



Hummingbird Humanity

Conversations of Hope, Heart, and the Human Spirit with Lydia Fenet

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Brian McComak: So welcome, Lydia.

Lydia Fenet: Thank you Brian, hi to everyone. I'm so excited to be here. First of all, I always like telling stories through storytelling about other people. So I just wanna let everyone know that I've known Brian for many years. He was a crucial part of my career development, and frankly, growing into a leadership position at Christie's. So I am indebted to him forever for that role and for continuing to just be a friend and also sort of a life guidance counselor, if you will. So, I can say nothing but good things. And I was thrilled to be asked. So, to give you a short story, I grew up in Louisiana. I grew up in the South. I moved to New York about 20 years ago, right out of college to work for Christie's Auction House, which is where I met Brian. I've been at the company for 20 years and I have two roles that I fulfill now. I am the global managing director of strategic partnerships there, which means that I deal with all of the large scale partnerships. And I'm also the lead charity auctioneer, which is another reason that I know Brian, because I taught Brian to be a charity auctioneer. And he's a fantastic charity auctioneer. So, I am lucky enough to get to go out and get on stage for nonprofits around the world and raise money on their behalf by using some great sales tips and tactics that I've learned, frankly, from doing it for 16 years. And all of those sort of conversations and all of that confidence and all that time on stage led me to write a book that came out in April of last year, called "The Most Powerful Woman in the Room is You". And the past year has been a really fulfilling and exciting time for me. I was on book tour. I was actually flipping through Instagram, looking for a picture for my kids for their sort of school year summation. And I ended up in sort of knee deep in my own Instagram rabbit hole, and saw May of 2019 was 15 different cities over the course of the month of May, going from book tour to charity auction, bouncing home between all of them to be with my kids. And it was just such an amazing sort of and stark reminder of the change that we've seen so quickly. So I've really just, like everyone else watched in awe since March as all of this has happened. And at the same time, really tried to take control of the situation in ways that I could so that I felt powerful in my own way. So that's kind of a short summation of me, but I'm thrilled to be here. And as I said to Brian I'm an open book, so feel free to ask any questions that you might have.

Brian McComak: I can attest to that. Lydia and I have had many, many real conversations over the years, and I think we've kept each other sane. Lydia has also been beyond being someone who taught me how to be a charity auctioneer and helped not for profits raise money, which is one of the things that I love to do, and I'm grateful that I to learn that, Lydia has also been a mentor for me as I've taken this journey to doing my own thing, and has been a champion and someone who has encouraged me at each step of the way, which I'm incredibly grateful for. And I'm gonna go back to the, was it the first

book tour stop that you had when I was in the room at the Barnes & Noble down in, I wanna say Soho, but I think that's not right. Tribeca, Tribeca. And Lydia then told a story about me on stage and made me cry, which was not part of the deal .

Lydia Fenet: Well, because you were in my book. And so, it was a relevant story. I told this story, and for many people who've read the book, if you haven't read it, I highly suggest it, because if you're in sales, you have to sell. So here you go. I will tell you that it was this sort of formative moment, about 10 years into my career, where I realized that I wasn't making close to what I should have been making in my job. And this realization had actually come before Brian pulled me aside as the new head of HR and said, "You know, Lydia, we should talk, "because you're wildly underpaid for your job." And it was the first time anyone in HR had ever taken notice of me or my career, had given me any guidance whatsoever. And I just cried. I cried so hard because it just felt like all of these years of work had gone into nothing when I realized that I was making so much less than I should have. And obviously, I wasn't doing something right. It wasn't asking the questions that I should have been, but I also needed an advocate in HR. And Brian became that advocate for me. So, that was a story I told in Tribeca. And he did start to cry, which I love, because crying's a real emotion. I do it all the time, I love to cry .

Brian McComak: Well, and we're all facing all of our real emotions these days with the pandemic and quarantining. Yeah, but I think the reason that that story had such an impact on me at that moment is hearing particularly in that forum, the impact that I was able to make on you as someone I admire so much and respect so much. And I dedicate myself to this work and I don't always get to hear the impact I make on others. So, to know that there was that moment that happened so long ago. Well, let's not make us sound too old, a few years ago.

Lydia Fenet: We were in our early 20s as opposed to our mid 20s.

Brian McComak: Yes, exactly, oh, it's very important, very important. But to know that I had that sort of impact on someone's life and career, and that's why I do this work. And that's why I tell the stories that I tell and share about myself in an authentic way is to hopefully have those moments of impact. So, it was just nice to hear that. Well, and in the spirit of that, I know you have been on this tour of sharing about your story, your sales story, your story of Christie's, your story as a woman in sort of a man's world in some ways, and having a chance to talk to lots of other women, I'm curious, what are the stories you've heard on that journey?

Lydia Fenet: Well, it was interesting because when the book first came out, I didn't really know when I was writing the book, I thought it was gonna be sort of sales tips and ideas, things I'd learned on stage. And what it really became was 13 chapters filled with stories of the way that I had learned to find power along the way. So, each of those stories, how I learned to sell, how I learned to negotiate, many of them I learned on stage, but I'd also learned in sort of shorter stories along the way. And what was

