

## Episode 44: Internal Work as a Path to Success as a Consultant—with Libby Wagner

Deb Zahn: Hi. I want to welcome you to Episode 44 of the Craft of Consulting podcast. My guest today is Libby Wagner, and she's a really interesting mix. That is, she's a consultant, but she's also a poet. She has a really interesting story of how she got into consulting. But now what she does is work with organizations—large, small, everything in between—all across the globe to help them build vibrant and healthy cultures.

And what she and I are going to talk about is the internal work that we know excellent consultants do. Internal work is essentially the work you do on yourself—one, to have the type of livelihood and lifestyle you want to have, but also to be able to attract clients to you and to get long-term relationships built with clients over time. And that internal work can make the difference between being able to do it and not being able to do it.

So we get into a lot of details about what that looks like and how we have both done that in order to build our businesses and build our lives, so let's get started.

I want to welcome my guest today, Libby Wagner. Libby, welcome to the show.

Libby Wagner: Hi, Deborah. It's so great to be here with you today.

Deb Zahn: Wonderful. Let's start off, tell my listeners what type of consulting you do.

Libby Wagner: Well, you know, I am a poet who works with organizations to help them change their culture, their language, and their communication, which oftentimes can impact their leadership and relationships with one another and their customers. I also do some performing with my work in terms of poetry and spoken word.

Deb Zahn: That's great. It's the first time in a podcast that started with I'm a poet, and I love that. That was one of the reasons I wanted to talk to you because I think that's such a great combination as well as origin. How did you get into consulting?

Libby Wagner: Well, you know, it's one of those things that we like to say an inspired path is not linear. I was a college professor for a long time. I taught poetry and writing and communication. After a pretty significant life event—I lost my sister to breast cancer—I sort of reinvented myself. I left my tenured teaching job, and I started a consulting business because I had a natural talent for working with teams and groups. So I began doing that work professionally and created a consulting business about 16 years ago.

Deb Zahn: Oh, that's wonderful. When we spoke, we thought a good topic—because it's so essential for successful consultants—is to talk about the internal work. Sort of

the work we have to do on ourselves that makes all the difference, not just in getting clients but also keeping them by being able to wow them and engage them in a very particular way. So let's start off, when you hear internal work, what do you think that means?

Libby Wagner: Well, it's funny that we're talking about this today because I was just writing an article on deep listening.

Deb Zahn: Nice.

Libby Wagner: And I feel like that's one of the most important things when we talk about internal work. It's about deep listening. Listening to our own voice, listening to maybe the...I don't know if you want to call it intuition, the soul, or genius ideas—however it resonates for you—but it really is about those conversations we have with ourselves and the way that we listen.

Deb Zahn: That's wonderful. I love that. When someone, before they're going to become a consultant, so they're professional, and they're thinking, "Hey, this might be a path that I want to go down," what type of internal work would you suggest they do or that you did with yourself before you took the leap?

Libby Wagner: I'll tell a quick little story here. I worked with a mentor for quite a long time, Alan Weiss, who is well known for working with independent consultants. I remember the first year that I had opened my consulting business. The thing I like to say is, "There's no logical reason that a poet would be an advisor to executives, CEOs, or corporations all over the world. I didn't go to business school. I don't have an MBA." But I felt like I could do this work.

Part of what happened though was I went to this event for consultants. The second day I was sitting up front, and I just knew that everyone behind me had all the answers, and everyone behind me had the successful consulting business. He came in the second day, and he wrote up on a flip chart, "self-esteem." I thought, "Oh, my God. He's seeing this in me. He's going to talk just about me." Because I didn't feel confident. Because I didn't know what that path was going to look like. I had been successful in other areas.

So when I think about the internal work of a consultant, it's related to self-esteem and self-confidence, but it's also related to the way we talk to ourselves when we are successful, when we fail, when we are alone because it's very solitary work sometimes. And I feel like those are the things we don't often talk about when we talk about consulting. We talk about business plans and marketing plans, value proposition, and all those things.

Deb Zahn: That's right. So this is that sort of hidden world that shouldn't be because, in my experience, it's the make it or break it for people to be willing to take the leap into consulting and then be willing to stick with it and not suddenly say, "Oh, no,

no, no. I have to have regular employment because this will never work," or "Oh, my God. I have to go right back to a regular job because this thing happened, and I couldn't weather it because it just fed on things that are inside of me that I haven't worked on."

