Speaker 1:

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Liesl Riddle:

Welcome to GWSB Proud, a podcast that's all about, why are you proud of GWSB? My name is Liesl Riddle and I am the Associate Dean for Graduate Programs here at GW School of Business. I have the privilege of being able to sit down with GW alumni, faculty, staff, and students and hear about why they are GWSB proud.

Speaker 1:

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Liesl Riddle:

Wow, welcome to GWSB Proud. Today I'm joined in the studio with Linda Mueller, who is one of our 1991 BBA graduates, who's come back to share her knowledge and expertise about entrepreneurship in a really, really interesting setting and context. She's the founder of The Expat Partner Coach and I'm going to have her tell you all about it, but first, let's go back. We're going to roll back time a little bit, Linda. Can you share with us a little bit about what was your GWSB experience like? What was it like to be an undergrad at GW in '91 and what are some of your fondest memories of being in Foggy Bottom?

Linda Mueller:

Sure, wow. Well, it was very eye opening, from the perspective that I came from a small town in the suburbs of Philadelphia. It wasn't very multicultural, to say the least. So, I went to GW and right away started making friends from basically all over the world and even all over our own country, which is very diverse and sometimes people fail to acknowledge how much you can learn from that, as well as people from other countries.

Linda Mueller:

My favorite memories are probably things associated with friends. I had some amazing professors, and took some great classes, and there's professors I still remember to this day that had an impact on teaching me that you think about business, but you think about other things as well. It's not just about the profit, so I always appreciated that. One thing that I've noticed since I visited GW is, when I was there it was really a city school that you would walk out of the buildings and you were on the city streets. I really love going back now and seeing how there's much more of a campus feel to it.

Liesl Riddle:

Oh, yes. You mentioned to me that you had a bunch of friends that you still stay in contact with all these years. Tell me about that community and the role it's played in your life?

Linda Mueller:

It's been really fun to reconnect with people throughout the years. I mean, I have my group of friends that I've been consistently friends with since we graduated, but there's other people that have come in and out of my life as I've moved around. I've lived in quite a few different places since I graduated and some friends that I thought I would never see again. I had a good friend from Hawaii while we were at GW. We took a lot of our business classes together and I didn't think I'd ever see her again really after we graduated because Hawaii seemed so exotic and I've been able to see her for a variety of reasons five or six times.

Liesl Riddle:

Wow, that is so great. I love to hear those stories of those lifelong friendships that really do ... They play such an important role in shaping who you are, not just while you're at GW, but later on in your life. That's really great. Well, I know that when we have undergraduates here, they spend a lot of time trying to figure out and maybe some of them already know what they're going to do when they get out of GW. What kind of career they're going to have, what company they want to work for, what impact they're going to make in the world. Was that your story? Did you live the plan?

Linda Mueller:

Absolutely not.

Liesl Riddle:

I knew that actually. Could you tell by my leading question?

Linda Mueller:

It's funny though because I actually fell off my plan the minute I graduated because my plan while I was at GW was to go and find my way to a C-suite in a big American company or international company based in the US. I started doing government relations right after I graduated. I was the only person in my friend group, I think, that did not do an internship on Capitol Hill. Then, I ended up with a job in government relations. So, right away I knew that I was going to have to improvise, but I did that for a few years and I really enjoyed it. I got so much out of it. I still keep in touch with people that I lobbied with form way back when, but at a certain point I realized that I did truly want to get into marketing.

Linda Mueller:

So, I went back and got an MBA. Then, from there, I did get back on my path of going towards my dream of the C-suite until one day my husband came home from work and said, "What do you think about moving to Japan?" It was really one of the most challenging decisions I've ever had to make in my life because my career was going quite well and I was actually in my dream job at a big corporation. I was going on two and three week international business trips and living the life I wanted to live, but then, I've always been interested in international issues, and life, and that sort of thing.

Linda Mueller:

I studied abroad three times, including when I was at GW. That made such an impact on my life, so I knew that I would enjoy living in a different country, which is very different than just traveling there. So, I decided to go. Then, that first three years that we lived in Japan it changed the trajectory of my life because one thing led to another, I started my own consulting business, and then I decided to get certified in life coaching with a business focus. Then, we started moving and we moved seven times internationally over 13 years. So, it's been quite a journey.

Liesl Riddle:

Oh wow, where all have you moved and lived?

Linda Mueller:

So, we lived in Japan twice, in Tokyo. We lived in Abu Dhabi, and in London.

Liesl Riddle:

Wow. In over how many years?

Linda Mueller:

13.

Liesl Riddle:

13, wow, that's a lot of moving. So, did you ... Each time you moved, did you set up new client base or did you keep a global client base that whole time?

Linda Mueller:

I was most active when I lived in Japan and so, I had that client base and then I carried that with me. I did some ... I tried to pick up some new clients along the way, but the reality is, is when we started moving every year and a half to two years, I had to .... Because I had my values very clear, I had to actually step back from my business at certain points when we were moving around and just really support clients that I had from previous times. Most recently, since I've moved back to Chicago, we repatriated four years ago, I've had a whole load of new clients that are all over the world, basically.

