

00;00;06;05 - 00;00;21;13

Joanna Campbell

Welcome to the CDN Leadership Podcast series. My name's Joanna Campbell and the principal of Dumfries and Galloway College, and I want to introduce you to my co-host, Valerie Jackman, who's Lead for Leadership and Governance of the College Development Network. Hello, Valerie.

00;00;21;28 - 00;00;24;08

Valerie Jackson

Hi, I'm really looking forward to this Joanna.

00;00;25;12 - 00;00;52;09

Joanna Campbell

The theme we are focusing on over the six episodes is women in Leadership. And today we will be exploring the topic of leveraging relationships networking. The podcast is designed for aspiring future female leaders who are working in education and aspire to progress their career to the next level. The podcast focuses on what women can do and how they can leverage their strengths to thrive and advance in their career.

00;00;53;07 - 00;01;04;07

Joanna Campbell

I'm delighted to introduce this episode's guest, who is Audrey Cumberford, Principal and Chief Exec of Edinburgh College. Welcome, Audrey. It's a pleasure to have you with us today.

00;01;04;26 - 00;01;09;16

Audrey Cumberford

Morning, Joanna Morning, Valerie. Lovely to see you. Delighted to be taking part.

00;01;10;08 - 00;01;17;25

Joanna Campbell

So before we start today's session, I just wanted to check in with you quality to see if there's anything else that you wanted to add by way of introduction.

00;01;18;17 - 00;01;25;25

Valerie Jackson

No, I think that covers it. I'm just looking forward to having a rich conversation about women in leadership.

00;01;26;10 - 00;01;33;28

Joanna Campbell

Okay. Thanks, Valerie. Well, I'm going to hand over to you to start us off with the questions today.

00;01;34;27 - 00;01;48;06

Valerie Jackson

I suppose the first question that I have really is to just get a sense of your leadership journey. Audrey, are you okay to just give us a little bit of background so that our listeners have an understanding of the context that we're speaking and.

00;01;48;19 - 00;02;16;06

Audrey Cumberland

Of course, the problem is probably fair to say that almost all of it wasn't actually planned. And the sense that, you know, there was never a kind of Airlie Grand plan. So having trained initially to be a teacher, actually devised quite quickly that teaching in a school probably wasn't for me and went to work in the university sector down at Bristol University in the area of sports psychology.

00;02;17;08 - 00;03;00;10

Audrey Cumberland

Before then, going into private industry, which predominantly was with the pharmaceutical industry, which from a networking perspective actually is quite interesting because I would describe that experience of networking in what was a fairly male dominated sector, a completely different link to what I would describe now as my kind of experience of networking, and then moved on to kind of specialising in marketing with a design manufacturing and which again very kind of male orientated environment before actually just being, I suppose, fortunate enough to be in the right place at the right time.

00;03;00;10 - 00;03;23;19

Audrey Cumberland

When Edinburgh Telford College, as it was, actually was interesting for a senior lecturer in the business school, but somebody with commercial experience and background and background in marketing. And at that point I said, Well, I'm not sure about this actually. So I'll give it a year and see how I go. And, and that was that was back in 1996, actually.

00;03;24;20 - 00;03;54;19

Audrey Cumberford

So and this may seem to be a bit corny, but I honestly working in education for me is just of course, I have parties and times when I do myself for date decisions making and have a yes. Yeah, just just some days are not as good as others, but predominantly it's just a wonderful, wonderful a blessing actually, to be involved in education because you know, genuinely that you're impacting and people's lives, you know?

00;03;55;02 - 00;04;27;22

Audrey Cumberford

Yeah. So I've been a principal for I think I'm I think I'm officially about the second longest nine. And and so which is hard which is hard to believe but I've been a principal for 30 years, and the latter four of that has, has been at Edinburgh College. So I've kind of almost come full circle actually, and coming back to my roots because I've studied as a student and my first job in a college was in Edinburgh and I'm back agent for college, which for me is like the dream job.

