

Kasie Whitener (00:04):

Welcome back into Moore Impact. My name is Dr. Kasie Whitener from the Management Department of Darla Moore School of Business. You're listening to our podcast, which features alumni from the Darla Moore School of Business. And today's alumni guest is Elena Arecco Bridgeman, who is an entrepreneur in Charlotte, but also a graduate of the International School of Business at the Darla Moore School. So will you talk to us a little bit about your MBA experience here at Carolina and what brought you here? What did you study? Things like that.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon (00:33):

Oh gosh, it's my pleasure. Well, first of all, good morning, good afternoon. Wherever people are listening from. I know we have alumnus all over the globe. Thanks for having me, Kasie. I went to the Moore School of Business for a couple different reasons. One was, it was in my backyard, so after I graduated from Clemson University. Go Tigers!

Kasie Whitener (00:52):

Undergrad.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon (00:54):

Yep, undergrad <laugh>. I went back up north and then came back and my husband was at law school here in South Carolina. So when I was looking for my MBA program, which I always knew I wanted to do, I looked back up north and then I looked here at the University of South Carolina. And the more I learned about the International business program, the more I felt in love. So I applied and got in, and I was a Spanish track at that point. We had tracks. I don't even know where we are today. I was a Spanish track, uh, student, and I started my journey in Guadalajara, Mexico with probably, I don't even know, a dozen or so of my closest friends who still are my closest friends now. And yeah. And that was my kickoff to my MBA journey. It was absolutely amazing. It was a special program because it wasn't, while we got all of the amazing business school education that I'm sure many of my peers did in other great institutions across the country, we, it wasn't that cutthroat sort of way that you hear might go at other universities in

Kasie Whitener (01:52):

Terms of competitive Correct. Between students.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon (01:54):

Correct. So my classmates and I really became bonded over our desires to, to learn about the global economies and to work in other countries, and quite frankly, to travel and rack up the countries we visit to. Right. I mean, one of the first questions we talk about is how many countries have you traveled to? When we first even started the program, everyone had that desire, right. To learn about other countries, other cultures, and to go and experience them. So that sort of bound us together, and that's, that's just the folks here in the United States. The, the program also attracted many colleagues from other countries that came here in the us, which was really cool too. So I had classmates who were from Germany and India and China and all over the globe. So it just made it a really rich experience. And one that I would say is not something that, you know, all of my classmates and peers, excuse me, all of my peers would've experienced at another program.

Kasie Whitener (02:42):

Right. When you think about the in-class experience Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, some of the professors that you had, some of the topics, what was in class like in the international business school?

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([02:51](#)):

Sure. Well, first I'm gonna say this. Um, when I first started to look at business school, I had only been out of Clemson undergrad for about a year or so, and one of the, I'll call them administrators, mentors at the time told me, Hey, you need three things when you go to business school, go to graduate school. And that is, you need the ed. You need, of course, you know, to have done well in undergrad, you need your GMAT scores to be a certain level, and you need a little bit of experience. And at the time, I bucked against that because I was, you know, disappointed, bummed. And then when I sat in class, Kasie, it became very clear to me that even my few years of real life practical experience gave me more of a perspective to be able to contribute to the conversation in a more, a more, I don't know what's the right word here?

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([03:35](#)):

Let me think. I could contribute to the conversation in a more meaningful way. And that's what I thought about when I looked around the classroom. I remember sitting there and thinking, gosh, if I had come here right out of undergrad, I'd have no real world experience. Oh, and then, by the way, I've got classmates from all over the world who also have real world experience. And here we are talking about what it's like to, to conduct marketing in South America or in China. And, you know, when we're studying case studies about companies that have failed in those countries, there are actually individuals in my class who could speak to the real impact on the culture and on the local economy. So it was really, really unique in that way. And something quite frankly, Kasie, I haven't thought about in a long time. So thanks for for asking me to talk about it. It's really, really fun.

Kasie Whitener ([04:18](#)):

No, we think of that at the Darla Moore School of Business, the number one international business school Yeah. In the nation. Very, very proud of our international business program. And a lot of times when we talk to our alumni, what makes that experience so unique, what makes it so valuable? And I love that you talk about sort of the texture of the conversation, but also the diversity in your classmates and all of that experience that comes into the room as part of the program. How long did that, um, MBA program last for you?

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([04:43](#)):

It was two years, full two years. So I started in May of 2004, and I graduated in May of 2006.

Kasie Whitener ([04:51](#)):

And where did you go after that?

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([04:53](#)):

I went right to Bank of America, and I entered into a leadership development program, so an entry program basically, that had me rotating through different organizations within Bank of America the first two years I was there. And so I actually started my journey at Bank of America in Jacksonville, Florida, working as the right hand person to a call center executive

Kasie Whitener ([05:16](#)):

Call centers.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([05:18](#)):

Yes.

Kasie Whitener ([05:19](#)):

So this is back when Bank of America's call centers, were all still US based. Are they still US based for Bank of America?

