Hi, I'm Mauro Porcini, PepsiCo's chief design officer. Join me for our new series where we dive into the minds of the greatest innovators of our time with the goal of finding what drives them in their professional journey and in their personal life, trying to uncover the universal truths that unite anyone attempting to have a meaningful impact in the world. This is In Your Shoes. True talent is when you're different and original and the concept is really yours. True talent is not one-dimensional. It has a holistic vision and sees possibilities between existing models and new technologies, I'm quoting the quest of today. Together with her partner, Damien Chiam, she is the founder of JANOU, a global creative and marketing executive search firm that provides highly personalized executive search and strategy within the luxury, beauty, and lifestyle industries. Over more than 30 years' career, she's founded search offices in Amsterdam. in Geneva, Paris, Milan, New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. She cofounded NONSTOCK, the first nontraditional photography representation later acquired by Getty. In the '90s, she launched the award-winning online magazine for the arts, IDANDA, which feature the work of celebrity designers, architects, and artists. Her agency has reach and received numerous design awards for first in industry at campaigns. Some of the award-winning campaigns are part of the permanent collection of the Cooper Hewitt. Janou Pakter, welcome to In Your Shoes. Thank you very much, very happy to be here with you, Mauro. Such a pleasure. We've been knowing each other for many years working in a variety of searches together. And over the years, I really learned to appreciate your in-depth understanding on the industry, You're one of the best recruiter in the market worldwide probably because you're not just a recruiter, you're so much more than that, right? You live and breathe design, it's your passion. It's who you are. Can you tell us more about your journey? How do you arrive to where you are today? Where did you start from? What happened in your life and how you arrived to where you are today?

Well, first thank you for your many kind words. You know, I am Dutch and the Dutch are... it's a design-driven country because half of the country is under sea level. Not everybody knows that. But what that means is throughout history, Holland has always been fighting the water for centuries. And so we learned how to build dikes and talk to, this strong kind of design culture came from there, really. And so I was surrounded, because I was born here in Amsterdam, I'm surrounded by design. Everything around me was kind of breathing design. It was the minimalist, modernist time. It's, you know, It's Dutch, Dutch design and it's kind of interesting because it's so very different from you where you come from. You know, the Dutch are very sort of sort of a little standoffish. They are very minimal in their expressions as well as in their design and vet they also are very experiential. Like if you look at the work of, for example, in 1984, the money was... at the time, it was a Gilder, so there was no Euro. But the PTT, which is the Dutch government lead postal organization believed. like all the other, government-run organization very much in good design and how important design was for communication, for clarity, all of that. And so, I was constantly surrounded by the beauty of design and the simplicity of it. I don't know if you've ever seen the Dutch money but it won awards. And that's kind of amazing to think that from a government design-driven place, I mean if you look at like our postal system right in New York, it's kind of different, right, like night and day. But so, yeah, I grew up with that, Mondrian, Reichfeld [PH], it was sort of all in my being and it made a big dent on. I think, how I look at design and how I talk to designers and but it was like coming to New York. How did you start then? What was your first job? My first job? Yeah. It's funny. I was a receptionist and I worked for Siegel and Gale which later became a client and Siegel and Gale became very large. But when I was a receptionist, it was Alan Siegel, and his wife, Gloria, and then maybe 20 people or maybe not even

and I answered the phone and I was just new in the country and didn't really... I mean, I could speak okay and I could read English but I wasn't that familiar with, in ways people speak. And so, I remember there was this client that came to meet with Alan, and he announced himself and I called Alan. And I said here's mister so and so to see you. And Alan said oh, well, send him back. And I said to the client, I'm sorry but Mr. Siegel cannot see you now and he said but I have an appointment. So, I called Alan again and I said are you sure that you want to send mister so and so back. He said send him back. So the guy left and I told him Mr. Siegel cannot see you. And he never fired me, you know. I was like amazed like normally you would've lost your job instantly. But he thought it was interesting and it's also funny because Siegel and Gale was about simplifying language. So, I took that very literally, like send him back, that's simplifying like he should've said send him to my office in the back, something like that. Anyway, that was my first job. I got paid. I think 200 dollars a month but I loved it because Siegel and Gale had, this design environment which reminded me of Holland and I felt very at home in that place. And then how do you become a recruiter and such a successful recruiter? I don't know. The journey... Okay, so, I got married way too young, I got kids way too young and I got divorced too young. So, all of that happened at the same time. And I had to make more money because I couldn't survive on 200 dollars a month. And I was looking in the paper. And I was looking like what can I do and I worked for several different companies. I've worked for as an assistant editor, as a part time thing but it was not full-time. And then I got lucky because I found a position for a recruiter. I didn't even know what that meant, recruiter. What is that? Anyway, it sounded interesting because it had the word creative in it and I thought, you know what, I'm gonna go and give it a shot. And so this guy interviewed me and showed me a portfolio of a designer.

