

Transcript for Sarah Robb O'Hagan | Extreme You (Episode 609)

Full show notes found here:

<https://theartofcharm.com/podcast-episodes/sarah-robb-ohagan-extreme-you-episode-609/>

SARAH: One of those things that drives me absolutely crazy is the people who, effectively kind of work to try and please the boss, as opposed to just grow the business.

(laugh)

SARAH: Get out there and do something.

JORDAN: Welcome to The Art of Charm. I'm Jordan Harbinger. Today we're talking with my friend Sarah Robb O'Hagan. She's a Kiwi who led the reinvention and turnaround of the \$5 billion sports brand Gatorade as its global president. She led the technology transformation of Equinox and worked at Nike, Virgin -- We're going to talk about epic fails, embarrassing screw ups and glorious rebounds, why it doesn't matter if you don't yet know what you're good at or what goals to pursue, turning failures into fuel and how to get out of a rut when you've been laid off, fired, or just feel like you're going where, and how to stand out in your field and at work in the right way. Last but not least, why and how successful people are constantly rebuilding themselves and how we can do the same.

By the way, if you're new to the show, we'd love to send you some top episodes and the AoC Toolbox. That's where we study the science of people and discuss concepts like reading body language and having charismatic nonverbal communication, the science of attraction, negotiation techniques, social engineering, networking and influence strategies, persuasion tactics, and everything else that we teach here at The Art of Charm. Check that out at theartofcharm.com/toolbox or in our iPhone app at theartofcharm.com/iphone. Also at theartofcharm.com you can find the full show notes and all previous episodes of the show. Whether it's your first or 500th

episode of AoC, we're always glad to have you with us. Now let's hear from Sarah Robb O'Hagan.

Sarah, thanks for joining us by the way.

SARAH: Thank you. This is fun. I'm excited.

JORDAN: Yeah should be a lot of fun. I mean it's definitely going to be different than a lot of the other shows. We were talking preshow about how -- especially a lot of business shows tend to go around and around the same thing and you have a pretty impressive personal brand that's a -- I guess you could say, in part an amalgamation of all these other brands that you've led, Gatorade, Equinox, you've worked at Nike and Virgin, and now Flywheel Sports. Obviously you like sports. I'm going to throw that -- I'm going to go out on a limb here.

SARAH: You might be right there. Although it's funny, I will say I've had such a long career in sports, that it's funny how people just assume, "Oh, you must have been an insanely good athlete."

JORDAN: Yeah.

SARAH: And I'm like, "Actually no I sucked," you know. I never made the A-team, but I played a ton of sports. I just always loved it, you know?

JORDAN: So last picked for kickball and then you're like, "You know what?"

SARAH: Yeah.

JORDAN: "If I'm going to be in sports and I'm not going to be starting lineup, at least I can get to the corporate side and be starting line up."

SARAH: Exactly, yeah. Let's try a different angle here. Yeah.

JORDAN: Yeah I hear you. Well I went to lawschool and a lot of people went there and they're like, "Yeah I'm going to be a sports agent," and I'm like, "Let me guess, played basketball in undergrad, didn't make the NBA?" And they're like, "Yep, pretty much." It's like, all right.

SARAH: Exactly. There's a lot of that.

JORDAN: Yeah.

SARAH: Oh, yeah.

JORDAN: But look, you're going to have a longer career, so you've got that going for you.

SARAH: I will tell you something funny though. When -- early in my career at Nike, like two weeks in, I want to say. It was an internal meeting and I got a -- sort of a survey. They were trying to survey the participants that would be attending the meeting and one of the questions was, "Do you have an olympic medal?" And I was like, "You've got to be kidding me right now."

(laugh)

SARAH: Does everyone here like have an Olympic medal and I'm the only one who doesn't?

JORDAN: That's an awkward conversation, like, "No I --

SARAH: Yeah exactly.

JORDAN: -- "actually haven't even watched the Olympics live. Only on TV. Let alone been to the Olympics let alone competed, let alone won a medal, so no."

SARAH: No.

JORDAN: "I'll be taking notes in this meeting. If anyone needs coffee, let me know."

SARAH: Yeah, I got that.

JORDAN: Well along the way, you must have seen some pretty crazy fail screwups, and rebounds of course. And that's what it looks like you write about a lot in the book, [Extreme You](#). But there's a lot of people who are corporate executives or former corporate executives, or former athletes and they're writing books. Why is [Extreme You](#) different? I mean what are we talking about here?

SARAH: Yeah so I wrote the book because it all started when I had led the turnaround of Gatorade, which is, you know a \$5 billion sports drink brand --

JORDAN: Yes.

SARAH: -- that you would know of. And after that I noticed, you know, whether it was media articles or people reading my bio at an event, they'd always read out these great accolades like she led this, she was this," and they missed all of the embarrassing **** that happened along the way. And in my case, I got fired twice. You know I was very average as a child, and I suddenly realized like the whole culture of success out there, it's all about people chest beating, "Here's how great I am," but if you speak to anyone who's truly made it, there's always going to be some self doubt, some failure, some vulnerability, all sorts of stuff behind it, and I just thought it was high time someone told that story. And I knew if I was going to do it, I'd have to really be honest. And so, it's definitely [00:04:53] and all about my story.

