**Episode 60: Cultivating an Audacious Consulting Career through Leveraging Diversity—with Jennifer McClanahan-Flint**

Deb Zahn: I want to welcome you to this week's episode of The Craft of Consulting podcast. My guest today is Jennifer McClanahan-Flint. She is an executive coach, your career strategist, and a consultant who works both with individuals and organizations and corporations. So with individuals, she works primarily with women and people of color to help them build the careers that they want with—as she says, and I just love it—audacity, not apprehension. So how they can develop their capacity to show up as their fully authentic selves and build a business based on doing that. And then she also works with organizations on issues related to diversity and equity and building strong organizations that embrace and embody those principles. So much great information in this episode, let's get started.

I want to welcome a guest to the show, Jennifer McClanahan-Flint. Thank you so much for joining the show.

Jennifer McClanahan: Oh, Deb. Thanks so much for having me. I'm very excited to have this conversation and hopefully I can share some insights to how my work as a consultant developed that can be helpful to other people who are listening.

Deb Zahn: I think it definitely will be. So let's start off, tell my listeners what you do?

Jennifer McClanahan: So I work with women and people of color, primarily helping them build dynamic careers. That's how I started my business back in 2010. That business, that work, kind of evolved to helping organizations support women and people of color as they progress in their careers.

So I still do one-on-one coaching and strategy work with my clients, and most of those are senior professional women. So in law firms it would be partners, managing directors, C-suite. And my practice in the last three years has really expanded in supporting organizations who need to understand, “How do we build values that support equity and inclusion as part of the culture that we have here? How are we really able to support difference and actually often improve our bottom line, our client share, and just generally the engagement in our organization?”

Deb Zahn: That's wonderful. Embrace the full power of diversity. That's wonderful.

Jennifer McClanahan: Absolutely.

Deb Zahn: Now, you have one of the best taglines ever, which is “build your career with audacity, not apprehension,” which I just loved. And so we're going to talk about that today. Particularly as it relates to consultants. Particularly women of color as consultants, and the organizations and clients that they work with which you also work with. So let's start off. So you talked about, because I've read a lot of your wonderful blogs, you talk about the capacity to just show up as your full authentic self. So if that is it's beautiful, most audacious version, what does that look like?

Jennifer McClanahan: Well, it looks like your unfiltered self. It's you actually being clear about what you value, the strengths you offer, what you believe to be true, and being free to come into your workspace and share that with your coworkers. Being free to position yourself and your work as you get clients to actually attract clients who want to work with someone like you. I think we often feel like there's a way to be "professional" and often professionalism is based in white supremacy cultural values. And we center that and we say, people will say, diversity. They'll say, oh, a place is diverse as if the people of color or the women or the people that are in some way different are the diverse. But what you really want is to understand that everyone has a difference.

And so it's not about showing up with a value that is "professional" and acceptable, as much as showing up and illuminating why your particular perspective is valuable. And then the environment is about appreciating everyone's difference. Not necessarily “otherizing” people who are different than what we think is the standard. So really being able to be in an environment where you're bringing your authentic self and you're able to show up the way you want is in many ways, right now, audacious.

Most often we go into an environment and we feel like the best thing to do is to conform because that's how we'll get clients. That's how it will be successful. And ultimately, especially for people of color, it doesn't really work out that way. Often we think that we're adapting and we're showing up and we're acceptable. But as I have said, many times when you're Black, you're always Black and often people are bringing stereotypes, ideas and biases often unconsciously to the interactions with you. And so if you don't name that and realize that, you're actually putting yourself at a disadvantage

Deb Zahn: That's right. And so say a little bit more about how not to put yourself at a disadvantage? So what would you advise some of the folks that you work with to do that would help them have that audacity and build their business with that?

Jennifer McClanahan: I think this is actually just such great business advice, but it's actually working with people that respect you, that you're psychologically safe with and that you choose.

So I don't think we always feel like we're in the driver's seat and we can choose our clients. We feel like we're just lucky to have clients or lucky to have a business. And we're lucky to keep going on. But as a person of color, it's really key that you...It’s key for any business, but specifically for people of color, it's key that you have people who are excited to see the world the way you see the world.

