

Podcast Episode #025

A Real-Life Reinvention Story with special guest Dina D'Alessandro - Part 1

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Announcer: Welcome to The Lift Off Project with Coach Pamela.

Pamela: Hi and welcome to the Lift Off Project. I'm Pamela Mitchell, your host and your coach. This is the podcast to help you meld your professional self and your personal self into an enhanced version of your best self. My goal is to help you take control of your work and your life, feel more relaxed and confident, and experience the satisfaction and fulfillment of a sustainable successful life. Today we have on tap for you a real life reinvention story. Yes, another one! I interviewed Dina D'Alessandro. Dina's background is in project management, publishing, and event planning. Now she's on her way to become a registered dietitian. All of this she's done using the principles of reinvention. She has a really interesting story, in fact it's a two-part interview, so this week we have part one. Next week we'll have part two, so let's dive in and get this show started.

Hi Dina, welcome today!

Dina: Hi, thank you!

Pamela: I am so glad to have you here because we have known each other a long time, right?

Dina: Yep, it's coming on eleven years now.

Pamela: Oh my God, I can't believe it. You were in one of my early classes.

Dina: I was, it was in downtown Manhattan and I happened to sign up for a volunteer registration table position. I did so because I wanted to also come and listen to your seminar. It was kind of a win/win for me, and that pretty much launched the next ten years of my life, being in that room with you.



Pamela: Oh my gosh I know! That was when I first started teaching the Career Reinvention Boot camp: the one class, how to career reinvent yourself in Media Bistro, years and years ago.

Dina: Yep.

Pamela: Let's talk about that. What more or less brought you? What desire inside you brought you to say, "This is a class I want to take?" Where were you at in your life at that moment that made you think that maybe it was time to make some kind of a shift?

Dina: I was in New Jersey and I had been working as a project manager, and I was looking to do something different in New York City. I wanted to get involved in publishing, or the entertainment field, or the media world since I had a background in communication. I started volunteering and going to some of these Media Bistro events, and I really enjoyed interacting and networking with people. It fueled my fire, and I ended up getting a job at a publishing house here in Manhattan that I spent about four or so years at. That propelled me to meet more people in the industry. I loved reading, I loved writing, so it really got my creative fire and energy going. It definitely at the time reinvented me because I felt kind of stagnant in the career I was in in New Jersey. I ended up moving here to New York City and pursuing the publishing world, and that was pretty much the beginning of the momentum in reinventing myself, which I've done probably a few times since then.

Pamela: Yeah, yeah you have. All right, let's first deal with that very first one and then we'll dive into the subsequent reinventions. Basically then, I mean you went from this whole project management job out in New Jersey, to moving to New York City, moving to publishing, and that was the very first reinvention. What real tactics, what did you do in the world to launch that reinvention? Oops, there we hear a siren, it's New York City.

Dina: Oh yeah, eight million people here, there's bound to be some sirens going off every now and then.

Pamela: Oh my gosh, yeah that was one of the things actually when I went through the reinvention to leave my entertainment career and start being a coach, one of the things that made me say, "I am going to launch this," was the sirens of New York. I realized I always felt tension when I heard a siren. In New York that was just constant, right?

Dina: Right, I don't even hear it. As a matter of fact, the fact that you pointed it out, I drew my attention to it. It happens all the time, I don't even hear them anymore.

Pamela: I know, I know.

Dina: Which is not really good or bad.

Pamela: It's just a fact of life in New York and of course that's how it was. I didn't even hear it, that's why I didn't even realize I was living in this constant state of being gripped



inside because I didn't even hear the sirens anymore. My body was still reacting to it, and then I tuned in, which is actually law number two in my book. When I started tuning into my body, I realized, "Oh, I am gripped all the time because the sirens are just making me feel all tense." Now instead of sirens I hear kitties in the background. If our listeners hear any meowing going on it's because it's deep play time here in this household.

Dina: Kitty fun, it's kitty fun!

Pamela: It's kitty fun. All right, back to you Dina and your reinvention. Talk about the tactics that you used to make that switch from project management.

