

EPISODE 873

“LP: My dad started an SAT prep business when I was around 12 or 13 years old. I remember, he went from driving a Toyota Tercel to a BMW.”

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:54.0]

FT: You're listening to So Money everybody, welcome back, I'm your host Farnoosh Torabi, that was Lindsey Pollak, our guest today who is a leading expert on the millennial generation and today's multi-generational workplace. She's often called a translator, she advises organizations and individuals on how thrive in today's unprecedented five generation workforce, I didn't realize this.

So people are working longer and years ago, we thought by now, that you know the baby boomers would all be retired but many of them are still at it and working in some cases, starting their own businesses. We have workplaces now with five generations in the cafeteria. That will make for an interesting culture and so she and Lindsey's book discusses how companies can thrive with these different generations and how to find common ground.

But we also just heard her talk about the financial transition she experienced growing up, her parents going from middle class to upper middle class and the perks that she experienced and the impact that had on her finances as an adult. Lindsey is a New York Times bestselling author of *Becoming The Boss - New Rules for the Next Generation of Leaders and Getting from College to Career: Your Essential Guide to Succeeding in the World*.

She has spoken at Facebook, LinkedIn, Yale, Harvard, Wharton, Stanford. She's been on The Today Show, The New York Times CNN NPR and now I'm proud to say, So Money.

Here's Lindsey Pollak

[INTERVIEW]

[0:02:31.2]

FT: Lindsey Pollak, welcome to So Money, my friend. I can't believe you haven't been on the show before and I apologize for that but I know that I've referenced you a few times on this show and I think listeners are familiar with your work.

Welcome.

[0:02:43.2]

LP: Thank you so much, it's truly a pleasure to finally be here. Thank you.

[0:02:47.8]

FT: Yes, thank you for making the time and congratulations on the launch of your latest book. It's called, *The Remix - How to Lead and Succeed in the Multi-Generational Workplace*. You've really dedicated your career to understanding the workplace and as humans, how we function in the workplace and in this book, it's really about looking at the different generations and what I thought was interesting and not want something that I've really have been hearing about is that we are on the precipice of a time in our history. In our workplace history where all the generations are going to be working together.

[0:03:26.9]

LP: That's right.

[0:03:28.1]

FT: Is that a good thing or is that – should we brace ourselves?

[0:03:32.8]

LP: You might want to brace yourself but my perspective is that it's a very good thing if you are mindful and proactive about it. Just to give you a little context. When I started my business about 17 years ago as a college campus speaker, there were three generations in the workplace, I'm a Gen Xer, there were baby boomers and there were traditionalists or the GI generation and I was coaching and mentoring and speaking to college students who were really my fellow Gen Xers, at that time.

Then around 2008, the millennials roared on to the scene and I studied them for about 10 years. Now we have the millennials and now the generation Z born '97 and later and what I found really interesting having spent my whole career studying the entry level and younger end is that baby boomers and traditionalists are now working many years or decades later than they were before. It's a stretch on both ends of the age spectrum.

[0:04:33.6]

FT: Right. I think 10 years ago, there was a prediction that there would be this drop off of baby boomers in the workplace around now we're in short time in short order, though, you're right. We're living longer, we're not able to retire because of financial difficulties so we have to keep earning that money and frankly, I mean, working, if you like what you're doing, it's not a bad way to exist.

[0:04:56.0]

LP: That's exactly right, you know? So much of the conversation is about the 2008 financial crisis, the great recession, people have to work longer, which is true. But they also tell me that they want to work longer. I think for a lot of people, it's a necessity but for many, it's also a choice.

[0:05:14.1]

FT: Now, the remix is really about what you describe as a formula which is mixing the old and the new in the workplace to create positive strategies and to create a positive work environment.

What from the old way that we work is worth hanging on to and what are some of the new developments that are really exciting and perhaps where companies should be focusing?

[0:05:40.2]

LP: I love that question because you're right, I named it *The Remix* because like a remixed song, it's a classic, mixed with modern elements and nobody's saying the classic is wrong or bad or should retire and go away. And nobody's saying the new is better, it's about the combination being powerful and a lot of DJ's have told me, once I picked the title, that the secret to getting people on the dance floor at a wedding or a party is to play a remix because the older people feel included and comfortable and happy to dance and the younger people do too.

That's kind of the vision I have for this multigenerational workplace it's not that we do this sort of 180, which I think a lot of people are worried that we might do which is millennials are here, it's a digital economy, everything's being automated. Take everything that used to work in the workplace and throw it away and just do the new stuff, that's not good advice. We need to be really mindful of looking at everything we do in the workplace from recruiting to retention to communication, to benefits, to financials.

