

Seeking The Extraordinary - Sarah Durham

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Intro Welcome fellow Seekers of the Extraordinary to our shared quest -- to understand how we can achieve our fullest potential. May we always have the courage and wisdom to learn from those who have something to teach. Join me now in Seeking The Extraordinary.

Michael Nathanson Today's guest is a friend of your chief seeker of the extraordinary. Regular listeners know that I am a grateful brain tumor survivor and was the longtime chair of the National Brain Tumor Society before stepping down to become an emeritus board member. Our guest succeeded me as chair and is now herself an emeritus board member following her own successful term as chair. We'll touch on our guest's personal story and her own connection to the brain tumor community.

But as compelling as that story is, there is so much more to her than that. The author of two books, "Brand Raising: How Nonprofits Raise Visibility" and "Money Through Smart Communications" and "The Nonprofit Communications Engine: A Leaders Guide to Managing Mission Driven Marketing and Communications." Our guest is one of the foremost nonprofit experts in the world. She is a sought after speaker on branding, fundraising and other nonprofit communications topics, was named a top fundraiser under 40 by Fundraising Success magazine in 2006 and was also named one of the most influential women in technology by Fast Company magazine in 2010.

As an adjunct professor at NYU's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service she taught strategic communications to aspiring nonprofit communicators for many years. She founded the company Big Duck in 1994 to help nonprofits increase their visibility, raise money and communicate more effectively, and now serves on its board of directors after selling the business to Big Ducks employees in 2021. And if you haven't heard of Big Duck, it's only because you don't work in the nonprofit space. Big Duck is a big deal. Along the way, she acquired a digital agency called Advamatic, which built technically complex Drupal websites for nonprofits, including Columbia University, the ACLU and others. She sold that business in 2021 to a larger digital agency, seemingly always moving forward and never fully at rest.

Our guest now provides coaching to entrepreneurs, business and nonprofit leaders and women in professional leadership roles through Compton, Durham, LLC. With nearly three decades of experience building, acquiring, leading and selling small businesses in the marketing, communications and digital sectors, she now supports executives in their leadership journey as a coach and an advisor. She helps clients clarify goals, set pragmatic plans, reach their objectives faster and with greater satisfaction and get unstuck.

Our guest is an international Coaching Federation credentialed coach, leveraging a mix of methodologies, including coach active and positive intelligence. She's an active member of the International Coaching Federation and the Bureau of Digital and is an affiliate member of the Institute of Coaching at McLean Hospital, a Harvard Medical School affiliate. Our guest serves on the board of Advisors for SHIP, the Student Entrepreneurship Club at the Rhode Island School of Design and for Project Open Door. And yes, she remains an active volunteer, an emeritus board member of the National Brain Tumor Society. Please welcome my friend, the extraordinary Sarah Durham. Welcome, Sarah.

Sarah Durham Michael, Thank you so much for having me. What a lovely introduction.

Michael Nathanson It's quite extensive, but I guess that's that's your life. I would describe your life certainly as extensive, expansive and pretty darn impressive. So thank you. Let's actually get into your life. And I usually like to begin our interviews by talking about the person and not necessarily the career or what they're up to. So I know you really well. Our listeners do not. Why don't we just start by having you tell us about Sarah Durham, the person beyond what I just said about you.

Sarah Durham Yeah. Thank you. Well, like you, I'm a lifelong learner. I am the proud mother of identical twins. I am ... I'm an artist. I love to quilt and draw. And so I'm a native New Yorker, and... And I'm proud to be your friend.

Michael Nathanson I'm proud to be yours to see you and I have been through a lot together. So why don't we actually get into that and. And we'll get to your your current interest as soon as possible. But there is this that there is this matter of how you and I met through our shared interest in eradicating brain tumors. I've talked about my story. Why don't you tell us about your own connection to that cause?