Libby Wagner: Absolutely, Deborah. And I think too, you know, I mentor a few entrepreneurs each year, people who oftentimes are either leaving the corporate world and they want to start a consulting business or they have a consulting business, and they really want to accelerate it. One of the things that we talk about is how do they take care of themselves in terms of this world that is quite solo. It's not for everyone. It really isn't.

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Libby Wagner: And there's no shame in making a decision that you don't want to have this entrepreneurial life because it's quite erratic. If your work is erratic, then we want certain things that are grounding and stabilizing. Those can be internal, and they can be external, like family and support groups and things like that. But I think that's just really important. A lot of people don't think about that when they get ready to start a consulting business.

Deb Zahn: That's right because, at some point, your confidence is going to take a hit, and you want to be ready for it so that you can weather it. I'm curious. When you were sitting in the Allen Weiss workshop—and his stuff is great, and he's the million-dollar consultant—so you weren't just aiming high, you were aiming very high. How did you get from, "Oh my God, he's found me out, and he knows I'm having self-esteem things going on" to a different place? How did you get there?

Libby Wagner: Well, I think for me, I'm a constant learner and very curious, so I made sure I could stretch myself intellectually. And that was comfortable for me because I was an academic. I was like, "OK, there have to be books on this and there have to be steps and things I can do." Part of that helped me—some very practical, pragmatic ways of building a business, being in business for myself and knowing what to do, and talking to clients or setting fees—all those kinds of things you talk about on your podcast that are really important for consultants.

But I also think it began to be a relationship with what I would call radical self-care and also the right relationship to my livelihood. Because a lot of times what happens is, we leave a work life that we feel is overwhelming and soul sucking, and then we create a work life that is so overwhelming and soul sucking that we're like, "Why did I do this?" And so...

Deb Zahn: We replicated what's comfortable.

Libby Wagner: We do. And you've heard this, "Don't be a worse boss for yourself than you had before you left." Right? So part of what I did is that I paid close attention, and I

still do. It's a practice. And that's what I would say. I don't think we ever can just check things off the list and say, "Oh, I'm good. I'm done." But it's a practice. It's a practice of truly taking care of myself intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and in relationships so that I actually get to have the kind of life I want by also being a successful consultant.

There's no reason...I remember once I got the flu, and I was in a hotel in Atlanta. I had taken the trip even though I knew I wasn't feeling well, and I was trying not to cough by eating a bunch of throat lozenges. It was just a mess. We've all been there, right? But then I was like, "Wait a minute. This is not why I took the risk of being independent." I have to care for myself first. And I do think it's more than just making sure you take time off, which is important. I think it's radical self-care.

Deb Zahn: Yeah, I like that because then you're connecting with a bigger *why* of it's not just making a bunch of money. It's what life do you actually want to have, and then what are you willing to do to produce that in your life?

Libby Wagner: Yeah. I really, really love the work of Danielle LaPorte who is a Canadian woman who created a body of work called The Desire Map or Desire Mapping. When I work with my coaching clients, we begin there. That is what I mean by internal work. Because I'll give you a quick example. There was a woman who came to me, and she wanted a coach because she wanted to be a college president. She had been in the top 3 or 2 candidates for searches, maybe 4 or 5 times, and she wasn't making it past that last selection bit. So she thought, "Well, maybe I need a coach. Maybe there's something I'm doing, my behavior patterns, whatever."

But before we even got into any of that I said, "Why do you want to be a college president?" She looked at me like, "Are you new? Of course I would like it. It's the next step for me. It's the next wrung in my ascension and my professional development." But the truth is she didn't want to be a college president. She loved research and science and working with students because those were part of her desires.

Part of what we did was we looked at what do you want to experience more of in your life. And when you know that, then you can use it as a filter to be discerning about, "Oh, I want this client. I want this job. I want this time off. I want whatever those things are." I think sometimes we set empty goals based on external stimulation rather than internally what we really want.

Deb Zahn: Right. And then examining those carefully to make sure that they're accurate.

Libby Wagner: Absolutely.

