

Welcome to The Power Lounge, your go-to place for engaging conversations in the digital world. In this episode, our host, Amy Vaughn, dives into the delicate balance of authentic networking with marketing expert, author, and CEO Maryann Lombardi. Explore the transformative power of genuine relationships as Maryann shares her unique approach to evaluating connections, emphasizing intentional interactions and understanding others' needs. From dispelling myths about confidence to exploring AI's role in networking, this episode offers actionable insights for personal and professional growth through meaningful engagements. Join us in redefining networking and embracing the profound impact of authentic connections!

## **Featured in the Episode**

### **Maryann Lombardi**

**Executive Turned Founder | Author | Speaker | Creative Economy Innovator**

Maryann's LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/maryann-lombardi/>

### **Amy Vaughn,**

**Owner & Chief Empowerment Officer**

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/ampvaughan/>

## **Takeaways**

- Misconceptions About Confidence
- Networking as Daily Essential
- Authenticity and Connection in Networking
- Challenges in Authentic Networking
- Balancing Personal and Professional Life
- Unique Value Proposition Communication
- Industry Adaptation and Intentional Networking

## **Quotes**

*"Empathy is key in offering support—everyone deserves to be heard and cared for, wherever they may be." - Maryann Lombardi*

*"Adapting skills to new industries and highlighting diverse talents add unique value across fields in career transitions." - Maryann Lombardi*

## **Chapters**

00:00 - Introduction

01:30 - Balancing Passion and Purpose for Career and Life

10:15 - Embracing Empathy and Open-Mindedness

13:13 - Conquering Networking Challenges

17:43 - Building Connections through Common Ground

22:19 - Setting Intentions for Aimed Success

29:25 - Reflecting on Experiences and Self-Worth

36:26 - Redefining Networking and Valuing Time

54:56 - Networking Shapes Careers

01:00:33 - Outro

Powered by Heartcast Media

## **Transcript:**

### **Amy Vaughn:**

Alright. Hello, and welcome everyone to our weekly power lounge. This is your place to hear authentic conversations from those who have power to share. My name is Amy Vaughn, and I am the owner and chief empowerment officer of Together Digital, a diverse and collaborative community of women who work in digital and choose to share their knowledge, power, and connections. You can join the movement at [togetherindigital.com](http://togetherindigital.com). And today, friends, we have something special for you. Maryann Lombardi is here to talk with us about rehumanizing your networking, a topic that is very near and dear to my heart as many of you know. She is the best selling author and former executive turned business founder and a single parent to the coolest young adult on the planet.

### **Amy Vaughn:**

With over 2 decades of experience, Maryann is a sought after expert in marketing, making authentic connections, and leveraging resources to support others. In this episode, Maryann is going to share with us her wisdom on identifying and communicating your unique value, building meaningful relationships, and authentically navigating the digital landscape. Like I said, Maryann, we're having such a good conversation here today. She's also going to talk about how we can use AI to support your networking goals while staying true to yourself. Again, such good intriguing stuff that we're gonna be talking about today. Maryann, welcome to the Power Lounge.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Oh, I'm so excited to be here. Thank you so much for inviting me. Let's get this party started.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Absolutely. We are thrilled to have you here. But to start, I would love for you to share a little bit with our listeners about your journey and what exactly led you to become an advocate for networking and building authentic connections.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. So I often think that there are 2 major themes for me. 1 is that I've always been kind of obsessed with the intersection between my life and my career and what relationship those things have to each other. And at the time, I don't think I would have ever called this work life balance or anything like that, but I've always been really interested in where those two things are aligned or when they're not. And then the other thing is that I have an enormous amount of trust, interest, and faith in people. Mhmm. Right? I just like people, you know, and I'm interested in them, their behaviors, how they tick, why they do what they do, and those two things in alignment with each other have really been core themes throughout my work. And so for the past 20 plus years, I've been working for governments and institutions and brands and all this bringing together these \$1,000,000,000 partners and leveraging their resources to do good for other people, whether that's help them get jobs, whether it's access mental health care, whether it's to grow their businesses.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

And I've had this weird trajectory where I started in New York City as a theater producer and a cabaret singer and have and and now sitting at the founder and CEO of my own, you know, consulting and coaching firm. Right? So it's been this very interesting ride, and I wouldn't have been able to do all of the things that I've done if it weren't for the people who I've interacted with, who helped me along the way. And I I think that we don't give enough credit to the other humans in our lives that really either give us advice or feedback or introductions or support or those kinds of things. And so I have a lot of care for that. Right? Like, I really love the support that people give and wanna honor them for that.

**Amy Vaughn:**

That's wonderful. I love that collective experience and connections make up the whole of, like, who we are and how we can truly end up, I think, in the places that we're meant to be and doing the work that we're meant to do, I think, which is so ultimately where a lot of us like hunger to be, and I think where a lot of our listeners are are working towards or maybe starting to be. And so I love that answer so much. And as you mentioned in that answer, you've worked with governments, institutions, brands, bringing together \$1,000,000,000 partners in order to help and support thousands of people. What is it that's helped you to successfully navigate these very different landscapes and foster what you're calling these meaningful collaborations? I think because oftentimes, you know, when we're kind of moving in and out of roles and companies and opportunities, they can tend to feel transactional. Yeah.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Well, I think often one of the challenges is so so most of my career has been about building partnerships. Right? It's about, you know, bringing people together to do big stuff, good stuff, whatever it is. And, organizations are run by people. Right? So people are at the helm of all of it, and I think that, often we can get clouded or we can get consumed by the idea that we're talking to organizations and businesses and brands and right? Like, all this fancy hoo Right? But the reality is there's an individual who's making a decision. And your ability to care enough about that individual, to listen to that individual, to support. I don't care where they are and what they're doing. Everybody needs something. And I mean that in a positive way, not in a transactional way.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

