

Fox Rothschild Podcast

Legally EmpowHERed Podcast

Episode 16

Featuring Sahara Pynes with Amanda Levit and Alicia Fazio

Pynes: Welcome to "Legally EmpowHERed." I'm your host [Sahara Pynes](#), and I'm really excited to bring this podcast to you. As an attorney and former business owner myself, I'm passionate about drawing on my own experience and insight to set my female clients up for success.

Today, I'm joined by the powerhouse duo behind [The Agency Worx](#), a women-owned, strategic staffing and workforce solution provider based in New York City. [Alicia Fazio](#) has 20 years of experience in staffing and recruitment, completely dedicated to the categories of creative, digital, marketing and technology, and within the market sectors of fashion, beauty, entertainment, media, marketing and advertising.

[Amanda Levit](#) is a corporate sales executive, having spent 12 years in executive search and contingent workforce staffing. Previously, Amanda worked in the fashion industry for global apparel manufacturers, but in 2010, the two worked together at a different staffing agency before branching out to revamp a traditional industry.

Welcome Amanda and Alicia! So happy to have you here.

Levit: Thank you.

Fazio: Thanks for having us, Sahara.

Levit: For having us. Yeah,

Pynes: Absolutely. It was so good to see you guys last week and to see you in person when I was in New York. But remind me, how did you guys meet the first time?

Levit: We met, actually, we're coming on about 12 and a half years ago.

Fazio: Twelve and a half years of marriage.

Levit: Yes, of love. I always say it actually, it was instant love at first sight. We met... I came in for an interview and I interviewed with Alicia. She had just been brought over to our last agency to run one of their divisions and we sat and we talked for endless amounts of time.

It was right around the holidays and we spent a lot of time together and I just knew from that very first meeting that we were meant to work together. There was some sort of energy, chemistry, you can call it

that. Really, I just knew that this was the person I was meant to work with and have a relationship with for a long time. I was right. I guess that's why I get to do what I do for a living.

Pynes: You guys then worked together at that agency for a period of time?

Fazio: Correct. So, it was about six years that we were together at our last agency. As Amanda said, I had come over to start the creative division of an already existing agency. It was really great, I had an opportunity to build up a whole new team, and Amanda was the first hire. So really, her and I have been together since inception of that rebrand of that other organization. So, we knew that we could do it together again for our own organization.

Pynes: That is so awesome. So, how did the "scheme," I'll call it, to start your own agency come about, Amanda?

Levit: I think it was a little bit scheme, a little bit organic. You could call it 50/50. We had been having a lot of conversations about things that we weren't happy with. Things that we saw going in a different direction at our previous agency that we knew we could do better and wanted to do better. We just weren't allowed in the situation we were in. So, we started talking and saying, "Hey, we could do this on our own." That's really how the conversation just evolved naturally, but then became our own reality.

Pynes: I think that whole thought of, "How do we go out and do this on our own," is really scary or at least to some people.

So, what was going through your head? What were the emotions? Were you scared? Were you nervous about the financial input, or what your day was going to look like, or whether you would get clients? What did that look like to think about that transition?

Levit: We definitely felt all of those emotions at different times. We knew we had an idea. We knew our work ethic. We knew what we could bring to the table. Now it was about really going out there and finding our way and our own path. We were lucky enough -- my husband had some great connections and he was able to introduce us to people -- that we did our own little "Shark Tank" version and eventually found a great partner that helped us launch the business.

Pynes: Alicia, what were you going to add?

Fazio: I think that we saw so much white space on opportunity in our industry, both in being progressive as how we think about the methodology of human capital management, as well as technology that still is evolving in our industry.

Going out on our own was of course scary in a lot of different ways. And of course we felt all of those emotions that you shared: scared and nervous and "what if?" Right? But the one thing that, sort of the guiding light, I think for us was just stick to what we know and stick to what we do best.

In human capital management, I feel like there was just such an over-complication of basic and simple principles. We've been able to capitalize on that, and it's been great. It's been a great seven years or so

that we've been in business in our new organization, after being together for about six years in our previous.

Pynes: I know your roles have evolved over the course of the years together. Tell me, what do each of your current day jobs look like? Alicia, you want to start?

Fazio: Sure. Yeah, in the previous organization again, I existed already, but it really was a new division. So I had one experience and one opportunity of starting something up once before. I've taken on the role of running our agency. But all the while, I'm a business developer at heart. I stay very close to clients and still, so to speak, run a desk. But then in my off time I run the agency. It's very much in the trenches, but also from a helicopter view of looking as to how we can improve, how we can scale, how we can do things differently. Stick to the core values of our organization. Meaning, what actions can we take to stick to what we're preaching?

