

**A Conversation with Dee Ann Turner,
Former VP of Talent for Chick-fil-A, 35-year Veteran in Identifying, Selecting and Growing Talent, and
Author of *Crush Your Career***

Q: *Crush Your Career* really creates a timely professional aid. And, it's like having a career coach in your pocket. You've written two other books about culture in the workplace. So, what really motivated you to write this one?

A: Over the last five years or so, I have enjoyed teaching leaders how to create remarkable organizational cultures and find and keep extraordinary talent. Then, I realized that talent needs help knowing how to become extraordinary. *Crush Your Career* is a tool to help talent learn to be extraordinary. I recognized that we have a generation of people entering the workforce, transitioning because of the circumstances in our world right now, and people who are mid-career and transitioning. They need a guidebook from somebody on the inside. They need that person who can say, "This is how the HR department or the talent department is thinking about this." So a good part of the book is about that: How do I get a job? What's the process for doing that? How do I interview? How do I get my resume in front of people? How do I use social media to help me do that? The other part of the book answers questions like, once you have the job, what do you do with it? How do you grow? How do you build a career over time?

What had happened was that my sons were continually asking me for career advice. I actually ended up doing several segments of a *FOX News* blog called "Career Advice I'd Give to My Own Children." I recognized that my children weren't the only ones of this generation that needed this kind of help. So I started with the advice that I had given through those blog posts and continued expanding. I started thinking about what I had taught my sons over time and the direction I'd given my mentees and my staff members over time that might benefit a wider audience.

Q: It's no secret that 2020 has been a tumultuous year for anyone in the job markets: graduates, burnt-out employees, people who are being laid off. What's your biggest piece of advice for navigating the current landscape?

A: Well, of course, the times we're currently living in are unprecedented. That in itself is daunting to think about. We live in a time where we've never really faced these types of circumstances. But, I'm incredibly hopeful as we kick-off 2021. Like many others, I have a small business, and really from March to August, I had very little business at all. The Fall started picking up, and all of a sudden, 2021 for somebody who does what I do, which is speak, teach and generate content about culture and talent, has picked up tremendously. It appears the marketplace is interested in these topics, and they're planning to add talent to their organizations. So be hopeful and expectant of good things because that optimism and positivity help you distinguish yourself above others. And it's the energy that keeps you going!

Secondly, along that same vein, you have to get started, and you have to keep going. When you see an obstacle, you find a way around it through it, under it, whatever it takes. But we need to recognize still that these are unprecedented times, and it's going to take more effort than what we were all accustomed to just a year ago. I'll give an example again of my son - he hadn't been in the workforce very long and was recruited continuously for jobs. We've seen that shift a little bit in some sectors and not shifted at all in others. Suppose someone's in the unfortunate situation that their industry has been eliminated. In that case, it's time to reinvent yourself and pick a growing sector. It might mean practically starting over again, but you need to take the long view. Ask yourself, "Is this going to be rewarding in the long term? Is this a good decision that's going to help me 5 or 10 years down the road?" Though it might be a temporary struggle, it's better to be struggling towards something than to be struggling at something to stay in a dying sector.

The opportunity may require you to reinvent yourself into a new sector. But you never know. It might be the path that was planned for you all along, and ultimately, you might be far more successful than you ever would have been in the other sector anyway.

Q: Well, that leads me into my next question. In the book, you talk a lot about finding your passion and purpose. Sometimes that can take years for people to find, and it can result in a sudden career change and shift. So, what advice do you have for those entering their so-called "second act," and are completely pivoting in their careers?

A: Sometimes, career pivots occur out of necessity. The first thing we all have to do is to make a living. We've got to feed ourselves and our families. Secondly, we'd ideally like to do that with something that we have a real passion for, and if someone's going to make a mid-career switch, I think it's essential that it's for something that they really resonate with.

I'll give you an example. The organization that I worked at for many years, Chick-fil-A, grew immensely while I worked there. When I started there, it was 150 restaurants doing \$175 million in sales. When I left, there were around 2,500 restaurants doing \$11 billion in sales. So the growth over those 33 years, particularly the last ten years I was there, was astronomical. Change like that requires people to make shifts and reinvent themselves over and over again, sometimes within their own organization. I was called upon to start the sustainability function. We called it social responsibility/sustainability for Chick-fil-A the last three years before I retired. I made that move for a number of reasons, but one of them is because it was a new need. I enjoy building things and launching things, probably more than I enjoy maintaining things. Ultimately, it was an excellent opportunity for me to do something different. I loved doing it, but I recognized it wasn't a passion that would carry me for the rest of my career. Sustainability is an integral part of any company, but it wasn't what I was made to do. So when I ultimately decided to retire from Chick-fil-A and start my own business, I was driven by my passion and my need to do the one thing I was made to do - help organizations strengthen their culture and talent systems.