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([05:24](#)):

So I'm not at Bank of America anymore. And yes, there's been this whole offshore onshore offshore onshore

Kasie Whitener ([05:30](#)):

Specifically with call centers,

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([05:31](#)):

Specifically with call centers. Yeah. And I think like many large organizations, it's ebbed and flowed with what's going on at a macro level. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> in the, in the world. And so I would say, if I had to guess that there's probably a mixture. In fact, it's actually funny, I spent a little bit of time at Bank of America working on offshoring policy and strategies to get pieces and parts of processes off shored. Um, but at that time, um, and still to this day, I know this to be true in, in those sunbelt areas where there's lower cost labor as well as rents, leases, things like that. There are larger call centers. So Florida tends to be that. Right. So this is Jacksonville, Tampa, Florida, out in Arizona, in the Phoenix area, and then also in Nevada near Las Vegas. And those still are pretty hot, pretty hot areas for call centers to exist. And if you ever call your, your friendly call customer service agent, whatever, you know, vendor that you have, you might actually talk to someone in one of those areas.

Kasie Whitener ([06:26](#)):

When I was in, uh, working for SYNEX Corporation up in Greenville, right about the same time as you were doing all that with business school in the early two thousands, our call centers went overseas as well. And they built Concentrix Corporation, which managed all these overseas components. And I got to go to Manila and actually work with the call centers in Manila and be part of that offshoring experience Yeah. And see the impact it has on the economy in the Philippines. Yep. So that kind of global piece where as you took your global education, your international business, and you said you did some of the work in Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> it started in Mexico, but then as you're working for Bank of America, did you get a chance to flex those international, uh, pipelines?

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([07:04](#)):

This is where I get really sad.

Kasie Whitener ([07:06](#)):

Oh, no. <laugh> <laugh>.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([07:07](#)):

So I, I worked in call centers and I came and I worked in Charlotte and I worked in, um, operation centers, um, related to our lockbox, lockbox processing. And then I did this strategy work, and I was this close, I'm showing my fingers inches apart of, to going to India to seeing our, our India, um, call centers and operation centers. And then the, basically the, the financial crisis hit

Kasie Whitener ([07:31](#)):

In 2008,

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([07:32](#)):

2008, two, early 2009. Right. So it was like, yeah, no, we're not gonna be able to send you agent, put

Kasie Whitener ([07:37](#)):

A hold in the business, travel,

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([07:38](#)):

Put a hold in the business channel. But I tell you, I went to the travel doctor, I got all the shots, I got all the vaccines, I got everything I needed, Kasie, I didn't get to go. And I was really sad about it.

Kasie Whitener ([07:47](#)):

Yeah. It was 2007 when I went and I got back and, uh, in 2008 had my, my baby. So <laugh>, that was my husband's way of saying, you're not going overseas again. <laugh>.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([07:56](#)):

Yeah. Right. True. And then here we go. Same here. I I, of course got pregnant. You started the family That's right. In 2009. And, and then, you know, then I, I left that, that dream for a little while.

Kasie Whitener ([08:05](#)):

Well, uh, so international business isn't something that goes away. Yeah. It can still be on the radar at some point. Yeah. We'll, we'll come back to that a little bit 'cause I wanna get into your entrepreneurial journey Sure. And where you think that's headed. So talk us through the work you did at Bank of America. Yeah, right outta that MBA program. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> and the way that the Moore School was able to kind of position you or tee you up to be successful in that role.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([08:24](#)):

Yeah. I think the biggest part for me, from coming from the Moore School to back into the corporate world, I had started my corporate journey in marketing. And when I went to business school, I sort of wanted to rebrand myself. And, you know, it's a little challenging. I'm not an engineer. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, although I have a lot of black and white thinking, I'm also a very creative thinker. So, um, to go from marketing, to, to look at something different than that, I, I was really focusing in operations. So taking operations classes, I think I, I don't even know if I minored or whatever it was called, or focused in operations, that helped to set me up to have conversations around being an operations and consultant. And that's essentially what I was hired to do inside of Bank America. I was an operations consultant. So I came in looking at ways to improve operations in whatever way, whether it was for people, for process, for leadership, whatever it might be. So I started working with engage employee engagement. I started working on looking at ways to reduce, you know, um, call hold times, errors in

processes, whatever I could do to help. And that was directly from my operations experience and, and education at, at, uh, the Moore School.

Kasie Whitener ([09:31](#)):

That's a, a similar sort of scenario. I went in and started training at, um, SYNEX, and then ended up in operations two, mostly on the software side, looking at like software implementations Sure. And how people's jobs were gonna change Yeah. And what they needed to do differently to be able to work with new software implementations. And so I think we're seeing more and more people that maybe going into school and looking for a major, you don't know that operations Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> is as big a deal as it is. But in a massive firm like Bank of America operations probably eats up a good bit of that workforce. People just trying to figure out how to run the ship. Right. How to steer the ship. Yep. How to make sure the things are, are, are churning and things are going in the right direction. You're at Bank of America, you're in Charlotte, you're working in primarily operations. I know you ended up in human resources. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> talk us into that <laugh>. Where, where does the human resources tap come and what gets you passionate about helping people make a better job for themselves?