We all need support to accomplish our goals. And so, most of it, the way I've been able to do this work is that I've really cared to get to know these people. Right? Like and what they want and what they need. And, so, when you're at the intersection, most of the time, what I'm doing is listening to all of the parties. Right? And I'm doing a matchmaking game because you're hearing what one person is interested in and what they need, and you're hearing what another person needs, and you're seeing how those two things can dovetail with each other and support each other. And so you're bringing those people together to, you know, make something big happen, but it requires you to be willing to listen in the room more than you talk. And I think often people spend way too much time talking and not nearly enough time listening. And that's actually how you get shit done, quite honestly, is listening.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Absolutely. Absolutely. So much good stuff in there. I think you're sort of right because behind every single interaction, behind every business, behind every brand are people. Like you said, at the end of the day, I think I learned this very early on, working on brands like P&G. Even though I was a creative director, oftentimes I was sort of shielded by fostering and growing relationships with my brand managers because we had an account person in between. And I felt like the times when I had the most success in sort of leading opportunities and kind of selling in some of my best work and ideas and sort of growing the account was when I had account partners that trusted me enough and allowed me to get to know the brand managers and spend kind of even 1 on 1 time with them unchaperoned as you might say. Like, God forbid, a creative alone with an account person.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Right? To really get to understand and know who they were and sort of what motivated them, what were their personal and professional goals so that when I was talking to them about the work itself, I kind of came at it in 2 different ways. I understood the business goals and objectives for the brand and the business itself, but also for them, you know, as a professional and based on their personality. And I earned their trust and respect. And because of that, we sold in so much more work, which made the account

person look good. Right? Because now the business portfolio grew and the relationship grew. And I just think that there's so much opportunity when we stop, like you said, kind of thinking it off as all these formalities and just really start looking at the humans behind the business, of the work that we kind of do day in and day out.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. And I think that there is this sense that we need some sort of cheat code or hack, right, to get where we want to go. And I get that. Right? Like, we're all in this productivity mindset and how do we make it more efficient and more, and we'll we can talk about the role AI has in doing all of that. Right? But the reality is, at the core, foundations are it. Right? Like, foundations are the core of it all. You know? And the basics of caring for people and listening to people and doing your best to understand people is it. It's not complicated and we wanna try to make it complicated.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

It could be difficult. Right? There's a difference between complicated and difficult. Yes. Right? You know, but it's not actually complicated and I think people make it more complicated in an effort to avoid doing the difficult work, which is connecting with people, which is doing that care and interest and, you know, listening and understanding.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Exactly. Yeah. I 100% agree. And I think this is so true too when it comes to sometimes difficult or challenging people. I think sometimes the more intention you can take and time you can take in listening, deeper and sort of looking for those opportunities to show that you're listening a little bit harder than everyone else

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Mhmm.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Sometimes it softens those folks a little bit more because it's like I think sometimes they don't know how to always communicate what it is that they truly want and need. And then when you show up in that way, they're like, oh, wait. Wow. You know, Marian actually gets me, and she's actually listening. And so all of a sudden now you have earned that deeper trust and respect, and then all of a sudden you have this new sense of I don't wanna say freedom, but, yeah, a little bit of leeway with that person now. I feel like this is how in the past I have it's and I wouldn't call it a hack or a cheat, but it does kinda feel like that in a way. But it does take time. Like you said, it takes time, it takes attention, and it takes listening.

**Amy Vaughn:**

But I love

**Maryann Lombardi:**

that. Well and I think to to your point, like, sometimes we get too sensitive to the idea that people are like, their personalities may be different or they may be gruff, they may be grumbly, they may be intimidating, they like, there's all sorts of things that that may be at the surface of the individual. Right? And so we can get distracted by that surface. And so, sometimes, you know, I always find that I remind myself that the person I am talking to is not me. Yes. That is not that they are not responsible for helping me understand them necessarily. It's my job to weed through what is happening around that's that's the front, right? Because a lot of people will have a front, like what's at the front, right? Like I wanna open door number 1, Right? And then I wanna open door number 2. Right? Like, I wanna be able to get further, you know, into this person and understand this person.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

And sometimes it requires me to allow them to be grumbling, let things bounce. Right? Like, you know, you don't know what's going on in their day. You don't, they may be grumbling for a really good reason. So, like, maybe I don't need to take offense to that right now. So it's just being willing to listen even if people don't behave the way you want, sound the way you want, look the way you want, have the same politics that you

do, and care about the same things you do. Right? Because at the core, we're all human. Mhmm.

**Amy Vaughn:**

I love it. I love that we've gone so deep so fast in this conversation, Maryann. Because also I want to draw a line in the sand here and say this is the difference between being intentional about relationship building and creating diversity within those that you create deep meaningful relationships with, and the difference between being that and a kiss ass. Right? Because being a kiss ass just means that you're going around and you're placating to people and you're not being intentional and you're not listening deeply and you're not taking action to sort of understand more intentionally. Right? You're just kind of doing it to placate, and you're just doing it to appease versus to understand.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. And in that way, you're also not aware of the big picture. Right? Because I always think about what to end. Right? Like, what is the end, what is to what end are we having this conversation? What is it that we're trying to get to? Where is the goal? What are we working toward? Right? So to what end are we getting to? And so when you have the end in mind, it is much easier to make it through, you know, the weeds and the complications and all that kind of stuff because you're focused on to what end. Right? And if the end is to get mental health care for free mental health care for a bunch of people who damn well need it, then you know what? I can handle a little grumbling. Right? Because I know exactly where we're going. I know you wanna do it. I know I wanna do it.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

We just have to figure out a way to get there because we both care about that issue. So let's get over our personal shit and, like, figure out a way that we can work together to make it happen.

**Amy Vaughn:**



Yeah. That, like, leads very nicely actually into our next question. You know, again, I think it's so easy for us to go deep. You and I both spend a lot of time in this space on this topic, in particular, but this actually came up recently in a networking conversation and workshop that I was helping to facilitate. In your experience, what are some of the most common challenges that people face when trying to network authentically, and how can they overcome them? And I wanted to give a specific example, although we can come up with some others as well. But one that I heard recently was sort of dovetailing off of what you just mentioned, which was, you know, we were talking about networking and getting relationships extended beyond, you know, your kind of general office relationships. And somebody had shared how it's really difficult sometimes when it comes, like, to office gossip and sometimes politics. Right? When you're trying to establish relationships, when we've got a lot of women facing, you know, layoffs and things like that, but you want to lean on people that you've worked with in the past, as possible references and things like that.

**Amy Vaughn:**

How do you begin to foster those kinds of things sort of when you're looking at those types of behaviors and whatnot?