JORDAN: Yeah, yeah, definitely. Sports being something you were always interested in, there's a lot of advice out there that I personally disagree with that we talk about this a lot on the show. That find your passion, "Go into sports if that's really your dream."

SARAH: Yeah.

JORDAN: It's like well, not really. I mean you don't necessarily need to find your passion. In fact, it's usually a losing battle. Do you agree with that or disagree with that?

SARAH: I completely agree with that. I actually got into studying the psychology around passion when I wrote this book and I just think it's B.S. to tell someone to find your passion. Sounds like you can put it in a Google search and figure it out, you know? And the truth is, you actually find the people who are really passionate about something, they made their passion. Like, they worked their asses off grinding it out, becoming more interested and then more passionate about what they were doing. And it doesn't actually have to be your career, by the way. Like, a lot of people had a great job and then they may go home at night and do guitar playing or podcasting in the evening and that's what really fires them up. And I think we've kind of lost our way a little bit on this whole passion topic.

JORDAN: Yeah, why do you think that is? I mean, what's happening especially with millennials slash Gen X --

SARAH: Gen X.

JORDAN: -- what's going on here where we're all being told this, got to follow our passion? Or we're all at least feeling like we should do that. Why is that happening and what do we do about it? Because it seems like a lot of people are setting themselves up for disappointment when it comes to this.

SARAH: Yeah, it's a good question of why is it happening. Because I mean, I don't know if it's all to do with every aspect of life has gotten better. You know every generation, the quality of life gets better, and therefore we are just constantly in the pursuit of perfection of happiness, whatever. But actually I really believe it, and having just written a book where I have interviewed 25 of the most accomplished people in the world.

You know from athletes to chefs to entrepreneurs, that you actually have to have some struggle if you're going to really enjoy the good times. Like they kind of go hand in hand. And it's a little bit weird to send out a message that, -- "Just find your passion and everything is going to be great," because part of the fulfillment of achievement is about working through the struggle and getting there on your own steam. And I think somewhere along the way we've missed that.

JORDAN: Yeah it seems like there's a lot of folks in your position who write things or talk about things, discuss things, they go and give lectures on -- the idea that it's the unexpected opportunities that actually helped define their career, their greatest achievement, the thing that they're proud of the most, and this tends to be a running theme. And yet, we won't find that ever if all we do is look towards what we think we want or what we think we're supposed to get. In other words if we're trying to find our passion, we might actually miss out on the stuff we actually care about, in the end.

SARAH: You're so right and I -- that was the big shift I made when writing this book, was that I think we all go through life and success is this kind of bar that we're aiming for. But actually if you totally reframe it and just say, "I'm going to open myself to experience and I'm going to really go deep in those experiences and learn from them and grow from them, find what blows my hair back, find where I suck." All of the above. By definition, you're actually focusing more on kind of tapping into your own personal potential and the output may be success, but it's not the goal.

JORDAN: That's a good point and it's an interesting distinction here. The outcome might always kind of look the same at the base, right? Like happiness, success, joy, whatever, fulfilling career. But it's almost never the target we're actually aiming at. So it becomes counter productive to aim at something and grind so hard towards that if things might be pulling us away. How do we tell the difference between something that is keeping us on target for a fulfilling career, an exciting job, a great family life, or

whatever success in that area versus something that we think we want? How can we tell those things apart? Because if you say, "Look I want to be a professional athlete," and then it's just not working, just not working, you're banging your head against the wall and then it's like, "Well actually I could go to law school and become a sports agent. Actually I like this a lot more."

SARAH: Yeah.

JORDAN: "I'm around different teams, I get to move around, I don't have to get up at 5 am and work out. My career's going to last 30 or 40 years instead of 8."

SARAH: Yes.

JORDAN: Right? Like there's a lot of other things that go into that. But how do we know when we're giving up on something versus, --

SARAH: Mmm.

JORDAN: -- "all right this is a good direction to go in. I should entertain this?"

SARAH: It's a very good question. I mean because one of the things I had learned from this project is that the most successful people, inevitably had to push through a lot of people telling them it wouldn't work to get to where they were going.

JORDAN: Right.

SARAH: Whether that was parents, or professors, or employers. You know, the classic people telling them this will never work, that's a bad idea, yet they had this kind of deep belief because it was something that they truly were knee deep in, in terms of knowledge, passion, whatever that may be. So, how do you tell the difference between that and when you've just gone so far and you're not going to get there?

And actually one of the great stories in the book was Condoleezza Rice of all people who had to make this really tough decision. She wanted to be a concert pianist and she was amazing at it, but then got to a level where she realized that she just was not going to get to be a full time concert pianist. She just -- there were people better than her. And I think we all know in our lives when we've kind of got as far as we go, we've practiced as hard as we can, we're going all out, and we still just haven't got it, and that's the time to take that experience, take those skills, and then move to the next thing. What I think is important in this whole discussion, is not to just give up too quickly. And I think that's happening a lot at the moment, the classic, you know, person comes out of college, job hopping every six months because I don't feel like it's fulfilling or that it's meeting the needs. You've got to go in there and try for a while before you make the decision to move on.

JORDAN: Yeah I think it's hard to say this right? Because it's like, "Never give up, never give up, never give up." Well actually you should shift focus.

