

Episode 1 Anna Obi - Why Have a Mentor, The Student View

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Episode 1

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Gerry (00:11):

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Welcome to the Seidman Mentorship Podcast. This is your captain speaking. On this show we navigate the voyage of life through the lens of Lakers, some who have just come aboard and others who are well underway. We will speak with experts who will show us the ropes, help us plot a course, and recount exhilarating tales of uncharted territory all while promoting lifelong learning agility and a culture of mentorship.

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Gerry (00:38):

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Today on the show we welcome Anna Obi. Anna is a senior with a double major in criminal justice, legal studies, and juvenile justice. She hails from Brampton, Ontario, where she mastered the track and field sport of triple jump. She holds the Grand Valley school record for a massive 12.11-meter leap and earned the GLIAC all academic honors. Anna and I will talk about why you may want a mentor in your life, how to find one, and how to establish a relationship.

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Gerry (01:10):

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Ahoy, Anna, welcome aboard and welcome to the show.

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Gerry (01:13):

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Hey Gerry, how are you?

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Gerry (01:14):

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You like this nautical theme we're doing here. Don't you?

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Anna (01:17):

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I do. I do. There's a lot of puns involved. I love it.

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Gerry (01:20):

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We're having a little bit of fun with the Laker theme, and thanks so much for taking time to speak with us. I couldn't think of anybody better that I wanted to kind of explain what mentorship is about from the student side of things.

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Anna (01:33):

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Yeah, of course. Thank you for having me. I'm happy to be here.

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Gerry (01:36):

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Well, it's a pleasure to have you aboard. So, tell us a little bit about yourself, where you're from and your Laker voyage thus far. Okay.

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Anna (01:43):

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So, I'm from Brampton, Ontario, Canada. I'm a senior. I study criminal justice and I have a double minor in legal studies and juvenile justice. I plan on getting my MSW. I'm also a student athlete here at Grand Valley. I'm on the track team. I'm a triple jumper.

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Gerry (02:02):

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One heck of a triple I will add.

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Anna (02:05):

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Thank you.

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Gerry (02:05):

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Don't believe us, go over to the Kelly turf center and look on the wall and you'll find somebody's name up there. So that's super cool.

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Anna (02:13):

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And yeah, and honestly, I'm just big on networking, meeting new people, and learning new stuff. Honestly. That's cool.

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Gerry (02:22):

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So when I say mentor, what do you think of?

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Anna (02:27):

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I think of someone that is going to like guide you, they're basically showing you the ropes of things that you are, uh oh pun!

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Gerry (02:42):

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That's our nautical theme! Come on aboard we'll show you the ropes.

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Anna (02:42):

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They're showing you the ropes of challenges that you may face in your life in the future, or just kind of giving you a sense of direction.

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Gerry (02:54):

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I think that's so important because I think a lot of people confuse, and we'll talk about this in a little bit, the difference between a coach and a mentor. Being an athlete, you've got a lot of coaches and you've had a lot of coaches throughout life. You've also had your family around you. And you've also, it sounds like, had some mentorship experience that we'll talk about specifically, but I'm going to jump ahead. Tell us a little bit about your coaches and your mentors, and kind of are coaches and mentors different to you, or are they same? How are they similar? How are they different?

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Anna (03:21):

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Honestly, I feel like for the most part they're mostly similar. I genuinely think so. I think the only difference between like a coach and a mentor is that the monetary value. Like the coach is getting paid to do one and a mentor is kind of just doing it out of their kindness of their heart. I'm not saying my coaches don't do it from the kindness of heart. They are, but yeah, my coaches do the same thing that the mentors in my life have, they show me the ropes, they teach me, and they guide me and make sure I stay on the right path. They still allow me to make faults here and there. So, I learned that looking at the grand scheme of things, they're there to make sure I stay on the right track and make sure I have a good support system. That's there for me. And knowing I have resources and showing me options just to make sure I have like a clear and level head, like going through this transition of my life.

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Gerry (04:17):

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And that never stops. So, I'll tell you that from experience, because even when you're old and gray, like me, you're still going to likely have mentors in your life as I do and still call on them because life doesn't seem to get any less complicated as we go forward. So back to my original question, now that you kind of talked a little bit about the difference between a coach and mentor, when I say mentor, what specific things do you think of and how have you used your mentors more specifically in the past?

