**The Thoughtful Entrepreneur Podcast**

**Josh Elledge**

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With us right now it's Kim Jones. Kim you are the founder and CEO of the Kim Jones Alliance your website is Kim Jones alliance.com. Kim, thank you so much for joining us!

**Kim Jones**

It's a pleasure to be here, thank you for having me.

**Josh Elledge**

Yes, absolutely, so tell us what the Kim Jones Alliance is.

**Kim Jones**

My business is built on a mission of elevating women in the workplace. A little bit of background on that- I have a 25-year corporate career.

Prior to founding my own company I worked my way up to very senior executive level positions in the information technology space. I was divisional CIO with a fortune 250 company and in that work really saw the need to elevate women in male dominant spaces, particularly in industries where women are significantly underrepresented, like leadership and TCH.

Once I left my corporate job I really had a very clear vision about how to work with women who are looking to achieve their Highest Potential through the work they do.

The work that I do takes the form of a number of different things from coaching to

consulting to education and teaching, to leading workshops and teaching leadership skills etc.

**Josh Elledge**

And on the topic of Gender Equity, if you were to give us a current state of the union, maybe some things that we should feel good about. What has changed over the past 20 years and where we are today. Maybe identify some of the largest gaps that we still have quite a bit of work to do. I would love your take on this.

**Kim Jones**

Yes, let's start with the good news. On the good news side the conversations are happening at a level that I have not experienced in my 30 plus years being part of the workforce.

When I joined the workforce and when I worked my way up to leadership there was this prevailing idea that there was one way to lead, that traditional models of leadership were based on traditionally male centered characteristics and traits.

Over time there's been a lot more recognition of the intrinsic qualities that women bring to leadership. Qualities like empathy, flexibility, collaboration and ways that we can express that and be authentic, so that we can achieve a really good balance and more authenticity in leadership styles that are out there, which creates more inclusivity.

That's the good news, the conversations are happening, companies are really interested in building more diversity in a number of different ways from leadership all the way down.

The bad news is that we, as you said, still have a very long way to go. We still see women being significantly underrepresented in leadership positions. If you look at Fortune 250, 500 companies, there are single digits of women who are sitting as CEOs of those companies.

C-Suite level positions are still hovering in the 20% range in Tech industry, depending on the role, and at other companies you can expect to see only 25 to 35% of positions being held by women.

So we have the awareness of where we need to go, the question now is how do we actually get there.

And that's one of the reasons why I built my company, to help those organizations turn their intentions into actions. So that they can start to benefit from the advantages of having more diverse workforces that include more women leaders and employees in general.

**Josh Elledge**

I'd really love to split up this question into two parts. I'd like to first address what women might be able to be more mindful of, regarding existing cultures or beliefs in the workplace, and internally what can women do to not undersell themselves, to not shortcut their worth?

If you were to turn and face the ladies in the audience right now and say: “women, let's have a quick conversation”, and we'll get to the men in just a second.

**Kim Jones**

I love that! The first thing that I would say is to understand that bias exists and it's part of the environments that we operate in.

That’s the idea that a fair and just world isn't exactly where we are right now and often just knowing that our systems are stacked against us, because of bias, can help us start to take empowered actions to maneuver and navigate in those environments.

Once we understand that any bias that we encounter is not personal, it's often systemic.

For example, if we're being interrupted or we're not being deferred to as the expert in our area or we're not being included in networks.

Once we understand that it is likely not due to anything that you're doing and that is likely a function of bias, then the next thing that I do is to encourage my clients to figure out and to identify what is the power move that they can make in any situation, where they're encountering bias.

Often, when women encounter bias they tend to shrink and make themselves smaller. They tend to think what they are doing is wrong and wonder how come they are not getting the same airtime as their male colleagues. Or how come they are not getting the same access to promotions as their male colleagues.

And they can start to doubt themselves and create a self-fulfilling prophecy where they're not putting themselves out there as much, not using their voice, and they're doubting themselves.

What I encourage them to do is identify what is that power move, so that they don't give away their power in that moment. What can they do to hold firm. That can be as simple as just noticing that they are starting to shrink and take back that position of confidence and authority.

