

[Theme music: upbeat electronica plays in the background as Katie speaks before fading out.]

Katie Axelson: Welcome to Have Hope; Will Travel. When we travel, we get to know people who are different than we are. We hear different perspectives, and we better understand other stories. We learn to stand with people instead of just having opinions on issues. I'm your host Katie Axelson. Today we're learning from my new friend Kellina. Kellina is a deaf queen boss; she's an entrepreneur, a life coach, an activist, an author. She's passionate about guiding and supporting people with disabilities to try different tools and strategies to reach their full potential. Today she's here to educate us a little bit about her own experience. Kellina, welcome to the show!

Kellina Powell: Thank you so much for having me. I'm excited to be here.

KA: Yeah, thank you so much for being willing to share your perspective because I think it's going to be one that's really helpful, and I'm excited to get to learn from you. So let's just jump right in: do you prefer the term hard of hearing or do you prefer the term Deaf?

KP: I go with both, but I know a lot of people refer to me as a hard of hearing person.

KA: I want to do whatever you prefer, so.

KP: [Kellina laughs.] Okay.

KA: Have you always been hard of hearing or was that a new development throughout your life?

KP: I would say that when I was growing up, I was known as Deaf, and the term hard of hearing did not come until later in my life.

KA: Oh, interesting, okay.

KP: They were creating new terms for people who wear hearing aids compared to people who do not wear hearing aids and those who do ASL. Compared to myself, I wear hearing aids but I don't do ASL.

KA: Okay. I do ASL, but I am hearing so it hardly counts! [Katie and Kellina laugh.] So were you born deaf?

KP: No I was not born deaf. I became deaf at the age of four due to an ear infection.

KA: Oh wow. So do you have memories before that?

KP: Yeah of course! Yeah I have a lot of memories. I was a normal kid, you know? Just having fun, normal hearing, and I was going to the daycare. I was in daycare, I know that.

KA: Yeah. How did your experience change after losing your hearing?

KP: I would say it changed a lot just because of the daycare. I was prescribed ear drops for my ear infection and they didn't follow the instructions. However the same day, the same day they did not follow the instructions, I actually became deaf when I got home.

KA: Wow.

KP: So that whole time frame, period, where my hearing was dropping, and I wouldn't even

notice. So from that memory, I remember my mom was calling me in front of the TV and I didn't even hear her. The TV was actually loud, I didn't even know. Not until my mom tapped my shoulder and she said, "Kellina, I've been calling you." I literally jumped. And I was like - and I looked at her, and I'm like "I can't hear you." And she said, "What? Wait, the TV is loud!" But my mom's like, "Okay it makes sense." She was talking to me and she turned on the volume, I still couldn't hear her. And I told my mom, like "Mom I cannot hear you." So luckily my grandma came, rushed from the hospital because my mom phoned her. My grandmother is actually a nurse at the time, thankfully!

KA: Yeah!

KP: So she just like, doing assessments with me and then my grandma said "Okay, this is not a joke. She cannot hear anything at all." So we called my family doctor right away to see if we could see him during that day, and unfortunately he was booked. He was like, "Come the next morning." So we went the next morning and there's nothing we can do. I became deaf.

KA: Wow.

KP: Yeah. See my family shocked, I - I remember my grandmother just came to me, she smiled at me, gave me a big hug. I could see my mom is the strong one, she was like "there's no one in the family who's deaf. So like how are we going to communicate with her?" Like: what is the next step for this little girl? And like, she's four years old, she doesn't know anything, you know? So yeah, so that was my story. I was very confused, I was lost. I couldn't hear anything at all, 'cause I'm looking at my doctor. Why does he keep looking at my ears, what's happening, yeah. So.

KA: How did you learn to communicate at that point?