Dina: Sure, well I have been kind of fortunate that I've known or I should say I've been fortunate enough that I am not afraid to meet people, so I end up networking at certain events, and getting my name out there, and also I don't ever want people to think that I'm just asking them to do something for me. I always say, "If there's anything I can do for you please let me know." I made some friends, I made some connections, and I found out about some openings. I went on some interviews, and I ended up opening doors through that. I've always had a really good relationship with my past careers, so I've always had good references too. That's important too. Once you leave a place, you know you just don't want to shut the door behind you because you really never know in this life. Especially when the thread might be similar as far as your skills are concerned. For me it was project management and event planning. When I got into publishing it was publishing coordinating. There's that organization skill.

I had a lot of people helping me out on that, saying that I was really good, and giving me good references. Once I landed the job at the publishing house, I moved up through there just by word of mouth. One department heard about my skills and my strengths, and then they wanted to take me in a different direction. I was happy to have that door open too. I think that's also an important thing: let life guide you organically and be open to things. Even if you already have a set strategy of what you want to do, or set idea or picture, as long as you don't turn too far away from that and it becomes something that makes you uncomfortable, let yourself be guided. Just say, "I wonder where this is going to take me." If it weren't for that I wouldn't be here now, in this new field that I'm pursuing.

Pamela: Yeah, let's talk about that and the role of serendipity. There are a couple different tactics in what you just laid out. One has to do with the building of relationships, which is the whole networking thing which we'll circle back to in a bit. Then this whole role of staying open to serendipity, having an idea in your head about your skills, and talents, and what you enjoy, but also allowing the magic of life to kind of present things and staying open to what's presented. Talk about that a little bit more in your journey, and how it took you now from publishing to this next level of your career and the steps along the way.



Dina: I remember when I was in your seminar, you had said something about envisioning what your day to day life would be, where you could see yourself. That's all I've ever done. Whenever I wanted to pursue something, I'd kind of close my eyes and say, "What does this entail? Am I in an office? Am I in a car? Am I traveling the world?" Then I'd honor how my body reacted to certain things. When it came to moving on from the publishing place, I was fortunate where I had some people who called me up and said, "There's an opening in our company." It was the Department of Health in New York City, and they wanted to know if I was interested in going back to the project management field.

That was fun. At the time, it felt right to me to move onto something else. I knew that probably what I had done in publishing was as far as I was going to go, and it was nice to be offered more of a managerial role to oversee a department versus working under someone. That was the next step for me. That's what ended up happening. It was a completely different dynamic. I went from the creative energy of having authors, and some celebrity writers in the publishing world and the local government, which was just a weird change as far as the dynamic and the atmosphere was concerned. Our particular department was kind of new, and so it didn't feel like what the stereotypical unfortunate government setting might be where everybody's just kind of like, "I come in, I punch out, I'm waiting for my pension." It was really a good vibe there and I felt like when I left the publishing world I was going to be so heartbroken. But I ended up being welcomed with open arms.

That's another thing too, Pamela. For my nature, you give what you get, and vice versa. I've always been welcoming and open to things, so it was nice to walk into that environment and feel embraced by this new group of people who I just met for the first time with the exception of that one person who head-hunted me. That was cool, and again, I spent about four years or so working in that field, and doing project management stuff, and working with the emergency management team. Learning and taking on more skill sets, and more strengths—that just helped elaborate my background and my experience, which was very cool.

Pamela: What skills did you take on there? Basically what I'm hearing, and this is a really useful thread for our listeners, is that you are using this core project management skill that you've had but you were applying it in different ways. Every step of the way it's been applied to something different, but it's also allowed you to expand your skills. It brings you into a new environment, and that new environment brings additional skills. This core skill is what allows you to make a shift, and then it also allows you to add and layer on. Let's talk about the health piece, and what skills you got while you were at the health department, and how that's led you to this whole Dish with Dina. I'm foreshadowing there because I want you to tell us!

Dina: Yeah, absolutely! We're getting up at the very, very beginning of my life. I was involved in food, I always wanted to do something food related. That was kind of a hobby of mine. Just to launch in for a second, the Dish with Dina part was just a food blog that I had. I'd go out to eat, and I'd go to restaurants, then I'd write about cool meals that I had.