Deb Zahn: ...and then devising a way to actually get it. That's the one side of the coin which is that radical self-care and how you relate to your livelihood. But this isn't just

navel-gazing—as I've heard some folks call it—just for the sake of it, or just so we figure out a way to feel better. It also makes us better consultants by a long shot.

Libby Wagner: Absolutely.

Deb Zahn: The excellent consultants I know are the folks that have done the internal work and who continue to do it. I love when we talked before—which my listeners didn't get a chance to hear—where you talked about getting clients or prospective clients to want to lean into you and to want to understand you. What are those things that clients or prospective clients want to experience, that you got to do the internal work in order to make that a reality for them?

Libby Wagner: I think one thing that I've been lucky in terms of my time with my clients and the development of my business is that one thing I say...If I said to you, "Deborah, when you think about your work, how often might you need to use the following skills: courage, noticing, remembering your humanity, and relationship?" Likely you'd say "What? How often do you have to use those things?"

Deb Zahn: "All morning long" would be my first answer.

Libby Wagner: All morning long, right. Exactly. Every day, right?

Deb Zahn: Every single day.

Libby Wagner: I stand in front of a group of scientists and I ask that same question. I stand in front of designers. I stand in front of people in information technology. And I say, "When do you have to use these things?" And they always give me that, "Well, all the time." OK, well, those are the same skills that poets use. Those are also the same skills that help us be fully present. I think part of the reason I have developed such long, high-trust relationships with my clients is that I work really hard to do that deep listening, to be courageous, to encourage them to do the same thing—to notice, to remember to be human.

Sometimes those skills people will call...I don't know what people call them. People used to call those kinds of things soft skills, which used to irritate me, but I don't really care anymore. They are those skills that there's a significant lack of them. You know?

Deb Zahn: Yeah.

Libby Wagner: All you have to do is just look around. I think when you get to have a working relationship with someone where you get to experience those things, it increases trust. It creates a sense of presence, and people then are willing to be vulnerable, to take risks, to share with you, "Hey, this is my really great idea, but

I don't know if I want to say it in front of all my team," or whatever. That edge, that threshold, that's where the good stuff is.

Deb Zahn: That's right. That is the work. I remember working with someone who I was mentoring, and she's like, "You know, I just feel like we could get so much done if it weren't for all the people." My answer was, "So the work we do with the people is the work, and we ain't switching the hamsters, so this is what we got."

Libby Wagner: Right.

Deb Zahn: And that is the difference between a consultant who just knows stuff and can show up and say, "I know these things," and a consultant who can show up and say, "I know these things. I also know how things work. I'm human. You're human. Let's figure this out, and let's get somewhere."

Libby Wagner: Absolutely.

Deb Zahn: I don't think you can do that effectively without those skills.

Libby Wagner: No. My friend and colleague, the poet, David Whyte, who is just really a thought leader...He wrote a book called *The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America* in 2002. So he's been having these conversations with organizations for a long time. But he talks about the conversational nature of reality. And the way I look at that when I talk with organizations, and this is what I would say...You hear them say, "Oh, we have so many meetings. We have so many meetings at work, and the meetings are keeping me from my work, and I can't stand it."

I always want to say, "Well, what's happening in those meetings? Because if those meetings aren't the work, then why are you having those meetings?" It's the same thing with we're not having conversations about the work. The conversations are the work.

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Libby Wagner: It's the same thing in any relationship. So the way you show up, the way I show up—with all our strengths and skills and baggage and all that stuff—that impacts every single outcome, every single project, everything. Knowing who we are when we show up there, and what really matters to us, helps us be congruent and present and grounded. And that kind of person, that kind of leader and consultant, is much more compelling than someone who's like all over the place, or in your face, or any of the other kind of personality traits that can show up.

Deb Zahn: That's right. Let's take a for example. One thing that most consultants hopefully will find themselves in is when they're meeting for the first time with a

prospective client. Hopefully they've done enough internal work ahead of time, but you still need to do it while you're sitting in that room with them.

Libby Wagner: Right.

Deb Zahn: You need to activate some of that. What is that like for you? What sort of internal work are you relying on in that particular scenario that you would encourage others to cultivate?

