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SPEAKERS

Meredith Adinolfi, Katy Alexander, Jennifer Landsberg, Sara Grimme

M Meredith Adinolfi 00:07
Hi, and welcome to the very first episode and SSP's new podcast series. My name is Meredith Adinolfi, and I'm joined by my lovely co-host in London. Sara Grimme. Hi, Sara.

S Sara Grimme 00:18
Hi, Meredith.

M Meredith Adinolfi 00:19
Do you wanna introduce yourself?

S Sara Grimme 00:20
I would love to. Just a very quick biography from me. I currently work at Digital Science, but I actually started my career in commercial consumer goods. My career is itself just a tale of the many different paths that we can take. So I started working for the National Lottery, and then went and worked at Johnson Johnson, found myself at Nature, and then went to Elsevier, did five years there and actually at Elsevier, was really exposed to all of the different aspects of scholarly publishing. And now I'm at Digital Science. I'm very excited to be doing this podcast with Meredith.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 00:55

Great, thanks, Sara. So I'm based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which is right outside of Boston. I work in publishing operations for Cell Press and I've been with Cell Press for a number of years in different roles. I started as a copy editor way back in the day, and love that work so much, so I decided to sort of grow my career at Cell Press. And then I got involved with SSP the Society for Scholarly Publishing a number of years ago and this podcast is just one of the many great initiatives that SSP does around career development. So before we dive in, we thought we'd give a bit of context about what this podcast is and how it started and who it's meant to serve. So this podcast started as the brainchild of SSP's Early Career Subcommittee, which is a group of individuals who focus on career development initiatives for those who are early in their publishing career in any sector of the industry. And the idea was to have a podcast that could serve that community by bringing guests and having topics and discussions that were either about the industry and current trends in the industry, or things related to careers and development, and other types of topics that are related to building your career in this industry. Although it comes from that early sub career committee, we hope that it will serve all sectors and all career levels as well, and hopefully the topics will be interesting enough to do that. Sara, do you want to tell us a little bit about what episode one is going to be?

S

Sara Grimme 02:23

I would be absolutely delighted to. So today's actually a topic very near and dear to I think both of our hearts, and that is mentorship. So we're going to cover a few different things around mentorship: why someone should get involved with mentorship schemes; why it's important for your career; what it means to be a good mentor as well as a mentee; why it's important to someone's career to do both the mentor and the mentee aspects. We also want to cover a little bit about coaching, career advice, best and worst experiences, and things we change if we had the chance to go back. So what we're really trying to do in today's episode is learn from the experiences of the peers that we have around us and hopefully pass on some really valuable information for those who are coming next. So Meredith, this is obviously a topic that's very near and dear to your heart, given your involvement in the Early Career Subcommittee. So it would be really interesting to find out what the subject means to you.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 03:19

It is a topic that's near and dear to my heart. When I first got involved with SSP a number of years ago, actually my first introduction to SSP and this organization was being asked to stand in for a colleague of mine on a panel about mentorship. And I really had a lot to

say on the topic because I had been mentored by some great people within my company throughout my career. I know we're going to talk a little bit about coaching and sponsorship as well as other topics related to mentorship. And, and yeah, I had been lucky enough to have informal mentors who were people that I worked with, colleagues, in kind of my own division and other divisions within my company. And really what it highlighted to me is that that's crucially important, but also that it's not everything, that it's also important to have perspectives from outside your circle and outside your organization. And I didn't know that early in my career, really, it just wasn't something that I had kind of come across. It wasn't advice I had been given. So I sort of wished that I had known earlier in my career, that mentorship was something that would have helped me develop my career. So I really wanted to sort of think about ways that I could help SSP to bring that to more people early in their careers and kind of expose more people to that in the industry.

S

Sara Grimme 04:30

So actually, I have a question on that. So tell me a little bit more about what you mean by informal mentorship, because I think for some of our younger listeners who are fairly new to their careers, the idea of informal mentorship outside our boss might be a new concept.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 04:46

I think when I say that, what I mean by that is other people in the organization that you have an opportunity to work with, who you don't necessarily sit down and come up with a structure for the relationship but you can go to them for advice, you can sort of talk to them in a transparent way, you can be honest, they'll give you advice. And I definitely had that opportunity in doing some training programs internally in the company. As you know, Elsevier is a very large company, so there are a lot of internal training structures and sometimes you would get paired with people in those trainings who had more experience, or worked in a different area, who would sort of, you would keep that relationship and learn from that person, and that person kind of became part of your network. But there is less structure to it, and less of a specific set of goals that you address. That's sort of my thought about informal mentorship. But I'm curious, because I know you were thinking about the topic of coaching as it relates to this. And I'm wondering kind of what your thoughts are about how that's different and what that means.

S

Sara Grimme 05:44

Yeah, so actually, I think that this is to a really important point. And that is that there really, when you think about your career, there are a number of different roles that people see, and you, too, will play. So of course, there's your boss, and the boss role, it can be

quite a functional role, or it can also be a very mentoring or coaching role. And you'll go to your boss to actually get your job done, and to get advice on what you need to do. But there is also a lot outside of that that we need. And coaching is really thinking about: within my career, where do I want to end up? What do I want to do next? What are the skills I need to learn? And what I've certainly found, and perhaps your experience is similar, is I have had some phenomenal bosses, and they've been excellent at helping me achieve, say, a really good grasp on the fundamentals of publishing. But it might be that what I also need is to understand financials or product management 101. And that's where coaching can become really, really useful. Or it could even be around things such as assertiveness: how do I stand in front of my peers and make sure my point comes across? And oftentimes, your boss will be well-placed to help you with that. But oftentimes, you'll also need to talk to someone else to get those skills because it may be that you need to talk to someone who has a similar background or similar experience to you, and understands what it is that you might be experiencing and how to help you. So for me, in my career, I've actually found having a really good manager, but also coaching and mentorship, to be very complimentary, where coaching is often really thinking about what are the skills that I need? And how can I get coaching on this? Whereas mentorship is something that can sometimes be a little bit more intangible. And I think particularly for people quite earlier in their career, having a really solid network around you becomes really important, particularly for promotion. And so the more we can find those coaches, the more that they will also become champions of us as we go through the business and help us with promotion. So for me, I think they're very complimentary, but they're all very, very separate, in that they'll provide you with something different.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 07:56

