



Raymond A. Mason School of Business

WILLIAM & MARY

LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 114: KELLY GRIER – LEADING ON A LARGE SCALE

Ken White

From the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, this is Leadership & Business. The podcast that brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from across the world. We share the strategies, tactics, and information that can make you a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host Ken White. Thanks for listening. If you lead a team, whether it's a team of two or twenty-two, you know leadership is challenging work. Well, imagine leading a team of tens of thousands of people spread across the world. Well, Kelly Grier is U.S. Chairman and Managing Partner and America's managing partner for EY. She leads over 70,000 professionals in 31 countries with annual revenue of fifteen point six billion dollars. She's been with EY for 28 years. Grier recently visited William & Mary, where she spoke at the annual Women's Stock Pitch and Leadership Summit. She took time to sit down with us, and she shared her thoughts on leadership, advice for young professionals, and how EY creates and maintains its special culture. Here's our conversation with EY's U.S. chairman and managing partner and America's managing partner Kelly Grier.

Ken White

Kelly, thank you so much for joining us first of all welcome to William & Mary.

Kelly Grier

Thank you.

Ken White

Yeah.

Kelly Grier

It's great to be here, Ken.

Ken White

Have you been before?

Kelly Grier

I have. Yes, I have. I've been a few times now. So first and foremost, I am the mother of a freshman student here.

Ken White

Wonderful.

Kelly Grier

So we came to visit a couple of years ago as Jack was evaluating schools and he and we fell in love with Williamsburg and William & Mary straight away.

Ken White

Yeah.

Kelly Grier

It's a wonderful place.

Ken White

I know the feeling, so you did the student walking backwards tour right.

Kelly Grier

Exactly.

Ken White

We've all been through it. If we have children who are in high school or college. Yeah great. And you're here for the Women's Stock Pitch and Leadership Summit going to meet some unbelievable

Kelly Grier

Yeah.

Ken White

unbelievably talented young women when you meet with young women professionals. Is there a message you try to share? A theme you try to talk about?

Kelly Grier

You know I would say you know I just encourage them to be bold and be courageous, and you know be completely unconstrained in their ambitions. You know I think that in this group in particular I think is emblematic of just the incredible talent and capabilities that

our women have. And for them to pursue those with sort of reckless abandon, I think is certainly a strong message that I would convey.

Ken White

Tough to do for millennials for you for the generation behind them. For men and women, that's tough.

Kelly Grier

Yeah.

Ken White

Yeah. What were you like at that age?

Kelly Grier

Well, you know I was pretty dogmatic in pursuit of my ambitions. I have to be honest with you I. I was putting myself through college, so I had an economic imperative in addition to my personal and professional ambitions. But I, you know, I really sought to be the best I could be at whatever it was I was doing at the moment, and I had a drive to excellence and into achievement. And so that that advice that you know I convey to women and not just women but young folks today is really a bit of a chapter at page out of my own early chapters when I was their age as well. And it served me well over the years.

Ken White

So there's passion then,

Kelly Grier

Absolutely.

Ken White

as well? I asked just about every guest on the podcast. How critical is passion to success? How much do you have to love the work?

Kelly Grier

Yeah. It's a great question. I think that it's I think it's central. So I think that you can be successful for a short period of time without having the passion, but I think for sustained success, you really have to be passionate about what you're doing. At the same time, I don't think that that passion is the only ingredient for success.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier

Obviously, you've got to be hardworking. You've got to have a curiosity. You've got to continue to challenge yourself. But the passion I think is the sort of that that rocket fuel that makes it you know makes a big difference in how you pursue those other the elements of success

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier

as you pursue your ambitions.

Ken White

You mentioned long time you've been with EY a long time, which is somewhat rare today. What are the advantages of being with an organization for an extended period of time?

