

Chloe McKenzie

Anastasia MacLean: Welcome to the Three Selves Podcast. I'm your host Anastasia MacLean. Join us as we chat with fellow Western alumni who've engaged in the often messy, but ultimately rewarding, undertaking of discovering their true self in their life's work.

A Western University alumna who ranked as 1 of the top 10 most influential Black corporate leaders to follow in 2023, today's guest on the Three Selves Podcast, Chloe McKenzie has found fulfillment in embracing the messy parts of her career journey. This thought-leader and VP, People and Culture, at one of the fastest growing companies in Canada explores how harnessing the power of asking great questions, being insatiably curious and remaining resilient in the face of small setbacks can catapult us to the next level in our pursuit of a purposeful life.

Anastasia MacLean: Chloe, thank you so much for joining us today.

Chloe McKenzie: It's a pleasure.

Anastasia MacLean: I want to get started with your Western connection. So, over the course of, I'm going to say it's probably been about ten years, you've gone from earning an honors BA specializing in Kinesiology to becoming the first ever HR lead with SALT XC, the marketing and commerce agency. Now, did you ever see yourself, or ever imagine yourself in the role you're in now when you graduated from Western in 2011?

Chloe McKenzie: You know what? I really like this question because I think the answer would surprise you. So, probably not unlike many other people that go through their university journey, you know many people, especially Western is an amazing school, they come from being achievers in high school, they come from having success. And university is a very different place than high school. I think many people lose their confidence or start to really, for the first time, experience sets of challenges and, and maybe not achieving to the level that historically has been their nature and their, you know, experience for their whole life. So it's to say, entering university, I probably did have this sense of invincibility and optimism and belief of big things for my life. And not, again, not unlike many others, I think university is still a very humbling experience, and I left there somewhere between lower confidence, some, maybe crazy optimism, and I really wasn't sure how long it was going to take me. I feel like I could land somewhere big, but I was also like, oh my goodness, do I need to rethink my choices here? Do I have what it takes to hit some of these big dreams? So maybe yes, maybe no but I think, I think I'm happy where I landed so far.

Anastasia MacLean: And why did you choose Western in the first place? And university, first of all, because people go to university to get a job, or they go to university to get a better job those are the two big reasons, right? So why university and why Western?

Chloe McKenzie: Mhmm. I'm a classic millennial. I'd say, you know, not going to university was never an option. And it was something that we aspired to and grew up as a family with the understanding that we would go, um, and that, you know, having a great education would unlock opportunities for us. So, it wasn't a matter of if it was a matter of where. Western was my top choice, and I had the benefit also of having an older sibling who went to the university, so it was already something that was familiar to me before I even got there. So, as long as I was accepted, that was choice number one for me and the place that I ultimately saw myself.

Anastasia MacLean: So, in your role now as VP of People and Culture with SALT, did your career mindset let's say, did that inspire you to take on such an exciting but maybe potentially daunting role?

Chloe McKenzie: You never really know where your path is going to take you. I think as much as I have had big ambitions, I didn't know today the role would be called, for example, a VP of People and Culture. But what I love about my Western experience is that it got me the opportunity to practice skills outside of what was in

the classroom. You know, SOPHing was a big part of my experience, all of the extracurriculars, leading some of the clubs on campus like CSO and ASA and BSA, and being a part of those. So, I was developing all of these skills that I wasn't sure yet what that would mean for me in terms of a career, but I knew it was a place where I felt passionate, it was a place where I had great skills. And through my career, I've really dipped and weaved in and changed my path here and there. I started in, in marketing actually, the first ten years of my career as being an agency side marketer, learning event production and client service and marketing strategy and business to business overall. And through my love of people and leadership, I've been able to translate some of those skills into a totally second act of career, which is now leading people and culture at an agency. So, you know, Anastasia, you and I were talking earlier a little bit about your background and how many different chapters there have been already and different, kind of, mini careers that you've had prior to this one. I'm curious for you, did you think this is where you would land or were there patterns in your previous experience that brought you here?

Anastasia MacLean: Yeah, I didn't have a clear sense of where I wanted to go. All I knew was that I wanted to go to university. Like you, it was a very important family value. Western was an easy choice because it had such a great reputation, I did know a couple of people who attended the university, I was fortunate that our school did trips, big bus trips to all the big universities in Ontario, and I got a scholarship to Western. So that was a really clear, easy choice for me. I thought, I'll get a BA, that's a good, strong background. And I also had a very clear sense that going to university was a beginning rather than an endpoint. So, I would be learning how to learn, as opposed to a particular profession. And that I thought was more important than anything for me, after high school, was to go somewhere where I found out, like you, although I expected it really that everyone there had A's all through high school, everybody there was an achiever. And so that good, humbling experience was awesome to have. But then yes, I just from there just started trying all kinds of different things to get me to where I am now. And I'm still trying and I'm still learning and I'm still exploring. And I think that always will be that this, this career journey for me is, is really about the journey and not the destination.