Libby Wagner: I'll tell you what I've done, and it has worked for me. Part of it relates to when I began speaking as a way of marketing my consulting services. I cannot concentrate or think about what I would call the sale. I don't think about it at all. When I go and speak in front of a group, I say two things to myself. I want to be a compelling person of interest. I want people to be attracted to me because I have something valuable that I'm giving. So I want to provide value and I want to become a person of interest.

I give people an opportunity. I would have an ask, or a card, or whatever. If you want to know more about...You know? So I have that kind of pragmatic thing there. But I also just know that if I show up, and I provide value, and I do my best, then those who need me will come to me.

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Libby Wagner: I really believe that. That's the first thing. Let's say I do something like that, and then someone does come and say, "Wow." I'm thinking about something that happened just a couple of months ago. I went to speak to a group about engagement and culture, and 3 potential clients came out of that event, 2 of whom I'm currently working with. What happened there? Well, that person was attracted to me, and they said, "Hey, I think I want to talk to you more about this." Then the internal work I do to show up there is, first of all, I get prepared. I look to find out whatever I can about that company online, and I read about it, and I see what's the language they're using to talk about themselves, that kind of thing.

I prepare really great questions because, mostly, what I'm going to do is listen. And I'm going to ask really great questions, and that's one of my strengths. And I'm going to be fully present. The other thing is the way I talk to myself, which is I'm also making a decision about whether I want to work with this person or this group. Is this a good fit? I don't entertain the idea of scarcity, and I don't pay any attention to my "competition." There's plenty of work to go around. I've never had a dip in my income or clients in the last 16 years even during our "recession." I just didn't think about it. I didn't allow myself to walk into a space with a client with a notion of scarcity.

I feel like that's what helps me be fully present to what's there. I hope I'm answering your question.

Deb Zahn: That's a great question because it triggers a few things. One is I'm the same way about scarcity. There's plenty of work to go around. If you focus on being really good at what you do and offering value, you aren't going to need to worry about it. But what I like about it is, first of all, if you walk into a prospective client meeting and you are soaking in any amount of scarcity, they can smell it, and they can sense it. And it changes the dynamic in the room.

But the other thing is with some of the prep you do. I do the same thing. And I like that I want to get interested and excited about who they are and what they do. So by the end of the meeting, if it's a fit for me and only if it's a fit for me, the feeling I truly have that's genuine is, "Let me at that. I would love to help you with that." If I feel that, and I've done the work ahead of time to help evoke that, they can tell. They can tell I care about their problem. They can tell I care about helping them do something that is in their true heart's desire and will really make their lives easier, in which case, there isn't a heavy transactional conversation after that.

Libby Wagner: Right. You're bringing up a couple of really important things. When I listen to you, first of all, one of the things you're doing is connecting unapologetically, Deborah, to your feelings.

Deb Zahn: Yeah.

Libby Wagner: If you follow kind of the traditional line of setting up a consulting business and all of that, there's plenty of information about all the pragmatics and all the tools. But there's not plenty of information about how you approach this emotionally and intuitively with who you are as a person. So you saying, "Wow, am I excited about this? How did I feel after that conversation?" Because there's a difference between—and I just went through this last year—"Yeah, I could do this project. I know how to do this," versus, "This is such a cool business, and I really connected with this person, and this is going to be fun, and I'm going to be compensated appropriately." All those things, that's listening to your internal voice when you recognize how you feel about something that just happened there.

I think sometimes we race past that because we're in that scarcity mindset, "Well, I just need this," or "I can do this with my eyes closed," or that kind of thing.

Deb Zahn: That's right. But then is that how you want to fill your days? Is that your sort of right livelihood is it just doing it to get some revenue coming in? One of the other places that I think internal work matters so much is, invariably in any

consultant's life—and I say this as someone who, one hour ago, experienced this—something's going to go wrong. The client's not going to be happy. Somebody's going to push back on something. There's going to be a mistake. You're going to miss a deadline. Something will happen and likely more than once.

And this is where I also find the internal work comes in handy. I'd love to hear your thoughts on when things go awry for whatever reason, what type of internal work you tap into to address that?