Often you're presenting something that they don't know happens. You might present a way of working or a way of looking at a problem based on your life experience that they otherwise wouldn't have available or accessible. And when we dim that, because we think we want to fit in. And because we're hoping that we get at work, we actually lose the capacity to build great client relationships, sticky client relationships. And so when you're your authentic self, and when you say, “This is how I work. These are the people that I like to work with.” This is how I know you're going to be successful. And being successful is not doing what we do in the status quo. And someone has success that way they'll stay with you, they'll recommend you, they'll become your best advocate.

Deb Zahn: That's right. They will market you as no one else would. And talk a little bit about how that opens up more markets for you. So that if you aren't in embracing diversity and using that as a strength and an advantage, what does that do in terms of markets you can step into or you close off?

Jennifer McClanahan: So we were just having a little bit of a conversation earlier about what kind of holiday card are you sending.

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Jennifer McClanahan: And so if you're sending a Merry Christmas card and that's your point of view, that might be fine. But now there's this whole segment of people who don't necessarily celebrate Christmas, but might celebrate some other type of holiday who feel that you don't get them, right? Who feels like you don't understand them. So when you begin to not just work with different people but hire different people as part of your team who have a different perspective, and who could relate to different people in a different way, who can help you talk about your copy and your marketing in a way so that it opens the door. For people who have the same needs that you service but may have a different perspective to feel that you are going to hear them, see them, and know their challenges.

And when you grow up with one particular perspective, it's very hard to understand. If you're a white person, white in a Black community, they might need when it comes to writing a resume. When it comes to the challenges they may have had trying to move ahead. If you've never talked to a Black person, or you don't have a Black person on your team, you may not have the capacity to have the language to speak to them. And now you have a whole market of people who aren't going to be able to use your services.

Deb Zahn: I've heard you mention that it also limits consultants when they start. They are often told to think about who your ideal client is. And if you have sort of unconscious biases at play, you're going to think, “Oh my ideal client,” or even on the other side the client’s thinking, “Oh, my ideal consultant looks like this. And this is what they're like.” Talk about how that plays out in how sort of the strategies or options you advise people to put into play.

Jennifer McClanahan: I'm really clear about my ideal client. I work with women and I work with people of color. And I work with them to build audacity. So to not fit in. To leverage their knowledge. To understand the importance of mastery and the work that they do. But don't confuse mastery with the ability to just do anything that anyone throws at you.

And as I really described in such clarity, what it means to build audacity that actually resonates with more than just women of color, right? I've worked with white males. I've worked with white women. I've worked with men of color. I've worked with women of color. And it's because my language about who I work with and what their challenges are, it's so clear that when someone also recognizes that they're having that challenge, because honestly these challenges are universal. They come to me for help.

So in many ways it broadens my appeal because people identify with their challenges in my language. And I then actually get to choose if this client is really going to be a good fit, for what I ultimately know that I'm going to be able to do. And there are times when I actually work with white males often because I have a client who's asked me, "Would you do it? Would you recommend it? I know you really could help him. I know you would really be helpful in their careers.” I often work with white people in general when I'm working in from the corporate perspective and I'm doing the consulting. So it's white people who're pretty much self-selecting to work in the style that I have. And so you would think like it would be counter intuitive, right? That if I'm so niched and so clear that I would have a smaller pool of clients and ultimately it just continues to grow.

And mainly because what I say really resonates at the heart of what people believe to be true. When I first started working with women of color, there was an acquaintance. I mean, family friend might be too strong of a word. He was Asian and he said, "Well, I don't know that Asian women would work with a Black coach. I don't know that that will work. I think that might actually be really challenging." And as he was telling me all the challenges that I might have working with Asian professional women. I was kind of laughing because at that moment, three of my clients that had just signed out were Asians women, right? And so, again, it's understanding what your clients need and believe and speaking to their particular circumstances. It happens that many people of color are having similar experiences of what I talk about, but it's not limited to people of color.

Deb Zahn: I also like how you talk about how you have your ideal client and yes you have these opportunities either presented to you or that you get that expands, but you also say no. And I just love that because I know that's hard for a lot of folks. But how do you know when to say, no?

Jennifer McClanahan: We have all had clients that three weeks in you're cringing.

Deb Zahn: I'm laughing…while not admitting anything.

