

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #125: Grit and Grace for the Working Woman

Cheri

All right, so let's talk about a few of the jobs we've had in our lifetime. Have you had any interesting jobs that our listeners need to hear about?

Amy

I've worked in a McDonald's drive thru. I've scooped ice cream. Probably the one that people are most kinda interested in is I worked for a company called New Neighbor Welcome that was like the welcome wagon, and I did that for six years. I visited 30 families a month that moved into Holly Springs, North Carolina. Can you believe that?

Cheri

I can totally see you doing that. That is such an Amy Carroll thing to do. I love it.

Amy

I said I was paid to be perky. Suited me perfectly. How about you?

Cheri

I've had several jobs that I don't know how well they fit me actually, because when I was in high school I worked in a clinical lab. I was in charge of taking the little printed lab slips and going onto the wards and then sticking them into the charts. So it was very detailed, and like, I got a demerit if I did it wrong, and I almost lost my job several times. I came really, really close, because I'm not really a detail person.

And then during college, I was a transcriptionist at a law firm. I earned really good money, and I learned to type really, really fast, but it was a medical malpractice firm so it was really depressing. And then probably the weirdest job I had was in college the last year I gave mud baths in Calistoga, so I literally piled hot volcanic mud on women, and that's all I'll say about that.

Amy

Oh my gosh! That is fascinating. All I could think about is Louis Litt. Yeah, I know you don't watch TV, but those of you that do watch TV might know what I'm talking about. Louis and the mud bath, but anyway. All right, so tell us what you love most about working, Cheri.

Cheri

I love checking things off my list. I just love accomplishing things, and I know that's not a very spiritual answer, but I like feeling like I get to the end of the day and I have something to show for my time. How about you? What do you love most about working?

Amy

Years ago, I was sitting across from a friend of mine that was in ministry. She was telling me about how she was pouring her life into these college students, and I had the thought, it was just this moment that I remember, I would do anything if I could get paid to talk about Jesus all day long. And now I do. I don't get paid very much, but it is my dream come true. So what's the hardest thing about working or the thing you don't like?

Cheri

Well, okay. So again, this is not going to be particularly glamorous, but I have a hard time knowing when to stop, because for me work is play. I enjoy it. When people say, "What do you do for fun, Cheri?" I'm like, "I just keep doing more of this." So, I really need my people to tell me to come play and to literally pull me away and once I go off and do what most people consider play, I'm okay at it. Like, you know, we went kayaking when you came to visit me. And it was fun and I was able to do it, but I just forget because I do enjoy my work enough that I keep doing it. How about you? What is the hardest thing about working for you?

Amy

Well, I actually like play a lot more than work.

Cheri

That's why we're friends. That's why I need you in my life.

Amy

The fact that the work takes me away from other things I love. Like, I love to dig in the dirt and it's just turned springtime here, and I am dying to get outside and plant some things, but I have stuff to do, so I'll do that this weekend. I said to a friend of mine one time, he asked me if I liked my job. This was when I was working for New Neighbor Welcome. And he said, "Do you like your job?" And I said, "I do I like my job." And I said, "But not every day." And he said, "Well, if you liked it every day it's your hobby, not your job."

Cheri

All right, there's wisdom, right there.

Amy

There's hard things to every job, but I cannot think of a job that's much harder than being a single mom. And one of our listeners said this: "I'm a single mother of five and a full time NICU nurse on the night shift. I have a lot on my plate, so there are ample opportunities to reveal my imperfections. Besides the obvious battle with self esteem and the practical aspects of not being perfect, the biggest struggle I have is that there is so much I'm interested in doing with so little time to do it well." Well, I know exactly how she feels and being a working, single mom

multiplies my respect for her, because I'm sure that she's doing a lot of things that I'm not able to do.

Cheri

Well, this is Cheri Gregory.

Amy

And I'm Amy Carroll.

Cheri

And you're listening to Grit-n-Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules, the podcast that equips you to love who you're not, love who you are, and live your one life well.