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([10:26](#)):

Absolutely. So it's, it's funny, I think that as I look back on my career, I realize that I'm a very curious person. And I like to talk about, talk to people about what they want, what they, what they desire in their careers and, and what's in the way of that. And so what ended up happening is I just got curious and I went to the woman that ran all of the entry programs that I came into the, the bank in. And I just said, you know, I'm curious, you know, how are you improving the programs? I had a hard time with my transition from my rotational experience to my full-time placement. And have you thought about how to improve that process? And so I just went in and asked a lot of questions. Who do you hire for these roles? What does it take? What skills do you need?

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([11:12](#)):

And next thing I know, I'm being offered a job to both recruit for and then run these leader programs for both the undergrad and grad versions of the operations program that I came into. And when I went to my boss at the time, the woman that was my, my leader for this, this strategy role, this offshoring, you know, the international role that I was so excited to have and go to India with, she looked at me and she said, you wanna be an HR person? And I said, no, I don't wanna be an HR person. I just wanna help improve this program to make it the best program it can be. Right. It's, it's my, it's now my legacy, right. I'm now an alumnus of this program, right. So I wanna, I wanna help it, and I'm passionate about it, and I love to help people and it needs some, some governance. And so I'm gonna go in and help them to create the governance that it needs. And so that's what I did.

Kasie Whitener ([11:58](#)):

Internal governance is a huge part of massive corporations and the way they organize. I remember as you and I reconnected, and you told me your title was a vice president of something at hr, and I was like, you're a vice president. I mean, <laugh>, you and I are the same age. And I was like, man, that Moore School program just vaulted you into VP status. And you said, no, there's like a thousand of us

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([12:18](#)):

<laugh>. There's a million vice presidents, and I, I ended as an SVP. And it means very different things inside of financial institutions and other ones. But, um, but yes, I mean, it, the governance piece of it's

important. And it's also because when you have a program like these entry programs, so coming out of Moore school, going into a rotational leadership development program, which was very desirable, GE started them a long time ago. And many of my peers were looking for those type of programs because it really gives you an opportunity to one, be identified as top talent within the company. Right. But also, two, you get an opportunity to sort of rotate and see what you like so you can get a feel for the organization before you decide where you're gonna be, which is not permanent. 'cause we know no roles are permanent. Right, right.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([12:57](#)):

But, um, but I love that part of it. And, um, and the governance aspect of it. What I was able to build in that role was a, a group of business leaders who were committed to the success of that program and who sponsored it, if you will. So they were, they were actually giving their time, their mind share, they were mentoring and they were providing their resources to be, we called them assignment managers. So when I was in my first year, my assignment manager was my boss, and she still a mentor to me today. That's great. She's one of the most amazing humans.

Kasie Whitener ([13:27](#)):

So it creates more of a, uh, a multidimensional experience. Sure. It's not simply show up and do your job and Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> and hope that somebody notices. It creates a little bit. Would you say more of a community feel? Oh, yeah. Internally,

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([13:39](#)):

Absolutely. In fact, there was a, recently, unfortunately I had to miss it, but there was a alumnus gathering of all of the, the graduates that had been through that program recently in Charlotte, where, um, and many of us have moved on, right? We might not be at the bank anymore. Many of us are still at the bank. And we were able to, to pull the group together. So yeah, it's definitely a community.

Kasie Whitener ([13:58](#)):

When you think about your Bank of America experience, where you get to the place that says, okay, I think I've, I've done what I need to do, working in somebody else's corporation, now I wanna launch my own corporation. What's the tipping point for that? Where did that Yeah. Entrepreneurial journey begin?

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([14:15](#)):

Oh, goodness. Well, it's interesting because I always knew I wanted to be an entrepreneur, Kasie, and I have that right side, left side creativity, also analytical, but not too analytical. Because if you remember, I was an accounting major at Clemson, and then I was like, got to tax, and I was said, no way, <laugh>. So I'm only an analytical to a point. Right. Um, I always wanted be my own boss, and I never was like, how can I, who's gonna pay me to do something? What am I gonna have a service, am I gonna have a product? I just couldn't see what it looked like until I started to learn about the discipline of coaching, which I had been doing undercover for many years. In fact, when I was interviewing some of my old professors, and even back to high school, I was doing a project for a, a coaching class I was in.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([15:00](#)):

And apparently I've been asking the question like, well, what do you really wanna do for a long time? And I asked that to my guidance counselor in high school, and he said that that question really changed

his life. And I, you know, to hear that 20 something years later, wow. Okay. So I've been doing this work, I've been coaching for a long time, and until I realized that this was a discipline that I can get paid for, and that I could actually build into a company that supports leaders and women and working parents, I had no idea that I could actually do it. So, where it started was honestly becoming a Rodan & Fields representative, where I started to learn about what it took to, you know, have, I didn't have to carry inventory, thank goodness, but have conversations with people, see what they wanted and needed, and see if I had something for them. If they didn't want it, no problem. Right? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> and I could move on, but it gave me a little bit more confidence that I could actually sell something or, or meet someone's needs to help them have a better life in some way. In this case, it was skincare. Now it's transitioned into, you know, your whole life.

