**Episode 65: Preparing to Take the Leap into Consulting—with Veronica Sagastume**

Deb Zahn: Hi. I want to welcome you to this week's episode of the Craft of Consulting podcast. If you've been dreaming of being a consultant, and you're thinking it's time for you to make that switch or of the economic downturn, you suddenly have to make that decision and you need to make sure that it works and it works fast, this is the episode for you. I'm going to talk with my guest, Veronica Sagastume, who helps accounting professionals figure out how to take all of their fantastic experience and turn it into a successful consulting business online. She's going to break down step by step what you need to do to prepare to be a consultant so the minute you enter the market you are ready to have a really successful business. So, so much terrific information in here that you can start using immediately, so let's get started.

Hi. I want to welcome my guest today, Veronica Sagastume. Welcome to the show.

Veronica Sagastume: Thank you, Deb. I am beyond excited to be here with you you and I have been talking prior to this interview, so I can't wait for this conversation.

Deb Zahn: Oh, me too. I've been so excited about this. So, let's start off. Tell my listeners what you do.

Veronica Sagastume: I want to take a step back from what I do right now. Because I would say my journey to entrepreneurship started at the end of 2010 when I left my 20-year corporate executive position as a CFO and COO in corporate America and I started my CFO consulting practice here in the Bay Area in the Silicon Valley.

Through that consulting practice one of my responsibilities that I would get hired for was to staff up the accounting, finance, operations department. As I would interview candidates they were more interested in what I was doing as a consultant. They would always want to know, “How are you doing this? How did you get into it?” All the questions. It wasn't until, I think, end of 2015, beginning of 2016 that I decided to expand my consulting business to the online space to be able to have a greater reach and make a deeper impact. But to start working with the corporate professionals, especially in the accounting, tax, finance arena to help them monetize their experience by starting a consulting business, which is essentially what I had done back in the end of 2010, beginning of 2011.

That is my primary focus now, even though I still have a few clients here in the Bay Area in the Silicon Valley as their interim CFO and help them throughout the years. I am on a retainer with them. They're my loyal, loyal, loyal clients. My focus is working with corporate professionals, that's what I'm doing now.

Deb Zahn: I love that, and I know the moment you're talking about when people start asking you, and I've had the experience a few times where almost like they look at me like, “Take me with you.” There's a huge need out there, and I'm so delighted that you're helping folks. Do you remember how you got your first client?

Veronica Sagastume: Oh, yes. My first client was actually...You are in the consulting world, as well, and I'm sure you hear this a lot, it is my last corporate employer. I went and spoke to the CEO and I sort of explained to him where I was at. I knew that me leaving, or giving two weeks, was going to put the company in an uncomfortable position, let's just say that. No one is irreplaceable. We're all replaceable, but it was not the best timing. So, I give him a proposal how I could transition from a full-time employee to a part-time consultant. My proposal included that I would stay on long enough to help him find my replacement and make the transition however long that took. But, that last full-time employer became my very first paying consulting client in a part-time basis so that I could then go out and seek other consulting work and with other clients.

Deb Zahn: That's so smart. I've seen other folks who have been wise enough to do that they already know how good you are, so why wouldn't they be your first client.

Veronica Sagastume: They could see the benefit of help me staying on long enough...It's also how you position it, right? You could serve it up in a really disgruntled, or “I'm done I don't want to do this anymore” way. Or you could say, “Hey. I'm making some changes and I would like to do the right thing by the business, by you, and here's how we can do it so it's a win/win for both of us.” It's always how you present it.

Deb Zahn: That's fantastic, and it starts to build your reputation in the market as a consultant, which is great. Now, we wanted to talk today about the all-important preparing to become a consultant. So what you do before you make that leap. As we had talked about it, it's always important but now with COVID it's...When people are either jumping ship because they realize that corporate life is not as stable as they thought it was, or they lost their jobs and it's either now is the moment to do what they've always wanted to do, or now they have to do it out of necessity. I know you have a great process of taking people through figuring out how to do it in the correct way. Let's start with the first step which is to decide. So how do you encourage folks to decide to become a consultant? What are the types of things you have them consider?