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Anna (04:44):

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I specifically think about networking and connections and that is genuinely the way I've been using it. I, as an international student currently, it's very difficult to continue to

work in the U.S. so I've been dealing with that, so networking a lot, making connections, and reaching out to mentors to help guide me. So definitely networking connections. They, my mentors in the past and currently, put me in the right, put me in front of the right people that I need to talk to. So, they're showing me all the resources that I need. So, whether that's in Grand Valley, outside of Grand Valley, and the community, I know that I have people around me that I can reach out to and they will get me in connection with another person and so on. And so on, next thing I know the whole grand rapids community. It's pretty cool though.

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Gerry (05:40):

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There's nothing wrong with that. I call it the personal board of directors, right. Facing the situation, no matter where it's at for our incoming first year students, it's the what do we need to know about Grand Valley? And it's nice to be able to pick up the phone, or send a text, or have a video chat with somebody who's been there and yeah.

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Anna (05:59):

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Exactly. Very helpful.

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Gerry (06:02):

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So, yeah. How do you think mentors and this program that we're launching now, or we're specifically kind of focusing on this first year student, how can these mentors specifically help you think first year?

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Anna (06:16):

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I think honestly just being there just because as a freshman you're overwhelmed, there's a lot of stuff going on and you have a lot of questions, and sometimes you're afraid to ask those questions. So just letting the first-year students know that, hey, I'm here for you. If you have any questions, whether you think they're dumb or not, they're probably not dumb. Just ask them. Cause like I'm here to support you and show you around and give you the resources you need. Looking back, like I wish I kind of had, like I had those like slight resources, but it'd be cool to have like this like little peer mentorship that you

guys are starting. I think it's a really good idea. Cause freshman year you come in and you're like, I have a lot of questions, but I'm afraid to ask.

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Gerry (07:00):

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Certainly. And for sure. And then, you know, other than, can you think of something specifically in your freshman year that you just found like overwhelming that either a mentor other than trying to nav the Mackinaw buildings? First thing I think of, right. Like navigating Mackinaw building, like, you know even I get lost in the Mackinaw building, of course they've added onto it like four times since my undergraduate days at Grand Valley. And now my professional career at Grand Valley, you know, you get lost in there. So other than the Mackinaw building, is there something specific you remember from freshman year where you're like, man, it was so great to have a mentor or you're like, I figured this out later, but it would be so much nicer just to call somebody.

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Anna (07:40):

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Hmm. I would think where to like meet new people, and just kind of be like one with the community. That's like definitely a big thing. Being an athlete that was kind of like, kind of like given at the same time You didn't really know anybody other than athletes, so it'd be nice to be able to like, know where to go and hang out where to eat, where to meet other freshmen and stuff like that. Also, I know that with orientation, they pushed us a lot, like tutoring and stuff like that. I wish like it'd be nice to have like a peer tell you like, yo, this is fine. If you do this, like, it doesn't make you any less smart or anything. Like I promise you're going to get the help that you need from doing this. So, kind of just that, and like, I remember being a freshman and like scheduling stuff was a little bit tricky. So having someone that's gone through what you've gone through, that's not an advisor to tell you is like, nice before you get to that next step of like talking to advisor, if you need to. So those are kind of the main things that me being a freshman, like stuck out to me.

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Gerry (08:48):

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Was the transition difficult for you? I mean, being an international student, had you ever been to the Allendale or the Grand Rapids area before I make it especially difficult or because of your sports background and how much you've traveled and stuff? I was like, nah, whatever.

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Anna (09:05):

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It was a mixture of both. Definitely coming to Allendale was a little culture shock coming from a big city. Like Toronto is huge and my hometown is huge too. So, coming to Allendale, it's very quiet here, but like I kind of like it because Grand Rapids is still like pretty close. You can just take the Laker line. So, you kind of have the city and the little quiet country area. So, it was really nice. But yeah, for the most part I feel like I adjusted pretty well. Aside from the athletics side of things, I honestly, I was just trying to get a feel for everything at once. It was, it was really overwhelming. I was like, okay, I have these orientations, I have the international stuff, I have the athletic ones, and I have like my on-campus housing orientation. So, okay. Well I have to, I have two that are mandatory. So, the other ones, the housing one, I don't know if I'm going to go, so I didn't get to like mingle as much as I wanted to, but later throughout the years, like I definitely discovered it on my own by just sitting at the library, just walking around campus. Everyone's very friendly.

