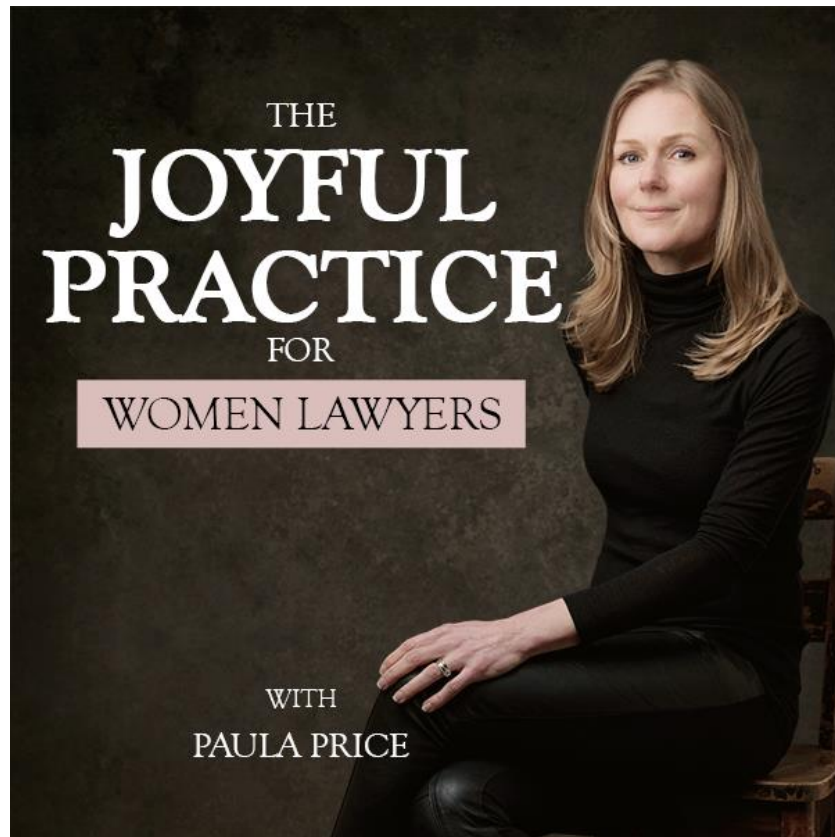


**Ep #34: Passion, Purpose and Permission:
Produce Your Own Path with Juanita Ingram, Esq.**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Paula Price

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You're listening to *The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers* Podcast episode number 34.

Welcome to *The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers* Podcast. I'm your host Paula Price, lawyer turned certified executive coach. This podcast was created to empower women lawyers just like you to create a life and practice you love. Join me every week for a break from the hustle so we can focus on you, what you truly want, and how you can create it.

If you're over the overwhelm, done with putting out fires, and ready to create a life and practice that brings you more joy, you're in the right place. Ready for today's episode? Let's dive in.

Paula: Hello everybody and welcome back to the podcast. I'm so excited to be inviting today's guest. Her name is Junita Ingram. She is amazing. I think you're all going to absolutely love her.

Before I introduce Juanita, I just wanted to highlight how so many people who come and reach out to me have questions about what they can do with their law degree other than practice law. I think Juanita is the perfect person to be talking about this topic. Because as you'll soon learn, not only is Juanita an attorney, she's also a filmmaker, an author, a fashion philanthropist, and an actress.

She currently joins us from Singapore where she lived with her husband and her two school aged children. She is the founder and CEO of PURPOSE Productions Inc., which is a women lead production company with a mission of creating content that celebrates authentic BIPOC narratives while empowering women and youth through film. She's also the founder of Dress for Success Greater London and Dress for Success Chattanooga. So with that, I'm so thrilled to be welcoming you. Hello Juanita, welcome.

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Juanita: Thank you so much for having me. I'm so excited to be here today. Thank you.

Paula: Thank you so much. Now Juanita, I just wanted to kick off and ask you a little bit about your background. So if you could tell our listeners in your own words kind of what your history is. Like how you started out in law, what you're doing now. We'd love to hear it.

Juanita: Sure. I am originally from the U.S. I'm from Tennessee actually. So I'm a southern girl to the bone. I knew I wanted to become a lawyer like many of us do or did since I was like eight years old. I was in a mock trial competition in high school that further solidified that that's definitely what I wanted to do. So I went to undergrad.

My undergrad degree was a little different. It's accounting. Not your typical undergrad degree that you go to law school for, but I knew that I wanted to do both. So I went undergrad at Tennessee State University straight through to University of Memphis. I did a dual JD-MBA because I knew I wanted to be a business attorney, and I'm a glutton for punishment. So I did that and graduated, gosh. I hadn't done the math, but at the end of this year will be 20 years for me. It was a while ago, yes.

Paula: And you look really young. No one else can see that but you don't look like it was 20 years ago.

Juanita: Thanks. It's a lot of shea butter. I will tell you that. Shea butter around the eyes shaves off at least 10 years ladies. I'm just throwing that out there for you. That's free.

But yeah I did that, and then started practicing in Tennessee at a law firm. Actually my first experience at a law firm was unlike some people. I had a very positive experience. Loved it. Loved what I did. I know that experience

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can vary. I had a great time. I started out in nonprofit law and commercial law and real estate and helping small businesses. Really loved it.