Veronica Sagastume: It's true. Right now in this environment, whether it's through, what is it like, whether it's by choice or not by choice, the choice was made for them. They have to not be paralyzed by fear, or be unprepared, paralyzed by fear is what that is. There are things you can do. Yes, I do have a framework and one of them is I help them to decide if it's time to leave corporate America and to sort of assess where they're at in their life. Is there a life event that's coming up that they need to have more flexibility, more freedom, or are they creating something of their very own? Have they started...I ask them to look for signs of: Are you a little bit bored? Are you bored with what you're doing, the repetitiveness? Especially in the world of accounting, let me just say. Is it month end again? Oh my god.

Deb Zahn: But, it's the most sexy profession. What are you talking about?

Veronica Sagastume: It's funny you say that because whenever in my corporate life I would have to give some presentation or company meeting, and I would say, “OK, now for the sexy talk.”

Deb Zahn: I love it. I love it.

Veronica Sagastume: Bring some humor to a topic that's not always…it's not sales and business development, but there we go. So I help them to recognize things in their life, take assessment of where are you at? How are you feeling? Are you bored, or are you frustrated because you're in a rut? Are you frustrated with the contributions you're making, or how you're not being utilized to your potential? How you may be overlooked for some reason or another. We've all been in those positions where maybe we're not the manager's first choice and you're so ready to contribute, you're so ready to be part of that project but they are not seeing you as that resource.

So I ask them to take assessment of where they're at. How they're feeling. What are they frustrated with? What are they craving? There comes a point where you start to crave something of your very own. Building something of your own. So we start with that. Then we move on to...If we're talking about preparedness there is the figuring out what kind of consultant do you want to be? Not all consultants are the same. Sometimes for me becoming an independent consultant was attractive to me. But I also was part of consulting agencies where they were doing all the marketing, and they were finding the clients, and then they would hire me out as a consultant. So, there's so many different ways that you could enter the arena of consulting, right Deb?

Deb Zahn: Oh, yeah. No, I've done both. Let me jump back because I love, love, love that you start with what your why is. Because if you don't know that all of the trials, and tribulations, and frustrations, and missteps, like all the things that are going to happen along the way towards success are going to be hard to take and whether if you're not really clear about what is motivating you to do this and make this significant choice in your life. I think that's a fantastic place to start.

Veronica Sagastume: Exactly. Just to add a little bit of my own why. Back in the day when I decided to leave my corporate executive position that comes with a lot of perks as well as a lot of stress. A lot of people had an opinion about it. Even though I didn't ask them for their opinion they gave it to me. In my case my grandparents all raised me, but my grandmother...I had one grandmother left and she had broken her ankle and she needed a lot of physical therapy. She and I had a very special relationship and I knew that I could get her physical therapy accelerated, like I could get her to do things that the physical therapist was not going to let her do. I started to resent having to explain why I needed the time off, asking for the time off. Thank goodness that I had the self-awareness to realize.

This is my grandmother. She was in her early 90s when that happened. I knew she wasn't going to be around forever. I didn't want work to be the thing that kept me away from her. So, having that resentment helped me to realize I need to do something else how am I going to feel when she is no longer around? The choices that I made? That life event could look very differently for wherever you're at, when you're assessing like where are you at in that life, your life or your cycle, that journey. It could be a young child. You want to stay at home and be a stay-at-home mom and nurture your young family. In my case taking care of an elderly parent who needed me because she gave so much to me. I'm the person I am because of her. So it was my time to give back to her. I am so...That was one of the best decisions I have ever made in my entire life. Never looked back.