SARAH: Yes.

JORDAN: It's not the same as giving up but you should shift focus. I mean in Condoleezza rice's case, she had some pretty good options. It was kind of like, "Oh, should I -- I really want to be a concert pianist. Oh, I'm never going to make it, guess I'll go work for the President." I mean it could be worse.

SARAH: Well, yeah but at the time, she didn't know that. Like, still like when you get to the nitty gritty of if you've had a dream your whole life and you've had that moment where you're having to accept it's not going to be, that's rough. And you've essentially got to, you know, take a new path and start over. And obviously she is exceptional and got to where she was going. But I still think that you have to kind of have that willingness every now and then, if your original mission isn't working out for you.

You have to have the honesty to say to yourself, this isn't where I'm meant to be and I'm willing to start over. But I do think the big lesson in all of it is that the time you've put into whatever that dream was, is never wasted time. I mean one of my favorite stories was Sam Kass who ended up being the White House chef, who wanted to be a provisional baseball player. And it felt like the years of being an athlete had not paid off, but they had, because he'd learned such competitive kind of dynamics that came to life in a kitchen. Who would have known? And it just -- it gave him a competitive edge and I think you see that happen a lot. Like those early years where it might not be perfect, are never wasted.

JORDAN: That's great. That's good to know and I think it's a relief to hear that, in any part of our career frankly.

SARAH: Oh, okay.

JORDAN: Because I was talking to a friend of mine yesterday. She's a TV producer. And she's worked on different talk shows -- you know, think somebody who works on Ellen or one of those daytime TV shows. And we met when she booked me on a show that doesn't exist anymore. And she's always trying to find work on a different show and there's always bouncing around. And I think she's probably, I don't know, early thirties. And she wrote me yesterday and she goes, "I just don't know what to do. I feel awful." You know, "I wish I'd done a different career path because it's so hard to find work," and she goes, "But it's just too late for me now. This sucks."

SARAH: No. No! No!

(laugh)

SARAH: It's definitely not. You know, one of the best, like inspiring examples from my own life -- my mother was a full time mom who'd never even been to college, decides to start a career at 50 and goes to college at 50. It's never too late. Like -- and I think you don't realize that all of those experiences -- even if she

was unhappy, she's suddenly going to realize that that will max up with whatever she does next to give her a kind of more rounded and interesting edge to what that may be.

JORDAN: I think that me telling her that was cold comfort but it -- Hopefully in the long term it'll give her a little bit more optimism. But I think when you're in the moment, yeah I can understand why that doesn't feel so good. But --

SARAH: Yeah.

JORDAN: How do we put ourselves in a position to get varied experiences and make sure we're not focusing on the wrong things? Because if we talk about these unexpected opportunities defining us, leading to great fulfillment -- how do we put ourselves in a position to receive those opportunities and not shut them down because, "No I'm focused on doing this particular thing for this other career that may or may not work."

SARAH: Yeah. I am a big fan of the quote unquote side hustle. But I think you have to do it in service of whatever that main objective is. So I think there's a big -- and I say this as an employer actually -- there's a big difference between someone who has a night time gig on the side that they're doing that is taking over all their time and therefore they're not delivering on the job I'm paying them to do, and someone who has the nighttime gig who is almost like, bringing more of themselves to the day job from whatever it is they're learning in that gig. Like my own example, when I desperately wanted to get into the sports business and I had no sports experience, I ended up volunteering effectively, for a project that was in the sports world, just to get myself in the game. Just to get something on my resume. But what I was doing, was acquiring skills in the world of sponsorship that could be applied back to my job in the airlines as a marketing person. So I think it's like pursuing what is the skill you're trying to learn and then making sure it's like bringing more value into where you're at.

JORDAN: Yeah I think that definitely makes a lot of sense. So we're not just turning the cannon way over to the right 90 degrees and saying, "Look I really like animals but I'm going to start making apps." I mean even then, I supposed you could make an animal related app, but on the other hand it looks like you're doing something that's maybe not directly adjacent but adjacent to something adjacent as --

SARAH: Mm-hmm.

JORDAN: -- as far as you want to get. So that at least, at the very least you're new pursuit is bringing in some kind of skill into --

SARAH: Yeah.

JORDAN: -- your existing career so that, yes even if you don't become an NBA player, you're still working with sports, you're still volunteering for whatever marketing thing that you were doing --

SARAH: Mm-hmm.

JORDAN: -- bringing skills back. But --

SARAH: Yeah.

JORDAN: -- how do we recognize and maximize those unexpected opportunities when they arrive? How do we know, aside from the side hustle which is I think a great idea, how do we know if maybe something in our existing career path is going to be a benefit to us? Because I've -- I'd look at my inbox every day --

SARAH: Mm-hmm.

JORDAN: -- and I see a lot of things like, "I really wanted to work on this project that was going to result in me doing XYZ at work but now they're trying to move me to this other thing." And it's like, "Well maybe that's really good. They're obviously looking at your strengths, they're feeling you can be of value here."

Rather than sulk about it for the next two years on this assignment, how do we recognize that this is an opportunity? How do we recognize that this is something we can use and then maximize our value or the value that we get from that opportunity?