interesting was one of the first lunches that I did on the book tour was a group of women from Morgan Stanley who'd made their own money. They were captains of industry. It was really intimidating. Everybody in there was probably 10 or 15 years older than me. And I remember kind of thinking that the book had been written for people in their 20s. That's what I assumed. I thought they were the ones who needed guidance on how to be a woman in the workplace. And I did a reading of a chapter where I basically told them the story of finding out, I worked for a company and everybody always told me how lucky I was to have this job, like good girl, you're lucky to have a job, go to work, don't ask for more money, just keep going to work, good job, good girl. All of this. And I said in the book and at the part that I stopped reading at the very end of the chapter, I said, "You know, don't let anyone ever tell you "that you are lucky to have a job. "You have a job, you get a paycheck "for showing up for work. "And if you're doing a better job, "you need to get paid more, period, end of sentence." And I looked up when I finished reading and there was a woman who was probably in her late 50s, and she was crying. And I think I realized at that moment that the book was gonna have a lot of broader reach than I originally assumed. When I sat back at my table, this much older woman said to me, "I can't tell you how many times I heard "that along the way, like just don't, "I don't want to hear any more "about how you need more money. "There are people who are supporting their family here. "So, you shouldn't ask things like this" And this was in finance, and all of these women around the table all of a sudden just started opening up about their stories. And ultimately for me, I think I did 120 events around the book, I realized that that's what the book was. Everybody who read it would come to me and say, "This is my story, this is what I went through," or "Thank you for addressing this, "I wish someone had given this to me." And so, I realized that actually, it's the story of everyone. And that my editor had said that earlier on, she was like, "Look, you grew up "in a small town in Louisiana, "you worked for Christie's Auction House. "You get a gold star. "Tell us the story of growing up in Louisiana "and then ending up at Christie's Auction House "so that every woman who grows up in a small town "who has a dream can see that that can become a reality." And so, it was really special. Honestly, the book tour to Louisiana was incredible because there were friends, and family friends, and some of my teachers from when I was little who were reaching out to say, "I've read your book, "I remember this." So, it was really special. And just hearing those stories from other women, just it filled me up, I can't even tell you. I would get off stage after giving a speech or I would finish a book signing, and sometimes I would cry just because so many people had so many stories that they felt like they needed to share.

Brian McComak: Yeah, absolutely. Well, and I think stories like yours and messages like yours are so important because so one of my commitments is to be an ally for others as an equity and inclusion practitioner, and when I think about groups that I'm focused on, one of those groups is women. And now, women have all shapes and sizes and colors. So, that's the broad group of individuals, but I'll just start with women as a general concept. And one of the things I've learned in my work is how women in the corporate settings are less likely than men to ask for what they need or ask for what they want. And then, there's societal reasons for that, which we could spend time talking about. But I love that your story is about putting away those messages, whether overt or subtle, that society has told us to say, "Hey, I deserve just what everyone else deserves," which is absolutely what I believe. But sometimes people need to hear that, those stories. And one of my favorite stories that you share in the book is about getting, if I remember correctly, it's the internship that you got at Christie's, which opened the doors, is that right?

Lydia Fenet: Yes.

Brian McComak: Can you share with that story with everyone? 'Cause I love that story.

Lydia Fenet: Yeah, absolutely. So I, as I said before, I grew up in Louisiana, my mom is British. So, this will explain this part of my story. When I was in college, there was an opportunity to do a junior year abroad at Oxford university, and my mom grew up in Oxford. And so, it was just this very exciting thing to be able to go to a place where my grandmother was still living. And so, I sort of jumped on that opportunity. And at some point when I was at Oxford and in that year in 1997, my gosh, I really just dated myself, in 1996. When I was at Oxford, I'd read an article about Christie's, and you can't find these articles because it's not on the internet. 1997, we didn't have one then. And so, I read an article about Christie's, and I can't even tell you, it just captured my imagination. It was just this glamorous auction world that I had never heard of. I didn't even know that art was sold. I thought it was supposed to be on the walls of the museums. And I, as I often do in life, anytime I have decided that I wanna do something, I set my mind to it. And then I tell every single person that I know, it's okay to complete, it's gonna happen absolutely. And so, I really told every single person I think I met from that moment on for months that I was gonna go work at an auction house. And no one had any idea what I was talking about. And so, then I go back to Louisiana, and it was funny because I mentioned this once in an interview that I went back to Louisiana, and I met a woman at a Christmas party who worked for Christie's and someone in the note said, "Well, isn't that the definition of a connection?" You were connected to that. And I was sort of like, "No, you don't understand, "Chrissy's is not a word that you hear "when you grow up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, "or Lake Charles, Louisiana." People do not talk about auction houses in those places. These are not bastions of art collecting. This was literally a young woman who happened to be at a Christmas party where there were 150 people. My dad met her and dragged her over and said, "This woman works at the place you've been talking "about non stop for months." And she was exactly what I wanted her to be. She was so dressed up and just, I was sort of like, "This is the place I need to work," which really makes it seem like I really was just wanting to work at a place where people were dressed correctly, and correctly as in what I wanted them to be dressed like from a movie. And it absolutely checked that box on every level. So, she gave me the information for the woman who ran the internship program at the time. And I literally stalked her. I called her every single day for two weeks. And as I also say in the book, before there were cell phones, before there was caller ID, there were just phones that sat on your desk and rang. And you had to pick it up because you didn't know who was calling. And that was the case when I started doing this. So, she picked up every single morning, God bless her, Mary Libby, and I just went on this campaign where every morning and my Southern accent, I would sort of sweetly say, "It's Lydia calling again. "I was just wondering if there was a possibility "that anything had opened up in the internship program "that I know you've told me is closed for the past 13 days, "but I was just wondering," and she would always sort of laugh. And if you knew Mary Libby, she had this lovely jovial way. She was like, "Oh dear, you know, there's no room." And so, on day 14, I just decided this wasn't working. And I had to come up with a different question. And so, before she hung up the phone, I said to her, "You know, Ms. Libby, can I just ask you, "why is the internship program capped at a certain number?" And she explained that

it was capped because there were only a certain number of people who could go on the museum tours, which was something the internship provided on two afternoons a week. And so, I quickly said to her, "Well, I don't have to go on this museum tours. "And I'm sure that there would be a department "who would need a spare intern "if all the interns were gone that day, right? "And maybe if an intern didn't show up, or was sick, "or something, or hung over, maybe I could go instead." And it was the funniest thing, 'cause it was the first time she didn't say no. She said, "I'll get back to you, I'll get back to you." And I just remember thinking that was such a huge win because she hadn't said no. And so, she got back to me an hour later and said that I could start a modified internship program and come in, I wouldn't be able to go on all of the tours and everything, but I would be able to do the internship. And the funny thing was, of course, these are a bunch of college students, so obviously, someone's hung over pretty much every day. And I went on every single museum tour except for one. So, it all worked out, and 20 years later, I'm still there. So, it shows that if you really dig in, you just keep calling , you might get an internship. And boy, have I really taken that one back in spades, because after I wrote the book, I have a lot of people calling me now and using the same tactic. So, Ms. Mary Libby's laughing somewhere as I tell the story .

