

EMBRACING A PURPOSE YOU NEVER THOUGHT POSSIBLE: STEPHANIE JACKSON AND KIMBERLY PAXTON HAGNER OF KWIK LOK

Along with their younger sister Melissa Steiner, Stephanie Jackson and Kimberly Paxton-Hagner are co-owners of their multigenerational family enterprise, Kwik Lok. If you've ever bought bread, tortillas, or apples in a bag, you've already used their product! Their grandfather, Floyd Paxton, invented the plastic closure tab that keeps food fresh and tracks the supply of many of our favorite foods.

The sisters' road to family enterprise leadership started as a total surprise: their grandfather and father never intended for women in their family to take over the business. But their father's sudden passing left a leadership gap, and the Paxton sisters had to ask themselves: What do we do? How will we do it? And why should we do it?

Listen as our guests discuss their trepidation and inspiration finding their purpose within their family enterprise, in roles they never thought they'd take on. We are also joined by experts Rob Lachenauer and Jennifer Pendergast, who offer thoughts on organizational change, defining purpose, and winning employee buy-in.

Kimberly Paxton-Hagner:

We're third generation family business owners. Our dad ran the business for 50 years.

Stephanie Jackson:

Our grandfather and dad did a tremendous job of innovating the product, and then taking it globally, and making it such a success 67 years later.

Kimberly Paxton-Hagner:

Our grandfather, and then our dad just thought that women couldn't run businesses, that their brains just weren't a match to the needs there, maybe a bit too emotional. So, we had to really stretch ourselves to find a way to realize how we could be a meaningful part of our family business when six years ago, the chance actually came up.

Stephanie Jackson:

What we are adding on top of a great foundation is bringing the heart into business. And I know our dad could be rolling around in his grave right now going, "Okay, what is all this fluffy stuff?"

Esther Choy:

What is it like to be told your whole life, no, you are not suited to get involved with the family business because... you are a female? Then, seemingly out of nowhere something very unexpected happens, and you realize that, wait well... actually never mind, you could lead the family business, in fact, from the board level.

But are you equipped to get involved as a board member or even as a board chair? What if you didn't even know what the word "governance" meant? And how would management and employees react to

you as a new owner? How can you still leave a positive impact?

Hi, my name is Esther Choy, the executive producer and your host of the John L. Ward Center for Family Enterprises' own podcast series: Family IN Business. A podcast that features stories of leaders, their families, and the family enterprises they transformed.

In this episode of Family IN Business, we're continuing our theme of Purposes in Season 2. AND. We're trying out a brand-new format. Instead of me preparing and asking questions to our guests, our two guests in this episode have prepared and asked each other questions. I, along with my family business experts won't come in until the end.

In this new format, my guests prepared their own questions to explore the journey that they've taken together on their shared and evolving purpose, one that even six years ago they didn't think was possible. My guests are gracious enough to let us in on this intimate conversation between them --- two sisters, who grew up having no idea that one day they would become family business owners and board chair and director.

And who are the sisters?

Stephanie Jackson:

My name is Stephanie Jackson and I am excited to be interviewing my younger sister, Kim, today.

Kimberly Paxton-Hagner:

Hi, I'm Kimberly Paxton-Hagner. I'm here with my sister, Stephanie.

Stephanie Jackson:

Well, Kim, I think people would be surprised that they have probably handled our product on a daily basis, probably most of their entire lives.

Kimberly Paxton-Hagner:

Yeah, Steph, I think that is surprising to realize that so many people already know us without knowing us. Our company's name is Kwik Lok, and that's spelled K-W-I-K L-O-K. And the reason you probably are familiar with it because it's most likely in your pantry right now, it might be in your junk drawers, it's the little tab that most people see on the end of a bread bag. So, it closes your bread, your tortillas, your apples, and other produce. And our grandfather, Floyd Paxton, invented that 67 years ago. So, it's amazing to think about how many people know about us without realizing they know.

Stephanie Jackson:

Exactly, we have so many people that will say, "Oh my gosh, I wish I could have invented something like that."

Kimberly Paxton-Hagner:

Well, Kwik Lok also produces the machines, the closing heads that put that lock onto the different bags. We also produce printers because a lot of the locks are able to be printed on. So, it's all about keeping food fresh and safe as well as traceability. And it all taps into sustainability ultimately because food waste is one of the largest problems that we have as far as carbon goes.