Jennifer McClanahan: Really, it's a lesson I learned from my clients. I always said it, I've said it from the very beginning. Does it mean that I always practiced it? But I work with a lot of lawyers and lawyers live in a scarcity mindset. I love lawyers, but it's challenging to work in corporate law and have to build a business. And I would see clients take work that they absolutely hated, how miserable it was. And I would say if you're taking work you don't like, you cannot say yes to the work you do like. When the work that you want to do comes along, you're going to be too busy to do it and take it.

And so I really started taking my own advice. Just saying no gave me the ability to say yes to what I like all the time. And even in the downturn, as we're experiencing right now has really carried me through. I think it also reinforces your brand to actually do what you say that you do with the people that you want to do it with. There's a conviction in that, that people are all in on. They appreciate that you know the difference and it makes them feel more valued.

Deb Zahn: Oh, absolutely. Yeah. You don't want to be the consultant who says yes to everybody. That's not a good brand. But I like that because I always describe it as you only have so much shelf space and you need to decide what goes up on that shelf. And if it's filled with things that you don't like, you're not the best person to do it. It doesn't honor you as who you are as a human being. Then there isn't room for anything else. And so, as you said, stuff can come along that's great. "No, I got no space for it."

Jennifer McClanahan: And part of building audacity is having agency. So the other thing that I realized early on and working with my clients is they had to decide how they wanted to grow professionally. So if there was an area of work or project that was going to be interesting and help them grow, they actually had the bandwidth to pursue getting that work.

And there's some feeling of risk in that. We'd just say yes to work so that we can have work. But if you really track after having experiences that are also professionally rewarding, it actually makes you a better consultant, right? It makes you a better lawyer. It makes you a better teacher, whatever it is that you're doing. So we really, when I work with clients to be audacious, the first thing we have to start with is agency so that you can choose what's going to be best for you in this moment.

Deb Zahn: That's great. So that comes around in terms of boundaries. So having boundaries is being able to say no. What other types of boundaries do you think are critical for the would-be-audacious to learn how to do?

Jennifer McClanahan: Well, so first of all, my big tip with a boundary is that if you're irritated or annoyed, you probably need a boundary. So we try to set them in advance, but they spring up on us. I like to think of boundaries as actually helping telegraphing to people the best way to work with you. And these are the things that help you give your best work. So I don't text. I'm over 50. I'm a certain age and texting with my clients is not going to serve them well. I have tried to text, and I forget that I'm texting and I go to the email or I can't find the text. And I realize that if I don't set a boundary for texting, I'm actually not going to give very good service to my clients.

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Jennifer McClanahan: So often boundaries are about how can I work best with you? And if I give you these boundaries, the service that you're going to get for me between 9:00 and 5:00 is so much better than the service you're going to get for me at 8:00 PM and 9:00 PM when I'm winding down and going to bed.

So when I email people who have sent me an email say at 7:00 and I'm emailing them at 8:00, I am telling them that my boundary is it's fine for you to reach me at eight o'clock or nine o'clock and expect for me to respond immediately. But I'm sure with many consultants, like I believe in the two-day rule. If I have a really challenging complicated problem, I like to have two days to really be able to think about it. To come up with an idea, maybe work with my client, but the idea that we can instantly solve every issue, I just say, for me personally, doesn't give the best work.

So I have a whole policy and procedures that I give all my clients about this is the way I've worked. This is what I need. I do a lot of in my consulting and coaching work. I'm on call a lot because I deal with crisis—that people were having crises and challenges. And they can reach out and call me. But I'm very clear on my voicemail message and my policies and procedures that if you call me late in the afternoon, I may not be able to get back to you until the next day. And then we will schedule a time to actually speak the next day. You can't just call me and I'll pick up the phone because I actually may not be able to anticipate how to best engage in the problem with you.

Deb Zahn: That's right. I know I read this in one of your blogs that say no to things or setting boundaries that are as specific as that, which I love, is also saying yes to other things. Because every choice is a relative choice. If you say yes to something you really don't want to say yes to, whether you're conscious of it or not, you're saying no to something else and vice versa. So talk about how that plays in terms of bringing that to a conscious level because a lot of folks may be saying yes or yes to thing, and they're just not even thinking about how that is going to play out. What does that signal about me? How's that going to look in my business? So how do you help them sort of bring that unconscious to the conscious level so that they can actually work with it.