Liesl Riddle:

So, let's try to shed a little bit of light for our listeners about what you really do in this business, what the value proposition is, but also how you differentiate yourself a little bit. So, take us a little bit deeper into the business model.

Linda Mueller:

Sure. Well, life coaching is really about helping people identify what's important to them, what their goals are, where they are today, where they want to be, and then my job is to ask them questions. I'm not meant to tell them what to do, I'm meant to ask them questions to help them pull from their own inner wisdom, so to speak, what's right for them. Basically, I help them breakdown obstacles or get out of their own way in a lot of cases and hold them accountable. So, it's important not to confuse life coaching with mentoring or therapy because they're all very different things. So, that's really the core of what I'm doing.

Linda Mueller:

With The Expat Partners, there's a lot of issues that arise because many ... Most of them are women at this point. There are more men starting to come up as expat partners, but the majority are women that stepped off of their career path to follow their partner's career and/or ... Even if they weren't working in their home country, they were busy and engaged in some way and then all of a sudden that's gone. So, that's really why a lot of them come to me for support. It's really around trying to figure out how to create purpose, how to feel fulfilled as a partner.

Liesl Riddle:

How have you gone about marketing your business?

Linda Mueller:

That's one thing that's evolved. When I first started coaching, social media was not what it is today. So, it was much more around networking locally in Tokyo. Even when I was in Abu Dhabi and London, it was all word of mouth and that sort of thing, but since I've come back to the US, there's really so much marketing done by social media. Clients that I have now have found me on social media. So, the trick there ... Although, maybe trick isn't the right word. I think the key there is to be ... You want to get people to know you, and like you, and trust you because it's a very intimate relationship when you work with a life coach. It's a very judgment free and confidential environment, so there's a lot that's shared. So, there has to be a strong connection between the client and the coach.

Linda Mueller:

I do a lot of collaboration because if a client comes to me and I'm not what I think they need, then I want to have somebody else that I can refer them to because that's really important to be really ... Sometimes people need therapy, they don't need life coaching. I call myself a life coach and a mentor because I do have times when ... I'm very clear when I'm speaking to a client if I'm life coaching them or mentoring them because if I'm ... Sometimes a client just says, "Look, you lived in Tokyo and this is what the issue is, what should I do?" So, I usually try to go down the life coaching route first, but there are times when it's important just to provide the information that the person needs.

Linda Mueller:

So, the marketing is mostly through social media. I also have engaged with the local international schools here in Chicago, international groups. I have a meetup group for international women in Chicago that's been quite successful. Then, there's a lot of very large corporations in Chicago that have a lot of expats.

Liesl Riddle:

What do you think has been ... Do you see patterns in some of these conversations or journeys really that you've been on with these clients? Are there certain patterns that emerge that you would like ... So many of our students actually go and they travel abroad a lot before graduating, but then after graduating maybe they get that international job. That very first time where they're really going to live extensively, on their own, overseas where it's not a program that somebody put together for them or they're going to get that extended consulting project. So, I'm just wondering, from your expertise in your business, are there some recommendations for young professionals engaging in that first abroad program that you could share with the audience?

Linda Mueller:

Sure. I think one of the most important things is when you go into a new country, culture, environment, however you want to define it, to really go in with an open mind, a mindset of curiosity. Not to come in like, I'm the expert from headquarters or I'm ... Whatever you think you're the expert in. I think that's really served me well, is to go in and ask the locals for their advice and to build that relationship because it's really important to understand what you see as the norm from your time at GW or your time in your home country may not be the norm locally.

Linda Mueller:

I think on a personal level, it's so important to engage with the locals and actually learn a little bit about the country. If you're living there, it might be hard to learn ... You might not have the time to study a language fluently, but you can learn the niceties, please, thank you, hello. I used to study twice a week with a Japanese tutor and when I worked ... The company I worked in, they were also speaking Japanese around the office, but I learned enough Japanese so that they felt like I was trying at least. I also learned, people's English gets a lot better when you try to speak their language. So, there's plenty of people I said, do you speak Japanese and they would say, no. Then, I would start to speak Japanese to them and then all of a sudden their English would come out. So, I think that's a big key.

Linda Mueller:

I do think learning something about the local culture will help you feel at home there as well. Through the food, through the history, through the cultural activities, and places that you can visit.

Liesl Riddle:

What are some of the most interesting things you experienced in Japan, in particular?

Linda Mueller:

The list is endless. Well, one thing is that I really ... I'm a bit of a foodie and I always used to think that sushi was Japanese food, but it's actually a really broad array of different kinds of food. That was a big education, but I think the biggest thing that I learned is that Japanese people are actually extremely helpful. A lot of them don't speak English and they have a very formal demeanor, but really ... I would be standing on the street ... Because this was back in the day where we were using paper maps. A Japanese person who didn't speak a word of English would see that I was lost, and have me point on the map where I was going, and walk me 10 blocks out of their way to get me where I needed to go.