KP: Honestly, they tried to communicate with me through like, paper. I only remember how they end up communicating. I think my mom tried to write some stuff - my writing was not that bad when I was four. I was very smart and I could tell her what's happening. And then... I was just yeah. I don't even know. Honestly, I feel like I remember my grandma just came to me, she's trying to say something to me and I don't know how but I kinda figured what she said, but I was reading lips. That's when I became deaf. I don't know, it was just some programming thing for the deaf community that we have when we read lips. And so that - yeah it was very difficult. I honestly don't know how we communicate. We - I, it was two days until we saw an audiologist.

KA: oh wow.

KP: Yeah.

KA: So you read lips. Is that your primary form of communication now?

KP: Yes, and plus my hearing aid.

KA: Okay, got it. What's it like, help us understand a little bit, living in two different worlds? The hearing world and the deaf world.

KP: Well I was bring into a Deaf school and hearing school. So I was able to balance between two communities. It was very hard at first because I didn't know why I was put into two different

communities and unfortunately I was learning a lot of ways to accommodate myself and the deaf community, and in the deaf community it was totally different. It was so sad, the part where I have to teach my teachers in the hearing school to teach me properly. It was that bad. And I was like, "What the heck?!" So now I'm grown up and I'm thinking about it, it's like - you are a teacher, how do you not know how to accommodate a student? It's like, you should be learning that while you're in teacher college or whatever. And I was thinking, I was like "Okay something's weird." And it was really difficult at first because I didn't know who I was. You know, do I fit in the hearing community more, do I fit in the deaf community more? I didn't know who I was, it was just a split personality shift I had. I was more comfortable in the deaf community when I was younger, and then the hearing school I was not comfortable at all. You know, sometimes to the point where I lied to my mom and said, "I don't want to go to the hearing school in the afternoon!" [Kellina laughs.] And you know, I tried to convince my mom to make me go there full-time but my mom's like, "No I need you to learn how to communicate, because I want you to learn to speak for yourself and to advocate for yourself, especially when you get older."

KA: So you talked about teachers needing to learn appropriate accommodations and I think that that's a broader comment too, of in that experience it was the teachers, but I think we as the general hearing population are not great at accommodating people who are different than we are. So can you educate us a little bit about what are some awesome accommodations and what are some not so great things?

KP: I would say the first not so great accommodation is just don't assume a student with a disability should always sit at the front of the classroom.

KA: Okay.

KP: I feel like you need to have that accommodation with the student and say, "Hey, how can we move you around the classroom?" Instead of just assuming. For example, I remember in high school the teacher literally said, "Oh have a special seat in the front seat," and it made me uncomfortable because I don't need a special seat, you know? So I was like, I completely fine in the middle. Not the back of the classroom, hell no, don't put me in the class [Katie laughs.] I'm not going to pay attention. And I told them, "Do not put me in the back of class. If you see me talking to my friend in the back of the class, put me back in my seat," you know? "Always remind me, 'Kellina, remember we had that conversation, you're not doing your work. Can you hear me okay?'" Number two: always follow the accommodation especially for students with disabilities because we usually have IEPs. I know a lot of teachers don't read it. A lot of teachers look at it, but they're not reading what needs to be required for the student. For example, watching a movie or a video - and there's no closed captions! And my teacher's like, "Oh, oops, I forgot! It doesn't have." It's like, really? And third thing is be very open and honest with your student, especially during parent interview. Be honest with them, you know? I had teachers that told my mom some next story and I'm like, "No that's not what happened." Even in my - I had an IPE teacher who came in the picture and she was doing all the work and a lot of teachers were improving. But the really great thing to do for accommodations, to continue is always make sure your students feel welcome. I did feel welcome, I did. I'm not going to lie. However there's still a lot more work that needs to be done.

KA: How about if somebody has a deaf coworker or a deaf friend or they go to church with somebody who's deaf, like how do we build strong relationships in that way and be accommodating without making the deafness the center of the relationship?

KP: Just ask them what can you do? What can you do better?

KA: Okay. Yeah.

KP: And ask them what is important and how can they communicate better. I know some people prefer – especially when you are going out – and when you going for dinner, go to a quiet environment. Don't go to a very noisy restaurant. And go somewhere it has lot of light so the deaf person can see your lips.

KA: That's a good call out.

