

BSing with Bob Major

Merle: Welcome to BS: Beyond Stereotypes. I'm your host, Merle Vaughn. Here to BS with me today is my friend Bob Major, whose story I find fascinating and who will no doubt inspire all of you to embrace your authenticity. Hi Bob. How are you?

Bob: Hey Merle, how are you? I'm doing great. I'm good.

Merle: I am so excited to have you on the podcast.

I just wanna say that, let everybody know that we are, you are just, we are, you are celebrating the 40th year anniversary of Major Lindsey & Africa. And that's just, it's just awesome. It's exciting and I'm so happy to have you here.

Bob: It'll be 41 next month [January 2023].

Merle: That is amazing. I mean, you know what they say, if you can make it through the first, what do they say? Seven years? No, that's a marriage. If you can make it through the first seven years of a business, then you'll probably be okay. But 41. Wow. That, that's impressive.

So, let, let me just tell folks a little bit about you. I think your reputation precedes you, but let me just give folks a little bit of information, background information on you.

Robert “Bob” Major graduated from Stanford University, I think, with a degree in political science and then went on to the University of Texas School of Law. After graduating from the University of Texas, you were an associate at Wilmer for about five and a half years or so. And then what we really wanna talk about is you started MLA. Did I leave anything out, Bob?

Bob: From Wilmer, I came back to California, and I went in-house with a company called Saga Corporation in Menlo Park, California. And I was their securities council. I did that for a year and decided that the Security in Exchange Act of 1934 and I were, we just had the park.

Merle: Little too boring for you, Bob?

Bob: A little too boring. And, as it turned out, I read an article in the American Lawyer about headhunters, legal recruiters, a term I use interchangeably with

headhunters, by the way. Yes, and I went home that night to my little apartment in San Francisco and I thought, you know, that job sounds really interesting.

And the more I thought about it, the more I was excited about it and grabbed a legal pad and a pen and wrote out a business plan. And five days later I walked into my boss's office and resigned.

Merle: Wow. And so that was in, I think, 1982, correct?

Bob: Correct. Yes, that's right.

Merle: And, for those of, for anybody who doesn't know, I just assumed that everybody who listened to this podcast knows, but Major Lindsey & Africa is the world's largest and most experienced legal search firm. As far as I'm concerned is the best, but I could be just a little biased. And Bob is the founding member of MLA. So, Bob, we'll talk more about that, but I always like to start the podcast by asking our guests a little bit about their history, their personal history, kind of like who influenced you most growing up? Where did you grow up? How did you end up in California? You know, just those kinds of things. You know, who made major impacts on you in your life? And because we usually find that there's some adult who does that.

Bob: Yeah. You know, it, it's interesting because I always use that same question when I'm interviewing candidates. I call it the log cabin question. Did you grow up in a log cabin? But I did not, I grew up in Dallas, Texas, and my parents divorced, and my father moved to California, to San Francisco, where he met my stepmother. Then I grew up with my mother in Dallas and then ultimately when she remarried, my stepfather was transferred to Oklahoma City. And that was probably when I was in the fourth grade. So, I graduated from high school in Oklahoma City, so I had sort of one foot planted in Texas and the other foot planted in Oklahoma. I went to college at Stanford, which really was a transformative experience in my life. I mean, a kid from Oklahoma going to Palo Alto was a real eye-opener.

And yeah, I must say when you talk about, you know, the sort of, the tipping point of one's life, I really have to pinpoint the Stanford experience. What really influenced me the most in terms of my thinking, my outlook on life, my willingness to take chances, my natural competitiveness. So, it was terrific in every respect.

Merle: I don't know if, you know, we have Oklahoma in common.

Bob: I did not.

Merle: Yes. I was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma. My entire extended family is still in Oklahoma, and I lived in Oklahoma. We lived in Oklahoma City until I was about four, and then we moved to Michigan, and then from Michigan to California. So, anyway, that's just one more thing.

Bob: Another point of intersection.

Merle: Yes.

Bob: So anyway, I, you know, having grown up in Oklahoma and Texas and then having gone to college on the West Coast, you know, the East Coast was a big mystery to me, and I decided after law school that I wanted to try it out. So, my original plan was to go to the East Coast for three years and then return to California where I was going to practice law and live happily ever after.

Merle: Mm-hmm.