Deb Zahn: I love that. I have a similar situation where I worked. I left the work of steady employment and went to a consulting firm, which was the best possible version of a consulting firm I could have gone to. I had a lot of freedom, autonomy, but we moved my mom here from Nebraska. My mom and my stepfather. And he, within a few years, passed away and it was really tough for all of us. So my mom is here and it's me and my husband. She's actually in great shape. She kayaks. She bikes. She's like this crazy jock. It's embarrassing for me and my choices of exercise. That's when I want to spend time with her. That's when I want more freedom and flexibility because I don't want to wait until it's all about doctor's appointments and logistics.

Veronica Sagastume: Exactly.

Deb Zahn: I want to be able on a Wednesday to get into a kayak and go hang out with my mom on a lake. If I didn't do that, similar to what you're saying, I knew I would regret it. Because you can't get that time back.

Veronica Sagastume: You can't, and those become those priceless, precious, perfect moments. That's what I would refer to my three Ps with my grandmother because I had her for years and years after that and I was so grateful because it was the best time. And it's not having those regrets. Not beating yourself up later. Make better choices when you can. So that goes back to, again, it could be something different other than consulting. But for me, and it sounds like to you, also, is making the transition from corporate America into a consulting world.

Deb Zahn: That's great. Then is the next piece, which you had mentioned, which is there's lots of different ways to be a consultant. You could go to a firm of any size there's all different types and versions, agencies. You could be independent. So figuring out what works best for you. What do you have them consider when they're trying to make that decision?

Veronica Sagastume: It's about, I think, considering the, like you just say, autonomy. The freedom of you as an independent consultant, or if you're wanting to build your own consulting agency, you are in control of the clients that you book. You are in control of the framework that you design. The systems that you use and how you deliver. When you work for an agency, for a consulting agency, you're trading your corporate job for another type of job, even though you're a consultant.

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Veronica Sagastume: The agency will tell you who your client is, what your role is. So you see how it depends on your personality and what you're looking for next to make that transition. For some people, man, going to a consulting agency is an incredible opportunity to learn how to do something. How to set it up. And also what not to do. So it's a great opportunity whatever you want to decide to do, it's based on your personality and also, I think, on your experience. How much experience you have versus how much more do you need in order to feel confident that you can venture out on your own, truly.

Deb Zahn: And your risk tolerance. There are some folks where stability just means everything to them, in which case you could suffer a lot if you're an independent consultant and you're stressed about that all the time.

Veronica Sagastume: Exactly. Well, let's talk about that because that's part of the preparedness. I do talk to them about when is the timing? I'm skipping in my framework a few steps, but what is the right time to truly leave corporate America depends also on building up a reserve, a cash reserve.

Deb Zahn: Hallelujah.

Veronica Sagastume: Because the cash reserve, as we all know in the consulting world, the payment...We can do a lot of things to protect ourselves with a contract but the client, that payment cycle could hurt you, your cash flow.

Deb Zahn: Oh, yeah.

Veronica Sagastume: Yeah, right? Two weeks, two months, it doesn't matter. If you don't have the cash reserves to help you weather that storm, which it's inevitable, we all go through it. By building up your reserve, it allows you to have the freedom to not worry about that so you could still show up and do your best, service your client. As well as focus on prospecting and having other consultation calls, or network, so that you are not constantly worried and having to pick. So that's the other thing. It's like if you don't have that cash reserve you're going to be in that panic mode, and you're going to take on any client and some of those clients will be your less than ideal client. I was going to say nightmare. Yeah, I won't say it.

Deb Zahn: Or, you can't do good work because...

Veronica Sagastume: You can't do good work.

Deb Zahn: ...you're not the right person to do it.

Veronica Sagastume: Exactly.

Deb Zahn: This is why I feel like we have a responsibility to tell people the truth. So when I switched to being an independent consultant there are invoices from 2019 that I still have not been paid for. That's not unusual. So I happen to do work for a State. They know who they are. They know I love them, but we now joke about how long it's taken me to get paid. That's the wheels of government. That's what happens. Academia, forget about it. If you get paid within a year you are like celebrating, and it doesn't necessarily matter what's in a contract. So I've had other guests who have come on say, sometimes it's a big company and you say, “Yeah, but it's supposed to be net 90 days.” And they're like, “Well, aren't you adorable?” That's the reality, which is why I so appreciate you brought up the cash reserve, as you have to prepare for that as a reality.