That is to think progressively, to think of things differently, to always find solutions. I think that you could say that it's a 50/50 look at things. It's being in the trenches with everybody and still operating as a producer, but also then thinking about, how do we improve? How do we get better? What sorts of things can we be doing differently, really to practice what we preach?

Pynes: So taking like the 30,000 foot view in addition to sometimes being in the weeds. I know you like to joke that you are not an employment lawyer, but you play one on TV.

Fazio: That's right. That, oh, that's true, Sahara. And if this doesn't work out, you can hire me.

Pynes: That's right. You know, that people in human capital management is really the prime concern.

Fazio: That's right.

Pynes: So, Amanda, what are you doing day-to-day these days?

Levit: I always say every day can be a completely different day.

One of the things that I also always say is what makes us successful, I think, in managing the team is that we are in it with them every day. So, I can be talking to clients, talking to candidates, and understanding on the ground level what's going on. I think that's helpful as we're guiding the teams. Maybe it's in our morning meetings or just on the fly of something that's happening. We actually understand what they're going through. If it's a difficult candidate market or, trying to close on a job. It just is I think, super helpful that we're in the day-to-day with them. That's definitely a big part of my day.

Managing all that, working on different operational things, whether it's negotiating different contracts with different sources that we use. It could be working with our CFO. We both work together to plan on our goals and working on team building, team contests.

Pynes: You guys are both all over the place.

Levit: Yeah. It could be, some days it's ordering paper towels. Nothing too big, nothing too small.

Pynes: That's right.

Fazio: I think that when you have a new business, you have to always be willing to wear all the different hats. I think that if you look at our timeline, we still consider ourselves a new business, or a startup, if you will.

We're moving out of that phase. We started in 2015. We were in business 4 and a half years when the pandemic hit, a full year of driving our plane through turbulence. So it still feels very much like a new business even though we're starting to grow up out of that startup mode.

But when you start your own company, in my opinion, you treat it like your baby, right? You feed it. It eats first, right? It has to be sleeping before you can go to sleep. It has to be fed and cared for and nurtured before you take care of yourself. That's how you treat your infant. So that is what it is and you have to really be willing to wear any hat. Because if you're not going to do it, who is going to do it? But now hopefully, we're up out of that phase and we've really created a great infrastructure and we're starting to see the growth and the scale of our operation.

Pynes: What are the current challenges that you're facing and what's keeping you guys up at night?

Amanda, you had mentioned talent market, and I'm curious if that's playing into any of the challenges at this point given the great resignation or what's happening in the capital market.

Levit: It's definitely one of the biggest challenges right now. Talent is really in the driver's seat right now, and it has been making it difficult at times to close on things that maybe should close easily. Giving them what they want. People have different needs and different demands. I think people went through a pandemic and have a different idea of what makes them happy now and, and felt that we could get into what is now being called the great resignation and where is that taking us now and what is that going to turn into?

We're hearing about the great return. I'm hoping it's coming soon. The talent market is definitely, I would say, a big challenge right now.

Pynes: When you talk about talent management, do you have any tips for our listeners and other entrepreneurs in terms of how to retain the best talent or how to attract the best talent?

I know we hadn't talked about this on our pre-call, but just thinking about it, I think your insights could be really valuable if you have any pointers.

Fazio: Yeah, I'm happy to speak on that. So, I think that what people want most is authenticity, and to feel heard and to have an active participation in what they're doing.

I know that sounds simple, but it's not always that simple. I think that number one, you have to align on expectations with your prospective hires. I'm speaking from a position of hiring people for our organization, but also this is how we advise our clients and this is how we advise our clients in our talent

community. Everybody has to know what they want and the expectations have to be clear for everybody. This way, when you're making your decisions, you're doing it with the utmost authenticity and being able to be on the same ground, the same playing field when you go into that relationship. I think that is the very beginning of a successful hire, because everybody is an adult in the room and everybody makes their own decisions. So, I think that when you find that someone comes to that decision as to what they've wanted, they understand what it is. It's clear. They can make an educated decision on if they want to move forward.