Kasie Whitener ([15:55](#)):

Right. I think what's interesting about companies like Rodan & Fields and just any number of other direct sales opportunities is that a lot of women find those as kind of side hustles. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> as something to add additional income. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, especially women who are staying home or out of the workforce for short periods of time when they have young children. Yep. And then they, some of them will, this will be the thing, and they will use that as a ladder and, and climb through. We think of like Mary Kay and building out this Mary Kay enterprise. And then others will continue to have the sort of side hustle and Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> and maybe keep it, maybe, you know, to a little extent, uh, we've got mutual friends that are working in like multiple little side hustle, direct sale pieces, but the, the knowledge or the, the learning, the lessons that you're learning as you're trying to run your own business, that's right.

Kasie Whitener ([16:39](#)):

Under the Rodan & Fields banner is that operational stuff that's not necessarily with the support of a massive organization like Bank of America. Instead, it's got this very minimal scaffolding, and you are the only person, if you don't do it, it doesn't get done. That's right. Which is like the biggest lesson in entrepreneurship at all. Absolutely. So you go Rodan & Fields as a side hustle for a few years. That's right. While you're still working at, uh, bank of America, and then at some point start coaching Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> as a side hustle too, but you had to get some training for that. What does that journey look like?

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([17:13](#)):

Yeah, I, I had been toying with the idea once I learned about coaching as being a discipline, and I had been thinking about it and kept saying I had young children when I was first introduced. In fact, I was introduced to it through the women's ERG or employee resource group at, at Bank of America. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, my mentor, if you will, was going through Queen University's executive coaching program and asked me if I could be a, you know, if, if she could pro bono coach me. And I said, sure. Of course. We already had a relationship. Right. So I learned through her what it was, what it wasn't. I learned that there was this organization called the International Coach Federation, and I had it sort of in the back of my head, and I put it aside and said, oh, one day,

Kasie Whitener ([17:52](#)):

One day, someday,

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([17:54](#)):

Someday I'm gonna do the same thing that you're doing. And I had little babies. So it was just that thing that was sort of over here on the side. I'm using my hand to show kind of back of my head. And then I met a woman through my kids daycare. Uh, it was class mom. I know you're not surprised to hear that Casey <laugh>. And I was sending an email collecting money for holiday gifts, and a woman responded and said, hell yeah, you wanna get money? And I don't have to do anything. Here you go. And she, she was hilarious. And she, she responded right away. And I noticed in her signature that it said, you wanna be a coach, click here, or do you know, are you interested in coaching? And I clicked and I kept looking around. I'm like, who is this woman?

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([18:31](#)):

What is she doing? Is she training coaches? What does this all mean? And I started to explore what that meant. And through conversations with her, one, we realized we wanted to be fast friend. She's now my business partner and best friend, but two, that I could be trained to be a coach. I hadn't really thought about that part. I hadn't thought about the training part of becoming a coach. So that was probably in 2013, I met her. And then I didn't enroll in the program until 2017, and I enrolled about the time when I was hitting a milestone birthday. And I realized that everything looked good on paper, that I had achieved what I wanted to achieve, had the dream house, the 2.5 kids, two kids, really two kids, the dog, you know, all these things. Right. And it wasn't fulfilled. I was burnt out. I couldn't see where it was going. I didn't, I just, I knew I wasn't sustainable the way it was going. And so when I enrolled in the coach training program, I got a coach, and through getting a coach and getting coaching, I got the tools that helped me to really learn to embrace my life and just start to thrive and see what I really wanted. And that's where my dream of being my own boss came back up and I started to build that exit plan,

Kasie Whitener ([19:47](#)):

Reexamining the trajectory. Right? Right. So a lot of times when we get to that place, uh, and there are people who will be listening that will be thinking about, do I go into an MBA program and international MBA program? Do I attend the Moore School to get this career I'm looking for? And they may not have that, they may not be far enough along in their career to have that milestone birthday and go, why aren't things where I want them to be? Um, it's a natural place to get to just about everybody we talked to that hits that milestone. Birthday goes, okay. Yeah, I remember that too. It was sometime around the time I turned 40, right. Like, and I start going, this is not the right place for me, and I'm not sure where. And, and then the other side of the hill looks a little bit shorter, so it's like, I don't have a lot of time Mm-Hmm.

Kasie Whitener ([20:29](#)):

<affirmative> to make the effort that I wanna make or make the difference that I wanna make here. And that draws us to entrepreneurship. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, you're not the first entrepreneur on the podcast. We've had quite a few that have come in here, and they've all been like, and I got to this place, and I went, it's time to do this on my own. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So how scary is it to walk away from this Bank of America career where things were maybe not satisfying, but at least settled and at least secure? Mm-Hmm mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And then go, I'm gonna, I'm gonna jump out and do my entrepreneurial thing because I know that it's gotta begin with a little bit of, um, some side hustle. I'm working Oh yeah. 80 hours a week Oh yeah. For my employer and 40 for myself. Right. Oh, yeah. And then eventually you go, okay, the, the revenue is there. Talk us through that decision to like, to walk out and go, this is the thing for me now.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([21:15](#)):