Then met this guy on a blind date and got married. Well, got engaged like seven months later. Got married within a year. We've been together for 17 years now. I keep moving for him and for his job and his promotions. Went to Indiana, practiced there for a while. Transitioned to in-house council for a bit. 10 years ago was our first journey as expats and living abroad and the first time that I had to make a transition and reinvent. So I'll bring us up at least to 10 years ago.

That's basically my background. As a child, I focused a lot in the arts. My mother's a music teacher. I grew up playing five instruments. I was a drum major in the band. My father is a CFO or just retired actually. It's in higher ed. So this duality brain I have, I totally blame my parents for all of that. That's my background. I'm a mom of two, and that's me.

Paula: I love in Juanita. This is the second time we've had a chance to connect. We spoke before the holidays. What struck me during our conversation was what you just mentioned, this idea of having both sides of the brain engaged, right. That you're highly creative and you're also highly analytical. You've managed to create such an interesting career for yourself starting out in a very traditional setting, from accounting to law. From private practice at a law firm to in-house.

Then your spouse, and I love this word that you've used. I've never heard it before. This idea of being a trailing spouse. In many ways, I feel like I can relate. I've not trailed anywhere, but I feel like there is that dynamic of balancing my career with my husband's career. You've done that as well. Once you throw children into the mix, you're dealing with all these different pieces and trying to figure out how do I take the skills that I have, the interests that I have, the creativity that you have, and turn that into the next

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iteration of yourself. It's so interesting to learn about how you have changed and evolved at each step of the journey.

So you've mentioned traveling to London. What happened when you arrived in London? I mean I gather you had a pretty traditional legal background up until that point. It was a law firm. It was in-house. What happened when you landed in London? At that point, I think you had...Did you have family at that stage?

Juanita: Yes. So my son was 15 months old. My daughter was three. In short what happened was I went into shock. Because I knew that we were going to live internationally in the sense that I had this gut feeling when we got married. So I'm a very, I won't say spiritual person because spirituality is a broad term, but I am woman of faith. So I pray a lot. When we first got married, I was praying. I told my husband I think we need to go travel abroad for our honeymoon. I don't know. I just feel like God wants us to be prepared.

At that time, I had never left America yet. I was 27. Never left as most Americans. A lot of Americans, at least back then. My family were all like you know why can't you go to Punta Cana or Cancun or Florida? Why do you have to go so far? We went to Rome and Florence for our honeymoon. After that every year we committed to going abroad once a year. So we did Spain. We did Paris.

Then started having kids. Then the next couple of years my husband's company offered him a promotion to go and be the HR regional lead and we were living in London. So I knew and I said yes to the theoretical idea of living abroad. What I did not fully take stock of. When you think about if I could go back and speak to my younger self 10 years ago, what would I say? I did not know what saying yes really meant to my career.

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So when I say I went into shock, the buzz and the beauty and the excitement of moving. You're like, "Oh I'm moving abroad." I had messages from people of that's great to you're crazy because I was quitting an in-house counsel job at Rolls-Royce at the time. My family was like, "You're going to quit that good job? Why are you doing that?" I had no idea what that meant. Because as many people in our profession, like many of us, we equate our identity, our worth to what it is that we do. That's who we are. I was no different.

I think any time you work as hard as you do to go to law school, finish. Like I said, I was a glutton for punishment. I did a dual JD-MBA. It wasn't as though I was trying to escape or didn't enjoy what I was doing. It wasn't as though I wanted to not be a lawyer at that time anymore or wanted to do something else. You had no idea.

I remember when my husband was pulling out the driveway to go to work. I remember hearing the cars roll over the gravel, because I'm that dramatic of a person. I remember listening to this child on my hip who I was still breastfeeding at the time and a three year old that looked up at me. They both looked at me like now what? I looked at them like I don't know. I remember feeling like oh my gosh.

Because I hadn't done the stay at home mom thing. I was still working 50 hour weeks. I remember thinking now what? Who am I? What am I? The first four months really struggling with what I now know is trailing spouse syndrome or trailing spouse depression. I had no idea to even give it a name. I just knew that for the first four months I just sat on the couch and cried every day.

I couldn't put my finger on what it was, but you don't pass the bar exam, not once but twice for me at least. Because when we moved to Indiana, I hadn't been practicing long enough to waive in. So I took the bar all over

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again. Again, glutton for punishment, but I passed both times. You don't do all of that because you don't necessarily want to do something. I had not taken stock of what it was that I was going to do to feel me and to give myself purpose.

Not that being a wife and a mom isn't purpose enough, because it is for many. For me, there was just another side to myself that I was agreeing to starve and I was not prepared for the hunger pains, and they hit me. So I had to go through it, and I did.

Paula: So what do you mean by go through it? How did you transition then from kind of being freshly landed in a city that you've never lived in. You have two young kids that you're looking after. What was the transition that you made at that stage?

Juanita: I did feel sad. I didn't realize at the time that I needed to give myself time to mourn the trajectory of my own career. I was so busy being supportive, which is great, but I didn't really want to. You think about oh let me be supportive. Support means therefore I can't complain or I can't feel at any point in time any sense of loss or anything other than yes I'm here. We're going to make this transition. It's going to be great. Which it was and it is.

If I had given myself the ability to be in the full dynamic of that move, of that transition, I would have allowed myself. So when I had to mourn and I didn't realize I was mourning. I wanted to be a judge after the first 10 years of practicing. I had that flash before my eyes of that's probably not going to happen. It was haunting me. I had friends who were like, "So what are you going to do with yourself?" In the not excited for you, this is new, I can't wait to see what happens kind of way but a are you sure what you've done?

