

FCATASPod_Eden Kristin Ep Edit_SC

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

sfu

Eden Pollitt 02:23

For anyone who doesn't know who Rick Hanson is, you are not alone. Neither did I. One quick Google search informed me that he's a paraplegic track and field athlete, as well as an activist and philanthropist. Between 1979 and 1984, he won 19 wheelchair marathons, three world titles, and 15 medals - six at the Paralympic Games and nine at the Pan Am Games. The man Kirstin is referring to is this journey of traveling the globe via wheelchair to raise awareness for accessibility, and to prove the capabilities of people with disabilities.

Kirstin Richter 02:59

And so it was really fun to kind of see firsthand what PR looked like. And it seemed like a really fun field. So I was a little bit torn between going in her direction and journalism as I had kind of originally intended. When I started looking into schools and SFU was flagged for me as a great fit. It was one of only a couple really strong communications programs back when I was applying.

Eden Pollitt 03:22

Personally, I've heard this claim before about SFU having one of the best communications programs, but when I go to fact check, I always seem to come up empty handed. The Communications homepage even claims to be one of the best communication programs in the country, yet lacks a reference, which is kind of ironic for our communications program, if you ask me. While my internet research may require some further digging, I personally love what I'm learning and won't complain too much about people's positive and prestigious view of the SFU Communications program.

Kirstin Richter 03:54

And I didn't really know anything about it, but I applied and was accepted and so that became my journey out to BC.

Eden Pollitt 04:04

Is there something in particular?

taking classes with and graduating with and it

just felt like being around all of it, I really got to get a good feel for how the industry worked, and, you know, kind of client relations and structuring pitches and all of that, you know, my, my role personally was more about, you know, answering phones and booking meeting rooms and, and that kind of thing, but again, it was just such a fun environment to be in and I really, really appreciated the experience that I got there.

E

Eden Pollitt 08:13

Would you say that experience inspired you to start The Social Agency later on?

K

Kirstin Richter 08:17

My aunt was my original inspiration. So I kind of always had this goal of running my own business someday. I thought it would be later in my career, but um, you know, it all kind of worked out the way it did. And so happy that it did, but yeah, working for the agency was the firm was called the Barkley Gazeley Group. And just getting a feel for how that was run and how the two principals were involved. I was like, Yeah, this is definitely something I want to do someday.

E

Eden Pollitt 08:47

I can imagine that finding that job on your own, and having such success in that role was very rewarding on a personal level, would you be able to maybe kind of elaborate on that experience?

K

Kirstin Richter 08:58

You know, it's just really goes to show that just kind of putting, you know, putting it out there that this is something that you're wanting to do. You never know who might be able to make the right introduction for you. So I felt very fortunate to be able to find this opportunity. And then to have two years there, it was kind of a perfect part time job while I was in school.

E

Eden Pollitt 09:20

So then after graduation, what was your mindset? Did you travel or join the workforce right away?

K

Kirstin Richter 09:26

I went and backpacked through Europe for three months, which I highly recommend. It was an incredible experience. And, you know, I, you know, you kind of think you got to get into the workforce immediately. But you know, kind of, I'm glad I took that time to just take a little breather and kind of think about what I wanted to do. I actually ended, in my last year of

university, I started temping with a temp agency, you know, and that takes you out on a variety of roles in offices, primarily. But again, I think it was just really good experience and one of those temp jobs actually led me to a position in the future. So you just never know.

E

Eden Pollitt 10:07

And then when you returned, what was the game plan?

K

Kirstin Richter 10:09

I came back here. And at that point, I think I started working at UBC. And it was kind of a different role. It wasn't communications, it was more of an events role at their conference center. So and I stayed there for a couple of years, but I loved it. I worked with a really fun team, it was really enjoyable, but I always knew that I was like really wanting to get back to communications. So that was kind of what was my goal and eventually, I found a role that was a really fantastic fit, and then really kind of provided the mentorship that I was looking for.

E

Eden Pollitt 10:44

And how would you describe that transition? Were there any like, feelings of impostor syndrome happening?

K

Kirstin Richter 10:51

It was 100% imposter syndrome. I was kind of terrified, to be honest, um, you know, like, the program at SFU is fantastic, but I really didn't know a lot of kind of the day to day things. And so I remember a lot of my friends and I were kind of starting our careers at that point and there was a lot of messaging each other going, "Hey, do you know what this is? And how do I do this?" You know, we were all really trying to figure it out.

E

Eden Pollitt 11:21

I love Kirstin's note here about messaging friends, it makes me visualize some sort of chaotic group chat with friends asking, "What is appropriate work attire? Or, what is a wireframe?" or all the sorts of questions I've encountered in my first job experience.

