries and roles.

And so then you also have the technical or the math component of it, like the technical STEM piece of tech, where we know that women are not seen as being as capable in technical roles. So it's like women are the ones that are good at language and emotions, and men are the ones that are good at technical and logical problems.

And we tend to over-index on the importance of that. First of all, it's not true that women aren't technical, but when bringing people into these tech roles, we tend to over index on logic and technical skills versus maybe some of the soft skills that we know are important in terms of understanding our customers, problem solving, being good collaborators and connectors and working well in teams.

The things that are associated with women that we know are also very important in tech roles, those often tend to get dismissed when we're hiring resources into tech. And so we don't bring in that balance of some of those dynamics either. And all of those things together create very inhospitable environments for women in tech.

So I mentioned this data, 25 to 35% of positions in tech are occupied by women. Women leave tech, 46% of women leave tech by the midpoint of their careers. And I mentioned earlier that 66% of them cite unfairness as their top one or two reasons for leaving the field because these environments aren't hospitable to them.

There's another factor also, which is this idea that to be a good tech worker you have to dedicate your life to tech 24-7. It's the mindset of “thank God it's Monday” because you want to just be working all the time. This idea tends to favor young men versus women who may be in caregiving roles or have things that they're responsible for outside of their work that makes them less available for working the 24-7 hours that are expected of many people in tech, which then biases the roles towards men versus women.

**Jag**

Got it, Kim. You know, I'm not expecting a ready-made answer from you or a data-backed answer from you. I want to know your opinion, what you think. Now, you know Bumble, right? Bumble is a tech company that has got a woman leader. It was founded by a woman. I think she came out from Tinder and she founded, and there could be a lot more companies led by women. Are situations different in such companies, from your experience, if you've come across such companies?

**Kim Jones**

Yeah, so I think it's mixed. So Whitney Heard is who you're referring to. I don't know a whole lot about how she's running her companies, but I've heard she's very woman-focused in the work that she does. She's a strong advocate for women in the workplace. That often has an impact on the things that I've mentioned.

And then you have other women tech leaders, like when Marissa Mayer was over at Yahoo where she was doing largely things that were consistent with the kinds of cultures that don't favor women. For example, when she pulled everyone back into the workforce. They had a remote culture, this was before the pandemic, she pulled everybody back in house when there were many women who were disadvantaged by that for caregiving reasons. She also was someone who had children while she was in her executive role. She came back to work right away rather than modeling having parental leave.

So some of the things that create a challenging environment for women in tech, and I don't know a lot about Marissa Mayer. I just know some of the behaviors and some of the things that were written about her leadership there. And there were so many positive things too, so I don't want to diminish all of the amazing things that she was able to accomplish, and she's someone that I deeply admire, but she was also someone that maybe wasn't looking at creating the conditions that would be more welcoming to women having better representation in tech.

**Jag**

Got it, Kim. Thank you for that. Kim, because you specialize mostly in working with women to empower them. To all the women listeners out there, who work in tech. After you put it out in such a detailed manner, I can connect with a couple of conversations that I've had in the past at which point I was not able to relate, but now I can see that this is what it is.

If you had to offer simple tools from a mindset point of view for women, who wake up and go to work in tech. To make themselves feel better, what would those tools be, simple basic stuff?

**Kim Jones**

So maybe the counterintuitive first thing that I would say is, don't expect to feel better. Meaning that when we sign up for these roles, especially if we want to be in leadership, part of the job is to become comfortable with really uncomfortable situations. So my first thing is to get comfortable with being uncomfortable.

I see a lot of women holding themselves back, not using their voice, not wanting to get on stage, because it's uncomfortable. And for women, it may be particularly more uncomfortable because they may suffer from lower levels of confidence or imposter syndrome, which can happen when you're in environments that look at you like you're less than, or you're not as competent or capable.

Sometimes women internalize that. That may cause women to pull themselves back from being visible, from sharing their points of view. So the first thing I would advise is - know that for us to succeed, we have to push ahead and continue to be visible, continue to have a voice, continue to promote what we believe in and stand behind, even when it's really uncomfortable to do that. And to think of it in terms of this is going to help us grow into the positions where we can have a bigger impact.

So I would say that's probably the first thing.