Bob: I was a summer associate at Morgan Lewis and then decided to go to Wilmer instead for a number of reasons, which are really relevant, but had a great time at Wilmer and was one of the luckiest, I was probably the dumbest associate they had, but I was the luckiest one and proves the point somewhere that it's sometimes better to be lucky than smart because I was able to get absolutely amazing projects starting with drafting the constitution of the Northern Mariana Islands as my first project.

Merle: Wow.

Bob: As an associate. And, my biggest case, or biggest matter, was an internal investigation that we conducted on behalf of Playboy Enterprises, where I was assigned Hugh Hefner.

Merle: Oh wow.

Bob: That was an 18-month investigation that was, you know, had just chocked full of stories about that. But I will leave that to another time after.

Merle: Oh my God, that's amazing.

Bob: Yeah, it really was. I mean, it was storybook law. Along the way I did Federal Communications Commission work, some antitrust work for IBM, and so just really, you know, met with just stupendously impressive lawyers, worked under them. Learned a cruel reality that I thought I was a really good writer, but when I got to Wilmer, I realized that I was, you know, quite mediocre in fact. And so, I said about to try to improve my writing skills, which really that I have to give a nod to that firm in terms of teaching me some really valuable lessons about workmanship.

Merle: I think that happens to a lot of us, right? Like even though the best brightest are coming out of these out of grad schools, and whether you, you know, we're at the top of your class or the middle class, when you go to these big firms, I just remember, you know, everything I wrote came back red. It was just bleeding with red. And I thought, wait a minute. I'm supposed to be one of the best and the brightest. And it was like, but that has nothing to do with it. It's, it's all about getting well trained.

Bob: Yeah. And humble.

Merle: Yes.

Bob: So after, at that point, I was there about five years and that was obviously two years passed my original plan to return to California, so I decided to act on the plan and I interviewed in California in the Bay Area and ended up at this company called Saga Corporation, where I was their council. A year of doing that really convinced me that I didn't...I was really unhappy practicing law and that's when I read that *American Lawyer* article and kind of the rest is history.

In the early days of the firm, we didn't have much; we'd had no money, and so it was about a year and a half before we made our first deal, our first placement. And, thereafter, the next month, we made another placement, and then gradually things took hold, and there was, you know, an upward, modestly upward trajectory.

Merle: At what point did you bring in Marty Africa?

Bob: Well, Marty was, at the time I started the firm, the placement director at Bolt Hall, University of California, Berkeley.

Merle: My alma mater.

Bob: Yeah, you're alma mater. And after two years, I got a call from Marty who wanted to have lunch, and I thought, what could this mean? And we went out to lunch, and Marty had said that she was ready to do something else with her life beyond Bold, but she did not want to lose all her contacts and her sort of Rolodex and her reputation, you know, she had a very fine reputation, right, nationally. And she wanted to know if I would consider, you know, having her join.

And I mean, I must say that was, you know, another real big tipping point in my life, because when Marty joined the firm, which was in 1984, the firm had gone from really being a local Bay Area search firm to one that was receiving calls from Paul Weiss and Covington and Kins, Cooley and Latham, and all these, you know, storied law firms that I certainly knew of and respected tremendously, but, you know, I did not count them as clients. Well, overnight they became clients through Marty.

Merle: And so again, that's another instance of you just have the mightiest touch. It's just luck, you know. Do you think it's like, how much of it is being in the right place at the right time, and how much is it, you know, your courage and willingness to, to just, you know, trust yourself and do something different?

Bob: Well, I think there's, you know, parts of all of that. There's another big part of it, which was doing things the right way. You know, one of the things that Wilmer had taught me, and just my schooling, was just having standards that are, you know, quiet, quite high and working really hard to reach those standards.

For example, when we started, when I started, a friend of mine was working in a major law firm in San Francisco and she brought me into the recruiting administrator's office and showed me a stack of headhunter submissions, most of which I would say 99% of which simply had the headhunter's cards stapled to the candidate's resume with the words for your consideration scribbled on the card.

Merle: Wow.

Bob: And maybe a stamp of the legal recruiter's office on the resume to let the firm be tempted to treat the resume as, you know, property other than that of the head owner.

Merle: Right.

Bob: Well, I was pretty appalled by that. And instead of that, I took the tack of writing very extensive, customized cover letters that went with every candidate's resume. And after I think about a year, I got a letter from the hiring partner of Hansen Bridget, a guy named Steve Schneer, who I don't think I've ever met, and it was one of the greatest compliments to date, you know, that I had ever received, which was he said, you know, your letters I received from your firm are without exception, the most interesting and revealing about the candidate of any other search firm that we use.