SARAH: I think those are some of the toughest career decisions that you make because in my mind, like nobody will ever take as good care of your career as you. So whoever you're working for, whoever wants you to do another project, obviously they are going to come through the lens of the value that needs to be created for the business. And you have to be the one monitoring where your spending your time. That said, I think as long as you have your own objectives in mind, of what you're trying to develop and learn, and then you look at those opportunities as, "Is that going to help me deliver some really significant value?" which in turn is what the business is looking for.

One of the things that drives me utterly crazy is the people who effectively kind of work to try and please the boss as opposed to just grow the business. Get out there and do something to bring new opportunity into the business. And I think if you see those opportunities like you just described, looks like a project that may not be what you would necessarily thought of but it's going to take the business in a new direction and you can be the one captaining that ship. That's going to propel you forward without a doubt.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

JORDAN: I think there's a lot of hidden opportunity in career paths, and even in the worst situations. People right now are going, "What do you know about career paths Jordan, you were a lawyer for like five minutes, 10 years ago." And truth be told, the biggest opportunity in my career was getting laid off in a way that resulted in them -- They still paid us for nine months because they laid us off so early in our career. And that became a guaranteed salary and benefits for the amount of time that it

took me to get comfortable with running a company with my business partners here -- running The Art of Charm.

So, people were crying in the office. Even getting my butt handed to me like that, it was -- everyone got laid off. It was the economic downturn. Everybody was on the outs. People were crying in the office and I was just thinking, "All right cool, I guess you know I'll have to figure out how to turn this into an opportunity." Don't get me wrong, it wasn't like, "Yes! We're getting laid off." I panicked just like everyone else did. I think I just did it for a few days instead of a few months or a few years. And that made all the difference because then once I started and shifted and looking at this as an opportunity like you suggested, it started to become, "Look I just got nine months or 12," or whatever it ended up being, "of guaranteed runway, and if I live at half speed," right, in terms of money, I've got 18 months of runway. So let's do this." Right?

SARAH: Let's do this! Greatest gift ever handed to you. Like I am a huge fan of getting rid of the stigma around being laid off. Because I have had the similar experience. One time I was fired, epically embarrassingly on my own and I got no nine months. I got a one way ticket back to New Zealand.

JORDAN: Oh, man.

SARAH: It was like. "Not only do we not want you in our company, we don't want you in our country," you know, it was like --

JORDAN: Deported. Damn.

SARAH: Deported, yeah! But then the second time, it was a lay off like you just described and a whole bunch of people and we got a severance. Even though you have this real hit to the ego, and this kind of like, "Oh, my God, what am I doing wrong?" As you just said, it ends up becoming this like moment to just go, "Okay take stock. Like, what do I want to do now?," and that's an amazing opportunity. Like, that should never be missed.

JORDAN: Why did you get fired?

SARAH: Oh, it was awesome.

(laugh)

SARAH: Because I was working for Virgin Megastores, if you guys remember when we had CDs --

JORDAN: Is that like a Tower records type situation?

SARAH: Yes!

JORDAN: Okay.

SARAH: Exactly. Like, I mean yes. And I joined the business when Napster had come along so the whole industry was in disarray anyway. But I came into it from the airline industry, and I'd been working for Virgin Atlantic, which is Richard Branson's airline. And I was 26, I'd been partying with Richard at the Canne Film Festival. Like, how good is that?

JORDAN: Yeah.

SARAH: So I thought I was the ****, you know. It's like awesome. And then I take this job in an industry I know nothing about. I was way over my skis, yet too arrogant slash naive to ask for help. And in the end, you know, when you're not making the right decisions and the business is in crisis -- I was like this rogue force on the team that just need to be got rid of. And I can say that now with honesty and understanding. Clearly at the time, it was unbelievably devastating and humiliating and all the things that go with it. But I do believe it was like the game changing moment of my career because, yes I nearly got deported but in this case, it just gave me this whole shake up of, "Holy ****, I've got to bring it down a notch and get my game on," you know?

JORDAN: What did you do right after that? What was your first move? Well aside from crying all the way back to New Zealand.

SARAH: Yeah.

JORDAN: What did you do when you landed?

SARAH: Well I didn't go back to New Zealand because I was like, "I've got three months to figure out how to get a visa and stay in this country." And yep there was a lot of crying, a lot of Ben & Jerry's, a lot of fetal position in the corner, but then, actually the biggest, most important move was when I finally wrote to my parents and my siblings and admitted what had happened. And at first, I was kind of writing this email blaming everyone else, you know? And then, eventually I just rewrote it and rewrote it and realized I had to just man up and say I screwed up. And it's remarkably empowering actually to just acknowledge that you screwed up. Because once you've taken the elephant off the table, it's like, "Okay, that happened and now I can move forward," and I can control moving forward. But if you don't acknowledge it, you can't own how you move forward from it.

JORDAN: So how long did that process take? You know how long was it from, "F Richard Branson," to, "Okay this is my bad. I got it."

(laugh)

SARAH: I think it was about three or four weeks until I really got it. And then I think it was honestly a few years before I started to regain my confidence, I'll definitely say that. Like I --

JORDAN: Oh, really?

SARAH: Oh, yeah. Well I got laid off right after it in my next job.