KP: Yeah.

KA: I had an experience in college actually, I was in the cafeteria with one of my friends who is deaf and she was struggling to hear me and I was like, "Well let's move to a different spot, that's fine." And then before we moved, she got a phone call. So we're still sitting in the loud spot and she's talking on her phone and I'm like, "Well let's move and you can take the phone call in the quiet spot," and she goes, "No actually I can hear on the phone way better than I can hear you because it's right in my ear." And I was like, "Things that I had never thought about before!"

KP: Yes! Because usually, I feel like when something is close to our ear we can hear way better than face to face. Because your voice is not close to our ear, if that makes sense. I agree with her, I can hear better on my cell phone than I can face to face because it's next to my ear.

KA: Sure, yeah. I had never thought about that way before and I thought like, as a hearing person I would struggle to take a phone call in this environment so I'm not at all surprised. But then I was surprised when she could and I was like, "Well that's a gift that I don't have!" [Kellina laughs.] We've talked a lot about the deafness so far, but the - you're also a woman of color. Do you prefer women of color or some other terminology?

KP: No I prefer women of color.

KA: Woman of color, okay. And so what's your experience looked like as a deaf woman of color? That's a couple different things "striked against you" for lack of a better explanation?

KP: I would say there's a lot of difficulty especially trying to get your support going versus non-colored women with a disability. I feel like they have more access to things than we do unfortunately. And again, also too just lack of consistently for women of color. I feel like I see that a lot of time. Especially for me it's double, more, because I am deaf.

KA: Right.

KP: So it's very hard to get my stuff out there, as much as I can versus a non color. And I feel like it's going to be that way, but I mean, we have to keep pushing forward and keep going and keep educating other people about it. And just really, that's how my experiences are.

KA: Sure. With your perspective, you're able to offer us something that's very unique that we don't always get to hear from. Being a deaf woman of color is a totally different experience than my experience as a hearing white woman. And so being able to learn from one another, I think it brings a really valuable conversation.

KP: Yeah exactly.

KA: What are some challenges that you've faced because of these identities?

KP: I would say able to ask for help, I know a lot of people like they'll help you but they're not fully helping you in a way that you wish they could. And then when you turn your head you see the exact same person helping a non-colored person and they're getting more help than you are and you're like, "Why? Why is it different?" Like we're both - in one umbrella, I would say. It's so many instances in color. It's like, we're both having a disability. It should not be no way of treating people non equally. For example, the police situation. That is so out of the line when they see someone of color versus non-color. It's the same thing as someone who is a woman of color and has a disability, it's the same thing.

KA: Right. What is supportive to make sure as we, as people who have different experiences, are still supporting your experience?

KP: I would say always having an open conversation. A lot of people are not comfortable having these types of conversations. Sometimes you have to have it. And in order for us to move forward, especially the future - it's tomorrow literally, if you think about it. If we don't have these conversations today how are we going supposed to improve ourselves in the future if we don't have these uncomfortable conversations? I always tell people it's super important to have, because you never know where it will take you. And you never know who needs the support, especially when you open your mouth and you say, "Listen, this is not fair." And we need to improve. All these things that are going on in our world, already now go on social media as a way of awareness. Keep going, keep pushing it out there. And I feel like a great way to support someone is by just having that open discussion and ask them, like "Hey, have you heard about this news? How do you feel about it?" You know, have that open discussion and always be mindful of how you're saying things. I know a lot of people take things offensive. I tell people "Just be careful, be cautious." I understand having an uncomfortable situation can not get you far, but it will get you somewhere.

KA: Yeah. I feel like sometimes it's hard especially if I'm like in relationship with someone and we've had relationship for a long time, it's hard to be able to say, "Oh am I doing this thing that's not actually helpful?" If it's never been confronted or anything in there. And so I always tell people like: blame it on the podcast. Like, "I was listening to this podcast the other day, the guest said this. I that your experience too?" and use the podcast to start the conversation!

KP: Exactly, exactly!

KA: What is - is there anything that people tend to do thinking they're being supportive that's really counterproductive?