Yeah, I think that's a really good point, then you're bringing up the point too, about coaching and sort of that point bleeding a little bit into sponsorship and advocacy, which, certainly a mentor, a boss could provide that but I think that's a slightly different function again.

S

Sara Grimme 08:10

Right. And certainly, again, I have to say, from my own experience, particularly at Elsevier, which of course had the benefit of being a large company, is that those people who might start out as coaches who really help you close a skill gap, then certainly do become advocates, because they know that you have the ability, and oftentimes, the skill set that's required for a more senior role. And so I think what's really important is, there is this great quote, where "once you get one job, you should be thinking about what the next job looks like." And I don't know if you certainly need to go that fast. But I think it is really important

to really assess yourself, assess your skills, think about what it is that you might want to go on to achieve and look at the people both within and outside of your organization who might be able to help you fill some of those skill gaps. And it may be that that is coaching, it may be that it is mentorship, or that it may be it's more of an informal sponsorship, but really making sure you have the structure around you to enable you to take that next step upwards.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 09:10

I think you're making a really good point that kind of summarizes everything we've talked about in this section, which is that you can't have enough people in your network at various points in your career, and if you have a mentor, a coach, sponsor, and advocate, that's not overkill by any means, that's the right kind of people to surround yourself with and that's going to help with your success. And sometimes I think it's easy to think that if you have a really good manager, that's all that you need and certainly that's a good start. But I really liked the point you made about sort of how those roles will change and people will play different functions for you as you build the relationship.

S

Sara Grimme 09:45

So one thing about that is I do wonder if it might be a bit daunting for people who are earlier in in their careers to think about how they can bring some of those people into their network. Would you have any advice on how if I was, say, quite junior I could think about filling those gaps?

M

Meredith Adinolfi 10:02

Something I always think about on this topic is, and we'll get to a little bit later, some comments that we got from a survey we put out to the community and, and I saw this theme come up there as well, this idea that you should not be afraid to speak up and also find out the people that you want in your network. And whatever that reason may be, whether you think they can mentor you, or help to guide you, or you just think they have skills that you don't have. Or maybe they just have a job that you think is cool and that you sort of aspire to or want to know more about, reaching out to that person and kind of letting them know what your interest is, and that you want to talk to them and spend time with them, that goes a long way. People love to, sort of, be flattered in that way, so to speak, and, you know, have somebody want to learn from them. So I think that's the first step is just being willing to reach out, and then having each person that you reach out to open up their network to you as well. That's I think one of the major benefits of a more structured mentorship relationship is getting access to that person's network and

supplementing your own with that so you gain not only one relationship. And then there are always going to be people who you hit it off with more than others professionally and personally and just are able to build kind of a different level of relationship with and I think it's figuring out who those people are and, you know, keeping those people close and making sure you're in close contact with them.

S

Sara Grimme 11:24

So actually, there's something there that you said that I wanted to pick up on. And that is that point about reaching out to people and people love being flattered. And, and that's the point that I would just like to focus on a little because certainly myself when I was far more junior in my career, I, even now to an extent, I would often find myself thinking, you know, "I would love to talk to that person and I would love to learn more about what they do. And it might be that they were from a totally different part of their organization, so they won't know who I am. I'm just a little pipsqueak." And what I found really interesting, particularly with the survey that we sent out, was that many responses really did say, "don't be afraid to take that step and reach out." And I think it's, we all do get a little bit afraid, a little bit worried these people might not think that we're worth engaging with but I think we all see how much we were given throughout our careers. And so one point I'd really want to make is never be afraid to reach out and talk to someone, if they don't have time, they'll tell you that they don't have time but most people really want to help and love the idea of actually helping younger people come up and really make something out of this career. So never be afraid to ask. And also never be afraid to ask your contacts for introductions as well. It may be that you don't know the person well enough, or you're a little bit intimidated. But it could be that your boss can step in and make that introduction for you. So think about other ways that you can get to someone who you'd really like to be able to network with.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 12:50

Yeah, that's really good advice, Sara. I remember a situation here we had last year, we were doing a career development week in our office and the committee that organized that pulled in a lot of different people to talk about various aspects of career development, and we ended up having the CEO of Elsevier at the time, come and do a session- he did it by video, I believe- and I remember sort of thinking, "how did we get him?" And he said, in response to that question that a lot of people asked, he said, "Well, nobody ever asks me to do these things because they don't think I'll agree to do it. They don't think I'll have time, they don't think it's important enough for me. And I'm happy to do it, I was thrilled to be asked." So even somebody at that level, with, arguably, a lot of responsibility on his plate and a lot of things pulling at his time schedule he really just, it's

sort of like, as long as he's getting asked he'll do it but people sort of are intimidated to ask him and so they never get through. So I think that was a good lesson learned to your point that you should always ask.