Well, I'm gonna start with, before I start about the, the transition. I wanna talk about even the decision to go get, to go get trained as a coach started to create breakthroughs for me. So the first thing was I went to my boss and I said, Hey, I wanna get trained as an executive coach. Here's what it's gonna cost. Will you pay for it? He said, which is something I would never have done by the way, I had like gotten to my cap at my base salary. So I had, I hadn't had a raise for years. I'd been a, a manager leading a, a team at that point in compensation for a while. And, um, he said, no, I won't pay for it, but I'll get you a, a salary increase. Sounds good to me. <laugh>. All right. So that was the first kind of breakthrough and the first step towards moving towards what you're, what you're talking about that, that exit strategy. Right. And, you know, it didn't happen overnight. Right? I started my coach training program in 2007. I started taking clients immediately in August of 2007. And what that looked like, Kasie, was 2007,

Kasie Whitener ([22:08](#)):

2017.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([22:09](#)):

2017. Okay.

Kasie Whitener ([22:10](#)):

I just was looking back at my notes and I was like, wait, did

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([22:12](#)):

I get that on 2017? 2017? You're fine. And I didn't leave. So I started to, to my coach training program in 2017. And I didn't leave the bank until 2021. I'd actually had a five year plan and left a year early. The pandemic probably helped that a little bit. But what I did was I did start, I started to coach before work. Mm-Hmm. I coached during my lunch break. I coached after work, I put my kids to bed, I'd coach a client at eight and I'd coach 'em at nine o'clock. Word to the wise, don't do that. Not so smart. And, um, eventually, now I do not do that any longer. I have a cap to when <laugh>, my latest client I take is my, my West Coast clients at six o'clock eastern. But yeah, it was, it was double duty. And the thing that brought me through that though, was knowing that on the other side of it was me building this practice, me building up the, the nest egg and the income so that I could sort of scale back, leave my day job and, and build this business. And, um, I did still didn't know how it was gonna work until Luscious Mother and LUMO came into the picture. And that's when it started to look like there was more of an exit plan. But it was from the very beginning, I said, I started my coach training program. I'm leaving the bank by 2022, my birthday of 2022, and I end up leaving, excuse me again, my birthday of 2021

Kasie Whitener ([23:35](#)):

Milestones.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([23:36](#)):

Yep.

Kasie Whitener ([23:37](#)):

<laugh>. They're so arbitrary.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([23:39](#)):

They're so, but you gotta, you gotta have something though, right? I mean, that's the thing. That's true. Like, you have to have something to pull you forward. And I would put the number, um, the number by age would be around. I'd write it all over the place. And my husband's like, what is this number everywhere? And he thought it indicated the president and I said, no, no. It indicates when I'm leaving the bank <laugh>. Yeah.

Kasie Whitener ([23:55](#)):

That's pretty funny. Yeah. You're like, Taylor Swift's 13. That's right. Is the lucky number. He is, that's right. Um, alright, so when we think about, 'cause I wanna get to Luscious Mother and, uh, LUMO in, in just a second. But I wanna talk about the structure of the business itself. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So coaching as a practice is a lot like consulting. Yes. In that this is knowledge work. Yep. Um, and when you build this business out, what does it look like from branding? So when you came up with the name of your company, where did that come from? When you go with your website and your initial brand, your value proposition, take us back to 2017 when all of this is coming together.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([24:29](#)):

Okay. So yeah. So as a solopreneur, so like, like you said, it's very much like consulting. And as a consult, as a solopreneur, the brand is me. And I was very, very inspired by a friend that Charlie and I, my husband and I lost, uh, the year prior. So we had a woman, um, who many listeners up there in South Carolina might know Tanya G. She was one of the, I believe, I'm gonna miss mistake this speak, but she's one of the youngest, I've believe female judges in South Carolina. And she passed away in 2016 at the age of 39. So that was really, really hard. And, um, she was always an inspiration. And she, even at her funeral was given out, um, a sticker that said, Live an Epic Life. And it was quoted by, by TG Tanya G. So that inspired me. So I called my company Epic Life Coaching.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([25:21](#)):

And really the intention of that, the value prop, was to support people who had similar experiences to me, their life was great and it was good, but it wasn't great. And they wanted to go from surviving it to thriving in it. And so that's how I started my practice. And that was the principles of getting the, the word out. I didn't invest a lot in marketing short of creating a website and putting some stuff on social media. The, the business is very referral based. So once I worked with someone, they would refer a friend and so on and so on. Um, so that's how it started.

Kasie Whitener ([25:55](#)):

And the brand is you. Right? Brand is me. So how quickly do you realize this won't scale?

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([26:03](#)):

Um, well, I'm also working, you know, full-time at Bank of America, and I'm realizing that my capacity is constrained, right? So I don't even remember how many hours I would could put into coaching back then, but I probably did too many, probably 10 hours a week, which was too much. And then you got a business develop as well. So, you know, it's, I'm working too much. I knew that. So it didn't take long Kasie, to answer your question, <laugh>. And that's where I knew that I needed to leave in order to really make this a thing that would sustain myself and my family.