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So I sat on the couch and cried. Then I decided to get up. I was like get up and go to the kitchen. Just get up. Instead of doing your routine of sitting. Because I had found a daycare for my kids or at least for my daughter at the time. In the UK, they start reception at four. So she needed to continue to learn. Early childhood development is not my thing. So I found a daycare for her. So I would drop her off. Instead of coming here and sitting every day and watching cartoons with your son and crying in between commercials when he's not looking, get up and go do something.

I got online, and I got a coach. This was the first time that I ever engaged a life coach because I knew that what I was experiencing was not normal. Probably should have engaged a little bit of a therapist too, but life coach did it for me. It was enough. I called her. I set up some sessions, and it was transformational. It really helped me to pivot out of you're being, I won't say abnormal but my life stepped out of the box at that point in time.

I had to figure out if I was going to sit there and let all of the talent and skill that I was starving atrophy and die and me along with it. Or what was I going to do? Who was I? I think the biggest thing I had to figure out was my identity not outside of the law, but just outside of what I had known to be the practice of law. Because I'm always a lawyer.

I think that's the misnomer. People will ask me even now. So are you still a lawyer? I'm always lawyer. Whatever it is that I do, that doesn't change because that's the training and the background that I have. I just shift and use it in a different way. So she helped me to come up with and identify what was it that really set my soul on fire?

I used to volunteer a lot. I actually used to do Mrs. pageants back in the day. I tell me people that was two kids and 20 pounds ago. Because there are like Miss, there's teens, and then there's Mrs. So I was in the Mrs. divisions. I used to, when you compete you have to have a platform and

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charities that you work with. I had volunteered for Dress for Success for about, gosh, probably about three or four years at that time.

She helped me to understand what was important to me. What were the themes of everything that I did. There was an undertone theme of the things that I volunteered for. What set my soul on fire? If I closed my eyes, when was I the happiest even going back to childhood? What did you do that you were really happy with doing in addition to the way you practice law?

It was those sessions and that process that allowed me to really explore not just what I could do but who I am. Once I convinced myself and got clear on me and who I actually was, then people talk about now like wow, you're really embracing this trailing spouse thing. I embraced it, stepped into it, and really started to thrive.

I decided to go back to acting. Just said what if I go and audition? What's the worse that happen? They say no? To go get an agent in London. What's the worst that could happen? They could say yes, they could say no.

I auditioned and I got an agent. Then within the first, I want to say the first year, I was in my first independent feature film. I started working, and it just kind of took off from there. It started with me getting very clear about who I was. I know that sounds like a cliché, but a lot of us go through life and we just go through life doing what we do. We never really have the opportunity to take the time to say but who am I? What do I really love? What's the theme?

My theme, undertone, undercurrent of everything that I did, the common theme that weaved everything together was I loved empowering women. Everything that I did through Dress for Success. At the time, I started out

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volunteering in the U.S. That's when I decided to write books. I already had these books inside of me. I just didn't have time to pour them out. Everything within them, even the children's series, was about empowering other people. So I decided that that's what I wanted to pursue. Yeah, the rest is history.

Paula: Yeah thank you so much for sharing that with us Juanita. It's wonderful to hear your story. So much of what you talk about, I think, it resonates with me, it resonate with our listeners. You talked about the transition of having a family, for example, and what that means already. You talked about it being a choice. Just because it's a choice that you make willingly doesn't mean that there's still a part of you that looks on at other things that you need to maybe put on pause in order to pursue that.

You talked about that experience of being the trailing spouse and being at home alone with the children. I know I mean for myself I mentioned before we started our recording today. We are in a pandemic. I've got two school aged children. Today was supposed to their first day back at school for myself, for many of us who are out in the world, professional women now have our children at home indefinitely. Maybe it's just for a little bit. Maybe it's home schooling. It depends on where you are.

So there are these circumstances that exist outside of us, and we're being asked to step up and find new ways of doing things that advance our desires to have purpose in a professional context, to make our contributions to the world. And having to do it in a way that challenges us.

What I love about your story is that you talk about this exercise of figuring out what is truly important to you and looking for the common themes and looking for the breadcrumbs in what you've done way back to when you were young. These are all things that I think are so important. Often it takes

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something quite dramatic in our lives to force us to come to that point where we decide to ask ourselves those questions.

When we do that, we get so much of the clarity that you're talking about. For each of us, it's going to be a different calling that will compel us to move forward in a particular direction. You talked about empowering women. I share that with you. I think it's a wonderful pursuit. So I just really love that you've shared that with us. Because I think for so many it's going to resonate because we're all experiencing some version of that or we all likely will at some point in our careers. Now we can look to you and say, "Well, Juanita had this experience and this is how she dealt with it."

One of the things I wanted to ask you is I have a number of lawyers who reach out to me. They have questions about what to do next. It's almost like we have this internal struggle. I know I've had this internal struggle where you're on the path. You have a traditional practice. Maybe you're in a law firm or you're in-house or you're in government, but you have a pretty traditional legal career.

You may have been encouraged by your family to enter law school. I have clients who are lawyers who come to me who were given a choice. Accounting sometimes is one of them. Accounting, engineer, doctor, lawyer. Pick one daughter, pick one child and tell me which of those it's going to be. So they enter into the legal profession without it necessarily being something that was a fully formed decision. I mean you talked about it being a dream of yours since a very young age. It's not how everybody ends up in law school or at a law firm.