Sarah Durham Yeah, absolutely. That's been that's been a really kind of game changing experience for me. In 1996, when I was in my mid-twenties, my father was diagnosed with a glioblastoma, which is an aggressive, malignant form of brain cancer. And I'm an only child. And so I was his his kind of health decision maker. And I began this journey to learn all about the standards of care and the options for him for his treatment. And that led me to what was then called the Brain Tumor Society and to immersing myself in that world as a volunteer. Unfortunately, my father died in 1997, but I stayed involved as a volunteer. I found that in that organization and it later merged and grew and became the National Brain Tumor Society that there were a lot of people with really challenging life experiences that they were trying to to turn into something better. 13 years after my mother, my father died, my mother was also diagnosed with a glioblastoma. So in 2010 I kind of re introduced myself to that community, got involved again. And what I learned at that point was that there had not been enough progress in in the state of affairs for four brain tumor patients, particularly malignant brain tumors. And so I got even more involved and was invited to join the board in 2012. My first meeting was the meeting where you were elected chair, and the rest is history.

Michael Nathanson Yeah, thank you for sharing that. And Sarah, just again, just a quick aside on a very important and tragic topic. ... As you and I both know, while glioblastoma is among the more common and certainly deadly forms of brain cancer, it's still a rare disease as as our brain is brain cancer. Generally, most brain tumors are not cancerous. And I imagine you've thought about the just the odds of both of your parents having glioblastoma. And the odds must be I mean, I imagine you've never tried to calculate it, but statistically, it's almost impossible.

Sarah Durham Yeah, I had I had somebody at a conference say to me, it's as if you or your family has been struck by lightning twice. But it's true. And certainly when you look around, you do hear a lot of stories and a lot of people who've been affected in ways, all kinds of ways. My best friend has a nonmalignant brain tumor. I mean, it's kind of all around us. So lots of important work to do there.

Michael Nathanson What do you think is your most important contribution to the brain tumor community? You've made so many. So that may be a difficult question, but that's what we specialize in on this show.

Sarah Durham Well, you know, I've thought about this a lot because when you volunteer for something where finding the solution is not the kind of thing you... You as an individual are going to do. Right? I'm not personally going to cure brain tumors. What what you can actually contribute and what the outcome of that is for you personally or for your family. It can really be varied. I think for me, probably my most important contribution in the community is modeling for others that you can experience personal tragedy and come out stronger for it, that it doesn't have to crush you and and form. Before I started volunteering as actively... And certainly for me, being on the board was a game changer in this way. People would say the word "brain tumor" or say the word "brain cancer," the words "brain cancer." and I felt it in my body as a as a source of pain. And ... and now I don't. Now I feel like I have really been able to have a very positive experience and be a part of something bigger than me. And I'm I feel really proud of that.

Michael Nathanson Thank you for that. Thank you for sharing. Have you stayed involved with the National Brain Tumor Society?

Sarah Durham Yeah, I have. I have. I've consistently volunteered. I don't think I've stopped volunteering since 1996. And it's just sort of taken different chapters this year. One of the things I've been doing as a volunteer that I'm very excited about is, is the organization is doing some really important research around quality of life for brain tumor patients. And I've been volunteering as a facilitator for a series of roundtables that are being led by all kinds of brilliant people. And that's been great. It's been a chance to hear firsthand what it's like for patients and their care partners today.

Michael Nathanson Yeah, You know, just one personal anecdote... I recently wrote an article about legacy. And on the topic of legacy, I believe that one of the most important contributions to a person's legacy in the professional world, of course not the personal world is is whom their successor is. And I just want to thank you for being my successor, because in my book, you succeeding me very much is an important part of my own legacy at the National Brain Tumor Society.

Sarah Durham No, thank you. They're certainly, certainly big shoes to fill. And it was a great it's actually a whole other topic that would be interesting to explore is is about leading finding your own voice as a leader and leading in unique ways. So I learned a lot from you as a leader. And... And then I had this opportunity to find my own way to lead my own style as a board chair.

Michael Nathanson So I always do a lot of research on our guests before they come on, and I feel like I owe them that respect. And I understand that you just completed an intensive training process to do grief, loss and trauma infirm support work. Is that a personal interest? Is that actually related to your work with NVTs or is it related to your work as a coach? Are you finding that that's important in your new work?