S

Sara Grimme 13:47

Yeah, and even just basic questions. I actually was once sitting next to a CEO on a plane, and he didn't know who I was. I just turned around and introduced myself and told him I worked for his company. And, you know, we spent the rest of the plane ride talking. And I just, I was genuinely curious about his career and how he got where he was. And I think people tend to be more than willing to share their experiences. It's just about asking the right questions and being interested enough to listen.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 14:13

Yeah. And I think taking the opportunities that you have to add people to your network. For instance, if you do go to an industry meeting, and you meet people, or you go to panels that you enjoy or hear about topics that you're interested in, adding those people on LinkedIn, and then messaging them, letting them know you enjoyed their panel, just adding them sort of to your circle and making yourself known to them and them known to you. Typically, when I go to the annual SSP meeting, I'm adding loads of contacts every day that I'm there. And immediately when I see someone speak, or I get introduced to someone, I step away, I go to my phone and I send them a LinkedIn invitation because then it's fresh, you know who you each are, you're kind of going on the momentum of the meeting, and you can really build from there.

S

Sara Grimme 14:53

That is a fantastic idea that I had never actually thought of, so thank you.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 14:57

No problem.

S

Sara Grimme 14:58

You know, I guess that also shows how much we can continue to learn from the different people that we surround ourselves with.

M Meredith Adinolfi 15:09
Okay, welcome back. In this segment, I'm pleased to be joined by a special guest who's going to talk to us a little bit more about mentorship and her experiences with having a mentor. Hi, Jennifer.

J Jennifer Landsberg 15:21
Hi, Meredith. Thank you for having me.

M Meredith Adinolfi 15:23
Can I ask you to introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about what you do?

J Jennifer Landsberg 15:27
Sure. My name is Jennifer Landsberg and I'm the product manager at Cell Press for the Cell.com web platform. So right now I am managing the the web process for our 45 journals and growing, and making sure that every journal has its own homepage that works functionally and that all article pages look great.

M Meredith Adinolfi 15:46
Just that, nothing, no big deal. So I'm curious if you could tell us when you decided that you wanted a mentor, and then how you ended up getting connected with somebody?

J Jennifer Landsberg 15:57
Sure. So I was actually participating in a company-wide initiative to look at innovation. And we have formed a subgroup to specifically look at innovative topics. And one of the things that we kept running into is that we really didn't know the resources that were available across the company, there just wasn't that person who could make that connection. So there came up a mentorship program within Cell Press, that I then applied for, and specifically asked for somebody from the greater Relx innovation team, because I could see from their internal website, that they were doing exactly the sort of things that we wanted to be doing at Cell Press.

M Meredith Adinolfi 16:35
And so just to clarify there, Relx is the global parent company under which Cell Press sits,

we're sort of a division of that much larger company, and that's pertinent just to say that your idea here was to reach beyond your immediate organization and reach out to the larger network that was available to you to find somebody who met the needs that you were looking for.

J Jennifer Landsberg 16:55

That's right, because there's such a large network that people are just afraid to sort of reach out on their own to do that and I would say I was definitely in that boat that I was afraid to make the connection myself. So I appreciate it that this program was going to go in and make that connection for me.

M Meredith Adinolfi 17:10

Yeah, that's a really important point about sort of the structure of the program, helping you to make a connection that you might be a little bit intimidated to make on your own. So you talked a little bit about, sort of, what you were looking for in a mentor and what you asked for, can you talk about what's important to you in the person that you ended up getting paired with, as far as just their qualities and characteristics, what works well with you in terms of having a mentor?

J Jennifer Landsberg 17:31

I would say someone who is brutally honest, and I was a little taken aback at first, when we first started our relationship, how comfortable my mentor was like giving me really sort of blunt and honest feedback. I really appreciated it and I feel like I learned a lot in a very short amount of time about what I was doing, what I was doing wrong, especially doing presentations in front of people. One of the things he would emphasize is "you need to be telling the story, keep that in mind," which seems like an obvious thing, but at the time, it really, really didn't occur to me. So it was really helpful to get that immediate, like quick block feedback and be able to improve from there.

M Meredith Adinolfi 18:05

Yeah, that's great. Sounds like some very specific concrete things that happened between you. Were there any challenges that you felt you had, working with a mentor?

J Jennifer Landsberg 18:14

Mainly, that we were in different time zones, so that was definitely a challenge. I will say

that it really helps when the mentor is really excited about the mentorship as well. So we had a very open relationship where if I found a spot on his calendar that was open that I was, he made it known that I was welcome to go ahead and schedule a time for us to chat about whatever issue I was facing.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 18:35

Yeah, that's great, time zones. That's a big issue and just not being in the same space and having to build a connection. Did you ever get to meet your mentor in person?

J

Jennifer Landsberg 18:43

Eventually. So after we had been in the mentorship relationship for a couple of months, one of the things that we had talked about was that he was going to be in the US and we organized a program where he would then come and train my larger innovation group about different innovation programs and workshops. So that ended up working out really well. Yeah, it was, it was odd to work for somebody for a while, and then not meet them in person.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 19:06

Yeah, I can see that. I'm kind of curious about this aspect. Sara is going to talk to somebody a little bit later who acted as a mentor for someone outside of her organization. You were mentored by someone inside of, although not your direct organization network, really in your larger company. And I'm just curious if you had any thoughts about whether there would be something different that an outside mentor would give you versus an internal one?

J

Jennifer Landsberg 19:31

It sort of felt like an outside mentorship because he didn't understand our company and our challenges, and that was definitely one of the first things that we had to explain that, you know, this is, were, our set of challenges, this is what was going on in our organization because he was not familiar with it.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 19:46

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. You talked about a few things that you've learned through working with your mentor. As you think about your job now, and what you're doing for your work, would you say there are still things that kind of stuck with you from

what you learned in that relationship and what advice you got? Are there any clear changes that you can point to?