So they follow these lock steps. Then one day they wake up and they're unhappy. That's when they kind of reach out and they have questions. They want to maybe make a change, but they're not really clear, right. Like okay I've been trained to be a lawyer. I'm getting paid a really comfortable

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salary to do the work that I'm doing. I enjoy it. I've invested all this time. I've invested all this money. It would be crazy for me to give it all up.

Yet for many that may be the right thing to do. So I would turn it over to you Juanita and ask you what you would say to a lawyer who would come to you, for example, and say they followed this fairly traditional path and they're starting to feel unsettled. What would you recommend that they do at that stage?

Juanita: I think it is beneficial for everyone to engage a coach. Because I could not navigate it by myself because there's so many factors both professional and personal that you really have to have someone that will give you a balanced view of yourself, of your options. There are books out. One of the books someone gave me when I finished law school was all the things you can do with a law degree. It sat on the shelf and collected dust. I never really even thought about it until I went to London.

I think it's very important that you reach out and create a community of support, a support system that will help you to navigate. No one succeeds in a bubble. You don't have to figure it all out by yourself.

Again one of the steps that I did with my coach who was actually from Atlanta, believe it or not. I was in London coaching with someone in Atlanta, Georgia and taking a moment to pause and take stock of what is it that really excites you? I say all the time yes I wanted to go to law school since I was a kid. The reason I wanted to go to law school was because I wanted to help people.

Now sometimes when you're practicing, sometimes you get an opportunity to "help people". I have to put air quotes around that. Sometimes you don't. By the time it was time for me to go to London, yes I still enjoyed what I did. When I went in-house, really when I moved to Indiana. Because I don't

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want to paint this unrealistic picture that every law position that I had a bed of roses and it was great. No. I had my full share of the toxicity that comes with our profession, and I love being a lawyer, but I'm very honest about people in general. The world that we live in.

Sometimes in our profession, we attract toxicity. It becomes a very toxic environment in many respects. Office politics, we play it well. We're trained to, and that's not a good thing.

So I had those experiences. I think getting a career coach, a life coach to help you navigate through that, but really stepping back to say. Doing the work to figure out who are you? Why did you become a lawyer? Do you like helping people? What aspect of helping people do you like? Do you like the thrill of winning? There's nothing wrong with that. I think taking a full assessment of who you are is the first step.

Then giving yourself permission to take the lid off. So often in our profession we are subconsciously bullied into being traditional in a particular box. I know I was. Again when I first moved to London, people were like are you crazy for quitting your job? You're going to follow this guy? I'm like I've kind of been married for 10 years. We're kind of together. We've got two kids. You do make that decision for family.

You could be a trailing spouse. You don't have to move internationally. The first time I trailed was moving from Tennessee to Indiana. I think the commonality that was that transition really took me through was navigating change. Now more than ever we are all familiar with having to navigate change and uncertainty and newness and recreating ourselves in different environments. Whether it's the new norm.

You talked about your kids. My kids are off until the 17th, but I live in Singapore now. They kind of planned for that. So doing the pandemic in

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Asia, that's a whole other podcast episode. That's a whole other conversation. We spent the first two years in Taiwan, just moved to Singapore. So Singapore actually planned and knew, "I bet a bunch of people are going to go out of the country and come back sick. Let's let the kids be off for an extended period of time." So my kids are still off.

Navigating through this pandemic alone. I think the commonality is change. That's what helped me to be really comfortable in the pandemic right now. I'm like welcome to my world. The instability is my norm.

Paula: Absolutely. Absolutely. It definitely is. I want to ask you more about that, but I also wanted to touch on something that you just said. Which was that one of the common themes that you had identified was this idea of wanting to help people. That was one of the reasons why you went to law school. I hear that from so many lawyers, right. That was the motivating factor. They really want to help people.

What's really interesting is that the way that you help people can evolve over the course of your career depending on the role that you're in. So it may be that you're a young lawyer working at a law firm and helping people means helping the partner on the file that you're assisting. At a later stage it could be, I mean you talked about founding Dress for Success in London. So helping people in that environment is helping set up an organization that's then going to help women who are trying to reenter the professional world.

So I think what you can do is then take that dream, take that sense of purpose and apply it in different ways depending on what stage of your career you are in and how you choose to apply your law degree. For a lot of lawyers I work with, they have questions about how their law degree sets them up for success in another role.

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For you, you mentioned that having a legal background was really helpful when you founded the Dress for Success chapter in London. What other skills do you think you developed through the practice of law that you are now applying in ways apart from traditional practice?

Juanita: Yes. I think it's really important too that while you're in traditional practice that lawyers get asked all the time to sit on a board or to help out in a nonprofit space. I think it's really important that you do that, but that you do it in an area that interests you. Do it for an organization that's really passionate about their mission. Because when you're doing that, and sometimes I tell people all the time when you are in a place where you are living your most authentic life in that moment, in that space where you are at that time, you never know where that can lead to in terms of opportunity.

Not that you do things in terms of opportunity or situations or opportunistic reasons. But that there's purpose in everything that you do. You'd be surprised where life will lead you.

So when we moved to London, I had been volunteering in the U.S. for Dress for Success. I'm very passionate about their mission. We help get women back into the workplace giving them interview attire and interview training. I tell people all the time we dress women from the inside out. What we're doing is really tackling poverty. Because when you change the trajectory of a woman's life, you not only affect her but her entire household. So this is generational change that we're doing.