Sarah Durham Yes, yes, and yes. It's related to all of those things for sure. You know, when when I was navigating the illness and death of my parents, I had the great fortune to have firsthand experiences with hospice. Both of my parents were in hospice care and entering into the world of hospice and understanding what happens there opened up my eyes to what grief and loss and sort of living with death can look like. And certainly my experiences with the National Brain Tumor Society to have brought I've been in a lot of meetings, as have you, where people's grief and loss is very front and center and very much at the table, whether it's spoken or not. So statistically, everybody is quite likely to have either experienced trauma or to be grappling with some sort of grief or loss. It's not necessarily a death. It might be the loss of an aspect of your identity as your life changes. And so I went through this training because I thought it might be a nice new addition to my toolkit as a volunteer. But as I got into it, I found, wow, this is super relevant for the executives I coach, and I almost immediately have found ways to put it into use with with small business owners, with nonprofit leaders. Again, part of the human condition is navigating grief and loss and and recovering, hopefully building resilience after trauma.

Michael Nathanson Am I right to say that your first professional interest and maybe your first professional love, if we can say that, was and maybe still is, the nonprofit sector?

Sarah Durham You're not wrong. But I would actually say my first professional love is actually communication. My undergrad degree, I went to art school. I went to Christie and started out as a visual communicator, but then got really passionate about writing and project management. And when I started my agency, Big Duck, in the nineties, it was to be a communications firm. I opted to specialize in the nonprofit sector and then really fell in love with the sector because I saw such an opportunity for nonprofits to become more mindful about how they communicate. It felt to me like both a great market opportunity at that time, but more so just an opportunity to really do good in my in my day job.

Michael Nathanson So that's really what attracted you to the space, Just this idea of being able to to, to work, make a living and also have an impact on the world.

Sarah Durham Absolutely. And and I've seen over and over again, as have you and I'm sure all of our listeners, sometimes there are these incredible causes, incredible organizations out there that are really lacking in visibility, lacking in support, not because they're not worthy, but because they're not doing a great job telling their story. And and that has always been something I've been passionate about, about working on and changing.

Michael Nathanson Yep. Okay. You you did something that that that most people would would not do and have difficulty doing it. We see this all the time in the professional athlete space. And you'll understand what I mean when I ask you the question. You started and led a fantastic business. I got to work with Big Duck as well and you could have just stayed there. You are a relatively young woman, but you decided not to. And rather than continue to grow it and benefit from it, you sold it and you didn't sell it to some third-party investor or some larger company, you sold it to your employees. So tell us a little bit about that and what your thinking was.

Sarah Durham Yeah, well, for me personally, I always imagined my career as being more like a buffet than a three-course meal at one restaurant. And I always wanted my career... I always wanted to do different things. The world is so big and interesting. There's so many cool things you could do. So I always planned to do something after Big Duck. I just wasn't sure what it would be and and when it would be. And what happened over many years was that my team grew and got more and more independent and high functioning. And as a leader, I felt like my job was to get out of their way and let them lead. One of the reasons I acquired a second agency was basically to get out of the hair of my employees, give them give them a little bit more room. And and at a certain point, I felt like it was really time to to have the business take its next step. For me, I really wanted to no longer be the person sitting at the head of the table. The metaphor that I like to use now, I'm kind of like the pit crew for for today's leaders and some of tomorrow's leaders. And that's a seat I'm very comfortable and very happy to occupy. The other thing that was very exciting was that in in as I started talking to my team about how I would leave Big Duck, what that would look like, the way I sold it to my employees is a little bit different. Big Duck actually became a worker owned cooperative. So this was not just a sale, but it was a complete structural shift. And now anybody who has been an employee of Big Dog for a year has the option to buy in and be a worker owner at it at a really low cost. So it's a kind of transformative model from an equity point of view. And and I felt really, really proud of the team for being interested in doing that and, and all of us for, for making it happen.

Michael Nathanson I'm guessing they felt proud of you as well. Have you and I ever talked about the Enneagram before?