Chloe McKenzie: That's 100% it. I think we're probably sold this idea that, you know, what do you want to be when you grow up? You're choosing your path, choosing your school and you're like, great, check the box I've chosen and now, like, my life is decided. When you're like, oh, actually, this is just the beginning. This is just the first decision of the next 100 you're going to make along your path. And by the way, it's not going to be a straight line. It's going to be up and down and loops and sometimes it feels like you're moving backwards to be able to move three steps forward. So, it can be really overwhelming as a university student trying to come to terms with that and be okay with the uncertainty of what looks like a career for the next 50 to 60 years.

Anastasia MacLean: Now at SALT, you've experienced a lot of growth with the organization, and I don't just mean personally, I mean the organization itself. What did you learn about how people think about and approach their work lives when you hired something like 150 people in two months?

Chloe McKenzie: Yeah. So SALT is, last year by The Globe and Mail we were named the second fastest growing company in all of Canada, which is bananas. So, I came off of a second maternity leave, really craving to do something that was more aligned with my values and passion for people development and was able to get this opportunity to lead HR at this agency. Now, I had no idea what HR was at that time, right, what I was signing up for. And like, oh yeah, you know, I can do some learning and development, employee engagement, it's going to be fun. And then I realized just how broad and how deep the profession goes. And again, another humbling but totally exhilarating moment where I was about to encounter a whole bunch of new challenges. I love being thrown into a fast-paced environment. So, in the last three years that I've been in this role, I do get to interface with a lot of people that are on beginning, middle, late stages of their career, all struggling with very different topics. So, I speak to early talent a lot as we recruit them, we've recruited a lot of Western students as well as many other universities across Canada. And I think, um, for the most junior folks these days, it's trying to teach them resilience in not only how they determine what their career is going to look like, but it's the day-to-day pressures, it's the pace of our industry, it's not letting small setbacks or uncomfortable

moments when they don't know what to do next have them quit the journey and move on to something else. Everybody's got to have a little bit more staying power to be able to get the most of their career experiences, and I find, these days, I notice people are ready to quit a little bit more soon than maybe their generations before them. That's not to say I don't know some amazingly talented and hardworking and resilient Gen Z, but it's to say we are in an era where delayed gratification is no longer something that's top of mind. Everything's at our fingertips, our Netflix, our food, or anything that we want we can have. But your career is something that you can't really shortcut in the same way. And I think some people are having a hard time understanding that time and experience and making those mistakes is just part of it, and something that you can't really skip over. So, for early folks, that's the advice and things that I notice most.

Now I think, you know, overall, today, there's also this balance of what do I want to be as my career starts to progress. Traditionally, if you want to grow in a career, your scope of your role is going to expand. So not only are you doing the role that you love to do, that you went to university for, that you're, you know, in the craft and learning how to do every day. But inevitably it does come with understanding how to manage people, understanding how to develop people, understanding the broader context of a business and of an industry. And, you know, other themes like work life balance, and trying to appreciate the things in life that are important, I find there's actually a little bit of hesitancy. Do people even want to aspire to be leaders anymore, of organizations? Do they want to take on these sets of stresses and challenges, or is work life balance more important? Is, "I'm okay to stay here and travel the world", or "I really want to invest in my family and, and in my kids". And I find there's a real moment right now where people are choosing intentionally, actually not to progress in the way that they always dreamed that they would as a kid or through university. So that's another interesting theme that I'm seeing right now, in corporate.

Anastasia MacLean: A couple of things really hit me from what you've just said. The first thing is about mistakes, you mentioned mistakes. And elsewhere you've said that we need to give ourselves permission to make mistakes, because that often leads to meaningful innovation. I think sometimes people get sort of a form of paralysis where they don't want to make a mistake, so they end up not doing something out of, out of that fear of doing the wrong thing. And maybe what you talked about with people jumping around from job to job is they think they've made a mistake somewhere, so they'll go somewhere and start fresh again. And so that in a sense, they can wipe out that mistake. Have you yourself made some sort of wrong turn or mistake along the way that your experience exemplifies that statement, that, that it can lead to meaningful innovation, that you can really learn and grow from it?