I met the worldwide CEO while volunteering right before I moved, right before I quit my job and moved over. We kept in contact. She actually got me a mentor while I was in London to help me navigate this time because she's a lawyer as well. That's the other thing I will say. Make sure you try to get a mentor because it's open to your flexibility and what your new life will look like. She called me and asked me to restart the affiliate.

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It's funny. I was just minding my business. I remember the first day I volunteered at Dress for Success in Indiana. They had just onboarded a new executive director. She was running back and forth. She had a real busy day. I was supposed to be there dressing women. I paused and I looked at her and I'm like she has the coolest job in the world. She's so amazing. This is amazing. I remember thinking man, it would be nice to do that one day.

I told myself Juanita, stop. Nobody asked you for all of that. I had this internal dialogue in my head. Go get this woman some shoes. Who would ask you to run a Dress for Success someday Juanita? Nobody's going to ask you to do that. They don't need a lawyer. Go get the shoes. You're volunteering.

I remember that moment. There used to be an old affiliate in London. They decided to stop functioning. By the time I realized that, because I was volunteering there was well. I was typing the worldwide CEO a note saying hey if you ever open up again, let me know. I'll come sweep the floors, fold some clothes, make some phone calls. I'll come volunteer. I hit send and my phone rang. It was her calling me.

I was like oh wow, that was fast. She said, "What do you mean?" I said well I just sent you the note saying if you need me, call me. She said, "I hadn't got that note, but I have a question for you. Would you start a Dress for Success?" So sometimes life aligns you to be in a place where your calling and your movement coincide and they collide.

So that was the beginning of me starting Dress for Success. There was a lot of lawyering to do. Because at the time, the other old affiliate, there was a lot of brand association clarity that we had to do. A little bit of a cease and desist notice that had to be sent out. A lot of clarity. All of my nonprofit law training I had to pull on in another country that I wasn't even from.

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Everything in my MBA, because nonprofits are businesses and I had to start a new business from scratch in a country that I wasn't even from. So I pulled on every skillset.

I think the other skillset that all lawyers develop and that we take for granted is this true sense of tenacity and strategic thinking and problem solving that you take for granted that everybody else has that in the specific way that we have it. I don't think they do. Now I'm biased because I'm in the profession. I think lawyers are great, and I think we're all superstars.

But the way that we have the ability to solve issues for our clients, it doesn't go away. So whether you are running a film set in a production and you need to be detailed oriented and have tenacity or whether you are running a nonprofit. The same leadership skills, strategic thinking, intelligence, and just the ability to achieve without excuse. It's something that I think has proven well a skillset that is transferable.

I coach women now all the time with Dress for Success about their transferrable skills. As lawyers, we have many. I don't want to that we're like Marvel characters, but close. Very close.

Paula: I love that. Achieve without excuse. That is powerful. First of all, I have goosebumps. That discussion about you sending the email and the CEO reaching out to you at the same moment in time. I just love that serendipitous connection.

You use the word alignment. To me that is one of the integral keys of just having a successful career right is when you're aligned with the world that you're doing. You talked about how this all started out with you pursuing volunteer work that is in alignment with your interests, right? For the work that you're doing outside of the office if you're joining a board or supporting

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an outside organization, it is really looking at what interests you and where you feel passionate. Look at where that led you. I think that's so impactful.

What you mentioned about finding mentors. I think for all of us. Wherever it is that you are in your career whether you're practicing as a lawyer or you've moved on from law or whatever it happens to be. Having somebody who is senior relative to you, who's in a different position. Sometimes they're actually not senior to you in age or stature. It may be somebody who just has a different skillset than you and you admire something about that.

Surrounding yourself with people like that who are there who will support you, who you can look to to bounce ideas off of and seek items from. That is such a wonderful relationship to have. So I love that you've highlighted that for our listeners. Because of all of us, they can be really impactful.

Mentors don't necessarily have to come out and find you. I think what can be really compelling is just to go and find the mentors that resonate with you. Again, going to who is doing something that you find really interesting, that you're passionate about, and that you share a common interest.

Juanita: Yeah.

Paula: So I have a question for you about challenges. I think that we'll all be able to relate to this.

Juanita: Yes.

Paula: We've all been living in the pandemic. I'm always learning more stories from people who have had different types of challenges. For you and I, we are parents. We're working in the home. For you I think also outside the home. It's challenging to navigate this particular stretch. It's

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been going on for a couple of years almost. So I know a lot of professionals out there are continually trying to find new ways to do this in a way that is more peaceful, right.

When you've got, for example, your kids at home and you're trying to work. I'm in Canada. I've learned that in Ontario, schools are now being turned to remove learning which is really difficult for parents. To have your kids on the computer in the room next to you while you're trying to have your conference calls and do your work. I mean it is really, really challenging. I think we can all relate to this idea of challenges.

For you, I would love to know what some of the more challenging things have been for you in terms of navigating your career changes, navigating the transitions that you've made from one location to the next. Also what surprising benefits have flowed from those challenges?

Juanita: Yes, there have been many. Because, again, I first had to get clear with myself. I think the biggest challenge often is internal. Pandemic aside, because the pandemic presents a whole other set of challenges. But in terms of the pictures that I had to make and reinventing myself on numerous occasions, I had to first accept the uniqueness that I was operating in. I had to accept it from myself first because there will be plenty of people that will highlight your own challenges.

Every time it felt like I was just getting in the groove of things in terms of acting. I was just really exploring that career. We had just launched Dress for Success in London, and then it was time to move back to America. I always felt like but I was just getting started. It's almost like now. When we thought the pandemic was, we're just getting to a place where we can return to normality. And we're back.

