

This is the **DO IT SCARED PODCAST** with Ruth Soukup, **EPISODE NUMBER 48**. On today's episode, we are going to talk to Hooters-waitress-turned-CEO Kat Cole about daring to seize every

Welcome to the *Do It Scared* podcast. I'm your host, **RUTH SOUKUP**, and each week on the show we will talk about how to face your fears, overcome obstacles, and, most importantly, how to take action and create a life you love.

This episode is brought to you and made possible by the world's very best tool for managing your time and getting your life in order, the Living Well Planner. Created by yours truly, the Living Well Planner is designed to help you organize your time, manage your budget, plan your meals and your to-do list, and crush your goals, all in one place. It literally is the tool that keeps me sane every day, and it can absolutely do the same for you. You can find it online at livingwellplanner.com. And be sure to use our promo code *do it scared* to save \$10 on your order in our special offer just for.

Hey, there, guys, and welcome back to the show. As always, my name is Ruth Soukup, and I am the founder of Living Well Spending Less and the Living Well Planner, as well as the founder of Elite Blog Academy, and the *New York Times*' bestselling author of five, very soon to-be six, books.

In today's episode, we are going to be talking to the very inspiring Kat Cole, COO and president of FOCUS Brands Foods, which owns Cinnabon, Auntie Anne's pretzels, and Moe's, just to name a few. And while at just 40 years old, Kat is one of the most impressive female executives in the country, with a stellar track record of growth and success for the businesses she has led. It is really her unconventional path to business success that makes her story so remarkable and what I'm so excited to talk about today.

You see, Kat Cole's climb to the top started while she was just trying to pay her way through college, first working in retail at The Body Shop and then securing a job as a Hooters waitress.

Now, for most people, a college job is simply a means to an end, but not for Kat. She proved her worth as an employee, worked her way into management, and was eventually recommended by her boss to work as a corporate trainer. She dropped out of college to pursue this opportunity, and at 26 was named vice president of training and development, during which time she helped Hooters grow from 100 to 500 locations.

In 2010, she was hired by Cinnabon, and within a year was appointed president and CEO. You might even remember her from an episode of *Undercover Boss*, where she posed as an employee in several stores to find out what was really going on inside the company she was running.

Kat has so much insight to share on doing it scared and daring to seize the opportunities right in front of you, even if it means working your way up from the bottom. And ultimately, that is exactly what this podcast is all about. It's about taking the steps that will help us make necessary changes so that we can create a life we love, because in the end, courage doesn't mean we're never afraid; instead, courage is being scared but taking action anyway, despite our fear. It's putting one foot in front of the other, even when we're not quite sure where the path is going to lead.

Okay, guys. So just a couple more quick things before we dive into today's episode. First, you can get all the show notes, along with the links, to everything we talk about in this episode by visiting doitscared.com/episode48. Once again, that's doitscared.com/episode48.

And then, now, without further ado, I am so honored to introduce you to the incredibly inspiring Kat Cole.

RUTH: Hey, Kat. Thank you so much for being here on the *Do It Scared* podcast today. I'm so glad to have you on the show.

KAT: My pleasure.

RUTH: So there are so many things that I want to ask you about, but I think the thing that I am probably most curious about is just your story, your crazy rise from Hooters waitress to CEO, and it's such an inspiring story. You're such an amazing role model for women especially, and I was just wondering if we could start there. Tell us a little bit about how you got started and how it brought you to where you are today.

KAT: Sure. I grew up in Jacksonville, Florida, and I'm the oldest of three girls, so I have two younger sisters, and we left my dad when I was nine. He was an alcoholic, and my mom didn't make a lot of money and didn't have a lot of resources but knew she needed to get us out of that scenario, so we left and went out on our own when I was nine years old. My sisters were six and three. So from a very young age, I took on leadership roles. And much of my story branches from that core moment of going out on our own.

When I was 15, I started working. When I was 17, I became a waitress, or a hostess, at Hooters. When I was 18, I became a waitress. I was the first person in my family to get into college. I started college as an electrical engineering major, had plans to

get my engineering degree and then go on to law school. But the company I was working with, Hooters Restaurants, happened to be growing. They were opening restaurants all over the world, looking for team members to help train new employees, and open those new restaurants around the world. And so at the age of 19, I was asked to go be a part of the team to launch the first ever of our franchise in Sydney, Australia.