Veronica Sagastume: Exactly. What a beautiful time to do that. There's two worlds that an employee can be living in right now. You are either, through no fault of your own good people doing a great job are losing their jobs right now...

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Veronica Sagastume: ...in this environment due to COVID-19, and just all the things that we're seeing, whether you're being laid off, or furloughed, or just plain out terminated. It doesn't matter. But if you're still in your job think of your employer as your angel investor. They're paying you while you're getting ready and preparing for this transition that you're going to want to expand to. Because you can absolutely start consulting while still at your 9-5. I love how we call it 9-5. I don't know about you, Deb, but I rarely worked 9-5. It's more like 7-7.

Deb Zahn: And then a little kayaking in between.

Veronica Sagastume: A little kayaking in between. Absolutely. So, that's the caveat of preparing. Knowing what to prepare. It's not just about building your skillset or networking and nurturing your network, or the contacts in your network. It's also about putting money aside for starting a business. You can't start a business on free. And it's not just about starting the business. It's about also the cash flow of the paying clients.

Deb Zahn: Thank you. That's wonderful. So that's part of the timing. I know that you really encourage folks to have a plan, and timing is a piece of that. What else is part of the plan that folks should put together?

Veronica Sagastume: To be thinking about what is it that they want to offer because a lot of times we know how to do a lot of things. We know how to create, develop, maintain. It's about also thinking about what is your ideal workday? What are you excited about? What do you love to do? What can you do but you don't love so much? Knowing yourself is so important because the worst thing that I think you could do is create a consulting business full of clients that you don't like to work with doing work that you don't enjoy. You might as well stay in corporate for that.

Deb Zahn: Stay in your job if you're going to do that.

Veronica Sagastume: So, it's about taking inventory of your skills, your experience, your knowledge, and then going through that and being very diligent about saying, “Love it. I know how to do it. I'm good at it, but I don't love it anymore. And I hate it.” Do not put a service offer of things that you either hate or are not excited to do. It will show. That's part of the preparing for this new business venture. Whether it's...Let's just say you're going to have one part-time consulting client doing one thing. What is that one thing that you're going to just be like you can't wait to get home to your home office and work on it. Do that.

So create a service offer where it allows you to use your creativity. That you bring your experience, your skillset, and that you are going to love and be excited about, able to translate. The other thing that goes with that is think about who it is that you want to work with. Who is going to be just as excited to get your service? It works both ways. That ideal client that we all allude to. That ideal client could be someone that you already know, have worked with in the past, knows your work. It doesn't have to be somebody that you worked with directly but just somebody that may be excited to pick your brain but to pay you while they're picking your brain.

Deb Zahn: That's exactly right. I think thinking through that then helps you because there's a lot of times once somebody enters a market there's often hesitancy to sell your services. So if you do that work...First of all, if you have a reserve you take away some of your desperation.

Veronica Sagastume: Yes. Desperation is the right word there, yes.

Deb Zahn: That's right. If you've worked through that now when you're showing up you're showing up to the right people. And you're showing up excited, which they're going to feel. And they're going to say, “Wow. They're on fire for this work.” And it's going to be true. You're not faking it they can tell.

Veronica Sagastume: Absolutely. It makes me think of this one client of mine. She lived, breathed, slept, ate, taxes. I have never seen, or met anyone, be so excited about the new tax law, and the new tax forms. Her excitement was contagious.

Deb Zahn: Now you love taxes.

Veronica Sagastume: I love taxes. It also made me feel so confident that she loved it so much, she was so passionate about it, that she was going to just do a great job for me. As a result, I referred other people to her because her enthusiasm was beyond just being happy about it. It exuded her passion. Her experience. Her knowledge. That's what I want to make sure that anybody considering a career as a consultant, in starting a consulting business, that you know how to create a service offer. A package that you're going to be excited about. Because your clients are going to be excited to work with you. And they will refer you to others.