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. Well, I think there's a couple of things. One is that it's helpful to think less about yourself and more about them. Right? I think that is something that's very, very helpful. And often, we lean in based on our needs, our wants, our insecurities, you know, our fears as opposed to going into a conversation focused on the other person. Right? And listening and learning about their fears, their insecurities, their needs, their wants, and whatever. Right? So, I think one of the things that helps quell your insecurities is to focus on them and not you. The other thing is to focus instead on the things that you have in common and not the things that you don't have in common.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Right? Because often we are very aware of where we differ. We're very aware of how we look different, how we sound different, our political things, our socioeconomic status, our whatever it is. And so we're hyper conscious of where we differ and less conscious about what it is that we share. And so, often I focus on and try to help people focus on

what are the things that you can identify that you have in common, right, that you can connect on and stay focused on. And then there's also some, just tactics around changing conversations if they're going down a route that you don't really wanna go down. Right? It's not like it might not be effective or useful to be talking about politics in this current, you know, conversation that you're in with somebody and you may be wildly passionate about it and you guys may disagree. But finding a way to divert that conversation back to a topic that is a little bit tamer for, like the goals that you're trying to get to. Right? So I think there's ways that you can divert conversations.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

And then the other thing is that you can also opt out. Right? Like there's no you don't have to network with everybody. You don't have to like everybody. You don't have to spend your time with everybody. People think that they have to network with the world, but the reality is smaller networks with deeper connections are way more powerful than wide networks that are narrow. This is partly why introverts are actually exceptional networkers. Right? Because they tend to build small but deep networks and extroverts often do the opposite. They build these because they can talk to anybody and they're, you know, they build these huge wide networks, but they're not very deep.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Right? So, you don't have to be friends with everybody. I always run my relationships through a rubric. Right? Like, is there interest? Is there care? Is there energy? Is there a vibe? Right? And if those three things don't exist. Right? If I'm not interested in them and they're not interested in me, if I don't care about them or they don't care about me, and care is like heart, interest is head, right, then that's good to know. And if there is a really bad vibe, right, like if the vibe check is off, right, if our energies don't match, if we're just, like, there's something off there. If those three things aren't there, I don't I don't need to be connected, we don't need to be connected. There's nothing wrong with you. There's nothing wrong with me.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

It's just it's not a match. Right?

**Amy Vaughn:**

I think that's great. So many good little pieces there. I just wanted to reflect back for our listeners, because I do agree, like, there's I think a lot of the things I've heard from people too outside of, like, the office gossip and politics, I think great piece of feedback there. Hold space versus rather take up space when it comes to those instances. Focus on the ways we're alike versus the ways that we're different. But a lot of people talk about, you know, the reasons why that they choose not to network or find network networking kind of like a dirty word or difficult or awkward is or why they don't like it is awkward. Time, rejection, those are sort of the things that people find challenging about it. So I do think, you know, even still, like, holding space, looking for the common ground, going for the deeper rather than the wide network, I think, is really, really smart.

**Amy Vaughn:**

And I think it's a more rewarding way to network. Right? Because you always walk away feeling more filled than depleted. Right? You kind of give and receive energy versus just being sort of walking into a situation where you completely feel like you. It's like a vampire situation where all the energy's been sucked out of you.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. Well, and I think going back to that idea of the reasons that people don't network Mhmm. You know, we have a tendency to lean into comfort as opposed to discomfort.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Yeah.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

And, and that is to our detriment. Right? And so, if networking is uncomfortable, yeah, it is. Mhmm. But what is your goal? If your goal is to find a job, if your goal is to improve your life, if your goal is to increase your income, if your goal is to x y and z, you need people. Yeah. You need a network. You need community. You need relationships.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

If your goal is to have better mental health and not be lonely

**Amy Vaughn:**

Yes.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

You need community. You need relationships. You need so so I think being focused on what again, back to the to what end, understanding what are your goals? What is the, you know, that's the kind of stuff that gets you through this discomfort. And acknowledging that the discomfort is there, but that's not a reason not to take action. It's not a reason not to do it. It's a reason to acknowledge because it's important for us to acknowledge our discomfort because it tells us what we're afraid of. Right? Like, discomfort is fear. And it tells us what it is that we're bumping up against, and that's really good information, but it's not a reason not to take action.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

It's like, you know, people think that things like self doubt and insecurity and all that kind of stuff means that you should shrink away. But the reality is confidence isn't the lack of self doubt or the lack of insecurity. Confidence is acknowledging your doubt and your insecurity and acting anyway. Yes.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Right? Yes.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

You know, you don't need to believe in yourself to be confident. You need to take action, do things and you will discover that you begin to believe that your action will lead to results. Right? Like, so we have it backwards, this idea that we have to be comfortable. We have to, like, I have such I'm going on a tangent here, but I have such a problem with the whole believe in yourself thing. Right? Because it's like, you have to feel comfortable before acting. And that's such the wrong message, right? You don't need to believe in yourself.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Right.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

No. You need to take action. And you need to learn from that action that if you continue to take action, you'll become more confident because you're confident in your ability to take action.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Exactly. Exactly.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

You don't need to believe in yourself. Yeah. You know?

**Amy Vaughn:**

Yeah. Exactly. No. I think it's a great tangent. We once had one of our speakers say, is it hard or is it just new?

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. That's all

**Amy Vaughn:**

there is to it. It's just new. And then once it's no longer new, it's not gonna feel so hard. And the first time is always scary. The first time is always scary that you ever did anything that was new or challenging or scary. And I 100% agree with you. I think I might have said it last week when I was interviewing our last guest about Sibson, and I was, you know, saying something similar that self awareness really is confidence. Being self aware and understanding where your strengths are and maybe where some of your weaknesses are just allows you to go in with that general sense of awareness that, like, yeah.

**Amy Vaughn:**

This is where I'm gonna sort of struggle, and at least I can go in feeling a little bit more prepared or a little bit more this sense of, like, general awareness of this is what I'm gonna probably need to do in order to show up. Yeah. You know?

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. I often tell people that networking is like sex. Right? Everyone assumes that everyone else knows how to do it. Right? Like, and some people look like they're gonna be great at it, and others pretend that they're great at it, but really, none of us get any good at it until we do it. Uh-huh. Right? And we practice it. Right? Yeah. And networking is just like that.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Right? We have to just go do it. I love it. You know?

**Amy Vaughn:**

Yeah. I love the analogy. That is great. And I like this idea of, you know, being intentional in goal setting because I think it's true too. I was reading and doing some research on the topic and, you know, oftentimes, you know, women especially do tend to network in places of comfort in the sense that we don't tend to aim high when we're networking. We tend to network with peers and people that, you know, maybe fall below us in, like, hierarchy in the workplace rather than sort of aiming high. So, you know, this wasn't a question that I had said beforehand, but I would be curious to know what are some what are some what's some guidance that you would have for those who are listening who maybe kinda fall into that space of, you know, networking sort of in the spaces and places and with the people that they already feel comfortable with but have a goal that would require them to aim higher?