Kelly Grier

Well, you see a lot. You know, in an over that period of time, you're able to connect dots across sort of the complexity of a landscape as broad and diverse as ours is at EY. We have so many different services that we bring to market. We have so many different geographic offices and practices, and we do so many different things in terms of how we run our own business. So there's a whole wealth of experience that is all sort of within the boundaries of EY. And the advantage of having been with the firm for such a long time as I've seen so many different aspects of the firm. I've seen so many different aspects of how we bring exceptional client service to the market and to our clients. I've seen so many different ways by which we have. We've driven our talent agenda, and we've created credibly rich and experienced and wonderfully valuable talent for the marketplace. In my time as the talent vice-chair, I've seen the way that we manage the business judiciously. How we create investment capital how we deploy that capital and so over the course of my career the ability to have had all of those various experiences at first and foremost, it gave me a wide variety of experience.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier

So a lot of people leave the company the organization that they're working for because they seek that diversity of experience as alternative experiences.

Ken White

Right.

Kelly Grier

I never needed to leave EY to have that I would I'd move into a different role. I'd move into a different practice area

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier

I transferred overseas, and all of those different experiences. Widen my aperture and also help me to understand business and certainly in the business of our firm better, and so it served you know it really served me well. You can have the same you can ultimately have the same I'd say overall career experiences and successes

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier

through a variety of different organizations. But there's something really powerful of being able to have it all within a single organization.

Ken White

Yeah, yeah. No doubt, you lead many. I mean, you're not leading a team of five. How do you lead on such a large scale so many people, as you mentioned, geographically?

Kelly Grier

Yes.

Ken White

It's big. How do you approach that?

Kelly Grier

Yeah, it's a great question and I actually just spent some time with the with a group of EY ambassadors including some interns as well as some of our William & Mary students who've just committed to EY and they asked me a similar question as sort of a corollary question which is what's my leadership style.

Ken White

Yeah.

Kelly Grier

It was a great question, and I think it's it's the way that I would answer your question, which is, first and foremost, those 72,000 people in the 31 countries that comprise the Americas they don't work for me. I work for them. My job is to make sure that they have what they need to be successful both at EY but also personally as well and even professionally outside of EY. You know we're an incredible source of talent for the world, and our responsibility is to make sure that whatever their pursuits are, how long they decide to stay with EY, or ultimately leave and pursue ambitions outside of EY. That they are as best positioned to be successful as they could possibly be. And so I think that's a pretty important part of how you think about leadership

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier

and the 72,000 people. What am I doing to enrich their experiences? What am I doing to enable their success? What am I doing to make sure that their skills and experiences are commensurate with what the market is demanding today and what the market is going to need tomorrow?

Ken White

Right.

Kelly Grier

We're very focused on looking around the corner and making sure that we've got line of sight into how the market skill requirement and skill set is evolving

Ken White

Sure.

Kelly Grier

to make sure that we're planning for that. And we're working with academia to make sure that academia is planning for that.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier

You know there's a vast responsibility to leading an organization of this scale. But I would say it is first and foremost about ensuring that those 72,000 people are going to be successful and in their success EY's success is derived.

Ken White

Right. It's interesting we've had many leaders on the podcast, of course, Mike Petters, the head of CEO of Huntington Engels, one of them. Exact same answer.

Kelly Grier

Is that right?

Ken White

What is my job to make sure the people who quote-unquote report to me have everything they need to be to be successful? That's it. You know you get that, and there it is. How do you know what they need? How do you communicate and listen and get the information?

Kelly Grier

It's a great is a great point. So it has to be multifaceted. I mean, first of all, we've got to be listening to the marketplace. We've got to be looking, you know, looking outside in. In addition to listening inside out as well and we do both, you know we certainly listen to our clients. Our clients expect that we are at the bleeding edge of transformation. We're at the bleeding edge of disruption because we are the ones who lead them through those transformations and that disruption and all the opportunities that come with it and avoid all the risk associated with it. And so they're an enormously valuable insight to us as we're helping them sort of create the future

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier

then using that insight to essentially recast and reimagine what we need to do at EY to be capable of doing that broadly for our clients but also again within EY. So it's a really dynamic environment right now. It's obviously you hear the term disruption all the time

Ken White

Sure.

Kelly Grier

transformation all the time, but in reality, that is very much the current state of play.

Ken White

Yeah.

Kelly Grier

We are helping companies transform themselves really across every single sector, and everybody's at varying degrees along the journey, but everybody is in some form or fashion looking to transform their business.

Ken White

Yeah.