J Jennifer Landsberg 20:04

I would say that definitely not being afraid to reach out to people, being willing to ask for that feedback, to make connections with other people in the company and elsewhere that I don't know offhand but that really can help. And, yeah.

M Meredith Adinolfi 20:19

And you've had a change of roles since that time as well. Was that after you worked with your mentor or before?

J Jennifer Landsberg 20:25

No, it was actually during it. So during the, our, relationship, I explained that I was looking to move from more of the production area of publishing into the product management area. And I had really good feedback for how to even just approach the interview process. For example, you know, most people go into an interview, they prepare for what questions they think they're going to ask, and the very specific feedback I got was, for these sorts of interviews, you really want to take control of it. So come in with a presentation where you've laid out this is how I'm going to approach your problem, these are your business needs, this is my plan. So you comment, and you're going to be answering the same sorts of questions, but you're going to be doing it on your terms. And I feel like they're really set me apart and definitely added value to my interview process.

M Meredith Adinolfi 21:09

That's great. If you were to end up with another mentor, at some point, is there anything you would do differently?

J Jennifer Landsberg 21:16

It really depends on what you're looking for at the time. So I would say now, if I was looking for a new mentor, it would be somebody who's also in product management working on very specific issues. Whereas, then I was looking for somebody a little more towards innovation, those towards innovation workshops. So it really depends on what I'm looking for. I would say if, if it's something where I just want to explore a new career path, it's very different than something where it's a very specific problem I need help with.

M Meredith Adinolfi 21:42
Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Do you think you would consider, after having such a positive experience and learning a lot and making some positive changes, do you think you would consider mentoring someone else?

J Jennifer Landsberg 21:52
Funny you should mentioned that. So I'm actually functioning as two people's mentors at the moment. So one is with the journal Helion that he is a editorial assistant. He's looking to learn about different areas of production in the company at large. And then the other person is also within the greater Elsevier network, who is looking to move more into UX and web roles. And so yeah, I'm meeting with each of them and trying to expand my network to them to sort of pay it forward.

M Meredith Adinolfi 22:19
Well, that's great. And that was quickly that that turnaround happened.

J Jennifer Landsberg 22:23
Yeah, really shows the power of having a positive experience with a mentor and makes you want to give that back to somebody else.

M Meredith Adinolfi 22:29
So my last question for you is, do you have any advice for anyone who might be listening who's thinking about getting a mentor, about how they could go about that, and what they should do to take that next step?

J Jennifer Landsberg 22:40
First I would start with your immediate manager, especially with somebody within your company that they can help make that connection with for you if you're uncomfortable making it yourself. And otherwise, I would say social networks, especially LinkedIn, if you see somebody who's working in a field that you're interested in, go ahead and reach out to them and make the connection, not just adding them on LinkedIn but adding a message of why you want to connect with them and what you're looking into. I'll say most people are pretty flattered that they're being reached out to and are happy to talk with you.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 23:09

Yeah, that is great. And that really follows along with a theme we've been discussing, which is this idea of just reaching out using the connections that you already have to build new ones and sort of leveraging that to find the people that you really want to connect with for specific reasons. Well, Jennifer, I want to say thank you very much. I think this is very illuminating, and really helpful. So thank you for your time. We really appreciate it.

J

Jennifer Landsberg 23:31

Thank you for having me.

S

Sara Grimme 23:32

Meredith, thank you so much to both you and Jennifer for talking about experiences there as a mentee. We now have Katy Alexander joining me here in London in the Digital Science office, where she's our Head of Marketing. And Katy is here to actually provide us with the other side of the experience as a mentor. Katy has a career packed full of a lot of experience and so I'm sure will have loads of great advice for everyone listening. So Katie, just to start us off, could you talk a little bit about your career so far?

K

Katy Alexander 24:00

Sure. So I've worked in publishing and tech for several years now, mainly in marketing. But I've also worked as a strategic and marketing consultant.

S

Sara Grimme 24:09

Fantastic. So I know that you've been a formal mentor through the SSP program. So what in your opinion defines a good mentorship program? And in this question, it would be great not just to think about the SSP program, but any other mentorship programs that you've been part of.

K

Katy Alexander 24:23

Sure. I think kind of the top three, for me, would be the importance of setting clear learning objectives and timelines. So, just making sure that from the very outset of the relationship, both parties know what to expect, the duration, and what they want to get out of it. And that kind of leads into the second one, which is being very clear on the type of mentoring that's going to be provided. So, we need to make sure that we match the

skills and the needs of the mentee to the mentor. And the other one is in a kind of increasingly global world is just bearing in mind some considerations like time differences. So I think especially for working parents, significant time differences, that can be a real issue and getting mentorships to work properly.

S

Sara Grimme 25:09

That's a very good point, actually, and one I suspect that a lot of people don't think about. And what do you see as being your role as a mentor?

K

Katy Alexander 25:18

I think a good mentor creates a strategy that fits the mentee's needs, talents, skills, and, kind of, desires. And you have to push the mentee towards a, kind of, better version of what they want to be, but not towards what you think they should be, or a kind of clone of yourself, because I think sometimes it's really, it's really easy to, to kind of push the mentee to make decisions that you would have made, but it doesn't necessarily mean it's the best for them, they need to make that decision themselves.

S

Sara Grimme 25:44

Right. I absolutely love that point, and I think that's definitely something that all of us should be very aware of. So for any potential future mentors out there, please definitely take that one on board. What else would you see as being your role?

K

Katy Alexander 25:57

To be a good mentor, you have to be a lifelong learner. And you need to encourage the mentee to do the same, and not just in the workplace. But you know, skill sets are changing, and we have to constantly grow. And I think we need to do that as people but also as workers, or employees.

