

Careering Podcast

SO1 E01. Defining Success

Welcome to the Careering podcast a collection of rants and reckons on all things career hosted by author and creator of Careering9, Melissa Davies and her partner in crime, Kelsey Ingles. If you're brave enough, take a seat, settle in and listen as we tackle difficult career and workplace issues. Sometimes we'll be wrong, sometimes we'll be right but we will deliver it with confidence and a touch of colourful language so it will at least be entertaining.

Cool, so welcome to the first ever episode of The Careering Podcast. I am Melissa Davies. I'm based here in Otautahi, Christchurch with an eclectic mix of experiences over 15 years in large multinationals, some time and local government. I've done a few ventures of my own and I'm now I'm breathing life into those while trying to write a book called careering and sitting on a few boards. So I'm passionate about individuals living their best lives, but I'm also a champion for truly diverse and inclusive spaces. So there'll be a bit of that flavour coming through, both the book the website and this podcast. And with me is Kelsie Inglis. She's a brand and communication aficionado, not the kind that is just booksmart, she's been hands on and led teams to sprint through a few 100 campaigns, including ones to grow the Wellington economy, major government department brand work internally and externally. And she's also taken the stage to lecture in Hong Joe in China. She's a recent addition to the Otautahi population and has had an on off relationship with Wellington (bordering on toxic) but I'm sure we'll tease that out as we go. How's that for an intro?

Kelsie Inglis 1:38

Hey look that's an Intro Hi.

Melissa Davies 1:42

Sorry, I thought I'd give a bit of an insight as to what is careering. And I think Kelsie, you and I have got some pretty good examples of careering is a term, being a verb, and that we probably started off at 19, bright eyed and bushy tailed with grand ambitions of how our career was going to go was probably quite linear. And we thought we would do these three or four things and get to a certain job. Is that true for you? And has that happened for you?

Kelsie Inglis 2:12

Yeah, I mean, I definitely went to uni, did everything as I was supposed to, like, kind of went overseas after I finished uni, came back, graduated, and I was gonna get this amazing job at an advertising agency, and then spent six months unemployed trying to find a job. So you know, start as you mean to continue. Yeah, I definitely have this fallacy of what an ideal career looks like. It's just it was completely shattered within the first three months of actually trying to get into the workforce.

Melissa Davies 2:48

Has it ever worked for your since, where you kind of had a plan and you've gone this is exactly what's going to happen. Has that ever worked?

Kelsie Inglis 2:54

Ah, I've had a plan, but it's always been the opposite of their plan.

Melissa Davies 2:58

And I think that's ultimately why this is called careering, right? because it's like a car careering out of control down the road, like kind of point it in the right direction, and you think you've got everything lined up and shit just happens.

Kelsie Inglis 3:09

Yeah, yeah, I think that's probably the best way to describe my career shit just kind of happens.

Melissa Davies 3:15

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Same, same. And I think ultimately, that's what that's what careering is all about is that when we look at other people's lives, especially documented on socials, we think that people have this beautiful vision board, and they've taken those five steps and landed where they intended. But most people, it's happened by opportunity, by accident, through circumstance, through good luck and some good design, but it's never perfect. Yeah, so we're doing this podcast because we've realised that we are both mass consumers of podcasts and audiobooks and or other forms of content. And we realised there was a bit of a gap for kiwi women sharing their stories, other than those that have kind of reached the stereotypical definition of success and are sitting, earning a six figure salary in a swanky house in Parnell with a beach shack up in Lee or out at Piha. And they don't really share their real life moments. And we wanted to do that and, and also just how to navigate the complexities of the workplace, some firsthand experiences that we've had, or some lessons learned from some cool people we've worked with. So in terms of what you can expect from us, we'll probably swear a lot. There'll be some raucous laughter. There'll be some references to shenanigans we've got up to outside of the workplace. And hopefully, it's entertaining. But also, more importantly, we really hope that there's some practical takeaways you can get from this because one of the other pet peeves we have is that people love sharing stories, and then it's relying on the person listening to be like, what does that mean for me, so we're trying to distil it down with a couple of key takeouts at the end of every podcast episode. So thanks for joining in. So to kick off every episode, we're going to just check in with each other so Kelsie, what's your theme of the week what's been happening?