Amy

Today, we're talking to Paula Brown Stafford and Lisa Grimes, coauthors of *Remember Who You Are*. Paula is a clinical research expert, business leader, and lecturer. Previously, she was the president of clinical development at Quintiles, a Fortune 500 company. She lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina with her husband and has two adult children. Lisa is a business leader, coach, and speaker. She has spent most of the last 30 years in healthcare and lifestyle startups, where she has served as CEO. She lives in Cary, North Carolina with her husband and has two adult sons.

Cheri

You are going to love learning from Paula and Lisa's 65 combined years of experience.

Amy

So Paula, tell us a little backstory on the title of your book *Remember Who You Are*.

Paula

The book, *Remember Who You Are*, in chapter one, there's a little explanation and it really came from my parents. There were four children. We were the Brown children. I was the third, and I have seen this occur with my two older sisters and then as I aged into teenage years and started going out with friends. Usually, my father would look and point his finger and look you in the eye and say, "Remember who you are." And that was who we had been taught to be and part of that was growing up in a Christian family, and you knew that it was the values of your family, the values, just who you are. And when we started talking about the book, when we talked about the first chapter being about building our brand, and that was the first chapter that we really wrote, and as we started talking about the title of the book, it seemed to then connect with every chapter that as we shared different stories and different insights, it kept going back to remember who you are. So, it was a working title for a long time and we weren't sure that it was going to be the title. But then our publisher actually liked the title and stuck with it.

Amy

How rare and wonderful. So Lisa, tell us why you guys decided to write a book for working women. What was it that compelled you about that topic?

Lisa

As much as we hate to admit it, we have 65 years of work experience between us. That means we're old.

Amy

And wise. And wise.

Lisa

Well, we'll see. You can judge that by the time we're done here today. We both really have enjoyed managing, coaching, and mentoring, and we found when we would get together, we'd just have chats and one night we were at dinner with our husbands and Paula's husband Greg said, "Why don't y'all just put this in a book so you can reach more women, because you're saying the same things? You have different stories, but in essence, the topics you're touching on are the same," and neither Paula nor I had wound up having a female mentor and we just thought, you know, if it could be a little bit of mentoring in the back pocket for a working woman, then that's what we really would like to do. So, it's kind of a way of giving back. It's some stories and things that you normally wouldn't put on a resume and say, "I'm really proud that I've made that mistake." But just things that we thought, you know, if we had known this 20 or 30 years ago, it might not have changed everything, but it might've changed a little something, and we all know what a little change can make if you're making a drive, and like me, make a lot of wrong turns, a little change takes you way off course and perhaps a little self-guided direction just would help other women. And we feel in the time we're living in right now, that women need to see other women supporting each other. Well, we think it's fantastic that we're talking to two of you working together, and we just wanted to set an example for other women to see that we can complement one another.

Cheri

Well, you advise women to build a personal brand. So first of all, what are the elements of a personal brand and then could you each share a little bit about your own personal brand?

Paula

Sure, I'll start. In terms of your personal brand, I think when we think brand, a lot of times we think about the swoosh for Nike and we think about the mermaid for Starbucks and the apple for Apple, and it's usually what you look and you see. And so, a personal brand is also what do you look and see inside, but what do others see when they look at you? I think coming down to your personal brand is understanding not just how you think you look externally to others, but how do they perceive you? Because oftentimes perception, we've always said perception is reality, and how others perceive you may be the reality of who you are and, you know, making sure that we marry those two up. You know, your personal brand I think is a lot of your DNA. A lot of it you can't change, because it's just who you are.

Lisa

It's how God made us unique.

Paula

That's right, but it doesn't mean we can't tweak. We believe in really focusing on your strengths and trying to leverage your strengths, because I can't cook, but Lisa can, very well. Right, Amy?

Amy

Right. But you sing Paula.

Paula

Exactly. I sing, and Lisa-

Lisa

Cannot. I would clear us all outta here, and you'd disconnect us on this podcast.

Paula

So you know, I hear her singing in the car and she sees me try to cook, but we know that we're never going to get there. So how much effort do we really need to spend on trying to be what we're not?

Lisa

Exactly.