And I feel like that's step one of retention is just that authenticity and that realistic expectation setting and agreeing in the beginning of the process. Then for retention is sticking to that. Everybody's gotta stick to what they've said they're going to execute on. So, you've got to try to set your plan and then read your plan and stick to your plan as best as you possibly can. Because everybody knows that plans change, budgets change. People's hearts and minds change. So, we can't control those things. But controlling what you can control, I think was really important advice to a perspective employer who is out there seeking talent.

Pynes: I guess communication too, right? Like when something does change communicating authentically and clearly about what the expectations are and how the person's role might change or if they no longer need the role. I find in my work that with open communication between employees and management, that it's usually a much more successful relationship.

Fazio: I couldn't agree with you more Sahara.

I think that's absolutely right. There's something else that I wanted to mention just in regard to our space in particular which is that creative, digital marketing, technology, right? Those are the spaces for which we recruit, that's where we are experts in talent acquisition and talent retention in those categories.

Something that I don't think is talked about is that in this digital space and this is part of the labor shortage. In this space of digital, creative, technology, marketing, if you look at social media and you look at how it has been used in business, you're not looking at much more than 10 years old. We weren't using Snapchat for business and we weren't using any of these... I don't even think that TikTok and Snapchat have been around for five years right? So what you're looking at is a talent population of experts. Here's the oxymoron, right? Five to 10 year old experts. But everybody is using technology, digital technology, the digital space to do everything that they need to do in business. It's not just social media. Technology is changing on an annual basis. It turns over and it upgrades and there's a new way of coding our new language or a new platform.

Technology is moving faster than the ability to acquire these skills to execute in the technology or in whatever platform they're using. So that's something else to consider: That simply put, the labor market hasn't caught up.

Hasn't caught up to the tools that we're using. The movement, the speed and pace at which we move. That's causing a shortage in talent really. 'Cause if you're looking for someone with 15 years of experience, it simply may not exist. It may only be five or 10 years old.

Levit: Yeah. Yeah. Just to add to that point also, especially after the pandemic and that space, every company was looking to "upgrade," so to speak, in that area and there just weren't enough people with the skills to fill all of the positions. So that's also a big part of the shortage.

Pynes: That is so fascinating and just watching, how these social media platforms evolve in my light usage, right? I'm not on these platforms all the time. But oh, the algorithm for Instagram has changed and who has the time to do that but these people that you are recruiting need to, that's their job. That's how they're going to get their next opportunity. Constant challenges of keeping up.

Looking back 12 years ago, what advice would you give to your younger self starting your business, or even earlier in your careers?

Fazio: I think it's probably the same advice that I continue to give myself, which is: Persevere. Nothing is what it seems, right? Or, things aren't as bad as you think they are.

I say that about myself because I think I'm my biggest critic, and I'm always, "What could I have done differently? How could I make this better? How could I get there faster?" It's the type of person that I am. So, I say, persevere. When your plan doesn't work, change the plan and persevere. That's probably the best advice that I would give, is that not everything is always gonna work out exactly as you plan it. You've gotta bob and weave -- that's Amanda's expression, too, she says that " You got to bob and weave" -- and if you keep persevering and keep looking for solutions, you will reach your goals.

Pynes: I love that.

Levit: I couldn't agree with you more, and yes, I do always say "bob and weave," and I think that's really what you have to do.

If you look back even just since conception of The Agency Worx, we've done a lot of what we've set out to do, but the road has bobbed and weaved or zigged and zagged, whatever you wanna say, along the way. And things, happen, for the better or for the worse along that way. Just always not be afraid to keep going.

Pynes: Speaking of keeping going, what is next for The Agency Worx? What are you guys working on? What are you excited about?

Fazio: Oh, a lot of things. So, I mean, a lot of things.

What's that, Amanda?

Levit: I said world domination.

Fazio: Domination. We have technology that we're building, which I want to talk too much about because it's just going to market. We're beta testing with a few clients. But, we have technology that we're building.

Right now in staffing, the big conversation is about technology that's going to disrupt what we do. I feel like it's one of the last industries... staffing itself is probably one of the last industries where we've seen technology really disrupt. I mean, we all use technology to augment what we do. We have advanced applicant tracking systems, automated scheduling technology, automated communication technology. But there really is no one type of technologies. A few different technologies stacked on top of each other in order to keep the ball moving and staffing.

I feel like there's reason for that actually. Again, something else that not a lot of people talk about, but I do feel like the reason for that is that because we are human beings and so you cannot capture all the time, always at a snapshot, what is going through someone's mind or their heart. Or, again, if they change their mind, I think it's very challenging to automate that.