Kelly Grier

And so for us, we've got to be able to meet those demands and listening to them is very instructive in terms of how we equip our people with the skills, the assets including technology-based assets. That we need to have available to us to enable those transformations and then to think about as well what does this mean for our own business. For example, you know EY was actually just recognized as literally the number one firm in use of robotic process automation RPA, which is really useful but increasingly ubiquitous technology in you know in process improvement and efficiency, etc. Well, we deliver that service for our clients across the board and are recognized for that. But we're looking at how do we automate our own processes. How do we incorporate robotics and bots if you will

Ken White

Yeah.

Kelly Grier

to the way that we, you know, we drive more efficiency into our business, and in fact, right now, we have 7,000 bots working at EY.

Ken White

Wow, wow.

Kelly Grier

So we've got one of the largest sort of bot families or bot

Ken White

Yeah.

Kelly Grier

workforces in the world. So that's an example of sort of the inside out.

Ken White

Yeah.

Kelly Grier

And our people play a really important role because they are very much on the front line

Ken White

Right.

Kelly Grier

of a lot of the client transformation

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier

but they're also very much on the frontline in sort of the user experience of being a part of EY. So their suggestions to us as to how we could do things better, smarter, faster you know is really valuable insight as well.

Ken White

We'll continue our discussion with EY's Kelly Grier in just a minute. Our podcast is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at William & Mary School of Business. If you're looking to raise your game and give your career a boost. The Center for Corporate Education hosts professional development programs that provide busy executives and emerging leaders with the tools needed to compete in today's business environment. The programs are taught by William & Mary's MBA faculty. The faculty ranked number one in the nation by Bloomberg Businessweek magazine. To learn more, visit our website at wmleadership.com. Now back to our conversation with the U.S. Chairman and Managing Partner and America's managing partner for EY, Kelly Grier.

Ken White

Your typical day, you're basically communicating all day. How what channels do you use face to face phone email town halls? What do you? How do you listen learn and communicate?

Kelly Grier

Yeah. It's all of the above. I am on the road at least 90 percent of the time

Ken White

Sure.

Kelly Grier

and I take those opportunities as I travel around to meet with our EY teams.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier

I spend a lot of time with our partners, and I spend a lot of time with our clients and other stakeholders, so our regulators are a very important stakeholder for us as well. So I spent a fair amount of time with them. And I do value the ability to have an in-person conversation right.

Ken White

Right.

Kelly Grier

The intimacy of that the candor that comes with that the level of trust you know that you build when you sit together is different than certainly a phone call

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier

which is different yet again from an email, and you know and believe it or not occasionally we'll actually still will still issue voicemail messages which are you know which is sort of a vestige of the past.

Ken White

Yeah.

Kelly Grier

But from time to time is actually useful to be able to put a voice over to some of the messages I do issue video communications

Ken White
Right.

Kelly Grier
to our people as well

Ken White
Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier
particularly if it's something that needs to be sent out broadly. But I want them to see and hear you know my accompanying expression and emotion associated with the message being delivered. I find that to be very effective. I've got a people advisory forum as well so a bit of a focus group if you will

Ken White
Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier
that will convene three or four times a year, and they set the agenda they will tell me what's on their minds. They represent the views of their colleagues. They tell me what's on their minds and vice versa. It's also a nice opportunity to socialize different ideas or changes that may be on the horizon. And we have the same with the partner level group as well.

Ken White
Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier
Again I think it is unique as a partnership. I work very much for my partners

Ken White
Right.

Kelly Grier
and you know we're all sort of in this together as co-owners of EY. So it's a variety different ways.

Ken White

When I think EY, I think culture it just leaps off the website right.

Kelly Grier

Yeah.

Ken White

What is it about. What is it? How what's the magic potion right.

