

Wichita Chamber Business Accelerator

Episode 114

Kianga Kelley-Crowley

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Don Sherman: [00:00:00] welcome to another exciting edition at the WCBA powered, of course by Evergy. Don't forget to like us, love us share us. We truly appreciate you checking us out In the house today, simply

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: a lady [00:01:00] E.

Yes.

Friends, we are here with Kianga Kelley-Crowley, and simply a lady company. How's it going?



Kianga Kelley-Crowley: I am just wonderful. I'm blessed to be here.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Yes, Yes and we are

happy to have you here. So tell us a little bit about who you are and

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: what you do.

Absolutely. Well, I am just not a one answer person. I am just, I'm every woman.

I'm like Chaka Khan.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: yes. And Whitney Houston,

both,

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: all of of that. You know, I just can't hit the high note, but that's okay.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Did you want me to try?

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: No.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Okay. .

Well that's that. Continue

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: respectfully .

No, but I am a former TV journalist who found a way to communicate differently. Simply,

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: I love that.

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: I saw there was a need. Not just in our community, but just in our society on how we focus more on our nonverbal cues.

I saw there was a lack of respect [00:02:00] for one another. And that just civility is something that is pretty much becoming more and more extinct as the days go by, and so, throughout my journey, I've learned, I'm still growing. Don't let me, don't let me fool you. I know, I know that it says simply a lady, but I'm always a lady that's always learning and I'm open to learning And so anytime I make a mistake, I make that an opportunity to be more of a lesson that I can then take and share it with the next person. I made the mistake so you don't have. Right. And so simply a lady was formed in 2018 because I was sitting in church one day and I was sitting there judging some of the kids, and I had a lot of negative comments.

Why do they look like that? Why are they acting like that? Why is she doing this? And I did those typical things.

My pew and I heard a voice very clear say, they don't know because you have [00:03:00] not taught them. And basically shut up and get the work going if you're not gonna do anything about it, be quiet.

And so I started simply a lady in 2018, and it has branched out into something I didn't even imagine. I didn't even, I don't even, I can't even imagine being right here with you today. Talking about simply a lady in this magnitude.

Yeah.

That's a powerful story. And when you hear that voice, you have to take heat. Right.

or shut up.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: So tell us exactly what does simply a lady do? What does it provide?

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: Absolutely. So I am an educator by heart actually. My job is I go out and I show people how to confidently. Communicate with someone, especially when you're talking

about entering into a professional realm. I have a lot of parents who like to reach out to me to teach their kids how to eat at the dinner table without being messy and sloppy.

I [00:04:00] have companies that actually bring me in to work with future employees, interns, universities call me in and we talk about dining, etiquette. Most people think that dining etiquette is just eating, but that's when most contracts happen. We are always communicating over food. How can we effectively do that with respect?

How can we effectively do that and still seal the deal at the end of the day? And it's something that we have to start learning even at an early age.

I teach etiquette for business as well. So anything that I learn again in how to be business development, let me say it more in that realm that might be what most people understand.

Business development is what I focus on as well as your dining etiquette.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Okay? So business development and etiquette,

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: Yes. And then you got your social etiquette.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Okay. And so what does this mean for a small business or myself? Like how do we,[00:05:00] I would call you in when when I'm, you mentioned colleges call you in for interns or new or for student engagement.

When, how, as a business, all the businesses who are listening and leaders, when should we call you

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: Anytime Really? Honestly. One of my favorite programs is the Professional Edge Program at wsu. I love what they're doing. What they do is they bring in professionals to come in and actually work with their students, their business students, to prepare them for life after college so that they can get their job.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: And this is called Professional Edge?

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: It's called Professional Edge with the Barton School of Business. Okay. And so, I would say I've had three opportunities to work with them. And what we do is we have a luncheon and I walk through the process of just understanding the table settings. We all go to banquets.

Companies go to have banquets, they have social functions. We always [00:06:00] have all these different types of events and people don't know how to do these things. We have networking events all the time. People don't know how to network. . And so why are we waiting until we are fully adults and don't know what to do?

Gotcha. And let's do it in college. And so we begin that process of walking them through it. For companies like yourself, for Evergy, you want to hire individuals who know. How to actually handle themselves, who have now, who understand your brand and what you're looking for, and they can fulfill that mission.