Our dad ran the business for 50 years then he suddenly passed away six years ago. So, we found ourselves in a place we never expected to be because we were not groomed to run the business. Our grandfather, and then our dad also, just thought that women couldn't run businesses, that their brains just weren't a match to the needs there, maybe a bit too emotional. So, we had to really stretch ourselves to find a way to realize how we could be a meaningful part of our family business when six years ago, the chance actually came up.

Stephanie Jackson:

I know we describe it as that we are one of, there's three of us, and we talk about three sisters that were raised by a dad who doesn't think that women can run businesses, but yet a mom in her mid-50s decided to get her master's degree and buy her first Harley Davidson motorcycle to ride around the US, a yin and yang of influence there.

Kimberly Paxton-Hagner

Right, and Steph, we had those two influences in our life, so how do you think that they impacted you?

Stephanie Jackson:

Well, I would say that dad, just being who he was and how he was raised, really was about, unfortunately, quieting our voices, and our mom was the total opposite on amplifying those voices. And I chose to be influenced more that my voice mattered. I didn't want to be in the background, and so, when this chance came, it was an interesting thing to think about.

Kimberly Paxton-Hagner:

Part of the gift that mom gave us also is to look at ourselves as three sisters and as unique human beings. We didn't have to be like each other, and each of us brought something to the table that was a value. And it was a real treat to be able to have her in my life, because unlike you, Stephanie, as the middle child, I am an introvert and I'm a quiet thinker, I'd rather be alone than try to fit in. But I think you are maybe a little bit different.

Stephanie Jackson:

I am the extrovert of the family. And I've been known to be the risk taker, the challenger, and deeply passionate. And yes, we are definitely very different. And then we have a younger sister, Melissa, who is a blend of both of us. And we really have figured out, which is really neat, to leave room for us all to be different and who we are. And so that is why she is not here today with us, because public speaking is not her jam. And we respect that. Our main thing is we want to work together.

Well, so let me ask you a question, Kim, what is your earliest memory of our family business?

Kim Paxton-Hagner:

Oh my gosh. I can remember being quite small and we lived in Yakima, Washington, and that's where the headquarters of Kwik Lok is. And so, walking into the lobby there in Yakima, they had a built-in planter box. And instead of seeing soil right on the surface, you saw all the colorful bits, which were the little pieces of plastic punched out of the Kwik Loks. And so, they look like the playing cards spade. And so, I remember running my fingers through those and probably putting some in my pockets. And that's one of my biggest memories from there.

Stephanie Jackson:

That is funny.

Kim Paxton-Hagner:

What about you Stephanie?

Stephanie Jackson:

I totally remember that. I was just so, again, walking in there probably at six years old going, "wow, this is really cool." And the other thing that I remember, oh, my gosh, is back then, in the early 70s, walking into grandpa's office, shag carpet, wood paneling on the walls, and seeing several animal heads all over the office.

Kim Paxton-Hagner:

Yes.

Stephanie Jackson:

... a pheasant, an elk, a boar's head.

Kim Paxton-Hagner:

Oh, I remember the boar's head and I especially loved that because grandpa put a pair of his old reading glasses on the boar's head, so that was always there on the wall. Oh, my gosh.

Stephanie Jackson:

Yeah, it was thrilling and scary all at the same time.

Kim Paxton-Hagner:

Right, definitely. Well, Steph, and we're now, gosh, six years into this new journey of ours together. And I know at many times during it, we had to ask ourselves why we want to stay as owners. So, I want to ask you that now, what was your answer to that?

Stephanie Jackson:

Well, to be incredibly honest, I didn't think that we could be owners at first. We had never been groomed in the business. We had not worked a day at the company. I was actually asked to be on the board by dad, but it was truly to be an ornament, and don't speak and don't ask any questions.

Kimberly Paxton-Hagner:

Right.

Stephanie Jackson:

So, when this opportunity came, it was at first like, "Oh my gosh, I don't think we could do this. We haven't worked in the company; we're not going to be owner operators. This seems very challenging; how could we really make a meaningful impact in our company? How could we get the employees to trust us?"

Kimberly Paxton-Hagner:

Right.