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For me it was when it was time to move again, and I had just settled not this groove and just figured out who I was. Now I've got to change again. I think that is a constant flow of change that you have to navigate. For me, it was okay I have to leave this total place where I'm fueling and pouring into this creative side. I just started this nonprofit. What does that mean? Do I step down from the board? Do I walk away from it? What does it mean? How do you do that? Having to fight through the doubt and the worry of not having clarity all the time.

So for example when we moved back from London and I had to go back to the traditional practice of law, there was a part of me where my stomach turned. Like oh gosh, I don't know if I really even want to do that. I did it anyway. I ended up being assistant general counsel and head of company, but I didn't let go of what I knew what had become even a safe place for me in being in control of my own destiny, of my own identity. Trying to strike a balance and never neglecting that side of myself.

So what I learned was not to neglect the full spectrum of who I am. I tell people all the time the best advice that I got from someone was looking at myself as a company, probably because that's the analogy that I could understand. So they talked to me in terms that I could get. They said even when you're working for someone else, even when your practicing traditional, look at yourself as Juanita Incorporated.

At the end of the week, what did you do for Juanita Incorporated? That's fine that you did great things for this company and you made them a lot of money and you're great at what you do. That's great. What did you do for yourself? Whatever goals and visions that you have long term or short for yourself?

I never neglected that. I continued to do that. We moved back to the states. That's when I started. Because Indiana is not really big on acting

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opportunities. It's not the Mecca of film or anything like that. So I started creating my own opportunities. I created my own nonprofit production company oddly enough called PURPOSE. Really stepped behind the camera to continue to fuel that.

On my weekends, on my off days I did short films and a legal talk show that I did with two other legal colleagues and friends. We took pop culture issues and then really delved into the legalities of it all. So when Aretha Franklin died and she died without a will. Well let's talk about wills and trusts and why you need one.

Paula: That's fabulous. Well not fabulous that she died but fabulous that you were covering that in your talk show.

Juanita: Like Cardi B decided not to go on tour with Bruno Mars when she became a new mom. Let's talk about maternity leave and what your rights are. So we did that. It was a lot of fun, but it really kept me in the creative space. So being able to navigate through the change, I continued to feed that side of myself as best I could. I think you have to give yourself permission to do what you can and that be enough. It's okay. You're never lacking anything.

What is meant for you, I know it sounds cliché-ish, but I am a walking billboard. You're never going to miss what you're supposed to do. It's just not going to happen. You're not going to not be in the right place. The only time that you are going to miss out on anything is if you are not prepared to just be yourself. If you have neglected you in some particular way.

At different stages in my career, it wasn't the time. I'm really big on seasons. There's a season for everything. It wasn't the time for me to do all these things when I was a new mom. I was still breastfeeding. The best thing that I could do in the beginning was be a lawyer, breastfeed my

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children, be a mom, and shower. Those were my goals. If I achieved the shower, I really felt like I was successful that day. And I smelled nice, which was not always hey. As a new mom, it is what it is.

So I think taking life in stages and in seasons and recognize it even in the pandemic that we're in right now, we're in an interesting season. I spent the whole pandemic in Taiwan. We were 84 miles outside of China. America's been in this, a lot of places in the world have been in this for a little over a year. This has been a two year thing for me because we were on our version of lockdown back in January of 2020. So it hit us first.

When I was saying hey I don't think I can make it to London this year and everyone was like, "I think you're overreacting. I think this is going to be something that stays over there like SARS. I think you're overreacting Juniata." I'm like you're probably right. Here we are two years later, and we're still in a place of navigating change. I think it's really important that now more than ever we reach out as community and know that there are people that can help us navigate change.

You talked about mentorship. I got assigned two mentors. People ask me all the time like what do you need a mentor for? You're a member of the Television Academy now. But I'm in a new industry. PURPOSE Production, we have a show now that's on Amazon Prime. I really stepped into it. When we knew we were moving in Taiwan, it seemed random. I know now that there was a bigger piece of purpose going there. I decided to launch a show about being a trailing spouse and about navigating change.

I'm part of Women of Color Unite, which is a nonprofit organization for women of color in the film and entertainment industry. They have Start With 8 is their mentoring program. I signed up. People are like, "Are you signing up to mentor?" No I'm signing up to get a mentor because I'm in a new space. I'm in a new industry. Barely new for me, it's been two or three

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years, but everybody needs someone to help them navigate this huge place of change that we're in. Constant place of the unknown.

Paula: Absolutely. Now Juanita I just wanted to mention for all of our listeners that we'll be having links in the show notes to all your, I mean you've got so many different projects that you're working on. I believe what you're talking about is your show about the expats.

Juanita: Yes.

Paula: Is that the name of the show?

Juanita: Yes. So it's called *The Expats International Ingrams*. It's on Amazon Prime in the U.S. and UK. Then we hit a roadblock where a lot of people because right now we're in Singapore. Singapore doesn't get Amazon U.S. or UK shows. So we created our own streaming platform called PURPOSE Streaming for people who live in other countries who may not be able to see the show because it's on Amazon prime for the U.S. and UK. I think you have to have an American or UK bank account.

I had the idea for the show when we were in London. It's all about people living abroad. It's the first sort of reality docu-based show about living abroad. There's never been one. We have House Hunters International, but they're just trying to find a house. We're talking about life. Applying for schools and third culture kids and navigating through COVID. We're actually filming season two right now. We're about 80% done with filming. It hasn't been easy to film in a pandemic.