What are we doing because we've always done it and it actually works really well and we should keep it. What are we doing that we've always done that it's time to get rid of and what do we need to add to our tool kit because we now have this digital economy and automation and all the modern elements?

It's really taking a fresh look at everything and figuring out not – what the boomer do or what would the millennial do but what is the best option from all of these amazing differences and choices and perspectives that we have.

[0:07:14.8]

FT: What are some common denominators, given that you've got now Gen Z, millennials, all the way up to baby boomers working potentially in the same environment as an employer.

What are some practices or benefits or systems you can put in place that everybody would dig? Because I think that's hard, I think that's really hard to find that common ground but you've obviously done the research. Tell us, what should we do?

[0:07:40.4]

LP: It is incredibly hard and you have to be really strong at communicating about it. There are two examples that come to mind. One is on how to manage people and I think we're all human beings and good managers of people are good managers of any generation and my preferred method of managing in the multigenerational workplace is really to take a coaching approach as opposed to command and control or dictatorial, my way or the highway.

It really is most valuable with all generations to get to know each employee and coach them, develop them mentor and train them. I think millennials demand it because they are used to a lot more attention, they're used to on demand learning on places like YouTube but other generations have always appreciated bosses who mentored and coached and developed them.

We just sort of got used to not always having that. The method of caring about your employees and mentoring and training them and thinking about their development is something that crosses generations whether you do that in person face to face or whether you do that on Skype or on Slack is sort of the modern elements.

The action of managing cautiously and in a coaching way is classic but the places you do it might be different. The other example is when it comes to benefits, something that I write about in the book is life planning accounts which I'm sure you talked about on your show which is every individual has different financial needs, has different insurance needs, has different preferences, lifestyles.

Rather than saying, everybody gets a 401(k) or everybody gets student loan repayment or everybody gets a certain gym benefit or travel insurance or pet insurance. Some companies are moving towards a number of points or amount of money to say here are the options that you have, you can make the choices for your life right now of where you want to allocate those benefits.

[0:09:37.4]

FT: That is so smart. Like almost giving an ala-carte benefits system and then you have a budget from the company to go and take advantage of this services based on what your life currently needs and in five years, in two years, it changes and you can shift that, that's brilliant.

[0:09:54.1]

LP: That's exactly right and it came out of a lot of companies with 401(k)s that young people were not putting money into and they said, well why aren't you putting money in? You must not care about your personal finances, you must be entitled, you must not be responsible, you don't know how to adult.

The young people said, I would be thrilled to put money into my 401(k), I need to pay of my student loans first, I don't know how to do both. I think it's about giving the choices but also the education around personal finance and health and all the different issues that come up with benefits to make, to not just give people the choices but also educate them about how to make those choices responsibly.

[0:10:30.4]

FT: Where are the best places to work? How can you, as someone who is about to maybe accept a job offer or looking to switch jobs. How do assess a company based on some of these criteria, some of these things you may not know until you go there and experience the culture.

What are some telltale signs that a company is implementing this remix, so to speak in a positive way?

[0:10:54.6]

LP: I think diversity and inclusion are one of the key factors that to me were commonalities between the companies that I most admired. A real commitment from the very top to diversity

and inclusion. Often we think of that in terms of gender and race or ethnicity or sexuality. That includes age so companies that are age agnostic in their advertising.

For instance advertising in maybe AARP as well as in college newspapers. Organizations that have very multigenerational employee resource groups I thought were very appealing where there were a lot of opportunities to network internally, across generations. Companies that are really committed to education and training at all levels.

I found a lot of companies that had really strong training and development for their junior employees and then it sort of fell off over the years and I think the companies that I most admire that I interviewed and that people were talking about desiring to work for are the ones that really think of you, over the course of your career maybe you won't stay there forever but at any entry point of your career, your development is a priority to the company.

Notice I did not talk about ping pong tables, I did not talk about Net pods or free lunches. Those things are cool but what people want is to know that their company is going to develop them and cares about them as an individual.

[0:12:20.4]

FT: There's also something else happening which is that people aren't staying at companies for very long and is that – it's like a chicken and an egg, is it that they are just – are they just looking for the next best thing constantly, employees or are employers not providing them with that next best thing?

Because we've heard about people having on average seven different career changes or job changes rather in their lifetime and I think for the younger generation, that's kind of going up to the startup. Environment that's my husband is a software developer, he works a lot for startups.

