



S1:E7 "Various, Various" Transcript

May 23, 2022

Karen Costa:

Welcome to the ADHD gallery, a podcast about teaching, learning and living with ADHD. My name is Karen Costa, and I'll be your host and curator. This podcast is for the ADHDers in the world. People like me. Join me to venture through this gallery of ideas, curiosities, brain science, random hyper focus interests, and reflections on what it's like to live with the gifts and many challenges of ADHD. Fellow dopamine hunters, let's be weird together. Stay connected at theADHDgallery.com. I'm aiming to be increasingly less active on social in the coming months and maybe even years. So my website and email newsletter will be the best way to stay in touch.

Hello, everyone, and welcome to episode seven of the ADHD gallery. Come on in. My name is Karen Costa, and I'm your host and curator. Today's episode is called "Various, Various." I'm going to talk today about my career path.

The title for the episode comes from the fact that when I fill out registration forms or surveys, you know how they always ask you, where do you work, and what is your role? I literally do not fit into those boxes. I work in a bunch of places and I have a bunch of roles, but for a while, I would just randomly pick one of my jobs, whichever one was present on my mind at the moment. But then I got into this habit of writing "various, various." I work at various institutions, and I have various roles. One day I filled out a form like this as I was going into a live webinar. And when I got into the webinar, it had "various, various" written across my video feed, and I died a little bit, and rushed to change it, because I had no idea what people would think about that.

So we're going to talk about this various various career of mine today. I want to begin by doing a little bit of intersectional analysis. I want to talk a little bit about privilege. As always, take what you need, and leave the rest. This is not an episode where I'm going to tell you to do what I did or where I'm going to tell you to quit your job or anything like that. I am sharing my story. And I invite you, again, take what you need and leave the



rest, and part of my story, the foundation of my story, is that I was born into a family where both of my parents had attended college and beyond. On my dad's side, neither one of my grandparents were college graduates. On my mom's side, my grandfather had attended and graduated from Penn State. I never wondered or worried about whether I'd attend college. I never worried about whether I'd be able to afford it. And financially, I wanted for nothing growing up. I'm also going to talk about leaving a full time job in higher education in a little bit, and I want to say that if I wasn't married to a person who had and has a very well paying, very stable, full time job with access to excellent health care, the decision for me to leave that full time job would have looked very different. I'm not sure I would have been able to leave, or it would have taken me a much longer time to leave, or I would have had to access other resources in order to leave. Part of the reason that I am able to have this various various career is because of my access to my husband's privilege and his current role.

All of that said, I am also a woman living in America. In America that is currently as we speak, stripping so many people of their fundamental human rights. I am a woman who lives with and has lived with a chronic illness and disability. All of that is true. So I invite you to keep that all in mind as I'm sharing my story, and again this is not a how to episode. This is a story episode.

All right. Let's dig into my career story. After I graduated from college with a degree in sociology, which at the time I had no idea what I was going to do with that degree. It was the degree that allowed me to graduate on time. I'm now so grateful for it. But at the time, it certainly wasn't really a plan. It was more of an accident. So after I graduated, I ended up working in a college access program and nonprofit. That was also by accident. All that I knew when I graduated was that I wanted to help people. And I was passionate about social justice. So I knew a lot about, like, what I didn't want to do. And I wasn't sure what I did want to do. So I kind of landed in this field of human services. I was working at a residential facility for displaced teenage girls. It was incredibly intense and stressful and emotionally draining and challenging. I was working 80 to sometimes up to 100 hours per week including overnights. One of my coworkers who was also a friend left and went to work at this college access program in Rhode Island where we lived at the time. They liked it, they made some more money, they had typical hours, nine to five kind of hours. Then a second friend left. Then I got an interview and I left; I went to work at the same place. We were all working at the same place in this college access program.



And after about a year of working there, I was doing things like college visits and constantly talking to my high school students about their higher education plans, and I kept being drawn to this idea of working in higher education. Before I worked at this college access program, I did not know that there was this career field called higher education, which is just, you know, says a lot about career education in our country. I'm always telling students, there's jobs that you just haven't heard of and you know, keep an open mind, and there's jobs that haven't even been created yet that you can create. I didn't know that higher ed was a career path. But I was going to, you know, spending time on college campuses, and I said, I want to work, you know, in higher education. I want to work on a college campus. So I applied to some master's programs in higher education.

I ended up at UMass Amherst, and I had several roles there through my graduate program, graduate assistantship and internships where I was getting work experience in the higher education field. A couple months, even before I graduated, I was offered a position as an assistant director at a community college. I spent the next six years there in a full time administrative position.