KP: There's so many things! [Katie laughs.] Especially for me as a deaf person. I know people try to open their mouth so much! So for example, when they're like "How are you?" [Kellina's

voice is very exaggerated.] They move their lips super wide, like they're stupid. And I'm always telling people, "Stop doing that!" [Katie and Kellina laugh.] "I never said that! I never said to open your mouth, I just said 'repeat again what you're saying.'" So a lot of time I always I always tell people, "When someone who's deaf asks you to repeat the word, repeat the words slowly and softer." That's a great way of saying the word properly so they can understand the words that are coming out.

KA: Okay.

KP: So definitely that's number one. Definitely. Number two is always, always, always, be consistent when you're advocating for someone. Don't be advocating for them one day and the next day you're not. For example, on an instagram story they just put the caption on finally! But however we see the content creators put the closed captions, but the next story they don't have it and you're like, "I thought you wanted to be acceptable!" Be consistent when you're putting closed captions on your content. So that's definitely another. Yeah.

KA: Yeah. I - every once in a while I will miss a closed caption on my content and I'm like, "Oh shoot! I just forgot. I'm so sorry!" [Katie and Kellina laugh.] The intent is to get it there and then sometimes something - I get distracted, it didn't happen.

KP: Definitely. And you know, some people don't realize. They're so busy, they're probably doing it while they're out and then they're like "Shoot, wait!!" It's happened to me before that's why I always save my video, I always save it in case if I forget the closed caption. Or sometimes the closed caption doesn't work! And I save it and when I'm not busy I upload the video.

KA: That's a great idea. And yes, sometimes the closed caption doesn't work. I've rerecorded content because Instagram's like, "There's nothing here to caption!" And I'm like, "Oh but there is!"

KP: Right, exactly.

KA: Like, I try again and it's like, "No," and I was like "Ugh!"

KP: Yeah I know it happened to me before so many times. And I'm always like, I honestly want to report Instagram so bad, like "Listen! Do something with the close captions, please!"

KA: Right! I remember when Instagram didn't have closed captions and so I'm glad when they finally have them. But they're - they can do so much better.

KP: Yeah exactly. A lot!

KA: So close captionings are helpful. What else is helpful?

KP: I would say always be careful of your terms, just like the way you asked me. "Kellina, what do you prefer, deaf or hard of hearing?" Always ask them what terms they prefer better. A lot of people have their own specific ways of defining themselves. Always ask them, just so that they know you are being conscious how you represent yourself and them, right? The third thing is, I would say, definitely be mindful of when you ask for help. I know a lot of people will go to - I would say, "assume too much" especially when they're helping a deaf person. So for example, I don't know - if I'm out with a friend of mine, and we're out at a restaurant. She ordered my

dinner, like she ordered what I wanted and I'm like, "Girl, I can order my food. Like don't worry." She's like, "Oh okay, I'm just trying to help."

KA: Sure.

KP: Don't do that. You know, ask! Like, "Hey, would you like me to order the food for you or would you like to order yourself?" Always, always ask! And I feel like when people ask, we will appreciate you even asking because you are being thoughtful and helpful for us. And that's the best way to help us.

KA: Sure. Yeah. I think of that like - that's such a common thing for so many different people who are different in situations. I think of say, one of my friends who we went out to lunch and she had her baby with her. And we - she needed like, ketchup or whatever and she was going to take the baby with her. And I was like, "First of all, I'm just going to go get your ketchup. But second of all, you could have left the baby with me. I would have watched your baby while you get the ketchup." And she's like, "Thank you!" But I asked like, "Can I go get this for you?" versus just assuming and walking away from the table. And so I feel like that's such an easy accommodation to do with everyone.

KP: Exactly, it's very easy. I feel like sometimes people think it's - they're trying to be nice but they're not. So I always tell people, "Take that mindset out and just always ask." Because you just never know.

KA: That's good. And so obviously we talked about school. You have finished school. Now you're a life coach. Tell us a little bit about how you got into life coaching!