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. Well, one, I think the first thing is to acknowledge that. Mhmm. Because a lot of times, you know, we can believe to ourselves that that's not what we're doing. So that honesty and that transparency with ourselves is a really good motivator.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Right?

**Maryann Lombardi:**

So I think that's a piece of it. Another thing that's super helpful is having a buddy, a networking buddy. Right? Is that almost like an accountability partner, is somebody that you because you don't have to network alone. Right? You don't have to go to these events by yourself. You don't have to do that. It's finding somebody who has a similar goal than you do and maybe has strengths that are different than yours, you know, and vice versa. Right? So I think that sometimes having a networking buddy will help you do that so they can hold you accountable to the idea that, you know, your goal is x. Are you doing y? Because y is gonna lead you to x better than z.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

So, you know, having that kind of support from a team is really really helpful in those kinds of situations.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Yeah. Yeah. That's great. I love that. Yeah. I gotta have my wing woman, which sounds funny because I know everybody sees me and they're like, oh, you're so extroverted and you're so great at talking with people, but it's like, no. It still takes energy and effort. And, also, I love bringing people with me because I will tell them my goals of what it is that I aim to do when I get to certain events, and I will have them hold me accountable.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Because if I start to lose my energy, I know that those that I bring with me will be, like, okay. Remember Amy how you said you were gonna go talk to this person? There they are. Go. Move your butt. Go talk to them now.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. Well, and I think along those lines, another thing that helps tremendously in this situation is to and this will get to the value proposition. Right? Like, if you know what it is you bring to the table, that's super powerful in this process. And if you also know what your ask is

**Amy Vaughn:**

Mhmm.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

That ends up helping to hold you accountable too. Right? Because a lot of times, people will go into these conversations. They don't know how to talk about themselves



**Amy Vaughn:**

Mhmm.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

And they don't ask. Yep. And, you should always ask. And, your ask, unless there's something, like, very specific, your ask should always be an introduction to somebody you don't know. Right? The currency in networking is relationships, right? Like, it's people you don't know. So, you should always ask the person you're talking to. Hey, do you know somebody I could speak with about that? Do you have somebody you could introduce me to about x, y and z? Whatever it is you guys have been talking about. And what's great about that is that when they introduce you to someone, often, they will introduce you to a person who is not the one you thought of and could potentially be at your level or higher.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Right? So this process of networking helps you solve some of those problems. Right? Because if you're only reaching out to people you can think of, you're not actually expanding your network. Right? Yeah. So you always wanna make an ask.

**Amy Vaughn:**

I love it. Yeah. Let's get to that. Let's talk about the unique value proposition. How can our listeners identify and effectively communicate their own unique values or values in a way that resonates with others?

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. Well, I think there's 2 steps. There's understanding it and communicating it, which are 2 different things. Yeah. So I think that understanding it is often harder than communicating it because once you understand it, then it's really just shaping language and practicing that language. Right? So people sometimes think it's supposed to be natural, but it doesn't have to be natural. Like you can literally come up with a, what I

call a power statement. Like I am this, I do this for this person, right? And practice it, right? Like practicing your answer to who you are and what you do.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

But the big piece is you need to understand what are your skills, what are your experiences, like, what's been in your experience, And what do you do differently than everybody else? You know? And a lot of people get focused on their job title, and their job title has absolutely no use whatsoever. It's totally useless. Right? What is interesting is your skills and those are soft and hard skills. What are your skills? What's your past experience and what makes you different? And so good solid self reflection is really how you find those things. And then you shape it into a conversation. Right? But you have to start with those skills. Break down your job into what those skills are. Mhmm.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Because everybody does something better than other people. Right? And it's not I don't mean it in a competition, but everybody's got a, like, a little secret sauce. Right? We all have a thing that we do Mhmm. That is that it is just different or better or unique or something that stands out. Yeah. You know, and it doesn't have to be a hard skill, it could be a soft skill, it could be about the way you make people feel. Right? It could be like how you create belonging in your space, it could be around empathy, it could be around productivity or technology or these kinds of things, but it doesn't have to be. But we all have our secret sauce.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Yeah. No. I love that. And I think that's so true too, I would say, especially in our space in digital marketing and advertising because digital coordinator, marketing coordinator, those titles could mean 1,000,000 different things. So, like, when you say that title, it absolutely means, not to devalue what any of those people do, but it just means 1,000,000 different things. And you're right. I think when you start to look at your skills and you break them down. I guess my other question to that would be when you're thinking about those skills, is it more about what you do well or what you want to be doing? Yeah.

**Amy Vaughn:**

You know?

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. I think it's a mix of those things because if you are really solid in what you're doing right now and you're kind of maintaining and that's what I think sticking with what you do, and you know you do better than anybody, I think is fine. If you are trying to shift industry, yeah, And do a career change. Mhmm. I I talk to a lot of teachers for instance and this is something that comes up for them all the time. Right? It's like, how do you translate the skills that teachers have into this other arena and how do I talk about what I do framed within the new industry that they want to work in. Right? And so, that requires a slightly different approach to talking about those skills. Because you wanna position it in a way that people will go, oh yeah, yeah, I could see how, you know, you working with thousands of kids and adults and, you know, in the volunteer programs that you that you ran for your district were would be helpful for us in our x, y, and z company.

**Amy Vaughn:**

You know? Yeah. I think it's so interesting to hear how we don't often give ourselves credit for the collective experience, which is why I always like opening our podcast with that question of asking the women, our guests to share their journey to see how that collective experience has sort of led to where they are now and sometimes how that collective experience was absolutely necessary to get them where they are now so that they can hopefully reflect and see that their collective experience is what was necessary. That journey was what was necessary. Even sometimes, like, the pitfalls, the failures, the trauma was all a part of what helped get them to where they are now, so that they too can sort of reflect upon their journey. I think another exercise that was really cool too that a friend of mine and a Together Digital member once shared, shout out to you, Andrea, if you're listening, was if you struggle sometimes to sort of give yourself credit for those things that you are naturally good at because you don't really just, again, give yourself credit for those sorts of things, ask others or pay attention to what others come to you often for. You know? Or you're just, like, constantly getting certain projects thrown your way that are maybe more, like, high pressure. Or, like, for me when I was still working in the agency world, I got pulled into every new business project. If it was something that needed conceptual work done or there needed to be ideas thrown at something, they came to me.