The second thing is not to waste too much energy when you encounter bias and trying to fix yourself in the face of that bias. I worked with one woman who is a CTO of a healthcare company and she would walk into a room when people didn't know her and they wouldn't treat her like she was a CTO. And she came to me and she said, what do I need to do? Do I need to change my hair? Do I need to change how I dress? What do I need to do? She took that all upon herself. And don't worry about if that is just bias.

So if somebody doesn't automatically think of you as that role, that's bias. And you're not gonna be able to fix bias. What you can do instead is to hold your power and not let that bias make you smaller. Because what can happen is when we're encountered with something like that, we feel like, oh my gosh, I don't look the part, I don't come across as qualified for this, and then we shrink in ourselves**,** then we give away our power.

So what I advise my clients to do is in those moments when they encounter bias is hold your power. What is the power move that you can take in that position? So that you're not presenting yourself or making yourself less than, which then creates an energy where you're not able to show up fully as yourself, have the impact and the influence that you want.

So those are probably two of the things that immediately come to mind.

Another thing that comes to mind is - find your support system. Find your mentor, find people, other women in the world, get a coach to help you navigate these environments so you don't take it personally and feel like it's all on you to figure out how to respond in these environments.

And another thing that happens… one of the best antidotes to bias is to become well-known, to actually let people see who you truly are, so they're not seeing you through the lens of stereotypes or bias.

And again, that requires you to be visible. It requires you to develop a network, to connect with your colleagues, to have a point of view, to establish a position. And then that can become a foundation for you to continue to grow, develop and elevate your career.

**Jag**

Got it, Kim. Thank you so much for that. Kim, earlier you spoke about a case study where, you mentioned a trade-off, you helped a woman client of yours, show her it is a trade-off at some point. If you're not comfortable with this, this is what it is.

But there are a lot of arguments that have come across where women are thinking why should there be a trade-off in the first place? But it just never ends if you take that route of argument. So as a solace, what do you end up saying when you see there is no choice, but trade-off is the only point, practically for them to both keep the job and also to have a peaceful situation. What's some of those perspectives or points of views that you share as a coach?

**Kim Jones**

First thing is I agree with them. It does suck that we have to deal with trade-offs.

It's like Ginger Rogers. I don't know if you're familiar with the meme that's always talked about Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire, a famous dance couple. That she did everything Fred Astaire did, but she had to do it backwards and in high heels.

So that's the kind of thing that we are often faced with. But I would say that yes, there's always a trade-off, but then there's always a choice too.

If you are in an environment like my client, that I mentioned earlier, who had the boss that responded to her only when she was saying, “hey, this is probably a stupid question”, she always has the choice to leave, do something different. And often people will learn to go through that experience of “I don't wanna be in an environment where I'm facing these kinds of things”. So when I go out and look for another job, I'm going to be intentional about choosing companies that are known for having cultures that don't have these kinds of dynamics to the same degree.

So the first thing is to validate that it's no fun that we have to think about it this way. Second is to be empowered to know that you do still have a choice, whether it's choosing a trade-off on either end of the continuum of authentic versus effective. And then the ultimate choice is you can always find something that's a little bit more aligned with your values and how you want to be treated.

Again, it's not fair that we are often the ones that have to leave jobs when these things happen. And the burden is on us to go find something that's more fair and maybe doesn't exist to the same degree, but it is always a choice.

And then I always remind people of the bigger perspective, the fact that if you look at who are actually in the dominant groups, like for example white men, they are less than half of the population. The world is becoming more diverse all of the time. If we adopt practices that allow us to lead from a diverse perspective where we're promoting other people, navigating ways where they don't have to be subjected to this, then we're doing our part too.

So, you know, it's almost like being part of the bigger picture of positioning ourselves to be more effective as these practices start to slowly become under more scrutiny and we know they're not as effective and so we'll be positioned to be able to lead in ways that people are going to be more responsive to.

**Jag**

Thank you. Kim, now as a coach, talking about the best practices in the coaching industry, are there situations where you felt that “I'm not really going to do this”. Have there been instances where you've gone against the grain, not bothering about the best practices that haven't felt right for you? And if yes, can you share a couple of examples?