Sarah Durham You and I have not discussed it, but I'm familiar with the Enneagram. Yeah.

Michael Nathanson Do you to know your Enneagram type?

Sarah Durham I don't. I don't. I've taken it, but I don't remember.

Michael Nathanson So for our our listeners who are not familiar with the Enneagram, it's another one of these personality tests. And I'm just sitting here speculating whether you might be in any gram type seven, which is the enthusiast, which is just has so many interests there. They're always looking for the next thing because they're just interested in everything. And I've never really thought about that for you, Sarah, but it would be interesting to know what your type is.

Sarah Durham Well, I do love to learn, I love to grow. I love to create and build. And and so for me, the the opportunity in life and the opportunity and career is to craft something that kind of is always growing, always evolving and always being shaped, which I think makes it more unique and more valuable.

Michael Nathanson So tell us about your current professional interests around coaching and advising business and nonprofit leaders. And I think you and I are both fans of Simon Sinek, and

maybe you could. You could. If this works as a framework, maybe you could actually speak about your what, your how, and your why.

Sarah Durham Yeah, well, so as I said before, my experience running my own businesses is one that I bought and one that I built gave me a lot of time to sit at the head of the table and lead and I was really thinking about a change. And over the years, I mean, I didn't I didn't go to business school. I don't have an MBA, but I sort of got an MBA by working myself with coaches, with consultants, learning from friends and mentors like you, reading books and trying to understand and shape my own, my own values and my own skills as a leader. And coaching to me felt like sort of the perfect next transition. So it's a way that I can shift into this new role and and be for other people. What at times in my career I wish I had. And and it's it's really fun. And it's also inspiring to see a new generation of leaders lead.

Michael Nathanson In your opinion, what does it take to be a good coach?

Sarah Durham I love that question. I think more people should ask that. And coaching is, as you probably know and maybe your listeners know too, is a little bit the Wild West. It's there are there are like the the International Coaching Federation, which I belong to, has a code of conduct and ethics and you have to take a rigorous test and be credentialed to join. But a lot of people call themselves coaches without necessarily knowing what that means. And, and a good coach is really there to listen and to care about their clients and to put the needs and the the helping their client ahead of their own agenda or ideas. So a good coach is a listener. A good coach doesn't advocate for their own ideas or push their client. They treat their client as if they are whole, they are not broken, and and that the job of a coach is to just help help the client get unstuck or help the client move faster, which is which is which is a privilege.

Michael Nathanson And do you think that all leaders need a coach?

Sarah Durham I do. I mean, look look at great athletes, right? Every great athlete has a coach. That's not because they can't do it. It's not because they're broken. It's because they need somebody to help give them perspective and and helps them see things differently and maybe move differently. And in fact, these days, a lot of business schools give their alumni coaches out of the gate. So I think all leaders can certainly benefit from coaches. And and I think there's all kinds of other professional development leaders can benefit from, too.

Michael Nathanson Yeah. Yeah. I've had them off and on throughout my my career. But but as I really think about it, I also think that I've probably had some people who are coaches that I didn't realize were coaches. So I'm curious. Obviously you can't reveal specifics about specific clients, but I'm curious if you could speak about some of the more common themes and issues that you and your coaching clients face as you do your work and help people become the best versions of themselves?

Sarah Durham Yeah. All the people I coach one on one, they're all senior leaders. So so there are a number of them work in the nonprofit sector. Many of them are executive directors or sort of C-suite people. I also coach small business owners, people who run run small businesses. And it's interesting, while those areas are all very different, there definitely are some common themes. One of them, probably the biggest one, is the challenge of managing people and particularly how hard it can be to challenge people directly, to be clear and specific and still be caring and adaptive in unique ways.