**Amy Vaughn:**

So it's like I always knew that even though I was a great copywriter, creative director, that ultimately I always have lots of ideas to throw at things. So I was highly conceptual, and so if I wanted to tell that as a part of my capabilities or skills, like you said, that would be one thing that I would throw into there. So that would be a really great way to sort of reflect.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Oh, absolutely. Because there's so many people who will see things or be able to frame them and shape them in ways that you would never think.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Right.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Right? And a lot of times there are things that we do in our day to day that we don't see as values

**Amy Vaughn:**

Yeah. Exactly.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

That is, you know, sellable in that way. Right? Like, there are things that could be skills that somebody else would want to use and package in that kind of way. So it's so great. It's great advice to have something else.

**Amy Vaughn:**

For granted. We take it for granted because it comes so easy to us. It's like my husband who's a mathematician. I would love to have the ability to do what he does, and it does not come naturally to me, but it's just always been second nature to him. But, again, we take these things for granted when it comes naturally. So it is a great piece of advice. So Yeah.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Awesome. Alright. Well, we also don't think about the value of those soft skills. Right? Because we're focused very much on those hard skills, but often employers actually, they need your soft skills more because the hard skills they can train you in, but they can't train you in empathy. They can't train you in that sort of team building kind of belonging kind of thing, the way you motivate people, how you make them feel seen and heard and valued. Right? You can't train somebody to do that. Yeah. Yeah.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

So often, you'll hear leaders talk about how if you don't have the exact hard skill we need, it's some of that, like a technology or a software or

**Amy Vaughn:**

Mhmm.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

You know, we can train you to do that, but we can't train

**Amy Vaughn:**

you to

**Maryann Lombardi:**

do that.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Be that. And I really love that that's starting to shift and change. That wasn't always the case. I really do love that because I think for the longest time, soft skills were diminished, especially because they're most commonly attributed to women. But you're 100% right. Hard skills can be taught. Soft skills are much, much harder to come by. Alright.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Building meaningful relationships is obviously a critical thing for both personal and professional life and success. One thing I've definitely addressed, especially since COVID, that, you know, all of us are being a lot more intentional about how, when, and where we're spending our time. And one thing that actually caught my attention and intrigued me, not just as a business owner that hosts and runs events both virtual and in person, But, like, even in the music industry, like, I don't know if y'all heard this, like, JLo canceled a bunch of her, concerts for the rest of the year, and musicians are starting to double up on their concert events. People are being much, much more intentional about how, when, and where they're spending their time. So, obviously, networking, not as exciting as a J. Lo concert sometimes. You know? Maybe, maybe not.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Well, if you're networking with JLo, I think that would

**Amy Vaughn:**

be different. Fair. Good point. Good point. Good call. Maybe that's something we should look at. Maybe. I know.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

We gotta get that one done.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Let's get back on. Yeah. What advice would you have for cultivating genuine connections when folks are being that much more choiceful about how they're spending their time and who they're spending it with? Because, again, I will say, you know, another thing is I'm seeing groups like the AMA, the AAF. This is kind of all industry groups within advertising, marketing, and whatnot in digital, they're struggling. They're really, really struggling when it's coming to, like, bringing people together and encouraging them to network. So, yeah, what advice do you have for those folks?

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. Well, I think that, 1, there's nothing wrong with it. Right? Like, I mean, yes, I I I don't call the organization. Yeah. Exactly. Right? Like, I I Sorry, guys. It's unfortunate to have the organization struggle, but I also think it's an opportunity for them to be rethinking about what their value is to their membership and what services and, you know, everything is an opportunity. Right? And so we need to think of it in that way as opposed to, oh, shame.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Why are people not doing what we want them to do? Go, well, what can I learn from the fact that they're not doing what they used to? Right? Not what we want them to, but what they used to do. Right? Because as a business, your job is to serve a market. Your job is to serve a customer. Your job is to support what they need, not to do what you want.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Yes. Right?

**Maryann Lombardi:**

And so we tend to forget about that as businesses or whatever is, you know, that things change. Right? Like, people's needs change, and our job as good and solid business owners is to be focused on our customer, not focused on ourselves. Mhmm. So, but I think that it's okay. Right? Like, I think that we all should be intentional about how we spend our time and who we spend our time with. And that doesn't mean that we should only spend time with people that we like and know and, you know, we still have to branch out and spend, like, network well. Right? Yeah. But I don't think there's anything wrong with that intentionality.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Right? And I think part of that intentionality needs to stem from the fact that, like, what are you doing with your time? Right? How do you spend that time? You know, because your time is currency. And, and, and do you have a family that you wanna spend it with? Are you doing hobbies? Are you, like, what is the, what is the value of your time to you, Right? Like how do you value your time and your attention and with whom? Right? And so it's great for you to figure that out. So you're very clear about who you want, where you wanna spend it when you're not spending it with the people or on the things that fill you up, right, personally.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Yeah.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

So I'm all for the intentionality of it.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Mhmm. Yeah. For those who are just listening to the podcast after the fact and not tuning in, listening live, they couldn't see my little praise hands that were going up for Maryann there. Because I wholeheartedly agree. It is to me, I think it is this opportunity to reimagine, to revolutionize networking, to look at it in a new light in the ways in which



we can come together, because I do think that it's just this whole sense of, like, forcing people to do things in a way that felt disingenuous, that felt forced, that felt unnatural in a in a time in our lives when we start to recognize and realize that time is short. Mhmm. And the ways in which we spend it are really truly valuable, and we need to honor and respect that when people show up that they showed up and that we should appreciate them and we should appreciate that every time they do. So thank you, live listeners.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Thank you to those who are listening to the podcast. You know, when people show up, I don't care if it's 5. I don't care if it's 50. I don't even if it's 500. Like every single person in the room now, I'm always so grateful when people show up, and it's just being that much more intentional about what's being said, what's being done, what kind of space we're providing, what kind of opportunities we're creating. Because, again, it's like just realizing that that lifetime energy opportunity, it's all that much more precious, and how can we maximize it for those who are taking the time to show up and be in the room. Yeah. It's awesome.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