Brian McComak: People will listen to the stories you tell them, right?

Lydia Fenet: Yes, it's true. I was like, "Wow, people actually read the book."

Brian McComak: I love it, I love it. I want to share a story of something that I really resonate with in your story here in a moment. But I just wanted to check or just invite everyone in the conversation, I certainly have, as Lydia has seen, I have a list of like 20 questions that I can ask her. And then, I'm also allowed to go off script, but we're here for you, everyone that's in the Zoom with us. So, if you have any questions that you'd like to hear Lydia or I talk about, feel free to put in the chat and Angelo will help make sure that we don't miss them. So, one of the things I wanted to share that I really resonated with as, and I'm sure we talked about this somewhere along the way, but I remember similarly, so my family, or my mom and dad are from small Kansas towns. So, they're good Midwestern people. And now, my dad decided to join the military to dedicate his life to serving our country. So, we moved around lots of different places, but I still think of Mom and Dad as those Midwestern people from those small towns. And those are the values and life experiences that we grew up with. And so, and I know that I've said this, there they're both from Kansas. I may have said that, but so I remember when I moved to New York City, it was like mind blown. My mom used to joke and she would say, "I know you didn't move to another country, "but it kind of feels like you did," because it's so different than, we lived in central Florida at that point. And it's so different. And I remember early on seeing an article on the front page of probably the "New York Times", but one of the major newspapers, and there was a picture of Christie's Auction House. And I remember reading about it. And I didn't even, similarly, I had no idea that that's how art got sold or what that existed. It seemed so far from the world I lived in. And for those of you who don't know, I moved to New York City working for Red Lobster, which I still love, Cheddar Bay Biscuits are amazing. But the idea of going from Red Lobster to Christie's Auction House seems like that wasn't even a bridge that existed, much less a bridge too far. And so, the fact that I

ended up there and got to meet people like you and Mary Libby, who is delightful and wonderful, it was an adventure that I just didn't expect that life was going to take me on. And I think it's all about whether it's the intentionality of picking up that phone every day, or just keep pounding the pavement, and opening doors, and making connections, and building relationships, you gotta do.

Lydia Fenet: Absolutely, and I think too, there's so many people who kind of closed doors before they're actually closed in life. And I truly see it all the time. I see it in my friends, I see it in some of my family members even, over time, where you're just sort of like, "If you saw what I see in you, "you would understand that you "have literally the entire world ahead of you, "but you keep stopping yourself from going any further." And I think once you allow yourself to really open your eyes and understand that no one is judging you for the decisions that you make, and if you move forward in a way that feels good to you and you are living in your truth, then you could do whatever you want. It doesn't matter where you're from or who you are. It's a question of how you choose to perceive yourself. And then, other people will perceive you in the same way. And I think I said this to you too, Brian, it was interesting when I wrote the book, I grew up in Louisiana, and in my 20s, I remember living in New York and a lot of people would say, "Oh, you're from Louisiana, I love New Orleans." I'm not from New Orleans, but I would absolutely say, "I love New Orleans too." So it wasn't a lie, but it wasn't entirely the truth. But I didn't want people to know that I was from a small town, 'cause I felt like that made something wrong with me, maybe I shouldn't be working at Christie's because I'm from a small town. And it was so wonderful to put it front and center in the book because I was just sort of saying like, "This is who I am "and I'm proud of the journey that I've been on, "I'm proud of whatever brought me to this place "and all of the things that I've learned along the way "have made me who I am." And I think that I draw on this in the book too. One of the chapters is about things I learned growing up in the South and how I've been able to apply those to the business setting. And I'm telling you, when I was running events for North and South America for Christie's, when things were going wrong and I was watching some of the people who worked on my team, who grew up in the city, who were going head to head with our clients over table placement, whereas I was sort of smiling while fixing everything behind the scenes, the way that I've been taught as a child, where my mom was throwing parties. And you can be the kitchen is on fire. But as long as you have a smile on your face, everyone will think that everything's fine. That's probably the best trick you'll ever have when you're planning events, or frankly, anything. You know in auctioneering, things go wrong. Plates are breaking, you're on stage in front of 700 people, waiters are dropping things, people are standing up and yelling at their friends or waving and you just have to roll with it and pretend that everything's fine on the surface, because you can fix it and nobody knows any different.

Brian McComak: Yeah, absolutely. Well, there was one auction where I almost fell off the stage. That was super fun.

Lydia Fenet: I've tripped a couple of times in heels and I'm six feet. So, I always say to the audience, "This could have been really bad, "not just a little bad, really bad."

Brian McComak: Yeah, well, and to your point though, things can happen anytime. I remember one auction where, while we were on onstage, doing the auction, I happened to be fortunate to be sharing the stage with Lorraine Bracco, amazing, amazing woman. We were having a lot of fun together. And the executive director came up and gave me another auction lot as we were in the middle of the auction.

Lydia Fenet: Yeah.

Brian McComak: Hey, well, here's this new item to auction. So you just have to roll with the punches sometimes.

Lydia Fenet: Absolutely, absolutely. And that's part of it.

Brian McComak: Yeah, Angelo, I'm curious. Did we get any questions or anything that...