Kasie Whitener ([26:33](#)):

When you get out into the world, you've got Epic Life Coaching, you're branded, where do you go? Do you end up at 1 million Cups pitching in front of a bunch of other entrepreneurs? Are you in, um, you know, fitness forums? Like where are you? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> to sell the, the coaching that you're trying to do. How do you find your target market and then, and then approach them?

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([26:53](#)):

Yeah. Um, I am reaching to my network. I'm talking to the people I already know. I am joining women's organizations like Ellevate, which you actually introduced me to. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> and talking to women there. And I'm also looking at other women's organizations. There's another, uh, group I joined called Know Women Network. So I've got a few different women's organizations. I'm going to networking events. I am active on social media sharing, although I didn't know what I was doing and probably wasn't that effective. I'm just having a presence out there. And then I'm talking, starting to talk on stages and be on panels and things of that nature, which attracts clients as well. And asking whenever I had a client, who do they know, who might be interested in having a conversation about coaching. The other thing was really instrumental and continues to be instrumental in, in my work and that of my both companies, is providing an a complimentary sample session where you get a really, a true experience of what coaching with me would be like. I do that for every single one of my clients, um,

Kasie Whitener ([27:55](#)):

Still to this day,

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([27:55](#)):

Still to this day, and so does my company because it's important. You're investing, when you're investing in yourself in a coach. It's, it is an investment, right? So you gotta you gotta give it before you buy it.

Kasie Whitener ([28:07](#)):

<laugh>. I like it. Uh, all right, so now we're in Epic Life Coaching. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, this is the thing you're doing. You're on your own. Take us to the next stage. Where do you get to where I gotta grow, I gotta scale, I gotta hire? How does, how do you move into that phase?

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([28:22](#)):

Yeah, so, so what happened though is I was, I had Epic and I had the bank. And in 2021, I started working with actually a little bit before that as like a side. I started working with Luscious Mother. And that was, that was Sarah Olin. Now my business partner and best friend, Luscious Mother was Sarah's side hustle, if you will. She had Sarah Olin coaching as her main thing. And Luscious Mother was her labor of love or her, her, her passion project. And so when I was a baby coach training, I would go and help her at her Luscious Mother retreats, which was these weekend retreats with all these moms who are hanging on by a thread. And so as I became trained in coaching, I kept supporting her even more. And then one thing led to another, and eventually she brought together a bunch of women to build Luscious Mother to be a bigger organization.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([29:15](#)):

And I had said to her, I remember being with her, um, on vacation one year and said, Hey, I think this can be really big. I think we can make Luscious Mother, not just a B2C organization, but a B2C B2B organization. She had the same conversations with other, other partners as well. And we all came together and started to build out that vision. What we quickly learned is that moms don't wanna invest

in themselves, like they'll invest in other people because we are, are one of service, aren't we? We always put ourselves last so quickly. We decided and pivoted actually in 2021 to be a B2B organization where companies hire us now to do the coaching and leadership training. And so you ask about scaling, the scaling happened when I joined up with Sarah and the other founders of Luscious Mother, now known as LUMO, to build a cohort or collective of coaches to expand our reach. So now I have 20 coaches that sit on our bench plus our founders. So we have more scale, more reach, and we can impact more people.

Kasie Whitener ([30:15](#)):

Talk about this change over from Luscious Mother to LUMO. What's the choice? Why do you guys decide to do that?

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([30:21](#)):

Yeah, it's really, it is really hard decision, right? Um, we had tested some things out. Um, in 2020 pandemic hit, we were doing a lot of free offerings. People came to that Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> moms would come to that. They were, they were really suffering. We called them community calls and we would coach them in groups. Um, we did a, a group coaching program. We had, I don't even know how many, let's just say 20 groups. The first year, the next year we, we didn't do any marketing besides our own, let's call it gorilla marketing, <laugh> and referral based hand selling, going to our own, going to the Epic Life clients and the Sarah Olin clients and whatnot, and going, getting our own clients to come in and join these groups. And then we invested in marketing and we invested in a campaign and we invested in social media and, you know, way more money, way more effort, still the same amount of effort to get people enrolled in these programs.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([31:17](#)):

And we had the same exact number of enrollees. So after being at this and, and sort of hitting our head against the, the wall and realizing that we were building a B2C and to B2B company at the same time, not to mention that Luscious Mother started to get spam filtered through organizations. We had to make a choice with limited resources. You know, the founders of the organization volunteering our time. We had to make a choice because everyone had to pay their bills too. And so we chose to bet it all on black go B2B, and we changed or evolved our name to be LUMO, L-U-M-O, which is short for luscious mother <laugh>. Don't tell anyone that's a secret.