So I want to take a little detour now in the story to talk about something that I've come to realize for myself about work and careers and purpose from that full time administrative experience, and that is the importance of what I call what a lot of folks call work values. We talk a lot about skills and interests when it comes to deciding on a career. So we ask people what are you good at, what do you like? I don't think we talk enough about work values. And what I realized after I left that full time role, which was ultimately not a good fit for me, which was a place where my undiagnosed ADHD was raging, and which was a toxic work environment, unfortunately, what I realized there, the silver lining was that I am someone who really values flexibility and independence in life and at work. I will never say never and certainly life circumstances could force my hand on this topic. But generally speaking, I don't think that I'm built for a nine to five. I don't think a lot of people with ADHD are built for a nine to five. I once read a book about ADHD where the author was talking about how a ton of first responders are people with ADHD. Guess what my grandfather did? Yeah. He was a, one of his first jobs was as a first responder. Back then it seems like they were really a jack of all trades. He was some sort of fireman slash, you know, ambulance driver, first responder type? Yeah. I'm gonna link in the show notes to a work values assessment in case that's something you're interested in checking out.



Again, I think this focus on skills and interests, combined with what you value, and in my case, again, couple of those important values - flexibility and independence. I think that combining those areas can be really worthwhile as you're trying to gain some current career clarity.

All right, back to the story. I leave this full time role working as an administrator at a community college. This was in 2012. I continued to teach for that college as an adjunct while I was also taking care of a two year old at home. My two year old. I was really really grateful, so relieved to be out of what had been an unhealthy environment for me. And you know, I said my ADHD was raging, my undiagnosed ADHD was raging in that role. My undiagnosed ADHD found new ways to rage after I left that role. So even though that amount of structure wasn't the right fit, I went from high structure to no structure. And that was, you know, brought up a lot of stuff. I can remember sitting on the floor at home one day, after I had left this full time position. I'm working from home. I'm taking care of my son. I don't really have any structure in my day. And I am surrounded by my open laptop, probably with 15 tabs open and just piles of papers and articles and binders and notebooks. Sitting on the floor surrounded by all of this stuff. This was probably in 2013, about a year after I left that job. This thought came into my mind, I said, something is not right here. Something is off. And I thought to myself, I wonder if I could have ADHD? That was the first moment where the thought of ADHD came into my mind.

So I was in my kind of early to mid 30s at this point. This was seven years before my formal diagnosis. I made an appointment with a therapist. I had been in therapy before, but I wasn't in therapy at the time, and I brought it up with her, and she said maybe. So I went home and as one does, went down the rabbit hole and did all this research on ADHD and read like three books on ADHD. I bought a label maker and literally just labeled everything my house, because that was a suggestion in one of the books, and learned all these other strategies about ADHD. I went back to the next appointment, the second appointment with this therapist. And I was telling her about all these things I learned and she said, Oh my gosh, I'd never thought of that and I should try that. She said, you know, I have ADHD too. And it was just a weird experience for me. I felt like I didn't want to be, I felt like I was giving her tips on ADHD, and it wasn't the right fit. So I stopped seeing her, and then, also, as one does, I basically forgot about ADHD. I went on to like study the enneagram or something. And I always think this is funny because for seven years, I forgot about ADHD until I remembered, and you know, it wasn't that I



wasn't struggling with it. It just kind of was in the back of my mind. And seven years later, I got that formal diagnosis.

Okay, after the, you know, little blip of ADHD, over the next several years, I took a lot of courses. I read a ton. I was active on social media. I was job searching, journaling, and constantly feeling like I had no idea what I was meant to do with my life. I took a little detour: I became a yoga teacher, went to yoga teacher training, got certified, taught yoga for a couple years, was kind of actively trying to get out of higher education at that point and move into the yoga and wellness space.

And then in 2016 I got a concussion, and I had to stop working, and was on disability for a couple months. As I started to work with my doctors about slowly adding things back in workwise, the first thing I went back to wasn't yoga teaching. It was higher ed. I don't know. It's just where I was called to return. What's happened over the past several years is that all of these seemingly random chaotic choices I've realized weren't really random at all. They just never fit into those boxes that everybody wants to put me in and put everybody else in. I realized that I've always been passionate about teaching and learning. I've always loved to help people. And I'm always a person who has thrived in a combination of structure and flexibility. So there was a clear path. It just didn't look like everybody else's. I just didn't do it how everybody else did.