And he said tell me what you think about the work. And I had not seen, I mean, you know, I was not really trained as a designer. I come from an entirely different background. And so I just had to go from my gut and I thought it's just, you know, sink or swim. And I told him exactly my thoughts about each page and I was just lucky the guy agreed with me and I got the job. And that was the beginning of recruiting and I did that for a few years and I learned so much. I learned about pricing, evaluating work. It was mostly based on freelance because this was not full time yet, that was my next step. But that's kind of how I got into it. You know, I'm not saying this because you are in front of me, but I really believe that your job is one of the most important in our industry but in general in the world of business. Many companies, especially the big ones, usually talk about processes and tools and they try to solve everything through that and the reality is that the most important variable in all of this is people. You can give people... imagine you give... processes and tools are like a brush. They're actually tools but you can give this tool or this brush to Picasso. You can give it to a kid and the results would be very, very different. So, people are really, really important. How do you select the right people? How do you find the right people but mostly how do you understand that the person that you have in front of you is the right one especially when you don't know them? And that's when you talk with them for a few hours here and there. What's your strategy? It's not a strategy. It's kind of working from my intuition. As soon as somebody walks in, I mean, everybody has that, right? You have an impression of a person. But then once that person comes in and sits down and starts to talk, talk about him or herself, show their work, you get a really good sense of a person and especially when you don't ask the questions, like the human resource type of questions. I am much more interested in understanding how somebody comes up with an idea, what motivated, what inspired her. I keep saying him, I wanna say her from now on. And that gives me the feel, the sense of oh, you're about that and I know you.

And nobody is the same. Everybody has like different quirks. But then it starts to form in me like this person would be amazing for such and such company. And my joy is to make introductions to clients where I do not have to search but upon meeting and interviewing a particular candidate and I feel this is the guy, this is the woman, then to call my client and say you need to meet her, I know you'll love her. So, I've made actually a lot of placements having done that way but you cannot always do that because most of the Fortune 500 companies have very strict rules. You can only work on a search if you have been given the search and there is a contract signed for that search. For me, it's much better to have a relationship with a client where, the contact, there is a partnership. Like I know you Mauro, I know what you're looking for and so even if I'm not working on anything and I've done that with you before in the past, if I see somebody that I think you're gonna love this person, I'd like to, either send a text or pick up the phone and say hey, you should meet her, she's amazing and this is why. And you've been quoted talking about the idea of design or the ideal profile for innovation positions branding like a Renaissance man or woman. What is a Renaissance woman for you? That is somebody who has both left and right brain. And not just that, but somebody who's truly evolved and doesn't come with just design-speak. But somebody who loves the theater, who loves culture and global, who has an interest in everything that is interesting in the world. Not just in the US or not just in Europe where you get a sense of this person can pull out of their history of knowledge, creativity, and I think that's a true Renaissance person. And, of course, you use the library. You use research. You use your own educational background. But the openness of mind, the interest in other cultures to me is what makes a person a really interesting Renaissance type of person. And I think they're coming back to that more and more. It was something I saw happening more in Holland back in the '80s and the '90s and then

I came to the US and it became very narrow.

But now more and more people are just more organic Renaissance thinkers who put it all together

and have a wealth of information and knowledge and that is great.

I love that.

I agree so much with you.

We live in a moment where everything is accelerated

and there are many competitors out there,

more than in the past in many industries,

because many of the barrier to entry,

especially of these big corporations, are down

because of the global markets, social media.

We live in a world of the startups, of new brands, new ideas.