Kelsie Inglis 4:57

Um, I think my theme this week is Ah, I'm gonna go with escapism. The world's just feeling a bit bat shit at the moment. So I have been diving deeply into my fiction books and just full on escaping. I think I read one over the weekend. I read it in two days. So I've definitely just kind of escaping reality at the moment just don't really want to deal with it.

Melissa Davies 5:26

So low tech escapism this weekend, not high tech.

Kelsie Inglis 5:29

No. I mean, there's probably some Tik Tok consumption, probably too much Tik Tok consumption. But in between all of it, I also read a book. So what was your thing? What how were you at this week,

Melissa Davies 5:41

I have just hiked the Queen Charlotte track, and I, my cousin - I often track our tramping with my cousin's two women in their late 20s. And we joke that if we were horses, we'd be Clydesdales because we are just rock stars on the flat, like we could walk for days, you could load us up with packs, and we could just trek from one end of the South Island to the other. But for me personally, as soon as there's a hill, I'm then become a train. And I'm like, I need, I need the incline to be nice and low and steady, because going straight up hill is just not in my DNA. So the theme for me this week was and I guess that's kind of a metaphor for life, right that when we're doing these big hills, we walked up Mount Bradley, no, not Mount Bradley, Mount Herbert in Banks Peninsula last year. And the whole way up, the track as it got steeper there's these orange markers. And to get us to the top, we were just like, let's just go one orange marker, get there, catch our breath, go to the next orange marker, like at every orange marker, take a breath check in, muster up enough umph just to get to the next orange marker. And I find that in a lot of the work we're doing on life stuff. That's such a good metaphor for just instead of trying to figure it all out and lay out all the plans like just to how the hell do I get my ass up to that next orange marker? Because then I've got a new perspective, I've got time to catch my breath. Just one orange marker at a time. Because if I look at all 400 of them, I'm like, Oh, hell no take me back to the car.

Kelsie Inglis 7:09

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Just sit down. I'm just gonna eat a week's worth of camping food right now. And I'm going back to the car.

Melissa Davies 7:14

Yeah, I have eaten a weeks worth of camping food before. But that was to do with a possum. But let's not go there. Yeah, so it was just that real get to the next milestone, like just focus on the next, like, because everyone talks about that whole, like, take the first step in the right direction. But I'm like actually one step sometimes is not enough. It's like do the five steps to get to that next milestone, and then you can have a bit of a celebration, a bit of a win. And you're closer to your finish line in a really tangible way. So I think that really, the reason that was really topical for me this week is we're starting this podcast. And it's something we've both talked about for a while. We're keen on it. We're a bit intimidated by it. It's definitely outside our comfort zones.

I mean, I'm not gonna lie, the stuff that you won't hear in this podcast, is the 10 minutes before this actually happened was insane. So best of luck to you listeners Best of luck to you.

But yeah, I think that's what, the reason we were diving in and starting this, and it's probably similar to that orange marker theme. And it ties into our theme of the week, which is around success, which is, you know, motivation actually comes from, it actually grows once you've started something we all kind of, I think we think that motivation, we have to wait to be motivated to start. But actually, all the research around high performance shows that you've actually got to use willpower to get started and then the motivation kicks in. So here we are, with our microphones in front of us recording, jumping deep into the deep end and getting outside our comfort zones to try something new. So yeah, we're at that orange marker. Now, the first episode. Hey,

Kelsie Inglis 8:45

who knows what the nice orange marker looks like at this point to be honest

Melissa Davies 8:51

catch your breath.

Kelsie Inglis 8:53

I just need to eat some chocolate and have a seat for a second. Yeah.

Melissa Davies 8:56

I think that should be a motto for life. Write that one down people

Kelsie Inglis 9:01

Im living my dream.