Stephanie Jackson:

But what I soon learned, and I think you, along with you and Melissa, is that this liability that we

thought, of not working in the company, actually has turned out to be a great asset. We realize that we are not entrenched in it, so we come with fresh eyes, fresh ideas. And also, being females, which is, again, very rare in this very male-dominant industry, manufacturing. We bring that diverse mind around how to solve different problems, different solutions. What about you? What was your thought when this opportunity first came?

Kimberly Paxton-Hagner:

I really had to search quite a while to figure out how we could add value as we were learning about the business, because I needed to understand how we could be owners and not be operators. I had the idea that you could be an owner at the governance level. I didn't even know the word governance. And the other part of it is, it's really easy to listen to the people that think you should just sit on the sidelines. And so, there was a push at first for us to just sit quietly.

So, it was interesting to basically realize that we could sit on the board and we can be an asset to the business. We can bring a new perspective, and also connect the employees back to the business in a way that they hadn't been connected, working with the heart and soul of the family. And the family really is an asset to the business. We have a long-term view. We are tied to our community. We care deeply about how our employees do. All of those things layered in are a natural fit to us. And then also we've learned to add to our extended group of people to be able to give us advice that was maybe a little less emotionally connected to the moment than my sister might be. So, we each have our advisors on the outside that are well-versed in business and governance issues that were able to help us find a way to really step fully into this new position as ourselves. To do both of those things at the same time was hard at first. What about you, Stephanie?

Stephanie Jackson:

Well, you touched on, which has been very important to me, is to have outside people, I call it in my corner, to process things about business who have great minds, but also are cheering me on and believing in me and reminding me, "Hey, you do deserve to be there. You deserve to ask those questions. You don't know everything and that's okay." We got to find out, one of my friends said, because I can go into a lot of self-doubt of, "Oh, you're not that smart. You really don't know." And she says, "Steph, I'm not going to let you think that way, because smart actually is the essence of being curious and being brave, and that is really where smart comes from and you exemplify both those." "And I was like, "Right on." So, to have those kinds of people in your corner is essential. I have found out and like you have too.

Kimberly Paxton-Hagner:

It is. And I think back to also the fact that the only example we had of how to do this were the two men in our lives, our grandfather and our father. So as women, not only had we not, we're not going to be owner-operators, so it's going to look different, we also only had men as examples. So, it's been great for me to find other women leaders to lean on, to see how they find their space in this and still tap into all of the things that makes them a powerful and valuable, unique human being.

Stephanie Jackson:

Yeah, I would also just add onto one of the challenges I just remember is, again, having the instinct that I know that our company can have great impact. Outside of selling the thing we sell and be very financially successful, I truly believed in my gut that, "Wait, we're here to do more." And at first, again, that was a different way of doing business. And so, the challenge was being pushed up against an old guard of, "Well, that's not how we do things." And then when I started using words like corporate social responsibility, that was like a new language, and it was met with, "Oh yeah, I think I've heard that that's a

report," which I'm going, "Ah, it's more than that." But I've learned that, the door was open, be patient, which is definitely not one of my strong characters.

Kimberly Paxton-Hagner:

Right, I might have helped with that a little bit.

Stephanie Jackson:

Exactly, not one of my strong character traits. And you know what, we really got to, we were wonderfully surprised that people earlier than later came on board and realized that some of the things that we were asking them to do were going to be not just a report, they were going to really be integrated into our entire company. It was literally a way of doing business. And so, if I could say anything is just, have the courage, and follow your instincts. And then, again, give people time to get on board and...

Kimberly Paxton-Hagner:

To catch up.

Stephanie Jackson:

... to catch up, to be okay with change.

Kimberly Paxton-Hagner:

Right.

Stephanie Jackson:

We know that we can do both, we can do good and do well. And it's been such a really cool last six years journey of leading from that, maybe not knowing all the answers, not knowing how-

Kimberly Paxton-Hagner:

That's a thing I think we do really well too, is the fact that we know when we don't know the answers.

Stephanie Jackson:

So, we ask a lot of questions. I tend to be the one that asks questions constantly. If I recall myself at the board meetings, they're probably sick of me, going, "There she goes again." One of the questions is why are we doing this? One of my blanket questions constantly is, "This isn't making sense to me, please explain."