Angelo Cilia: We have a question that just came in. First off, you have a fan club in the chat box, Brian, so we're gonna make batons, just so you know. And, yes, very good, we'll make sure you all get one. No, but there is a question for Lydia and for Brian, what was the hardest part of moving outside of your comfort zone from which you grew?

Lydia Fenet: I honestly think one of the largest amounts of growth that I've had has been in the past year with this book. And I wrote, just to give you a little bit of a quick story about the book. I started writing this book years ago, but I wasn't writing it, I was just telling everyone, remember how I was telling you about how I tell people that I'm doing things, even when I'm not, I told people that I was writing a book for many, many years before I started actually writing a book.

Brian McComak: Me too.

Lydia Fenet: And I told Brian that I was writing. I told everyone that I was writing a book. I was not writing a book. I was thinking about writing a book. And I basically told Uma Thurman and Jason Weinberg six or seven years ago that I was writing a book when we went out for breakfast, after they saw me take a charity auction and offered to take me out for breakfast, and asked me what I was gonna do with this talent that I had. I said, "Well, I wanna write a book about selling." So, that happened. That was the first time I can remember actually saying it to somebody who could have done something about

it. And then, an interesting thing happened, right? I guess it was 2017. So March of 2017, I was pregnant with my third child. And I was walking down the street. And my phone rang and this reporter who I had met eight years prior said, "Hi, this is Alex Strauss. "And I was wondering,, "are you still doing that thing where you go to work all day "and then you leave work and go take charity auctions?" And I said, "I am, I actually have two kids now. "So, I go home for a little while "so that I can do dinner and bath and get them in bed. "And then, auctions usually don't start till about nine. "So I do them after that, and oh, by the way, "I'm also having my last child in the next, who knows? "But like in the next month, really." And she said, "Well, do you have any more auctions?" And I said, "I do, I do have, "I have one more auction and it's in two weeks." And she said, "Can we photograph it?" And I said, "Absolutely, fine." So, there I found myself nine and a half, 'cause actually pregnancies goes to the full nine months. So, it's actually 10 And so, nine months and two weeks pregnant. And I'm tottering around New York City a pair of four inch heels. And I keep saying to the photographer, "Does this angle look good?" He's like, "No, no angle looks good, you're huge." And I eventually ended up going on stage that night at, I think nine or 10 o'clock at night with Kelly Ripa. I'm six feet tall. Kelly Ripa is four feet flat, I think she's like this big. And I think she weighs like 12 pounds so it was hilarious. think she weighs 12 pounds. So, it was hilarious. That was my last auction before my last baby was born. And I don't really recall anything that happened that day 'cause I was in so much pain 'cause the shoes hurt so badly and I was trying to look glamorous, but all I wanted to do was just go home and get on the couch. Anyway, flash forward to the end of the summer, I was sitting with my best friend and she said to me, "What ever happened to that 'New York Times' article?" I was sort of like, "Oh, you know what? "I had totally forgotten," because I had a baby two weeks later. So, I didn't think anything of it. So, I emailed the reporter and she said, "You know, "we decided to push it 'till October, "because October is going to be the philanthropy issue, "and I'll send you the transcripts so you can just read it." So, she sent it to me and she said to me, last thing she asked 11 o'clock at night as I'm getting into a cab, "What do you do when you get home after an auction?" And I said, "Well, I'm usually so amped up "from being onstage, I either read a book "or I write this book that I'm writing," I was not writing a book, "And I'm writing this book," and I saw it in print. And I just thought to myself, "You know what? "You either write a proposal "or you just never talk about it again." You've gotta stop because you're never gonna have this moment again. And so, for the next basically six weeks, I wrote a proposal for the book called "The Most Powerful Woman in the room," I added "Is You" when I was writing it later. But the interesting thing was that the timing is such a crazy thing. So basically, the day the article came out, it was two weeks after the Harvey Weinstein article came out. And if you really think about 2017, there was no groundswell of women's movement, nobody really cared about it. Donald Trump and the election definitely stirred something, and there was discussion, but there was no sort of unified voice behind that. And after that article came out, all of a sudden, there was a groundswell and you know what? Every publishing house wanted at that point was a book about a powerful woman. And I had a book called "The Most Powerful Woman in the Room" that just happened to be a proposal written. So, I guess I tell this story because I then had three months to write the book, and I was nursing my last child. I was so crazy busy at work. And I pulled it, I wrote every night, a thousand words a night until it was done. And I handed it in. And then, when you ask about the growth process, the biggest growth process for me was owning it because telling people that you're writing a book called "The Most Powerful Woman in the Room is You" really makes people question you. Especially again, we were not two years down the road where everyone was like, "Yes, girls, yes, women." It was really early in those days. And I remember our chairman at the time, Marc Porter, walks by me after he read the article in "New York Times". And he said, "The most powerful woman in the

universe," as he walked by and I just went bright red, because I couldn't even own it at that point 'cause I was so embarrassed that I'd written those words down. But then, over the process of A, writing the book, promoting the book and going on a book tour and hearing those women's stories, I realized that I had written the story and I had to own it. I had to be exactly who I was telling everyone I was because how I felt like I was on the inside. And so, it was just this amazing, it really was such an incredible sort of 18 months of growth. And I really, I can't explain it, but I say to people now, if there's any kind of panel where there's power woman in it, my friends have two things to say, first of all, "I went to a panel with a power woman panel, "and you were not on it." I was very upset. Or, "Oh, I have this women's panel "and you should be on it, Lydia, "or you should moderate it." And I realized I have given myself that space, right? I have created that and I believe that, and I know what I'm talking about, and I truly own this space and feel like I own this space now. And that for me was just incredible growth. So, that was a very long story, but there you go .

Brian McComak: I love it, I love it. Well, I knew each of the pieces of that story. I don't think I knew all of the way they all connected. So, I love that, thank you for sharing. And I will be brave and share with everyone that I'm writing a book now.

Lydia Fenet: Yes.