Melissa Davies 9:05

Awesome. Well, I guess that's a really good intro into the today's topic then, which is actually around what does success mean to you? And I guess when, when I was working in the corporate world, it was really obvious that we had this homogenous view of success, and it was typically money related. And it really started to piss me off. It was related to hierarchy, status, money, all kinds of external symbols. This was in Australia and New Zealand. And yet, in other cultures, they have much broader and wide ranging and interesting definitions of success. And it just started really playing on my mind that actually, there isn't one definition of success. It's up to all of us. So I'm really keen to hear from you Kelsie, so what is your definition of success? What does it mean? what does that even mean to you?

Kelsie Inglis 9:50

Oh, God, yeah, let's, you know, kick off the first podcast that we ever do with like a real simple question. Serious. Um, I would say that at the moment, I'm still trying to figure that out. I think that's

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definitely been sort of the theme of the last few months - Where am I heading? And why do I want to head that way? I think what I'm trying to do at the moment is unpack the 'shoulds'. And the impact of the 'shoulds' on my life, and I should have a house and I should have a car and I should be married, and I should have children and I should have this job. And all the things that society sets up around us, is what determines success. Like, I know that there's like a famous Mark Manson, like tweet or quote, where he talks about how most of us don't actually, like define success ourselves. It's always adopted by our family, from our families and our environment and our culture. And like he ends up with, and that's what fucks us up. And I feel like I'm at that point right now is that I went through my 20s going, I want to work in an ad agency. Cool, I've worked in an agency now I want to be a marketing manager, cool, I've been a marketing manager. And now I'm like, I'm out of ideas. I don't know, I don't know anymore. And so I'm currently working through the unpacking the shoulds. In terms of that, and then defining what I actually want.

Melissa Davies 11:31

And is that a lot? like when you when you're talking about I'm packing the shirts and thinking about success? It sounds like you're thinking about it, and quite long term thinking. Is that? Is that the kind of what some timeframe? Are you thinking about when you're thinking about success?

Kelsie Inglis 11:45

I think multiple timeframes, right? Like, sometimes you just gotta get some fucking wins on the board,

Melissa Davies 11:50

Get the orange marker.

Kelsie Inglis 11:59

Yeah. And I think, yeah, I think sometimes you're just gonna get to the orange marker. But sometimes you've got to look out to 90, and sort of say, What do you want to end your life as and what does success mean, on your deathbed? Versus what does success mean? Age? 60 at 50 at 40 at 30? Whatever? I don't think there is, for me, I don't feel like there should be one... oh there's that word should. I don't think that there is one big overarching theme of success. There's lots of ways to be successful in different parts of your life.

Melissa Davies 12:36

Yeah, that's a really important thing to tease out. Also, first episode, let's go for the deathbed chat. Nice one.

Kelsie Inglis 12:42

Sorry, HUGE. Taking it right to the end haha

Melissa Davies 12:47

But I think that's a really important point is that what you're kind of saying there is that there's not one definition of success for you. And you have multiple moments in time where you can look at and have an aspiration for where you'd like to land. And I'm guessing that you're saying you're sort of saying that life's going to change, you can't force those outcomes, and you're not, you'll probably adjust those right as life as you move through life, your preferences will change, yeah

Kelsie Inglis 13:12

I'm mean Christ, you know, you can just look back on the last 10 years of your life, or even five years of your life and go, Man, 25 year old me had some expectation for what 32 year old me was gonna be doing with my life right now, even 10 years ago, and I thought I was gonna be living in Edinburgh and like changing my life and then go global pandemic. Yeah, who would have seen that coming. But it also means that you suddenly, like, there are just these intervention measures that make you reassess success as well.

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Melissa Davies 13:44

So that's a really good point. So in those last two years, when lots of things have been out of your control, have you had moments where you felt like you've reset your own expectation of success, or when you felt successful in the last couple of years?

Kelsie Inglis 13:58

Yeah, I mean, for everyone listening, I was... just as a quick rundown. In 2019, I was gonna leave my job in Wellington and go, go overseas, go over to Aussie and ended up having a bit of an accident and ended up not going to Australia and not walking for six months. Which then led to an opportunity to go to China and teach with Melissa for six months, and then came back and ended up back in Wellington and back in the marketing manager game. And was gonna go over to Edinburgh and back to China, and then COVID happened. So I think my definitions or definition of success was kind of changing every three minutes probably. But I think because it was changing so quickly. I think I started to adopt other people's definitions of success a hell of a lot more because I was so unanchored with what I actually wanted, and I think I'm now spending, I think I've realised that now and I know that I now have to put the work in to figure out what I actually think success is versus what other people have told me success is.