Not being entrenched in, this is the way we've done it, because it's all new to me and Kim, that we ask a lot of, why are we doing this? I think this is a true gift, to give any of our leadership and our people to answer that and to hear themselves say out loud, "Well, because that's the way we've always done it," it has been some of the answers, and then we go, "Well, can you provide a little deeper answer to that?" And then there might be, "Well, I don't know why," or, "Because your dad said so," was a lot of the leadership that my father had. He definitely was hailed as Jerre and what he says goes. And so, I believe us asking just a little bit to that next question, why? Is this still serving us? Is this still working?

Kimberly Paxton-Hagner:

One of the questions I had when I came in was, we have plants all over the globe. So we are in the US, Canada, Japan, Ireland, Australia, and I came in as a newbie saying, "You mean the plant managers don't talk to each other. They aren't sharing best practices," because our plants are not necessarily unique,

they might have a slightly different layout, but they're trying to accomplish a lot of the same tasks. So how can we all be and act as one unit and share things that helped each other out? That was one of the things that I remember pushing on was understanding why we weren't talking to each other more.

Stephanie Jackson:

Yeah, and now we call it One Kwik Lok. We really use the language of how are we as a global company being consistent in our messaging, being consistent in our practices, the experiences our employees are having and our customers. And we have found out, again, what backs our instinct, that the employees love it. They love being engaged with all of the different plants. They love that, they actually felt like they were alone in a silo, and that's the way it was, but now that they're getting the chance to interact it's added a new excitement and energy to our company.

Esther Choy:

From Stephanie and Kimberly's conversation, we've heard a story of how, even when heirs of family enterprises were NOT groomed to succeed the family business, they still have abundant opportunities to contribute as owners. In their story, their fresh perspectives have created tremendous and positive impact on setting the company's corporate strategy and readiness for the future. They have been able to do so from the board level.

If you find even some of the dilemmas that the Paxton Sisters had faced resonated with you, keep these three key points in mind.

1. Make sure you have trusted advisors and friends on your side. You don't have to and shouldn't do it alone.
2. Show your management team your curiosity, and be transparent with areas where you have little knowledge by asking questions—lots and lots of it.
3. Being firm about what you expect your executive team to accomplish.

Kim said it best with the purpose statement that she and her younger sister Melissa put together for Kwik Lok.

Kimberly Paxton-Hagner:

Melissa and I worked on this and it was amazing how long it took to really mine the exact words we wanted, but this is our core purpose; to create a world where people feel they matter knowing their contributions will change the future and help all beings thrive.

Esther Choy:

That is both a specific and inspiring purpose statement. But what does it mean? To break it down, here are some of the major questions and components for Kwik Lok's employees that are especially important to the Paxton Sisters.

Stephanie Jackson:

How do you feel at work? Do you feel that you matter to the company? Do you feel engaged? Are you excited to wake up and walk through the doors?

Kim Paxton-Hagner:

Is your work meaningful? Because meaningful work is so important to each of us as individuals. To not provide that opportunity to the people in our company just seems not possible. We have to have people feel that they have meaning when they're doing their work.

Esther Choy:

Coming up next, I will be talking to two family enterprise experts on questions such as:

- Why is coming up with a purpose statement so challenging and time-consuming?
- What are the key things next generation owners should keep in mind during ownership transition?

And also, I asked Stephanie and Kimberly this question. So, suppose you now have an opportunity to leave a voicemail message for your father, Jerre Paxton, what would you say to him?

Stay tuned and find out what's in that voicemail.

Esther Choy:

Welcome back to Family IN Business.

By the way, you probably know that Kellogg's Ward Center for Family Enterprises has been running many popular and in demand executive education programs for over 20 years. But what you may not know is that you can contact us with your specific questions about family enterprise challenges so we can identify resources to help you meet those challenges.

Just write to us. The email address is familyenterprises@kellogg.northwestern.edu
That's familyenterprises@kellogg.northwestern.edu.

The email is in our show notes as well.

Ok, back to Kimberly and Stephanie. The purpose statement that Kim shared with us is really heartfelt, and yet specific to what she and her two sisters want Kwik Lok to achieve. She also mentioned how long it took her and Melissa to mine the exact words. I want to know... why can this process take so long?

Rob Lachenauer:

Purpose is really hard to intuit your way to the answer. Like I'm going to develop a purpose, it can be a dry well. You just have to take part of it and figure out where that is.

Esther Choy:

That is an interesting angle to purpose! Who is speaking here?