Moving countries in the middle of a pandemic, that was interesting. Probably my biggest challenge to date was when we moved from Taiwan to Singapore back in August. The show is all about trailing spouse syndrome and my journey and other expats. I have about four other trailing

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spouses that talk about their life and their career and through their lens. So it's a lot of fun, and very family friendly. It's not your typical reality show. Life is dramatic enough. We do not have to make up.

Paula: Especially with kids in the mix.

Juanita: Oh gosh yes. It's dramatic enough.

Paula: It's fabulous. We'll provide links because it sounds amazing. I saw one of the trailers today and it's really amazing. I just wanted to touch on one of the things that you said a few moments ago about the seasons of your life and how when you had your young children for example, that wasn't necessary the time for what you're doing today.

Juanita: Right.

Paula: I think it's impactful for all of our listeners to really let that sink in because I think for so many of us, we feel like we're in a rush. We see someone else do something, and we think it's amazing. We think well why haven't we done that yet? You just feel like you're in a hurry to do something or you realize we're entering into another sort of lockdown-ish phase. That means I'm going to have to slow things down a little bit.

It can cause a lot of stress. It can cause a lot of anxiety and feeling of falling behind. What I find so impactful about this idea of looking at your life in terms of the seasons is that it allows you to really step back and just allow whatever stage that you happen to be in right now to be the stage that you're in right now. Like you said, you're not going to miss anything that wasn't meant to be for you. So I just wanted to touch back on that because it's such a powerful message and one that I think so many of us can really connect with, especially right now.

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I also really wanted to ask you about the balance. Because you're moving from country to country. You're setting up nonprofits here and you're lawyering over there. You've got your production company. You've got your reality TV show. You've got two young kids. I saw them in the trailer. They are adorable, of course.

Juanita: Thanks.

Paula: I know for myself that has been an unexpected. I mean I always knew I wanted children. Mine are seven and nine at the moment. I never imagined what it would be like to be a parent. There's so much that is involved. We talk a lot about work-life balance. I would love to hear your take on this because I know it's something that so many of us can connect with right now.

Juanita: Yes. I tell people all the time the idea, even the term work-life balance, is a misnomer to me. Because there is no balance. Balance denotes that everything is equal. That you're trying to make everything equal out. I prefer to look at things in terms of priority. Before I do anything, I evaluate what's important to me. Again it's the importance of taking time to step back and say who am I? What's important? What does success look like? When I reach that place, what does it look like?

I prefer priority because nothing is going to be equal to my children. I'm not looking to balance my career with my family because they will always take precedence. There's always going to be more important, but what does that look like? What does that mean?

So I took the time before doing everything and through trial and error because it's not as though I haven't double booked, triple booked my life before and been at a place like I am dying. I am overbooked. I'm

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overworked. Everything is out of balance at the time, but it's because I haven't set my priorities.

So when you do that, you don't feel the feeling of anxiety. At least it helps me not to feel the feelings of anxiety, of oh I'm missing out. Oh I've turned this down. I knew I was going to turn anything down that took away from me being at a piano recital or at a school. Something happening in their lives. Because for me, the priority was then.

Having good organizational tools. There are many apps. I use Calendly now. There are so many things that could help organize your life, but the prioritization is what's important. Because that's what will help you say no without any regret. I think the biggest thing that we live in life right now is that the anxiety that you feel is really fueled by fear and regret and feeling like you've missed out on something or that you're afraid if you prioritize your family or yourself. I mean I do a vision retreat with myself every year. I know this sounds crazy.

Paula: No, no, no. I'm so glad you're saying this because we need this. We need to do this for ourselves.

Juanita: When I started doing that, everything changed. I felt so much better. I set my intentions as they say.

Paula: So what is this? This is a vision retreat for yourself?

Juanita: A vision retreat for myself. My family knows mom makes this a priority?

Paula: Do you go somewhere for this or do you do this at home?

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Juanita: No I go to a hotel. If I stay at home, they won't leave me alone. I love everybody. They're not going to leave me alone. They will never leave me alone long enough to do this. Sometimes it's been as long as three days if I'm lucky. Sometimes it's a single day.

It is a moment you have to step away from everything and everyone and sit down and say what is it that's important right now? Where am I in life? If I get a role and an audition, what can I do? It's important for me to tell my agent, "Look don't send me on a casting call, and I'm going to be filming in Sri Lanka for three months." That's not my life right now. That might be my life at 50.

Also recognizing that thanks to the miracle of shea butter and the fact that I have all this beautiful melanin honey and black don't crack, I'm going to look 30 until I'm at least 50. The roles are going to be there. Somebody has to play the auntie. Somebody has to play the mom. I'm never going to be without opportunity.

I think it's women, and people period. We think that if I don't do this, if I hit 40 and I haven't done this then it's over. No seasons change. We get better with time. I think it's a misnomer. You get wiser. You get more capable. Things get better with time. Time is your friend. Once my coach told me that. I was looking at time as the enemy. She was like, "No, time is your friend. You have all the time in the world. All the time that you have. It's okay."

So I do the vision retreat for myself. A lot of us do like vision board with groups and everything. That's all cute and fine and a good time with wine. Get with yourself. Sit down and prioritize yourself and get the priorities together so that way when the opportunities come, you already know what you can and cannot say yes to.