Libby Wagner:

Well, I think no one likes to make a mistake or feel like they failed at something. I don't like that anymore than anyone else. I think that one of the parts of my own spiritual practice is to participate in a 12 step program. Part of what I've learned through that program is to make amends. We make amends when we feel like we have caused harm in some way, but we only take responsibility for our part. We don't take responsibility for everybody else's part, and we don't take responsibility for things we didn't do. But we own it. We own whatever it is.

And I think in terms of my own clients and when things like that happen. I have the ability to step back and reflect and say, "OK, what's mine to do here? What do I need to own or how do I need to demonstrate understanding and compassion?" Because the most important thing is the relationship. That's the other thing I would say about the sales process. I've said to clients, "I'm creating a relationship here. We're just seeing if we want to work together. Let's just explore that and see how that feels."

I think when you do have the relationship the other thing is that no long-term relationship can be sustained without forgiveness; do-overs; oh wait a minute, that was mine, I dropped it. Any long-term relationship. So unless you have a consulting business that's all about transactions, totally event driven—you're there, you do your thing, you're gone—and that is a way to have a consulting business.

It's not my way. But you don't have to do do-overs, and you don't have to do those kinds of things. But I have really benefited from long-term relationships. And that means, when stuff goes wrong, I own my part. But I also tell the truth about what the client's part is. And we say, "Hey, can we work this out? Can we have a do-over? Can we begin again?"

Deb Zahn:

That's right. And I think it also goes back to what you were saying about self-esteem because I got a complaint earlier, which was legit actually, and I said I made a mistake, I owned my part, and I talked to them about what's going to be different going forward. But what I didn't do because of all the internal work I've done over the course of many years, is I didn't start to build a case against myself or against them. It's usually one or the other, or sometimes I get creative.

People get creative, and there's a combo. But I didn't turn that into "I'm bad. I'm not a good consultant. This is going to ruin my reputation, dot, dot, dot, dot, dot," carrying it out to some illogical conclusion.

Libby Wagner: Right.

Deb Zahn: And I also didn't say, "Well you know what? You did this and you did that." There was none of that. There was, "This is my part. Here's the mistake I made. Here's what's going to be different going forward." I didn't need to give excuses or reasons.

Libby Wagner: Right.

Deb Zahn: It was as simple as that.

Libby Wagner: Right.

Deb Zahn: And did it feel good? No. But did I turn it into something else by creating a whole narrative around it? No, I didn't. And that can be paralyzing if you haven't done that internal work to be able to weather mistakes without turning it into a story about somebody being bad.

Libby Wagner: Right. That's so good, and it speaks to your own internal and professional maturity, and that's part of that. What I would say as I'm listening to your story is that you demonstrated a lot of courage by being willing to be in that conversation. You demonstrated humanity and vulnerability by being able to say, "OK, you know what? Wow, we need to talk about this. This was my part, and where can we go to make this right or make this happen in a different way?"

I think the other thing is, no doubt, as you have time to reflect you will learn from this. There will be certain things you'll be like, "OK, I'm not doing that again," or "Oh, OK, look, this is what I will do again." I feel like when we get to a place where we can have loving detachment with ourselves, with other people, with our activities, then we can look at it with that whole human lens. This doesn't mean you're a bad consultant. This means you're a human consultant.

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Libby Wagner: I don't know about you, but I like working with full human beings. I'm more attracted to them, and I find there's more grace there and more chance for excellence and brilliance and all those things.

Deb Zahn: That's right, that's right. Because robots don't innovate.

Libby Wagner: They don't. No matter what they tell you.

Deb Zahn: One thing you also mentioned is that it's not a one-and-done experience like, "Excellent, I did my internal work. Check. Now I can go forth and conquer." It's really that continuous quality improvement process of ourselves and getting to know ourselves and how we respond to things. So what type of things do you do to do that sort of regular not just maintenance but also improvement?

Libby Wagner: One of the things I would say to you or say to the people who listen to your podcast is that sometimes I feel like we need indicators that help us understand like, "Oh, it's time to do some internal work," or "It's time to do some contemplation or reflection," or whatever it is. Usually, it's because we feel some kind of pain, distress, discomfort, or frustration. I have a model where I talk about change, but I like to call it divine discontent. You're like, "I don't like this," and anything from mildly annoying to, "Wow, this is really significantly impacting my life." Noticing that first and then saying, "OK, well, what will support me? What will help me?"