I had never been on a plane. I did not have a passport. I'd only been out of the state of Florida twice in my life for cheerleading competitions, but I still said yes. Then I bought a plane ticket, flew to Miami, stood in line, got my passport expedited. Few weeks later, left for Australia; opened the store; had an amazing experience, as you would imagine any 19-year-old going to Australia would have; and learned a lot, but thought it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. And came back, made up the college classes that I missed, and thought I was just back on my normal path.

I was working waitressing shifts in between, kitchen shifts, all kinds of—whatever I could do to make money, to pay for college and life expenses. And then a couple months later was asked to go launch the franchise in Central America, and then a few months later South America, and so on and so on to the point that I was failing college because I was never there and there was no opportunity to make it up, so I quit.

I dropped out of college at 20, got my first corporate job opportunity at the age of 20, moved from Jacksonville to Atlanta to work for the corporate office, and the rest of the story is summarized by as the company grew, I grew. I started leading departments. I got active in the restaurant industry as a volunteer working in different associations, industry associations, political advocacy, mentoring others. By 26 I was vice president of Hooters, doing close to 800 million in revenue. Moved up, helped grow the company, was there through some crazy, crazy times.

And at 31 I left and became president of Cinnabon, the global bakery chain. I turned that around for four years, and then, also as FOCUS Brands, the parent company of Cinnabon, grew, I grew. So I turned around Cinnabon, became group president of the parent company, helped grow the licensing and CPG division, and then two years ago, which was 60 days before I went out on maternity leave for my first baby, was promoted to president and COO. So, that's what I've been doing for the last two years.

RUTH: Wow. What a whirlwind.

KAT: Yeah.

RUTH: When you tell that story and you look back, do you just kind of go, "Oh my gosh. I'm a little exhausted"?

KAT: No. It does—you know, as you get older, your story takes longer to tell, even when you try to summarize it into its highest points or its momentous milestones. So it's exhausting to say it all, but it doesn't feel exhausting. But it doesn't feel like particularly amazing accomplishments, either. It feels like a lot of hard work and a lot of great opportunity and a lot of learning and a lot of creativity, and there's so much, when I glaze over my highlights, as is true with anyone, that's unsaid.

RUTH: Yes.

KAT: There's the personal story, there's the volunteer story, there's the humanitarian story, there's the mistakes story, there's the learning—you know, there's so much that's unsaid—

RUTH: That's so true.

KAT: —so it is a little tough glazing over what is now a multi-decade career because you don't ever want someone to think, "Oh, it's all the high points."

RUTH: Right.

KAT: Those are just—

RUTH: Right.

KAT: There's a whole lot of mountain below those.

RUTH: It's so true. And I actually want to go back on that because I think that sometimes when we hear a story like that and you can look back and go, "Yep, I did all these things," that it's easy to forget how different it looked going into that, how different it looked when you were 19 and just waitressing to try to pay for school. Did you know when you took that job at Hooters, the first point, that this was going to be the step that led to the most amazing opportunities you could have ever dreamed of?

KAT: No. I mean, I was a hostess. I was in high school. It was just a job.

RUTH: Right.

KAT: It was a job because I needed money to pay bills. We weren't wealthy. My mom fed us on a food budget of \$10 a week for three years. She had to work multiple jobs. I had to work. And in the state of Florida, you could start working when you were 15. So, I worked in malls, I sold clothes.

I loved it. I loved customer service. I was very good at it. And then got recruited to work at Hooters. And it was fun, working at Hooters while I was in high school, and it was very cool to me to become a waitress and rock the orange shorts. And it was empowering, which is surprising to some people, but it was super fun.

And I learned a ton, and I took leadership roles very early. So, even though I was in leadership roles, I still didn't think that was my career. I was in college. My plan was to get my engineering degree and go to law school. So all of my hourly employee time at Hooters was just a means to a different end. And then I thought, "Oh, well, this is cool because I'm getting to travel and open restaurants and learn." It was great. But even after the first few openings, I didn't think it was a career. I just thought I was really good at it, but I was 19 and 20 and still in college, and not until I dropped out of college where it was just very clear that maintaining the level of travel and college was going to be an impossible parallel path, because there wasn't the access that we all have now to online compartmentalized education, specialized learning, things like that. It was just starting. This was in the late 90s, like '97, '96, '97. So, I mean, when I opened restaurants in Argentina, I had a beeper, a pager. So, yeah, it was not a career to me until it was a career.