It's so it's so powerful, right, to think of it that way. And I think that this thing about networking suffers a bit from the idea that it's so connected to business, Right? And business has always been a man's world. Right? Like and and this isn't about being down on men, it's just about the reality. Right? Like the context, it matters. The context matters that we exist in a world that was designed and built around men's needs and the way men work and, you know, how they function. Right? And so, women are then in this world navigating that. Right? And so, when you try to do things the way others do them, the way men do them, it doesn't work as well. Right? And I think it's a wonderful opportunity for women to figure out how they want to network.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yep. How you as an individual want to network. If part of the way you network is, you know, riding the train back together with a different person, you know, than you did the day before and you guys talk that way. And if how you build some authentic connection is based on the mom's group that you're a part of or the book club you're a part of.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Mhmm.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Right? Like, that is networking. Right? Like, it. So if you just replace the networking word with building relationships, that's what it's about. Like, women have been building relationships since forever. Right? We are exceptional at it. Mhmm. You know? I mean, whether it's at the PTA or the book club or at the grocery store or at the hair salon or like, we know everybody. Right? And you could be an introvert or an extrovert.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

I gotta tell you, women know people. Yeah. Because they're paying attention, because they need to know people.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Yeah.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Right? So I think that we have to sort of get out of this idea that there is this right way to network.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Yeah.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Right? You know, and if you, if you like playing tennis or something like that, like ask one of your colleagues who had a tennis racket you saw down you know what I mean? I mean, like, do it the way you wanna do it. You don't have to go to the happy hour. You don't have to play golf. You don't have to, right? Figure out your way to do it.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Yeah. I I absolutely agree. I think the only thing that we don't do is we just aren't as opportunistic about it. As you said earlier, we don't come in ready to talk about our value proposition, and we don't come in with an ask. We are great about connecting. We're great about giving, and we practice this. It's been together digitally. We practice our gifts.

**Amy Vaughn:**

We also really, really, really enforce that they ask as much as they give. And the asking is, like, it's a muscle you have to build because it's like you ask these women, what is your ask? What do you need? How can I help you? And they're like deer in headlights. Like, I don't know what they don't know what to do because they're not used to anyone asking them, what is it that you need? How can I help you? And they're almost taken aback, maybe sometimes get a little choked up because they're so used to just going it alone, figuring for themselves that it just they don't they they could ask for a million things and then sort of, like, analysis, paralysis, fear, anxiety, all these different things building up in them. You can kind of just see it in their face. But at some point, they get beyond all of that and they start becoming more comfortable asking either on our Slack channels or in their peer groups or at one of our events because we just constantly are putting it in their face. What do you need? How can we help? What is your question? And like what you said, have your value prop in your is that your ask and your goal. So when you go on a new network, you're just constantly there doing it and it becomes second nature. And it's just so funny because when I talk to men about how they network and what they're doing, they don't have all the strategy.

**Amy Vaughn:**

It's just kind of it's they just don't even think about it. They just kinda do it. It's just a part of how they were conditioned because it's just they they just they ask and they receive, and we don't get unless we ask.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Right. Well and and a lot of times they're used to people doing stuff for them. True. Right? So, yeah. You know, and and again, it's not meant to be like

**Amy Vaughn:**

100%.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

How dare they? It's just like we're all conditioned. Right? Exactly. We're just all conditioned. Right? And so it's easy to ask somebody to do something for you because people have been doing things for you forever.

**Amy Vaughn:**

So true.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Right? Women specifically have been serving you forever. Right?

**Amy Vaughn:**

Yeah. So true.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. And then the only other thing I would add to that is, like, it's really helpful to, come to be a good question asker.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Yes. Oh. You know, because and

**Maryann Lombardi:**

it and it and it really reduces the stress of networking if you start with a couple of really good questions.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Yeah. I love that advice.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

You know? And then you and it sort of gets the conversation going and then can lead you into talking about yourself and making the ask. Because sometimes people get really like deer in headlights when it's like you're coming right in. Gotta do my value prop. This is who I am. This is what I want. And then this is where I need help. It feels inauthentic and, like, crunchy in a bad way. And so it's nice if you start with a couple of really good fun engaging questions.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Yeah. I love going in. I like finding the lonely person in the room and asking them things like, what are you reading right now? Or how was your day? Or let me know what was the last really fun trip that you took? Or something like that. And, again, people love to talk about themselves. So, yeah, just get curious about them and spend some time getting to know them first before you bounce.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. Totally. Yep. Yeah. It makes everybody more comfortable.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Absolutely. And, again, like you said, that genuine curiosity and that desire to get to know people on a more authentic level always kind of helps to kind of make it feel a little bit more real and a little bit less, like you said, salesy crunchy. Yeah. Alright. Let's chat about AI, because how can you have any conversation in 2024 and not mention the words artificial intelligence? Yeah. Obviously, it's becoming increasingly prevalent in our lives. How can we leverage AI as a tool and networking and still come across as authentic? What kinds of tips and tricks do you have for us?

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. Well, I think, well, AI is spectacular, and fascinating, and terrifying all at the same time. Absolutely. And so, but it is something that we all need to understand and learn and sort of engage with at whatever level we can do that in. So, one of the things that's so great about AI, is its ability to write and its ability to engage with you in certain ways. One of the ways we've been exploring AI is, with interview prep, with practicing conversations with AI around, like, those who may be nervous about talking in front of people and, you know, having conversations is that working with AI and prompting it to ask you questions, you know, with the voice commands and have a conversation with you to practice. So they're really interesting ways that you can use AI to make you feel a bit more confident, to feel more prepared, you know, as a tool for that purpose. There is nothing that AI can do that will solve the fact that you have to talk to people.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Yeah. Right? Not yet.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

So yeah. But yeah. But, like, you know, the more we get down that road Yeah. The more powerful and valuable the authenticity is of the face to face interaction. Right?

**Amy Vaughn:**

Yeah.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

So YOU think that we need to double down on the idea that the more AI grows, the more you need to talk to a human face to face. Absolutely. And it's not only good for your career and your business, it's essential for your mental and emotional health.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Absolutely.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Right. So, that would be the biggest thing I think about AI is that the bigger it gets, the more you lean into the human to human. Yeah.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Right. I I wholeheartedly agree. I think there's a ton of studies and research showing, especially, like, gen a, gen alpha suffering from a lack of, like, social coping mechanism, social skills, and socializing because of the amount of screen time that they receive. So while they're amazingly digitally native and tech savvy, which is really wonderful and amazing, at the same time, they really do struggle with social anxiety, understanding general social cues, body language, and whatnot. And a lot of it has to do again, like we're going to be looking at obviously additional years of research because of COVID and isolation, you know, what those things are kind of doing to, like, our youth, but even us as adults. I know that there was, I did a talk last year talking about how connection is a form of self care, and then us as humans, we need physical in person connection, and it can't just be, like, we can be alone. Right? We can feel alone. There's perceived isolation.