Rob Lachenauer:

Hi, I'm Rob Lachenauer, I'm managing partner of BanyanGlobal Family Business Advisors. We're an advisory business. Our clients are owners of typically very large family businesses. And our service essentially is to advise and help them in making great decisions together. And it's usually about the tough things that family business owners can face.

Esther Choy:

If you have ever drafted up your purpose statement you can probably relate to why it can be time

consuming and difficult to intuit your way to the answer. So, what are we supposed to do when we try to craft our purpose statement? Here's Rob again.

Rob Lachenauer:

I believe purpose is best found, not directly saying what's your purpose. I often find a more specific way to get the purpose is through a more simple idea, which are owner goals. What is your goal here? It's a more concrete question than like, what's your purpose? Purpose is a big word. The goals questions are more concrete and specific. Questions like, why do you own these assets together? It's kind of a stunner question for most owners like, "Well, because Granddad gave them to us." No, we call that surface purpose. We try to get into, "No, really you could sell tomorrow. Why do you not sell the business tomorrow?" It's another way to start getting into the space around purpose.

And goals for privately owned companies, including family businesses, typically come in three forms. You can grow your business. You can bring out money from it, liquidity, or you can control your business to do certain things. And it's a tradeoff among those three goal sets. And then we go deep into those goal sets. Do you want to grow your business? So, you want liquidity from your business? Do you control it for specific reasons? Most clients can start answering those quickly. And we can then back our way into something like purpose.

Esther Choy:

Starting from articulating more concrete goals, in terms of growth, liquidity and control, and then back your way into purpose strikes me as a very smart and pragmatic approach. Rob also has additional insights on why drafting your purpose statement can take a while.

Rob Lachenauer:

Family businesses are owned by people or trust, and then people behind them. So, setting owner goals and strategy and purpose is a very personal thing. Owners get to set the rules. They set their own goals. Now, well, that's both great and a little bit scary. Because if you're asked the question, "What really, what do you want?" From your life? From your business? It's almost like the purpose thing. It's a little bit big and scary. We really believe family business is a team sport. As you're figuring out what you want you've got to figure out what we want and that's a big task.

Esther Choy:

Purpose has some of life's biggest questions baked into it. And family businesses owners have to figure these big questions for not only themselves individually, but for the whole collective.

Now on the other hand, I'm really curious about the employees and management's perspective.

Like Rob mentions, owners get to set the rules. It's their right to call the shots. But as the next-generation owners transitioning into leadership, like the Paxton Sisters did, but they hadn't worked in the business, weren't groomed to lead the enterprise, had no prior academic background or professional training in the industry that the family business operates in, and yet they have fairly concrete ideas on how to lead the company and what goals it should go after, how would employees and management team react to this?

Jennifer Pendergast:

There's a really fine line there. I can actually perceive being on the management side of what you're saying and feeling like, "Hey, wait a minute, you don't know, you're questioning what I'm doing, and you

don't know what I'm doing."

Esther Choy:

That is Professor Jennifer Pendergast, executive director of Kellogg's Ward Center for Family Enterprises.

Jennifer Pendergast:

But oftentimes the outside questions are the best ones. But what you need is a culture where people are open to hearing that and not personally attacked by doing it because the problem is if what I immediately hear is "you're doing that wrong," I'm not even going to listen.

I'm just going to shut down and say, "Esther, you don't know diddly squat about this business" I have an excuse not to listen to you. So, you're going to have to convince me why I should listen to you. And by the way, the built-in excuse, that's a stick, which is, I'm the owner. So, you have to listen to me as much less effective than the carrot, which is, I'm just really curious. And I want this business to be the best that it can.

And please don't take this as criticism, more take it as curiosity. But if you can... you've got to actively communicate that. And I think you have to earn the right to say those things. I think you have to build the relationship. All this is foundational, and in any business, any relationship is trust, right? So, I have to trust that you have good intentions that you're coming from the right place, that your idea isn't to attack me or get me fired, but that we're all trying to achieve the same goal. But if you do that before establishing the trust, it can become very difficult. So, I think the foundation of trust is important and then openly articulating why you're doing this.

Esther Choy:

Which is why having a well thought out and articulated purpose statement is so helpful in establishing trust.

Owners can set rules and expectations, but it's the employees who carry them out and make their goals – or purpose – a reality.