Chloe McKenzie: I make mistakes every day, every single day. I came out of graduating, as much as my Kinesiology degree was something that ended up being really fun and I met amazing people and amazing faculty, it's not actually what I went there to study initially. And I came out of it feeling like, and I actually went through most of my undergrad thinking did I make the wrong choice? When I come away with this four-year degree, have I made the wrong choice in being able to pursue the things that were important? I always thought I was going to be an entrepreneur, you know, that's still the, the later chapters of my career that's where I'm going to end up. But I think starting with that, starting with the first jobs, you know, everybody wants to be doing big, meaningful work but in reality, when you enter a career, you're, you're doing coordination level tasks. You're doing administration, you're doing lower level tasks and I think people get really demotivated for that and have them questioning their choices. Again, am I in the right job? Am I in the right industry? So, there have been many times more junior up until, you know, through my career, every day I'm, I'm learning and, and making mistakes in terms of am I delegating effectively? Do I have the right skills to be innovating in this way? Do I need to pursue further education? I think anyone who went to university probably at, in some sense, really believes in academia and the value that that can bring, but it can also be a little bit of a trap in thinking, "do I need more school to go and do or start the thing that I want to do"? So, for me, as I'm entering new industries, changing careers, that's also a thought on my mind. Have I made a mistake here? Do I need to go gather more credentials or do more school before I can be effective at that thing? And ultimately, what I have

learned, not only on the job but through mentorship is, some of the most impactful learning actually happens in those moments where you're uncertain and when you're forced to get into action and make mistakes so you have a point to reflect on. And also, some of the most impactful learning really comes from mentorship and learning from other people's mistakes. Being able to listen for their perspective, share where it is that you are struggling and feeling vulnerable. Many of my early mentors, when I changed to HR, they said, build a network of people that have done this before that you can bounce ideas off of, that can give you perspective into the changes that you're going to be making, because the value and the gift of sharing of mistakes is actually one of the most important things that you can inject into any stage of your career to be successful.

Anastasia MacLean: So, mentorship obviously has been a real value to you in your career path. How would you advise people to start to cultivate mentorship in their own lives if they haven't for their careers to date?

Chloe McKenzie: Mentorship has been an interesting one in that it can feel like a daunting concept, like you're having to go seek somebody that is wise beyond your years and established, and there's even a perception that they have it all together, and you quickly realize that they're all also learning as they go, making mistakes every day. But I think it's important to not set people on such a high pedestal, but to also recognize your peers can be mentors. There is opportunity for learning every day. There are people that are junior or younger than you that can also act as mentors or people to learn from. There's also an idea that not every mentor is going to service all areas of your life where you're trying to grow. So, I have mentors in my life that are about parenting and finance versus career. I have mentors that share some identity attributes with me in terms of being black women or being minorities in spaces that they operate in every day. So, I think it's to also seek for yourself the types of places that you want to grow in your life, and where can you find somebody that can, a little bit ahead of you, that can share their support and their perspective and point you on a path. And I imagine for you, too, Anastasia, you must have had mentors or people that really changed the trajectory of your career as you met them, whether that was to open you up to a new path or to point out some areas of opportunity for your growth. How has mentorship shaped your journey so far?

Anastasia MacLean: Yeah, I haven't really had a lot of mentors along the way, and certainly not in a formal sense. But I've always surrounded myself with people who are very supportive in general, no matter if it's my personal life or my career. And people of different ages. I don't know if I consciously did that, but I've always had a wide circle of friends of different ages. So, people who could be, you know, at this point, 10 or 20 years younger than me or people who are 20 or 30 years older. And at one point I had my own food business for a number of years, and so I took a course through the Center of Entrepreneurship at Centennial College, and we had a very formal mentor there. But there were some people in my class who I've always kept in touch with, and because we have that program in common, it's a great way to reach out to somebody who's gone through what you did and, you know, talk about what your experiences have been since then, where you're trying to go, where you've been, you know, what makes sense for you. So, I really do recognize the value of mentorship, and I guess if I look at it in an informal sense, I've had a lot of mini mentors along the way, yeah.

Chloe McKenzie: If somebody finds themselves to be a naturally curious person, they're going to discover probably mentors every day as they walk the street, right? The power of great questions and curiosity can also, in everyday conversations, help point you along to something that you hadn't considered before or open you up to, to new perspectives. So, I totally can appreciate that.

Anastasia MacLean: I want to go back to something you said earlier, because I found it really intriguing when you talked about people who are looking at other values in their life, for instance, work life balance and saying, you know, maybe I don't want to continue on this particular path to this next level, become a manager or become a leader, whatever it is that would take them sort of on a ladder of success, let's say. And I've heard you said previously that success itself is not an end point. So, for people who say "I'm fine where I'm at here, because I have other priorities in my life that I would like to attend to besides my work", can a person be

successful in their career if they don't have a particular title or status, or if they're just continually on a journey?