**Kim Jones**

So you're saying as a coach or when I was at work? lAre you saying if as a coach, have I gone against what I felt like was a best practice for a client? Gosh, where have I done that? I really try not to. I really try to offer information that the client is going to be empowered to make a decision with.

**Jag**

No, as a coach, let me clarify this. When I say against best practices, I'm not asking if you've done anything that is not supposed to be done. What I'm trying to say is, as a coaching industry, it is an industry and people kind of stick to certain rules. Oh, you know what? This is exactly what you're supposed to do, but sometimes it may not be effective, it may not be correct. You might feel something that may not be supportive, but it might give you amazing results. So that's where I'm coming from.

**Kim Jones**

Something that I do a lot of, which I think this is probably a preference, but I hear a lot of people in the coaching industry say, “you know, you as a coach, take yourself completely out of the equation and make it all about the client”. I will actually share my own experiences with clients.

So one thing, so I'll give you a great example of that. I mentioned that it's important for clients to feel comfortable being uncomfortable to use their voice to be on stage. All of that terrible fear of public speaking when I first started out in my career. I would do anything in my power to not have to be on stage, but of course I was at a senior level position and it was part of the job. And so I had to learn how to manage through that fear. That is an example of a story that I will share with my clients to say to them that often when we look at leaders, we look at the finished product.

So when I was in my role in the last years of my career, you're looking at the finished product, but you didn't know my journey getting up to that point. I was almost fired too early in my career when I was in leadership because I had a very command and control leadership style at the time. And I was getting great results in terms of metrics being met. But I had very unhappy teams who complained about me to HR and I almost ended up losing my job for it.

So those would be examples that I would share with clients to say, “as you go through your leadership journey, know that all of us that you're looking at have gone through our own journey”. We've learned through our own mistakes. Here are some of mine. And in a way it's done to help them believe in their own ability to work through some things that might feel like insurmountable challenges to them.

**Jag**

God bless you Kim. For the listeners that are coaches who are aspiring to be a coach like yourself, one of the biggest challenges sometimes happens to be how much of a subject matter expert they are, but putting themselves out there and getting those big gigs creates resistance. So what are some of the things that you would advise or suggest to them to start with?

**Kim Jones**

The first thing that I would advise is to be very clear about what you offer as a coach. The coaches that I've seen that are not as successful in building their businesses oftentimes say things like, and there's nothing wrong with this, this is what we do, by the way, but they may say, “I help people navigate finding their purpose” or “help them transform their beliefs to serve them more”.

I think a lot of people, especially in our culture where we're so used to seeing the outcome, “when I do this, here's what the outcome is gonna be”. They have a harder time getting their head around what coaching is gonna do for me. So when I market my business, I talk about the fact that I help elevate women at work. And then there's things that I do around that. But I'm very specific about the kinds of clients I serve and the types of problems that I help them resolve.

So I think that's the first thing, as a coach, is defining what that is for you. So you can clearly articulate that.

The next thing that I would say is figure out what kind of marketing works for you. I think this is where people often have the hardest time growing their business. They get stuck in trying to figure out how they're going to promote their services.

So as an example, a lot of people will feel like I've got to build my business online. So I've got to have a newsletter. I've got to have an email distribution list. I've got to have a lot of posts that I do on social media. And that may not be comfortable for them at all. That may not play into their strengths. I happen to be one of those people that don't enjoy that way of marketing. I like to market through developing connections with people. I am much more of a one-on-one person versus large groups and talking to strangers and things like that.

So what I learned to do was to build my business through developing a network of people who got to know me personally. So I belong to a professional networking group called Provisors, for example, where I'm in with professionals who refer clients to each other. So if I have a client, for example, who's getting a divorce, I can refer them to a divorce attorney. If there's someone in the group that has a client who needs coaching, they can refer them to me. That is a much more effective marketing strategy for someone like me who doesn't enjoy social media marketing and things like that.

So I mention this because a lot of people will give up on building their coaching practice because they think they need to market in a way that doesn't align with them and then they end up resisting it and not doing it and then feeling like they're failing versus really understanding what kind of marketing approach is gonna work best for you.