I'm there to coach them, to get them ready so that they can come in and you can just do the rest. But you don't have to walk them from the beginning of like, okay, this is a table, this is what we don't do, this is what we do.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Okay. That's awesome. That's awesome. So where can we find you?

Are you're on social media?

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: I am on social media. I'm on Instagram and on Facebook. [00:07:00] No, I have not gotten on the TikTok trend. I just, not yet. no, I just, maybe I need a little bit more youth around me. to get me hype. But I have not gotten on that trend.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Okay. Well, maybe that's a part of your goal for

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: It should be. It just might have

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Okay.

Well, I'm just saying if you need your first TikTok, you can come back up here to the chamber call

us and we

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: be glad to.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: That's I'm marking it down. So gonna follow up with you on August. Got it. All right. So kind of walk us through Kianga now.

So when I first met you, like you said, you were on the news, you were out here saying, hi, my name is Kea Kelly, reporting And so you're a storyteller. So you went from telling your stories behind camera to now being in front of, with persons in their face. So what does this look like?

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: I'm honest. I will never paint [00:08:00] this perfect picture ever. I love to share my stories when we talk about alcohol.

You know, that is a huge issue, especially with my college students.

I, I give them the real deal. I'll tell them my mistakes with alcohol and how not to do the same thing. And I try to drill it in a way that they can actually remember. I'm not your traditional etiquette consultant. Most people think of very prim and studious and the stereotypes that come with etiquette, that's not me.

I'm. At the end of the day I am a normal living, functioning person. Simply a lady is really, it's not even a side hustle. It is more of my passion than it is a side hustle. I have a daily job that I learn. I'll still take those pieces of knowledge and bring it into my settings. So with me, you're gonna have a good.

we're going to, I'm gonna make it relatable, but I also want you to remember, I want you to walk away with at [00:09:00] least three things because I give so much knowledge you can't really remember everything. It's a practice like doctors have to practice. You gotta practice what we do at the table. You have to practice what you do whenever you're talking with someone, giving good eye contact and just boosting that self-esteem.

That's really at the end of the day, what I'm here for.

Absolutely. I want people to be feel confident. Yeah. You know, it, it can be intimidating to step into a room.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Agreed. And so now you've, this is your passion and you've, and Yeah. And I can tell, we can feel it as you're talking about this business, which is really awesome. So how, what can the Wichita community do for you?

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: The

Wichita community is doing for me. They're doing exactly what they're doing. They're keeping my name going. The amount of calls that I get, I appreciate them so much, the support. I am not one that really pushes my [00:10:00] company as much as the next, however, there isn't a day that doesn't go by, that someone doesn't reach out.

I would love to work more with more restaurants. so that we could partner and I can teach these classes, even hotels. We're talking about a service industry that is starting to lose that customer service value. That's important. that's important because when you go out to eat now, there's a disconnect.

Connect , Yeah, you're even, right? Not even when you just go out to eat. You go to stores, you're, we're losing touch with, you know, human connection. I really think that we have a grieving problem. I think everyone is in grieving, everyone is grieving some form. I mean, the pandemic really just exposed it more for me.

Losing my father allowed me to see where the problem really lies and [00:11:00] that we're not

taking time to pause and just recognize that someone might be grieving. How can I do a better job of communicating what I need or how I can assist them, for example. Okay, because I see your face kind of like, where are you going with

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: No, go

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: ahead,

When people go oh, okay, I'm gonna talk about it. An experience at a pharmacy. I watched as this pharmacist was just frustrated talking with individuals. And people were fussing and screaming at that pharmacist, and the pharmacist is giving them the instructions and telling them clearly this is all I can do.

But that person was not hearing it. You have two individuals now who have two different things going on. You have a frustrated pharmacist who is doing the best that they can to try to deal with the situ. as is because we're talking covid and everybody's got issues, right? But then you [00:12:00] got someone else who is confused, who really just doesn't know who's probably scared.

Neither one is taking the moment to pause and actually hear each other out. It's just bickering. Another example and I'll give personal. My mom is staying with me. It's now. switching into that position of caring for my mother. . And over the weekend I said, mom, let's get up. Come on, what you doing?