K

Kirstin Richter 11:37

You know, it's really a fake it till you make it moment, I'll be honest. For the first probably year, I was working in, like communications role and I just kept at it. And I knew we were kind of all going through this, we were just all kind of figuring it out together. And everyone was kind of landing in really different spaces. It was really fascinating to see, I'm still friends with a lot of people I went to school with. And, you know, somewhat kind of, you know, when I started my career, it was really the kind of whole "dot com" thing. So a lot of tech companies were popping

up in Vancouver. And so I ended up in the tech industry with along with a lot of people I know. And, you know, some of the people that I graduated with, they were some of the first people to kind of launch web agencies in Vancouver, and some of them are still around today, and have been really successful, so... It was interesting, because that was kind of an element of my studies. Richard Smith was one of the professors and I still know like, you know, it was so groundbreaking at the time, everything we were learning about, you know, the internet and kind of, you know, the marketing aspect of it. So this was kind of pre social media and we were just trying to off kind of figure out what it all meant

E

Eden Pollitt 13:00

Maybe talk a little bit about how you got to creating The Social Agency from, you know, maybe earlier in your career and having this nonprofit job. When did when did that transition start to take place?

K

Kirstin Richter 13:16

So part of the job when I was with Digi BC, the not for profit, one of my major roles there was launching and kind of producing the Vancouver International Digital Festival. It's called VidFest. We ran it for five years and we brought in speakers from around the globe. Some were pretty amazing and you know, we had it was a fantastic fun event that, you know, I kind of put all of my heart and soul into

E

Eden Pollitt 13:42

VidFest ran in Vancouver from 2004 through 2008 for a total of five years and had guest speakers like Don Matrick the president of Electronic Arts and Sander Schwartz, the president of Warner Brothers animation.

K

Kirstin Richter 13:55

And I met some really amazing people through that journey. And you know, including my future who was going to be my future business partner, Monica. So she was doing some freelancing for us for PR for the festival. I just really enjoyed working with her. And then eventually, I mean, the real impetus for me starting The Social Agency was the fact that I had a child. So I went back to work after having my first daughter. And I felt that I just wanted to be a bit more self directed. I wanted to be able to have a bit more flexibility in my schedule, because I was feeling a bit run off my feet with a new kid and just trying to juggle everything. So I decided that I would see if my boss at the time was open to me taking on more of a freelance role. And thankfully for me, he was and so I left my full time job and started freelancing. He was my first client and then I started to pick up a few more clients. But I quickly realized that I'm really kind of a team person, I really enjoy being collaborative, that's when I feel most creative. And so I decided that maybe instead of starting my own company, in 10-15 years, maybe I should just do it now. So I reached out to Monica because she was still freelancing at the time to see if she would be interested in CO founding an agency with me, and thankfully, for me, she was. So we launched The Social Agency in 2009, and really, with a focus of being able to work on projects

that were really inspiring to us and work with great people, but also to be able to have some work life balance, because we both by that point, uh, I had two children by the time we launched, and she had her first so we wanted to really prioritize our own schedules as we kind of navigated everything at that point in our lives.

E

Eden Pollitt 16:05

Would you say that being a mother has influenced the way you and Monica, run your business? I was looking at your website, and it looks like a lot of your employees are also women, so I just be interested to know how not only as a founder, but as a current manager, slash team leader, how that affects your business practices?

K

Kirstin Richter 16:22

It completely informs everything that we do. And you're right, we do work with a lot of women and majority of them have children, we really wanted to create an agency that provided an opportunity for people like ourselves to do the work that they love, but not be constrained to a 40 hour workweek, you know, to be able to kind of pick and choose projects to be able to work when they want it to work. You know, we've always had a kind of hybrid model way before COVID as far as like, where people work from. Half our team actually doesn't even live in the Vancouver area and it's always been like that. We have people in Toronto, Ottawa, Vancouver Island. So we just always wanted to allow people the flexibility to do their work, because it's just enabled us to work with some extremely talented people who just weren't interested in working for a larger company that had kind of more restrictions around what a job looked like.

E

Eden Pollitt 17:26

Were there any obstacles that you face initially around that kind of a work schedule? Or maybe just even the creation of the company? And how did you overcome those obstacles?

K

Kirstin Richter 17:35

Oh, yeah, the first year was a little bit crazy. I was pregnant, Monica had a newborn, we were trying to pitch clients, I had a toddler at home. You know, it was a bit wild first year. I was, you know, when my youngest was born, I just remember she was like days old, but I really wanted to just kind of finish up this one project I was working on, and, you know, my mom was like, "What do you mean you're going to work today?" and I'm like, "Yeah, but I'm only going to work for an hour." You know, um, so just trying to like, figure out that balance, that first year was a little hectic, but we did get our groove pretty quickly, and we've always really spelled each other off. You know, we've both allowed for each other to take the space they need when they need it, and I think our whole team is super supportive that way. So yeah, the first year was definitely a little hectic, you know, trying to basically launch ourselves. We were, you know, building this website and this brand and the thing with our timing was, it was actually kind of amazing, because when we launched, there was only probably a couple other agencies that were specializing in social media, so our timing was pretty awesome in that regard. So we were able to kind of get on some pretty great projects right from the get go, um, which obviously

really helped and some of tho