Jennifer Pendergast:

I think there's work you have to do as a family to communicate your intentions to management and also your commitment. What we're hoping to do is be supportive of you and help you make this a great company by ensuring we keep enough money in the business and that resources are dedicated and that we're paying people well and can attract good people. And that we're all proud of the name that's on the door so that we all view this as something.

And I think the other thing that active owners can do that can be really helpful is say, "We actually intend to keep this business for the long-term." Because I think a lot of people worry at that transition where there's no longer a family member running a business of how long is it going to be till these people are going to sell? Because to management and leadership and even employees, what you're really worried about personally is, "I'm investing myself in a career in this place. Will it still be around and will it be around and run the way that it is right now under this family, which I've come to enjoy?" So, actually the fact that the Paxton sisters are present can be a really good thing because it demonstrates that there's a longer-term family commitment to this business.

Esther Choy:

One thing strikes me most as Kwik Lok experienced an unexpected ownership transition six years ago when then G2 owner and CEO Jerre Paxton passed away suddenly is this: Not only did his three adult daughters had to grieve over the loss of their father, they also had to figure what this loss meant to each of them in terms of their own role with the family business. It's probably a huge understatement to say that they were at a forked road.

Even as the sisters stood at a forked road, imagine what Kwik Lok employees and management must have wondered as the sisters contemplated their decisions. And then once they did reach their decisions, and then set directions, they learned about things like sustainability, direct communications across their international plants and that the new owners fully intended to bring their hearts to the business. As Stephanie ascertained that her dad would "probably rolled around in his grave and wondered, 'what's this fluffy stuff?'"

Here's what Rob has to say.

Rob Lachenauer:

It's essential for successful transitions to be as transparent as you possibly can. As you talk about in your podcast, it should be a slow process. And as transparent as you can say to the management team. All the time, as you're changing leadership as CEO or whatever we're talking about, there'll always be a change in style. To me, this engineering to heart is just an example of, there's always a change in leadership style, and you have to talk about it and be so explicit and hopefully celebrate it.

We learn that oftentimes like G1 is a conqueror. They just get out and they take new land. And do, do, do, do. Oftentimes when you're out to G3, G4, G5, the best leadership model is not a conqueror because you like rollover your cousins. It's a ruler. And by ruler, we mean someone who's actually very adept politically. Because basically in that time of starting the business, that was the necessary skill. In the time of running the business, the ruler is the right business model. It's a failure when the future generations try to import the previous generation's conqueror's way. And if you're going to be good politically, you're going to win people's hearts and minds.

Esther Choy:

That actually sounds quite like the Paxton sisters.

Over six years ago, they were at a crossroad where they weren't sure if they wanted to stay on as owners because, well they'd been told their whole life not to bother. So, I asked this question to Stephanie and Kimberly: Say you're leaving a message, a voicemail for your dad right now, what would you like to leave him?

Stephanie Jackson:

"Hey dad, I know you were coming from a place of protecting us by not bringing us into the company because it's stressful and it's hard and it is a lot of responsibility, but guess what? We're doing a great job."

Esther Choy:

They're doing a great job despite having tremendous doubt in their ability to lead initially. But this initial doubt and one particular fear that Stephanie had ended up neutralizing each other.

Stephanie Jackson:

I spoke a lot about this fear of when both of our parents passed within about a year and a half, they were

the family glue. The parents were our glue and I, as the oldest sister and deeply into the family thought, "Oh my gosh, what's going to keep us together?" And so, saying yes, to running this business with you guys has provided tremendous family glue, and has lowered my anxiety. It's really one of my dreams to be working with you guys.

Kimberly Paxton-Hagner:

I love, Stephanie, that you used the word family glue because I know that there's this quote that we in our family have a deep connection to, and it just, you remind me of it because it's one by Maya Angelou. And we actually used it at mom's celebration of life. But it's that, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." And when I think about this quote, I think of you a lot often, because it is one that you live by.

Stephanie Jackson:

First of all, I have to stop crying right now.

Kimberly Paxton-Hagner:

I know.

Stephanie Jackson:

Yeah, that quote has always hit my heart, and I think that's the crux of it is, I think that is the essence of life of how you make people feel is the magic, right?

Esther Choy:

Thank you for tuning into Family IN Business, a podcast sponsored by the John L. Ward Center for Family Enterprises.

We're nearing the end of season two. But in the next and last episode, you will find out how one family enterprise leader narrowly escaped death and that experience showed him the one purpose he had always meant to live for. You don't want to miss that story!