Deb Zahn: Oh yeah.

Veronica Sagastume: That's the beauty of it.

Deb Zahn: They'll become essentially your marketing arm, which is what I've found.

Veronica Sagastume: Exactly.

Deb Zahn: Now, I also like how you didn't start with revenue goals, which is what I've seen sometimes in other places. Like how much money you want to make as one of the first questions. And I really like that you put that further down in your process. So how does that show up and how do you help people think through that?

Veronica Sagastume: I think part of it is also going...It ties into the timing of when they would like to leave that corporate job. As well as the cash reserves, being very realistic. I'm in the numbers game. I love numbers because numbers paint a picture. A realistic picture. Not the budget and forecast where...I've never seen a budget where the salespeople are like, “We're going to sell 10,000 widgets.” When in reality we've only sold 1000 in the past, and the jump from 1000 to 10,000 is a big leap.

Deb Zahn: It's magical.

Veronica Sagastume: It's magical.

Deb Zahn: Pixie dust.

Veronica Sagastume: Exactly. So by working with the person who is thinking about it, and working through the cash reserve, and working through the plan, and the service offer, and even pricing it, then working towards the revenue goal. That's how it ties in. It's like, how much do you need in order to make it as a consultant, either on a part-time basis or as you start to transition from a full-time employment to part-time, and then start consulting on the side? How much money do you need to live? And how much money do you need to run the business? It's a formula.

So often they just come up with one number and it's like, no, no, no. You need money to pay your bills, personal bills. And then you need money to invest in your business to then be able to deliver, run, grow the business. So we sit down to kind of map out what those revenue goals are in order to not only just meet the minimum but to have a little bit of a reserve, as well. Because that's the thing. If you don't have a roadmap, if you don't have some sort of mapping, or guideline, that you're trying to get to you'll never get there. You'll always come short.

Deb Zahn: That's right. Because you're going to end up doing scattershot things because you don't have a real plan. So where then does the pricing model, and price, fit in to that? Again, I've seen consultants start with, “Well, I think I could do this for X.” I could charge X per hour because I don't have confidence in what I'm doing is usually the reason that number's picked. Or they have way too much confidence and they pick a whack-a-doodle number. Where does that come into the planning?

Veronica Sagastume: I'm going to give you one more, the ones who are in their job they'll just take their salary and then divide by hours and then that's what they're going to charge. I'm like, OK. It's OK, if you don't know better that's what you go out with, and you learn the hard way that that is just not even the case. So pricing as you know, Deb, we as consultants know, we want to get away from the trading hours for dollars.

Deb Zahn: Yes.

Veronica Sagastume: We say it both ways, dollars for hours, hours for dollars. It's still trading time for money.

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Veronica Sagastume: We want to have it more be on project-based. But we as the experts have to realize how much time is it going to take and build some cushion in there because things happen. Whether it's a tech issue, or a delay, or something happens where it takes you a little bit longer. So it's really important to build that in there.

Deb Zahn: I call it the drama cushion, which I will admit.

Veronica Sagastume: You know what, I'm going to have to borrow that. Can I borrow that to use?

Deb Zahn: Take it. Take it.

Veronica Sagastume: The drama cushion.

Deb Zahn: The drama cushion.

Veronica Sagastume: It is absolutely right. We know, again, as experienced consultants ourselves we know it's inevitable. It happens. What you don't want to do is...Again, there's a sweet spot. You don't want to undercharge or overcharge. I think that there's a path to take early on because you don't have the confidence, or the social proof. And social proof meaning you haven't had a client that you've got results for. Once you do that first one, or second one, give yours some leeway that maybe your pricing will be a little bit lower than it should be based on what other people are doing in the market. Based on what systems that they're using, or the timing that they're delivering the product, or the service, in. You can start at a pricing that's above what you're making. Maybe that's competitive with what is in the market.