Brian McComak: So, it's now out there. It's somewhere, it's going to be memorialized on the social webs somewhere. So, there is a book happening about humanity in the workplace. So, stay tuned for a bookstore near you. I think I'm happy to answer as well. I think, and I shared about the first step, the big step of moving to New York City, but I kind of feel like I've made a career of stepping out of my comfort zone. I am someone who generally likes tradition, and routine, and consistency, and everything in my career is exactly opposite of that. I think the part that really resonates with me in a significant way is when I came to New York City, I needed to find my community. So, this is more about how did I get through it? I needed to find my community. And I found the New York City Gay Men's Chorus. And I found friends like Angelo, who helped me know that I was gonna be okay. And so, and what I've learned over the course of my journey is we can take those brave steps. And I encourage anyone that has the opportunity to take a brave step or a courageous step out of your comfort zone to do it, but have your fans with you, have your friends, have your supporters, have your community, because we don't do anything alone, nothing that Lydia and I are sharing about did we do on our own. We did it because we have friends, and family members, and people who believed in us, people who shared of their time, and energy, and wisdom, and ideas and suggestions, and we got to a better place. So, for me, at the very beginning, it was I just needed people who loved me in New York City. And I was fortunate to be embraced by New York City Gay Men's Chorus. They got me through the first three months. And then the journey just went from there in so many beautiful ways. And there are still people who are part of that journey who continue to be friends and champions. And actually my boss, who was the one who was the manager I worked for at Red Lobster, she's on the call today. And her name is Anita, say hi Anita, everyone.

Lydia Fenet: Hi, Anita.

Brian McComak: She's amazing. And I learned so much from her. But she supported me in that journey. So, there are people who make that difference for us along the way. Angelo, do I see another question pop up?

Angelo Cilia: There is another, there were a couple of questions. I'm gonna go with this one first. it's from Kelly A. Hern, Kelly is 26 years old, "Just starting off my sales and marketing career "and seeing how much experience you have is inspiring. "What was your mantra for building yourself up "and sharing your story, who you are?"

Lydia Fenet: So, I think that if you lead with honesty, and I think I was kind of going back to that, what I was saying earlier, as it pertains to the story about Louisiana and kind of fudging the truth with New Orleans, I think really the most important thing about sales and marketing of yourself is being authentic and telling the story, figuring out what your story is, figuring out what that angle is, and figuring out what you wanna do with what you have. So, I say to someone, I was not even coaching someone, someone literally on Instagram called or emailed me and asked if we could just jump on call, because she had a very small business that needed help. She needed to sell a certain number of these things in order to keep her business solvent during this time. And she said, "Do you think I should ask people for help?" And I said, "I absolutely think you need "to ask people for help. "You need to state your goal." That is the most important thing. We talk about it in charity auctioneering. If I'm getting on stage and I ask an audience to give me money, they'll give me money. If I need a certain amount of money and I tell them what that money is gonna do, and I get them there through just sheer hard work and language, we will get there. So, I would say to you at this point, when you're just starting out, like figure out who you are, figure out what you want from your career, and then figure out how to tell the story of yourself in a way that feels authentic. So, every time you go to a pitch, you're starting with a nugget of information about yourself and why you're the best person for this or a nugget of information about the story that you're telling about the product that you're selling. But I just believe that sales and marketing is such a storytelling environment and the people who do it best are the people who people come back to. And I would also say, don't ever underestimate the need for research in sales and marketing, because people so often walk into a meeting, thinking that the only thing they need to do is sell what they're selling. Half of the journey with sales and marketing is listening to the person across the table from you. So, if there is someone in front of you, ask them 20 questions about their business, what are their angles? What are they doing? Do they have grandkids? That'll keep them going for hours. But the point is that you need to get to know the person across the table to figure out what makes them tick. And once you have that information, whatever you're selling should meet those needs, not just walk in with a blind pitch every time.

Brian McComak: Yeah, absolutely. The one add that I would offer in the spirit of networking and making other connections is each of us want to tell our stories. And I just believe that humans are

inherently programmed to be helpful. So, there's that combination, right of, hey, can you tell me how you got to where you are? If you were having a coffee chat, how did you get where you are, what do you do? What did you learn along the way? What advice would you have for me? Those conversations, you get so much information. You get to build relationship and trust with someone else. And I got to have one of those conversations with someone a number of years ago, she reached out to me in sort of a cold call through I think it was LinkedIn. And a year later, I hired her to work on my team. So, it wasn't a direct cause and effect. We had a conversation, a coffee conversation, and a year later that hire happened. But sometimes it's really about building the relationship, which I think is a lot of what Lydia was just sharing as well is that relationship, which is built on the stories that you share.

Lydia Fenet: Yeah, and also my dad's favorite phrase, which we all use in my family is network or die, just network all the time, not just for the people in your industry, network with the person on the plane, network with, not right now, but when we get back on planes, when we are in social settings again, network or die. But it sounds actually like a horrible phrase right now, but I promise we were using it way pre COVID, I promise, a long time. but I will say honestly, as it pertains to just networking in general, this is a great time to network. I've had a lot of calls with people over LinkedIn. I've had a lot of just Zoom calls. Honestly, there's more time right now than there ever is. And there is time for 15 minutes here. Don't ask for an hour, jump on a call, meet someone, follow up with an email, follow up again. If something changes, just keep people updated on your journey, remind them how they met you in the first place. And then, just keep that door open. 'Cause as Brian said, it could be a year. And then all of a sudden they're like, "Wait, who was that amazing 26 year old woman named Kelly "who I met, yeah, I should hire her." And that's how it happens.

Brian McComak: Right, totally, well, and I know that we're not at the point in this conversation where I typically say, how do people find you? 'Cause we have a few more minutes before we get to the conclusion, but it seems like the perfect time to ask how do people, besides buying your book, which everyone should do, I would totally, I would hold it up. It's not with me right now because it's in the other place that I typically live, 'cause I have escaped the city for the pandemic. But how do people find you? Where can people find you?