Thank you, Stephanie Jackson and Kimberly Paxton-Hagner. True to form, you are trailblazers and so open to innovative ideas such as this StoryCorps style interview format. Thank you also, Karen Reed, Global Director of Marketing and Communications at Kwik Lok for setting this interview up. And of course, we're so delighted to have learned from Rob Lachenauer, co-founder and CEO of BanyanGlobal Family Business Advisors. He is also the co-author of a great book by Harvard Business Review called Family Business Handbook.

Our show is supported and advised by Professor Jennifer Pendergast, executive director of Kellogg's Ward Center for Family Enterprises. Kane Power is our audio engineer. And, I'm Esther Choy, an adjunct lecturer at the Kellogg's Ward Center, founder of Leadership Story Lab, and author of the book *Let the Story Do the Work*.

Don't forget that you can contact the Ward Center so we can help you identify resources that can specifically address the particular challenges that you and your family enterprise are facing. Email us at: familyenterprises@kellogg.northwestern.edu.

Esther Choy is the President and Chief Story Facilitator of [Leadership Story Lab](#), where she teaches business storytelling to organizations and professionals who are searching for more meaningful ways to connect with their audiences. Leaders trained in storytelling find compelling narratives to communicate authentically, inspire others, and create unimagined, lasting impact.

Since 2010, Esther has combined the science of persuasion and the art of storytelling to help her clients gain a competitive edge. Since launching Leadership Story Lab, she and her team have served clients across industries, including United Airlines, Tyson Foods, ZS, McCormick Foundation, Brookfield Asset Management, Adyen, Moore, US Cellular, SC Johnson and PayNet, an Equifax Company.

Esther is the author of the book [Let the Story Do the Work: The Art of Storytelling for Business Success](#). Her work appears regularly on forbes.com, virgin.com, entrepreneur.com, and ama.org. Her podcast, Family IN Business, is sponsored by the John L. Ward Center for Family Enterprises at the Kellogg School of Management, where she also holds an adjunct lecturer appointment. She is a graduate of Kellogg, as well as Texas A&M, holding an MBA from the former and MS in Higher Education from the latter.

Esther spent nearly half her life in Hong Kong, and now lives in Chicago with her husband and two daughters.

Established in 1999, the [John L. Ward Center for Family Enterprises](#) pioneered much of what is known about the collective challenges that family businesses and their leaders and owners face, making the Ward Center synonymous with new ways of thinking about the ownership and leadership of family enterprises. Clinical Professor Emeritus John Ward, along with co-founder Lloyd Shefsky and numerous faculty and staff aligned with the Ward Center, developed a world-class teaching and research center that provides cutting-edge thinking and guidance for family business purpose, vision and strategy, governance, leadership, succession, entrepreneurship in family business, family engagement and cohesion and family business culture.

The Ward Center has built a collaborative family business community among Kellogg students, faculty, alumni and family business scholars, and has developed a global network of successful business families who can learn from - and connect with - each other to generate innovative solutions to current and emerging challenges faced by family enterprises. The Ward Center also creates unparalleled executive programs and conferences to drive strategic conversations about innovations and best practices in the field of family enterprise.

Renamed the John L. Ward Center for Family Enterprises in 2020, the center today is in a unique position to transform the decision-making and strategic thinking of future generations of family enterprise leaders. The Ward Center is dedicated to producing rigorous and relevant research into the unique demands, strengths and evolutionary paths of family enterprises. Results of this research are delivered in the classrooms to all ages of family business leaders.

In addition to our focus on the complexities of family enterprise leadership, governance and strategy, we integrate Northwestern University's and the Kellogg School of Management's authoritative expertise into our curriculum to create a world-class, comprehensive, cross-discipline family enterprise resource. Our fusion of this deep academic capability with knowledge gleaned from our global community of

high-impact business-owning families helps create the Ward Center's unique theory-driven, evidence-based frameworks.

The Ward Center has a three-pronged approach:

- Providing MBA curriculum and programming for students who are part of a family business, as well as students interested in the fields of private equity and venture capital
- Offering executive education courses that cover the full gamut of family enterprise management issues including family business strategy, governance, succession planning, entrepreneurship, family offices and family business culture
- Conducting groundbreaking research, both academic and practitioner-based, to better understand the challenges facing business families