KP: Honestly? I didn't even think I was going to become a life coach. Just to be honest. Really, I actually wanted to become a neurosurgeon actually.

KA: Wow.

KP: Yeah, but I just realized because of me being deaf, the technology has not improved in the medical field yet. So that's kind of made me kind of step back and I realized I wanted to become a psychologist. I wanted to become a counselor, where I could help someone. And so it's funny because I was looking at my research in psychology. What kind of psychologist do I want to be? And so I don't know what happened, but I saw Life Coach on the, on the description. And I'm like, "What the heck is a life coach?" Because I'm a kid in Canada, so life coach is not very popular compared to the States and any other country. And so I looked it up and I'm like, "Okay let me see what a life coach is," and I looked and I'm actually like: well I actually like it! And it focused on the positive psychology instead of the negative psychology. I feel like negative psychology is not something I always want to touch base on because it makes me uncomfortable talking about trauma and this and this and this. But I'd rather just help my clients to focus on right now. How can we get to your end goal? I love helping people achieve their goals, I'm that type of person. And I thought, "Maybe I should stick to that." And so moving forward, I met my mentor and she thought that I should be podcasting and not work, and I thought, "Me, podcasting? Hell no!" If you tell me go back like two years ago, I would have been like, "Me? No, no, no, no, no!" And she was like, "No we need more voices like yours!" Especially you are attraction with the hearing community and you're attracting the deaf

community, that's super fascinating! Do you know how many people would love to hear your story? And I was like, "You know what? I'm going to give it a shot." She also, on top of that, she invited me to an app called Clubhouse. And I went on Clubhouse, there was one specific room I went into. It was called Life Coach Versus Psychology. and I'm like, "Ooh I need to be in this room to listen!" And I was learning the pros and cons between the two careers. And I realized and I asked a question. I went on stage and I asked a couple questions and they answered. And I realized, I'm like "Maybe life coach would be the best one for me." So I started doing more digging, I hired a lot of business coaches, business mentor who can help me, guide me to how to have a business coach. And so it was really cool. And then I started it. I liked it. I started with two clients, three clients, very slowly. 'Cause I was not in a rush to get so many clients all at once, I wanted to get into it. And I loved it. I realized how, how there's not that much bills out there for people who are looking for an assistant in their life, because everybody needs someone, a buddy. We need that person. So being that Life Coach, I can help them to get farther in their life. And it just makes me drive, like "Oh my God I want to help them more!" Versus the psychologist, they go by the school, they go by the books. So it's like - that's not something I want to have or do with the client. That's not what I tend to want. And so that's why I choose to become a life coach.

KA: Very cool. So do you still work with mental health?

KP: Yes! I still do.

KA: Okay so why - what drew you to that? Do the two fields merge together?

KP: Not really, I guess I would say because of my personal experience. So I know what it's like to be in their shoes, so that's why I wanted to do mental health. And there's not a lot of awareness in mental health in the disability community, unfortunately.

KA: Yeah. Why does mental health matter?

KP: Mental health matters so much. It's because you don't know when you will be hard on yourself. And also to myself, like I've been through so much in my mental health and I don't even realize that. It made me lost weight, it caused health problems, and so it's very important for us to really look out for ourselves, and really understand what we have. And so that way we can improve ourselves day by day.

KA: Yeah. No, that's so good! I feel like taking care of our mental health needs to be a priority and unfortunately I feel like it's not often prioritized.

KP: No it's not. And it sucks because I see people take their own life, right?

KA: Yeah.

KP: And it's not fair, because there's not a lot of not a lot support out there, there's not a lot of like - not a lot of speakers that look like them, can help them. And it's very unfortunate. And there's a lot of them who offer too much, you know? And what I mean by "too much" is they, they're too much money for certain people. Not everybody can afford a coach right now. And that's why I'm creating my coaching business to be affordable for people, so that way people can afford it. I don't want people to suffer because they can't afford it. It's like, that's not fair.



KA: Yeah. That's so good. What are other barriers that prevent people from hiring a coach?