I think that if you get to a point in life where you're beyond survival mode and you're into significance mode, you need to transition into something you're passionate about. Otherwise, it's not going to work. I had the experience of going and doing something okay for a little while, but I just couldn't do it forever. Then recognizing, "Hey, if I'm going to jump off into this great new adventure, it has to be about something that gets me up in the morning."

We make you known.

231 public square | suite 300 | pmb #45 franklin, tn 37064 | choicepublicity.com

Q: We're at a point in time right now where most of us are working virtually, and it's a big transition for a lot of people. In *Crush Your Career*, you talk a lot about the importance of workplace relationships and managing up. So what advice can you share for managing up virtually?

A: It's really the same advice that I'd share if you were working on managing up in an in-person setting, but you just have to do it a bit differently. I think that when you're working remotely, and you're constantly not in physical contact with your coworkers and your boss, it's easy to get lost in your own little world. You have tasks to complete every day, meetings to go to, and don't have that usual "face-time" you get with the boss.

I recommend having a plan for how you can communicate regularly with your boss. And, I'd recommend creating some cadence around it. In other words, think about requesting a regular one-on-one with your boss. That means having a virtual call - not a phone call - where you're face-to-face, cameras on, having that conversation. It's so important to have that face time virtually! Then, look for ways to communicate what's going on proactively. Don't share tasks, communicate results to your leader. That's what they want to hear. And be strategic and consistent about communicating these results. I don't recommend sending a note like this every Friday afternoon, because who wants an email on Friday afternoon. But maybe it's Friday morning, and you decide that you're going to communicate to your boss the results of that week on Fridays. Do it concisely, and share that plan with your boss! It can be something as simple as, "Hey, this is the way I'd like to communicate with you, so you know exactly what's going on. I'd love to be able to present results to you once a week." If that's not okay with them, figure out another game plan together.

At the bare minimum, you should have face-time with your boss at least once a month. I know a lot of organizations engage with their employees far more often than that. In one organization I know, the leaders meet with each of their staff members once a week in a virtual call, which is fantastic. Don't use working virtually as an excuse to communicate less; instead, be sure you're actively communicating more.

Q: You write about navigating negative feedback, and personally, I love how you put it. I pulled out a quote here. You say, "it's likely that negative feedback will fall in the range between being so vague that you have to read between the lines and so harsh that you have to survive the shock." Regardless of how that negative feedback is delivered, I think that digesting it and creating the next steps are important for your career growth. So, I'd love for you to talk to us about the importance of shifting your mindset from thinking that negative feedback is a critique to realizing that it's a gift that can help you grow.

A: I like the quote too because I lived it! I had one boss that I adored, but every time he gave me feedback, I had to figure out what he was trying to tell me.. And then I had another boss who was just downright mean. Regardless, it doesn't matter because our performance is ours to manage, and if we can depersonalize the delivery method and look more at what the message was, I think that's most important.

When you receive a piece of negative feedback, think, "What can I get out of this?" Now, this is hard to do if you get your feelings hurt, obviously. The less experienced you are in your career, the harder that is to separate. But if you can train your mindset to be, "When I receive feedback, I want to look for that clarification," it will help you grow immensely.

We make you known.

As I talk about in the book, my advice when you're receiving feedback is not interrupting, allowing them to provide the feedback, listening, taking notes of the questions you want to ask, and letting them finish talking before you say anything. That way, they feel like they've been able to say what they need to say, and you're more likely to hear what you need to hear if you're not trying to either defend it or interrupt to ask questions in the middle. And then, as you said, digest it a little bit. If you feel hurt or angry, take some time, and come back at another time to go more in-depth. Want a great response to your leader? Say, "I hear your feedback. I'd like to have a little time to think about it, and then could we set another time that I could come back and respond to you?" Usually, they're just so thankful they were able to say it, and they'll be grateful that that's the approach you took and will probably agree to you coming back later. When you come back, ask those clarifying questions. This is really important. Most of the time, negative feedback is a blind spot. Most people don't intend to mess things up, and if they give you negative feedback, often, you didn't go into it doing it intentionally. So when you come back, ask clarifying questions. A great way to put it is, "I've been thinking about this and trying to understand what you want me to see in my performance. Can you give me an example or tell me about a time you've seen me do this so that I'll have a clearer picture of what you're seeing?" That's a really important question, and you can ask it in such a way that doesn't put your boss on the defense. When you start to understand your feedback, the way you're going to create a relationship with your boss is by making affirming statements that you understand. This is essential. Now, don't do it if you don't really experience it, but if you do experience it, then say things like, "Your feedback provides me more clarity" or "I understand the expectation better."