00;04;27;26 - 00;04;30;28

Audrey Cumberford

And the same actually, you know, I feel so lucky.

00;04;31;13 - 00;04;43;26

Valerie Jackson

What a wonderful journey, but a really rich journey as well. And so if, if the focus of the conversation today is about networking, why do you think it's so important?

00;04;43;26 - 00;05;26;00

Audrey Cumberford

Because it's based on the assumption that actually you can't do everything yourself. You can know everything yourself. And I respect there are other people around you who can add value to you, either add to you a very personal level in terms of just your very personal journey and an experience as a leader or in very practical ways. You know, I often use to say the term for a friend, you know, Diana's on that list where, you know, again, you know, I absolutely know I don't have all of the answers for everything.

00;05;27;01 - 00;05;54;25

Audrey Cumberford

And Sheila's really important to challenge myself and to cultivate. And I think relationships is probably a better word. The networking actually, so interesting networking has got some negative connotations attached to that, and which I've kind of alluded to an introduction. So it is about using those relationships. And again, by definition for me, that has to be a two week, aa2 week experience.

00;05;54;25 - 00;06;25;03

Audrey Cumberford

It can all just be a one way or transactional. It has to be something that all of the parties involved feel. There's a added value, there's a benefit to it, and it's about broadening your horizons. It's about tasting your thinking. And some of it can be very personal in the sense that it's about you actually, if you if you want to get better, a lot of you want to, you know, change your career.

00;06;25;03 - 00;06;46;19

Audrey Cumberford

If you want to move into a different career, if you want to take on more responsibility, why on earth? And my view, which did not pick the brains of somebody who's already got the T or has been on that journey before, you are role model that you can see, right. I need to soak you up in terms of your experience.

00;06;47;01 - 00;07;01;10

Audrey Cumberford

So in my view, it's actually a it should be it should be right up there is one of the eight the key things that you consciously think about as a leader and you consciously do something about it as a leader.

00;07;02;05 - 00;07;31;28

Valerie Jackson

Yeah. On the we delivered the CMO leadership programmes and also the executive leadership programme and that's something that comes up quite a bit. It's interesting because women feel a little more uncomfortable about the idea of networking. Sometimes women would say just seems a bit manipulative and but we talk about how important it is. One of the one of the workshops that's delivered talks about how important it is to have people around your fire exactly what you're saying.

00;07;31;28 - 00;07;48;29

Valerie Jackson

You can't do it all yourself. So how do you make those connections where you can support other people but they can support you and even challenge you? You know, it's not to get a group think, it's just to get different mindset mindsets and insights as well. So yeah, I mean, I.

00;07;49;06 - 00;08;23;13

Audrey Cumberland

Know I mean I absolutely it's like I mean, I suppose I can understand why some people might see it as something that they do, particularly do. Maybe that's because of experience actually, is that there are people who I would see abuse the ethos of networking and, and, you know, and I've I've had the experience of that, particularly when I, I worked in a more commercial environment where as I say, it can be more, more male orientated.

00;08;23;13 - 00;08;46;03

Audrey Cumberland

Now, I was much younger and much less experienced than now, but in those days I viewed networking as a very negative thing because to me my perception was that it was a boys club, that it was a it was really, really beneficial to play golf because that's what we seemed to do. A lot of business was done on the golf course.

00;08;46;03 - 00;09;13;20

Audrey Cumberland

A lot of business was done going out for dinner. And, you know, and for me it did feel like something that was a very hard thing for as a woman to break into because, you know, you maybe didn't have the same interests or, you know, just physically you were different and, you know, so so I can understand why women are cautious about it, But I mean that our whole industries exist here.