Melissa Davies 15:15

Man, that's a really powerful insight. And I think that's quite consistent with other sort of theories around when life gets uncertain, we look for certainty. And if someone's yelling in your face that you should want this, and this is important, or you're at a certain age where, if that option isn't available, you should look for the next best alternative, and you start grabbing onto it just so you've got something that seems solid to hang on to. And I really liked that insight that you said, it kind of, feels like there's a bit of white line fever, where we set a definition and we go for it, but yet we forget to spend time knowing ourselves and actually success, and over the next six months for you might look quite different. And it might be more about that, you know, six months from now you're standing there feeling really confident in who you are, and knowing yourself and your own definitions, which might not have even been possible had, had you been able to get on that plane to Edinburgh or Melbourne?

Kelsie Inglis 16:05

Yeah, absolutely. But then, you know, spending that time to figure out what that means to you. I think a lot of that is actually just battling against what other people are telling you what's coming in from the outside. And that's just consistently hard. Just like real hard.

Melissa Davies 16:26

What would be some examples that you're talking about?

Kelsie Inglis 16:27

Well, I mean, like, not just from a career perspective, but from a life perspective, as a young woman, you know, you sort of get to the between the ages of 20, sort of 25 and up. And when are you getting a boyfriend? when are you getting engaged? when are you getting married? or having children? And it's the life milestones, that and the implication of the 'should', behind those questions from families and family members, that, you know, you have to unpack whether that's something that you actually want, or whether that's just being told to you your whole entire life, and you just assume that you should want that. And that's what success should be to you. And I think, as you come out of your 20s, and you start to sort of be told that you need to figure your life out. Trying to define whether figuring your life out at that point in time is something that you want to do and whether that is success to you is also a big question. Yeah, so I think lots of lots of different ways.

Melissa Davies 17:35

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That yeah, there's so much in that. Like, interestingly, we were talking so on that hike at the weekend, there was four of us girls, one who's married and got married really young in her 20s in a really happy, healthy loving marriage, and three of three others of us were single. And again, talking about those expectations, like the amount of times that when you say you're single and if you're someone who's moderately got your shit together, the standard responses are but why are you single? You're great. It's like, take a seat. I'm not the problem. That was some first class sass coming from us. Wow.

Kelsie Inglis 18:08
Men are trash

Melissa Davies 18:08

Hahaha #notallmen But yeah, I think these that, that expectation that you should want to be coupled up, you should want to wear those ridiculous scrunch bum tights in the gym, that you should want to be on Tiktok because that's what the mass middle is doing. And if those things, if you love those things, do those things. And if you don't stand in your authority and be like, I respect other people's choices to do those things. Here's the choices I'm making, because that's what matters to me. Yeah, because it's interesting when I was making some notes about this, like what you were talking describing about your journey was really similar to mine. In the sense that in my early 30s, I'd realised I'd ticked everything off my bucket list. Like, I had actually ticked off everything I'd kind of entered the workforce with a trade based engineering qualification and wanted to be an aircraft engineer. But thanks to some government changes, they stopped taking on engineers and I ended up working for an industrial engineering company for 13 years, which was amazing and I had such a cool career there. I loved working with that organisation until I didn't but I definitely ticked off all the boxes, but I remember leaving that organisation working for a couple of others, and living in Sydney and thinking oh my god, if my 15 year old self could see me right now I am living the dream like this is everything I thought I wanted and I am so fucking miserable. Like I was literally driving my cute little convertible Audi with the top down, banging out some Beyonce and driving down the back road past, you know through the north drive from Roselle thinking if anyone looked at me right now from the outside. I literally look like I'm killing it and I was in tears going this is not feel good. Like the organisation I was working for was awful. My values did not align with theirs. I was so unhappy. And I guess that was a real tipping point for me to go. Okay, that was a definition of success at a point in time. And now I'm different. And so now I need new definitions of success. And so I spent quite a lot of time with an executive coach setting some new goals. And I remember so clearly this one. And it's amazing because it's something that's really important to me now. So this is, yeah, pretty much a decade ago, and sitting in Sydney with my executive coach and her saying, like doing a visualisation exercise to kind of come up with what my definition of success was. And I was like, I want to be in my own home. growing my own strawberries, I want to walk outside at the end of the day, and eat some strawberries straight off the vines that I've grown that a warmth from the sun, and I just want to be able to breathe. And I knew that I wanted to be back home and Aotearoa like, like, at the same time, I've been reading this quote that said, if you want to know what someone loves, take a take a look at what they photograph. And anyone that knows me will know that I just spam the shit out of all the socials with pictures and trees and forests and mountains like I'm in nature