Kasie Whitener ([32:03](#)):

So you go B2B and you start now reaching out to organizations. And what's the pitch here? If I'm an executive, I run my mm-Hmm. <affirmative> Insurance Company. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> or I run, um, the, I don't know, um, I'm thinking of, we're in Columbia, so it's all insurance companies. <laugh>, I'm running a healthcare organization Sure. Or I'm running some other corporation that's doing, uh, I don't know, um, logistics or something like that. And I've got women who work for me. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> who we've been, and you mentioned this before, you were part of the, uh, employee resource group. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, the ERG. Right? And I think my ERG is crushing it. My women are all taken care of in their ERG. So now, how does Lumo come in and go, you know, your ERG was a good idea, but here's how you can get to this next place. Yeah. And here's what we have to offer.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([32:49](#)):

Yeah. So, you know, we, we believe, and we've heard from our clients that coaching is the, the big, the best thing you can have to a silver bullet as far as really supporting your employees to help them to, to feel engaged, productive, and really enjoying their time working with your organization and their life in general. Right? And so coaching is number one. We are executive coaches and leadership trainers. We coach one-to-One, we coach groups. And then secondarily, we have programs that we've developed to support different populations within the company to help them to learn the skills that they need to be able to do all those things thrive in their, their life and their career. And those programs include a women's leadership program, a manager training program. And the reason why we started the manager training program is because we found, and this is through our coaching, but also through our experiences that we have outside of coaching, that managers are promoted oftentimes because they are very good at what they do technically, but that doesn't mean that they're great at leading people. So we have a whole program around that.

Kasie Whitener ([33:53](#)):

As a management professor, I'll say that it's a hundred percent true. And it's something that we talk a lot about in the management, in the school of management here in the discipline, I should say, of management. Yeah. How do you teach people to be managers? 'cause it is a very different skillset, very for helping to organize your resources, motivate those resources, respond to their needs. That's a different skillset than being a great sales rep. Absolutely. But you made manager because you were a great sales rep. That's

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([34:17](#)):

Right. Yeah. Yeah. And sometimes people, you know, a lot of times people, I would say are motivated to get to the next level without even understanding what that actually means. Right. And, and even myself, when I, I, all I wanted to do is be a leader of people. I didn't really know what that meant. And if I didn't have a great manager who groomed me, um, the woman that hired me actually into hr, she hired me to be her takeout. So after I went, came back from maternity leave and had been in the role for a couple years, she, she went on to the next role and she, and I was promoted into her role. And she helped me to understand that I had everything I needed because of who I was and the experiences I had. But I had those conversations with her. I don't know that a lot of people have those conversations.

Kasie Whitener ([34:55](#)):

No, it's very rare. Very rare. I had a manager when I was in training that was really focused on her managerial skillset. Yeah. I mean, she was reading books and being coached, and she really wanted to be a very good manager. She was an exceptional manager. Yeah. And as I was looking for what's my next challenge and where do I wanna go next, she and I talked about the things that I did that were effective and the things that I did where I was not as effective. Right. Yeah. Um, if you're always looking for your next place, you can't, you know, bloom where you're planted, these kinds of things. And there were some lessons that she taught me that I think if she hadn't taken the time to really focus on helping me get where I wanted to go, and this is me in my twenties Sure. And my thirties. Sure. And I think a lot of times in or that early part of our career, individuals don't have that. Right. That's right. And you're sort of expected to just go out there and do the best you can, and maybe you get noticed, maybe you get lucky Yep. Instead of being intentionally led through that process. So LUMO offers this as a consulting, add-on to major corporations.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([35:54](#)):

Yeah. And we, we consider it to be a leadership training and development program. And, and everything that we do is all built around our own philosophies around coaching. So when you're, when you're coaching as a, as a trained coach, we're always meeting our clients where they are. And it's less about us talking at you, but actually being in a conversation with you. So that's how we've developed all of our trainings. They're really special, very interactive. And we generally do them in small groups of 25, where we also, our cohorts of 25, where we also have three coaches. So they split up and we do small group experiences of groups of only about eight or seven or eight. I can't do the math right now, but you get it smaller groups so people can really be vulnerable and get the support that they need. And we can really address, Kasie, the way that you're taking in the content's gonna be different the way that I take it in.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([36:37](#)):

And then how we action on it might be different as well. We're not gonna tell you you have to do A, B, and C. We're gonna ask you what's gonna actually support you to get towards your goals. Right. So that's why we built all the programs. And then, um, I, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the other really cool programs that we created, which are what we're really most proud of. And what we started in the pandemic was, um, a program to help the transition between being a working professional and being a working parent. And we created that program for both the employee and their manager. So we have a manager program just around supporting people as they go out and come back from leaves. All types of leaves, of course. Right. But we know that the, the parental leave is generally the longest Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But people have other leaves, bereavement leaves and, um, FMLA leaves and things like that. So

Kasie Whitener ([37:22](#)):

There is just this sense that you'll come back to your corporate job and you'll just pick up where you left off and keep doing the thing. Ugh. Even though it's, I mean, I remember dropping Hollie off at daycare for the first time and just walking in the door, bawling my eyes out and nobody really knowing what to do with that. No. Or what to make of that. And there not being any real, I mean, not that they were cold about it, but they just don't know what to do about it. Absolutely. And so having some kind of know, or at least awareness of that and helping executives to have an awareness of that, helping managers have an, an awareness of that we spend so much time in our work life Yep. That the personal life can't be separated from it. It just doesn't, doesn't work.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([38:00](#)):