So for me, my gosh, I've used all different kinds of things. Certainly, at certain points in my life, I've used therapy or professional development work, meditation. But in my own life now, I regularly use journaling and writing. No surprise because I'm a writer. Right? But I also use it with all my clients. We reflect. We contemplate. We get quiet. I think walking is a totally underrated way of sorting out your internal life. Just simply being in the natural world and outside.

It's not just an idea. I actually just finished reading a book called Brain Wash, which was fascinating. I get obsessed with certain things. Right now I'm obsessed with brain detoxification. Anyway, I'm reading all kinds of books, but it's called Brain Wash. And it's all the science around what it is that detoxifies our brain.

Deb Zahn: Nice.

Libby Wagner: And one of those things that they now have a lot of research about is just literally being outside. The ways I get in touch with my internal self and the way I practice those things is in creating space in my life. Even just my calendar. I can't have back to back to back because I have no time for assimilation, no time for reflection. It's not good for my clients. It's not good for me.

I've written a couple of articles. One's called Triple Booked. You probably have all kinds of clients. I'm going to show up for 10 minutes at this meeting, and then I'm going to go 15 minutes late to this meeting, and then I'm going to... That way I can be at all these places at once. That just isn't good for anybody. Right?

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Libby Wagner: I think those are some of the practices. The other thing I think is to have your posse. You have your people, whoever those people are. They can be family members, colleagues, friends, mentors, prayer groups, mastermind groups. I think when you have a solopreneur life where you are by yourself a lot and you go into clients and companies a lot, you need people. We need people. Sometimes people have coaches because you don't want to burden your family with all of your reflection and processing. Sometimes people have those kinds of relationships with their partners and spouses. People, nature, reflection, walking.

Deb Zahn: I love it. Nature is a big one for me. I think this was a term that came out of Japan—forest bathing.

Libby Wagner: Yes, absolutely.

Deb Zahn: And I think of it as cleansing because if you pay attention to what's around you, it's really hard to get stuck in any of your stuff. I find it also works with animals too. I rescue a lot of cats, so I will hang out with a kitten, and I call it purr bathing.

Libby Wagner: Yeah, purrfect.

Deb Zahn: It's really hard, and dogs...

Libby Wagner: That was a pun on perfect. Yeah.

Deb Zahn: You can do it with anybody. If you don't have the moments of quiet, and if you do the triple book the same way you watch your clients do the triple book kind of nonsense, there will be no time for that internal work that's going to make you a better human being, a better consultant, more successful. Are there other ways you carve out time in your life to bring more balance to your life?

Libby Wagner: When I hired an assistant, which was 100% positive with one little whiny exception I have, which is now I don't get to have a paper calendar because I prefer a paper calendar. But having an electronic calendar helps because I can block time for writing. I can block time for I call it wellness. I can block time for personal things. I make particular rules like, for example, Monday is ordinarily what I would call admin day. I might schedule a couple of things that I want to just because it's easy for me to do it that day, but what I found early in my consulting career is I wasn't putting time down for those kinds of things. Then I was cramming in proposal writing and getting back to people in between a lot of other things.

I put my time for walking and exercising on my calendar. I make rules about my schedule. Now I break my own rules too, which is why I need all those practice

things that I do. The other thing I think that's really important is I have two things that I do. One is I really do treat each day as, "OK, what's this day going to be like and bring? How am I going to take care of myself and my clients today?"

The second thing is that sometimes when I feel myself in a sense of overwhelm or busy or big to-do is, I say to myself, "What's the next indicated thing, the very next thing?" I think that helps me also have that time for spaciousness. You probably will have someone who's much more expert be able to come on and talk to you about this. But I'm in the constant practice of having the right relationship to technology in my life. I actually went to the end of the year and made a decision to go and spend a week at a detox cleanse center just for myself—quiet time; whole, fresh foods; and meditation—because I just really wanted to end and begin my year in that way.

They had, for the first time, a tech detox element of this where there were no cell phones allowed and no technology anywhere. And I just fantasize about a life like that sometimes. Even in the same research I was telling you about—about what that does to our brains, the constant ping-pong, swiping, clicking, reminder thing. It really has a significant impact on our brains. We can't access our brilliant ideas when we're constantly, constantly stimulated in that kind of chronic adrenal drain.