It's so much more democratic, the process of innovation.

And therefore either you have leaders,

not just in design or innovation but in business in general.

There are holistic leaders that are leaders at 360 degrees

or it would be very difficult to compete at this space.

This modern world you have hyper specialized people

that you connect through processes,

it's not that efficient.

It's not fast enough.

It's not reactive enough.

So, I totally, totally agree with you on this.

Yeah.

Something else that I learned to value in the past 10 years,

it was always part of who I am

but I always gave it for granted and then step by step,

I realized there was something kind of unique

is what I call kindness is something, being nice to each other.

So, if I look at the team that we have today in PepsiCo, for instance,

it's a team of nice people, of good people that are there for the big dream,

for the cause and they're there to help each other.

And again I realize that is not that obvious

and that's why in the past few years,

I've been very, very vocal about the need of, being a good person, be kind. It's for me criteria number zero when I search somebody, the first criteria.

How important it is for you this idea of kindness and being a good person? And do you think it's common in corporation,

it's valuable, it's not, what do you think about it?

I have always put kindness as number one when I was like a kid.

That, to me, I didn't realize it until I got, banged up and beaten up.

I mean I don't mean physically but by people, by their words and I thought

why couldn't a person say that in a different way?

Why this meanness or this unpleasantness, you know?

And I think that kindness is so underrated.

And to me, it is empathy, kindness, it's all that and that is something that you cannot really learn. It's not part of the, you know ... it's like part of the multi-senses that if you are a really full grown person, that kindness is as important as intelligence. It's who you are, what makes you. And so much more can be accomplished with your peers, with everybody who you are in touch with, having a kind heart. And it's true that that's lacking, you know, a lot. And I'm so glad that you are talking about this and that you find this important. Because a lot of our clients on the corporate end, they don't even consider it to be part of the total human being. You know, they're looking more into skill sets and education and management and all of this. And the kindness is never... nobody talks about that but I think it's crucial. The way I try to push it for people that don't value kindness as such, I think you should just value kindness for what it is. But even if you don't, what I usually tell them is look, if you have nice people in a team, they are gonna trust each other, and they're gonna enjoy working with each other. So, the level of engagement of your team is gonna raise but mostly the productivity is gonna raise because you have people working together in a more productive way. You won't have people doing things behind the back of others because they're afraid, they don't trust, you know, each other. So, it's a productive move. It strategically makes sense even if you don't care about kindness. Right. But I think that kindness and fear, I mean, fear in a company, a lot of people are not motivated by fear but run by fear of doing something that might shock or shake something up. And if it's met with kindness, then so much more can be accomplished, right? I totally, totally agree. You mentioned fear. There is another kind of fear unrelated to what we're discussing now. That is the fear of failing, the fear of making mistakes that is inside our, human being, you know, in each of us. And therefore also in the culture of these companies. But we know very well that failure is so important when you drive innovation. You know, it's part of innovation. You need to experiment and therefore if you experiment, sooner or later, you will fail to finally arrive to the right solution. It's funny because in the science world, the scientists call those failures experiments.

It's more the business world that call those experiments failures. But again, they're part of the innovation process of a company but also of us as human beings. So, what do you think about failure and how did you manage eventual failures in your life? How do you relate with the idea of failure? Well, okay I've had several failures in my life at all levels, professionally and personally. And, you know, the thing is, yeah, it's so easy to say you learned from your failures and then you get up and, you know, you get yourself by your bootstraps. It's easy to say. It's not always easy to do. And I think not everybody can do it, not everybody has the strength or the perseverance to do it. So, in my life, well, yeah, I've gone through a lot of stuff. You know, I started my first company in 1984 with my partner, not Damien, that was not another partner. And for 30 years, we ran a successful company where indeed we had these offices in Paris, in Milan, in Amsterdam, LA. And after 30 years, we got the economic downfall and things all, it started to fall apart. It just didn't work anymore, the model... it was just a total mess. And I kind of had to sell the company after 30 years of success. That was a difficult thing to do. And I lost some of my best recruiters who were my best, not my best, but they were close friends and allies and they left me in, I think, in a shabby way. And so, that was a difficult thing for me to overcome. Anyway, that was hard to do but I thought I saw a light. And a new company, a company that followed me, came to me and said. hey, you're the best in creative search, we'd like to acquire you. So, I thought that this was the saving grace. Well, I made a big mistake. It was with the wrong partner. And so it didn't work out. Then that didn't work out, it was two things of failure after, that came very short time after each other. And I was truly at a very low point in my life and didn't know what to do because I had actually lost pretty much everything a person can lose. And I got it together but not by myself. I had a really close friend who helped me through this. But then I met Damien and Damien, who is my present business partner