That was just kind of in the back of my head. Then the project management, event planning, corporate events, that type of environment allowed me to grow my organizational skills and learn how to schedule. I became known as a leader in my group because I'd send deadlines to people and then manage who does what by when. It became very structured, very routine, which I enjoy even though I like flexibility and I like creativity. I also do like my calendar, I like alarms, I like checking things off my to-do list.

I became really good at what I joke about: counting backwards. I could tell you we should have started three weeks ago if you want that deadline to be met, but we can see what we can do. We can make changes as far as costs, and time, and scope in order to get us to meet whatever that goal is. When it came to the Health Department, I was working in emergency management so I joked that I was the party planner for major city disasters. If something went wrong in the city, the agency would then switch hats and respond to the event. Whether it was a coastal storm, or some kind of epidemic outbreak, or whatever. We put on rehearsals for that to practice what to do in case of emergency.

In that field I started learning more about obesity, health, and farmer's markets. It was a whole different world, and because of the project management component I got to meet everyone from across the agency and learn a little bit more about what they did. Then I started thinking, "Wow, I kind of want to get back into food, nutrition, and health. I want to teach people how to eat well, and I want to pursue that." That was about four years into the health department job. I started thinking, "Is this something that I want to detach from and just start a new business, or do I want to go back to school? Am I at the age now in my forties where I either do it now, or I end up regretting not having done it." And I chose to do it. I chose to take that step.

Pamela: Wow! That's really huge because you've been having this sort of set career that has evolved in different ways and allowed you to have some flexibility and creativity. You then pulled in this long-held desire and said, "What do I want to do? Do I want to do this now?" That's kind of a scary moment. Talk about that moment a little bit more deeply, where you had that desire knocking at the door, and maybe we're thinking a little bit about, "Well, I'm at this point in my life." Take us through that decision.

Dina: I first will say, and my parents will attest to this, that I am fearless. Not in the sense of going skydiving, but I don't mind being in uncomfortable situations or being put into new environments. I'll end up coming out the other end knowing more, learning more, and making friends along the way. I've always been an independent spirit where I'll just do things on my own, and find out how it works, and take chances. It didn't strike me as surprising as far as saying, "Oh look at this, I'm going to end up wanting to pursue the food field again." I do, again as I was saying before, honor how I'm feeling in certain situations. I think maybe the four-year mark is where it turns for me when it comes to working in offices. There were certain things that were just going on at the time that started making me think, "Am I really okay with staying here forever? Can I keep growing here, or should I be moving onto something else?"



Pamela, as things have happened to me in my life, this is no coincidence. Once you start thinking, and putting action and thoughts together, things start lining up. Before I knew it, someone knew someone who was involved in the nutrition world, and the dietetics, and somebody knew somebody at a school, and "You should go and talk to her," I did. It was just all those things lined up and I thought, "This can't be coincidence. This is meant to be." I was able to pursue all of that. As it ended up unfolding, over the course of a month or so I looked up some schools, I looked up some information, and I decided what I wanted to pursue. "Do I want to take an integrative approach? Do I want to go back and get a whole degree? Do I want to start from scratch or just get a certificate in something?"

As it turned out, what I ended up doing was going back to school. I started out as a second degree undergrad, and midway through I switched to a Master's program. Then I also applied for a dietetic internship and got it, which was kind of a competitive time as well. Everything worked out as planned. I was fortunate enough that I could pull the plug on everything and go back to school full time. I am totally aware that's not the case for a lot of people my age. I don't have children. I don't have a lot of other responsibilities like a mortgage or anything like that. I was able to ask many dear friends and family members of mine if they would be interested in investing in a couple things.

Pamela: Oh nice, that's interesting! Wait, wait, before we, I want to stop here for a moment. One of the things that you and I have always talked about over the years is this idea of having a board, and being able to tap into your supporters.

Dina: Yeah, love my board.