Thank you. This idea that we have work life balance is a complete myth. In fact, I've done a keynote on this. There's, there's no balance. First of all, it's never gonna be sep it's not reasonable to think it to be separate. Now, that's how we were trained. I mean, leave it at the door, don't bring your personal stuff, but that's just not reasonable. When I'm a mom, I'm a mom all the time. Right. I'm not a mom just from nine to, uh, outside of nine to five or whatever the hours are. Right. Right, right. I'm always a mom. I'm always, yes. I'm always gonna be present and in my work and doing the best I can. And sometimes I'm gonna have to be worrying about my teenager who's walking down Park Road right now to get her her manicure, and I'm gonna make sure that she gets there safely.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([38:34](#)):

I mean, that's just, she's my responsibility. She's my ultimate responsibility, but doesn't make me less of a great worker. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And to your point about your managers or people not knowing what to do, this is where I believe the coaching conversation comes in because we meet people where

they are and we, we teach them to do the same Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So it's not actually that challenging or that different from being a, a great leader is just to be a great person. Right. "Hey, Kasie, how's it going? What's, you know, do, what do you need? How can I support you?" It's, I mean, just even those little questions you can ask your, your people can make such a big difference. And you don't have to solve it. Like, it's not for, for me to solve it for you. I can't solve it. Right. I can't, I can't get inside and, and help you work through that. But what I can do is I can be a compassionate human being and notice that you might be in a time of need, or you may need a minute to yourself, or maybe you just need an hour to just go sit in your car and cry and that's okay. Right. So those are some of the things we talk about.

Kasie Whitener ([39:26](#)):

I love this conversation though, and I, I hate that we're like running up against our 40 minute, 40 minute mark here. So I, I think it's definitely worth giving your website for people to be able to, to learn more about LUMO and what LUMO does. So go ahead and lay that on our listeners.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([39:42](#)):

Absolutely. It's very easy. It's LUMO, L-U-M-O leadership.com,

Kasie Whitener ([39:49](#)):

Lumo leadership.com, the opportunity to bring your gifts from the Moore School, the experience that you had, the way you were in this diverse cohort. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> that taught you to be curious or maybe you were curious when you got there, but maybe helped expand that curiosity and then show how rewarding it can be to learn what other people's journeys are. I think that's the empathy journey that you've been on this whole career and it's sort of culminating here at LUMO and letting you really put your gifts into the world for a value proposition that that is unparalleled with others. So good job, Elena.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([40:23](#)):

Thank you. Lot.

Kasie Whitener ([40:24](#)):

This is exciting stuff. I think too. And then this is where I think the next, the conversation should probably go to as we're looking at manager challenges with things like work from home, remote work. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, uh, and a lot of these articles that are coming out Mm-Hmm. Now about failed remote work and quiet quitting and quiet vacationing and all of this, a lot of that can be solved with conversations that get at the heart of why do people feel disengaged? Yep. Why do they feel underappreciated? And how can managers do a better job of bridging those conversations and really working in those relationships while still being focused on the numbers. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> for productivity of course. And for the business to be viable. Right. But then really saying, I want my people to be viable. If my people are viable, my business will be as well.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([41:10](#)):

Yep. I completely agree. I would love to talk more about that. And actually, I'll just put this in a couple things that I heard in that. One is I have this conversation, you would be surprised how many times a week, "have you asked your, your employees about that? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, have you talked to your employee about that?" And how many people and managers are scared to have those

conversations. So, um, the antidote to that is to actually get to know your people, be in a relationship with them. Right. So it's not, while I get that we have roles within an organization, it doesn't mean that you can't be a human being and be in a relationship and actually care about that individual. You may not wanna get a beer with them, but you need to be able to talk to them. Right. So that's number one.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([41:46](#)):

The other thing that I would say is there are so many tools out there that help managers to, to be able to organize their people and put structures in place. And the one that I am super psyched about right now, I don't know if you've heard of it, Kasie is the entrepreneurial operating system EOS. Based on the book called Traction by Gino Wickman. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, I'm a huge fan. And that was recommended to me by a ment mentor about a year ago. And I'm implementing self implementing, implementing right now. And what I love about it is it takes all the amazing things I learned in business school. My 20 years of corporate experience are more I think now. And, um, and it helps to make it accessible to everyone in your organization, whether you're 1, 2, 25 or 250 people. Yep. So if there's any entrepreneurial entrepreneurs listening, or even any leaders of of departments, it's something to have a look at.

Kasie Whitener ([42:42](#)):

We've got a practitioner here in town that, uh, comes and spends time with 1 Million Cups and some of our other entrepreneurial ecosystem groups. Beautiful. To talk specifically about EOS and the capabilities of it. So we're very familiar with it here in Columbia. It'll be interesting to see if any of our listeners on the broader Moore School network are as familiar. Thank you Elena, Arecco Bridgemon for being here. Thank you.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([43:02](#)):

Kasie Whitener

Kasie Whitener ([43:02](#)):

And part of our podcast.

Elena Arecco Bridgmon ([43:04](#)):

It's my pleasure. Thanks for having me. It's an honor.

Kasie Whitener ([43:06](#)):

This has been Moore Impact. When you learn more, you know more, and when you know more, you do more. Thanks for listening.