00;09;14;04 - 00;10;06;01

Audrey Cumberland

And basically on the basis of promoting networking, I mean, I myself was involved and in a is it's a kind of a group. And it was it was it was male, you know, women, men and specifically that was people in different industries and but a similar level in terms of chief executive level. So there was a recognition that because of your role, you had you had certain responsibilities, but also challenges and and issues you were dealing with and work is and that this organisation brought people together on a regular basis from a huge spectrum of experience and industry sectors to have discussions, to network about challenges, about solving challenges, about your leadership style and so

00;10;06;01 - 00;10;29;25

Audrey Cumberford

on. And again, hugely, hugely beneficial because and particularly when you become a leader, people use the, the kind of salary freeze as it must be lonely at the top. Yeah, and sometimes it does feel like that and there's a lot of things you can't necessarily share or you don't want to embody. And certain people because that's, that's what you're paid to do.

00;10;30;19 - 00;11;08;13

Audrey Cumberford

And your network becomes in some ways probably smaller. And therefore even more important. And so, you know, you can feel exposed in a way that you might not if you're part of a team type approach and again, that's really one of the main reasons why it's important to get people around you where there's mutual trust actually, I think is another really important ingredient as well, is that when when you know, mutual benefit and values, those of you trust and respect at the heart and some networking and relationships can be fairly superficial.

00;11;08;25 - 00;11;26;02

Audrey Cumberford

But as long as people know that and understand, you know, I mean, I you know, LinkedIn, for example, you know, I think I could accept pretty much a free invitation to connect with me. I don't really think about it. I just accept it because I think, well, some of these take the time to do it, period. Not to it.

00;11;26;04 - 00;11;37;22

Audrey Cumberford

But I don't ever engage with these people. Or if I do, it's very transactional. It's like, Can you do this for us? Are you interested in this product? No, I'm not. Yes, I am indoors, you know.

00;11;38;12 - 00;11;42;11

Valerie Jackson

Yeah, I know. What's your experience? Just instinct here.

00;11;42;28 - 00;12;04;21

Joanna Campbell

So I pick up on the point though. Or do you mean to be, you know, sometimes feeling slightly intimidated by these networks? And I think as you progress up through your career, the more

confident you become as a leader, then the easier it is to make those connections. And I guess there's this whole sort of a train of thought around.

00;12;04;21 - 00;12;43;11

Joanna Campbell

Women prefer to build strong personal relationships as opposed to transactional ones, but I think there's a time and a place for both and part of your confidence as a leader is building, you know, the ability to be able to differentiate between the two. But I guess as you are, you know, early on in your career is trying to get over that fear of, you know, pushing yourself forward into these networks and, you know, my reflection on as in perhaps a women are less effective at that than men.

00;12;43;15 - 00;12;59;07

Joanna Campbell

But maybe that's just my view on that. I don't necessarily know if that's a, you know, a universal, you know, line of thinking. I have no idea. But I'm always interested to hear from other people's experiences of that.

00;12;59;23 - 00;13;20;27

Audrey Cumberland

Actually, I think you're spot on. Joanna And that is research out there. But in look at the differences between men and women where, you know, if men are going for a promotion, more often than not, they will take that. They will have the attitude from their say it, which is, yeah, I could I could really do that job.

00;13;20;27 - 00;13;53;08

Audrey Cumberland

And if I can do it, well, you know, I'm going to apply because you never know. I might get it and then I'll, then I'll pick up readers. Women generally tend to do that. Well, actually, I'm not ready. I'm just I'm just not quite ready and I need a bit more experience. So there definitely is something there. And I think you're right when it comes to networking, you know, women, some women might perceive it as being I'm being too forward or, you know, I'm making assumptions that people want to speak to me and want to network, work with me, whereas other people just don't care.

00;13;53;08 - 00;14;17;16

Audrey Cumberland

I mean, you know, they just walk into a room of strangers and find it very easy to to go and speak to people. I still find that difficult and that so that's a core part of my job, and it's almost like going into

performance, actually, you know, when you walk into that room and and and you saying, actually, I don't know anybody here, and I'm going to have to just go up and make an introduction.