RUTH:

What came first there? You first dropped out of school and then all of a sudden realized this could be a career, or vice versa? How did you make that decision? Was it just, like, pure necessity, like, you were failing and so you had to make that decision, or how did all that play out?

KAT:

Yeah, I was failing. I mean, I came back from my third or fourth opening and met with the college counselors, and they said, "You're failing. There's no way to make up the classes. So, you can either start over and make up what you've missed, which is going to require full-time-plus,"—which meant not only could I not travel, I would barely have time to work, and I couldn't afford that. So I had to trust fund. I had no—I luckily did not get into student loans. I just was not willing to go into debt, and so I had to work. And so the decision was sort of made for me. It was pretty clear.

I mean, I could've stopped working. I could've figured out a way. I could've taken loans. But I was so good at opening restaurants. I was so good at international operations. I loved it, and I wasn't perfect, but I was naturally very good. And I was having a ton of fun and learning a lot, and I'd moved up in my scope of responsibility every single business event I led.

From Australia to Mexico to Argentina, each one of them, I progressively took on more responsibility, and within a year, I was leading them, setting up supply chain, helping to train the overall employees, helping to hire, running the media, A to Z of launching a new business.

And so to be doing that at the age of 20, I knew even then that that was very unique. And to me college was something that if it ended up being really important, I could eventually go back to.

And I did. I have a masters, but I don't have a bachelors. I went back and got an MBA—

RUTH:

Which I love.

KAT:

—in the executive MBA program. So, I was just clear on what felt right to me. And as when people ask, because I do a lot of teaching at universities, in particular Ivy League schools, and people, of course, ask, like, "Do you not believe in higher education?" My answer is, "Higher education's one of the greatest privileges in the world, and if you have the opportunity to have it, you should take it. But in my case, I had a compelling alternative." I was doing something I loved that, yes, paid the bills while I was doing it, but I loved it. And to me, it was very clear what the path was. And so I dropped out of college, and then it was a few months later that I was offered a corporate job to move to Atlanta. I had no salary; I was an hourly employee. I had no guarantees. I had no contract. I had no nothing. I was just—I just believed that the momentum would continue.

RUTH:

Wow. That's kind of a leap of faith. Did you, at that time— I mean, it sounds like your higher ups were definitely seeing the potential in you and giving you more and more opportunity every time. You were killing it; you were proving yourself. Did you have any mentors that took you under their wing and lead you along or saw that potential in you, or did you just see it in yourself?

KAT:

Not mentors in the sense that most people think. I have this whole belief system around mentoring moments as opposed to mentors, because mentor sounds like this thing, like a set relationship, where we're checking in weekly, and they're taking me under their wing, and we're like a pair moving into the future together. That is so hard to find and not accessible to everyone, especially people without privilege or resources.

But I had many people who gave me learning, who shared perspective when I asked, who took an interest in me and called out things and said, "Hey, have you ever thought about x?" And so, I like to say I benefited from many, many mentoring moments from incredible people along the way, both at work, in the industry, franchisees in other countries, but no solid mentor.

But I had amazing bosses. My corporate bosses were all women, and they believed in me, they trusted me, they gave me chances when I made mistakes; as long as I learned and move forward, it was fine. I had a ton of mentoring moments and then people who really believed in me, despite me having less of a resume or fewer years of experience in life and business.

RUTH: Hm. That's amazing. That's amazing, too, that there were so many women role models for you in a company like Hooters. I think that's probably counterintuitive to what most people would assume about a company like that.

KAT: Yeah. Most people don't think about it. But if you think about it just one-inch deep, 80% of the employees, which is 100% of the front-of-house employees, are women. And if you think about any company, right, a good portion of the employees move up into management. So just the math of what the employee base is, so many managers were women, and then those people moved up and then they became executives over the decades. I only worked for a few men in my 15-year career there.

RUTH: Really?

KAT: Yep.

RUTH: Wow.