Kelsie Inglis 21:01
And like water.

Melissa Davies 21:02

Yeah, water, actually water. That's so true. And it's amazing how different bodies of water have such a different impact on me. But New Zealand like pictures and pictures and pictures of New Zealand, like Australia is ridiculously beautiful, but in a really different way. Like I just feel this real soul connection to especially the South Island. I just think there's something pretty magic about where we're from. And I had this calling to be back here. And so that growing of strawberries became this whole definition of success. And so it seemed like a really weird one yet I remember not knowing where that would be,

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what kind of house what kind of city, what kind of work like it was not that specific. And I landed, I sort of knew I just had to grow strawberries. And I am so proud because I literally here we are, and nearly winter and I have got strawberries growing right now. They will be delicious. Like I pretty much get them nine months of the year, and they're not in a greenhouse. But yeah, so that so I feel like so much of the time now I'm living my definition of success, because it was such a for me, it was just a really clear, simple thing.

Kelsie Inglis 22:02

Is it still your definition of success?

Melissa Davies 22:04

It's part of it, it's become a hygiene factor for me now, like for me to be knowing I'm living a good life, I have to be able to grow some of my own food.

Kelsie Inglis 22:12

I really like what you said though there around the comparison. Like if anybody looking in at me would say that I look successful. And this is the definition of success. And I think, like for me, the devils or sort of the evil of success is the 'shoulds' and the comparison. I think they're just the killers to what actually makes it easy to figure out what your own success is .

Melissa Davies 22:42

Yeah, and then having the confidence to stay in your lane and go this is this is where I'm playing and this is what I want. And this is what matters to me. And yeah, not buying into the shoulds. And I think to you know, we're we're definitely coming at this from a really a white western perspective, right like, because that's our thing, that's our lens of the world through our experiences yet. When I think to our time in China, one of the things that we all love doing was around sort of five o'clock every day, the apartment complex where we're staying, and in Hong Joe. Yeah, around five o'clock every day, the grandparents would take the babies and the dogs out for a walk. And we were just like a highlight of the day like cute babies, friendly people cute doggos all hanging out downstairs, we were like timing it so we could be hanging out too. And, you know, I think is that it'd be really insightful to hear from other societies, other cultures, other experiences, what success, those 'shoulds' and that look like, because I certainly know that having a good career and a good education and cultures like in China is really important. And you know how hard it must be. For all of us, no matter what culture we're in, to if our definition of success looks different to a really strong cultural societal definition of success. That must, I mean that it's hard to go to kind of stay in your lane,

Kelsie Inglis 23:58

Oh even just like within a family, right? Like there. We're both lucky that we, you know, we're sort of sitting in a position of privilege as young white females where we can actually go no, fuck you and your definition of success, I'm going to figure it out, I'm going to have the financial freedom and a safe community or safe ish community as much as it can be safe for a woman in the world anyway. To be able to find yourself within that space, but I can't I can't speak from a place of culture where your family sets your definition of success. And if you go outside of that you are ripping yourself away from that family definition of success. Like I just I don't know that. I can't speak on that.