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Gerry (10:16):

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So many resources the university has. You mentioned the library, libraries that exist both at Pew and Allendale campus. And I think there's so many tools in the toolbox. And I think sometimes the overwhelming part is the mentor. The professor, the advisor dumps out every tool, you know, imagine this table, you just have this giant toolbox and you dump it all on. And you're like, this is what we got. And they're excited about it. And they're like, you want this and you want this and you want this, you walk out going, oh, I don't know that I want you. Right. You know, and then you're thinking about your major declarations. And then you're thinking about when you're going to graduate. And then you get to your level and now you got to get, you know, going to move on with your career. And I think what you said earlier, and then I'm going to ask you for in a second, is this networking idea and this idea and identity, this connection to community I think is, is really important. And it's got a lot of traction right now. And I think that's why the timing is right for kind of this mentorship program. Because everybody I talk to, I say, Hey, we're doing this mentorship program is like, I'm in the professionals, in the community, the students, the peer mentors that are in the middle of that. Everybody's in on this program and everybody's paid the same. It's all voluntary program stuff. So, I think that's cool. So, there's a lot of mentors listening to this, take us through what you're looking for right now.

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Anna (11:42):

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Currently in my position right now, I'm looking for someone who is just going to get me engaged in the community with the right resources that I need with organizations and companies that relate to my field of study. So basically, from there, I would like to have that lead into internships or volunteer opportunities so that I'm able to possibly like work for that company or organization. So yeah, I've been reaching out to many people, whether that's through LinkedIn or just through word of mouth. And I have been, it's been working for me and I've tried to find one specific mentor now, just so I can have that one direct source of guidance, but for the most part I have faculty from GV. I have places from the YWCA to every little corner. I kind of have people helping me. So, it's nice and the connections are being made.

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Gerry (12:40):

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So when you meet this new person or you meet new people, how do you form those relationships and how do you, how does that, I mean, maybe it doesn't always lead to mentorship, you know, you decide or whatever, but I think that there's a lot of talk nowadays, especially for students about human skills. And back in my day, we used to call them soft skills. But it's the idea that you learn how to have a conversation, how to pitch yourself, develop your own personal brand. And some people do this very naturally and some people carry a card in their pocket, and both ways are correct. Yeah. How do you do it? How do you meet new people? And when you do, how do you introduce that, those topics?

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Anna (13:21):

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So, I've actually been that person where it's like, I wouldn't even do this. Like I definitely stepped out of my comfort zone and I'm still learning. But one thing I did learn is that I have to know what exactly I want from this and what I want from this person. And I don't mean that in the wrong way. I mean, it, like, what, how can I better explain to this person what I need help with? So, once I figured that out, I'm like, okay, I'm able to just have a conversation and just ask for help and have that conversation be yourself. And that person is going to take you for who you are, because you're being your genuine self and your authentic. And then if they don't know how to help you, they may know someone that can help you. So then that connection has just been formed just based off

you, knowing what you want and you being yourself. So that's kind of what I've learned and I'm taking the ball and rolling with it.

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Gerry (14:18):

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It's very smart. And like you said, if you know what you want, but let's talk about that a little bit. How do you, how do you, do, I assume as an athlete, you think about goal planning all the time and you have very concrete objective goals, whether it's to, you know, gain another X amount of centimeters and your next jump or whatever it is that you're doing. How do you do goal planning when it comes to the question of life? Because that's what we're here to figure out, right? Yeah. College this giant lab, right. We're trying to experiment and figure out where we fit, where resonate is my word into who we're going to become, not beyond your degree and be under job, but who am I going to become? And how does that satisfy my requirement for life?

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Anna (15:05):

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Um in my case, honestly, it's it took a lot of self-reflection like, I honestly thought back to like what like my childhood interests were, this is kind of weird, but I knew that growing up, like I wanted to be a doctor. I wanted to be a nurse. Like I just wanted to do anything that involved helping somewhat. So, as I got older, I'm like, okay, I don't think I can handle the doctor setting or the nurse settings. So, I'm okay. But I still want to help people. So, then I'm like, okay, I'm interested in things related to crime. For some reason, I'm just nosy in that sense. I want to know what's going on. Whenever the police cars, or ambulances are there, I want to know. So, I'm like, okay. So how can I tie helping people mixed with crimes?

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Anna (15:46):

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So, then I started doing my research and then I got my degree while I'm getting my degree in criminal justice. And then I'm like, okay, I kind of want to further that. I'm like, I have a passion for like, advocating for people. Like this is like really fun. So, then I took it up a notch and I'm like, okay, what are careers that I can do such and such things. And then I saw social work and I'm like, oh, okay, cool. Now I'm like, we're getting somewhere. And then I started piecing the puzzles together. And then I started asking around and that's when the questions started appearing. And then once I realized

there's so many different types of jobs out there that like check off all the boxes that like I'm interested in and I'm like, okay, I'm going to start shadowing. These people are going to start asking questions and that's kind of the current stage I'm at right now. I was able to shadow someone at the Muskegon public defense office. And it was pretty cool cause she's a social worker, but she worked alongside an attorney. And then after I did that, I was like, okay, I think I found it. I'm like, I get to use both my graduate and undergraduate and I get to help people. I'm okay. Yeah. I think I narrowed it down. So, it took some reflection.