And so, I, I struck me that, you know, there's a lot of ways to run this business. And Marty heard that when she was investigating search firms, our name kept on coming up as really, sort of a cut above everybody else. And that's actually what led her to telephone him.

Merle: Wow. And so, you, I mean, that's the standard now. That's the standard, you know, I mean, obviously there's some, some recruiters who haven't got that memo and don't do it, you know, well, but you basically created that standard. That's amazing.

Bob: Right. I think, and you know, one of the things that, when, in those days, Merle, since there were no barriers to entry to our profession, there was quite a range of headhunters that were in the profession of legal recruiting.

Merle: Mm-hmm.

Bob: Ranging from, you know, some very, very good ones to some very bad ones. And I had the fundamental belief: instead of treating our practices as trade secrets to be hidden from everybody, we should try to elevate the profession. And as a result, we became very involved in our trade association where every year Major Lindsey & Africa, or whatever it was called at the time, would give seminars to our peers on our best practices. And the intention was to, you know, bring the level of recruiting up way up. And I think we were very, very proud and happy to be involved in that effort. We weren't the only ones, of course, who did that kind of thing, but we were certainly very active in that endeavor.

Merle: So, I have to tell you, Bob, and I want everybody to know this, that I consider you like one of the nicest, most humble people I know that I've ever met.

Bob: Well, thank you. Thank you.

Merle: And you know, and that comes through. I mean, all you got to do is Google you and there's like, not that much that comes up. You look at your LinkedIn profile and it just says partner Major Lindsey & Africa. It's so refreshing to meet somebody with your type of accomplishments who's so humble and so genuine. And the other thing I wanted to say is what made me want to do this podcast is we just came back from our annual meeting in Arizona, and we took this big group picture commemorating the 40 years. Then you came back, and you posted on LinkedIn how struck you were by the fact that you started this thing 40 years ago with just you, and now there's hundreds of people. And it was so real and so emotional. It brought tears to my eyes, and I was like, I got to get him on here and let everybody experience the Bob Major that I know and love. So, thank you for doing this.

Bob: Well, those are really, really nice words and I appreciate them. And I mean, you know this and that. Maybe your listeners don't know this, but you know I don't have a family. I'm a single guy, a proud gay man, and I will probably never have a family, but this firm is my baby.

Merle: Right.

Bob: And I love it. I'll do anything for it to protect it. To improve it. But one of the things I learned a long time ago is that you surround yourself by people who are smarter and better than you are.

Merle: Yeah.

Bob: And you have to reward them for it, else they will become your competitors. And so, that's one of the things that I think has been a very, very unique part of our firm. People say that we invented the legal recruiting business; that is absolutely untrue. There were lots of legal recruiters in New York and Washington and Los Angeles in 1982 when I started this firm. But the one thing that we did do is that we broadened it to be a national and then ultimately an international firm. The only way you could do that is to get really, really good people who see tremendous value in being with the firm as opposed to being on their own. And we created that secret sauce that has allowed us to expand and continue to attract people like you, Merle. You know, to be easily doing this business or another business very successfully on their own.

But if you create value and you create and make it fun, and you provide people with a living, and you care about them and you make sure that they know that you care about them, there's a stickiness to our firm. It's a familial type of place

that is actually, you know, people within the industry recognized as something unique.

Merle: Well, and you know what, that kind of brings me to 2008 when MLA combined with Allegis Group and how was that a hard to see? How did that all, how did that happen? And how's it going?

Bob: Well, it happened when we had a CEO who started implementing certain reforms and changes within the firm, creating more offices, creating infrastructure, hiring manage professional managers, hiring a professional IT department, marketing, all that kind of stuff. Finance. And those are typical hallmarks of a firm. That is readying itself for an exit strategy of some type, whether it's going public, as some firms have done or more often an acquisition. And the acquisition was an effort to really find a partner or a parent that was very much in line with our values.

And I will tell you a story, and I'm not even sure if our parent Allegis Group knows this, but when their name was floated to us as being interested in acquiring us, I immediately called a friend of mine, old-time friend of mine who had worked at one point for one of the Allegis Group, and I asked him, I said, "What do you think of these guys?" And he said, "They're very good. They're extremely professional, they're extremely ethical, they are go-getters. But the one thing that I see as a misalignment is that Major Lindsey & Africa is extremely diverse."