believed in the power of the brand JANOU

and that's why we called it JANOU because I was, people don't always Janou Pakter, it's always about Janou. And he said, you know what, we can rebuild you. You have to make a comeback because people know you. They have worked with you. I mean don't give up. And this is, for me, the turning point in my life that somebody who was a super smart business person actually believed in me and could see that there was the potential to come back. As you know, Mauro, when you're leaving the business for a few years. coming back is really hard. It's because the competitors are all there to take over, especially people that used to work for you who quickly built on your past history. But I did it and we did it very small. We started, you know, the two of us and it was incredible because he didn't give up. I didn't give up and we complement each other in many different ways which is excellent. I did not want another me at all and so we're two opposites. So, Damien is a huge part of why I'm here and the other part is both my parents were Holocaust survivors. My father was in the camps from '40, '45. He was a doctor and therefore he survived in the camps and my mother joined the resistance. She did underground work. She helped Jews find hiding places, made false passports. And she was caught and was in the camps as well and they both came out damaged but alive. But what I learned from these people was you never ever give up. I'm a survivor and I will continue fighting. And I mean I don't have to fight anymore because I have achieved what I wanted to achieve and that is total happiness, having fun in what I'm doing, having a commercial success together with my partner. And so I went through all of these obstacles. But it has been really tough, you know, it has not been an easy road. And I'm sure that a lot of people who [go up?] have had similar, not the same, but other difficulties. If you're able to fight them, to work it out, then life is even better than before. So many beautiful lessons in such a short story, the inspiration of your parents, the power of partnership with somebody that is complementary to you. And often people are afraid of people that are different than our self. Even the willingness of Damien to bet on your brand and the power of personal branding both for yourself as a human being

and, of course, for your business.

And often for people like us, business and your personal life are very closely merged together.

So, it's a beautiful story the power of resilience, resistance.

But also you didn't mention it by this part of the story, your dreams.

And, you know, you wanted to get somewhere

and you did it and you kept doing it.

And you need to keep fighting.

And to be there. And then, finally, you used one of my favorite keywords, happiness. Because at the end of the day, it's all about that, right,

it's all about being happy.

If you're not happy in doing what you're doing, you should just change.

And I also believe even broader than that

the companies should give happiness to their employees.

They should give happiness to the society.

That should be really the most important value of any kind of organization.

So, it's a beautiful story the one that you shared.

Talking about personal branding,

you've been over the years a strong, strong personal brand.

How important it is personal branding for the people you recruit?

For any of us, is it important to build a personal brand?

And if it is, how do you build a personal brand in this new world that is totally social media driven

and therefore there are so many opportunities to actually do that?

Are you referring to a people that are actually working full-time

or are you referring to people

that are independent designers who have a consultancy?

To both but probably I'm thinking

probably more about the people that work in a company.

Let's say you are the design manager of a big company and in the meantime,

you can build your brand and your brand can create value also for your company

because it will help you attracting more talents to the company.

At the end of the day, we know very well that people follow people.

You go, to work for a leader most of the time not just for the brand.

It's a combination of both.

So, the more people that you have that are real leader

and people know about their leadership skills,

the more value you have also as a company.

So, how can these people build their personal brand, be more out there?

I met so many unbelievable talents, amazing talents

and nobody knows who they are.

And so when you try to recruit for certain companies,

people that need to work under these leaders,

these people are like, well, who is this person, who is this woman, this man.

So, the importance of building your brand

when you work in a company is, for me, it's key.