Chloe McKenzie: Absolutely. I think we all have the opportunity to define what success looks like for us. And that might change also as your life changes, as your level of responsibility, as other commitments like having a partner or having kids or having other things that you're pursuing. Your baseline and measurement of success absolutely can change. But certainly, if a title is important to you or a level of responsibility is not important to you, but being able to sustain and do great work, bring value somewhere, and also juggle raising a family as an example or having a side business alongside of that. Those could be really impactful measures of success for somebody. And I think people would be a lot happier if they actually took the time to check in with themselves on what does success look like versus chasing something that they realized 10 or 15 years down the road when they're burnt out that wow, I didn't even actually want this, I just thought I should be chasing this because that's what society said or my parents said or somebody in my life said.

Anastasia MacLean: Do you think there's a particular philosophy or mindset that nurtures career satisfaction and growth?

Chloe McKenzie: I do. I think, to my earlier point, if we can all manage our own expectations about what we are to get on each stage of our career journey, I think we would be much happier and much more satisfied. So as an example, many people enter a career looking for a job they're passionate about, work life balance, great pay, great benefits, a place to learn, a place to be developed and the list is very long, the wish list of things. And they get there into this job or this role where maybe three or 5 or 7 of those things are being satisfied, and their focus turns to those 3 or 5 things that are not being fulfilled. And it can really put you into a place of dissatisfaction, not feeling fulfilled, maybe even feeling a sense of depression or anxiety, or like your life is a failure, like I'm going down the rabbit hole here, but it's to say, if we can manage our expectations, that at this stage in my career or this role, this is going to provide me X. So this role is going to be a role about boosting my finances, but I know here I'm not necessarily going to have the most fulfilling list of duties and responsibilities, I can walk away each day to say, yes, my expectation is being met here and I'm getting out of this chapter what was important to me, knowing that the next chapter I can focus on something else, something that's more fulfilling, or something that's going to be a stretch chapter for me. So, managing our own expectations around what each job does, I think is something that's really important.

I think also, if we can walk into each chapter expecting to make mistakes and knowing that is all a part of the experience, versus avoiding them, you really release out a lot of the weight off of your shoulders to feel like you have to be perfect, or you have to know exactly what it is that you're aiming for on the next chapter. You really have to look at it section by section. What is there here for me? What mistakes are helping me learn? Being in the mindset of always reflecting on that growth is also where the juice is. Being able to look back and see patterns and connect the dots, those are all things that leave you with a sense of richness, so that when you move forward, you've got a lot of, kind of, data to work from.

Anastasia MacLean: And not comparing ourselves to other people. You know, not saying, well, I'm at this stage, but look at my friend or look at my sibling or look at what my parents accomplished or whoever it might be. To know that your journey is unique to you, and you won't find happiness or satisfaction in a comparison. I think people do that a lot. They look outside rather than inside for that sense of fulfillment.

Chloe McKenzie: Even when I think about how we recruit and some of the traits that we look for that we think would determine somebody's level of success, it's yes your resume is part of it, and the skills you've acquired and the experience that lives on there but more often it's about your attitude as it relates to that experience and the attitude as it relates to moments of challenge and resilience. And the curiosity you bring shows a level of self-awareness and a level of this is a thinker that will be committed to exploring new ways of working and innovation versus, you know, feeling like you need to have the perfect resume or you need to have been at a

certain stage to make you successful. No, it's actually about the attitude that you bring, and the level of curiosity and self-awareness are really strong indicators of how you're going to perform at work in life.

Anastasia MacLean: Now here we are chatting away on this podcast, and I know that you started your own podcast back in 2021, “Start Right Now”, was the name of it originally, and it, and currently it's “The Leaderful Inc.” In starting that podcast, Chloe, did you do that purposefully in the sense of it was a strategic decision to fuel your own career growth?

Chloe McKenzie: It was actually. So, I came out of one of my mat leaves, as many people can attest once they have a baby, you are rethinking your whole life and you're like, what is next? Do I like this job? What is it that I want to do? So, one thing that I really preached, that was true for me, is sometimes you, for sure you don't have the experience that you want to be able to open up new career opportunities, but there are so many tools out there for you to create your own case studies and projects and experience that you could just as easily use on your resume, or to open up opportunities as a formal job. So, for me, the skills that I was interested in learning about was digital marketing and content creation through podcasting. My background, way, way, way, way back in the day was also as a musician, and a singer, so I also really liked the audio medium as a place for me to play. But using the podcasts as a place to explore my own fears and insecurities I had about being a creator and being a creative person, about putting content out there on the internet and having people react to it, about talking about some of the topics that I was really passionate about, around people development and leadership and coaching and getting into action. So, I created the podcast as a project for me to test myself. Commit to putting content out in the world, not have, you know, crazy high expectations that it's perfect but taking each episode as an opportunity to learn and ultimately get better at something. And for me, actually after my second mat leave, the podcast opened up the opportunity that I have now, being a leader of HR at this agency, because other people saw it, noticed it, I was gaining credibility and talking about people focused topics. I was gaining credibility as somebody who could start something that they knew nothing about and be successful at it. You know, my podcast very early on was charting in different countries around the world and having, you know, high volume of downloads, which is amazing and such a testament to this idea that you can start right now and get into action. So, I really encourage people to think, what is something that they can do today or tomorrow that can help them unlock opportunities or give them experience in the thing that they're hoping to do in the future. You've got AI, you've got the internet, you've got social media like there's nothing stopping people from creating their own projects to help them along and actually learn new skills. But the podcast was really important for me in my journey the last several years.