He's had multiple jobs in the last 10 years where his dad had one job for many years. What do you think it is about the current generation, I guess the younger generation, the Gen Yers, what are they looking for? Because they do care about matriculation but not necessarily at one place.

[0:13:15.7]

LP: This is one of the most interesting findings. I think what we're dancing around is the word loyalty, right? Are you going to be loyal to a company or are they going to be loyal to you? There is a study that as employers, do you think millennials are loyal and about 1% of HR professionals and employers said yeah, millennials are loyal.

Something like 85 or 90% of millennials said they were loyal. There is this huge disconnect and what I think the disconnect is how we're defining loyalty and what our expectations are for how long someone might stay at an organization.

I had a similar experience, you know, my dad, same company, you know, same employers whole career. My husband multiple jobs and many of our friends the same thing, what a lot of younger people tell me is you know, I would love to work at a company for a long time but I saw my parents get laid off, I saw my older sister or brother get laid off, I saw what happened with Lehman Brothers and NRON and all these companies in journalism and media that are going out of business.

I don't have any belief that a company is going to keep me employed for life. I'm just being cautious in growing my career, growing my training, my credentials so I can move around if I need to. What that means is, there is a disconnect and I hear it and I see it, where companies say, I'm going to provide all these training and mentoring and coaching and benefits and all these things you say I have to do to have multigenerational employees.

People are going to leave anyway and the answer is that they might because we just live in a time where a lot of people are afraid that if they stay at one company for too long, they won't be marketable at some point in the future where that goes away.

One of the phrases that I heard from a few people that I liked is about lifelong colleagues or lifelong relationships so that you might not work at the same company with the same person but you might find some of the colleagues that you worked with at various jobs along your path in the future.

I don't think we know yet exactly what that employment model will look like in the future. I have some ideas, But we know it's not going to be that past of working at one company or whole career. It is really complicated and really challenging on both sides for the company and the individual to figure out what that model is going to be.

Kind of a long answer but I think that is sort of the issue of our modern workplace is what is it going to look like in 20, 30, 40 years because it is not going to look like what it did in the past.

[0:15:48.2]

FT: Well, that just means you'll have a lot more work ahead of you. Your job is secure.

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LP: Only working for ourselves are we ever secure I guess is sometimes the answer.

[0:15:59.4]

FT: Well I mean nothing I guaranteed but I mean I would like to talk about your career journey and I think that in some ways, I admire so much what you have designed.

Really you have created your own niche, you have become an expert in the field, a go-to person in a much needed field and really have carved and identified this marketplace for yourself and just a content machine. On top of that you're just a boss and I believe you are a parent too, right?

[0:16:33.5]

LP: I am, I have a seven and half year old daughter, sorry, seven and three quarters.

[0:16:37.3]

FT: Seven and three, very important, every month counts and so I would love to learn, let's go back in time a little bit, maybe shoot a little bit too some of the So Money questions when you were growing up, how was your education around money?

This is actually airing in Financial Literacy Month, in April and so with our partner, Chase, we're asking guests what was the way that you learned about money?

[0:17:03.4]

LP: So I have an interesting background. My dad was a teacher, he is retired now. My mom was a stay at home mom, she was had taught before I was born and then stayed home and we lived very modest. Again, as the oldest of three children I grew up in Norwalk, Connecticut and I don't remember feeling like we didn't have enough but we certainly were not wealthy. My dad started an SAT prep business when I was around 12 or 13 years old.

And I remember he went from driving a Toyota Tercel to a BMW and what I remember is that suddenly we were able to go on vacations that were a little bit fancier. We were able to go shopping a little bit more, the presents got a little bit bigger and what we find really interesting is that I saw my dad start a business, my mom subsequently started her own business as well and entrepreneurship, doing something on your own was very much presented.

As a way towards more financial security, I know my mom used to listen to financial tapes and how to start a business and Zig Ziglar and Tony Robbins and all of those kind of gurus in the car and so I think they must have seeped in that it was a very strong transition and really interestingly, my younger brother and sister came of age more in the years when my dad had this own business and they grew up with a very different sense of money.

I had seen it before and after and I think that really affected me to see both sides of that experience.

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FT: So you witnessed a lot. Were there conversations around money as well?

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LP: I don't remember any conversations about money. I remember having a conversation with my brother. I am the oldest and I am female and my brother and then a younger sister and we were talking about investments or investing or savings and my brother knew all of this stuff about stocks and I said, "How did you know that?" And he said, "Dad used to tell me about his stocks." And I said I never had that conversation.