00;14;18;02 - 00;14;37;28

Audrey Cumberford

I remember once going to an event at the Science Centre, and it was one of those very formal kind of black tights. So immediately I'm feeling uncomfortable because I'm completely power chasing and a fancy dress and major high heels like I can't walk. And so I physically don't feel comfortable. I walk into a room, it's quite dark, don't know anybody, can't see anybody that I know.

00;14;38;07 - 00;15;05;20

Audrey Cumberford

And then I see this head of my chair at the time who is a is a six foot six tall, towering above everybody. And it was just it is like a beacon. So I'm just going to go straight to him. But what's important about that is, you know, people like that then help you build your network. So people who are good friends, who are good colleagues that you trust can often help you build that network, which is really important.

00;15;06;21 - 00;15;30;13

Valerie Jackson

And I think bring into mind some of the the myths that there are because I was reading that myths around networking and what you're seeing, you know, just correlates really well with that. So, you know, women can maybe feel that it's a bit insincere or a bit manipulative. They can think it's about politics and it's not. What you're saying is it's it's about relationships.

00;15;30;13 - 00;15;49;07

Valerie Jackson

It's about support at mutually supportive relationships. And sometimes as well as the idea that networking is something that you do when the job is done, you know, it's an added extra. But what you're saying, Audrey, is that it's really important. It's a really core part of that leadership role to be building your a supportive network.

00;15;49;19 - 00;16;11;21

Audrey Cumberford

So see that thing you know the most? You mentioned earlier about political so political with the small key is, you know, I remember a minister within government a fairly long time ago saying to me,

Audrey, my advice to you is you need to develop your political acuity. And they had to go and look up the word to use to see exactly what's it mean.

00;16;11;21 - 00;16;48;01

Audrey Cumberford

But, you know, and essentially what that person was saying to me was it is about that emotional intelligence of and in this particular context, it was about putting myself in the shoes of politicians and understanding the challenges they have and then trying to help, you know, frame your your kind of we have influencing politicians around that. So it has let's political with a small P because it is about acuity is about emotional intelligence is about, you know, making the right decision at the right time about investing in your time.

00;16;48;12 - 00;17;12;13

Audrey Cumberford

I mean, I think if you see networking as being insincere, manipulative to what I would say to people who feel there is no it's not because of how you behave. So if you're, if you're authentic and you're not manipulative, i.e. you're genuinely looking at a way of developing a mutually beneficial network, then that's a positive thing.

00;17;12;13 - 00;17;35;27

Valerie Jackson

And it's not about how many contacts you have either, is it? Because I see that, you know, I spoke to somebody recently and they were speaking. It was a conversation between three of us and one person was hugely impressed that the other person had over, I don't know, 200,000 followers. And he said the thing is, I don't know the vast majority of those.

00;17;35;27 - 00;17;58;14

Valerie Jackson

I actually know a handful of those. That comes back to what you were saying as well, Audrey. But, you know, having connections where you can and it's transactional and you can communicate and send messages out, but a core kind of network is really important as well, where there are genuine relationships and genuine supportive relationships. So it's not about numbers, is it or not?

00;17;58;15 - 00;18;23;04

Audrey Cumberford

I mean, I absolutely know what I mean. It's, you know, having I mean that you do come across people who just namedrop all the time. Yeah, absolutely. Completely. You know, so-and-so's, you

know, I know them, I've got their phone number, they've got my phone number. And actually I just don't pay attention to that at all because it's a bit like friends and I do do Facebook actually.

00;18;23;04 - 00;18;47;01

Audrey Cumberford

And Facebook, some people have got hundreds and hundreds of things. I could take my really good friends. I could phone in the middle of the night and ask them for help on one hand. Yeah, I when it comes to my really, really strong networks that go beyond the superficial and my career, again, it's not a huge number actually, because it is about investment, it's about authenticity.

00;18;47;01 - 00;19;00;25

Audrey Cumberford

It's about time. All of these things and is really, really important. So yeah, tighten up the numbers. This is a that's somebody used to networking who's not authentic and potentially, you know.