So if you like more of the social media stuff, do the social media stuff. If you like networking, do networking. If you like to promote your business by getting speaking engagements and then soliciting clients after the fact, do that. Figure out what works for you and then lean into what works for you because you're gonna be a lot more successful if it's something that you feel like you do well at and that you relatively enjoy. I mean, like most of us don't love marketing in any capacity, but do the things that are relatively more enjoyable for you than others.

**Jag**

When you came to your practice and your business, you said you have a specific set of clients that you would like to cater to. So, how do you define them? And if you have a style, what can people expect from you?

**Kim**

Great questions. I like coaching people that I deeply relate to, which are women who are navigating workplaces where they have an ambition, a goal, an aspiration that they want to achieve, and they want to work with someone who is going to partner with them and help them achieve that. I also work with women who are in career transition, who like me, decided that they at one point wanted to go in a different direction.

And so that's how I define it for me is, what problems do I care deeply about in the world?

The thing that I care most deeply about in the world is having more balance in leadership and especially male dominant industries on the gender scale. I believe our society will be a better place when we have more balance and positions of power.

So that mission then translates into the coaching that I do. And what can people expect from me when they work with me? I tell people that I am, what I bring to the table, is the combination of the coaching tools that I've been trained in, as well as my cultural anthropology background, which helps to identify and break down the systems that they're part of so they can navigate them effectively.

And then also my corporate executive experience where I can consult with them and help them understand things that I've done that might be helpful for them that they may not even think about because they just haven't had those experiences yet.

**Jag**

Got it. I did a quick research. I just visited your website and I saw this Academy for Women that you're coming up with so what is that about, how different is it from your coaching? Can you talk a little bit about that please?

**Kim Jones**

A little over a year ago I started teaching at UCLA Extension to their technology management as part of their technology management program.

I teach courses on building 21st century leadership skills and creating engaged and inclusive work cultures for leaders in tech. And so I'm taking that and turning it into an academy for women to help women in male dominant industries navigate their way to their highest potential.

So we work on everything from understanding your strengths and how to apply them at work to building a professional brand so you can build a reputation and create opportunities according to that, to creating a compelling vision and strategy, to navigating bias, to developing the confidence and executive presence and communication skills that are needed for you to be successful, all in a small group cohort where people can learn from each other and build that networking and community aspect to support them as they advance and elevate their careers. I'm really excited to be launching that this summer.

**Jag**

Wow, okay, good luck with that, Kim. And probably my concluding question, where do you see women at workplaces? Is it improving? Are you seeing good things? And where do you see coaches that are coming out specifically to help women? How does it all look? Is there going to be a lot of work for them? And your general views about this.

**Kim Jones**

About the question as to whether it's improving for women, sadly, women's representation in the workforce overall declined significantly during COVID because of caregiving needs where women were choosing between work and things like schooling their children.

The latest report, let's see, I have it here, was from the Global Gender Gap Report of 2023 from the World Economic Forum, indicates that we're now starting to see a modest recovery, that women are re-entering the workforce right now at faster rates than men are.

But it'll be a while before we get back to where we were before the pandemic. And I think just the fact that women left the workforce is indicative of the fact that we still have a long way to go.

So I think what I will say on the positive side is that we're having more conversations about what is needed to have supportive workplaces where women can bring their whole selves to work, not just do it, you know, like only being a professional person who doesn't have life responsibilities outside of work. So that's positive.

We're having more conversation about diversity, equity and inclusion, even though there's a backlash happening now. Most companies get the fact that having programs that support diverse workforces help with performance and business results.

We haven't yet seen that translate into numbers and tangible outcomes for women in the workplace. So we need to do more to get what we know into action so that we actually see the outcomes that we're looking for, which is again, more parity and having fairer work environments that support all people.

**Jag**

Thank you so much, it was a pleasure talking to you. It was very insightful, some of the things that you said. Personally, for me, it was eye-opening, some of the little situations. I'm excited to see more coaches like you contribute and help women elevate in tech and whatever they're doing. Thank you, Kim. Thanks for this.

**Kim Jones**

Oh my gosh, Jag, it was such a pleasure chatting with you today. Thank you for all of the support that you give to the coaching industry. It's really fantastic.

**Jag**

Pleasure. Thank you so much, Kim.

**Kim Jones**

Take care.