Melissa Davies 24:45

That's a really good point. And I think as this podcast goes on, I think Kels and I are super aware that our view of the world is our view of the world and it's not reflective of everybody. So we are really both very committed to being as inclusive in what we do as possible and so if we get it wrong, we want you to tell us so, so we can get better. It's really important to us. And as you were talking Kels, I just kept thinking about other privilege we have is that the upside of being single and not having kids is we have the luxury of time to choose how we spend that. So we can read a book over the weekend, we can go hiking, we don't have people dependent on us be that our parents or children. And that brings a whole

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lot of other complexity. And I guess, yeah, I think we're just really mindful that not that our worldview is not the same as everybody else's. And it can like, it's really easy for us to sit here and say, you know, spend time getting to know yourself and defining success on your own terms. But actually, if you've got three minutes a day to yourself, that's not as easy as it sounds. But it is really important. So making that a priority really helps. And there's some really cool books that help you figure out your values or some online tools that you can jump on to help you figure out what your key strengths are and what your values are. And it's a really good place to start when it comes to success, which is actually you've got to know yourself, and then you've got to define it for yourself.

Kelsie Inglis 26:00

Yeah, absolutely. I think there's a really, there's a beautiful Brene Brown ununlocking us episode where she talks specifically around values. And has like a worksheet where you can figure out what your sort of core defining values are. And we'll link it in the show notes. But it is like, it's a great place to just spend 15 minutes, start there. And figure out where to next.

Melissa Davies 26:28

Awesome. And I think the other reference that I had would be if you're really keen to define success on your own terms, there's this really cool book by a kiwi author called *The Art of Deliberate Success*, and by Dr. David Keane, and he's an Irish kiwi, and he's super cool. And what amazed me is reading his book, how aligned his vision was with mine around success is what you say it is, so whether that's growing strawberries, being an amazing mom of four kids, actually, that's I'm going to I'm going to interject with a quick story there. So actually, at the same time, I was having a really tough time, thinking, My life wasn't what I wanted it to be and trying to figure out what next, what I realised is all of the media in Australia which, and again, I loved my time in Australia, and I think there's some massive cultural differences between Australia and New Zealand and arguably Australia, is quite a capitalist society and quite commercially focused. And so all the women that were being held up as successful, I noticed were people that were typically were typically successful in a measurable wealth sense. So they had all that achieved sporting success, it was kind of whatever field they were in, that had hit the highest level of that field. So that was either, you know, generally in society, it was around money and assets, and sport, it was Olympics and music it was headlining or billboard acts. And at the time, I had a really good friend of mine who, who was in her early 30s. And knew her calling was to be a mum, that's that was just who she was, she knew it was her definition of success was to be a great mom. And she'd really struggle to fall pregnant. And then that relationship ended, she was single, she went travelling met someone incredible. And they then suffered some really difficult miscarriages, and, you know, watching someone you love, go through. I can't even imagine what that's like, let alone what they did for their relationship. And what really upset me is that going through all of that she's still expected to go to work to handle her life to manage all of her responsibilities to keep up appearances to not sit there and break down because she's dealing with all of these things you know, that real should thing around keeping, you know, that brave face at work bullshit. You know, side note link tree have an amazing miscarriage policy, which we will also link in the show notes. Yeah, it's incredible. And I'd really encourage if you're in a position to influence your company's policy around leave, and bereavement leave that I really think you should have a look at this. I will absolutely tag that in the show notes. Yeah, and so she had this, these really tough experiences. And now she's an amazing mom of four. She had her daughter, then twins and another daughter, and she's absolutely acing life and living her definition of success and she inspires me so much. And it was pissing me off that those stories don't get told. Like those stories are really powerful. They're really meaningful. You know, there's a lot of heartbreak heartache and love that goes into achieving success when your success has to be an amazing mom yet we don't celebrate those stories. And so I guess that's ultimately why when I read definitions, like the one that David Keane wrote in the art of deliberate success, which is you decide what successes you have to own it and if success for you is being a rock star Mum, or being a great entrepreneur or the best landscape gardener in town? Or a kickass Ruby on Rails developer that builds your own apps, like whatever you decide, like, just champion the shit out of yourself, like, please, please do that. Like, you just never know who you're inspiring?