As a manager and a boss, I often use the book *Radical Candor* by Kim Scott as a coaching framework because I see a lot of people struggle with that, and I think there's a layer in management or sort of a theme in management. We don't talk about enough, which is when you're the boss, you feel accountable for the outcomes. You feel like it's up to you to make sure results happen. So letting people giving people the right altitude of feedback where you're not micromanaging them, you're empowering them, but you're still ensuring that the outcomes and results are there, that's a challenge for everybody. In my experience, I think there are some other

themes that are going on in the work world today that are also having a profound impact on things. One of the one of the things we don't talk about enough, I think, is that we've got four generations in the workforce today. And those four generations have pretty different norms and values and priorities. So people like you and I, who grew up at a certain time, we inherited the norms that the generation ahead of us set. And we often people of our generation often expect younger generations to adhere to those norms. And they don't. And they that there's a lot of tension around that that I see my clients navigating. And then the last piece is just the kind of new dimensionality of businesses operating in fully remote hybrid and in-person work environments. And the and the ways that that plays out for leaders and managers and employees. Lots of lots of themes around that, lots of challenges around that today.

Michael Nathanson Hmm. Interesting. So it does seem like many of those themes are connected to the times that we live in. And much as you spoke about four generations in the workforce at the same time having different perspectives and there's the environment's changing as well.

Sarah Durham Absolutely the environment's changing. And I don't think that the dust has even really begun to settle in terms of the remote hybrid and in-person work dynamics. We're seeing a lot of big companies make people come back to the office now, and I think it's going to be even different still in two years or three years. What the expectations are around going to the office and and you and I know because we both have children who are working or entering newer in their careers that that it's challenging for people who are earlier in their careers to figure out their place in a in a remote office world and a Zoom office.

Michael Nathanson Sure. Sure. Talk about leadership. And it's such a ubiquitous term now. People talk about it all the time. And one thing that I wonder is and I'm not sure it's my place to share my view on this, I'm I'm curious what you think about about this question. It's a pretty simple question. Can everyone be a business or nonprofit leader?

Sarah Durham I'm actually dying to hear your answer, so I'll tell you mine. But maybe you can share your your reflection, too. Can everyone be a business or nonprofit leader? That's a question that I think infers some sort of static or foundational assumption that I would challenge you on. So. So I would say that leadership is situational or contextual, that you might be a leader in your work or in your family or in your volunteer work. At certain times you might not in others. So so for instance, when you and I both served as members of the executive committee of the National Brain Tumor Society Board, there were projects that I led and there were projects where I contributed and followed. So I think the opportunity is well, and actually, just one one other piece about that that I love. I remember Pat Connolly, who a, you and I both know well. But for those of you who don't know Pat, he's a biophysicist and entrepreneur, a writer, really interesting creative guy who is on the board with us. At one point he said something like, In order to have leaders, you have to have followers and more people should want to be followers. I think that's true to do so. So I like to see leadership as an opportunity and a situational. But but what do you think? Would you share your your perspective?

Michael Nathanson Yeah, well, I would say that everyone can be a leader, but that doesn't mean everyone actually becomes a leader. I like what you said, but I do think that there is context and I think there's fluidity. And I agree that some of the best leadership a person can offer is "followership." And all good leaders ultimately also understand that there's a time to follow. I think that's that's key to being a good leader. I'm really making a reference to this notion that I see I think I see fairly regularly, which is this this kind of concept that, well, everyone's a leader. And and of course, if everyone's a leader, then no one's a leader. But I do understand the the potential for every person to be a leader. And maybe it's, it's, it's, it's about when that person becomes a leader at the right times and and also again, our willingness to also follow.

Sarah Durham Yeah, I agree with you. And I the way I see it is that it's really about finding your voice and feeling that you are able to use your voice, that you are comfortable using your voice and power to do so. Welcome to do so. Yeah.

Michael Nathanson Yeah. And I'd like to think that some people actually are leaders and have no idea that they're leaders. And, and we often lead by just our example and how we behave. And you don't always understand the impact that your actions and words have on others. I also think of you as a DEI leader, and you most certainly are a leader in that space. You are outspoken. And I guess I would just ask, first of all, do you agree with that characterization? Do you think of yourself as a DEI leader? And then I'd also ask, how does your passion around the topic factor into what you do your work?