JORDAN: Jeez.

(laugh)

JORDAN: You're like a freaking punching bag over here.

SARAH: I know. Yeah, I was. I call it my canyon of career despair.

(laugh)

SARAH: But in a weird way, yeah it was a very tough time. Especially in your twenties, you know --

JORDAN: Yeah.

SARAH: -- when you sort of meant to be on your way up. But it, was -- Also I think all of it kind of helped shape where I ended up figuring out where I really could shine. Because you see the differences between yourself in that environment when you end up getting laid off to when I ended up at Nike and I just was like a duck to water. And I'd learned so much by then. I mean I was so humble. I was like, "Oh, I just don't want to get fired," you know, "I'll do anything to just stay here." And that was very important in that culture.

JORDAN: It's not just, "Well sorry we need you to find another job." You're like, "I have to literally travel to the other side of the world if I get fired again."

SARAH: Totally.

JORDAN: I get voted off of one island onto another one that's much smaller.

SARAH: Yeah.

JORDAN: Yeah.

SARAH: Like Survivor Exile Island.

JORDAN: Exactly. In your book you've got a great practical exercise about taking the opportunity to try new things that you've

thought about doing but have never followed through on. Can you guide us through that? I think that's useful especially if people are looking at new opportunities to grow in their career or if they're listening to this right now and they're like, "I'm in my canyon of career despair. What should I do now?"

SARAH: Yeah. I'm a big believer in -- openness to new experience is really important to help discover you at your best and it can be as little as instead of going out to lunch every day with the same three people to the same place, pick someone from a totally different department and just pluck up the courage and just go out and learn something about someone different. But it can also be as -- much bigger than that. Like don't vacation in the same place. Go to a whole new country where you're totally out of your comfort zone. See how it makes you feel. Could be in your work out. Don't do the same workout every day. And lord knows everyone does that and your body plateaus.

JORDAN: Mm-hmm.

SARAH: Like how do you bust that up and try something different like feel the burn of a different set of muscles hurting, you know?

JORDAN: So the point is to essentially wake up, as you call it, 'retuning your peripheral vision.'

SARAH: Yes, definitely. Because I think we all do tend to -- when you're busy as we all are, your heads down in your iPhone all day, you're walking in a straight line, and you're not looking at all of the opportunities that might be on either side of you that might actually be something very interesting to you.

JORDAN: That's interesting, right? We tend to get tunnel vision in one career path maybe.

SARAH: Mm-hmm.

JORDAN: Yeah.

SARAH: Totally. I think a lot of people do that.

JORDAN: How did failure help your career other than mellowing you out and making you humble enough to start fresh at Nike?

SARAH: It also definitely taught me an enormous amount of resilience. Just gives you that reservoir of resilience because I think like later on in my career when I was turning around Gatorade and things were not going well in the first year or so -- there were a lot of moments where I was terrified that I was going to get fired, things were going badly. And then I would sort of reset myself and go, "Well wait, I've been fired before. I know what that's like. I'll survive." You know, so it gives you that kind of calming confidence that you're going to be okay.

And I actually think if you haven't had those experiences in your career or in your life, you're going to end up getting to a higher point in leadership and really have trouble when the going gets tough because it will tough. Like, that's just the nature of leadership. And I think it's important to have had those really sort of ***** difficult experiences that you've had to just work through to develop your own techniques to calm yourself.

JORDAN: Yeah I think that knowing now that I could get laid off from a corporate job or something like that and then make it through, was actually really good fuel to continue going with The Art of Charm in its infant stages because --

SARAH; Yeah.

JORDAN: -- the odds are stacked against you in any start up, back then. We've been doing this for over ten years now, but back then it's like, "Well, oh, shoot. What are we going to do if this doesn't work out?" And I thought, "I don't know, the same thing I did when I got laid off from Wall Street, which is --

SARAH: Right.

JORDAN: -- regroup and cry for five minutes and then get back up and do something else.

SARAH: Exactly. I've actually wondered a lot, as I've been in this process of writing the book, if one of the great lessons that we should give aspiring entrepreneurs is take a few years of getting experience before you jump in. Because I bet you, you as the person with however many years under your belt, you just have that calm and resilience that you're going to need. I mean, starting a business is really freaking hard.

JORDAN: Yeah, tell me about it.

(laugh)

JORDAN: Amen. Yeah, half the audience, you know -- we have a lot of small business owners that listen to this as well, and they're thinking --

SARAH: Yeah.

JORDAN: "Amen." Do you think that the phase that you go into that canyon -- that career canyon where you feel just like a total loser for a while or hopefully not, but some people for a long while. Do you think that's an important part of the process or something we should seek to minimize?

SARAH: No I think it's an important actually. I actually met a guy at a talk I was doing a couple of weeks ago who literally had just been fired and he was like, "I'm just at the bottom of this ebb and I can't get my confidence back." And I looked at him and I said, "That's good because that means you're actually processing it." Because it's like grieving. Like if you don't truly feel it, I'm not sure if you learn from it. And if you're going to go through these failures, you'd better come out better on the other side, right?

JORDAN: Right.

SARAH: And so I certainly don't think you want to have a pity party for months on end but I think taking the time to fully wallow and experience the emotion and then decide how you're going to move forward with it, I think is an important part of the process.