As soon as you have social proof, meaning you got one or two clients that you got the results that you wanted, and that they can give you a testimonial, you can raise your price no problem. Keep increasing it that's the thing. It's like...Here's a sign I always use. When I give a price, or I say what the fee is going to be and they say, "Oh, sure no problem." Then you know.

Deb Zahn: It's too low. Darn it.

Veronica Sagastume: Too low. It's too low. They're like...In their mind they're thinking, “Is that it?”

Deb Zahn: Score.

Veronica Sagastume: Score. Exactly. There's a time and place for that. I can think of the very first few clients outside of my first client being the employer that I converted from my employer to my first paying consulting client. The following ones, the ones that followed, they were more like I gave them what I called my friends and family fee.

Deb Zahn: Yes, I've done that.

Veronica Sagastume: What I did is in my contract I said, that fee was for the first three months...

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Veronica Sagastume: ...and then we would renegotiate by then we both knew that it is this a good fit. Is it a good working relationship? Then, you're not stuck in that fee. It was a much lower fee than I would have charged normally but I was looking for recommendations for proof for a track record to even prove to myself so I could feel more confident in being able to go out there and price that fee. So it depends on what service offer. Again, we go back to an earlier step, which is think about the service offer you're going to be creating. In my world of accounting it could be developing a budget, an Excel spreadsheet to develop your budget, or it could be setting up financial statements in your accounting software system. Whatever it is, it could be very project-based. There's a start and an end. You know. You can ask a few questions. That intake questionnaire becomes so relevant at that point, so that then you can quote a good price.

Deb Zahn: That's right, based on an understanding of what the value is to them. Yeah, I was actually thinking about this the other day because I like what you're saying in terms of increase it over time. But there's also a reason not to trade time for money if your value is not your time. So your time is not your value, right?

Veronica Sagastume: Right.

Deb Zahn: I love that you put that, and the reality is one of the reasons it should go up over time is the more engagements you have the more valuable you become.

Veronica Sagastume: Exactly.

Deb Zahn: So if you charge hourly, it's occurred to me, actually yesterday, if you charge hourly actually as you become more valuable your price is actually going down because you can do things much faster than you used to be able to do it. So your price is actually going down...

Veronica Sagastume: Exactly.

Deb Zahn: ...if that's how you're charging. That makes no sense when your value's going up.

Veronica Sagastume: It's so counterintuitive, though. In the beginning, especially like if you want the client, you want the fee, you want to be able to send the invoice and get paid. So you start to shy away from that understanding of, the more valuable you are the faster you do it. Like you just said, the less you're charging if you do the hourly thing.

Deb Zahn: It was a painful moment...

Veronica Sagastume: Yeah, it is.

Deb Zahn: ...when I realized that I've been actually, I've done that before. So, what other planning things do you throw in the mix that you think folks need to do?

Veronica Sagastume: This one is not as tangible, and it is the mindset.

Deb Zahn: Oh, yeah.

Veronica Sagastume: We can talk ourselves out of doing something really well. You can come up with 10 reasons as to why it's not the right time. You don't have enough experience. All those little voices of doubt will keep you from taking a chance on yourself for pursuing something that you'd really like, like starting your own business. It will keep you stuck. You have to work on your mindset. That means believing in yourself. Debunking misbeliefs. Looking for proof that you are qualified. You are experienced. You have services that people will pay for. So go out and prove that to yourself. You have to also believe that you are more than capable to do this. If you don't believe it go out and look for it. Listen to podcasts like this. Go read a book. Enroll in a class that will help you to improve the thoughts that you have the thoughts that we have impact the decisions that we make and the actions that we take ultimately.

Deb Zahn: That's right. I was working with someone recently who we had a great conversation. Super excited. Within a day, she had started to talk herself out of living the dream of being a consultant she immediately started doing the, “I can't, I can't, I can't.” And my response back to her is, I said, “We haven't done enough planning for you to make that determination. So why don't you put that on hold and let's talk about some mindset things. But also suspend that for a bit until you walk through some of the details and you start to see how doable it is. Just give yourself a minute.”