Sarah Durham I'm definitely passionate about diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism. I don't think I would claim leadership status. I would say I work to be a good ally and a good champion. My my experience emerges from the fact that I started a business in my twenties and as a young female entrepreneur, I had multiple experiences where I was marginalized, minimized, overlooked, particularly in my twenties. I'm also Jewish and I've experienced antisemitism kind of multiple altitudes, but still I'm white, I'm cisgender, I have a lot of privilege. And so the experiences I've had of being marginalized are really minimal because in a lot of spaces I occupy, I reflect the the dominant norms. But but, you know, I feel that I have and I really believe other everybody has an obligation to try to learn about other people's experiences, try to remember that other people have very different experiences from our own and to be personally responsible for constantly learning and growing about that. So I don't think that makes me a leader. I just think that's what we should all be doing.

Michael Nathanson And that's an interesting study in perspective because while we work together on the National Brain Tumor Society Board, I felt like you were a leader and I felt like that was something that that you spoke about frequently. And I felt that you were leading in that context. Whether or not you saw yourself in that in that capacity. On the topic of privilege, I'll just shout out to Gloria Cotton, who is a former guest on this show, and she is a DEI consultant. You said DEI in anti-racism, so I'll use your term IV. Some people are using the EIB for belonging as well these days. But Gloria said that there's there's nothing wrong with with privilege. It's just how you use your privilege. And I'd like to think that you have used your privilege. Well, you wrote a blog called "It's Time to Really Unplug on Vacation." Oh, this is something I can really relate to. You pretty much describe how someone like me takes vacations, which is to say that I'm really never fully off when I take a vacation as much as I try. And I actually think that that's because I maybe, maybe. Sarah I'm looking for some coaching right now. Yeah, I grew up in a belief system that I've long adhered to, which is that it's all about work. I've got to work all the time. I've got to show everyone that I'm working really hard, so maybe coach me. Tell us about your thinking on this topic.

Sarah Durham Yeah, I'd be happy to share my thinking on this topic. I'm really passionate about it and and if anybody wants to read that blog, it's on my website on ComptonDurham.com. I mean, Michael, the way you you just ended that question, you talked about how you were how you were raised. So so we we were all raised people of our generation and most generations and we exist in America in a capitalist culture. And and that culture prioritizes the advancement of a project oftentimes over the individual's health and well-being in in in many ways. And of course, it varies from business to business or institution to institution. It really makes a difference what you do, where you do it, how you do it. For me, what what brought me, like my journey with this was that I, like you, never fully unplugged. I was always checking my email or taking a phone call or dialing into something that I felt was important for years and years. And then at one point, a bunch of years into my career, I had somebody on my team say, Look, why don't you just take this vacation and just like, we'll call you if it's a crisis, just let it go. Just just put it aside. And I took a week off fully unplugged. And I found just at the end of the week, I was starting to really relapse. So then the next vacation, I took two weeks fully unplugged. And what I found was that with real time off, where you're not checking email, you're not working, all that kind of stuff, you are actually able to kind of put aside thinking about work in a way that is almost impossible to do for most people if every day you're checking in. So it's kind of about putting down the mental construct of your office and remembering who you are without it, reconnecting with who you are without it. Another another really interesting example of this is Bill Gates, who does these things called reading weeks or thinking weeks where he goes off. The words fully unplugged and just reads for a week. So I guess my theory unproven, but my theory is that there's so much being written about right now

about burnout and and fatigue in the workforce and all of that. And I think that this is one of the reasons why I think if we feel we can't let go of the constructive work and find out who we are and let ourselves fully relax when we're on vacation, then we don't fully recharge. Now, that's not universally true. I don't think anything is one size fits all, but in my experience, most people who are able to fully unplug really come back feeling a lot better. So I wrote this piece to kind of encourage people to try to do it. Try to talk about it in your office or try to set that out or respond or to say, I'm not going to respond until next week as an experiment. So, I mean, if I were coaching you, we could talk about all kinds of pieces around this. But I think my advice would be maybe try an experiment, see how it. See what happens.