And he said, "Well how did you learn how to put on mascara?" And I said, "I guess mom must have taught me." And so it is this really interesting feeling that maybe my brother was having conversations with my dad that he wasn't having with me. If you are listening, we need to talk about that.

[0:19:16.7]

FT: Yeah, I mean it is not unusual and it is not intentional. It is not like our dads are saying we don't want our daughters to have this information but maybe it is like a bonding experience. Many for so long have been considered to be a man's domain, period. A boy's club thing you know? Did you ever become really curious about money? Do you remember a moment in your life where you are like, "I want to get this. I want to understand this. I want to move forward."

[0:19:42.6]

LP: No. I will tell you when I became serious about money and this is my big confession Farnoosh. I was very much supported by my parents and very fortunate. I won a scholarship to college. I went to graduate school, very fortunate not to have debt. I worked for a year and a half at a startup called workingwomen.com, the old Working Women Magazine and I had a salary and benefit, which I didn't think so much about it.

That company went out of business and I was job hunting, I was freelance writing, writing a blog, starting to get my speaking career off the ground and I had to file my taxes for the first time

with 1099's instead of a schedule C and I did not know that I was supposed to save quarterly taxes and how do you know?

You don't know until you know and I had a very, very unpleasant upsetting and shocking meeting with an accountant and I thought I never want to feel this way again that I didn't know what I was supposed to do with my money and that is when I started to get serious. That was probably 2003, 2004.

[0:20:53.1]

FT: Nothing like a big sticker shock from the IRS to put your financial life in order.

[0:20:59.6]

LP: Yeah, it was that feeling that I didn't know about my own money and I didn't know something that other people knew. I never wanted to have that feeling again.

[0:21:09.3]

FT: What would you say is your biggest financial win, your So Money moment?

[0:21:13.7]

LP: My biggest financial win was the first time I negotiated for a speaking fee that was a number I was afraid to say and this is probably more recently than I want to admit but I kept it very safe for many, many years with my speaking fees and I knew, actually this is an interesting story. I had a woman pull me aside once at a speech and she said, "There is something I want to tell you. Are you open to some feedback?" And I assumed it was something about my speech or my content.

And I said yes, I was super nervous and she said, "We interviewed and auditioned three speakers for this spot. You were by far the best and half as much as the other speakers in your pricing and the other two were men."

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FT: Oh my gosh.

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LP: And she said, “I recommend that you double your prices,” and after that, the next inquiry that came in I doubled my speaking fee and the person said yes and that was a huge aha financial moment but that was like a dagger to the heart when she said that because as a speaker as you know in our business, you don’t really know what the going rates are. They are very different and that was just a huge moment and I am forever grateful to that woman for saying that.

[0:22:35.0]

FT: See? You know, yes a dagger to the heart but also so fantastic that she told you and so appreciated. We need more of that. We need more men and women being transparent and in that case it was – she was giving you a little bit of the behind the scenes and that should happen more often. I know that it is so true.

Well, I am glad you’re getting what you are worth now. There is not a glassdoor.com for speaking gigs. You are right, when you are a freelancer –

[0:23:07.2]

LP: You know there used to be a site for writers. The American Society of Journalists and Authors had a site called Whisper where you could tell people how much you got paid for work and I used to read that religiously because you don’t know until you know and that was so valuable.

So I am not sure I am comfortable saying my numbers to anyone in the world but if another speaker wants to call me and talk numbers I am always happy to do that because I think we have to and I am forever grateful for the person who did that to me.

[0:23:32.7]

FT: Listen, you need to make a website okay? I have a business idea, someone who is listening can you make this? I think you should do it Lindsey though because it is so in your wheelhouse and I can help but a website that is dedicated to solopreneurs, freelancers and then it is categorized by industry and then that's the Whisper you talked about for writers but for all sorts of projects like what if I am doing a speech, what if I am doing consulting work for financial institutions.

And you know obviously, it is all going to have to be dependent on the scope of work and whatever but I just think that having access to something like that, I would read that for pleasure. I would just want to know how much people are getting paid kind of how I just go on real estate websites and browse at houses. This would be fun for me so count me in as a consumer but I think that there is no shortage of transparency when it comes to pay for reasons like this.

Now you are making what you are worth, did you ever think that you could make that much money? Did you know that that was what you are worth or you're just afraid to ask?