What do you think about this? Is it important? Is it not? How do you build your brand when you work in a company? Yeah, I think build your brand could be know who you are and be your true self and be true, authentic. Because if you have achieved, if you feel that way and you know who you are and a lot of people don't. I can tell when I interview them, even some people at executive levels, they ask me questions that I wonder like wow, don't you... I'm surprised. But I think that that's part of who you are, is your brand. That is how you come across. That is how the world will see you, and that has to do with confidence and all of that, awareness, consciousness. And I think, this is, to me, very interesting because nowadays and in the future more than ever, this brand, as you call it, is crucially important because companies are struggling, The current model, the current business model is not working anymore. It's like a mess. It needs to be rethought. There has to be a complete transformation in everything because of what's happening in the world? It's a reflection of that. And so we CEOs need to kind of work with creative talent and I'm not saying that creative talent has like the answers. But they certainly can give ideas and direction and understand about the future of the world and the product and how people are gonna live and how they are gonna change. And that's, again, if you know who you are, if you're a strong brand, then you are in a position to actually help the senior executive, level, and companies, and brands to help them make this transformation and go through a whole innovation thing. And people who are still looking for jobs and are just kind of... those people, I mean, they're necessary and we will place them but for me, the most interesting in people are those that want to help change the current climate. You know, I call it climate. But it's the world and they are now more needed than ever. And I think it is an incredible opportunity for really super top creative talent to do that. And I think that executive leadership should really listen to that type of talent because it's the future.

It's the designer of the future. They are not people that solve problems. These are designers that know what will happen in the next five years or 10 years or not know but they have an instinct, an intuition to climate change, Black Lives Matter and everything that's happening. They're totally in tune with that current landscape. And they... not people that are technical or that are strictly marketing, it's the creative in talent that has the ideas that should be now there. They're incredibly necessary. I'm taking your question way too far but... It's exactly what I was expecting and I totally agree with what you're saying. You mention Black Lives Matter. In the past few years, not just in the past few months, but in the past few years there have been many changes and the new awareness about the importance of diversity at many levels. A big focus on gender diversity that started a few years ago and now a new focus on a variety of different kind of diversities. Black Lives Matter is a manifestation of this. How important is diversity for you and how difficult it is to find diverse people. Especially, I'm thinking about gender and now more recently African American or Black people in the design community? Is it a challenge and in case, why? Many questions in one. I can talk for an hour about this one. This particular question is for me incredibly important. And I've been thinking about this for a really long time and wondering like well, how can we change this. So, diversity is what makes a company a better company. It's essential that a company hires all kinds of different people from different cultures. They have to have an open mind and as of now, it's not happening. And it hasn't happened and it's interesting because, I've been in the business for a long, long time. And I remember 50 years ago the exact same question. Janou, get us a candidate that's diverse, right? I mean even 20 years ago and every time we get this request, we're struggling. We're struggling because we do not find enough diverse talent. And so the burden comes on the corporate HR departments and on us, the searchers. So, we are given a task of finding people that either are very few out there or that are not gualified for the particular searches that we're working on because those people didn't have the same opportunities

and chances that the white male had.

And so, I think instead of hiring the wrong talent for a role,

if the perfect person with the right qualifications walks in

and happens to be a white male, then that person needs to be hired for that role.

What we need to do, and this comes from the corporates,

from the executive leadership in companies,

they need to realize that in order to attract diverse talent, they have to start. The burden is on them to make a change.

And that means not coming with some few little programs here or there, no.

To put a substantial budget for empowering diverse talent,

for making an environment where diverse talent feels comfortable,

supported, respected, with a future to stay in that company for jobs.

And that means you hire people that are not qualified or don't have the skills.

But they have the potential, they have the desire,

they have the will, they're interested.

And then the big global companies

should have the funding in place for further education

for executive leadership programs, for management training, for all of the things that we're looking for in diverse talent that's not always there.

And so they have a place in your company

but they need to be groomed and built and educated further.

And that's simply because they didn't have the opportunities.

There has been a systemic oppression in this country of diverse talent

and they need corporations as well as the government

must put a lot of money, I'm not talking about 1 or 2 million,

I'm talking about millions, and put that towards the advancement of talent

that is badly needed for a company to be successful,

truly diverse, and have innovation going on.

I was talking with very, very talented African American designer

in one of the previous podcasts

and one of the advices he was giving me was also to invest in education,

to really help African Americans.