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Gerry (16:56):

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So, where's your future plans now? So, do you see yourself? Do you lay these out and in five years I'm going to do this and one year I'm going to do that? Do you think about that?

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Anna (17:04):

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Yeah, so I do. And I also try to not think about too much because I feel like it's just going to happen naturally. But I do think about the what I'm going to do one year from now, five years from now, and the kind of the way I organize myself with that is what I can do in the now to control it and continue to execute that. And it's just going to get me from there to plan B.

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Gerry (17:33):

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I am so jealous if I had known half of that, when I graduated from Grand Valley, I could have been so much further ahead, but you're absolutely right. And a lot of people don't know what they want to do and, and that's okay. Yeah. And it's just picking a, point, I'll go back to our, our sailing references. You picked that point on the horizon and go get it. And then you pick the next one and the next one, the next one. And pretty soon you've got quite a voyage that you've done. And it's just important because if you're aimless, then not that, I mean, the journey is important, but where are you going? And where have you been when you're all done with it? And I think what you're doing is brilliant and that is, that is mentorship. And I think too much has been tried to many mentorship programs have been put into a box or said, you're going to do it this way.

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Gerry (18:23):

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And you have to have this and you have to do this and this and this. And what we're talking about here is exactly what the focus of this program is. And that's building that relationship and then creating time, space and conversation around self-actualization. Who am I going to be in the future? And I can bounce it off to somebody. And they're like, yeah. You know, that makes sense. Or no, that does not make sense. And then you find those people to have those experiences. And if you're the student out there, who's listening to this going well, I'm not doing all that, that's perfect because then you can come in and talk to your mentor about what you're interested in, discover careers you didn't even know existed, just like you did. And that's the brilliance of that. You don't have to do it alone. We don't sail the ship by ourselves. And if you're new, you're probably not supposed to walk up to the wheel and say, let's do this thing. It might be good to walk around and meet some of your shipmates of life and kind of figure out how show me the ropes.

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Anna (19:24):

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It takes a team!

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Gerry (19:24):

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See how things are going on. Right. Yeah. Right. So, absolutely. Brilliant. Anything else you think the listeners would be interested to know anything you want to share?

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Anna (19:37):

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Hmm. I would say to all the incoming students just honestly ask questions and don't be afraid to be yourself. I wish I like spoke up more and I asked more questions because I definitely would have started this process earlier. So, it's not too late to start it. But if I just like spoke up because I had a lot of questions that I just didn't ask, I just got to myself. So maybe if I just spoke up and like showed my true personality, even then we get to begin with that. These things would have happened earlier. And I would have been a little bit ahead of the game, but yeah, that's my advice to all that coming from first years.

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Gerry (20:13):

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That's good advice and, and hopefully we're going to help create some of those connections. So, people have that person reach out to you and ask that question that maybe they didn't want to ask in the middle of an orientation with everybody else sitting around or at a mixer. And you know, that first day of class, when your instructor is going to hand you this giant syllabus and be like, here we go. Is there any questions? And you're like, I'm so glad I found my way into Mackinaw today. And if you get trapped in a staircase, you know, my alarm clock went off and I found something to eat before class. You know, sometimes it's those little victories that get us through the day. Anna, absolutely a pleasure to speak with you. Thank you so much for being on the podcast. We wish you all the success in the world. And I know we're, we're very proud of your accomplishments. And I think about you every time I'm at the Kelly, I look at the wall, your name. So, I hope that your record stands for many, many, many years to come.

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Anna (21:09):

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Thank you so much. And thank you for having me it was a pleasure.

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Gerry (21:12):

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It was our pleasure to.

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Gerry (21:16):

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Thank you for sailing along on this episode of the Seidman Mentorship Podcast. For more information on the Seidman school of business mentorship program at Grand Valley State University set your heading to www.gvsu.edu/Seidman. If you have a story to tell, know someone we should interview, have questions or comments, email us at go2gvbiz@gvsu.edu. Until next time, keep a weathered eye on the horizon and we wish you Fairwinds, so long.

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Speaker 4 (22:10):

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Outro Music