Anastasia MacLean: I think it's really important that people are open to putting themselves out there and taking risks and trying things. And, as you've done, work on creating the career that they want for themselves rather than simply maintaining the job that they have.

I think about some of the jobs that I've had, some of the projects I've worked on, and where I've taken ownership of, what would be considered a starter role, and always with small companies because I feel there's a kind of nimbleness there and availability there in terms of growth. So, I think people really can create the career that they want by being open, you talked about curiosity, which I think is huge as well. If you're not curious, I think it's very difficult to find yourself ending up somewhere that is not, sort of stereotypical or traditional or, you know, you really want to be on a different path for yourself, you need to sort of cultivate certain attributes. And that's something else I wanted to ask you about is what are some of the attributes that people need to get from where they are to where they want to be, and can they be learned?

Chloe McKenzie: I believe that anything can be learned, and it's not just about learning in the moment, it's being able to practice those skills. Adaptability, resilience, curiosity, emotional intelligence, lots of the soft skills actually are the place where I see people really rise above relative to others, but it's also a place where you're going to see the impact of those skills not only at work, but in relationships, in friendships, in

community, in life. I really think being able to focus on those things have a lot of impact. Early on in my career, I had the opportunity to, because I was interested in it, do some training as a coach, and educated myself through the *Coaches Training Institute*, or CTI. And being, call it 23, and going through a coaching program, that was like the biggest unlock for me and gift of my life. Having that before I got married, having that before I had significant roles, but it really all is about confronting your own identity, your stuff, where it is that you're stuck, where it is that you're inflexible in your own ways, developing a sense of emotional awareness, developing curiosity through the power of questions. So, I really advocate for coaching, both being coached or in attending something like that as a way to just take a look at yourself and being willing to acknowledge where we have some room to grow and room to work.

I actually hear this concept a lot when I think about, uh, if you've heard the term like main character energy, and this idea that we are the main character of our, our lives. I kind of, as I hear it, I cringe a little bit to say, you know, as much as we are our main characters of our lives, we are supporting characters in many other stories and, you know, we have an opportunity to not be so centered on ourselves sometimes but be a lot more aware of the impact that we have on others and the impact that they can have on us, inviting them into our world, sharing and supporting others. So, I really think this just openness of, again, awareness, curiosity, EQ, those are things that really need to be developed in a person, and they'll be successful no matter what.

Anastasia MacLean: And when you talk about openness, I'm thinking about openness to opportunities to grow. Have you ever said no to an opportunity and then regretted it? Or, you said yes to something and then regretted that? How did you turn that into a life lesson?

Chloe McKenzie: Hmm, I don't spend much time thinking about my regrets. But it's to say every decision that you make, whether it's the right one or the wrong one, that's actually also valuable. It's valuable in the moment to reflect on something, say, whoa, that was a bad choice because, oh, wow, the unlock for me is I really don't like this type of job, I really don't like this type of opportunity, this really doesn't align well with my values. So, in that way there aren't really decisions that I regret it's, is there more of a positive learning, or is there more of a learning about something that I would avoid or is not the right fit for me. I'm curious for you though, do you have regrets that really linger in your mind as moments that are, you know, significant on your journey?

Anastasia MacLean: Yeah, I think there have been a couple of times when I have said no to things, and then fortunately, I was able to turn around and say yes in time to salvage them. But I think there's something about my personality. If it's something that I don't know, I don't feel confident about, I'm not sure what the outcome is going to be, I might be quick to say no and then turn it into a well, okay. And on the other hand, there have been times when I've been asked to do something and I've said, sure, and I've had no idea how to do it, and just not a clue where to start but I just thought, well, I'll just figure it out. Or I'll go to one of those informal mentors and say, "you're not going to believe it, but someone asked me if I could do X and I said, yes, and I've never done X". And they'll say, "but Anastasia that's happened to you so many times in your life and you've managed to figure it out each time, so you'll be fine". But on the regret side, I think regrets are important, not a million of them, but just to as a reminder that we're not perfect and we are here to learn, and the learning never stops. And so, it's okay to say, "oh, I really shouldn't have done X, or I really wish I had done Y". It's okay because you remember that and hopefully that informs your other decisions down the road. And that's what I've tried to do for myself.