Michael Nathanson Yeah. Yeah, I have. I have tried to do things. I remember your legendary out-of-office replies, which I think you still use on your email, which basically say, I'm gone. Don't expect to hear back from me until I get back. I tried working with my with my my close business partner Jeannie, to look at my emails and and, and and I've tried to do things to make myself not worry so much. And I do try to I tell everyone in our company and I'm the CEO of a pretty large company that everyone should take vacation. I might be a bit hypocritical in terms of the way I do it myself, and I have awareness around that. I, you and I, are both readers, and one of the classics that I talk about is The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, and the seventh habit of highly effective people is sharpen the saw. And what that means is when you become a dull saw, you can't you can't cut anything down at that point, and you do have to take time to sharpen it.

Sarah Durham Absolutely. Absolutely. And maybe that's the question is what sharpens your saw? Right. For me, unplugging is really important. I feel screen fatigue a lot. I don't want to look at my phone. I don't want to look at my computer when I'm on vacation or on a day off because I want to be able to be fully present when I'm working.

Michael Nathanson As I mentioned, you and I do share a passion for books, including business books. And I guess I'd ask that. What have you been reading? What have you read lately that that has potentially shaped your thinking or it doesn't have to be lately? What are your what are your go to books?

Sarah Durham I think at my coaching practice, there are probably about five books that I find are really helpful for a lot of people. One of the books that I found really helpful that you and I have never talked about is a book called How Women Rise by Sally Helgesen and Marshall Goldsmith. And you might remember Marshall Goldsmith because he wrote the book What Got You There or What Got You Here Won't Get You There. And What How Women Rise is almost like a sequel to that, because it turns out that his his his first book was written using research that was almost entirely men. So how Women Rise talks about I think it's 13 habits that often hold women back in the workforce. These are habits that we develop when we have internalized business norms that are common in the workforce. And you'll find that a lot of younger women don't struggle with these habits the same way as as women 40, 45 and up. But that's a great book. I'm a big fan of Kim Scott's book, Radical Candor. I think there's a lot of great content in that. I like a lot of Gina Whitman's stuff Traction, and both of my shops were iOS shops. So I think I also have some beef with traction too. We can talk about that. I think it's extremely hierarchical system and very challenging from an equity point of view, but I think a lot of great ideas, really useful ideas. Too bad around in there.

Michael Nathanson You mentioned the EEOC. What does that stand for?

Sarah Durham U.S.? Is the entrepreneurial operating system. So if you if you read Traction and you love it, you can go hire one EOC, skilled facilitator or consultant, or you can implement EOC at your at your business. So I did that. And and I've worked with a lot of organizations that are EOC businesses.

Michael Nathanson It's a it's a simple insight That's an excellent book Traction. And as and as he says at the beginning of the book, there's really nothing new in the book. It's just the magic of how he put it all together. Absolutely. And one of the things that I that I read, the passages I really like is

the one that talks about the Thanksgiving ham. And he talks about a family that for for generation after generation cut off the end of the ham. And finally someone asked him, why do we do this? It seems wasteful. And and they researched it and determined. It's because ovens were a lot smaller many years ago and no one bothered to figure out why. They just kept doing the same thing. Interesting stuff.

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Michael Nathanson Sarah, We are now going to move into our extraordinary teaching segment. Seeking The Extraordinary presents, extraordinary teachings, a deeper look at the qualities that allow people to do extraordinary things. All right. So I'm now going to ask you the same questions that I ask just about all of my guests. And we're going to begin with what's been your most satisfying accomplishment in life so far?

Sarah Durham Definitely my relationship with my life partner, Craig, and the daughters we've raised together.

Michael Nathanson Great answer. Any regrets in life?

Sarah Durham I don't have any big regrets, although I do. I would like. I wish I had learned to play drums as a teenager. I'm a wannabe drummer. I played bass guitar in a punk band. Never got around to the drums.

Michael Nathanson Hmm. It's not too late.

Sarah Durham Maybe not.

Michael Nathanson What single tip would you offer that has helped you be your most extraordinary self?