S

Sara Grimme 26:13

Right, right. And so would that be looking outside their role and thinking what else is going on in the industry, or even more broadly, what's going on in the world?

K

Katy Alexander 26:21

I think it's wider. It could be sometimes the things that you might learn will be very, kind of,

related to your current role. There might be things that you want to learn to help you develop to your next role, or there could be things that could be completely outside of the sphere that you work in. But the things you learn from it will benefit current, future roles.

S Sara Grimme 26:38
Okay. Yeah, absolutely. Is there anything else that you would add?

K Katy Alexander 26:42
Probably encouraging them to step outside their comfort zone?

S Sara Grimme 26:45
Okay.

K Katy Alexander 26:46
I think that's really important. It's not always easy, as well, especially when you're junior.

S Sara Grimme 26:49
Yeah.

K Katy Alexander 26:50
And then I think as well, probably the final thing is, kind of, being the role as mentors, just respect and just being a decent human being.

S Sara Grimme 27:00
Another very key piece of advice there, I think, so what have you, yourself learned from your mentors of the past? And, or any of these lessons that you might have learned, what did you take into your inventory?

K Katy Alexander 27:11
So, surprisingly, I've never been lucky enough to have a mentor. I think looking back and seeing the benefits it can bring, I think it's something I would definitely change if I could

go back in time. Part of it was I didn't seek them out because I wasn't necessarily aware of the impact it could have.

S Sara Grimme 27:25
Okay.

K Katy Alexander 27:26
But then many of the places I worked, and many of the managers I've had perhaps never saw this as important. But you know, maybe that was a different time.

S Sara Grimme 27:33
And actually, one of the things that we've talked about earlier on in the podcast already, which I think fits in quite nicely to this is, sometimes we look at people more senior to us, and we see their roles in their organization and we might be afraid to ask as well, because we, we don't necessarily see that what they do is directly related to us. As a mentor, particularly given that you hadn't had one in the past what did you get out of it personally?

K Katy Alexander 27:57
Learning. I love learning about different jobs, different roles, different people, the way, just the insights that people bring to problems and how people approach problems differently. And there's a lot that I can get out of the relationship as well on things I might have never thought of questioning, which is great.

S Sara Grimme 28:14
Yeah. Okay. And so actually, on that note, how do you incentivize people to want to be mentors given how much you can get out of it, and how rewarding it is?

K Katy Alexander 28:23
Thinking about it from a company perspective, I think companies should consider what the benefits of being a mentor can bring to the business, and how much it can actually increase the value of your managers. So, I think all people managers should be mentors, or be required to be mentors as part of the learning and development that they need to do in order to become managers.

S Sara Grimme 28:45
Would you see that as being something separate to being a manager?

K Katy Alexander 28:48
No, I think it's very much part of it. It's very easy to fall down the manager, kind of, hole of managing for performance sake and not for the development of the team. And in the long term, it doesn't benefit the business or the people who work for the business in, in the team and I think, as a mentor, it really opens, what opened my eyes to kind of what this means on a bigger scale.

S Sara Grimme 29:10
Yeah, I think, I think that's a really valuable point, actually. Is it anything else you would add to that in terms of the incentivization?

K Katy Alexander 29:17
I think companies should also consider allocating time for mentorship.

S Sara Grimme 29:20
Right.

K Katy Alexander 29:22
I mean, if you're going to be working, you know, 60, 70 hours a week, becoming a mentor adds, it adds a lot of strain.

S Sara Grimme 29:28
Right.

K Katy Alexander 29:29
And if you're going to do it properly, just like managing a team, you need to be able to have the resource to develop them. Going back to, to the first part of the question, which has just come to me is why it benefits a business and why they should encourage it is if you're really managing to develop your team you won't be as blindsided by events. I

mean, I guess, you would foresee many of the things that would happen. So, let's say an employee was, was struggling with their workload or didn't think they could speak up. I think it would be really easy to, for me as a manager to say, well, they never spoke up. Right, right. But if you don't create the environment where they feel that they can, then there's kind of a joint responsibility, and being a mentor really teaches you that because you have to start seeing things from people's perspective.

S Sara Grimme 30:09
And I would imagine you have to start listening more?

K Katy Alexander 30:11
A lot.

S Sara Grimme 30:12
Right? Yeah.

K Katy Alexander 30:13
And paying attention to, like, the small things.

S Sara Grimme 30:15
I love that advice. And to the point about paying attention to the small things, is that about listening? Is there anything else that you need to be aware of?

K Katy Alexander 30:24
I think it's listening, but also creating, kind of, conditions where teams or your mentee, they feel comfortable coming to you.

S Sara Grimme 30:30
Okay.

K Katy Alexander 30:30

We always talk about open, transparent environments, but it's really building that environment, and being a mentor really teaches you that.

S

Sara Grimme 30:36

Okay, yeah. Fantastic. So how do you put yourself out there to be a mentor? What are the different channels?

K

Katy Alexander 30:43

I guess, if you're not aware of industry-wide initiatives like SSP, then maybe consider looking in your own organization? Speaking to HR. If you manage a team is to start considering your team as being your mentees and take it from there.

S

Sara Grimme 31:01

Yeah. And do you think there's also a role to play, for example, all of us who exist in teams, have a manager and our managers have multiple reports, is there also a role to play in cross-mentorship within different teams?

K

Katy Alexander 31:15

I think so. I think either cross-business or in a team itself.

S

Sara Grimme 31:17

Yeah.

K

Katy Alexander 31:18

And it's, kind of, you can either find someone who complements your gaps and, kind of, try to learn from that if, if you have the time to kind of assess where your gaps might be, or looking in different departments, which can actually be beneficial, maybe a little bit easier, because you don't feel like you have the same constraints that you might have in a team.