Chloe McKenzie: I love that. You're continuously learning, and it's so true in that, some of the places where we might decline an opportunity or have some regrets, it's to say, like where can I find evidence that I was already successful in my life in something similar. Where have I already learned and applied these skills that I can lean on those to be successful in the next pass. But that kind of check-in and reflection is, is really important.

Anastasia MacLean: You mentioned earlier about people feeling depressed or disheartened about where they are, or some of the decisions they've made career-wise. I imagine that a number of our listeners, and some of the people that you meet and some of the people that you work with and connect with, they'll have times when they feel really burnt out, overstimulated, disconnected in the workplace. How would you advise people to address that? What kind of steps can they take to turn that around?

Chloe McKenzie: Burnout and stress is different for people depending on how they operate or their ways of working. And also, there could be some real things happening in their environment that are triggers or that are unhealthy. So, I think the first step is to identify what those triggers are, or what are the reasons why the sense of burnout or stress is happening. It could be as tactical as wow, I haven't yet made space for a difficult conversation with a boss or a leader about how their interaction with me is impacting me, so maybe it's the way that they communicate that's stressing me out or the fact that I don't know what my deadlines are for something I need to complete. So sometimes there's a conversation that needs to happen that could move some of that along. Sometimes it's our own expectations of the level of quality that we want to deliver, or the amount of hours that we need to put in and I think it's to understand, are those expectations ones we've placed on ourselves, solely, or is it truly the expectation of our boss or our company or the place that we're working. I think the, the third thing is, and especially I think for a particular generation, I don't know about you, I get such a kick out of content on social media that makes fun of the different generations in the work environment, I think all the millennial stuff is hilarious. So, I'm speaking to the millennials here that are work obsessed, you know, the sticker kids, participation medal kids. Um, you know, I think there is also just understanding what our relationship to our work and our career is.

There's a whole generation of us, perhaps, that have attached our sense of worth to the idea that we have to be successful in our career or a certain title will mean that we've made it, and there can just be an unhealthy overall relationship with your idea of your career that needs to be checked in on and to assess what are actually my values, why do I want this thing? And aside from that, it's, it's thinking about your life in terms of your overall health. Have you made time to detach? As I say, go touch grass, go for a walk, listen to music. You know, spend time doing the things that give you energy. Connect with your friends, call your family. Really consider what are the things that give you energy, and how can you inject them throughout your day and week to make sure you feel a sense of balance. It's easy to get caught up in work and have an unhealthy relationship and obsession with it. You have to be intentional about putting in the things that give you space and balance and make you feel a little bit more stable in stressful time, so. Also just breathe. Everything for a season, everything for a moment you're going to come out of it. It's the belief that this is just for a time, I'm going to get through it, let me take a deep breath. Everything starts with a deep breath I feel like.

Anastasia MacLean: Something else I wanted to chat with you about that I found interesting is this idea that we should be grateful for the messy parts of our journey. Why is messy good?

Chloe McKenzie: Why is messy good? I love messy. Messy is good for a couple of reasons. I think it forces us to confront this ideal we might have about everything being perfect, and put together, and in its rightful place, and there's a straight path for me, and things are predetermined. It's a lie, right? It's to say in the mess is where we start to find order and make sense of chaos and be willing to play and be willing to be embarrassed and, you know, just be willing to put ourselves out there. If you can do that in the messy parts or in the places where you don't have it all together, it'll be very easy for you to do it when you have all the information, and you feel like you're in your groove and doing something that you're ready, already very comfortable with and accustomed to. So, embracing the messy parts of the journey has been a place that I've found so much fulfillment and release. And, you know, that vulnerability also, it's the fear that people are going to see you in your stuff, right? They're going to see you tripping up, and they're going to judge you for it, and it's always this feeling of somebody is watching you in the mess. It's not even about the mess, it's somebody is watching you in the mess. But until we get comfortable with that idea and know that we're, you know, it doesn't matter what people think, you're in it for yourself, you're going to you're going to be stuck in a lot of places until you release

that. So, embracing the mess and actually practicing that as a skill is something that's really valuable and a good use of time.

Anastasia MacLean: I know for you that volunteering has been an important part of your life, and it certainly has for me as well. What role do you think volunteering has in finding one's true self?