Paula

So, when I was looking ... someone said to me when I was in my thirties, what is your brand? And that was when I started searching. I don't know what my brand is. I found the quote around really my priorities being my work, my family, and my faith, and that was kind of the brand that I wanted to externally make sure other people saw. That yes, I'm very committed to work, but I have other priorities, too. And so, I really tried to balance them. Then I was asked to write a six word story, which is ... Ernest Hemingway said, "For sale: baby shoes, never worn." Those six words are a story. I mean, all you have to read is those six words and you know the whole story. So I was told to do a six-word story and so I came up with "I'm Paula, I'll be your server." And so it was all about I'm Paula, so I'm who I am and that I was about serving. Then, when Lisa and I started working on the book and people are asking us about our brand, you know, do you give them the long story, the medium story, or the short story? So the short version for me is serve.

Lisa

Right, and so obviously it's easier to describe our brand when we can use unlimited words, but I do think getting down to ... 'cause we can ramble, and we'll uncover a few words and things that are important, like having integrity and being fair and all of those things. But I think, challenging people to really try to get it to six words is something that's been interesting. It's

really resonated with a lot of people. My six-word story is "Live life meaningfully, on purpose, connected." And my one word is connect, because I love to connect people with other people and I can be in the middle of it. I can have nothing to do with it once I say you two really need to meet, and I think the beauty of our two different words is that they are so complementary of each other because I can make a connection and Paula can serve them. Paula can serve, and I'm making other connections, and it just flows well. But again, it goes back to how am I wired? And I think when we look at our brand, if we hit our sweet spot to the way God has wired us, we find our passion because our passion is really what makes our brand and that helps us find our purpose. So connect is me.

Cheri

Well, one of the biggest struggles every perfectionist and people pleaser faces is trying to do things just like everybody else does them in order to gain approval. How could we use our personal brand to embrace our own uniqueness and strengths in our communities and in our work places? Talk to the perfectionist and people pleasers among us.

Lisa

Paula and I both, as I know Amy does and I'm sure that you do as well Cheri, but we strive for excellence, but there is such a big difference in striving for excellence and trying to be perfect, because we all know only Jesus was perfect. So, I think that's kind of a foundational place that we start. You know, be a lifelong learner. Try to improve. But try, as Paula said earlier, to focus on your strengths. Like, I do enjoy cooking. Well, I like to hone that, and I like to learn more about cooking and I like to get better at that and there's just no need, and Paula verify, for me to take voice lessons. It's not going to happen, and it's easy because we talk about-

Paula

It's really not.

Lisa

I know, it's not gonna work. I'm not going to comment on cooking, because I think I can teach her a little, but, we can laugh about that, but the reality is, when we sit down and look at what we often try to do, it's like, "Oh, I wish I could sing like Paula," and I go spend hours trying to sing like Paula. Maybe it's that I wish I could do math equations in my head like Paula, but you know, that's not the way I'm wired. And I think all too often, we take a weakness and try to work and try to work and try to work instead of taking our strength and the way God wired us and pushing it over the edge for his glory and to benefit others, being authentic. And I think that is ultimately the background story to get to kind of on one word answer to your question, Cheri, but it's really ... We so often see all these other things and think, "Wow, if I could do that," have that, have that job, go on those trips, go to these speakers, have a podcast, you name it, and then we just get bogged down, and we weren't meant to be everybody else. We're meant to be the best me, the best we, that we can be.

Cheri

What if we have a listener whose strength is something she's not aware is a strength, because somewhere along maybe early in her life, she was actually told it was a weakness? So, I'll just go ahead and give myself as an example. I was told I talk too much. I was called a chatterbox, and people rolled their eyes because I wouldn't stop talking. Now, I get paid to talk. I get paid to produce words, but I mean there was a period of time where I kept trying to keep my mouth shut and communicate less, because there were people who didn't want to hear from me. And so, what would you say to the listener who feels like they don't have any strengths, but maybe they have strengths, they just can't recognize them because somebody else has labeled it as a weakness, but it's not the weakness?

