

Transcription - John Tarnoff Part 1

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn, and although she's not here today, we are going to be joined by one of our former guests on the podcast, Jamie Wadley. Fulyana will be back in about a month's time, I know that many of you are looking forward to that and we are happy to have her back. Today, we're going to be talking to John Tarnoff. John is joining us from continental US, and he's going to talk to us about transitioning to a new career.

As many of you know, transitioning to a new career is a big and challenging process, and it requires careful planning, perseverance and a willingness to step out of your comfort zone. Without a strong support system or guidance, navigating a career change can feel overwhelming. John's goal is to help mid and late career professionals in defining, planning and achieving more meaningful and sustainable careers. Being a film studio executive defined the first half of John's career, and he reinvented his own profession at 50. John is the author of the best-selling book, "Boomer ReInvention: How to Create Your Dream Career Over 50." And I will also add that he has a very entertaining TED talk from some years ago. Welcome John, good to have you with us.

G'day Kim, thank you so much for having me on.

John, is there any highlight, in terms of career transitions, that you want to share with us first of all before we start to talk about?

I'm happy to dive into it. I mean, I think the key differentiator for me and the reason why I focus on mid-career, is that we used to talk a lot about mid-life crisis as a kind of a life stage. And I think that applies also to mid-career, the same kinds of questions that we have about ourselves and our identity occur not just in our lives in general, but specifically in terms of our careers, because we attribute so much value and so much investment personally into the work that we do, the work relationships that we have built over the years. So it's different changing jobs, changing careers in mid-life, than it is when you are younger, when you're in your 20s, your 30s, even your early 40s. And this is a natural developmental question at mid-life. I'm a big fan of the psychologist, Eric Erickson, who talked about life stages and the life stage that is relevant to me. I apologize for kind of being a little bit long-winded, but you gave me the floor, so I'm going to grab it. The idea of generativity, that at this particular point in life, having learned so much, done so much, really achieved some sense of command or mastery over your life, your career, you know what's what, you have this obligation, psychologically, to generate value and to really make it worth something. And then if you don't generate this value in mid-career, you will stagnate. That is the alternative that Erickson observed in his research. So it really is a call to action for all of us who are getting in and through mid-career, not to pull back or to feel overwhelmed by it, but to really downshift into a new dispensation for ourselves.

That timing of when this happens, is that overlaid by what we see and what we've talked about on the podcast often, about how people identify themselves with the job that they are or the career that they have? You ask them, when they retire, so if we go ahead, say 20 years and we say, and they're retired and when you're introducing them, networking, whatever, and

it's, I'm so and so, "I used to be X". They can't identify themselves with anything other than the role, the title, the job that they had. So they move into this period of time where they're not that and they don't know what they are. They don't think they've got the energy or the drive or the ambition or the interest or the permission, and we'll talk about the permission in a little while, to actually make those changes.

And very good observation, I think that's spot on and I talk about this, I think in my book where, there's a certain kind of colloquialism around this, where you introduce yourself to someone and they say, what do you do? And you say, I am vice president of whatever or I am a marketing expert or whatever that is, but it's not who you are. It's what you do. And that is a distinction which we don't tend to make or think about because as you say, there is this intense identification with the work. So one of the first steps in affecting a transition is to decouple ourselves from this idea of, I am that job. It's really a role that I have taken on, but it doesn't define who I am.

Do you see that as something that starts very early in careers though, when people are first starting their careers, they align themselves with this is the role, this is the title, this is the job that I want to have, not this is what I want to do?

Absolutely. And I think we're conditioned by society to do this. I think it kind of, is a one of the outgrowth of the industrial era, that we are dealing with in a post industrial age and it's toxic.

Does it go right back to high school, to preparation for careers?

I think so. So what do you want to be when you grow up? Right. So the answer to that question, I want to be, which lens tends to lead to, I am, right? I have become this. But again, we do ourselves a disservice to identify as that job. And I also say you are so much more than your resume.

In introducing Jamie, I will say that there's probably a tenet in his life that says I don't want to grow up because I know that he will say he never wants to retire.

Bravo, Jamie.

Jamie, we can't hear you. We'll let him work on the technology.

John, just in terms of talking about that particular area where we've just started to look at changing careers and about that correlation with mid life crisis, is it age-ist?