Lydia Fenet: So, I'm very active on Instagram, so you can DM me on Instagram. And because I think I actually am the only person with my name in the world. My name is the only Lydia Fenet that you can find. So it's great. So Lydia Fenet on Facebook, Lydia Fenet on Instagram, Lydia Fenet on Twitter or Lydia Fenet on LinkedIn. So just go to town, feel free to DM me. You can send me messages, I'll respond. If I have time, we can jump on a call. So, I'm always happy to meet people. This is one of my favorite things.

Brian McComak: And tell us about what you're doing. 'Cause I know one of the things that I think each of us, which is each of us is trying to do is find our way through this strange, difficult, challenging time. And these calls are part of that journey for me of how do I give back? How do I find a way to make

connections? What does that look like? How do I explore this dream that I have of building this company? So, that's where these conversations came from. But you're doing something similar, right?

Lydia Fenet: Yes, exactly. So basically when we first, when all this first started happening, I'd take charity auctions in New York during this time in April and May. So, I'm usually on stage pretty much three or four nights a week taking auctions for different philanthropies, and towards the end of March, and not even towards the end of March, towards the middle of March, right as the gala season was starting to ramp up, all of the auctions were canceled. And if you understand, I think people see galas and they see people dressed up, and they're sort of like, eye roll, I don't need any of that right now, but what a lot of people don't understand is for a lot of nonprofits, 70 to 80% of their operating budget is raised that night. I got that clarity one year when I was just the very beginning of my charity auctioneering career, and I was late, the auction was running late, everything was late. I was so tired, it was a Saturday night. And I said to the guy who was their chief operating officer, he was making small talk, and he said something about the operating budget, and not even because I was really asking the question, I was just sort of leading the conversation. I said, "So, what is your operating budget?" He said, "You're about to tell me." And I was sort of like, "What do you mean?" And he said, "Whatever you raise tonight "is our operating budget "for the Boys and Girls Club next year." And I think that for me was such an awakening in terms of the need and also the reality of the job that I was getting on stage to do and how I needed to take it so seriously because kids' lives, kids' livelihoods, where they go in life are dependent on these organizations. And so, it just was such a wake up call for me. And so, when all of these organizations in May and March, April and May started canceling, I just felt so powerless. And so, I started an Instagram live for one in particular, called the River Fund, which is in Queens, New York, which I had visited in November. And they had a food pantry line at that point that was around a city block. And they emailed and said that, this was in the very beginning of the March, that there were so many people who were losing their jobs so quickly that it wrapped around three city blocks, and they just couldn't keep up with the need and they needed help. And just reading that and feeling like there was nothing I could do, I was sort of like, "Look, I don't have a stage, but I have my iPhone. "You know, I have more people who are following me "than I do in a room on any given night. "So, maybe I can use this platform "and I can use 'The Most Powerful Woman in the Room Is You' "and merge the two." And so, I started an Instagram live every night that I've been doing now for over a month, Monday through Friday, starts at six p.m. on the dot, it's over by 6:20. And I interview different women in industries that talking about fashion, talking about small businesses, talking about charities. Tonight, I'm speaking with an employment attorney about what to do if you lose your job and what resources you need and things you need to know. So, just sort of giving content to people who are at home and have 20 minutes of the day, just to sort of get a little bit of hope and inspiration, and also hopefully learn something that they can take with them. So, we've raised a lot of money for the River Fund, which is great, and it's been so nice 'cause people screenshot their donations and they're like, "I donated money." I just ask anyone who's joining to donate through a link in my bio. So, that's what I'm doing. I wish I could do it for every organization, but I felt like the focus on a very small one at this point was also very important.

Brian McComak: Yeah, absolutely. Well, thank you for doing that. Lydia. Yeah, well, and I feel similarly to you is realizing we, yes, there's a part of me that loves to be on stage and have the moment of performance and I enjoy entertaining, but the fuel behind that work is to help those organizations who do good in the world to raise the money they need to do what they do.

Lydia Fenet: To do what they do.

Brian McComak: Yeah, and I just felt so sad for them, for those organizations that had to cancel their spring events because I know what that money means to them, so.

Lydia Fenet: It's also, just one other thing. It's a very difficult time too, because we saw this after September 11th in the charity and nonprofit sector, everybody goes towards COVID relief right now. So, it's all the emergency funds that are set up that need money immediately, for PPE, for COVID research, for the vaccine. So, all of the money that would typically go for the neighborhood food bank or funding cancer research, things that still need to happen, immediately disappears. And as people lose their jobs, all the extra sort of 100, \$50 donations that would have existed also dry out. So, I've had a lot of women on and I always ask them to shout out philanthropies. And one woman in particular just said, "Listen, if you do nothing else this year, "just give something to the organization "that you have given to in the past, "because they're gonna need it regardless."

Brian McComak: That's a good plug. Good reminder for all of us.

Lydia Fenet: Yeah.

Brian McComak: Absolutely. Angelo, I'm guessing we have, do we have other questions? Oh, Angelo, you're on...

Angelo Cilia: There I am. We have another question, sorry. My finger was too fast. Since we're moved onto some COVID-19 questions, there's a great question that came through from Toby Usnik.

Lydia Fenet: Oh, Toby, hi!

Brian McComak: Hi, Toby.

Angelo Cilia: Hi Toby , as brands come through COVID-19, how do you coach their leaders to the humanity in their actions? Examples, layoffs closures, uncertainty.

Lydia Fenet: Well, do you wanna start this because you have an entire consulting agency set up to discuss this and then I'll tell you what I think ?