Paula

Yes, it's a great question. I think God gave us all skills and strengths. We've all been blessed with something, and we have to figure out what that something is. I'll give two quick examples. We were doing a talk on the book, and there's a woman that I know in her sixties, and she came to my house a couple of days later and she said, "I don't know my brand. I'm 60 plus years old, and I don't know my brand." She wanted to do her six-word story, and I gave her three words, just right there on the spot. And she said, "How did you know that?" I was like, "Well, 'cause I know you, I see you, I see that in you," but you know, she couldn't see it in herself. And so, one of the things that when we do workshops, we encourage people to ask others what they think their brand is because, you know, we all have strengths that others see and sometimes we just don't see in ourselves. And so, I think that if you can find a confidant, almost everybody has at least a confidant, and I think asking what they think your strengths are, or maybe not even strengths, but just what do you think my brand is? I think that helps. And I will say we were recently with the female chancellor of a university and a similar question came up and she said, "I was told that I would never be chancellor, because I'm short and I smile too much," and this woman is now chancellor of a very large university. But she had been told her whole life you're short, and you smile too much. And neither of those things held her back.

Lisa

And they're now part of her brand, a very successful brand, because everybody would know about that university. And I think the other thing, Cheri, I mean, my mom will still tell this story. I mean I got, other than in Home Ec, I got my worst grade ever through all of school was always on conduct because I talked all the time. And so you're taught like, well, sit there and don't say anything. But I think it is getting competence in how God wired you, tuning out those other voices. Because sometimes things are said to sharpen us and they're good and we need to listen to them but we ultimately have to spend some time in prayer and God's word to say, "Well, this is how you wired me, and I am a talker," and ultimately that's part of maybe why I like to connect. And I think the other thing, because we both agree, every single one of us was given a skill and likely more than a skill, but God wired us all with gifts and talents. If people can't figure it out, and they don't know of anyone to ask, I think a good question is, well, what is it that you seem to notice that needs to be fixed? Because oftentimes, you know, if I notice something needs to taste differently, just because I like to cook and I like to blend things or I'm observing a sales presentation, and I'm like, "Man, if you just said it a little differently," because that's how I'm wired. So, I think sometimes the things that we notice are maybe a hidden way

of uncovering our giftings, because we pick up on them, and we too often take for granted our gifts because they come naturally to us.

Cheri

Oh ladies, thank you so much.

Amy

That's very insightful.

Cheri

It is. Oh, that's marvelous. All right, well, back on script.

Lisa

Can we answer one little thing that's not on script about our brands?

Cheri

Please.

Paula

Just because it occurred to me, and we'll just go off script for a moment too. We, also, in being authentic, we came up with our individual brands and this was before we even knew each other and we talk about it ever so briefly in the book, but because we both were in sales for large parts of our careers, we came up as part of our brand, like with a little trademark. And mine became eating hot sauce. So I got hot sauces from all over the world and when I go to clients, they would have hot sauces, so it's also something you can have a little fun with. Paula's-

Paula

Mine is a Krispy Kreme hot now donuts. I would show up in Tokyo and they would have donuts. I would show up in Bangalore, India, they would have donuts. I would show up in Kansas City, Missouri, and they would have donuts.

Lisa

Krispy Kreme.

Paula

Krispy Kreme. They were told by my secretary, never have a Dunkin' Donut in her presence.

<Laughter>

Amy

Hey, if you got to be known for something, donuts is an excellent thing to be known for.

Paula

And being a North Carolina native, of course, it had to be Krispy Kreme. So.

Lisa

Just have fun with ... you know, there are ways to have fun. We can get a little serious with our brands, and I think ultimately it is a serious conversation, but we would just encourage folks to also have a little fun.

Cheri

Each of your chapters ends with a letter, a letter written by an executive woman to her younger self, which is just a beautiful example of reflective practice and demonstrates reflection and self-awareness that's gained with maturity. So Lisa, would you read us a portion of your favorite letter, and then, Paula, would you tell us maybe some of the top pieces of advice found in these letters?