KAT: I had one manager, one regional manager, who was super supportive, and then many others in that two and a half years that I was in the restaurants that were women, but only two true male bosses in those first few years, and then all female, all women, until I worked for the CEO when I became vice president.

RUTH: Wow. Interesting.

KAT: Yeah.

RUTH: So, did you ever try to make a point of really going and seeking out advice from other people? Was that something that you were really intentional about? Was it just sort of like, "I'm going to work really hard, and I'm going to do a good job and let the chips fall where they may"? What was your attitude going into it?

KAT: It was all the things. I recognized that I was young, which meant I had fewer years on the planet, which meant I had fewer experiences, which meant I had less knowledge to draw on. And so I had the humility to recognize what I was missing, and I had the humility—I guess, the humility and the courage to ask people for help all along the way.

It wasn't like I had a just regular behavior of asking for advice, because people will come to me sometimes and say, "Can you give me advice? How can I be successful? How can I plan my career?" That is so big, so open ended, and not effective. I would go to people when I had a thing I needed help with. So I'm working on this. Have you ever done it? What should I know about it? Who

should I talk to? Go get exactly what I need in the moment, allow that to color my thinking so I can benefit from their life and their experiences, and then put that into use.

So I was just—had a good blend of humility and curiosity on one side, and courage and confidence to put it into play, so I always seemed more mature. I seemed more experienced because I listened to people and I chose what to or not to bring into my own behaviors.

RUTH:

Smart. I like that advice, to go in with specific questions, because I think you're exactly right. I mean, people come to me all the time, too, more in the blogging and online business world, like, "How do I build an online business?" I'm like, "Well, there's a lot to that." And I think it's the same thing in any industry, in anything that you want to do. You take those opportunities and start finding those role models, finding those mentors, and then go and ask specific questions. That's great advice.

So, let's talk a little bit more about where you are today. Can you talk a little bit about what your current position and responsibilities are, and what does your day-to-day look like these days?

KAT:

My current position and responsibilities is I'm the president and COO of Focus Brands. We're a company that has several billion in global product sales through our franchise and licensing locations. We have now seven brands, and I run those businesses. The presidents of those businesses report to me. So I have eight presidents that report to me, and they each run their business units, and I am accountable for the collective business unit in the company.

So that's Auntie Anne's, which is 1,800 locations in 40 countries; that's Cinnabon, which is about 1,600 locations in 60 countries; that is Jamba Juice, which is about 900 locations in six countries; that's Moe's Southwest Grill; Schlotzsky's Deli; McAlister's; and then we're the licensee for Seattle's Best Coffee. So mostly franchise. Amazing brands ranging from fun-for-you to really-good-for-you. So we've got ice cream and cinnamon rolls on one end, and juices, smoothies, and bowls on the other end, and some cool restaurant brands in between.

My day to day is not a day to day like most people's lives. One day it might be meeting with franchisees who have big opportunities or big challenges. It might be working with a president to build out and develop their team for that brand. It might be working with our IT division or our consumer insights division or real estate or sales division to better support and integrate with our operating

businesses. It could be meeting with our executive team to talk about what's the next acquisition or strategy for the overall business to allow it to be competitive.

I am a public speaker and spend occasional opportunities connecting with groups in other industries to talk about lessons in change management and resilience and learning, and then spend time with my 18-month-old and my amazing husband and all the stuff that comes in between. And so it just depends on the day where the weight is in those categories.

RUTH:

That's a lot. So, do you have any specific hacks or tricks that you use for managing your time? What kind of daily habits are you practicing?

KAT:

I try not to focus too much on managing time alone, but rather to manage energy. I'm 40 years old. I've learned what gives me energy, and I've learned what takes it away. So I have to balance my days with a combination of things that give me energy and things that might be neutral or distracting. It is incredibly important to do that, both as a leader and as a business person, but also as a mom and a life partner.

And so I focus more on energy management. I try to make sure there aren't too many things that are more draining than giving, and as much as people say, "Only spend time doing the things that give you energy," but when you're running businesses like this and it's impossible to have that be 100% of the time, but it's a noble goal and a noble goal that I have, and so I focus on energy management.

I am very good at saying no. Some people might not think I am because of all the things I do, but trust me, even with all the things I say yes to, there are far more that I say no to. I've gotten very good at saying no in a graceful way and in a direct way. I say no. I say no. I say no, thank you. I say not now. I say, not me, maybe this person. I have all the ways to say no. And the most important piece of managing my time is my priorities are very clear, and my values are very clear.