You're just sitting here. You're not doing anything. You didn't even open up the curtains. And I just kept coming into her room and fussing. And then it dawned on me to just pause and I stopped and I said, mom, how are you doing today? Really and truly, how are you doing? And she opened up and then started to express.

grief of losing my father and I, it made me realize how often are we interacting with people and not realizing that they are going through [00:13:00] something.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: So this is some of the things that you teach and that you help others recognize.

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: I'm implementing it into my program now because I recognize that, you know, when you gotta find the why.

Why is it that we. are always agitated or anxious. , or, you know, I don't wanna call the Karens out of the world, but you know, we all have these things that we're trying to do. Right. To get across and people get frustrated and upset. Well, maybe it's time for us to kind of just step back. It's that civility part, you know, having respect for one another and not always being in a rush.

We just all need to pause. When we're sitting at a dinner table, the fact that you're sitting here and listening to me, you're listening to what I'm saying, and you're wanting to know more about me. That's what I teach at the table. It's not about getting a free meal. , I sure hope it's delicious, but that's not the whole point of sitting down.

We're here to connect with one [00:14:00] another. We don't have food, but we have water. We meet over coffee, we meet over anything that is edible.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: It's true. Yeah.

That connectivity piece is critical. So how do you know, you're evolving and you're finding new things to implement such as that.

How do you define success as an entrepreneur

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: I've, you know, that is one of the hardest things because everybody has.

limit on what success looks like. I feel successful when someone can come back to me and tell me, I remember when you taught me this, and this. Then I can say, okay, well I did something for the day. If I failed at something and recognize that it was a failure, I can see where the mistake lies and where I can correct it.

That's a success for me.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: That's wonderful. Well, thank you for sharing that, Madam

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: My pleasure, .

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Of course.

Well, friends, we're gonna hear our word from our sponsor, but we will be right back with simply a lady.

[00:15:00]

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade:

Welcome back friends. We are here with Miss Kianga Kelly-Crowley, and simply a lady company. She's telling us a little bit about her success and her path and how she can assist small business as well as the youth in our city.

Kianga, you're not originally from Wichita, is that correct?

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: That is correct.

I'm a transplant. It's going on 10 years for 10.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Wow. It's been a

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: throw a party. Yes. Wow.

June 20th, 2013 is when I moved to [00:16:00] Wichita. I thought I was only gonna be here temporarily. Working in television. Of course, you know, in that industry you hop around, so I was gonna give it a max two years and then I was out.

But of course I met a Wichita.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Yes.

And,

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: and he, you know, he hooked and reeled me in. And so here I am. I've drank the Kool-Aid and it's delicious.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: and it's delicious. That

is important. I am so,

glad that he is a part of the reason why you stayed

So, so Wichita. You've been here for 10 years.

You've seen it grow, you've seen it change. You've seen a lot of different things. Let's talk about your entrepreneurship journey. Like I said you. Used to be an industry. What made you decide, you know what, now's the time for me to take a leap of faith. You took the leap of faith in staying in Wichita, right.

Found a man. And now why entrepreneurship? Because that can be scary,

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: It still is.

Still It still [00:17:00] is, but one thing entrepreneurship has taught me is it's just.

And if I call myself a believer, how on earth can I get up every morning and not have faith that whatever I'm working on is not going to work?

Obstacles are going to happen. There's a audio book I like to listen to, and it's called Obstacles In Our Way or Obstacles. Obstacles Is the Way, is what it's called. Don't ask me what the author's name is, but I listen to the audio. You can listen to it on YouTube.

Okay.

obstacles are going to happen.

How do we maneuver around them? My father lived and thrived on the rhinos principle. The rhinos. The rhinos, when it sees something in its way, could be in a distance. It's views it as a threat and it charges, we gotta charge at our obstacles. So again, entrepreneurship is nothing. Nothing but activating your faith,[00:18:00]

noticing that there's an obstacle in charging at it.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Okay. Wow. That's a very interesting viewpoint. And so you said, this is what I'm going to do, I'm gonna start my own thing.