Sarah Durham I really benefited from having parents who were both a little bit odd or eccentric or outside of the norm, and I benefited from that because I think they really taught me to listen to myself and trust myself, particularly when my inner voice was maybe saying something different or unusual. And so I guess the tip I would offer is, is listen to that voice and make space to have real conversations with yourself and challenge what the social norms look for, what the social norms are telling you. And and don't be afraid to challenge them if they don't work for you.

Michael Nathanson Because that might end up being an answer to my next question when I ask anyway. And it's what's the best advice that you've ever given or received?

Sarah Durham Actually think one of the best pieces of advice I ever got, my father gave me and this he quoted this is apparently an Einstein quote, but I don't know, I don't remember the quote itself. But the idea was don't clog up your brain trying to remember things that you can write down. So I write everything down. I take notes. I have to do lists. Don't use up. Use your brain for thinking. Use your brain for the good stuff. Don't use it to try to remember what you got to do this afternoon.

Michael Nathanson I used to ask people, what have been your your your, your greatest mistakes? Now what I ask is simply what have been your best learning opportunities?

Sarah Durham I mean, just everything like that. That is such a big question. I guess I, I like the idea of everything being a learning opportunity. I just another book I just read and some coaching study I've done is with Shirzad Chamin's book about positive intelligence. And one of the things he talks about at the beginning of the book is this kind of this business that has this, like epic fail. It's on the

brink of disaster. It's just a mess. And the question that he asks that leadership team is, is what has to happen so that you could see this failure as the biggest gift you ever had in the business. And I think that's such a great example of that of of that, anything can be a learning opportunity. So I've learned from people, books, schools, doing things. Yeah, it's all good.

Michael Nathanson Who are your key role models and mentors?

Sarah Durham I mean, I would I would say that goes back to the conversation we had about leadership in that it's contextual. And in some ways, I mean, I've got farmers who live near me in Massachusetts where I spend part of my time who are role models because they have such great work life balance and such great connection to the land. I have mentors like you in places around volunteerism or business leadership. I have all kinds of things.

Michael Nathanson Sarah, do you have a personal mission?

Sarah Durham I don't have a... Well, that's actually not true. I do. I do this year. I mean, I think generally I try to feel good about the decisions I make so that I don't look back and say, I misspent my time on this earth. But this year I do sort of have not a personal mission, but almost like a a tagline or a slogan for the year, which is deep service, serious play.

Michael Nathanson Hmm. I like that. My last question is about legacy. I'll quote Stephen Covey again. And Stephen Covey says, Begin the rest of your life with the end in mind, meaning begin thinking about your own end and and and how you'll be remembered. So what do you hope your legacy will be?

Sarah Durham I love the Covey "begin with the end and in mind" quote, And I think about that a lot. Although it's interesting, I want to read your article about legacy, because one of the I have a kind of an odd perspective on this. I don't Bill, I'm not sure I believe in legacy or a different way to say that is I actually take comfort in the idea that my life will be short and finite and that I will be forgotten. I think that's actually an unburdening idea. So I am interested in being being the best person I can be and the best person I can be for the people who are connected to me in my lifetime. But I'm okay with the fact that that might be it.

Michael Nathanson What a what a great thoughtful answer. Really appreciate that. And that, my friends, is the extraordinary Sarah Durham. Thank you, Sarah.

Sarah Durham Thank you. Michael, what fun.

Michael Nathanson It has been fun. So I'm going to end the show with Sarah's simple tagline from her website Work Smarter, Not Harder. You can learn more about Sarah and her extraordinary quest at ComptonDurham.com, and on LinkedIn. And thank you to our sponsor, The Colony Group. The Colony Group is a national wealth and business management company with offices across the country that itself seeks to extraordinary as it pursues its unrelenting mission of providing clients with peace of mind and empowering their visions of tomorrow. To learn more about The Colony Group and how it manages Beyond money, visit TheColonyGroup.com. You can also follow The Colony Group on LinkedIn and on Twitter @Colony Group. For Seeking The Extraordinary. I'm Michael Nathanson. Follow me on LinkedIn and Twitter @Nathanson_MJ to learn more about my ongoing search for the extraordinary.