But we have technology and we're building it and we're putting it out there. And I'm excited because it's going to allow clients and candidates to learn much more about one another faster, which I think is a great solution for a lot of clients. We want to learn as much as we can about the person as fast as we can and make an educated decision on hiring that person at the speed at which we need to, because this market is moving too fast.

Then we just got organic growth that's been happening. We're in a lot of different markets right now. We are working in really exciting categories that are just sexy, I guess you could say. So, we're in a great space, and we're just gonna continue to build upon that.

Pynes: So many exciting things going on. I know I've had a little sneak peek at some of your products and I look forward to seeing how you guys roll them out and can promote them and can hopefully push them out for so many companies to enhance their candidate selection process and their tracking. I wanted to ask a more general question about just having two women partners and how you guys support each other and how you think that other women entrepreneurs can best support each other as they're growing their businesses?

Levit: It's a yin and a yang. Some days one is up and the other one's down. Some days, it's the other way. So, we're constantly supporting each other. And that could mean a million different things depending on the day or the hour.

I think that's what has helped make our relationship successful. We talk things out when we need to. We know how to agree. We know how to disagree and come to a middle ground and then execute on whatever it is needs to be done. So, I think that between us, it's just been a great working relationship and we work hard at our working relationship.

Fazio: Yeah, absolutely. I think that's a great point, Amanda. That we work hard at the relationship. I think that is something that women can actually bring to the table in any capacity.

I really try to be -- as a female entrepreneur and as a woman supporting other women -- I want to support all people. I want to support all women and men in what they want to do. I don't want to be a woman who only supports one group because then that would really, truly, not be somebody who acknowledges diversity, equity and inclusion. You have to include all.

So I try to, number one, look at the entire population of people: people of color, women, people of the LGBTQ community and men as well. I really seek to be a human that puts myself out there for other humans. That's first and foremost something that I think as a woman, I can do differently than what has existed out there.

I do think it's important to promote the minority groups, women, people of color, women of color, men of color, LGBTQ, because I think that we've not sat in the boardroom as much, as often. And I think that could be a daunting place to be sitting around other people. Feeling confident in your ideas, feeling confident to speak up.

I think that is something I would offer to communities of people that may not have always had a seat in the boardroom. Every idea is a good idea, right? That's what we seek. That's what we try to get out of people. Give me your ideas, let's bring it to the table, we don't have to use them all. But then that type of methodology and that type of thinking comes with empathy. I want to hear from you. I may not use it, and that's okay though. But give it to me, show me, bring out your voice. So I think that as a woman, that's how I can best support other women and other people in general.

Pynes: Yeah, and that circles back to something we were talking about earlier, which was the opportunity to be heard and to feel like their voices are out there and the communication and tracking back to finding the best candidates in this crazy job market out there.

Fazio: Yep. That's right. Right now, again, lack of talent, right? There's a talent shortage. Speak out to those other women. Again, I include people of color, people of the LGBTQ community, because of the fact that these are the groups that haven't had their voices heard. So, there's so much opportunity to go into technology, digital marketing, the world of any type of digital technology.

So much opportunity for people to go into these market categories and job categories, because there is such a shortage of talent. So I say, think about that and maybe consider those areas of business or those lines of business as career options.

Pynes: That's an interesting point, like extra training and opportunity for this point in time to open up to people who may not have otherwise thought of those career paths.

Fazio: Correct.

Pynes: Yeah. So any final thoughts?

Fazio: We would love to introduce any of your listeners to our technology that we're building, which is called the JobWorx platform. There's a JobWorx app that you could download from either Google or the Apple store. It's beta testing right now. It does have the ability to allow talent to create a much more robust profile of themselves so that when we are marketing our talent to our client community, we're doing it in partnership with the person, in partnership with the candidates. It's not just, I meet a candidate and I define you. You define yourself and I can then expose that to my client community.

So, I would love to tell all job seekers to download the JobWorx app. Again, you can get it in the Google or the Apple store. Create a profile for yourself, even if you're not an active job seeker. Utilize it and we'd love to have you in our network, in our marketplace and in our community.

Levit: It's JobWorx with an X, J-O-B-W-O-R-X.

Pynes: Perfect. I was gonna clarify that as well.

I love it. The two of you are two of my favorite people, so thank you for being here today. I could spend another hour with you and I'll have to have you guys back next season as well.

Fazio: Thank you Sahara. Really appreciate it.

Levit: Always a pleasure. Thank you.