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: No I really didn't know what I was doing when I was growing up. I went to beauty camps every summer. We would have this beauty camp, it was called Vision Summer Beauty Camp, and we would learn about becoming a woman.

We learned about our bodies. We learned. The dining etiquette piece. Of course, my mother was our instructor at the time. We learned about just being a woman in professional realm. We were introduced. I will shoot, that's where I met television news reporters. And so, okay, there you go. That sparked that interest as well.

But when I had an epi. Other than sitting in my church pew whenever you are working in news, they fly you out how it works, they fly you out and they take you out to eat. And [00:19:00] it dawned on me that they were taking me out to eat to see how I conducted myself, what I aligned with their brand. Not only that, they paid attention to how I spoke to.

Servers. How did you speak to other people? Anytime they introduce you to someone, the interview is just one piece, But when you're talking about being a actual brand ambassador, cuz people, you don't think about someone being on the news, being a brand ambassador, at the end of the day, they are.

They represent that new station or any other company. They take them out to.

The there is an executive director for Charles Schwab. He does that purposely. He takes them out to eat and then he will have the restaurant mess up their order just to see how they respond.

So when you think of those types of interactions, those types of things, I've been through this

I've had people ask, well, Keanu, how do you do it?

You can [00:20:00] go into a room and it's like everyone knows you and you know, everybody. Okay, well, how can I take these things that I know what I grew up with on how to, you know, conduct myself, how to groom myself properly, how to, you know, fake it till you make it at a dinner table during a lunch meeting or interview.

And then three, how do you take up space in a room when you don't know anyone? So I knew that our children needed it, so I started out with a four week program. I went to the Boys and Girls Club like great. I have a great husband, lemme tell you that. He's amazing. He's my pusher along. You know, he's always like, well just do it.

do it every time. I'm like, we, somebody needs to, well, you just do it. Uhhuh So I went to the Boys and Girls Club. Justin White was the director at the time, and I said, Hey, I want to do a workshop for girls. Okay. [00:21:00] He gave me Boys and Girls Club. It's a matter of just asking. So again, activating that faith.

Yeah. And there you are. I just started asking people and I was like, well, I don't, I can't do this alone. I need women and I don't want just any kind of woman. I want women in nice positions of all age range of all ethnicities in all backgrounds so that these girls can see what their future could be. and I brought them in to interact.

So we had an etiquette piece on interviews. We talked about finances, we talked about dining etiquette. We talked about all these different things. Simply a lady evolved from that. I did it one time and people were so excited, like, are you gonna do it again? I chickened out. I wasn't activating my faith.

I condensed it down to just that piece of regular basic etiquette lessons. So I did a tea party. I wanted to do, have fun with little girls, and so I disguised my lessons as tea [00:22:00] parties that I didn't realize was going to be a big hit with a lot of people. Everyone loved that idea. Again, I reached out to people and I said, Hey, here's what I wanna do.

What do you think? The amount of support that I got, I just didn't expect people to tune. And be excited. Or for people

too. Let me tell you, people, I don't let anyone talk bad about Wichita because this is the only place where really, just whatever you can think of. If it's something you really wanna do it.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: You can do it. And you have the support and even, and you're a transplant here,

right? So

you're not even a native.

and the fact

that people are gravitating to you and seeing your light and like,

listen, we want more of this, and now you have created this

network. If

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: This is my home. When people ask me, well, why are you in Wichita?

Especially people from out of town, you know, family and friends. Like, what do you like about it? Like [00:23:00] you really like Wichita? Yes. Love it. I have a tribe here and honestly, you can go anywhere in this country. You can move to the largest city that has all the bells and whistles, but you are still not going to be happy.

You're going to stay in the same. Bubble that you have as if you were here in Wichita. We, everybody's got a bubble. Yeah. yeah. It's just what do you put in your bubble?

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: I love what do you put in it and the, you know, one of the things that I appreciate you know, I've come to know you over the years and in fact you were just your recent graduate of leadership

Wichita, so, right. And that was a wonderful experience. That was what was your favorite.

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: Oh,

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: economic development day, obviously, but other than that,

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: body language,

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: favorite? Yeah.

no,

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: Economic , even though the information was valuable, I mean, solid, valuable information. Still not my favorite [00:24:00]

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: favorite. I'm gonna make it your favorite.