First of all, get access to the design schools

but mostly also, and this was very interesting,

to build awareness that design can be a career.

And be a career where, if you have that chance

to study that many, unfortunately, don't have,

you can choose also this career.

And this career can be really great for your happiness,

and your purpose in life, and your realization.

But you can also make money with it.

Because many people was telling me if I have a chance,

I need to make sure that I leverage that chance for me

and my family that's invested in me.

So, building awareness is probably something

very important as well, this is a career very, yeah,

Yeah, and I think once people have the awareness of design

and other professions and they feel it's safe to go to a company.

Any Fortune 500 company where they're welcome, you'll see that HR

and search firms will have no problem attracting them.

They will come like flies because this is where you have a safe environment.

This is where you can actually advance your career

and that's where you wanna be.

And I think it's so simple, it's really not a huge problem to solve.

It's very simple.

Create an environment and people will come to you.

But that environment is not there now.

I mean I'm generalizing with all Fortune 500 companies.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Well, I will go on and on and on for hours

to talk about this topic with you, Janou,

but I have just one last question.

It's a question I have to make and I think many people expect.

As a recruiter, what is your advice to anybody that goes to an interview

and he or she has one hour in front of somebody to sell,

the idea of himself or herself and how good they are?

What should they do?

That's an easy answer.

And I'd like to reverse that question too because

it's not just the candidate but it is the interviewer as well.

And that is what I wanna say is that be yourself.

Because okay, when you go out on a date for the first time,

you want to be the most charming person

so that you can have a second date and you will be everything perfect.

Well, first of all, that never works anyway

because soon enough, the real you comes out and who knows.

Will you still be loved?

But in a job, it's really key that you come off as exactly who you are and what you want to do, what your desires are.

So, you should not be, you know...

And the questions from the interviewer

should be not just about tell me about your skills

and how, you know, it should be more.

But who are you, what interests, what kind of interests do you have?

What do you think of other companies?

Why are you here?

What makes you excited being here.

And then that person, the more honest you are, the better it is.

But that also means that the interviewer has to say everything,

instead of oh, we have an amazing group of people,

everybody loves to be here, nobody ever leaves.

It would be much better for that person to say, look, we have some challenges. Yeah, I'm gonna tell you what they are but we're working on them and I think somebody like you could actually be a catalyst to solve some of these problems. So, here you then have something where people are both honest with each other and [they?] level. And then you know this is the place for me or it isn't. Both people will know instead of this fake, the perfect this, and the perfect that. It's gonna... after two, three months, you're gonna be unhappy and your boss will be unhappy. So, it's better to be honest on day one. I say that was the last question but I have another one. Because you say something that made me think. You are talking about authenticity, and essentially being transparent, be who you are. And so many times when you look at the profile of people, for instance in platforms like LinkedIn, you see one dimension, the professional dimension, the perfect dimension. And the reality is people are also what they do in their weekends, their hobbies, their private life, their friends. But usually you separate the dimensions. Your private life from your professional life. But then, in reality, when you go to work, you take your private life with you, inside you, it's who you are. So, would you recommend to people to mix a little bit more the private and the professional in the way they talk about themselves, not just in an interview but also in their social media platforms or we should keep them anyway separate? There are platforms for work and platforms for fun or private life or personal things. What do you think in this new world we live in? Definitely of mixing both, you want to know what somebody is like, who he is, who she is. And that would make somebody much more of an interesting whole rounded person rather than this is my professional career and this is who I am on the weekends. And I think the more interesting people have combined that and work and life and play, it's all one thing. I see that also as the designer of the future that is able to do all of these, the personal and the professional combined and that should come out in your social media. It should be discussed when you have an interview and when you approach a company in your letter writing

or whatever you do to get... yeah.

Because that's who you really are, right?

There's no two people.

It's like many different people in one

and we want to know all about you and all the things you do.

I'm totally in agreement.

But Janou, thank you so much.

We talk about resilience and love and people and empathy

- and diversity. - And kindness.

We touched so many topics and there will be so many more that we could touch but we have a limited time. This was great.

Thank you so much for taking the time to be with us today.

Thank you, Mauro.

Thank you so much for inviting me.

It was so much fun and I really enjoyed it.

Thank you.