Brian McComak: Yeah, well, and there are so many layers to this, and there are suggestions and recommendations I would make for very specific aspects of those difficult conversations. What I would think though, what I would suggest right now is, and what's most important is to remember that those people who are impacted are humans, who have lives and have kids that they have to feed or who have, I remember once when I had to have a lay off conversation with someone, what he was most worried about was his benefits because he had a son who was in addiction treatment, and he wanted to make sure his son could continue in that treatment program, and being able to answer those questions. And so, what happens I think in corporate America sometimes, and understandably, corporate America is largely driven by the spreadsheets and the profit and loss analysis. And so, we look at head count. So the number of heads that work at that company. And then, we say we have to take this number down. The number has to be reduced. Well, each one of those individual numbers is a person who has been impacted. And if you treat them with humanity, with respect, with care, with consideration, it doesn't take away the fact that the message that is being delivered might be difficult, but it helps them to navigate that journey and say I've been treated well. And so, that their emotion and energy can be focused on how do I take this? How do I deal with this? What do I do next, rather than I'm angry about how I was treated, because that's not the focus we want for them. We really want them to be able to say, I respect the decision, I respect that I was cared for and treated humanely, how do I move forward? So, I think that's the biggest thing is just to remember that those people, they're people.

Lydia Fenet: Yeah, and I think, just in terms of leadership now with my own team, I feel like I've always been a very hands on boss. So, I do know my team well, but I also feel like there are certain personalities that, on different days are having different emotions, and there's a need for all of that. And this morning, we had a group meeting call. And one of my team members, who has a very fiery personality, was clearly upset about something. And this has happened throughout the past couple of months, where immediately after the call, I just pick up the phone and I call her, how are we doing, you okay? Just ask that question, And this morning, the answer was, "I had a bumpy morning, "I had a bumpy morning," is was that simple. And she doesn't really need to tell me any more than that. It's just things aren't always okay, and that's okay. I was sharing with Brian and Angelo that I had one of those mornings that I haven't had since basically the second week of our sort of quarantine time, where just pictures and questions from the kids, and questions from the teachers. And all of a sudden, I found myself crying. And I couldn't explain why I was crying. I just couldn't stop crying . And I think we're all going through that right now. And so, leaders need to understand that they're not the only people feeling these emotions, and some people are getting a high off of this, and starting an Instagram live and doing a billion things. And other people just wanna crawl under a blanket and cry every single day.

And so, checking in with your team, asking the questions, asking them all as a group, how are you doing? And I set up a daily call six weeks ago, and we have been doing that, or 60 days ago, I don't even know how long it's been, but we do a daily call every morning, every single morning at 8:30 in the morning, and I'm central time, so it's 9:30 for them. But the point is that we're touching base every single day, even if it's for 20, 30 minutes, just to sort of check in on everyone. And I think that's what leadership needs to be now, It's good for people to see kids in pictures. It's good for people to understand that they're dealing with parents or just dealing with themselves at that point. So, I think that is what we're gonna see out of this. I really do.

Brian McComak: Yeah, well, I certainly hope that what we, well, I feel like we're seeing a lot of humanity emerge in our world and certainly our workplaces from this. And certainly there are some really wonderful stories of organizations that are showing up in really wonderful ways in how they treat their employees. And so, I'm hoping we can take that with us as we architect our next normal, as I'm starting to hear people say. What I love what you shared, Lydia, and actually it reminded me that one of the clients I'm working with right now is doing this, is that there is that personal connection of just, and whether the person is still with you or whether the person has been impacted by a furlough or a layoff, they're still part of your community. And I encourage leaders and managers to make those personal calls to check in. It is a wonderful action step that can help people feel seen and heard, and that they're cared for. And that's so important, I think all the time, but certainly right now.

Lydia Fenet: And one more tip for people, just because you said furloughed, and if there are people who are furloughed and are not checking in for work, because they can't, it doesn't mean that they don't want to be there, right? It's just they're kind of on hold and on pause. So, one other thing you can do is build in, like as I said, we have a daily meeting. So on Wednesdays, we built in a little extra time in the morning 'cause one of the women who's furloughed for us in the U.K. is pregnant, she's due in June. So, we did a virtual baby shower where we had cupcakes and flowers delivered to her house. And then we came up, she's Dutch, and we came up with this absurd list of names for her daughter . Did you know the name Moog is a big name in Amsterdam, apparently? So, we all had a good laugh about that. But anyway, the point is you can do things, even though she's furloughed, it doesn't mean that she's not a person and she doesn't necessarily wanna see the team. So, build an extra five or 10 minutes before a call and just have a social call. They can drop off and you can continue with something scheduled. So yeah, treat people like humans, treat people like you'd want to be treated if you were an employee. That's what leadership's about.

Brian McComak: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. One thing that we haven't talked about, you've mentioned the fact that you're a mom, but as we've been navigating these last couple of months and certainly across the corporate America, but in the diversity equity inclusion space, one of the things we've talked about a lot is the impact to parents and how parents are navigating this new world, where they're responsible for doing their jobs, they're responsible for teaching their kids, they're locked at home with their significant others, who they hopefully love, but it's a lot . It's a lot for a human.

Lydia Fenet: Mm-hmm.

Brian McComak: And I got to see you in action when we caught up a couple of weeks ago on FaceTime and I got to see what real life was like for you in that moment. So I'm just curious, and I know, I think, I'm not a parent yet, hopefully I will be, but for the parents out there, or those of us that are trying to understand what this is like for parents, can you tell us a little bit about your experience?

Lydia Fenet: Yeah, it's intense. We have three kids who are all homeschooling and none of their timings line up. So, it's been very challenging. I think a lot of it has to do with the structure you put in place. I try to do everything the night before and moved all the calendars so we can sort of see what things are gonna look like the next day. But it's an imperfect science and look, there are sometimes, the kids are just so not into it, but you don't wanna push them to do something. My kids are pretty small. They're three, five and seven. So, it's junior kindergarten, first grade where the first grader actually has a full school, our junior kindergarten has sort of three random classes throughout the day, there almost never at the same time. And then our three year old, we're not even really sure what was going on there . So, we're just sort of trying to do the best we can and understanding that, as long as our first grader seems on track, and we are as a family unit, staying together and not getting on each other's nerves too much, and just trying to be joyful and not constantly fighting, that that's the best we're gonna be able to do right now. And that's it, what else can you do? You look for the silver lining, oh. I will trade you my children for that dog.