JORDAN: How do we then just not live in that failure? Because I'm sure there's plenty of people that are going, "Hey look, Jordan and Sarah, I don't have a problem feeling like a loser. That's what I've been doing for the last months or years." How do we then go, "Okay it's important that I felt this way. Got it. Lesson learned. Now I want to take the elevator back up." How do we get up out of the rut? How do we get out of the canyon?

SARAH: I think in the end, it's all about momentum. And momentum comes from taking action. Like, I think this applies to any aspect of your life. Whether it's physical exercise, whether it's a break up with a boyfriend and you're depressed. Taking action and starting to move forward is what begins the engine of momentum and when you have momentum, you have -- it's just like an engine that pushes you forward and the confidence to actually get moving. And I can remember when I came through the first firing. When I finally kind of got past the sadness and then it's like, "Okay action." You know, "I've got to come up with a plan to get another job," and the action of starting to make lists and reach out to people, it just gives you a sense that you're moving forward and that's a very, very empowering sense.

JORDAN: You've got an interesting practical as well. Once you've gone through the bad experience and you go, "All right I've cried in my Cheerios," --

SARAH: Yes.

JORDAN: -- "for a while," or Wheaties in your case, being a sports person --

(laugh)

JORDAN: "Now I'm trying to get out of the rut."

SARAH: Yes.

JORDAN: What's the first action step that we take? You mentioned it's about momentum. How do we kickstart that?

SARAH: So I do -- I like this idea that I suggested of start by like, writing down the things you learned about yourself. So like in my case, what I did learn from the Virgin experience is, I naturally am someone -- I tend to look at the horizon and I can get very lost in the details. So, what that tells me is I need to surround myself with partners that have the opposite skills so that next time I don't make the same mistake.

And so it's like, what are the things you've learned and then what's the action step that you're actually going to take in the next instance to make sure this doesn't happen again? And if you actually write it down -- you know, you may not look at it for a year but then a year later when you're sort of in your next environment, it's a good gut check to remind yourself of not falling back into the habits that might have got you into the failure or the mistake in the first place.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

JORDAN: In your work you mentioned that -- something counterintuitive which I always love -- that trying to fit in and not get fired is actually a bad path at work. Can you explain that? Because that --

SARAH: Yes.

JORDAN: -- kind of doesn't make a lot of sense to anyone, probably.

(laugh)

SARAH: So what I mean by that is I have seen it a lot and I think we probably can all cite experiences where we've seen people in corporate environments that are just sort of trying so hard not to get fired that they're editing themselves into the culture, and the culture may not be true to sort of them playing their best. And when you do that -- I liken it to sort of doing your job in a foreign language. Like if you're turning off your natural comfortable ways of communicating, of whatever it may be, and trying to fit into a box that isn't the same as who you are, by definition, you're not coming from a place of strength.

And so, I really believe that you have to figure out how to go with your own sort of style, your own approach as long as you're delivering the results. Because, the end of the day, most bosses, they don't want you to please them, they want you to deliver great results. And you can get away with any kind of style, idiosyncrasy, way, shape or form of doing it, if you're delivering results. And it -- I think it's these people that end up playing on defense and trying to make sure everyone's happy that lose their own sense of confidence to make some of the tougher decisions and do things the right way.

JORDAN: And the solution to that you say is -- in your words, "Get out of line."

SARAH: Mm-hmm.

JORDAN: "To grab opportunities that others won't." Can you enlighten us? What does that mean and how do we do it?

SARAH: Yeah, so getting out of line is like that moment when you see an opportunity that may not have been -- it's not like someone's come and tapped you on the shoulder and said, "Jordan I want you to go do this," and then -- it's the opposite. You've seen an opportunity for the business, you want to jump up and get it. And doing that effectively, can really propel you forward. But one of the things that I really talk about is there's a right way to do it and a wrong way to do it and when you're doing it to seek the glory -- we've all seen those people. You

know, you can fall flat on your face. However when you really line up the circumstances of you've got the right experience, you've got the right credibility, and you're doing it in service of your team and your boss, and like making sure that the business is actually moving forward -- it really can yield pretty extraordinary results and those are typically the people that get the promotion because they've delivered something over and above.

JORDAN:

So this is the essentially -- it's kind of instead of trying to make yourself as vanilla as possible so that you blend into the culture, start looking for things that you can reach out and grab. But is there a limit to this? I mean I love the practical which you have in the book -- Brainstorm three ways you can get out of line to accelerate your progress, for like going out and pitching new business for the firm etcetera. How do we know when we're doing the right thing in terms of getting out of line versus just going rogue? Like, where's the dividing line between that and, "Hey man, just do your job and don't worry about all this other Mickey Mouse B.S. you're doing."

SARAH:

I think it all comes down to whether it's having a true meaningful impact on the business. So I could argue that when I got fired I got out of line because I had all these highfalutin ideas for Virgin that -- frankly I look back now and go, "I was so ahead of my time." Because I was effectively proposing what is now Spotify 10 years before it became. However, who cares? That was a business in distress and I was doing nothing to worry about how many CDs went through the cash register that day. You know and so all it looked like is it was me trying to be the smart one with all these great ideas.