RUTH:

I love that.

KAT:

I know what is number one, and it is my family and my health, and everything else is a distant second and third. And it doesn't mean that there aren't times where I trade off a little bit of time with family for work or vice versa, but I am super clear on the net of each week and month where my energies and my priorities lie. And that makes

decision making for time management very easy. I'm not stressed about not going to that third cocktail event. I'm not worried about leaving the office at 4:30 or right at five so I can get home. I just make better use of the time when I'm there.

If I have calls, I don't do them in the middle of the day. I do them while I'm in traffic on the way home. If I have meetings I want to hold, I hold lunch meetings. And I don't feel FOMO, I don't feel like I'm missing out. In fact, when I schedule meetings during the day, even though it might take longer to get them pulled together, people who have interests outside of work, not just family, it's just interests outside of work, are grateful. I'm not cutting into their evenings or their mornings. And so having my priorities straight and very clear and super rooted and highly communicated and clear allows the decision making as it relates to your question, which is time management, to be pretty easy-peasy most of the time.

RUTH: Hm. So, when you talk about energy management, then, what are some things that fill you up and give you more energy?

KAT: Spending time with my family fills me up. Getting exercise and being outside fills me up. Spending time with franchisees within the business fills me up. Working on the back-of-house type things, being in the office, that doesn't fill me up. It's not always draining, but it's probably neutral. And some things are energy giving, but I like being in the field, and I like being with employees and franchisees and customers and staying really close to the action.

Spending time in my humanitarian efforts and helping people think through challenges. Mentoring really gives me energy when it's people I enjoy mentoring, when it's people who are thoughtful and focused and concise. I like helping people think through what they believe is an impossible situation or a complex task, and I love being able to be a sounding board and bring my experiences to bear, to help people see things more clearly. So those and many other things give me energy. Sleeping also gives me energy. I love sleeping.

RUTH: Sleeping is good. One of the parts I love about your story is that after you dropped out of college and then you started moving up the ranks at Hooters, you were doing amazing, you got named vice president, and then you decided to go back to school and get your MBA later, which I think is just actually pretty remarkable because it takes so much humility, like you were talking about before, having the humility to ask and to admit that you don't have all the answers and that there

might be other things that you can still learn. So can you talk a little bit about what was the decision behind going back to school to get your MBA and how that all played out?

KAT:

Sure. I had a woman who has given me many, many mentoring moments over the years who I would say is one of the few people that I'd put in a bucket as a mentor just because it was mentoring moment after mentoring moment, and then eventually it was just like, "Oh, this is a relationship. This is a thing."

She called one day, and she often did just to check in and said, "Hey, how are things going? How are you thinking about both your career and the evolution, etc, etc?" She said, "You know, you have built a great reputation in your industry, and if you want any job, you're going to be able to get it because your reputation will precede you. Your results in the business are pretty well known. But, if you ever want to go outside of the industry into retail or into tech or into other parts of hospitality, because you don't have a degree," and I do believe her advice then was true, but it is not as true today, she said, "If you don't have a degree, you're not going to get through their HR filters." She said, "Not that it's the end of the world, because you could have a long and fantastic career just in your industry, but why would you want any doors closed to you?" And I thought it was a fair point, and I certainly didn't see myself staying purely in that industry my entire career.

So, I listened to her, and I said, "You know, the problem is I dropped out of college. I don't have a bachelor's degree. And the thought of going back to just spend the time and energy just to get to that point violates my mind, especially, when I've been leading complex businesses for years and years and years, and my real-world knowledge has to be worth as much if not more than a bachelor's degree." And she said, "You know, it's not common. It is very rare, but there are some people who can test out and work with executive MBA programs to get into the MBA program." And she pointed to one specific executive who had done that, and all I needed to hear was that it was possible, that that is one of the great powers of mentoring. And as soon as she said it was possible, I went, "Oh, well, of course, that's what I'm going to do."

And so I called multiple universities in Atlanta. Atlanta has a phenomenal university system. We have Georgia Tech, University of Georgia, Georgia State, Emory. I mean, amazing, world-class business schools. All of them told me I had to take the GMAT in two weeks, that literally it was near the summer, so it was a cut off, or end of spring.