Jennifer McClanahan: So I had a client, I just talked to her yesterday and she had a hard time saying no. So she works in technology and she does diversity and inclusion work. And she has a PhD as a doctor. She has a PhD and she talks really about cultural anthropology and how that impacts AI.

And so the work she really does is talking about how we build AI that can include and expand a market. Because often, AI is built around the current people who are engineering it, who are white men. She did not believe that she could get a job doing that work as a Black woman. And it's hard. I mean, in technology, it's super hard. But I said, look, she got a couple of great job offers doing work she didn't really want to do because she could fit. I said, but if you pursue work that you don't want to do, you're never, ever going to have time to go find the work that you want to do.

And when you have a business, to me my business is like being on a spiritual journey. It's like, wherever I go, there I am trying to level up, manage all of the thousand facets of having a business. I love it and I'm devoted to it, but it's no small thing. So if I'm putting all that energy to having a business, and then I'm working with people who make me miserable or that don't allow me to share my best self, then what's the point of having a business? And so for her, she waited, she said, no. And the moral of the story is what we did was we went out and we networked. So then you really get clear about what it is that you do and what you believe in and the work that you like.

And she found someone who said, “Oh my gosh! You're my person. I'm going to create a job for you.” And they created a job. It's a huge technology company here in Silicon Valley. And I find that happens with my own clients. When I talk about my work and because my work is different and because I have a different stance, I get hired by companies because no one else is talking to them that way. No one else is having that conversation. But if I'm saying yes to work I don't want to do, I don't have time to have that conversation with people.

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Jennifer McClanahan: I don't have time to develop my network. I don't have time to explore who else actually wants to hear this and needs the help that I'm most fired up about. And that I'm going to do better than other people. And I don't do work that I don't like better than other people who like to do that work.

Deb Zahn: That's right. And it sounds like you're also promoting the value of self-worth, right? That it's OK for you to want what you want and your heart's desire to be your heart's desire. And often values are those things that are either not stated or not conscious again. How do you work with folks who...because this is so important in consultant. You’ve got to know what your values are because if you don't build your business based on values, I think you're building in on shifting sands to pick a random metaphor. But how do you help people solidify, embrace, and be willing to make choices based on their values?

Jennifer McClanahan: This goes actually back to a lot of equity and inclusion work. Because often the values that we are assuming or thinking we've got to have the data. Our values that have just been given to us because they're professional values. Because we think this is the best way that we're supposed to show up.

But if you want to have an environment where you're working with different and interesting people, mistakes might need to be OK. Conflict might actually help you generate some of the best ideas. So what are the values that you would have to practice in order to start building a diverse and more challenging practice? Working with clients that you really like. So one of them would actually be that you value boundaries agency and the ability to say no. When I work with clients and we're working on this work, we actually do an identity exercise where people talk about who they are at work and who they are at home.

And often they see when they're not necessarily the same people they are at work. And this is across race, gender doesn't matter. And they'll say, “Well, I don't think that I can bring that to work.” And so then we say to the group, as we're doing this work. “So if you can't bring some of your most creative self to work, how helpful are you to the company? How helpful are you to your team? How helpful are you to your organization?” So if there's parts of my identity that I feel aren't going to be acceptable, then maybe what we need to do is talk about what values do we need to now insert so that people feel safe enough to bring their full selves. That creates the idea, right? That person who's thinking out loud, That person who really needs to speak up in a meeting, but doesn't feel like it's appropriate or the right thing to say.

So what values do we have if people don't feel free and full of agency at work? Is that the environment we really want to have? And then when I'm working with clients in a consulting perspective, because I have so much experience in HR, what we do is we start to identify the values that we need that are going to support people showing up as themselves. And then we incorporate those values into their HR practices.

So how does this value show up if you're hiring people? A lot of people I work with, because I work with attorneys, do time tracking. And so they'll have a time tracking policy. And so when I'm working with companies that track time, I ask them, how is tracking time actually serving you? And are you communicating that to your employees and the people that are tracking time because often people who are intruding in your time, feel micromanaged by that. Right? They feel constricted and they feel like they can only think and be engaged in the work when the clock is on. But we know people like sometimes our best ideas are in the shower.

Deb Zahn: Oh, yeah.