Brian McComak: Lydia, you probably didn't, I should have warned you, one of the things that I did not consider that, when I scheduled these events from three to four, is that Bosco gets dinner at four. And so, as we approach four o'clock .

Lydia Fenet: Bosco needs dinner.

Brian McComak: Yeah, he says, "Dad, do you know I'm still here? "Are you going to make sure you feed me?" So, he's also been given the title chief happiness officer of Hummingbird Humanity. So, 'cause he makes us all smile, so.

Lydia Fenet: Bosco looks like he has the softest ears I've ever seen. I just wanna sort of pet him through the screen.

Brian McComak: He's the sweetest, he's the sweetest.

Lydia Fenet: I think Brian, when we were having our call a couple of weeks ago, I think I had to get off the call because as I said, the school cafeteria is opening. 'Cause all three of my kids were on the door knocking, asking for sandwiches . So, this is just the reality of where we are, and there's nothing you can do about it. And it won't be like this forever. Or maybe it will, but let's hope that there's a happy medium, that we'll all find. So, I think that's just, honestly, in my opinion, that is what's going on right now. We're all doing the best we can. And we have to forgive each other for the things that are going wrong and celebrate the things that are going right. And keep moving forward one day at a time.

Brian McComak: I love that, I love that. Well, Angelo, before I start with closing thoughts, any other questions that we need to respond to?

Angelo Cilia: Nope, people are starting to log off, so, but everybody is loving it, I will say that. There's a lotta loves in the room there.

Lydia Fenet: Well, thank you guys so much for joining. This has been so fun.

Brian McComak: Yeah, well, I feel like I got to catch up with an old friend, which is true, and still I feel that Angelo's here. So any, I think we've covered how to catch you, Lydia. Anything else that you wanna share? Any parting words or any other thoughts on what's next for you?

Lydia Fenet: Just .

Brian McComak: Oh, look.

Lydia Fenet: As I said. Just hang in there, everyone, just hang in there. We'll get through it. Next year, we'll all be thinking about this and wishing we were still there, and this is my Beatrice, this is my oldest.

Brian McComak: Hello, thank you for joining us. Well, I'm really grateful to everyone for being here today. I'm super grateful that we get to do this, and that my dear friend, Lydia, was able to spend some time with us and share her story. Next week, I'm super excited that Ben Greene will be with us.

Lydia Fenet: Oh, amazing.

Brian McComak: I have become a huge Ben Greene fan. So, I will try not to be too much of a groupie, but I recall I'm on with Ben, and you have to watch Ben's TEDx talk, you have to see everything he's done, he's amazing. So, Ben is just about to graduate college from Brandeis University, and he already has a TEDx talk and he shares about his journey as a transgender person and his work, really championing for others. So, really an amazing human, and I hope you all join us next week. You'll see here at the bottom of the screen, if you have thoughts on today or suggestions for the future, there's a special format, hummingbirdhumanity.com/live. So, we'd love to hear your thoughts and suggestions. And then, please do follow us on social media. Hummingbird Humanity is on both LinkedIn and Facebook. And I think Lydia, you shared you're on both of those platforms as well as Instagram, you're a big Instagramer.

Lydia Fenet: Instagram is my main, yeah, Instagram is the main one. That's where you'll find me the most .

Brian McComak: Amazing, amazing. So, we'll hang out here for just a couple of minutes, as people are saying goodbye. So if you have any final questions for us or anything, feel free to throw them in chat. I'll keep an eye on chat, but we'll say goodbye to everyone. And thank you again for being here. Happy Wednesday.

Lydia Fenet: Happy Hump Day, almost over .

Brian McComak: We've almost made it through, I love it.

Lydia Fenet: So, the weekend that I love.

Brian McComak: Well, I don't know. Well, actually I do feel like there is a difference for the weekend these days so.

Lydia Fenet: I do too.

Brian McComak: Well, is she gonna come back, is she gonna come say hi again?

Lydia Fenet: Okay, she's going to put some makeup, so she has theater.

Brian McComak: Oh, I love it.

Lydia Fenet: Virtual theater, they actually have a virtual theater performance next week, which I think is gonna be very interesting. Can't wait.

Angelo Cilia: How do you get tickets to that?

Lydia Fenet: I can send you the link if you're interested in joining .

Angelo Cilia: It sounds interesting.

Lydia Fenet: Yeah, I think it's gonna be great. So, it's kind of a new everything, but I have to say it's been, the amazing thing has been to watch the creativity of all the teachers coming together to come up with things to do for all of these classes and even the dance classes and things like that. They all have the teachers' teaching and they do things that are different every day, but then they also do the rehearsal, it's amazing to watch.

Angelo Cilia: The amount of innovation and ideas, and just people thinking outside of the box more than they've ever thought about it is just incredible and so inspiring.

Lydia Fenet: Yeah.

Brian McComak: Yeah, well, yeah, well, send it around, I love it.

Angelo Cilia: Yeah .

Brian McComak: We'll make them real famous.

Lydia Fenet: I promise I will do that .

Brian McComak: Lydia, thank you so much, this was delightful.

Lydia Fenet: Oh my gosh, my pleasure, this was so wonderful. Thank you Brian for having me and Angelo thank you for moderating.

Angelo Cilia: Thank you, Lydia.

Lydia Fenet: Really appreciate it.

Brian McComak: Bye everyone, we'll talk to you soon.

Lydia Fenet: Bye, thanks again.

Brian McComak: Bye, bye.

Lydia Fenet: Bye Bosco, have a good dinner.