Chloe McKenzie: Mm, great question. Volunteering on a practical level for me is also, again, given me an opportunity to practice skills or get closer to something that I wasn't getting in my day job, so I wanted to get closer to community. So, even at Western let's say, as an undergraduate student I was really involved in clubs that had to do with, again, my identity at being in a minority on campus, you know, small groups of, of black students, of Caribbean students. So, in those days, it was about identity, it was about culture as a thing that, you know, filled up my cup. And other times it's been about, again, practicing certain skills like leadership or like coordination or like event production. So, for me, volunteering has been a skill builder and a community builder. I wish I had spent actually more time in undergraduate really nurturing the community part of that. I don't think I realized at that time, the networks that you're building as an undergraduate student and the friendships can become lifelong friendships, and folks that you hopefully work together with at some point or build business with at some point. But now I take that mindset with me in the clubs that I join and the places where I choose to give my time, whether that's formally as, um, an executive member at the Black at Western Alumni chapter that I served on for two years, or in some of the other spaces that I volunteer in through the industry now. It's really seeing how can I serve the group? How can I be of service to the group? Where can I be generous with my time? How can I sustain and create relationships that can live beyond this particular moment or season? So that's where I see a lot of value in volunteering. What about for you?

Anastasia MacLean: For me, I think that it's an opportunity to do something that's not necessarily career related. And I think people are more open to that, open to taking chances and to just trying something when it isn't their job. I found such a great sense, when you talk about community, it's, it's humbling for me, like some of the volunteering opportunities that I've been involved in have made me just give my head a shake and say, "Anastasia, like, what's going on in your life, is it really that important?" Or something that I thought was such a big deal and such a huge problem in the greater scheme of things isn't. So, I get that sense of perspective from volunteering. And also, I find that, when you're working and being paid for your work, it can be just very transactional whereas volunteering can be transcendent. You learn more about yourself when you're devoted to some other purpose that isn't about you.

Chloe McKenzie: Especially something volunteer based tends to be mission driven, where some of the places that we work may not be. It may be a little bit more profit centered. So being connected to something greater than yourself and connected with others through that mission is such a powerful thing.

Anastasia MacLean: There are a couple of questions that I want to ask you that are, sort of, what we call our "Series of Ones" questions, and I'll start with this. Can you name one person who has had a profound influence on you in your career journey? I know you've had lots of little mentors along the way, but someone that comes to mind as having been super impactful.

Chloe McKenzie: Hmm, Yeah, I um. The first job I worked at was at a small marketing agency in the GTA, and I learned of a ton of really great skills. I knew it wasn't necessarily where I was going to end up long term but learning great skills. But I started to get the itch at that time of wanting to be more connected to this purpose and passion around people development and coaching and I was putting myself out there, I'm a lifelong learner. I'm always listening to something, downloading something, reading something. And I came across this event, it was an event called Women of Influence, it was like a night with a guest speaker, and the group is called Women of Influence, and I decided to go, I'm probably about 23 at the time. I decided to go because I had noticed one of the speakers on the agenda was a black woman who owns their own consulting firm, consulting agency. And when I went there and she spoke, I felt really connected to her story and her message and the fact that her day job included developing people, developing leaders, creating resilience in

organizations. And I connected with her that night, and we had a really strong rapport, and shortly after that she ended up actually offering me the opportunity to work with her as her only, I would be her only employee at the time. And it was going to be for a year contract, and I took that opportunity, left where I was at that marketing agency, joined her and got to work side by side with her, literally in her, in her house, you know, working on her consulting work and leadership development work for a full year.

It was through her that I got to do the education as a coach as well. But there were so many learnings and lessons for me in that moment. I think A, we can't underestimate and understate how important it is, especially again as a minority, as a person of color, having representation in the spaces that you want to be and having somebody that would have the lived experiences that you go through beyond the typical career stuff. There's so many things that through your identity, as a woman, as a mother, as a black person, that shape how you navigate your career. So having access to her for a full year side by side was really powerful. Learning how she navigated the world as an entrepreneur, as a small business owner, you know, working through her own philosophies and innovation and being able to co-create with her, that was also really impactful for me and gave me some confidence to think, yeah, this dream that I have of entrepreneurship, it is achievable and I have the skills that I need to keep developing and to pursue those at a later date. So, I'd say that chapter in her as a person was really impactful for me. Even today, I, like, hear her voice every couple of months to say, "oh, that didn't click for me at the time why we did that in consulting but now I totally understand it in the role that I'm in today", so I'd probably say her.

Anastasia MacLean: And what's one risk that you've taken in your career that's had a significant payoff?