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Even in this pandemic, recently there's been a lot of pressure, "When are you coming back to London?" I have an 11 year old unvaccinated child in my household who has asthma. I have one job, and that's to keep him COVID free. That's my only job. I'm not at a place where I am traveling outside of the country that I live in. I haven't traveled since this happened. I traveled all throughout Taiwan, and then I had to transition and move to Singapore, but I'm not leaving.

The pressure that some people tried to put on me, attempted to. Because I'm still chairing the board in London. I launched another Dress for Success affiliate in Chattanooga where in from in the middle of the pandemic. There's a lot of pressure to say oh you need to be there. For me, my priorities were to stay put no matter what that meant to anybody else. If it disappoints them, get another chair. It came down to being that clear about my priorities.

Paula: I love that Juanita. I have to say, your idea of having the vision time however long it is. Whether it's a day, whether it's three days. Ironically you're taking time away from your family in order to really have the space to make them the priority that you want to make them. I know for all working parents out there, this is something that really resonates. I so highly recommend just being able to have that time and space.

I feel this particularly coming off I guess two and a half weeks of winter vacation where everything is all jumbled together. We're in the house and people are on top of each other. It's nonstop. What it means is I know for myself I need exactly what you've described. Just a few, maybe it's a couple days. I don't know exactly the amount of time, but it's that time you get to recalibrate. Where you get to refocus on what your priorities are.

Juanita: Yes.

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Paula: Especially we're at the beginning of 2022. What do we want for our families? What do we want for our careers? What do we want for ourselves? Let's not leave each of us out of the equation. To actually reflect on that so that we can approach commitments and projects with that intentionality and to be able to parent in a way where we feel like this is completely in alignment with what we've chosen. And to lessen those feelings of missing out on an opportunity or resent that you are folding laundry when you could be, I don't know, attending a gala in London. Whatever that looks like.

So I think these are all really impactful messages. What you said about time, I think that's an ongoing relationship that all of us are working on, right. To have that approach that you have, which is that time is our friend. Things happen in seasons. When it's time for this to happen, I'll be there. This opportunity if it's the right one for me, I'm not going to miss it. So I just really love that you shared that with us because I think it's such a gift. I know it's a gift that I'm taking out of this conversation. For our listeners, I think it's a gift for them as well. So thank you for sharing that.

Juanita, I think we have time for one last question. Then I think we will let you go back to all the wonderful things you're doing in Singapore. I think you mentioned you graduated law school in 20 years ago. Was that?

Juanita: Yeah.

Paula: That was the number. So if you were to go back and give Juanita of 20 years ago advice on life, on career, wisdom, what would you share with her? I would invite all of our listeners to think about this in terms of how this might be applicable to them in terms of their own trajectory?

Juanita: I will tell super young Juanita. Cause there's super young, right. That she was enough. That right where you are in that moment is always

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going to be enough. That everything is going to work out really, really well. That you don't have to try to make it work. It is going to work. It's going to work exactly the way it's supposed to work. All you have to do is to try to be your authentic self, and that's it. It is enough.

Everything else that is meant to be for you. Not just meant to be, but everything else that you actually desire is going to happen. Never to let anyone put you in the box and put the lid on the box and to not allow yourself to put a lid on.

I think that would be the two things that I would tell myself. Because those are the two areas that being in such a conservative industry traditionally that I struggled with being this whole brainer. One of my coaches gave me this book called *A Whole Brainer*. It's about people who balance their left and right brain very effectively and use both very effectively. I'm not right or left brain dominant. I'm not. I'm both. It took a while for me to embrace that. I grew up with narratives that I was okay but not special.

People used to ask me all the time, "Well, you've done all these Mrs. pageants. Why didn't you do pageants as a child?" I didn't think I was that cute. I really didn't. I didn't know. I clean up well.

Paula: I think you're very cute.

Juanita: I didn't know. I had no idea I was this cute. I was like okay, I'm all right. But it was for different reasons. We all have different narratives that we have grown up with that stay with us whether it was childhood, teen years, law school, undergrad, whatever reason. Whatever the limiting statements are that seep into the psyche, I would tell myself that you are going to be just fine.

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Paula: So beautiful. Thank you so much Juanita. I love that. I had goosebumps as you were saying that. I think it's just so beautiful. So before we wrap up, where can people find you? We will link to all this in the show notes. Your website, where can people find you?

Juanita: Sure. I am Juanita Ingram is my website, all my social media handles on Instagram, Twitter, I'm on TikTok. But as my daughter points out, I'm horrible. So I don't really. Yeah, gotta love the honesty of a 13 year old. My daughter's actually 13 now. She'll be 14 in a couple of weeks. Very honest with me. Like mom, don't try to lip sync on TikTok. It's not your thing. On all social media, I am Junita Ingram.

Then the website for PURPOSE is purposeproduciton.org, purposestreaming.com. The show, if you type in The Expats Reality Show, the website's there. We're on social media. You'll find us. We're on Amazon. We're filming season two right now. I'm not sure when we'll drop season two. Amazon has been a great partner. We'll see. We'll see. We're kind of hot right now. So we'll see what happens. That's me.

Paula: Beautiful. Thank you so much Juanita. Thank you. Like I said, all these links will be in the show notes. So go check them out. Thank you again for joining us. Thank you to everybody who has joined us to listen to today's interview with Juanita Ingram. It has been such a pleasure to connect with you Juanita and to connect with everybody who's listening. So happy New Year everyone. We are having this conversation January 4th to be exact, 2022. So looking forward to what the year has in store for everybody.

So with that, I'm going to sign off. Thank you all again. I'll look forward to seeing you all again next week.

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