Yeah, which aspect of it? Are you asking is it age-ist to kind of differentiate this period in a way? (Yeah) I don't think it's age-ist to differentiate it. I think it's age-ist to diminish it. (Okay.) That, I think, is the defining line for me, that ageism is this bias against the value of age, right? It is a series of false beliefs about what being a certain age means. Right. As opposed to looking at this as about capability, because there are 35 year olds who are perfectly capable or incapable of doing a given job for a variety of reasons, right? But we don't necessarily think that it's because of their age. We just think it's because of who they are.

And that could work in terms of people thinking about what they want to do in this new career direction?

Well, absolutely. And I think that that is a really key issue for a lot of people who harbor limiting beliefs about what they're capable of doing or about how life works or about age itself. That is something that older people do to themselves as well and buy into this idea of, oh, I'm getting old, right? Or I'm having a senior moment. I can't remember my key where I left my keys. Well, yeah, I mean, there's just so much crammed into that head of yours after all these years that you're having a random access memory problem. That's not necessarily just about getting old. If you have some kind of clinical diagnosis, okay, but otherwise it's just part of being human and having a lot on your mind.

In terms of that thinking, there are physical and physiological changes that happen for us as we age obviously. How do we, I guess, not let that be the defining part of the decisions we're making about changing careers and thinking, well, yes, I'd like to be an athletic coach, but I know that my body's not going to withstand that activity, but that's really where my passion is? Is it about, okay, that's the bottom line of what I'd like to do, what else can I do that allows me and gives me permission to pursue that area without the negative of, I can't physically do it?

I think this is a question of attitude and this is a question of attitude at any age. So for people who have had an accident and have a disability as a result of that accident, at any age, some of the most inspirational stories are from and by those people who have survived these accidents and turned their lives around and made great strides and accomplished a lot in a different area because of their physical limitations. So why not adopt that same attitude in the face of natural physical decline and to shift one's focus and ability to using what we've learned through all of these years, the wisdom, the insight to share with people to better our businesses, to mentor others, et cetera, et cetera? So again, I think it is unfortunate if we take that decline as a defeat. It can be a challenge.

Or as the defining part of the decision-making process?

Well, I mean, it depending on the physical condition, it can be very definitional. But that's okay. I think we have to be realists about it. We can't be in denial about it and try to do say, well, you know, I have a knee that's failing me and I'm going to still run that marathon. I mean, that's just crazy, right? But if you've been a runner all your life and now you can't run anymore or you're, you know, you're getting your knees replaced, which is amazing, an amazing thing that we have over the last 20, 30 years, so we can do these things. You may not be able to run the same time. You may not be able to push yourself in the same way, but you can still run. You can still help others. You can coach others. Right? You can use the wisdom and the information that you've gained from all of this life experience and put it to good use.

We might get onto the questions that we sent through to you. First one is about barriers to mid-career change. Do you see that there is a trend towards acceptance or otherwise of mid-career change geographically or culturally?

It was an interesting question when I read the question. I think so. I work essentially in an anglophile world and I work with people who are mostly native English speakers, are working in an English speaking world, Australia, Canada, the US, Great Britain. So I'm kind of

experientially confined to that reference point. And I would say that across that sector, there is this uniform shift to questioning the previously established norms around aging and retirement and work. I'm seeing it everywhere. This pushback against the blind career job requirements that employers impose, the bias that human resources are people, organizations within companies impose, these rules are now being increasingly seen as arbitrary. The other factor which I think is really significant and emerging is the age bubble. The fact that demographically, older people are making up a greater share of the global population. And that is affecting the way we do business. And for many companies, they need to realize, are beginning to wake up to the fact, that they can't source the skilled and talented employees they want from younger generations. And there may be this bias towards younger generations. Oh, we want young people with energy and innovation. Well, good luck.

Those young people may have the energy. I'm not sure they necessarily have the innovation. I'm sure some of them do. But you need to balance out energy and innovation with experience and wisdom. So what we're going for is a multi generational workforce where everyone has a place, everyone has a value. And that is something which is slow to happen, I see it happening slowly. Maybe it's in my own mind. I've talked a lot about this. I've done LinkedIn courses about this. That's one aspect of it. Mostly I think it's cultural. Where it comes from, I think is the industrial age, the idea that as a factory worker, you're no longer physically able to work past 65 and you're going to probably die by 75 anyway. So, you know, we're going to farm you out and we're going to give you a little bit of a pension and and there you go.

I'm going to take a break now while Jamie re-establishes his connection to join the conversation. Join us for the next part for now. I'm Kim Baillie and this is Inside Exec.