Merle: mm-hmm

Bob: "And especially with the number of women in senior positions." And there is not that much diversity that I could, that he could see at our parent. And I think that that has, we have changed them, I think. Yes, yes. And so when you say how is it going? When they acquired us, basically, I think they took the very, very correct position of if it ain't broke, don't fix it. And they left us alone. Now obviously, they put in their own CFO and their own IT guy and their own marketing people, and ultimately their own CEO. and those are changes to be expected.

But the thing that we were most afraid of is that we had left, you know, the more corporate America, the strait-laced Brooks Brothers suit white shirt, you know? All that stuff. We had left that behind and we wanted to continue to enjoy our freedoms. And we did not want to give those up. And they have been very true to their word. They have embraced our commitment to diversity,

which was yet another Marty Africa mantra. And so that...I would say that it's been a splendid marriage.

Merle: I love the way these things just flow, right? And so, you talked about Allegis, you know, your concerns about diversity and women, but talk to me about you. You proudly said that you're a proud gay man and was that a concern at all in how your identity in terms of LGBTQIA, I mean, how has that been in this profession, in the law, with Allegis? How do you manage that and how do you manage the stereotypes associated with that?

Bob: That's a great question. And I...on the one hand, the law profession is very, very concerned, very slow to change. They can be forced into it as any number of initiatives around the country have forced, tried, new thinking, terms of diversity, or as defined by ethnicity or gender. But the sexual orientation thing is often sort of left behind. And it's yet to be fully realized, but—and I've been both in our San Francisco office and our Houston office, and those are two very different environments. You have to be a little bit of a chameleon, but you also cannot be untrue to yourself either.

One of the ironic things Marty once told me, she said, “You know, Bob, you may be gay, but you can pass as straight.” And I said, “You know, Marty, that's a two head sword because sometimes people will say things to you revealing their true feelings about LGBT people not knowing that you're one of them.”

Merle: Yeah.

Bob: So, it's a two-edged sword, but there are tremendous changes. Fortunately, I'm in a firm that has embraced all of its people. We live under a big, big tent at Major Lindsey & Africa, where you're free to be who you are. And it's encouraged. It's championed and it's celebrated. Years ago in San Francisco, one of the major law firms in the city, which I won't name, was very stodgy and very very slow to recognize the value of their gay lawyers. And another firm, a major competitor of that previously mentioned firm, Morrison Forster and Morrison stepped into the breach and said, “We'll take that editor-in-chief of the Law Review who happened to be a lesbian. We'll take that Supreme Court clerk who happens to be a gay man.” And after a while, the law firms that were slow to recognize the value realized that MoFo was kicking ass on the recruiting front.

Merle: Yeah. I actually had to decide between MOFO and Cooley, and that was a hard decision. I went to Cooley, but MoFo was definitely considered at the time the most progressive law firm nationally, I think, and particularly in San

Francisco, in California because it was considered a San Francisco firm at the time. But I don't know if you know my story, so I actually was running the office of one of our competitors and was about to hire somebody that had been laid off by MLA. That's the only way I could get anybody from MLA; they had to get laid off. And I called for a reference. He gave me a name of somebody at MLA to call for a reference. And I called that person, and he was like, "Yeah, he's fine. You should hire him, but you should come work for us."

And then then introduced me to John Cashman, and John and I met, and ultimately John was like, "You should come work for us." And I said the only way I really would consider doing that is if I could focus on diversity and he said okay. And that was it. So that really is a testament to everything that you just said.

Bob: Yeah. And it also aligns well with something that my parents always told me, which is find a job you love, and you'll never work another day in your life. If you can get something you're passionate about, diversity in your case, MLA generally in my case, it's not work.

You know, this is something that you jump out of bed every morning, kind of pinch yourself that you're lucky enough to be doing this, and you throw yourself into it with such exuberance and enthusiasm and a willingness to go the extra mile.

It's something that is and we're in the business of counseling people on their careers. And one of the most interesting things I found out about my business as a recruiter is that there is such disenchantment among lawyers. There's a lot of very happy lawyers, but a lot of them don't find their way to our offices but there's a number of very disenchanted lawyers whose stories just reinforce our decision to do this business and celebrate really in a strange way the fact that we are so darn happy doing it.