Veronica Sagastume: I know. I'm asking the question, “Well, is that real or is that a story you're telling yourself?” Because I've had to go and do some of that work as well, with all the experience that I had in my corporate career. Because I was extending into the online world. It was a whole new world. A new language. Everything was new. It was one of those things, “Am I too old to do this? What am I doing?” It's like you start to question yourself. Then I'm like, “Well, why don't I just give myself...” I allowed myself to give it a try. I was going to give it six months. Forget it. It took 30 days. And it only took 30 days because even when I extended online, I didn't even have a Facebook account. I was one of those people who was like, “Aw, LinkedIn is fine. That's all I need.”

Deb Zahn: That's right. Wow.

Veronica Sagastume: So I would say the preparedness. Yes, we can look, inventory our skills, inventory our experience, look at the context in our network. Who is going to be a good ideal client? What service offer can we prepare? How much money should I put aside? Then, none of that will come into play and matter if your mind continues to tell you that you can't do it.

Deb Zahn: That's right. We could do...I feel like I need to have you come back because we could do an entire podcast on mindset and the narratives that we create about what we can and cannot do. The thing I always tell people is, “Are you building a case against yourself? Finding things and piecing them together to decide that this is your story? As opposed to authoring your own story?”

Veronica Sagastume: I love that. Perfect. Well said.

Deb Zahn: OK, you're going to have to come back because we got...I love this. So let me ask you this. Is there anything that you tell folks absolutely do not do this?

Veronica Sagastume: Don't say yes to everything that comes your way.

Deb Zahn: Oh, yeah.

Veronica Sagastume: Don't say yes. Don't be in that desperate mode feeling like you need to say yes to that client. To that, “Oh would you mind? Could you? Would you happen to know?” Those sentences never lead you to a right path. So I would say don't say yes to everything that comes your way. That's just one of my best pieces of advice.

Deb Zahn: If someone asks you for something and you start to say, “Well, I guess I could.” Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. That tells you shouldn't do that.

Veronica Sagastume: Catch yourself. Catch yourself.

Deb Zahn: Does COVID change anything in terms of preparation? Has that world changed how you're talking to people about preparing?

Veronica Sagastume: It has changed. I've had so many conversations where there are days when I say, "I'm Zoomed out."

Deb Zahn: Oh, yeah. That's a verb, though.

Veronica Sagastume: Exactly. I'm Zoomed out. Can we just hop on an actual call on the telephone? Anyway, but the conversations have changed. Because I think people are willing to take a risk more so now than before. Because they were under this belief that they had a secure job. That secure job is no longer secure, even if you were able to ride the wave of the furloughed people, or the layoffs. Even if you still have a job right now, you could be in the next wave of those layoffs. So I think people are a lot more willing to take a chance. To be open to learning online. Or to having a strategy call. I have found it so much easier now to invite people to a Zoom conference call, or a strategy call this is our new norm right now.

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Veronica Sagastume: Whereas before they were, “Oh, I don't really like being on video.” And whatever the excuse was, or the resistance. That has gone away. I haven't had any of that. Also, just to say I have found that the conversations are a lot easier now in terms of willing to take a risk, willing to show up to learn something different. To get out of their comfort zone and realizing that they need to expand their revenue by looking at other opportunities. So, yeah, COVID-19, I think, has accelerated people's willingness to look at other opportunities outside of their, using air quotes for their “secure job,” because that is no longer a secure path.

Deb Zahn: I've seen the same thing, and I love it. It actually makes me...I'm sad that it's this, this thing is happening. This is an outcome of it that actually I think is going to be helpful for people's lives. So, speaking of people's lives, I got to ask you the balance question. We love our work but also, work is a part of our lives. It's not the whole thing. So how do you bring balance to your life?

Veronica Sagastume: You're right. It can't be all about work. That's the best way to achieve burnout and to actually hate your life. And who wants to do that? I definitely don't. I call it my SBC. Structure, boundaries, commitment.