Paula

I will be glad to. I will have to say they are all my favorite letters. We know, even though we have 65 years of experience, we don't have all the answers. So we asked for these letters, and we gave no guidance other than we want a letter about what you would tell your younger self and try not to go over a thousand words. But literally that was it. But I would love to read you a portion of one of my favorites. "You are wired to pursue perfection in all that you do. Anything less than an A on an assignment or a performance below your self-imposed standards is unacceptable to you. However, I want you to understand that the pursuit of happiness is riddled with opportunities to create memories wrapped in pure joy. Do not be so immersed in hard work that you miss valuable lessons in building long-standing friendships, smelling the roses, and living in the moment. There are valuable lessons in this life that aren't taught through assignments, but they are the parts of life that will cultivate your resilience and grit, both of which will help you to navigate tough times. The most important thing you can do to prepare yourself for this beautiful, divinely orchestrated life of yours is to understand that experiences, not accolades, are what will make your life rewarding for you and a model for others. Be patient, relax a tad, and enjoy all that you're doing as learning experiences and not goals to be conquered. So, life's disappointments yet to come will not derail you. They will empower you because you know that you're strong enough to remain diligent in the face of adversity. You may think that tears are signs of weakness, but actually they are signs of strength. Years from now, you will find true happiness because you've learned to master perspective and resilience, and these things, not money or accolades, will make you richer than you ever imagined."

Amy

That is so beautiful. Who wrote that? Can you tell us?

Paula

Yes. Dr Tashni-Ann Dubroy. She is executive vice president and chief operating officer at Howard University.

Amy

Oh, wow. Awesome.

Lisa

It's hard to follow that, but a lot of advice ... it's presented differently, but there are some themes and a lot of the themes are around building confidence, and I think getting early in your career building that confidence as quickly as possible. And some of that is getting, if you will, quick wins. Setting yourself some smaller goals. We have big goals, the BHAG, the big hairy audacious goal, but you can have small attainable goals right in front of you to help you build confidence. I think a second one is taking risks. A lot of these ladies are where are they now are because they took some risks along the way. They may not have had 100% of the information, because they didn't get into analysis paralysis; we call it. They took maybe 80% of the information, and they went with it. And take risks along the way helps you to become a leader of others. And then the third one really goes back to the title of the book and we saw that throughout many of the letters is to be you and to be authentically you. Build confidence, take risks, and be authentically you.

Paula

Sure, right.

Amy

So what closing words of encouragement would you like to leave with our listeners?

Lisa

I think to be you, and if it's been so long since you've been you, that you're not sure who you are, figure it out, figure out your brand. We all can walk around with masks. We can all walk around trying to be that perfect person, but you know, when we take the mask off and see who we are, learn to be proud of who we are and build on our strengths and just remember to be us and have our confidence in the way that God wired us.

Paula

And I think Lisa said it earlier, the only perfect person was Jesus and none of us are perfect. And so the other piece of advice and encouragement I would give is to complement others, because we are whole when we complement others around us and put different skill sets, different way of doing things. We had someone do an analysis of Lisa and I, and they said between us you have a brain.

<Laughter>

Lisa

A whole one.

Paula

The same values and the same foundation. I mean, we just overlay each other, but when it comes to how we do things? Opposites. And so it does take both of us and that's why it took

two of us to write a book. But you know, no one except Jesus Christ was perfect, so just learn to complement others and find your gaps and build those with others who have that skill.

Lisa

Right, because one's not better than the other. They can complement if we allow them to. And I think the other thing, and Paula reminded me when she said that, and we haven't touched on it, but is find some way, somehow, somebody to give back to. And giving back, depending on the season of your life, might mean your smile and your kindness to a cashier at the grocery store. It might mean you have time to donate an hour a week to mentor a younger woman. It might mean that you can volunteer for charitable organization, but we can all give back from where we are in our individual walks.

Cheri

Head on over to gritngracegirls.com/episode125.

Amy

There you'll find this week's transcript, the digging deeper download, bible verse art, and there will also be directions on how to enter to win this week's giveaway of *Remember Who You Are*.

Cheri

We want to give a special shout out to all of our Grit and Grace growth partners. If you're interested in learning how you can support this ministry, head on over to www.patreon.com/gritandgracegirls. We would love to have you join our team.

Amy

Join us next week when we'll be processing together what we learned from Paula and Lisa.

Cheri

For today, grow your grit; embrace God's grace, and when you run across a bad rule, you know what to do. Go right on ahead and...

Amy and Cheri

Break it!