It can be finding allies within their organization, who will support them in the kinds of things that they want to do in their career. It can be promoting floor time for themselves so that they are getting equal air time in any situation.

It can be as simple as being prepared to go into a meeting and use their voice when they are really uncomfortable doing that.

If you're someone who tends to hold yourself back because you're a little bit worried about how your messages will be received, having a very clear structure about how you can show up and lean into your areas of discomfort, lean into the edges of your comfort zone, can start to build that confidence muscle and to help you operate confidently. Even in the face of the things that we, as women, encounter in male dominant fields and industry, so that we don't give away that power and we then put ourselves on the best path to success.

**Josh Elledge**

Excellent, I love it Kim! What a great address. All right gentlemen, now let's turn and address the other side of the room. In this bizarre imaginary room, for some reason, they've separated themselves by gender, but now let's address the gentleman.

And I hope I could be completely naive here, but I hope that at least intellectually 98 - 99% of men, when asked, would say “yes, I absolutely believe in inequity”.

I could be completely off on even intention, and then I believe that there is likely where intention and what's being exercised, or what's actually being done, there's likely some gaps, that's my suspicion.

**Kim Jones**

Yes, it's a great point and I agree with you Josh. I see the same thing. I see most men absolutely advocating for an experience of equity. The challenge that all of us men and women have, is that we are conditioned to hold certain biases and stereotypes just from the environments that we're in, from the norms that we're exposed to.

So if I were talking to men in the room, the first thing I would say to them is, don't assume that the experiences that you are having in the workplace are shared by everybody else.

We know from data and surveys that men are much more likely to state that they feel that their environments are fair and inclusive, because those environments were built for them and support them and they may look around and they may see women and people of color and people in different marginalized groups and think like “hey, we don't have an issue here”.

I see a representation of what they may not be aware of. The experiences of those groups might be vastly different and there's a whole lot of maneuvering and negotiation that we and underrepresented groups have to do just to feel like we're on Level Playing Fields.

What I would encourage the men to do is first take away that assumption that everything is fine. If you happen to believe that, get to know your colleagues, who are in underrepresented groups. Ask them questions about what their experiences are, start to pay attention to where you might be holding your own biases.

By the way, I've had my biases as well, because we're all conditioned to have these biases, but because my experience and my career is affected by my gender, I'm much more likely to go out and learn about how those biases show up and do something about it.

Where people in the majority groups may not be so aware that there's these things that are existing, and to learn about them and to start to unlearn some of those behaviors.

Once they can become aware of the fact that they're likely carrying biases that are affecting the trajectories of people in marginalized groups, they may be in a better position to change their own behaviors.

I would invite them to be allies to people who are in marginalized groups. For example, men have access to things that others may not have, in particular if you’re a white man, and so understanding where you might be able to give some of that advantage that you have to those who are underrepresented groups may be a start.

For example, you may give the stage to a woman or a person of color when you're invited to speak on a panel or in a conference. Perhaps you're speaking and there is a woman or a person of color in the room. When an opportunity comes up to promote them for some stretch assignment or promotion, you can think about ways where you can support those groups, that have a steeper climb up the path of success, because of some of these biases that we've been talking about, would be the place I would start with, talking to the men in the room.

**Josh Elledge**

I absolutely love this, Kim. The thought of extending ourselves just a little bit more, beyond what might feel normal or comfortable.

I think sometimes we want to be authentic in this and we don't want to come across as if we're pandering or anything of that nature, but I’ve had enough great conversations with leaders that if anybody else has that insecurity, it is really important for those who are champions and advocates and allies out there to do a little bit more.

Because the reality is, there are plenty of people that are not doing near enough and there are workplaces where there is unfortunate disparity. I've been seeing these signs encouraging customers to be polite to the staff and you could be asked to leave and I think a simple thing that all of us can do is just be extra kind to outdo some of the negativity.

It's that same principle out there and this, I believe, inspires other people. It certainly can outdo some damage and not just damage of the past, but current damage that continues to happen out there. But I do love this concept, thank you so much for sharing that message.