Linda Mueller:

So, I really have such a soft spot in my heart for all things Japan and Japanese because it's a very intimidating city ... Tokyo's a very intimidating city on the outside, but when you get in there, and you understand the culture, and you have your life setup in your neighborhood, it's really a very, very easy place to live.

Liesl Riddle:

Yeah, it's really interesting to me about how you've been able to walk the talk of your business. That's, I think, one of the greatest arguments anybody would have to want to talk to you because you've lived and you've done this. You've faced the hard times and you've turned the solutions that you found into a business where you can really share that wisdom with others. I think it's a great testament to your creativity and your resilience that I hope a lot of our listeners really truly appreciate because I think so many times life throws curve balls at us and we have this career map, career plan, but you're a great example to me and you're a big inspiration, I think, to have the different kind of frame on when things happen to you and look more for, well, what new opportunities is this bringing to me rater then, what have I lost or what am I not doing now. I think that's one of the reasons why we wanted to have you on the show.

Liesl Riddle:

Before we go, I wanted to ask, we have a lot of students, both undergrads and grads, that either currently are entrepreneurs or are planning on doing an entrepreneurial venture of some kind. What advice do you have for students that may just have a really good idea, but are filled with a lot of concerns, worries, fears that this may not be the right time to take a risk in their life?

Linda Mueller:

There are a few things. One is, always remember that nothing has to be forever. I have friends that have become entrepreneurs, and it didn't work out the way they wanted them to, and they did not have trouble getting jobs with corporations because I think when they were interviewing, they got a lot of respect for actually being willing to take the risk to go out on their own and they learned a lot through the process. So, be able to tell your story. If you do it and it works out really well, great, have a story, what did you learn? If you do it and it doesn't work out, same, have a story, what did you learn, what would you differently, and be able to sell it that way.

Linda Mueller:

I think the other thing is that you just have to do it. Get out of your own way and do it because the only person stopping you is you and the stories that you're telling yourself in many cases. So, I think having the confidence to just get out there and be authentic. If you're doing things for the right reason, understanding why you're doing it, because that'll keep you going. If you understand why you're starting your own business and what you're really trying to do on a deep level, when it gets hard that'll keep you going.

Linda Mueller:

I think the last thing is, ask for help. I think a lot of us are afraid to admit what we don't know and we just try to keep pushing through or we let it stop us, but everything I'm doing now, I am either collaborating, studying, or hiring someone to help me. Whenever I face a roadblock, those are the things that I start to do because I feel like there's nothing that ... There's no reason that I can't do what I want to do.

Liesl Riddle:

So, if you had three people, just three people, that you could look back on the experience of creating this business and turning it into the great success that it is, who are the three people that you think were the most influential and what do you want to say to them?

Linda Mueller:

Well, the first one is, I worked for a woman when I was at GW. She was writing a book and she hired me as a research assistant. She had been a professor at GW and she became like a grandmother to me. I learned so much from her, I can't even begin to tell you. She just gave me the confidence to do whatever I want to do. Her life didn't go like she had planned when she was younger and I think I've always held that with me. That it might not go as I planned, but I can find a way to make it work. That's a big thing.

Linda Mueller:

I think the second person is my husband because he's really given me the leeway to just ... He's like, I just want you to be happy. If you want to get a corporate job, get a corporate job. If you don't want to work at all ... He doesn't care, he just truly wants me to be happy and that gives me the confidence and the area in my life to just experiment with things, which is hat I've been doing my whole life. I've been experimenting, and going around, and searching for what is it that I truly want to do. I'm so glad that I actually found it because as much as I wanted ... I sometimes feel like I missed something by not going as far in my career as I had originally wanted to, but I know everything's worked out as it's meant to be.

Linda Mueller:

The third person's my daughter because I had her when I was 40. I think if I would have stayed on that career path that I was on, I don't know if that would have happened. So, I really spend a lot of time now trying to set a good example for her and to show her that you can have everything in life. You might not be able to have it all at once, but you can find a way to have it all. You have to be resilient, and you have to just keep pushing, and searching until you find what it is you're looking for.

Liesl Riddle:

Such incredible wise words. Great, great example, I think, of a GW grad who not only stays in contact with your home community that you met at GW, gets all that support, but has really been an incredible thought leader in the world of business. Thank you so much for joining us today, Linda.

Linda Mueller:

Thank you.

Speaker 1:

[singing 00:20:20]

Liesl Riddle:

That's all for this episode. Thanks for listening today. Shout out for music credit to Plantain Poppy, also knows as Michael [inaudible 00:20:36], GW class of 2020. See you next time to learn more ways we are GWSB proud.

Speaker 1:

[singing 00:20:45]