We're gonna do some more economic development days, just you and I going around this city doing economic development.

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: I will do that happily and willingly. But that day and you guys know, cuz I, I gave that in my speech.

did. You did. And yes.

But I would say it was simulation. Was amazing. Like, that was a communication day. Of course. Loved that.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: So you had a fun time.

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: I did. And walked away with some friends. Not even just connections, like friends. Like I, I'm trying to, matter of fact, I have some dates set up to connect, so, it's about. absolutely. And it, it just expanded my relationship status because sometimes we go to who we. , and again, that's that whole taking up space when you walk into a room now.

Oh, I know. I love that. I can walk into a room and I don't really see a stranger anymore, and it's getting out of that [00:25:00] insecurity of ourselves, you know, getting comfortable with being uncomfortable and just walking in and just making that friend. Yeah, I love it.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: I'm so, glad you love that.

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: awesome.

I, and I don't know if you could tell, like if you look at our group picture, You can actually see how uncomfortable I was on day one, but if you were to look at any other pictures, I, it was like I evolved throughout the that is so great. time I look at I'm like, oh gosh, why couldn't I fake it that day?

But I could actually

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: that's real.

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: Oh yeah

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: and I'm so glad. And you know, that's one of the things about leadership, Wichita putting all these leaders with all these different thoughts and different ideas and different back.

Grounds and different stances together and going through these experiences that allow you to see the the opposite viewpoint to see through different lenses as you're going through this leadership experience. And then at the end of the day, learning to have those civil conversations that actually bring you together and say, Hey, we're not as far apart as we thought.

You know that, [00:26:00] So I'm, so happy to hear that. What, last question before we wrap it up. What's the best advice you've ever received in, I.

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: Oh, , can I cuss? No, I won't do it.
it.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Okay. Good idea. Good idea.

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: I won't do it. My mom might be listening, but she knows. I receive a lot of great advice. Okay. A lot. There's so many impactful people in my life and I wanna share 'em all, but I'm gonna stick with my dad.

Don't sweat the small stuff.

Ask me what small stuff is.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: What is small stuff?

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: Everything. everything is small stuff. So at the end of the day, anything that you are worrying about, especially as an entrepreneur, we start to get in our head and we start to have these expect unrealistic expectations and goals that, oh, I'm gonna make all of this money.

You may not make any [00:27:00] money. you have to put your, you gotta put your, you gotta put time in. People have to get to know you. Wichita is one of those cities. They, you gotta earn their trust. Now. They'll do everything for you. They've got your back, they will support you, but if they don't know you you're getting nowhere. So you're gonna sometimes have to put in that time and develop the relationship so that someone can then invest in you.

Small stuff is worrying about what others think.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: so. All of that, don't worry about it. So your dad taught you that.

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: Just do it. And it took him passing away for me to get it.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: And to understand it.

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: I couldn't get it. But when you are going through a journey that you never expected to go through, then it clicks, it clicked. Everything I was worried about, he would

always tell me it's small and I didn't get it.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Well, thank you Mr. Kelly.

That's a good one. I love that. Well, we've come to the end of our time, so we're gonna do a little word [00:28:00] association. Don typically does this, but I am going to fill in, so we're gonna see how this goes. All right. You ready to go? Yeah.

All right, leader.

It's in you. It's a good one. What about failure?

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: It's inevitable.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Vacation.

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: Needed

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: college

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: development.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Okay.

What about Wichita?

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: My heart.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: chamber of Commerce,

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: the soul,

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: family,

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: my everything.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Okay.

Always, And the last one, beverage. The real answer. And we want the real answer.

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: Beverage. Huh? Only when you're thirsty.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: what do you drink? I wanna know.

Kianga Kelley-Crowley: Water.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: water. That's a good answer.

Okay. well that's it, friends. hydrated Water, Stay hydrated.

Well, friends, we've come to the end of our time. Thank you, Kianga, for being with us today.

[00:29:00] Thank you so much for having me.

Absolutely. Well, friends, let us know who you wanna hear from next. Please leave us some notes and tell us share this with someone in your network who you think they would find value in this. And let us know how we're doing till next time.