Merle: And so how has, I mean, there's a lot that has happened over the last two, three years, right? I mean, the world has just kind of been turned upside down and the pandemic is probably one of the big one or two or three things involved in that. You've been in this business for a long time. I mean, you saw something very similar, I would think, with the AIDS crisis back in the eighties. How have things changed? What are your projections for what's next?

Bob: I think we'll be fine. I think we have...there's a great resilience among people, especially really smart, hardworking, principled individuals who will always sort of bounce back. I think the bigger question, and I'm sure that the

managing partners and the managing attorneys in the corporate law departments are worried about this, is how do you create culture when you have so many stay at home workers who are not able to forge the cultural bonds that one does over the proverbial water cooler on Monday morning when they're talking about the big game between Stanford and California? Those are big, big questions.

And if you look at firms like, it was the old McCutchen firm when they were around, or Latham I think right now, or maybe Kirkland that have very, very strong cultures, they achieved so much benefit from those, from that cultural adhesion. It's easier for them to recruit, they retain their employees longer. The lawyers and the staff people are willing to work overtime and work weekends because it's for the team. There's so much at stake, more than just money. And so, everybody is looking for that secret sauce. Every law firm and every corporate law department wants to have that. And I think that the search for that secret sauce is been retarded by COVID and its aftermath, which is the stay-at-home situation.

Merle: I agree with that. I will say though, that I look at everything kind of through a little bit of a different lens because I talk to so many, particularly people of color and women. And one of the positions that some folks of color have taken is that it's been helpful, because people are talking to folks that they ordinarily might not talk to. They can go on a Zoom, or they can talk, they can reach out to people and it's not as personal, like you have to stop by somebody's office to do that.

Is there a discomfort with that? Can you find other things in common that maybe you might not have had in common just over the water cooler, and I know that it's just a different way of looking at it. But the other thing is, I was reading an article this morning about millennials and how law firms are trying to figure out how to deal with millennials. And it really reminded me of... generally millennials seemed to feel the way us as people of color have always felt. And the question is how you do...like what you're saying is, to me, it comes down to belonging, how do you make everybody feel like they belong? And then it's exacerbated by the fact that you're not in person.

Bob: Yeah, it's interesting you bring up the millennial issue because I used to think that that was really a crock of BS. No pun intended.

Merle: I like it.

Bob: Because I really couldn't get my head around why millennials were any different from my generation or any other generation. And I was at a law school

reunion and one of my classmates is married to Roberta Katz, who is a profoundly smart woman, who had just written a book about millennials. And so, we were having a beer and I said, “Now, Roberta, come on, but isn't this really ridiculous that millennials are any different?”

And she said, “No, Bob, it's absolutely the case.” And she said, “I'll tell you how, I'll give you one example.’ She said when you and I were in school, we would sit in a class and the teacher would be up at the head of the class standing and would basically give the lesson and we would write it down, and then we would regurgitate it at a later time. She said the millennials grew up in an educational system where the teachers sat on the floor with their students around them, and rather than in a sort of didactic way of telling them the story or the lesson, basically invited discussion. That led to sort of a group discovery of what the lesson was to be. And she said that was that one little thing. And she said there are many, there are dozens or hundreds of other things that also had a very formative influence on the millennial way of thinking. But she said that one little thing has made the millennials approach to learning very different from the way you and I had it in those ancient times.

And I was struck by that. I mean, I could see that example as being true.

Merle: Right. And see what...and I think that that's the perfect example. And that's why if you can make that leap from that culturally and through an experience wise, if you think about a person of color and having them having a different culture experience or a different learning experience, it's very similar and things are changing. I think everybody benefits from this change, but I do think it's painful.

Bob: I'll give you another example based on ethnicity. Years ago, and this really relates to why lawyers belong in the C-Suite to advise on business matters because lawyers are smart; they see things we're taught and trained to see things from different angles because the way Wilmer always taught me, you anticipate even if your opponent doesn't make a very good argument. You make the best argument for them and then you dismantle it. Right? So, I remember years ago, one of the wine companies decided that they would make a fortified wine with very, very high alcohol content. And they decided, some marketing idiot decided, that they would start marketing it in basically African American neighborhoods. And ultimately it turned out to be a public relations disaster as well as could be anticipated. And the company spent millions and millions of dollars trying to undo their mistake. It had the happy result of creating new initiatives of outreach to disadvantaged neighborhoods by this particular company.