00;19;01;03 - 00;19;08;02

Valerie Jackson

Yeah, Yeah. And have you any examples of how it really benefited you in your career and.

00;19;09;24 - 00;19;40;28

Audrey Cumberford

What would examples be? A Well, actually, yes. I remember a interviewing and I was on a public appointments panel and I remember interviewing one of the people that was interviewed to be joining this airport. And I was on the panel and I knew instantly this I probably should see this applause each are people whistling. But, you know, I just walked into the room with within 2 minutes I was just like that, Oh, my goodness, this person is wonderful.

00;19;41;17 - 00;20;20;18

Audrey Cumberford

I think they're pro-EU. And I really clicked with them. And and, you know, after that formal process, I then got in touch and and this particular individual was involved in private industry. A It was like managing director chief. It's a, you know, big, big job of a maths global organisation and, and that individual ended up becoming a kind of mentor for me and, and actually you know, we still stay in touch and actually we've bounced off each other a few times in terms of, you know, we, I think I may have been able to help him and visa versa.

00;20;20;18 - 00;20;47;13

Audrey Cumberland

And, and also, I mean you know, there is that there is that reality actually where you're looking at advancing your career. Yeah. Well, if people know you and they know what you're about, who they know, what makes you tick is if they if they see an opportunity that they think actually, you know, what I think is you a of course, somebody who's a really good strong network for you is going to see.

00;20;47;13 - 00;21;13;18

Audrey Cumberland

Actually, I think you should I think you should look at that. You know, that's that's we're lucky to be in that position. And I'm amazed at the number of people who don't have probably the leg up that I had a dog Joanna, that you are vital you had where you know, you might be had, you know, good friends that are good family, people who are absolutely making those connections, early connections for you.

00;21;14;00 - 00;21;25;26

Audrey Cumberland

And and I've been benefited hugely from that. There's no question. But what happens if you don't have that around you? Therefore, you do have to work at that yourself. And yeah.

00;21;26;12 - 00;21;48;29

Valerie Jackson

So if if you were then thinking so if very young women who, you know, who either are starting their leadership journey or they're aspiring to be to be more senior leaders, if you were to to give some guidance or advice on how you start and how you go about developing your network, what would it be? And I put that to both of you, actually.

00;21;50;06 - 00;21;51;15

Audrey Cumberland

Joanna, do you want to go first?

00;21;53;05 - 00;22;29;25

Joanna Campbell

From my point of view, I I've benefited greatly by getting involved in industry networks and and learning from people with the education sector. But that's not been easy to see. It's very much I've maybe been involved. So my subject areas computing and I was really lucky that early on in my

career I was able to connect in with people in the tech sector and through things like curriculum development and what not.

00;22;29;25 - 00;22;56;00

Joanna Campbell

And I kept a lot of those connections and I was able to tap into those at various points throughout my career. And there's been other examples of that in other areas. But not everybody has that aim. And one of the things that I'm always keen to do with the various teams that I have managed through my career is to try and give people the opportunity to link in to the network.

00;22;56;00 - 00;23;22;10

Joanna Campbell

So with their, you know, speed of education, if you like, so that they can then build from that. So I don't really have a playbook for a such a but you know, that's really my advice that I would offer. And then are obviously the other networks that you the subject network so you guys can there's groups that are available through membership of a learning societies or IAG.

00;23;22;12 - 00;23;59;24

Audrey Cumberland

Or places like that. Yes I suppose I mean, Joanna's just described it almost as that can a ripple effect where you start off with an office network, you know, so that's people that you and respect of my role models, people that you work with in a similar role. And so there's those very obvious, very close immediate networks actually fairly easy to establish and join, as you've said, that are organisations like KTN who, who do the work for you in the sense that they set up those networks to invite people in, which is a huge strains of what seed does.