And so I had two weeks to scrappily prepare, and so I did. I also had to get a higher entrance score than the typical entrance score on the GMAT because I didn't have the other things that people typically come with. So the schools have to manage their risk, understandably. So I scored high enough on the GMAT. I got into multiple of those programs.

I chose Georgia State because it was the most diverse. The Cohorts had more passport holders outside the United States than any of the other programs by a huge margin. I'd grown up in international ops, so I didn't want to sit around only a bunch of Americans dealing with what was going on. I really wanted to have a diverse experience.

And it was amazing, and I got out of it what I expected and more. I knew I knew how to run my business. I was very successful, but I didn't know what I didn't know. And I also didn't know if I was successful because I knew everyone. You know, I'd been at Hooters for 15 years—well, at that point 13 years—and I just wasn't sure. Am I successful because I'm good at this company, or am I successful because I am objectively a good business person? I felt that going through an MBA program was one way to answer that question. The other way, obviously, would be to leave and to pressure test that, which I eventually did.

But I didn't need the degree, and it wasn't about the degree. It was about proving to myself that the knowledge I had was the knowledge I should have in closing any gaps. And I also wanted to polish my financial acumen and language. Growing up an operator, you learn a lot about business, but you don't necessarily speak the language of lawyers and analysts and banks, and going through that program really helped me refine those skills.

RUTH: Huh. Interesting. So, you got your MBA before you left Hooters?

KAT: Well, I went through the whole process, but then I graduated with my MBA two months after I started at Cinnabon.

RUTH: Oh, got you. So, switching gears just a little bit, because this is the *Do It Scared* podcast, I am curious about the role that fear has played in your life and in your business, because you've been so successful. You've had this very unconventional path, and like we were talking about in the beginning, we got the highlight reel, and it's easy when we get the highlight reel to just believe that somebody like you is completely fearless and that you haven't made any mistakes or had any struggles along the way. What is something, first of all, that has

just really scared you either in your life and in your business, and how did you move past that fear?

KAT:

Yeah. I think we all have very unique fear triggers, and mine is not people or business. It's being physically out of control, like skiing too fast, and I literally ripped my leg apart on a mountain. And that's not enjoyable for me.

Yet, I can stand up in front of 40,000 people and give a keynote, and I am calm and feel that I am in my most purposeful place. I can sit in front of a group of highly conflicted leaders and executives in a super complex and emotional situation and bring a level of calm. I can be given a scenario I've never been involved in before, like going to Australia when I was 19, and approach it with a level of calm.

It's not that I don't have concerns or questions, it's just that I trust my ability to be humble and ask for and find answers and enroll help. I guess I just have the muscle of de-risking risk very easily because of my belief in my humility and curiosity.

RUTH:

I love that.

KAT:

And I'm not just humble and curious, right? If you're just humble and curious, you're just a student. You're just going to learn a lot, and that's going to be interesting, but you're not going to get a lot of shit done.

And so I grew a lot of confidence in my ability to ask questions, to ask for help, but then to make decisions and to act on it. I knew that fail to me was reframed as "first attempt in learning." Failure or mistakes were not the end of the world. I wasn't worried about being judged. Even today, if I make mistakes, yes, I have a giant job and career and role, but I was also a really damn good waitress and bartender. I know that I can always go back to doing that.

RUTH:

That you always have something to fall back on.

KAT:

Yeah. And I don't live extravagantly. My husband and I are minimalists, and we don't have debts, and life is pretty simple. And so, yeah, I don't have the tip—I try to keep out of my life the typical things that would put me in a position of what most would deal with in terms of anxiety and fear so I can make decisions from a place of strength, from a place of power. I'm not worried about, "Oh, can I keep up with all the balls that I'm juggling?" As I move up in income, right, I don't spend more money. I don't have a lot of things, so I don't

have financial fear.

I have taken a lot of risks, and when you take a lot of risks, even if you are good at de-risking them, you aren't—it's like anything, you do it a lot and each new opportunity doesn't seem scary. It's just something to learn and figure out, and yes, you're going to have some bumps and you try not to make them big bumps, and you try to learn and move forward. And every story that people are interested in my career are times when I've taken a leap. It's not that it was easy. It's not that I didn't mess up. It's not that I didn't have nights where I would go home and cry because I was either exhausted or stressed, but they were just tiny moments.