**Amy Vaughn:**

We can feel alone in a crowded room. If we aren't connecting, like eye contact with others, feeling a sense of deep connection with them, perceived isolation, so even feeling alone in a crowded room for an extended period of time. Overtime can be the same as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and can actually shorten our life by up to 15 years. And, you know, what's wild is that you would think, you know, in years past, a lot of the research shown, and this was all from the surgeon general, would have shown that a lot of our elderly population fell into this, you know, portion because a lot of them would be living alone or in nursing facilities where they spend a lot of time isolated. But, no, it's like our Gen z. Yeah. It's our young kids, and that's just so heartbreaking because that there's an easy fix there.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. No. There is totally an easier fix there. So, it is scary, and it is something that we have to be very aware of. Mhmm. I think another thing that AI can do really well is its ability to capture and take notes. Right? Because one of the challenges is often yeah. With networking is that we don't track the conversations that we're having.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

And, really smart networking is about the follow-up. Right? Because if somebody says, oh, sure. I'll introduce you to so and so. Right? Following up with them to make sure that introduction happens, like, politely and lovely, obviously, not badgering them to do that. But still, if you have a conversation about a book that you read or something that you said they would you would send them, remembering to send that thing. Right? So, I mean, it's amazing how many people don't do the follow-up. Yep. Right? The thank yous and the follow ups are key.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Huge. And so tracking AI is spectacular at Yes. Because it can keep notes for you. You can prompt it in interesting ways to put it where you want it and how you need it to, you know, take notes for you. So I think everybody should be doing those intro AI classes, prompt generation classes, like learning how



**Amy Vaughn:**

Yeah.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

How to use those tools.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Make it your networking assistant and best friend. Absolutely. I agree. Because, you know, we've talked a lot about building your personal brand, and a big part of that is growing your character and credibility. And part of that is, you know, building a trust, establishing trust, and that means you follow through with what you're gonna say. And all of us want to when we say we're gonna do things, but then, again, we're all busy. Af. So when you say you're gonna do something, yeah, sometimes you just need a second brain.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Let that be AI. That leads nicely into this next question I'm gonna move ahead to because we're running close to time. But you're a single parent. You're a busy business owner, so you've undoubtedly faced a lot of challenges in balancing your personal and professional life. Outside of some AI tips, that was a great one. How else do you prioritize your self care and maintaining a sense of balance when you're building your network or even just working on making time for networking? Because that's another thing I heard from a lot of women was just, oh, time. You know? I just don't have time to network.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. Well, 1, I don't believe in work, life balance. I think it's a lie. Right? There is no such thing as it. Right? You have a life and your work's job is to support the life that you choose to live, and that's it. Agreed. Right? So, for me, I see networking as essential to be living the kind of life that I wanna have and building the kind of business that I want to have. And so, therefore, it is not secondary.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

It is not something that I have to make time for. It is something that I do as a part of my day to day existence because I understand the value of it. And so this whole thing about time, right, is a fallacy. Right? Like, because we make time for the things that matter. Right? And the things that generate joy, income, right, or opportunity. Those are the things that we make time for. So, and if you want to grow in your career, if you want to grow your business, if you want to build deeper relationships so you don't feel alone, you have to connect with other people. Right? So, it isn't something you make time for.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

It is something that you put on your calendar and you do. Right? It should not be secondary. You know? And, so, that's how I look at it, right? Like, I don't. I don't worry about making time for it because I do think it's essential to me living the kind of life that I want to live. And I think when it comes to balancing the personal and the professional, I have always had jobs where I just bring my kid. Right? Because yeah. When I first got divorced, the woman friend of mine, an African dance teacher, I remember coming in, and my kid was like 3 at the time, and I was talking to her. We were running a program together, and I was complaining. I was like, what am I gonna do? I don't know how I'm gonna, how do I go to meetings when I've got my kid, and what I'd and she looked at me like, you know, a lot of older women look to younger women, and she sort of rolled her eyes and she said, you bring them.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

And I was like, what? She looked at me like I was an idiot and was like, you bring your kid. And I was like, I can do that? And she was like, yeah. Just bring your kid. All this idea about negotiating, oh, can I do that? What's the right way to do this? What's that, yeah. She just cut through all that bullshit and was like, if you gotta bring your kid, you bring your kid. Right? And then if there's a consequence to that, you have to deal with that. Right? Like, if somebody's upset or whatever, like, navigate that in the moment. But you know what? You gotta do what you gotta do.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Right? And be unapologetic about it. Mhmm. And so I've always had that in the back of my head that sometimes it might be awkward, but, you know, I bring my kid. What an exciting one. And I granted my kid is 20. But now, this so, but, like, back in the day 20 hours

**Amy Vaughn:**

a day.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Exactly. They just want the food. Right? Don't go anywhere where there's food. But, but still. Right? Like, I think about that all the time. It's like whenever I worry about the way it's supposed to be, I don't know. Marilyn Cilla, man. She told me you just brought it.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

You bring your kid. I'm like, okay. Here I go.

**Amy Vaughn:**

I apologize. I love it. Yeah. That is great feedback. And I I I again, I so much agree with you. I think once because I've shared this story a lot in other podcasts that I've been on as well and then I think the original episode for this podcast is, you know, I'm not the founder of Together Digital. I was actually a member first. I often say they found me, and I didn't know how much I needed community.

**Amy Vaughn:**

I, you know, I think that's another piece of social conditioning that we get as women, this message that we have to do it all and we have to do it alone. And especially when you kind of get into the space of leadership or, running a business, I think especially there, I am always so floored by how many women are like, I'm okay. I'm really successful in

doing well. I don't need community. I don't need peers to talk to. Wrong. You so need it. And because like you said, it's joy.

**Amy Vaughn:**

It provides additional opportunities. It can help you continue to grow and be successful in the ways in which you increase your income if that's what you're looking to do. But honestly, for me, it really showed me that it was self care, that every time we had an event or a meeting, I left feeling more fulfilled, more whole. I even when we had board meetings, I left feeling more seen, heard, and fulfilled, because I was connecting with women that were, you know, in the same place as me who were dealing with, you know, caretaking, raising young kids, also balancing that plus their ambition, you know, or just bad bosses at work or challenging clients. And there was just something so great about being seen and heard and understood or just being able to just sit and cry. And then actually sometimes even having them cry with me Yeah. Because I am not a crier. So for them to even see me cry was already big.