S

Sara Grimme 31:36

Right. Yeah. And so how do you bond with your mentee? And I think, obviously, we now

live in a very global world, and mentees can often be on the other side of the world as we already heard earlier. How do you do that?

K Katy Alexander 31:52
I guess it's a really good question, that, it's very much down to the individuals. And I think that's why the fit is so important.

S Sara Grimme 31:59
Right.

K Katy Alexander 31:59
If you're an extrovert mentor and you have an introvert mentee, what's the best way, or vice versa?

S Sara Grimme 32:06
Right.

K Katy Alexander 32:06
You know, if you're an introvert mentor, I mean, I'm somewhat of an introvert. So you know, perhaps like over a coffee or a tea the first time might be the easiest. So I think it's kind of assessing the situation and how both parties basically work, and what they feel comfortable with.

S Sara Grimme 32:21
Yeah.

K Katy Alexander 32:22
Skype and WhatsApp or Slack calls are, are really, it's so much easier nowadays. But the time difference, I think, is a very big issue because it has to be at a time that doesn't add additional strain to either party or it'll fall apart.

- S** Sara Grimme 32:35
Right. And, and that, to me sounds like that's something where organizations need to be really aware of making sure they're making sensible matches, not just on personality, but also thinking about lifestyle, timezone, etc.
- K** Katy Alexander 32:48
Agree.
- S** Sara Grimme 32:48
Yeah. Being flexible with different working environments.
- K** Katy Alexander 32:51
Yes. Yeah.
- S** Sara Grimme 32:52
So on that note, what was important to you about your pairing with a mentee, just thinking about characteristics, qualities, backgrounds?
- K** Katy Alexander 33:00
So I think at SSP, the pairing was done for us. And I think this might be something SSP might want to consider reviewing. I think the, the mentor-mentee relationship, it needs to be a really good fit, because, especially if the mentee is junior, they need to feel really comfortable.
- S** Sara Grimme 33:14
Yeah, absolutely.
- K** Katy Alexander 33:15
And they need to feel like, and part of that is the mentor's job to make them feel comfortable, but they need to feel like they have some say in the matter, in the selection of who's going to mentor them.

S Sara Grimme 33:26
So that's really all I'm curious about in terms of mentoring, but, we sent out a survey as well where we ask people about their different, their careers, and career advice that would have given to their younger self, and you actually had some really good answers here. So even though this is a little off-piece, I actually was really curious to get your answers to the first question, which, we will go into this later, but well, I've got Katy sitting here next to me. What career advice would you have given your younger self?

K Katy Alexander 33:53
Oh, gosh, yeah. So I remember when you sent this to me, I was really intrigued by this and it took me a while to think it over. But I think there are a few, and whether or not my younger self would have listened to these I don't know. But I think, especially nowadays, you're not just going to have one career. So I think I would tell myself, don't limit yourself to a job or industry because the scope of fields is so broad and industries are changing so much that I think the trick is to find a place that allows you to exercise your strength, but that keeps you engaged. Keeps the curiosity ticking, especially for me. I definitely, I definitely when I was younger needed that and still do. So, job hop. Don't, don't do it recklessly, but job hop. It's really important.

S Sara Grimme 34:38
Okay.

K Katy Alexander 34:40
Be patient, but never settle.

S Sara Grimme 34:41
Right.

K Katy Alexander 34:43
And I think I did this a lot when I was starting out, and it's that, kind of, passive waiting. And companies, however amazing, they're never going to have your best interest at heart.

S Sara Grimme 34:52

Right.

- K** Katy Alexander 34:53
So it's really up to you to decide what you want and determine the things that you need to get there.
- S** Sara Grimme 34:59
Yeah, and I think actually that determining the things you need to get there really relates to everything we've been talking about with mentorship and coaching. Find those skill gaps. Yeah.
- K** Katy Alexander 35:09
And sometimes you need someone to help you show what those might be. As much as possible, be a role model, so that the things that you learn can be passed on. And then probably, to just always remember to be humble but courageous. So never be too proud to admit you've made a mistake.
- S** Sara Grimme 35:25
Yep. That's, I mean, that is fantastic advice. Thank you so much.
- K** Katy Alexander 35:29
No, thank you.
- S** Sara Grimme 35:38
We recently sent out a survey to our experienced publishing professionals to share some advice that they had gleaned throughout their careers. We'd like to take you through these questions now. So thank you so much to everyone who shared their experiences and filled out the survey. The first question was, "What career advice would you have given your younger self?" Meredith, what were some answers that really resonated with you?
- M** Meredith Adinolfi 36:00
This was such an interesting question with a lot of interesting responses and definitely

some themes emerged. The one that jumped out at me was, "don't be afraid to say what you don't know, learn as you go, go with the flow. But don't be a doormat." I love the conciseness and succinctness of this quote, just about, sort of, early in your career, in particular, not being afraid to speak up and say that you're in a learning phase, and everybody goes through that, it's perfectly normal and natural, reaching out for the help that you need, looking to others, to, to help you on that learning journey, and just not feeling embarrassed about having to go on that journey.

S

Sara Grimme 36:41

And would you say that, I think particularly not being embarrassed, would you say that this is something that perhaps a lot of people struggle with, simply because when we're young, well, we don't have the confidence to understand that others have been in that situation?

M

Meredith Adinolfi 36:56

I think that there's this idea, and probably this happens, not just early in your career but if you've had a role change, or you take on new work, where you really want to validate your presence in that role, or in that organization, and you want to come across as knowledgeable and like you know what you're doing, you want to give that impression, you want to have the answers. I think that's, that's a good instinct but it can definitely lead to being afraid to admit when something is out of your comfort zone, or when you don't know something. And I think that's a trap. I think that's a definite trap. I know I've fallen into it at various points.