**Kim Jones**

You're welcome

**Josh Elledge**

So Kim, tell me a bit about the work that you do. Your website is Kim Jones Alliance.com, obviously you do both individual coaching and then you also work with organizations as well.

 Do you mind explaining a bit more about what that looks like?

**Kim Jones**

Yes, sure. We can start with the work that I do on a one-on-one basis. I do individual coaching with two primary groups: women, who are in leadership and women who are in the tech industry, and we work on the kinds of things we've been talking about here, which is how those women can navigate and chart their own path to success.

Often it starts with just defining what it is that they want to accomplish in their work and really building a brand around that. Often, as women, we think that in order for us to step up and lead in greater capacities we have to know everything about every area that we're responsible for, otherwise we might begin to feel like imposters or like we're not qualified or we're going to get challenged.

By developing a brand around what it is that you do incrementally better than your colleagues, what is your secret sauce, that allows you to play in the lane that you do exceptionally well and surround yourself with the resources that can help support you in areas where you're not as strong…

An example of this for myself is that I came over to it from the business side. I did not grow up through the technology industry and that could be a very easy way for me to take myself out of the game or not even look at that opportunity, because clearly people could challenge me on whether I'm qualified based on just technical skills.

But when I looked at myself as being a transformational leader, who is capable of leading teams through large scale transformations in organizations, and I played in that brand and in that lane, then I was able to speak confidently from the value that I was adding versus worrying about all the things that I didn't know that were in my domain and who I could partner with to make

sure I was well covered and fully conversant in those areas.

So that's where we start in one-on-one coaching, working with people to understand what they bring, what they want to accomplish, how it aligns with the organizational mission and how they can use that to grow in their own career path.

The work that I do with companies is centered around inclusive leadership and team building. Building the kinds of leadership teams that are based on strength, leadership principles that have high levels of emotional intelligence, that are psychologically safe etc.

I teach about this at UCLA extension. It is part of their technology management program so I work with tech leaders of both genders to help them build the kinds of environments where everyone can thrive, because ultimately that's what drives top performance and helps them build strong strong loyal and engaged workforces that help them as leaders accomplish their highest potential as well.

**Josh Elledge**

Yes, Kim,your website Kim Jones alliance.com and perhaps you have some other resources someone, who may have stumbled upon our conversation.

Maybe they're already aware of the work that you do and now they're listening to our message today. For someone that wants to spend a little bit more time virtually with you, what would those next steps be? I mean ultimately hopefully leading to a conversation, where I think really great work gets done, but what's next for our friends that are listening?

**Kim Jones**

Yes, so there's lots of great information resources on my website, so you can check out other places that I have shown up to talk about other various aspects of my work. I've got a news page on my website that you can check out that has links to other podcasts that I've done.

I've got my blog posts out there as well, if you want to check some of those out and then ultimately if you'd like to chat about some of the concepts here, there's a way to book a call with me as well and we can go deeper into any of the topics here that might be of interest to your listeners.

**Josh Elledge**

Yes, you do some impressive speaking as well, which is on your events page. For someone that has some say over upcoming events, it looks like you have an opportunity to do some real good in this format as well.

**Kim Jones**

Yes, I actually have a number of different workshops that I offer, both virtually and in person. I do everything from leadership retreats to team building, to focused workshops on topics like building accountable cultures, giving good feedback, how to navigate gender bias in the workplace, just to name a few.

I talk about my own journey to the C-suite for those audiences that are interested in just understanding how they can work their way up. My message there, I think, is particularly important for people who feel like the only way to the top is if you build a certain credential list, versus how I've done it and how I coach others to do it, which is to understand what you bring from a leadership capability that can be leveraged into great value for your organization.

So definitely check out that page as well and reach out if you want to chat more.

**Josh Elledge**

Kim Jones, you're an executive leadership career coach and a gender equity advisor, consultant, keynote speaker. Your website Kim Jones Alliance.com.

Kim thank you so much for the conversation

**Kim Jones**

Thank you, this was so fun.