Pamela: Through this whole thread Dina, it's like when you said, "Okay, somebody knew somebody," and then this person said, "Oh, you should talk to this person." Underneath all of this is the fact that you are talking to people about what's going on, and the thoughts that you're having around making a change.

Dina: Correct.

Pamela: This talent, this skill I definitely want to pull out and have you talk to our listeners about. This is a key piece of being able to reinvent yourself.

Dina: Correct.

Pamela: Tell us how you do this for yourself.

Dina: Absolutely. It started pretty much the second I met you for the first time back in in August of 2005.

Pamela: Oh my God!



Dina: From that moment, I immediately started the board of director's meetings that we had. Every month, I would gather a group of people, and we would consistently meet once a month, and sit and chat about our dreams, and goals, and pursuits, and help guide each other. That was something that you set up. You said, "Have people on your team who aren't necessarily your mom or your boyfriend. People who can think a little more effectively and tell you what's what if you need that guidance." That began, oh gosh, this is going on ten years now. Every single year I've done a board of directors, or a board meeting type of thing. At the time in the beginning it was just, like I said, once a month or so. We would meet with some friends, and it was about the same group of people all the time.

Then it became way more structured because of who I am by nature. I like to make sure things are set up. I ended up actually having people sign up. As people learned about this, they would have to sign up because they all wanted to be part of it. I thought, "Well, half of you don't even live in New York City, so how's this going to happen?" We ended up doing virtual sessions, we had men and women sign up, everybody had to put together what's called, "Smart Objectives, Smart Goals," at the beginning so that they could keep the end in mind. With the exception of this year, I've done them ten years in a row. This year was different because I started the dietetic internship. That was a full time job, plus the grad school was a full time job. I just didn't feel comfortable having the quality meeting environment if I was going to be in charge of it.

Yeah, within the last few years when I have set that up, I had a poll. You had to sign up, register online, and in just a few hours it was quote unquote, sold out.

Pamela: Wow, I love this!

Dina: I would keep it finite. I didn't want it to get too scope creepy, so I would keep it to about six people max. Once those seats got filled, that was the end of that and you had to put your name on a waiting list. I don't charge for this, obviously, this was everybody on their own free time. That is what believe me, my boyfriend would say to me, "Are you crazy? How much stuff are you constantly putting on your plate?" It was what kept me in line with my own goals because as I guided people, they would also guide me. Then I would have people say, "Oh my friend is interested," or, "My cousin's interested." These were people I've never met before, so why not grow your circle? You never know who's going to know what.

That's exactly right, that's pretty much what you were talking about before. Establishing that kind of setting, and then allowing it to grow dynamically or organically, and kind of putting your faith in people that could be complete strangers, knowing that there's a reason everybody's come together for this year, and next year, and the year after that. I loved it, love it. I can't wait to do it again. I told everybody that wanted to be involved this year that this would be the only hiatus. Then next year we start up again.

Pamela: Okay, wait, I want to ask a few more questions about this because I know our listeners are going to be like, "Okay, how does this specifically work?" You said that



people are bringing their smart goals. What I'm drawing out of this is that it really is collaborative. You're all sort of acting as a board for one another, is that correct?

Dina: Correct, yep.

Pamela: Okay, and that's a key piece of this because part of what we talked about in that same chapter in the book, "Law Six," is that it's also a circle of giving. This is the underlying thing that's going on in your story. I want to pull it out for our listeners so they understand that it is not just about asking people for help, but also offering help. You mentioned this right up front. In this way you're walking people through their own goals, and everybody's helping one another.

Dina: Correct. I had people in 2012 who said that they've gotten more accomplished in the last five months of meeting regularly than they have in the last five years writing some sort of dream in their head of what they wanted to pursue. That alone is fantastic because some things will just sit on your to-do list, or your bucket list, or whatever you want to call it, forever. If it's important enough to you, you'll make it happen, but sometimes you just don't know how. To have that accountability, and that regular check in with people, we alternated partners. You'd have your formal meeting once every six weeks or so, but behind the scenes you got to team up with somebody specifically who could maybe check out your resume, or give you some advice one on one behind the scenes.