That was going rogue, there was no practical application to the current needs of the business. And the flip side is when you see that opportunity to, like you just did, go out there and pitch a new client to bring in, that everyone's going to benefit from, and it's in line with what the whole team's trying to do. That's going to get you a lot of kudos and a lot of new opportunity, I would imagine coming from it.

JORDAN: One thing I've noticed that successful people do and you mentioned this as well -- And Gary Vaynerchuk, you know, one of those types of guys, he says things like this in half jest. "I secretly want to lose it all just to build it all up again." And I think that's a pretty common sentiment when you hear entrepreneurs or just any successful person -- entrepreneur or executive, say things like, "I just want to start over." Or they do this in other areas of their life where they're, "I'm 60 and I'm the C-level executive at Ogilvy and I'm going to learn how to do ski jumping or something like that." And you're like, "Why?" And it seems like successful people have this trait where they just constantly want to leave the comfort zone the second they get too settled in and too comfortable in one area or in any area.

SARAH: I think that's bang on. I used a lot of mountaineering analogies in the book. But I think what tends to happen is successful people, they set their sights on a mountain, they climb it. It's enormous like exhilaration of achieving it and they see that there's a bigger mountain range sitting right behind it that they didn't know was there. And therefore it's like, "I got to do that one." Because I think it's the feeling, the fulfillment of the achievement at the end of a really hard one battle, for lack of a better term, it's just so -- almost addictive, I think. And it's like, "I want to go do that again." And it can come from many different aspects of your life, hence your crazy like skiing examples or whatever.

JORDAN: Yeah so it's like they live for the challenge and not the win, basically.

SARAH: Yes. Definitely. One of the things that really blew me away from these people I spoke to was how the willingness to become a beginner again was actually kind of amazing. Like if you think about when you were at the top of you game and you're used to everyone coming to you for the answers, and then you're willing to start over and say, "I'm going to learn an entirely new craft and be a beginner," that takes a lot of

courage I think. But it is definitely something that these successful people have in common in pursuit of getting more out of their own potential.

JORDAN: This sounds kind of like what Condoleezza Rice was more or less elected slash forced to do --

SARAH: Yes.

JORDAN: -- if she wasn't going to make it to the top of the piano game, she joined the White House.

SARAH: Another awesome example was Mister Cartoon who's a tattoo artist. You know, he had obviously -- took him years to perfect the art of doing his art on, you know, the canvas of human skin and then, he's now -- it's really interesting, with all of the new kind of technologies we have, and getting into all sorts of animation and all sorts of stuff. Because there's new things that he can explore but it requires him really going back to starting over and what I'd noticed from all of them was this real cycle of once they find a new sort of mountain to climb, for lack of a better term, my God they tune everything out and just get focused and go. You know? And I think that's a big lesson too. It's kind of tuning out the distractions in pursuit of really achieving whatever that may be.

JORDAN: One common theme that a lot of people present on this show is that you can never go it alone. And it's a central theme --

SARAH: Yes.

JORDAN: -- to what we teach at The Art of Charm as well, which is just that relationships, that kind of leverage is always unmatched. You could be superhuman in your amount of -- or you could have no family and no life and focus on one singular thing but you still can't do as much as two or three people who are all on the same team rowing in one similar direction. We only ever reach our greatest potential when we understand where we need help. That's from your work. And we seek the kind of

partners that can provide that. Does that hold true both in the professional and personal sphere for you?

SARAH: Totally. I really, really, really believe it. And I think like knowing who you are, what your strengths are, and where you need to be complimented, both in your personal and professional life, is super important. Like in your personal life, in my case, you know I'm married to a total stud who's the lead parent in our family. There's no way I could do what I did if I wasn't married to not only someone who was leading the parenting, but a guy who has the willingness and courage to like bust into what has typically been a woman's world, you know? It's not easy. But together, we're kind of exploring our own different territories and supporting one another and I think that is something I saw over and over again from talking to successful people, was just this total awareness that they needed to surround themselves in all aspects of their life, with a support system. It's as simple as that. Just a support system to get there.

JORDAN: How can we identify the right type of people in our lives that will become a part of that support system? Because failing to do that is bad news.

SARAH: Oh, for sure. The number one thing I would say is that you have to be willing to bring people or keep people in your inner circle who don't necessarily tell you what you want to hear. And that's hard. Like --

JORDAN: Yeah.

SARAH: -- I have to say, often when we're going through tough times, you know you want people to give you that hug and say you didn't screw up or whatever. But you actually do need people to be real with you and tell you where you could have been better, if you did something that was obviously not at your best. And I think it is about like those relationships where you get into that vulnerable place and people who've seen you at your best and your worst and have been there with you the whole way,

that therefore can sort of be that guide for you when you're not quite sure which path to take to get back into the right game.

JORDAN: How can we make sure we don't break those people down? And this might be outside your area of expertise but what I've found is a lot of people find a great partner and then they get really mad at them when they do give them a hard time or hard feedback. And I am so guilty of this. Right, it's like, "Jen I love her, she keeps me real, you know. That's why we're getting married. She gives me all this hard feedback." And then if she catches me in the wrong mood or something I will shut it down. And then I realize like, "Oh, this is not what I should be doing."