And it served as a prime example of what not to do for many, many other companies. But this is the way we can learn from each other, and we can avoid mistakes, right? To be able to understand gender issues. And I was on a panel years ago. It was an LGBTQ panel and we had five or six panelists there: a lesbian, a couple of gay men, one law firm person, one in-house person, and there was also a trans person, a male to female. And a question was raised. Somebody in the audience raised their hand and asked me, they said, “Bob, all of what you say, what the panelist said is, it sounds all very lofty and nice, but in your honest opinion is Brenda, the trans person, does she really have a legitimate shot at a great job with one of your clients?”

It was a horrible, tough moment. And I said, no, she doesn't. And I said, and here is the real tragedy. Our clients ask us for smarts and communication skills and leadership and sense of humor. Affability Brenda has all of those, but the clients also ask for bravery. And I point out to you that there is nobody braver, in my experience, than Brenda sitting right here, yet she is not going to get that chance to show her stuff in most employers. And that's a tragedy. That is a human tragedy. Now, this was, Merle, happened 10 years ago, and I think in the last two years, dramatic changes have happened for trans people. And I'm not sure, not at...

Merle: not at expense though, but there's been some tragic things happening. But that's...

Bob: I think there would be. I don't know if the result would still be the same as 10 years ago, but I would wager that there would be a very long discussion among serious minded people within these, within that employer, about whether they should take this step.

Merle: Yeah.

Bob: Longer, longer discussion than previously where it was just a quick judgment. No, she's, she's not a fit here.

Merle: Those curious words that quote unquote fit word.

Bob: But the fact that it's a longer discussion is a big win for trans rights, I think.

Merle: That's an awesome observation and thanks for sharing that.

So, let's talk about something a little lighter, a little bit more fun. I wanna know what makes you happy. What brings you joy, Bob? Because you are, again, one of the happiest, most humble, nicest people I know. How do you pull that off?

Bob: Well, I think my parents and other role models were very instrumental in developing a sense of wonder and a sense of wanting to learn and a sense of the glass is half full rather than half empty. It's all about mind over matter in many ways. People can choose to be happy or optimistic.

Merle: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Bob: People can choose certain pathways to a lighter life. If they insist upon negativity, negativity will find its way to them. I just believe...I'm a big, big believer in optimism. My mother, actually my stepmother, she would rent a car in Paris and park on the median in front of her hotel. That's sheer optimism that the car is going to be there in the morning.

Merle: That's hilarious. That is hilarious. I'm a firm believer in that as well, and I'm also a firm believer that the only person you can control is you, right. You can't control anybody else. And so, it's a big waste of time to spend a lot of your time...it's hard as it is to try to change people or really worry about what they're thinking or what they think of you. But that's hard. It's really hard to do, especially when you're an overachiever.

Bob: I think especially when you're young. Yes, eventually, one of the great things about getting older is that you see that truth being repeated over and over again, only worry about the things you can control and not control.

I had a former boyfriend who was forever checking the weather four times a day. And I would just shake my head and I would say, what difference does it make? The only thing that we need to know about the weather is whether to put on a jacket or not or to carry an umbrella. But he actually enjoyed meteorology. So, I guess he had a good excuse for it.

Merle: That's hilarious. So, oh, so, and then my other question for you is, what's your favorite city? I know you've lived all over the world; I've been with you in other countries. What's your favorite city in the world?

Bob: Well, it's kind of where I am at the moment. I mean, there's some that, quite frankly, I don't really care to go back to. But I do love Paris. You and I have been there at the same time. It's endlessly fascinating. I love San Francisco, but I'm not unlike my parents who thought there was really the par

that San Francisco was the center of the universe. I don't really believe that. I think there are so many cities that have great charm. Last Christmas, my boyfriend and I, we went to, we spent it in Mexico City, which is a terrific place.

Merle: That's wonderful. Wonderful. Yeah.

Bob: My heart sort of soars whenever I go to Seattle where we have a wonderful office and great colleagues and you can see Mount Rainier, and I mean, eat the great food. And, and Chicago is fantastic. Beautiful. New Orleans beautiful is great. We're just...it's a cornucopia. There are very, very few places that don't really put a smile on my face. And there are some absolutely exceptional places. I don't want to evade your question, but if you had a gun in my head, it would probably be in Paris.