Jennifer McClanahan: Right? So if you're tracking time, are you encouraging that kind of thinking? Are they free to bring that in because what are you telegraphing and tracking time? Now, tracking time helps you measure some things that is really to their benefit. Then you need to create a policy that explains that and explains the value of the time.

Deb Zahn: Yeah. And the value behind it. When I worked at a firm, and we had to track time, I once dreamt of something that would help one of my clients. And I woke up and, I kid you not, I was like, I don't know how long I was asleep. So I'm going to assume that's a 15-minute increment, which is why I'm having an absurd conversation with myself. And instead of focusing on value for my client, which is, I went to bed, I thought of you, and, boom, I have your solution. I'm thinking about increments of time. And is that really what you want if you're building a business?

Jennifer McClanahan: Is that actually getting the best idea? You have the great idea, and that idea is minimized on how you're going to track it instead of expand on it.

Deb Zahn: I know you've also written about vulnerability, which goes along with values, so value and culture and vulnerability within the workforce. If some folks are showing up as their authentic self, which I think would be a beautiful, wonderful world-changing thing, if that were to occur. How does vulnerability play into that in terms of having cultures that both respect diversity and the vulnerability needed to be able to actuate some of the values you're talking about?

Jennifer McClanahan: So vulnerability is the key to psychological safety, and it's the thing that actually builds the trust. Right? Whenever we're dealing with companies that want to build more equity or inclusion, and especially in the role of the consultant as the leader, you have to go first. The leaders at that is to me, not so much do you need vulnerability or how it shows up. We wait for someone to be vulnerable and a need for vulnerability. So, as the leader, whether it's the leader in the consulting, whether you're coaching the leader of the team or the company, you have to say to them, your job is to show vulnerability first.

You got to model it because people don't know what it looks like in an organization. People don't know how to be comfortable with it. People don't know, well as vulnerable, if I cry at work what is it going to say? So there's so much fear and adaption that if you actually want to create that environment as the leader, you have to model it.

Deb Zahn: And if you're leading your own consulting business, it's the same way, right? Which is to show up with your clients or your colleagues, and how do you also model and normalize that?

Jennifer McClanahan: I know it's so interesting, I blog. So you've been reading my blog and I sent out a newsletter. And I tell you, when I talk about the newsletters, well, I talk about like how I feel or the mistake I made or what I used to believe and why I believe differently now. I get so much response. I almost always get a new client when I write that type of an email or letter. I always get comments on the blog post. I wrote this note, I wrote one, I don't know if it's on my blog, but I cried at Target.

Deb Zahn: Oh yeah.

Jennifer McClanahan: I cried because it was part of COVID-19, and we couldn't find toilet paper. And so we go to Target early in the morning, and this woman is cleaning the door. She works at Target. She's cleaning. She's hanging a sign. And I don't usually shop at Target, but I went in at the door. I asked her, “Do they have toilet paper?” And she was like, "No, we don't. We're out of it.” And we're talking about when will it come in and the stock. And eventually she's like, "Well, just come here and follow me." And I came in. I followed her and she gave me her own toilet paper that she had saved for herself and her family. She pulled it out from under a cart. And then I shared that all these people, as I went through Target, I had these people who were helping me and guiding me and they were all Latino people.

And I felt like these people are out here serving us. And because they're showing up and they're doing the work, my family has everything that they need. And, as we were talking, I live in Marin County. Marin is not overly diverse. And it says something about white racial disparity here in the county that I live in. And I wrote that story.

I don't even know how many views I had, but I had clients who I hadn't worked with for a while who read it, who wanted to re-up. And now that was March. And then I get clients who were so happy that they're working with me. And so happy that I actually talked about who was on the front lines. And this was before we really understood the impact that COVID-19 was having on frontline workers and communities of color. It was just something that I had happened to observe. And I was just really thankful for it. So expressing that vulnerability, that thankfulness, gave my clients this idea that I actually was so in tune that I was signaling something that was later going to come up, which came to be so. And so then now I have this sense of authority with them. Because I was so in tune to what was happening in my vulnerability. So I think it felt unsafe. My mother called me. "You cried? You told them you cried?"

Deb Zahn: You got a mom call.

Jennifer McClanahan: I got a mom call.

Deb Zahn: That's real when you get a mom call.