There were absolutely themes and a sense of purpose beneath my sort of weird and wonderful way of doing things. I didn't know until very recently, probably, I didn't know what I was working toward. I didn't say my goal is to do X, but I was making daily choices to do the work that felt right for me. And I was also at the same time getting better and better at setting boundaries. Thank you therapy. Thank you 12 Step programs. I was getting better and better at saying no to things that felt wrong so that I could say yes to what felt right. So as I'm making these daily choices to do work that feels right for me, I'm also behind the scenes doing all of this intensive exhausting interpersonal healing. That's an important part of the story.

Today, I have a faculty development business that I created, just me, called 100 Faculty, LLC. Was that my goal in 2012 When I left that full time job? No, not even at all. Really not even at all. I didn't realize it then, but I'm learning now that what I was doing was taking what folks call and what I'm now calling a generative approach. And that's something that maybe if you're listening to this and resonating with this you might want



to think about leaning into. I just focused on doing the next best thing. The next thing that felt like an intersection between service to others and what brought me joy. Every choice that I have made, the seemingly random and chaotic choices which weren't actually random or chaotic at all, every choice that I've made has led me to the work that I do today.

So a little bit about what my life and work looks like today. Through my work at 100 Faculty, I partner with different organizations to offer faculty support and development, primarily to educators working in higher education. I also do a lot of work offering keynotes and workshops to higher education institutions. I teach as an adjunct. I teach online. I am 100% virtual, remote, have been pre pandemic, still am during pandemic. I have a lot of freedom and dependence. Excuse me. I have a lot of freedom and independence to decide what to take on. And what I want to say no to.

So a little bit about what that looks like, in May and June, I'm teaching three online courses to students as an adjunct. I just finished up a faculty development course where I was contracting for another faculty development company. I have some workshops coming up. One is on using Notion for second brains. And one is, I'm not facilitating this, but I'll be hosting and attending a zine workshop. I have another workshop that I am leading on using emergent strategy in higher education. I'm working on this podcast. I have a really big and exciting faculty development offering coming up this fall. I'm working on that with another small team. We're going to be announcing that soon. So we will be starting to design that course. Well, we're really starting that this week, the design process. I'm also taking July off. I'm looking forward to that. And for the past two years I've been home with my son who is in middle school, and it's an online school so I do a lot to support him as well.

Did I mention a couple other work values? I love creativity and variety. Did you get that in that description of the work that I do? I love to create. I love to design, and I need variety. I thrive on variety. It's really important, I think that we, that we're able to notice and name our work values.

I want to talk a little bit more about this idea of how I perceived my career labels that were placed on me, boxes I felt I was forced into. I used to fear that I was quote unquote, all over the place or lacked direction. I now realize that was because I was seeing myself through the lens of a world that tells us there is one right way to live and



one right way to work. I've heard people refer to, you know, my particular approach to career work and work as a slash career. Multi hyphenate, multi potentialite. I don't know, I guess it's various various for me; it's about doing that interpersonal work of learning about boundaries, learning how to get my needs met, and learning to develop a clear sense of self apart from other people. That interpersonal work has absolutely been in tandem with this generative career work of doing the next best thing. I actually said in therapy yesterday, new therapist, different therapist, many therapists since the one I left many years ago, I said in therapy, that in the midst of what feels like a literal societal nightmare that we are living in, strangely enough, at the same time, I feel like I am doing the best work of my life, and I feel so clear about what I need to do to take care of myself and my family, while also doing my work for the world and in the world. As someone who has, you know, again, probably 700 journal, notebook, Google doc entries that begin with something along the lines of "what am I here for? what is my purpose?" I can't I really can't believe that I have arrived at this point of clarity. It was something that, and I think a lot of ADHDers struggle with this, I've read so many stories that this is a really troubling aspect of ADHD, that a lot of folks don't understand is this constant sense that we aren't doing what we're supposed to be doing this, bombardment with so many ideas, but feeling what like we don't know which to follow, not finishing things, all of that. It weighs on us that we have a sense of shame about it. So to have worked through all that.

Rocky is saying hello in case you hear him. He was on my lap. I forgot. I forgot to introduce him.

So for me to come to this point of really finding this clarity is really big for me. I feel like I've realized the past couple years the extent to which, sadly, some people want to burn our world and their fellow human beings into the ground. I'm being a little blunt there. But that has, again, in tandem with my personal work, that has helped me to realize and clarify my purpose of helping to create a more colorful, inclusive, life affirming world.

Okay, everyone, that's my various various career story, and it is a wrap on Episode Seven. Thank you so much for taking the time to listen today. I know that you have a lot of choices about what to give your attention to. And it's an honor that you chose me and the ADHD gallery. Your support means the world to me please rate the podcast share with your friends and colleagues. And of course, make sure to sign up for my email list by visiting the [ADHD gallery.com](http://ADHD.gallery.com) Thank you friends.