Merle: Yeah. And I'd be there, right there with you if you let me come back. , . So, yeah, I mean, San Francisco has changed a lot. When I moved to San Francisco, it was like, it felt kind of like a European city in, in the US but now it's, , everything's so homogenous everywhere. right. And San Francisco has changed. It still has that, , beauty that, , kind of unparalleled, beauty. But in terms of the feel of the culture, I would definitely say it's changed. And, and I, I agree. Paris's Paris is pretty, pretty awesome.

Bob: yeah, we've got work to do in San Francisco.

Merle: Yeah, and I love what you said about its wherever you are. I mean, it sounds like, I don't know if you know this, but I've practiced Buddhism off and on, and that's a very Buddhist concept to be in the moment and appreciate and be grateful for the now. Or anybody who meditates, that's what you're always thinking about is what's going on right here in this moment because you can't control anything else is something that I work on. Does that just come naturally to you?

Bob: No, I think a lot of it has to do with my legal training and I think lawyers are very, very good at stepping outside of themselves and taking a look at an argument or a case, or a problem, with an absolutely brand-new perspective, we're forced to do it.

As I referred to earlier, the training I had at Wilmer we're forced to do it often with our opponents, arguments and litigation. And you're certainly in a transactional or corporate arena. You're always wondering what are the key points or deal points that are important to the person across the table from you.

So, I think lawyers are very much in the habit of having this sort of out of body experience, if you will, of examining things, really de novo in a way without preconceived notions or biases or that's the other thing. We're very attuned to bias or things that might ruin the purity of the argument.

So, I really, my hat's off to the legal profession in many ways for bringing that kind of experience to me and allowing me to...if I'm having a bad day, just say, wait a minute, I'm not having a bad day, it's a good day. I'm alive.

Merle: What, the best thing I heard once was an older lady ask how are you doing? And she said, baby, just keep going to bed. Getting up and everything's good.

Bob: Yeah, it is good. It's a good life.

Merle: It's all good. And you've changed a lot of people's lives, both inside MLA and outside, and I applaud you for that. We're pretty much at the end of our time here. I hate to end. We might have to do this once every year, but the last question for you is, because you've been able to do so much and make, decisions that are different and you've been able to stay authentically you, what words of encouragement or advice do you have for others about embracing their authentic self?

Bob: Be brave

Merle: Courage, huh?

Bob: Courage. Don't, do not fear failure. It's interesting, having grown up sort of professionally as a legal recruiter in Silicon Valley, it's interesting to see our clients there and their attitudes toward failure. Everybody is quite proud. Everybody there is actually quite proud of having gone through the throes of failure and all the experience that comes with that, with that by being with a company like Excite at home or snowball.com or whatever it was. And when I talked to our some of our clients in the Midwest or in the Southwest in Texas, failure is viewed differently. They wonder why did you go to a company that would ultimately fail? What were you thinking? And that's not the right question.

The question is, please tell, educate me on all you learned from that experience. And how are you going to apply it other than simply to avoid the same missteps, but how are you going to apply it to our present enterprise? How are you going to make us better? And the people who embrace failure, and maybe not embrace

it too enthusiastically, but people who embrace it in the sense that they can learn a lot from it, I think are going to step more lightly and they are going to have a, a, a much better attitude toward their life. And I think they're going to take chances that are going to be a win.

I mean, if I hadn't believed me when I left the legal profession stop being a lawyer, it was my parents were not happy. I can tell you that and breaking the news to them that that was going to happen and telling them I was going to become a legal recruiter was a very, very unhappy moment. But it was now they think I'm the genius of the world.

Merle: Right, right. So, right.

Bob: It's all a matter of perspective, isn't it?

Merle: Yeah. And courage. I mean, I couldn't agree with you more. Just having the confidence and the courage to be yourself and be true to yourself, that and really always be thinking about at least I'll have no regrets.

I think that that's a beautiful thing and I think you've, what you've done in your life and with your life is a beautiful thing. And I just want to thank you for being here to BS with me today, bob.

Bob: Well, thank you, Merle. You're a, you're one of our stars and, it's just always a pleasure. Thank you.

Merle: You're welcome and thanks to everyone for listening until the next episode. Remember that everybody is different and different is good.

That's what I'm talking about. Wait. Okay. Now from the beginning.

We hope you enjoyed the stories shared in today's episode, BS: Beyond Stereotypes. Join us next time when another authentic personality unleashes their uniqueness on the world.