Jennifer McClanahan: I have gotten so many people who feel like they know me. And then also want to do better because, oh, maybe they didn't even realize that was a problem.

Deb Zahn: Yeah. I truly think there's a hunger for it. I have the same experience. I did a short little video where I was talking about thinking through ahead of time how when you walk into a room you introduce yourself so you don't end up babbling and all those things we've all done. And I said in the video, “I'm really good on the fly, and I have butchered it more than once.” And I'm making fun of myself because it's true. It's absolutely true.

Jennifer McClanahan: It's true.

Deb Zahn: I'm presenting myself as an authority. But part of that authority comes from recognizing the mistakes I made and learning from them. And I got more comments on that one from people, from clients, from other consultants who just assumed it was only them that walked out of a client meeting and thought, "Oh my gosh. I'm so embarrassed. What did I just say?" I'm like, "Oh, that's nothing. You want to hear something *I* said."

Jennifer McClanahan: So true.

Deb Zahn: But people have a hunger for it I think.

Jennifer McClanahan: They do. They do. And also in the work that I do because I help people build narrative stories. So either about themselves, their career, their team, their organization. Because they might have a certain belief or value. And then as they dig really into what matters to them, what they believe in, what their strengths are telling them. Because your strengths, you usually develop strengths based on things that you value. Right? So we have to develop a narrative so that we can communicate to people not only what we do, but why we're great at what we do and why it matters.

So in doing that, that takes practice. So you develop a narrative. You're telling a narrative that might be counter-cultural. It might be against what everyone assumes that you should do or would do. And so the first time you go out to tell that narrative, you actually have to have it bounced off of other people. See the look on their face. Are they getting it? Are they are not getting it?

Deb Zahn: See if your mom calls you…

Jennifer McClanahan: Exactly. Or maybe I need to work on that. It's really the practice of doing it until your narrative becomes, "Oh, this is what I talk about. This is the way I talk about myself." So the idea that you're going to go and make a mistake is actually part of the work.

Deb Zahn: That's right. But no one tells us that unless we come to you and say, make me audacious.

Jennifer McClanahan: I know. And they don't know that actually making the mistakes makes you endearing.

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Jennifer McClanahan: There's a plus side to that.

Deb Zahn: That's right. Because people hire humans. They don't actually hire consultants. They hire humans who can help them and make them want to feel like they want to be in a room with them, or now want a Zoom call with them.

Jennifer McClanahan: Right. And that also has kind of been there.

Deb Zahn: Yeah. So let me ask you this question, because obviously in the world that we're currently in there are going to be folks that are either looking for opportunities that are different than what they currently do or lost their job and are thinking, “I want to give a shot at being a consultant.” So if you were talking to a woman of color, professional, who is either looking to become a consultant or just started, what advice would you give her?

Jennifer McClanahan: I would really encourage her to reframe the idea of uncertainty or risk. Because really we've always had uncertainty or risks. This is just so much more present and it seems so much more pervasive. But when we look at why things, like so many people don't have healthcare. Or so many people don't have savings. It shows that there has been uncertainty and risks around us all the time. So if we could begin to reframe uncertainty as the capacity for opportunity, I think we could really, really take hold here. I mean this on a personal level. I mean this on a business level. And I actually mean it on a societal level. And I think many people have talked about the status quo has been disrupted. So if you've been uncomfortable with the status quo and you don't fit in the status quo, now's a great time for you to show up as yourself.

Deb Zahn: That's right. That's right. And not return to just some old normal that held people back. Stifled people. Marginalized people. And killed people. I'm in healthcare so what we see with health inequities is it was deadly. Now, if you didn't know that you know that now, and so what are we going to do about it?

Jennifer McClanahan: And know that opportunity comes from other people. So if you reframe uncertainty as an opportunity to be my fuller self, the expression of your fuller self is actually in connection with other people. So now's your opportunity to start telling a new story.

Deb Zahn: Wow, that's beautiful.

Jennifer McClanahan: This is the time if this is who my authentic self was, and we're all kind of starting from scratch again, or feel like everything's tenuous again. What better time to show up? Because when you show up as your authentic self and you can really tap into it, what you do is show certainty to people because they know who you are. They know what to expect. They know you're telling the truth. They know that you're going to do what you say you can do. You might do it and there might be a mistake. You might do it in a way that's new and conventional to them, but you're going to show up consistently as yourself.