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LP: I didn't know. Well first of all when I started 17 years ago, I didn't know that speakers made money. I didn't know that that was a thing. I actually started, I was on a rotary scholarship to graduate school like local rotary clubs and I started speaking at rotary clubs, which they don't pay. It is for the exposure and this is more of an organization and it was a great start. It got me a lot of experience and it was a Rotarian who said, "Can you come speak to my daughter's high school? We can pay you \$250."

And I remember thinking, "Oh my gosh, someone is going to pay me to talk? That is amazing!" And that was the very beginning. So this is an industry that I think is really confusing to a lot of people where I am very hopeful and where I think there is a lot of generational change is I think that millennials for the most part not every millennial is the same but the comfort with talking about money, the comfort with salary transparency, I speak to many banks.

And law firms where the young millennial employees will pass around spreadsheets of who got what bonus and they are totally transparent about it and the goal is a little bit competitive or possibly a lot competitive but also we are in this together, let us support each other with this information. I can't imagine seeing that 15 or 20 years ago in my career.

[0:26:00.6]

FT: No, I love it. I love the progress we are seeing on that front. All right Lindsey, let us do some So Money fill-in-the-blanks.

[0:26:08.3]

LP: Okay.

[0:26:09.4]

FT: This is just finish the sentence, first thing that comes to mind. If I won the lottery tomorrow, the first thing I would do is?

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LP: Buy an apartment in Manhattan. I have been renting for too long.

[0:26:20.3]

FT: Oh yeah girl, you need to own. That's happening this year.

[0:26:23.8]

LP: Yeah, all those real estate sites I am right there with you.

[0:26:26.3]

FT: Well it is actually a pretty good year to buy I think, prices are coming down. I don't know.

[0:26:31.4]

LP: That is what I am saving up for, that is our number one financial goal right now.

[0:26:34.6]

FT: Awesome, one thing I spend on that makes my life easier or better is?

[0:26:39.0]

LP: Childcare, having an extraordinary babysitter for my daughter who we love and trust is the best money I pay every month.

[0:26:49.0]

FT: It is an investment. I concur.

[0:26:51.2]

LP: It is the best thing and I credit my husband with this. Who else would I want to pay more giving her metro cards and extra money for snacks? I want this person to be happy and healthy and it just makes a huge difference to my life and my daughter's life and it is where I want to invest.

[0:27:10.8]

FT: How about this, when I donate I like to give to “blank” because?

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LP: Organizations that support women and children and gun control issues.

[0:27:24.9]

FT: And last but not the least, I am Lindsey Pollak, I am So Money because?

[0:27:29.1]

LP: I am So Money because I am a Gen Xer and we are the least recognized generation and we need to get out there and speak up for ourselves.

[0:27:38.3]

FT: What happened? All of the '90s movies were about you all and then nothing.

[0:27:43.3]

LP: You know I think about this a lot more than other people. I am like a died in the wall, right in the middle Gen Xer, born in 1974 and I think that is why I am so interested and have dedicated my career to generational study because we are in this weird place, where we were the slacker generation, the baby bust after the huge baby boom and we thought someday it would be our turn to dominate culture and business and then the millennials came along.

And completely zoomed past us and Gen Xers are caught in the middle and so I have spent a lot of time thinking about how do we thrive in that spot because we are never ever going to be the biggest generation. We just aren't and we never going to dominate the culture and the business discussions and the financial institutions. Some have called Gen Xers the Prince Charles of the generations, forgive me, to my British friends.

But the Queen has been going forever, she is not going anywhere and William and Kate are on their way up. So never going to have this moment and that is where we are and so I thought about how do you really thrive in that situation and where I think Xers have a unique talent is that we have had to be translators. We have had to be the bridge. We have to be the glue between the generations and so I think the fact that I wrote this book on multigenerational success.

The fact that my mission is to connect the generations I think is my coping mechanism for being in the generation that was never going to be in charge. So I really feel this very strong sense of being in the middle and trying to bridge those gaps and translate among all the generations because we really have been outsiders for a very long time.

[0:29:35.7]

FT: Well, you are making some changes.

[0:29:38.1]

LP: I am trying.

[0:29:40.0]

FT: You are leading the charge, you are leading the charge. Lindsey Pollak, thank you so much. Your book, *The Remix*, comes out May, correct?

[0:29:48.5]

LP: May 7th.

[0:29:50.4]

FT: May 7th, lucky seven. We'll be looking out for it but I think you can all pre-order it so head over to where all books are sold and check out Lindsey's book. Thank you so much Lindsey and I look forward to you becoming a home owner in 2019.

[0:30:04.8]

LP: Oh thank you Farnoosh, I appreciate it. Great to be with you.

[END]