And when you learn that, you're like, "Oh, yeah, that's actually almost guaranteed to come with doing anything new," so I expect it, I don't fear it, and I get excited about being on the other side of it.

RUTH:

I love that. I love how you are constantly pairing humility on the one side with confidence on the other side, and like, they're the two sides of the same coin. And yet they work together so well, and those two qualities have served you so well throughout your career.

So, what is the most common mistake that you see entrepreneurs and business executives make, and what advice would you give to someone who's just starting out in their career or in their business?

KAT:

One of the most common mistakes is people try to take on too much. They're not focused, and sometimes it comes from this admiration for hustle. I have this #hustlemuscle that I use, but it is not about admiring, killing yourself doing work, morning 'til night. It's about doing the hard work you need to do to close the gaps if you're younger or newer and you're saying yes before you're ready. If you say yes before you're ready, you need to do the hard work that allows you to be as good, if not better, as someone else who's more experienced, but it is not about everything is work.

I think there's a glamorization of hustle that has come out of a lot of the covers of magazines for entrepreneurs and people accomplishing big things. To the point of our earlier conversation, the highlight reel conversation where people just feel like they need to be everywhere, do everything, and so it's taking on too much, it's not managing their energy, and thinking I need to be at every networking event and every cocktail event and every—yes, there are seasons of your life where you need to overinvest in building community and showing up places so you can both learn and see as well as be seen and be learned about,

but not at the expense of health, wellness, and your core mental strength as well. So I just see people taking on too much and not being focused.

And then, also, for young entrepreneurs and business people, I get asked a lot about how to deal with being young. And I see young people make being young a bigger thing than other people make of it. It's in their head and they're like, "Oh, I'm not going to be listened to because I'm so young," and I'm like, "I don't know how old you are. You look just as old as I do."

RUTH: So true.

KAT: So some people get in their own way and create more of a dynamic than what exists instead of—

RUTH: It's like a limited ability.

KAT: —using that energy—yeah. Like, use the energy to focus on results. Use the energy to out relationship, out network, out idea somebody instead of being so worked up about how do you come across as older, or how do you get the trust you deserve. The answer is you earn it.

RUTH: Right. And that goes the other way, too. I have a lot of listeners who are on the older end of the spectrum and who will say, "Well, it's too late for me. I'm too old. I'm too old to start over. I'm too old to do this stuff," but that's not true, either. Most of that is in your head. There are so many stories of people who have started over at 50 or 60 and completely reinvented themselves. It's really what you bring to the table. I love that.

KAT: Totally.

RUTH: So, quick, few rapid-fire questions here. First of all, what do you do to help build and protect your confidence?

KAT: The thing that helps me build and protect my confidence is doing things and being in groups where I'm new and unpopular. And that may seem counterintuitive—

RUTH: Yes.

KAT: —but just sitting there in your comfort zone doesn't help your confidence. In fact, the more you're alone, the more you're quiet, it's like I'm no one, I'm a barnacle, I don't belong with anyone. You just, like, end up in this dark mental corner. And yeah, it's a little scary to

make mistakes and be in new groups, but when you're on the other side of it, you always feel accomplished.

Once you do that enough, you know that that's the outcome. I think one of the best ways to feel confident is to make mistakes, or be a part of a new scenario, and come out on the other side.

RUTH:

I love that. So, what are you working on right now that has you really fired up?

KAT:

I've got several founders of businesses that I'm just mentoring on a weekly or monthly basis, and I'm so proud of their work and the impact they're making on the world. That really fires me up. It makes me feel good about being able to put my experiences to greater use than just my day-to-day business.

I'm super excited by our most recent acquisition of Jamba Juice. I have wanted a purely healthy brand in our portfolio for quite some time, and you can find a way to eat healthy at some of our other businesses, but Jamba's purpose in life is to democratize access to a more-healthy lifestyle without judgment, though. So we still have the PB Chocolate Love and the Mango-A-Go-Go and things that are a little sweeter, but we're launching spirulina and turmeric drinks and just things that are further along the health-wellness journey. And I'm just so proud of that business. We acquired it, took it private from being public, which was a great experience. I just hired a president, a CMO, promoted to VP of ops, and we're really getting that brand ready for its next generation of relevance and transformation. And it's cool that Travis Scott loves Jamba Juice so much and his wife. It's just a fun brand, and I'm very proud of what it stands for and what it will stand for once we make some important decisions.