My son did something really smart the other day with his boss. He was interviewing for a promotion, and he had to do a case study as part of the interview process. Afterward, his boss gave him feedback about what he should have considered and questions he should've asked. But, she didn't tell him the exact examples. She just told him an approach she thought he should have made for this case study. So he could have just taken that and said, "Okay, next time, I'll do that." But instead, later in the day, he sent her a message and said, "I've given thought to the feedback that you gave me, and these are some of the questions I would ask." He demonstrated well how you can turn these negatives into positives.

Another really important piece of advice - don't make excuses. You don't want to focus on why you did what you did because, honestly, nobody cares except you. It's good for you to think about why you did what you did, but you don't have to share that with anybody. It's better to say, "I hear you, and going forward, I'm going to do this instead." If you're fortunate enough to have somebody who really tells you the truth, as harsh as it might be, thank them for being a truth-teller. We don't have enough of those in our life. And it's good to write them a note to follow up just like my son did in the example. Next, you want to validate the feedback. Now, why would you do that? Well, if you go to your most trusted advisors and mentors, they can do a couple of things for you. They can help you overcome the negative emotions you may be experiencing, and they can add insight for you that might be useful. They can take what your boss said and package it in a way that's a little bit more digestible for you so that you can learn from it.

Lastly, take the feedback and make the changes. Don't wallow in this criticism forever because usually, once your boss has told you about it, if it never happens again, they don't think about it again. You might think about it forever, but they won't think about it again if you resolve it and don't make the same mistake again.

We make you know.

Q: Something you said when you were talking about managing your ego really stood out to me. You said, "Make others, not yourself, the heroes of your story." So tell me a little bit about the importance of supporting and encouraging others and how that can make you successful in your career.

A: Well, I certainly learned this from a lot of mentors in my life. Robert Woodruff, who was President of The Coca-Cola Company, said, "There is no limit to what a man (or a person) can do or where he can go if he doesn't mind who gets the credit." When we're either building a career as an individual contributor or when we become a leader, our real success is how many people we take along with us. I think that the truth is, we're not an island. We don't do anything on our own. It's like the African proverb that says, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." And it's true. We have examples all around us of people whose egos have destroyed their effectiveness. These are smart, talented, and amazing people, but their inability to bring others with them really limits their success.

I was just reading an article yesterday about this very issue - about the most critical skill needed. Now that people have the technical skills and so forth, it's all about social skills. The number one social skill is including others in the work and bringing them along with you. So I think if you're going to be a successful leader, you're going to need to be able to do that.

Q: You also talk about the importance of going all in, in your career as one of the most important parts of developing yourself and just growing your career in general. Can you expand on what you mean by that and why it's so critical to your success?

A: What I often see is that we want to hold back. We want to ensure success. We want to know what's in it for us before taking the risk and just jumping in. But I think sometimes we just have to jump in and see where the path takes us rather than being assured of the destination. It's great to have a goal and a destination out there, but I believe that you can't hold back if you want to have a successful career. You have to give it what I call the last 10%. You have to give it all to see where it's going to take you. If it doesn't work out, then make a change then, but it won't be because you didn't give it your very best shot.

I'm seeing this pattern of holding back more and more. I've even seen it in my kids - this mentality of "I have to know how it's going to turn out before I jump in." If you look at some of the greatest success stories, like technology gurus, people who started a business, or pursued a leadership role, or anything in that realm, they didn't size up the trade-off. They just said, "I want to accomplish this, and I'm all in to do it." They did what was necessary to get there. I think you get to a point in your career when you can make some of those decisions about trade-offs. Take me as an example - I don't work on Saturdays anymore. I just don't. I worked on Saturdays for 35 years of my life because I had a lot of responsibility, and I was all in. But when we start out protecting something, holding something back, and not putting ourselves all in, I think we miss the potential opportunity because of the competition. There is competition in the workplace. You're going to have those people that jump in and go, "I'm going to do whatever it takes." I'm not suggesting that you abandon all boundaries. I don't mean that at all. But sometimes, you have to be able to jump in without knowing what the outcome is going to be.