S

Sara Grimme 37:30

I would actually say the same. I think very early in my career, I felt like I had to be perfect all the time. And I saw it as a real sign of weakness in myself and I was worried that other people would as well, if I didn't have all the answers. There is this need to strive for perfection constantly, and I now see that that's really not that important, and that it's okay to ask for help.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 37:50

Yeah, and it's a little bit almost of imposter syndrome in a way, right? Where you sort of feel like, oh, if I ask this question, or admit that I don't know this, or ask somebody for help, they're going to discover that I'm not really qualified to do this, or I'm not in the right place. And the fact of the matter is, I think it actually shows a lot more strength to be able

to say that, and a lot more confidence. And people definitely respect that and typically are happy to help you along that that path. Sara, were there any on the list of responses that jumped out at you?

S

Sara Grimme 38:18

Yeah, actually, there were a few. But one that particularly resonated with me was "editorial and production aren't the only, or even the most interesting, departments within a publisher. There's an assumption that you're not really working for a publisher if you aren't an editor. Obviously, that's not true and I'm not even sure that working for a publisher is always the best way to learn the industry anyway." I absolutely love that one. I, myself, can personally relate to this, because I didn't really realize how big the publishing world was. I started in market research in my first job in the in the industry, and then moved into a publishing role. And you get so caught up in the detail in your first couple of jobs that you don't necessarily see everything that there is outside of that. And once you start to go to conferences and engage more, within your organization as well, you really start to see what possibilities are out there, whether that's moving into production, or learning more about technology, or working for a vendor. There are so many companies that support so many different aspects of what we do. And I think in the early days of our career, we just don't understand or can't see all of the different possibilities that are out there. So I just love the idea that there is so much that can be achieved in this industry and it's really about just making sure that you see all of the different career paths that are possible.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 39:34

Yeah, I really think that's a great point. I love that quote, too. I think this idea of, sort of, being limited to editorial roles and thinking that's what publishing is, and maybe that's more of, sort of, a historical, traditional view of what it means to be in publishing or to be a publisher. A few years ago, I gave a talk at a student conference at Dartmouth College, and this was basically what the talk was about. It was about thinking about the fact that if you come from a background where you think you want to go into publishing, there are all sorts of different ways you can contribute to that broad industry. And I actually flashed up a slide during that talk, that was a list of all the different roles that we have at just Cell Press, not even Elsevier, which is much larger. And it was really shocking to the students to see all the different functional areas that you have at a publishing house, you have marketing, and you have press, and you have web roles, and technical roles, and onward from there. But yeah, just to kind of open eyes to that, as well as the fact that other industries that aren't strictly considered publishing or media have roles that our skill sets transfer to, and that would kind of fulfill our desire to be in the industry.

S

Sara Grimme 40:40

Right. And I think that, that one of the best ways to get a handle on that is just to ask people, ask as many people as you can, get out there, explore, network. And I think there are a lot of the industry bodies that we work with that offer a lot of free events, where there is an opportunity to just really go and talk to other people and find out what it is that they'll do, and often what you'll find is where you started is what got you into the industry, but it'll potentially be something else that you find is your true passion.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 41:07

Yeah, I definitely agree with that. I think that's why organizations like SSP, and many others that are out there that serve this industry are great, because they do have these meetings and other types of events where you can connect with people, and I know I've definitely had instances where I find that someone just has a really cool job that I never knew existed, and, or they work in a part of the industry that I wouldn't have thought of, it's, kind of, part of the same industry that I work in. It's a really great way to just get exposed to all the different things you can do and where you can go from wherever you are.

S

Sara Grimme 41:38

And actually, on that note, there's one other one, and one other quote, that I really loved, one other answer, which is that "it's okay not to have a plan, you can experiment and try new things within your career. Not everyone follows a linear path." And I think that's very much related to the same thing. There's so many opportunities out there, try them, see what comes up, it might not be the plan that you envisioned where you thought you were going to be a Senior Editor or an Editor-in-Chief from day one, you might end up in a sales role or something else. But that's okay.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 42:05

Yeah, that's a that's a really good point. I like that one as well. I think it's, especially, we're talking about mentorship and I think it can be sort of easy to think that if you don't have a plan, or you don't have a very specific set of structured goals, that there isn't anything you can do, there isn't any help you could get, there isn't any guidance you can get. And that's actually not true. Experimenting, and trying new things, that, actually, should be what the earlier years of your career are about, to figure out what you like, what you enjoy, what you're good at. I think that hits on a very important point.

- S** Sara Grimme 42:34
And are there any others that you would call out? Or would you move on to question two?
- M** Meredith Adinolfi 42:38
Yeah, just one other one I wanted to, sort of, quickly mention is this one, it says "don't compare yourself to others so much and worry about your progress compared to others. There's no one way of approaching career development, and there's no one way of doing things at work. Don't be afraid to let your personality shine through in your work and communications with your contacts." I think this is a really interesting point, because it's a bit different than some of the other ones we've talked about. This is really about, kind of, charting your own path and figuring out what your place in your organization is and making your mark. And that's a lot based on, of course, performance and how you do at your job. But it's also your personality, how you fit with the business and the other people that you work with. If people get to know you, and they think about you, you're going to have more opportunities and more, more chance to grow. So that one jumped out at me.
- S** Sara Grimme 43:24
Yeah, I really liked that one as well. I think it's so important because it's, it's very hard not to compare ourselves with others. It's the natural tendency of all of us and to worry about how we're doing. And we have to continue to remind ourselves of that.
- M** Meredith Adinolfi 43:37
Yeah, I definitely agree.
- S** Sara Grimme 43:39
So question two was, "What was your biggest career mistake?" And we had some interesting answers there as well. Is there anything that you would particularly draw out?
- M** Meredith Adinolfi 43:48
Yeah, so this first one that I want to draw out, I think there are several responses that actually speak to this theme. So this one says, "I've been pretty lucky to not have any major mishaps. But I do think that there were many times early in my career that I didn't speak up because others voices were louder. It is a tough thing to do as you gain confidence in your abilities in the job. But I was likely overlooked for projects and