00;24;00;13 - 00;24;44;14

Audrey Cumberland

And, and then if even just through that net networks, generally networks, you know, so people generally contacts with other people. So just naturally you will find your network starting to evolve and start to expand and grow. And again, Joanna, I completely agree with you is that there comes a point where you need to push your comfort zone a wee bit and initially where you go be on the safe office networks and you just push yourself out your comfort zone a wee bit into those areas of influence that you can see having an impact either on your current role, on a role you aspire to, and then almost takes on a life of its own actually.

00;24;44;24 - 00;25;03;24

Audrey Cumberford

And then then at then the experience kicks in because then it's about seeing, well, actually, you know, that network or that individual is really important to me. Where does that that a relationship actually isn't as important and you can start to judge the lose lose situation. So yeah.

00;25;04;14 - 00;25;26;05

Valerie Jackson

Yeah. And I've also heard people talk about how I suppose linking to what you're saying, how people in your network can connect you to a greater network. So it may be that you want to be working closely with people in a certain organisation and you think, I don't know anybody, but you may know people in your network who can connect you there.

00;25;26;05 - 00;25;27;20

Valerie Jackson

So that's another, another benefit.

00;25;27;20 - 00;26;06;17

Audrey Cumberford

Isn't that I mean, I remember being invited to go to one of these kind of leadership evening sessions and Glasgow somewhere, and I can't even remember who the person got my details and, and I thought, Oh, you miss me? I'll go along and see who's there. And there was just a complete mix of people. But again, there are people who I met that one time that I still stay in touch with a you know, they've got a business idea, you know, So again, it's just, you know, in some ways I probably thought when I went to that actually I'd rather just stay at home and just cook and EastEnders and relax before I have to

00;26;06;17 - 00;26;22;08

Audrey Cumberford

go for work the next morning. But, you know, so sometimes you just have to see. Actually, No, no, I think I'll do this. Be rubbish. But he fell even in the last years of your life, I guess that's okay.

00;26;22;09 - 00;26;26;25

Valerie Jackson

Well, that's been the fastest half an hour I've had in a long time, so I know what you think.

00;26;27;18 - 00;26;54;06

Joanna Campbell

Definitely. And it's been a pleasure talking with you. Gee, I wonder if we could just maybe finish off with a just maybe a couple of questions. So don't you know, Abe, what advice would you give yourself your 16 year old self? And B, so top tips that you want to give any sort of aspiring female leaders So start with the first one.

00;26;54;12 - 00;27;21;18

Audrey Cumberlandford

Oh, goodness. But think back to when I was 16. My goodness. I actually I think you probably do underestimate at that age just how important it is to to try and develop those kind of you know, your world is actually probably very, very small at that at that time. And as I said, I was lucky because I had people around me that were helping me, helping me make those connections, actually.

00;27;21;18 - 00;27;45;21

Audrey Cumberlandford

So that was just, you know, that's that's just the way it was. And I was so lucky. But I think it is about seeing actually, you know, it's great if you've got the strains to rely on your sales A in good times and bad times. But it's always, I think, better to do that journey with other people as opposed to on your own.

00;27;46;03 - 00;28;06;19

Audrey Cumberlandford

And and then for people who are aspiring leaders as the first port of call is going speak to somebody who's in the role that you are aspiring to, to be or have an even if you're not sure about it doesn't matter. Go speak to them and just make the call, because I've always phone nine times out of ten.

00;28;06;26 - 00;28;15;19

Audrey Cumberlandford

Most people who have contacted will say, Yes, I'd be happy to help you make it. The old one who see I'm too busy, in which case that's fine. Move on.

00;28;17;02 - 00;28;38;00

Joanna Campbell

The thanks to Audrey and thankfully there aren't too many that see a no thank you. It's certainly my experience. Most people are more than happy to help is just getting the courage to be able to go

and ask for that help. So that's just at the end of today's episode. A big thank you to the episode's guest, Audrey Comerford.

00;28;38;07 - 00;28;41;16

Joanna Campbell

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Audrey.

00;28;41;16 - 00;28;42;02

Valerie Jackson

Thank you.

00;28;42;12 - 00;28;44;16

Joanna Campbell

I.