People will often be working with one foot in and one foot out, and they don't understand why they're not getting promoted or recognized. Well, it's because, on the one hand, you're working, but on the other, you're over on LinkedIn looking for what else is out there, not fully committed to what you're doing. Most people achieve success and recognition when they're fully committed.

We make you known.

Q: At one point or another, we all shift from a do-er to a leader. How do you know if you're ready to move into that leadership role?

A: Sometimes, we don't actually know. Sometimes other people identify that for us, and sometimes, we have a sense. But in both cases, the reason we're ready is that we have followers. So when people are tapped for leadership, it happens because they have followers. That's what leadership is. Simply put, a leader can't be a leader without followers.

Q: How do you think people grow as an emerging leader?

A: I think to grow as a leader, you want to envision the person you want to become. You don't focus on a title or a role. Instead, you focus on the kind of person and the character qualities you want to have as a leader, and you work on developing those. When you go all-in on that, the titles and everything else will come. But first, you need to focus on what qualities you want to have, not the title or role you want.

In *Crush Your Career*, I talk about the importance of nurturing your soul and the importance of leaders developing a positive and healthy self-image. So many people who start on this journey fail for this very issue. We often don't realize how many people really struggle with developing their self-esteem. Great leaders have self-awareness and self-confidence that comes from really understanding themselves. And ultimately, that comes from nurturing your soul. The more grounded you are as someone who has positive self-esteem and self-image, the greater you'll be in your role.

Statistically, the difference between great leaders and not so great leaders is their ability to develop self-awareness. I talk about gaining my own self-awareness a good bit in *Crush Your Career*. It's always a journey, but you want to get there as fast as you possibly can. Then it takes us back to the whole issue of feedback. How do you get self-awareness? The only way you're going to find out about your blind spots is by having people who are willing to tell you. That's how you become more self-aware, which creates a better leader. I also recommend developing your mind by reading, studying, and learning from other leaders. If you want to be a great leader, then you should constantly be looking for opportunities. Whether it's through the books that you read, the e-courses you're attending, seminars, or conferences you go to, you're sharpening your mind all the time. In the long term, these opportunities help you invest in others. Like I previously mentioned, you can't be a leader if you don't have followers. You get followers by investing in, teaching others, and helping the next generation. What you teach, you learn. So as you repeat and reinforce the principles of great leadership, you continue to instill them in yourself. Not only that, but I learned this the hard way: take care of yourself. If you deplete yourself of energy, you can't be effective. You have to know how to rest and refresh to be a great leader, including your body, mind, and heart. Those are all really important skills for emerging leaders to develop.

Q: What do you think makes someone a great leader?

A: A leader is someone who always tells the truth, even when it's hard. A great leader admits mistakes because they have integrity. They will be vulnerable and admit their shortcomings so that others around them can learn. Great leaders do what they say they will do - they keep their promises. Great leaders demonstrate respect for others, authority, and resources. They treat everyone with honor, dignity, and respect, even those they perceive are unable to do anything for them. They're good stewards of resources, people, and money. Great leaders take the high road every chance they get and stand up for

We make you known.

what is right. They avoid highlighting the failures of others and like to focus on their own opportunities and challenges. They pursue the highest good for those they serve and strive to find the win-win in all situations.

Q: You talk about questions that you should ask yourself if you're on the verge of breaking up with your job. And one of the things that you highlight, which I loved, is the importance of working for a company that aligns with your core values. I think that's something that a lot of people don't think about. So, I would love for you to expand on why that's so important.

A: The two questions I often ask people when they're thinking about changing jobs are one, "do you like the culture of your organization?" and two, "do you like your boss?" Because if those two questions are yes, you really need to re-evaluate changing jobs. Especially if you don't have the life experience to know that that's not always the case in the next company you may go to. You know, there are many people out there who aren't happy with their jobs, their company's culture, or their boss. Of course, bosses will change within an organization, but typically the values don't. If you're aligned with the company's values, you will be a lot happier. You won't have to compromise who you are as an individual every day when you go to work if your values align. If they don't align, you'll be miserable because you'll constantly be having to compromise something about what you think, believe, or even the way you behave.

Sometimes aligning with your company's culture is more important than your role. Your role can change. You can go into a role, and you might only be in that role for a few months or a year. Something else will come along in the organization. And it's the same way with your boss. It's important to have a boss that you love, but they're going to get moved around, too. That's why you should come back to asking, "Am I really aligned with this culture?" And, "Can I be who I am in this organization's environment?"

We make you known.