Then once we got back on the actual formal meeting day, everybody would chime in and say, "Here's what we did, here's what we came up with." Then we would open it up to the whole group for feedback. It was so much fun.

Pamela: Wow, wow I love that!

Dina: Me too!

Pamela: Yeah, that is just awesome!

Dina: I give props to you all the time. Every time we start it in January, I always talk about how this began, and then I have some sort of structure of the monthly schedule, but people have to come up with their own ideas. Then we have little homework assignments for each other at the end of every meeting about what is that you can do, what's the next step you can take, are there conferences that you can go to in the next few months, or classes you can take in the next six months? Make a point of going to them. Commit to it, then report back on what ends up happening. It's been so much fun, and we've made friends, peers, and colleagues along the way that continue to lend support.

To this day I think most of my friend base is more professional than elementary school or anything back in my childhood. I think the largest amount of people I have in my life come from professional interaction.



Pamela: Ah, and it would be no surprise given how you have organized all of this.

Dina: I force everyone to be friends with me after we're done!

Pamela: That's right, "We're staying as friends."

Dina: Exactly, exactly.

Pamela: I'm mindful of the time, and I can't even believe that we have been talking as long as we have. It's amazing, I want to wrap up and ask what advice you would give to our listeners about their own reinvention. If they're sitting on the fence and wondering whether or not they should step out, what would you say they should do or think about?

Dina: This may sound crazy but just do it. Just do it, even if it's a small step, even if you can't just break away from your full time job, start looking into it. Like I said before, the minute you start putting actions and thoughts together, things will line up and you will be very surprised how people come out of the wood work to help you, and support you, and see you through. If it's meant to be, it's meant to be. But you have to make that first step. People aren't just going to be knocking on your door unless you ask them to keep an eye out, or an ear out, for you.

Even to this day, however many years that's passed since my first reinvention, since the first board meeting, I still have people who check in with me and vice versa. Just, "I can't believe how far you've come," and, "This is so exciting." Everybody's always looking out for each other. Definitely my only world of advice would be to set something in motion, just do it.

Pamela: Yeah, and that is great advice because it's because you set something in motion eleven years ago, and continually pull out this skill, that you've been able to evolve, that your reinventions have been successful. That's the beauty of this whole process, right?

Dina: Oh yeah, and I'm not done! I was just telling my mom the other day that I'm forty-seven now and I'm at that age where again I could say, "Well, I'll just sit back and relax and ride it out." No way! I've got so much left on my plate that I haven't even begun to tap into. I just finished this dietetic internship, and then I can become a certified registered dietitian, and then the next part of my life will begin. I can't wait to see what happens when I start diving into the next chapters.

Pamela: Yeah, it's going to be amazing! Like I said, given everything that you've created so far, I know that story will continue to be amazing.

Dina: Thank you!



Pamela: Thank you so much, Dina, for appearing today and for sharing your story with our listeners. I truly appreciate it.

Dina: You're welcome, thank you.

Pamela: Wasn't that inspiring? As I said, this is a two-part interview. Next week I'll share with you the story that Dina and I had once we turned off the microphones. Yeah, you're going to get to hear all of the juicy stuff. In the meantime, if you want to learn more about Dina's work, you can visit her at DishWithDina.com. Go over there and check out all that good stuff!

That's it for this segment of The Lift Off Project. Be sure to visit our website, TheLiftOffProject.com/podcast, where you can download a transcript of today's episode. If you have a question for an upcoming segment of Ask Coach Pamela, go to TheLiftOffProject.com/question and leave me a voice mail. If I answer your question in a future episode, I'll send you a free deck of reinvention cards as a gift. Mosey on over there and leave me a voice mail with a question! You can also connect with me on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram @TheCoachPamela. And if you enjoyed this episode, please leave a review for us on iTunes. Your feedback truly does make a difference.

Today's Lift Off inspiration comes from Robert Frost who says, "Freedom lies in being bold." So take a bold step for yourself this week. Thank you for listening, and remember, why settle for good when great is waiting? Take one small step this week to lift your life. Bye for now.

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