Then, there are a few startups that I'm invested in and that I am either a friend of or advise that are just doing really cool things that are going to be great for the planet and great for consumers.

I'm super proud of how my husband and I have figured out how to both work. He's a director at a VC here in Atlanta and an endurance athlete, so he's pretty busy himself, and we have an 18-month-old and are working on number two. It's so beautiful to—I'm jazzed by that. I'm as jazzed by seeing our son learn, like start to say two-syllable words and be a slightly insane daredevil, and how my husband and I still protect our relationship and stay close throughout all the craziness. That has me as, when I think about it and when I'm in

those moments, it has me as jazzed or more than the other things I've mentioned.

RUTH: That's amazing. Final question, what is the best piece of advice you've ever received, and why?

KAT: I think the best piece of advice I've received is, it wasn't exactly worded this way but I turned it into this phrase. My mom, when I was becoming a well-known story in the media, started writing these notes to me on my birthday cards. They weren't always worded this way, but it was sort of—this summarizes it, which is, "Don't forget where you came from, but don't you dare ever let it solely define you." The reason why that is so powerful is it is as true for each of us as individuals and our ongoing transformation as it is for building businesses and turning them around.

When I became president of Cinnabon, it was in the shitter. I mean, it was a beloved brand, but it was in the middle of the recession, it was mall based, it was only known for cinnamon roll the size of your face. The franchisees were scared. There was no access to capital. It was such a mess. And so the way we turned it around was not forgetting where we came from, staying true to a great recipe and a great product, but not letting it limit us. We launched smaller portions, we launched iced coffee, we got out of malls, and so we look very differently today and therefore are very successful in that brand, but we're still rooted in our truth.

My story personally, I am rooted in my truth. I am a child of a single parent, alcoholic father, college dropout. That is my truth. It is part of my power, though. It's not my jail; that story is not limiting for me, and so I can say the truth is in our roots, but the fruits are in the branches with your ability to grow and spread beyond the roots. So, that phrase, "Don't forget where you came from, but don't you dare ever let it solely define you," is a summary of the best advice I've ever had and is a theme in my past and my present and my future.

RUTH: Wow. I can't think of a better way to end this than that. Your mom sounds pretty amazing.

KAT: Yeah. She's amazing.

RUTH: Well, is there anything else that you want us to know? And then, let us know where we can find you online.

KAT: Awesome. I think just for anybody that's listening, just tell your story. Each of us have things in our lives that can be inspiring to someone else. And the best place to connect with me is LinkedIn or Instagram, [katcoleatl](#).

RUTH: Awesome. Thank you so much, Kat. It was great having you today.

KAT: Oh, thank you so much.

Okay, so, don't forget that if you would like to get all the show notes for this episode, along with all the links and everything we just talked about, you can find it all at [doitscared.com/episode48](#). Once again, get all the show notes and the links on our website at [doitscared.com/episode48](#).

And then, before we go, I just want to say, as always, that I love hearing from you. So if you have any questions about what we talked about today or any other topics that you would like to see addressed on the *Do It Scared* podcast, any guests that you would like to see interviewed, please feel free to reach out via email by filling out our form at [doitscared.com](#), or just reach out to me on Instagram—it's really the best place to message me.

And that about does it for this episode of the *Do It Scared* podcast. Thank you so much for joining me today. And if you liked what you heard, please be sure to leave a review on iTunes, or better yet, post it in your InstaStory and tag me, and if I re-share your story, we will send you a T-shirt just for fun. Also, be sure to subscribe via iTunes or Stitcher or wherever you like to listen to be notified of new episodes.

And speaking of upcoming episodes, be sure to join me next week to talk about learning how to embrace your mistakes rather than run from them, because at the end of the day, there are no mistakes, only lessons. It's a truth I've had to learn the hard way, through more wrong moves than I can count. And in next week's episode, I get brutally honest about some of the worst mistakes I've made and how they led me to where I am today. It's going to be a good one, guys, and I will catch you then.