KP: I really think not understanding what the goal is. I feel like a lot of people just jump too much because some may go for the money or some may go for, I don't know, for so many reasons. And for me honestly, the barrier is really understanding if you and the client can actually work together. I feel like people just jump into it and not offering a free thirty minute call with the client, just to make sure like, "Hey, is this something that I can do for you, or is this something I cannot do for you." So I think that is the biggest barrier a lot of times that I hear.

KA: Yeah. So tell us a little bit about your coaching business: what kind of offerings do you have?

KP: So for me, I offer one-on-ones, couples, and I'm now looking into groups because I know a lot of people who have a disability don't have friends. So I would love to offer group sessions so everybody they can meet each other and really have a buddy that they can go to instead of coming to me. And so I offer one-on-one, how I run my one-on-one: I do once a week sessions with the client for one hour and a half and we will work on different tools and as well work on your goals and I will be sending out emails regarding how we can improve, making sure we're on top of each things. And also too, I will also be offering a lot of help in terms of resume tips, job offers, how you can get yourself out there more, and how can we, how can you improve your self-esteem, your confidence, your anxiety, depression, how can we work on that? How can we improve your mental health moving forward?

KA: Yeah that's so good. Where can we find you online?

KP: So I have two things to look for. So the first one is Instagram which is @DeafQueenBoss. The second is my website which is KellinaEmpowerment.com.

KA: Okay, great. We will link to those in the show notes as well. And you're the author of two books - tell us about the books!

KP: Definitely. So my first book is called Everyday I Am Just Deaf, so it's about me being deaf in the hearing community. It's a poetry book, by the way, so don't think it's too long because it's not! It's only ninety-four pages, so don't worry about it. 'Cause I know a lot of people don't like reading books for too long so I just made it like a poetry book. And my second book is called Changemakers, so it's where all eight - I would say nine or ten of us, which is young professionals who come together to write their story. And each other's chapters, which is very cool and fascinating because you get to learn about other entrepreneurs too inside the book.

KA: Very cool! And can we find those on your website?

KP: You can find them on Amazon, and I'm going to add those to my website as well. I am also building up my website, very, very - like right now.

KA: We are always building up our websites, right? We always want to do more with it. [Kellina laughs.]

KP: Yes, yes!

KA: One of the questions that we always like to hear from different perspectives is: what do you wish everyone knew?

KP: I wish everyone knew is that not every deaf person you meet cannot speak. I noticed that a lot of people, every time people see me and I talk - they're like, "You're deaf and you talk like that?! Oh my gosh!" It's not even funny, I'm like, "Yes I talk and I'm deaf." Like, come on. Get it together. So I wish people knew that there are deaf people who do speak.

KA: Yeah. And they probably worked really hard to speak well.

KP: Yeah.

KA: What's something you've learned recently?

KP: Something I've learned recently is that I learned that tomorrow is not a promise. You have to live your life to the fullest today.

KA: That's so good. That's such a hard reality, but also a true reality.

KP: It is hard.

KA: Kellina, thank you so much for your time today! This has been so insightful. You've been able to help me see things a little bit differently, to help learn from your perspective, to help hear your story. So thank you so much for being willing to share it with us!

KP: No problem, thank you so much for having me!

KA: Absolutely.

[Theme music: upbeat electronica plays in the background as Katie speaks.]

KA: As always: a big thanks for listening. Be sure to connect with Kellina online to continue to learn from her. Her links are in the show notes. If you enjoyed this episode, check out Episode {65} with Ezelis Sanderson. She's the daughter of Deaf adults and the mother of a Deaf child. Hear how her experience is similar and how it's different. It would mean a lot to me if you hit the five stars in the podcasting app you are listening on. Leaving a review is how guests know that their stories are safe here. Be sure to follow for the opportunity to learn from more perspectives. New episodes come every other Monday. Until next time friend: know that you are loved, know that you matter, know that your story has value. We will see you again soon. Bye-bye!

[Katie stops speaking and the theme music: upbeat electronica ends.]