Deb Zahn: Right. I love that.

Veronica Sagastume: It has served me so well. And I go back to my beautiful grandmother. Because she...It was through her lessons and her teachings, and my relationship with her, that allowed me to know that by having structure, and those boundaries, and commitment, it allowed me to have freedom and flexibility, in order for me to know when I could work. When I was willing to work. Or when I needed to work. And also when I needed to be present for my family, or a friend. I have friends that I've had 35, 40, or longer years. It's important for you, for me, to show up for them as a best version of myself. I can't do that if I am all about work 24/7. Almost showing up to whatever event, or whatever circumstance, or just even a life, and showing up resentful because I'd rather be working. We need to just think about that.

So having structure in my life, and what I mean by that is I know what my work days look like and having my meals with my partner, Eric, breakfast. Right now it's breakfast, lunch, and dinner because we're home.

Deb Zahn: That's the world.

Veronica Sagastume: We always, even from day one, we've been together for over 15 years, and from day one we said we wanted to start the day out together. Lucky me he likes to cook so we have breakfast together. And we talk about our day. We talk about just what's going on in the world, or even listen to music. Our dog, our 14 and ½-year-old dog, is right by our side. We don't take that for granted. We know that what we have is something that we have both made a commitment to doing in order for us to then refill that tank. And that gets depleted throughout the day as we get busy with life. And with business. And with work. Yeah, there's structure, boundaries, and commitment. The boundaries piece is more for clients but also with some family members.

Deb Zahn: Of course. I got that.

Veronica Sagastume: We know who they are. Then, also, the commitment that I make to myself. It's out of that self-integrity. So quick. We're so quick to break a promise to ourselves. It means that somebody else...If we don't have those boundaries. If somebody comes our way, whether it's somebody of influence, whether it's a boss, a client, or a family member who does have seniority, or a lot of influence in our lives. We're quick to maybe think that it's OK to break a promise to ourselves. So we need to be careful with that because that's our character. That's our value, our core values that we live by. If we continuously break those promises to ourselves it's not going to be a good relationship. We're not going to feel good about how we're showing up in our lives on a daily basis. So, yeah, it's a work in progress. I'm constantly doing it because some seasons are better than others.

Deb Zahn: Oh, yeah. To me it's add curiosity to it because I'm amazed at how clever I am at breaking my own boundaries, or removing structure that's actually really helpful to me. I am extraordinarily creative in how I do those things. I need to always pay attention and go, “Huh, that was an interesting choice.”

Veronica Sagastume: You need to write some sort of article, or maybe make a podcast, out of that. Of, like, all the warnings. It's like what not to do, or watch out for these. Are you doing this? That's a sign.

Deb Zahn: That's right. Use that creativity in some other way. Well, Veronica, thank you so much for joining me on this podcast. This is, I think, going to be so helpful for people who are dreaming it and want to do it, and you can, you just got to prepare and you got to do it right. So thank you so much for sharing that great wisdom with us.

Veronica Sagastume: My pleasure. This has been a wonderful conversation. I always love talking to you so this was no different. I'm so happy to have been here with you in sharing this time with you. Thank you.

Deb Zahn: Wonderful. Thanks so much for listening to this episode of the Craft of Consulting Podcast. I want to ask you to do actually three things. If you enjoy this episode or you've enjoyed any of my other ones, hit subscribe. I got a lot of other great guests that are coming up and a lot of other great content, I don't want you to miss anything. But the other two things that I'm going to ask you to do is one is, if you have any comments, so if you have any suggestions or any kind of feedback that will help make this podcast more helpful to more listeners, please include those.

And then the last thing is, again, if you've gotten something out of this, share it, share it with somebody you know who's a consultant or thinking about being a consultant, and make sure that they also have access to all this great content and all the other great content that's going to be coming up.

So as always, you can go and get more wonderful information and tools at craftofconsulting.com. Thanks so much, I will talk to you on the next episode. Bye-bye.