Deb Zahn: Yeah, looking for the next dopamine hit when someone likes our Facebook page or something.

Libby Wagner: Right. I think it's complicated. I think we need to be conscious about it and use technology as a tool and use it well. I'm not going to get on that soapbox right now. But that's another thing I really try to do. I don't have any television or technology in my bedroom at night. Those things that you think, "Oh, yeah, that's so common sense," but you know what? We don't do them.

Deb Zahn: Yeah. I like thinking about it. I like the term detox, which you're using. We don't always necessarily think of it as things are toxifying us until it builds up, and then we feel it because now we feel like crap. One thing I've sort of vowed to do is I don't check work emails first thing in the morning when I wake up and I'm lying in bed. I don't do it. Because if I do, now I'm in a completely different space, and that's my time to get up, spend time with my husband, meditate. I also journal. I think that's a really transformative thing to check in with what's going on with my internal world.

Libby Wagner: Right.

Deb Zahn: If I get into routines—even if, in the moment, they don't feel like they're switching things up in a way that I don't want, then it's too easy to just let that be the next thing that happens and the next thing that happens until you get

completely overwhelmed by it, and you don't actually want the life that you've constructed.

Libby Wagner:

Right. Exactly. You know what you're reminding me of too? You're not mentioning it, but I'm thinking about it—there's also this relationship to our artistry and our creativity. That is a very particular way that we can have an internal work and internal conversation. I wrote a book about 5 years ago called *Somehow*, which is a collection of poems. But it's different because on one page is the actual poem itself, and on the other page I wrote the notes, the backstory. And the reason I did that is because I would be speaking or working with groups—and I use poetry all the time—and sometimes people are super excited about it, and sometimes they're like, "Oh, my God. This is weird, and I don't know if I can deal with this woman."

But what would happen over and over and over is people would come up to me, and they would whisper; they would be like, "OK, I'm not really a poetry person, but I really like that thing you did." Then they would begin confessing to me, "I used to write poetry. I used to play music. I used to paint. I used to whatever. And I'm not doing it anymore because I'm so busy, because my to-do list is overpowering."

So many of us have lost touch with...Every 6-year-old thinks they're an artist, an opera singer, a painter. And then, over time, we lose connection with that. And that's a very different part of our brain and a different part of our internal voice and soul and whatever you want to call that thing. That's another thing that I would tell you I do that's about my own internal work. All those things help us show up in our consulting work differently. And people are attracted to people who are calm and grounded or enthusiastic or centered. It's like being a magnet truly.

Deb Zahn:

Yeah. I couldn't agree more, and I've seen it time and time again that internally...It's almost like I want to say, "Do the work. The work will set you free. And, by the way, you're the work."

Libby Wagner:

Yes, that's it. There, that's your book. You write that book.

Deb Zahn:

There you go. I got that. You've got the other ones.

Together I think we've said it. I can't thank you enough for coming on the show and sharing this because in order to do this work, you do have to be vulnerable, and it's so critical to being excellent at what you do. I thank you so much for all the tips and guidance on how other folks can do it.

Libby Wagner:

Well, you're so very welcome. It's my pleasure. I hope people find some value today and maybe just even one thing that maybe you need to try that gets you connected and allows you to show up as more yourself with more of your own

voice in those client relationships and in the relationships you have with others in your life too.

Deb Zahn: Perfect. Thank you so much.

Thanks so much for listening to this episode of the Craft of Consulting Podcast. I want to ask you to do three things. If you enjoyed this episode or any of my other podcasts, hit subscribe. I've got a lot of other great guests and content coming up, and I don't want you to miss anything. The other two things I'm asking you to do—one is, if you have any comments, suggestions, or other feedback that will help make this podcast more helpful to more listeners, please include those in the comments section. And then the last thing is, if you've gotten something out of this, please share it. Share it with somebody you know who's a consultant or thinking about being a consultant, and make sure they also have access to all this great content and the other great content that's coming. As always, you can get more wonderful information and tools at [craftofconsulting.com](http://craftofconsulting.com). Thanks so much. I will talk to you on the next episode. Bye-bye.