Kelly Grier

Yeah. It's a great question, and I have to tell you that there is nothing that I'm more focused on than that question. You know, being the custodian, the guardian steward of our culture is I think my number one job.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier

And I do think we have a unique culture, and it's incredibly powerful in how you can align you know an organization around this shared set of values, and you know this esprit de corps is first and foremost. Starts with making sure that everybody we bring on board is going to be accretive to that culture

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier

is going to align with the culture. That everyone understands what our value systems are and that they ascribe to those values and share those values, and they commit to those values and that you know central to those values is the concept of teaming. And this is what's really extraordinary I think about EY and one of the things that is really really difficult to replicate because we have first and foremost we bring the most talented people and the most accomplished people from campuses.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier

certainly from William & Mary and from various other campuses and we know from external sources that we are one of the most attractive employers

Ken White
Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier
on campus. And so we know we've got the best talent that chooses to join EY. Incredibly accomplished students, great grades,

Ken White
Sure.

Kelly Grier
having done lots of really meaningful work

Ken White
Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier
in addition to the academics. And in addition to that, when we're recruiting for experienced hires, we also have phenomenal success. And inevitably they tell us they join us for our culture, but we bring this incredible talent into the firm and what we ask them to do, which is somewhat extraordinary. Is we ask them to subordinate all of their personal successes and achievements and really elevate the primacy of the team. And so you really sort of yield your

Ken White
Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier
your individuality and your individual not your individuality but your individual goals and aspirations

Ken White
Right.

Kelly Grier
to the team's goals and aspirations. And there's a bit of a leap of faith that you take that in doing so you're going to be profoundly successful

Ken White

Yeah.

Kelly Grier

and that is really unusual to be able to cultivate in a group of extraordinarily accomplished people. This sense of team being primary and individual things that secondary. That is I think one of the things that's really essential about the EY culture

Ken White

Yeah.

Kelly Grier

and really really distinctive, and I think it all rests on you hear me talk a lot about this concept of belonging that again you see yourself in the firm your value system aligns with the firm's value system. You feel this commitment to the team because you feel a sense that you really belong here.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier

And in that I think is probably one of the most powerful attributes of our culture.

Ken White

And isn't it just incredibly fun to be on a winning team?

Kelly Grier

Exactly.

Ken White

Just a blast, isn't it.

Kelly Grier

Well, there's that too.

Ken White

Right, yeah.

Kelly Grier

Exactly. You're doing great things really helping companies do some of the most extraordinary things this as I mentioned earlier I mean we're helping companies literally create the future

Ken White

Yeah.

Kelly Grier

and our people are part of that, and to be a part of a team that's doing that is very gratifying.

Ken White

A tough question for our last question. Looking forward in the future as you say so much innovation and disruption. What's it take to be successful moving forward?

Kelly Grier

Insatiable curiosity. I was actually maybe I'll say it differently. I was actually just in Israel a couple weeks ago, and I was meeting with one of our clients who's a prolific entrepreneur and innovator and successful many times over. And when we talked about Israel as the Startup Nation

Ken White

Right, hmm-mmm.

Kelly Grier

You'll hear that term obviously used very extensively because of how entrepreneurial, innovative culture is of this wonderful little country. And he used the term he said Israelis have a healthy irreverence for everything. And he said, in other words, they challenge everything. They don't accept the status quo. They they're always asking you know asking questions around why or you know if not this could it be that and how do we make it better and how do we just see the world differently. Does it always have to look this way is the sky truly always blue. I mean, they're just this irreverent this healthy irreverence that really drives that curiosity that ultimately drives innovation. And I think I think that that's the most important. I literally think that's the most important distinguishing feature of anyone who's entering the workforce now because it is such a credibly dynamic world. And if you're not constantly asking what's next or what's around the corner or where do we go from here or where does this product this model this service this capability. What's the next version next generation of it. If you're not asking those questions, you're going to be left behind.

Ken White

That's our conversation with Kelly Grier U.S. Chairman and Managing Partner and America's managing partner for EY. And that's our podcast for this week. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the William & Mary School of Business. The Center for Corporate Education can help you and your organization get to the next level with business and leadership development programs taught by the William & Mary MBA faculty. The faculty ranked number one in the nation by Bloomberg Businessweek magazine. If you're interested in learning more, visit our website at wmleadership.com. Finally, we'd love to hear from you regarding the podcast. We invite you to share your ideas, questions, and thoughts with us by emailing us at podcast@wm.edu. Thanks to our guest this week, Kelly Grier, and thanks to you for listening. I'm Ken White. Till next time have a safe, happy, and productive week.