SARAH: Yeah.

JORDAN: I need to encourage this because what I don't want is for her to go, "Well, you know, I used to be able to get away with giving him honest feedback but now he's just such a little punk about it, it's not worth it." How do we avoid breaking down the people that were our reality check and turning them into yes men? How do we stop that process?

SARAH: I think it comes down to taking ownership for you and for who you are and -- because you only shut down and sort of get mad at the person for giving you negative feedback if you're not willing to acknowledge it yourself, honestly. And then, you know, when you start kind of getting mad at that person and pushing it back on them, generally it comes from a place that you're just not manning up, you know? And I think it's just important to -- no matter what happens, in relationships when things go kind of into not a good place, is just you've got to -- I had a great coach who used to say to me, "You have to own 100 percent of your 50 percent." And it's a great way of thinking about it.

JORDAN: How do you evaluate that feedback actually? How do you know that your husband or best friend isn't just telling you something that's based on a misperception or their own

emotional stuff or maybe they're jealous or something like that. How do you weigh it and know, "Okay this is real," or, "No that's just Janice being insecure."

SARAH: I don't even know if I have a process for that. But I think for me it comes down to I listen really intently to the people I deeply respect and love. And we all have people in our life that give us feedback that we may not necessarily respect and I think it's okay to tune that out. Like, I tend to take a lot of feedback from people who I'm really inspired by and modeling my own behavior off. So I want to hear the truth.

JORDAN: How do you know if it's the truth?

SARAH: I just assume it has to be because if you have that good of a relationship with someone and you know that they care about you and they know that you have your best interest in mind, then it can be hard to hear. But no one wants to give ***** feedback. It's not fun to do. You know? Especially if you care about the person. And I think in those situations it's like just recognizing it was as hard for them as it is for you hearing it so therefore there's got to be truth in it.

JORDAN: I think that's important right. For those of us that have these people in our lives, it's hard enough for them to give the feedback. And I suppose after a while, you would notice if it's always coming from the same person and it's always something radically different than anyone else. That's probably why it's more important to have more than one of these people in your life, right? Because if it's just your best friend, they might be jealous sometimes or they might have an issue. But if your husband says this thing, and your best friend says this thing, and your other close friend, and then your mentor and your boss say this thing, it's probably true. But if one person is always disagreeing with them and it seems a little suspicious --

SARAH: Yeah.

JORDAN: -- and nobody else agrees with that feedback, then I think maybe yeah, you could sort of, by process of elimination, you could test -- it's a litmus test to see whether or not that's valid feedback, right? You just have to have more than one person you can trust, I think.

SARAH: Oh, I totally agree with you. And in the end, the most important filter is how well you know yourself. I think that really matters because with any kind of feedback, it's up to you what you do with it. And even sometimes people -- they may be very right in saying something but for whatever reason, you may have decided, "I actually don't necessarily want to change that because I'm trying to go in this direction that they might not necessarily understand or support or whatever." And I think it's about just having your own really clear filter of what matters to you.

JORDAN: Sarah, thank you so much for coming on the show today.

SARAH: It's been a blast! Thank you.

JORDAN: Super fun conversation. Great big thank you, once again to Sarah Robb O'Hagan. The book title is [Extreme You](#), and we'll link that up in the show notes of course for this episode. If you enjoyed this one, don't forget to thank Sarah on Twitter. We'll have that linked in the show notes as well. If you would, tweet at me your number one takeaway from Sarah Robb O'Hagan. I'm @theartofcharm on Twitter. Remember, if you need to look at the show notes, you can tap your phone screen. They should pop right up unless you're using Spotify, in which case, God help you. Boot camp and Art of Charm live program details, theartofcharm.com/bootcamp.

Boot camp is potent. Man it's really cool. It's by far and away my most favorite part of running AoC. People come in from all over the world, live on site in residence with us as your coaches. We sell out a few months in advance. If you're thinking about it a little bit, get in touch ASAP, get some info from us so you can plan ahead. I also want to encourage you to

join our AoC challenge at theartofcharm.com/challenge or if you're in the States, you can text the word 'charmed' C-H-A-R-M-E-D to 33444. The challenge is about improving your networking skills, your connection skills and your relationship development skills. And we'll also send you our fundamentals Toolbox that I mentioned earlier on the show. That includes a lot of great practical stuff that's ready to apply right out of the box on reading body language, charismatic nonverbal communication, the science of attraction, negotiation techniques, networking and influence strategies, persuasion tactics and everything else that we teach here at The Art of Charm.

It will make you a better networker, it'll make you a better connector, and it'll make you a better thinker. That's theartofcharm.com/challenge or text the word 'charmed' in the U.S. to 33444. For full show notes for this and all previous episodes, head on over to theartofcharm.com/podcast. This episode of AoC was produced by Jason DeFillippo. Jason Sanderson is our audio engineer and editor. And the show notes on the website are by Robert Fogarty. Theme music by Little People. Transcriptions by TranscriptionOutsourcing.net. I'm your host Jordan Harbinger. Go ahead, tell your friends. Because the greatest compliment you can give us is a referral to someone else, either in person or shared on the Web. Word of mouth really is everything. So share the show with your friends and your enemies. Stay charming and leave everything and everyone better than you found them.