Chloe McKenzie: Changing from the marketing sphere to now being in this role of HR was a, on paper, a big jump. I was surprised, though, at how much of the skills that I had learned through my career were transferable, and so much of the role felt familiar. I'm still in a, an agency environment, I was always developing people, but now I need to give people the tools to develop others. It wasn't as far of a jump as I had thought, albeit there was a ton of catch up on just learning about technical HR and all the components that I would be managing as the leader there. But it was scary thinking, how am I going to do a job that I have never seen, learn the job, build the job, build the team that does the job. There is a lot for me to learn, but I have no regrets, I've learned a ton in the last three years. You know my, I was one of one in that department, now there's about 12 people that sit within our department doing everything from HR to L&D, DEI, employee engagement, you know, learning development, employer brand communications. It's super broad, but it's so fulfilling to, every day, feel challenged and feel like I'm learning and don't have the answers. It's, that's one of my values, learning and stretching so it's a great move and a risk that's paying off for sure.

Anastasia MacLean: What kind of impact has the pursuit of what we consider your true self in the work sphere, what kind of impact has that had on your personal life? You've talked a bit about being a mother, about work-life balance. Have you had any pushback from people as you've pursued your journey, or had some struggles with trying to keep all those balls in the air?

Chloe McKenzie: Definitely. I would actually flip the perspective, though, in the way that you asked it in terms of whereas some of the learnings on my career would be shaped other areas of my life, but I think it's actually more the other areas of my life that have shaped how I show up in the workplace. So, my reference being a mother, you're sick of it now, but for anybody who is a parent, you know, I literally say, as somebody who's a personal development junkie, being a parent is probably the most impactful personal development opportunity you will ever have because it puts a mirror right in front of you, of the places where you're insecure, of the places where you are difficult or challenging or stuck in your ways, or going to get frustrated. Between, you know, being a mother to two very spunky girls, between having an amazing partner who, who challenges me and is so supportive and really high EQ, I learn from him every day in terms of how to be a supportive partner, how to be empathetic to others. Between, you know, the, just the daily mess. Working through the messy chapters when I didn't have it all together, those have all helped me show up as a better leader every day in the working world. And if there's anything that I've learned, especially in the last couple of

years, you know, there is a, for sure, an intention and an aspiration to be able to do it all and to balance it all and you can have it all, just not all at the same time. So, it's to really again, be focused on what does this chapter mean for you, what's important to me at this stage of my life? My kids are small right now, they're six and four, they need their parents a lot right now. We're guiding them and stewarding them every day. And as they get bigger, I know other chapters will be an opportunity for me to stretch more in areas of my career or maybe do some more academia if that's something that continues to call me. So, at least now I can show up with the expectation that there's more, there's more to life than work, that's what it's taught me.

Bring everything that you learned outside of work into how to be a better leader and, you know, show up for people in your organization. And also, again, manage your own expectations about what is this chapter here to do for me and, you know, let's take it, take it one day at a time. I think I appreciate that more and more every day. Certainly, as I relax the idea that I'm supposed to have it all together and appreciate that it was the opposite, you're supposed to be spending the journey figuring it out, every day that awareness is clearer and clearer to me and, and very freeing. And I'm actually excited knowing that ten years from now we would be having a very different conversation about, you know, twists and turns in the career journey that I couldn't even have predicted and that is the whole point. So, I appreciate being at this stage of my career, because I know when I was 22 being like, "oh my God, I don't know what I'm doing with my life", that was the worst feeling to feel like I was doing something wrong, that other people had right. So very happy to be where I am right now.

Anastasia MacLean: Final question and you talk about people who are, you know, you said you were 22 and thinking, you know, where am I? Where do I want to go? There are people, I think, at every age and stage along the work spectrum who are in that spot of thinking, where am I and where do I want to go? And this isn't where I want to be, but how do I get to where I want to go? How do I figure out what it is that I want to do to get to where I want to go? Any sort of final tips for people who want to make a big change, but they don't know how or where to start?

Chloe McKenzie: It's very rare that people really do have a clear idea of the end. But it's to say if you can at least have a clear picture of what's next, to start there and follow that. And if you don't know what "what's next?" is, what are you curious about? And it's to spend time exploring your own curiosities. If you're, let's say, in accounting and you always thought you should be a creative and you used to be a writer, where can you start to write as a passion point and see if you like it? Can you be a publisher on LinkedIn of content? Can you start a blog? Following the first curiosity, if nothing else, and just trusting that each stage, even if it doesn't feel like a straight line to the end, each day you're going to be collecting skills, you're going to be thinking of yourself as, you know, a scientist. You're collecting data on yourself about what you like, what you don't like, what you value, what works for you. Just think about the next immediate step versus planning for the next 20 steps, because that's such an overwhelming task. And take action on it. Follow the curiosity, take action, that's the reason why the podcast was initially called "Start Right Now". It's start right now with the one thing that you can influence and have some impact on and, and do that.

Anastasia MacLean: Chloe, you've given us so much to think about. Thank you for your time today. This has been great. Thank you.

Chloe McKenzie: Thank you for the time I love this. Thanks.