Deb Zahn: That's right. And you're not another source of uncertainty which…

Jennifer McClanahan: Absolutely.

Deb Zahn: Love that.

Jennifer McClanahan: So if you can really think about it as an opportunity to show up and show up in connection with other people as your authentic self. It becomes an anchor for people.

Deb Zahn: I love that.

Jennifer McClanahan: I have that conversation with myself as the leader, as one who works with so many different clients. I have to decide every day how I'm going to show up. And some days that might mean that I have to show up for myself. In these days where you hear the news or you lose a client that you've had for a long time, because I can't afford to have you. You have to decide, OK, so what do I mean? Where am I? And what do I need today to show up as my authentic self? It might mean that I don't need to have Zoom calls from 9:00 to 3:00. I actually stopped doing that. When we first were sheltering in place, clients had emergencies and there were crises popping up. And so I start at 9:00 and I would literally sit here until 3:00. And at some point, I was tired. I wasn't motivated. I was feeling spent. And I was like, "Jennifer, you're not even taking a break." Who's telling you that you have to book a 9:00 AM, 10:30 AM, 12:00 PM, 1:30 PM call? Who's telling you that that needs to happen? And I was really, I think kind of in the beginning, driven by the uncertainty. I was feeling like, OK, this is going to...I've got work and things are good. And I can't say no to work because what if this is my last time.

Deb Zahn: There goes the agency.

Jennifer McClanahan: Exactly. I was right there with everyone else. And then I really had to replay. As my back went out, I really had to kind of refocus. Getting up. Taking a walk. Deciding who I was going to talk to. My schedule's just not open for everyone. Every client isn't equal. It's not an energy thing might take. So it was really deciding every day. What did I need to show up fully for myself? For other people?

Deb Zahn: And you anticipated, of course, my last question, which is how you bring balance to your life. So agency sounds like would be at the top of that list and deciding and not just doing because doing seems like the right thing right now.

Jennifer McClanahan: Yeah. I was working with a client. We were having...They were re-creating a diversity, equity, and inclusion statement for their organization. That's the smallest size organization. And one of the things that they value is intensity. And while intensity isn't necessarily a bad thing, it was so intense that people didn't feel like they could back off.

So if I'm not working intensely all the time, I might look like I'm slacking. And so the conversation came up, but what's really important. What I would really like for us to value is balance. Like how can we have more balance in our life? And I said, what gives people balance is the ability to choose. Balance doesn't mean like I work four hours here and then four hours I'm at home. Or I work out this day and I work out that day.

It's the capacity depending on what you need in a particular day and how you want to show up that you have the freedom, agency, and choice to do that thing. Whether it's with your family, whether...I mean, there are some days where we're working on a client, I'm sure we've all had client work that is so interesting. You want to be all in. You're like, I love this work. This is so great. It's so exciting. MJ, who is my assistant coach, she's a coworker. We worked together some days we are so in to building the client that that actually feels nourishing to me. Right? That feels exciting to me. But then we also acknowledge that there might be a day where this is not a creative day.

Deb Zahn: It's just not going to happen.

Jennifer McClanahan: Not happening today. And so I'm shutting down at 2:00 so that I can go and enjoy my daughter. And so I can go walk my dog. So I think it isn't so much that I say, you've got to have balance. You have to have agency. And in this time especially, you got to reset every day.

Deb Zahn: Oh, I just love it. Well, Jennifer, I am having a hard time stopping our conversation, which is a very good sign. This has been absolutely wonderful. There's so much in here and I would encourage everyone and I'll have links to your website on the show notes. I've told you this, you have some of the best blogs I've ever seen, and they're filled with strength and vulnerability and insights. They're just lovely. So I want to encourage everybody to go and check out what you're offering out to the world.

Jennifer McClanahan: Thank you so much. Deb, it was a pleasure. I love meeting and speaking with people who actually make you think more.

Deb Zahn: Wonderful, but that is what the show is for.

Jennifer McClanahan: Yeah. I mean, it's like you combine your thoughts together for even bigger, better thoughts. So thank you so much for that opportunity.

Deb Zahn: Absolutely.

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 if you've enjoyed any of my other ones hit subscribe. I got a lot of other great guests that are coming up in a lot of other great content, and 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.