opportunities in those first few years. I didn't put myself out there as forcefully as some of my colleagues." This is really an important one to me and it kind of fits with some of the things we've been talking about throughout the podcast, this idea of just not being afraid to put yourself into the conversation, and this is about asking for help but it's also about showing your personality. We were just talking about that. And I think it's about the connections that you make and just being yourself on the job, and Katy talked a little bit about this, but not being passive in your career and not just expecting that opportunities are going to come to you if you kind of sit and do your work well. It's, it's about more than that.

S

Sara Grimme 44:48

Yeah, I absolutely love this one as well, and it relates a little bit to imposter syndrome and this idea that it is better to stay quiet instead of being assertive sometimes, and I think something else that we've talked about a little bit. It is not having the confidence when people would actually relish your thoughts, your ideas, your requests, to be a mentor and so on. Speaking up is really important and having the confidence, and the backing, and believing ourselves, even though that can be very, very hard to do.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 45:15

Yeah, I agree. And there's another one on here that I think actually relates and is from a slightly different angle to, to the first quote, and also what you just said. I won't read this whole one, it's a little bit long, but "in one of my earliest positions as a manager, I was too afraid of giving negative feedback and was not blunt and clear enough about an employee's shortcomings. That experience taught me that it is always best to be straightforward with feedback." And I think this is relevant, because even though, if you're early in your career, you might not have people reporting to you and you might not have manager feedback to give, there is an element of that that is always going to be part of your role with your peers and your colleagues, and being able to have constructive discussions, and not do it in a way that's going to be alienating for anybody, but being able to do it confidently and constructively. And that really is going to gain you a lot of respect and, kind of, allow you to navigate things more easily.

S

Sara Grimme 46:04

Yeah, I absolutely love that. I think that that you're absolutely spot on. And it is hard. I think we all agree that it is a hard one to do. But the earlier you start trying, the easier it gets.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 46:15

Yeah, I would agree with that. Practice, and also just looking for the opportunities when they come. Not every situation is going to be right for that.

S

Sara Grimme 46:22

Yeah. But what, I mean, what I've certainly found in my career is things that I sat on for too long, and was too afraid to try have been harder down the line and, and thinking about what was my biggest career mistake there are times I, I do think to myself, "if only I'd been more assertive in the early days of my career would stand me in really good stead now."

M

Meredith Adinolfi 46:39

Yeah, someone in their response pointed out here that we use the word mistake and the question, right, and that maybe that's not the right way to think about this. And I think that's an important point, right? Because if you do try something, or if you do speak up, and maybe it doesn't go the way you thought it was, or as well as you thought it would, that's a learning experience and that's okay, and there's really going to be little harm done from that.

S

Sara Grimme 47:01

Absolutely. And actually, that's a great way to frame things rather than mistakes. It's experience and it's all adding to everything that makes us as we go through our careers, we learn from everything we do, we build on that, and, and that's what makes us the people we become.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 47:14

Exactly. Was there anything else with question two, Sara, that jumped out at you?

S

Sara Grimme 47:18

Yeah, there was just one thing. Actually, I mean, a lot of these are very good, but one more that I think I would say is not taking chances externally. So, remaining in the same company does not always have the best progression opportunities. And the flip side of this, of course, is sometimes we leave companies too quickly. My own career mistake, I think, has been a tendency to be a little bit impatient. So there's certainly a balance between impatience and not taking chances. But, oftentimes, the best thing for our

careers is to move to a different company, to try something different, to meet new people, to have a different experience, or to see what else is out there and how big this industry is, and how different companies operate differently. So for me, I think that's a really, really important one.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 48:02

Yeah, I agree. I think this brings up the important point that, basically, we should not be afraid to move on to other companies as we need to, to learn, and we should not be afraid to grow our career for a period of time at the same company. It depends on where you are, where you work, and how things are going for you, but that either of those options is okay, but we should not do one or the other out of fear or out of necessity, we should do it because it's the right move for us.

S

Sara Grimme 48:31

Right. And actually, if we're doing things for fear, it's the wrong reason and that's where, perhaps, we do need to go back to those, some of those earlier comments about being a little bit braver to be a little bit more assertive and try to address the issue that's causing you to feel that way.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 48:45

Well, sorry, it looks like we're out of time for this podcast. It's been a really enjoyable time talking about mentorship and all of the various topics and angles related to it. I definitely want to thank our two guests, Katy and Jennifer, who did a great job giving us both sides, both perspectives on mentorship. So we're gonna be recording some other episodes. So watch this space. I also wanted to mention that SSP as an organization has some really great information online about mentorship. They have a page that has some general information about mentorship and they also have a page specifically dedicated to the mentorship program that SSP runs, Katy talked about that program a little bit in her section. There are certainly other programs out there in the industry, but this would be a good start to, kind of, take a look at this information if you think you're interested in either mentoring or finding a mentor. So you can go to [SSPnet.org](https://sspnet.org) and you'll find the mentorship tabs there for reference. Okay, and with that, thanks very much, Sara. It was great to have this chat with you. I'm looking forward to our next chat about a different topic.

S

Sara Grimme 49:47

And thank you so much, Meredith, as well. This was really enjoyable and we look forward

to coming back to you all soon. Goodbye.