**Amy Vaughn:**

But then to have him cry with me was like, woah. That was huge. Yeah. Because, again, it's like, you know, as the big sister, as the leaders, the boss lady, as the mom, where do you ever get that space to cry? You know? For sure. Right? That's usually it. And it's all alone. Right. But guess what? You don't have to do it all alone, ladies.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Right. Yeah. Alright. I've got a couple more questions, but I just wanna throw it out there and make sure I can see the chat in case anybody from our live listening audience has any questions. But I was curious if you could share a quick story with us or an example of a time where some authentic networking possibly led to a transformative opportunity in your career or your personal life. And then I've got one more question before we wrap it up if we don't have any questions from our audience.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. There was one introduction that actually changed the course of my life.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Oh, okay.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

And from a family friend. So, we had a family friend who when I got divorced and while I was going through family court, I was trying to move from the state of Massachusetts to the district of Columbia, and I couldn't get permission from the court to leave. I was commuting from Massachusetts DC for the job that I had because I had a consulting gig. And so, I got an introduction to a gentleman at GW who ended up giving me, after this consulting gig, this full time gig, which ended up unlocking my opportunity to move from the state of Massachusetts with my child, to start an entire life. And so, when I look at networking, I go, like, you were you were one introduction away from a life changing conversation. You know? And if I wasn't willing to ask and say, Mike, I'm desperate. I like it, I'm doing everything I'm supposed to, but I can't I can't find a gig. And Mike said, hey, you know, you should talk to so and so.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

And I got on a call and so and so, and obviously, you know, I have to do my job, right, in that call. But if he had not connected you know, like I can sit now and trace that back, but that introduction changed the course of my

**Amy Vaughn:**

life. Mhmm. Absolutely.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

And this is the thing that our personal and our professional lives are intertwined with, right? The other thing that I hate about this whole work life balance thing is if there's

some like box you can put them in. Right? You know? So so, yeah, that that's the one that always comes to mind.

**Amy Vaughn:**

I love it. I'm so glad we asked that question. I love that we are all one intro away from a life changing introduction. Yeah. And it's so so true. I wouldn't be sitting here right now doing this interview if it wasn't for networking and an introduction and a random person finding me on LinkedIn saying, hey. Wanna connect and help start this thing in Cincinnati? I'm like, I don't know who you are, but sure.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

But, hey. Why not?

**Amy Vaughn:**

Yeah. You just you never know. I love that. And, again, like, I've said this so many times too. It's like networking happens anywhere, everywhere, all the time. Like you said, it's not just personal or not just professional. It's also personal. Alright.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Nicole would like to ask you a quick question. You said to think of what the other person needs when inviting them to chat. Can you give us one example of what a mid level can offer to an executive?

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Well, I wouldn't think of it like a mid level to an executive. I would think about what you could offer that other individual. Right? And this is where the listening comes in. You know? It's just getting to know that person, looking at their content. What do they talk about? What's going on in their lives? That kind of thing. I mean, I think that we need to break down this idea of hierarchy and just look at each other like individuals. So instead

of looking at that person as a mid level versus executive level is go, that's just a human. Right? She's doing her own thing, having her own challenges.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Right? Like, we all do. She just may happen to have a different position than you do. But I think we all have to sort of flatten it out Mhmm. And realize that we're all just at the same level.

**Amy Vaughn:**

I love that advice so much, Maryann. I think that goes a long way. I hope that goes a long way in helping to maybe minimize some folks' anxiety as well. Because I don't think I have any problem , I keep saying this. I have no problem with authority. I have no problem with authority, but I don't necessarily put any one person on a pedestal. I really want to look at every single person. I wanna treat every person as a VIP. I want every person that I walk up to and talk to to feel like they are deserving of my time, my energy, and whatever it is I have to offer them in the way of help.

**Amy Vaughn:**

And I think if you kind of come into it like that, Nicole, with everyone, people are gonna feel so welcome, seen, and heard by you. Because, honestly, you're not always gonna know when you're talking to an executive. So if you kind of treat everybody in that way, you never know when you're gonna open up a really nice door, possibly by just being that way.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. And it goes back to that idea of what do you have in common, not what are your differences. Right?

**Amy Vaughn:**

Like Good point. Good point.

**Maryann Lombardi:**

You may both be women, you may both have children, you may both be parents of fur babies, you both may have taken a trip to, you know, Tanzania. You may both have lived in Peoria. I don't know, but, like, what is it that connects you in some ways? Because we all have the same insecurities. We all have that. Just because you are in the c suite somewhere does not mean you don't have the same insecurities that somebody else has. Right? Like, we all are dealing with the same shit. And so we just have to remember that we are all dealing with the same shit.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Absolutely. Oh, Maryann, this has been so, so good. I could keep talking to you for a whole another hour, but we are at the time. So I'm gonna just ask this one last question. Nicole, thank you so much for jumping in and asking. We love it when we get questions from our audience. What is one last piece of advice that you would want to give to someone who is maybe still feeling a little stuck or overwhelmed by networking, and building meaningful connections?

**Maryann Lombardi:**

Yeah. The first thing I would say is breathe. Right? And then, the second thing I would say is make sure you understand why it matters. Right? It's like, why why are you why do you want those connections? Do you want a new job? Do you, you know, not wanna be lonely? Like, why? It's just figuring out the why and it'll help you through that anxiety because you just keep touching base on that why.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Agreed. Agreed. Maryann, thank you so much for being here

**Maryann Lombardi:**



and for

**Amy Vaughn:**

doing this. I

**Maryann Lombardi:**

I love happiness too.

**Amy Vaughn:**

Love, love, love these kinds of conversations. Again, such a big advocate for especially encouraging women to get out and to network and to grow their network and their community. We are just really so much better at it than we give ourselves credit for. I think we just need to really kind of look at it through a different lens, mindset, and light. So all of your advice today was just so wonderful, so helpful. So, listeners, I hope you really took away a lot. I know I took a lot of notes. So thank you so much for your time, everyone.

**Amy Vaughn:**

We hope to see you all next week when we are here with Bridget Murphy. She is a former Disney employee. She's gonna be talking about the power of partnerships. This is gonna be a great extension, Maryann. Once we've kind of built those meaningful relationships, how do we take those partnerships to the next step further and begin to grow our work, our business? So, everyone, until then, please keep asking, keep giving, and keep growing. We hope to see you next week. Bye, everyone.