

This is a rough transcription of The Career Contessa podcast. This transcription is for **Season 10 Episode 40**. It originally aired on Oct 7, 2025. There may be errors in this transcription, but we hope that it provides helpful insight into the conversation. If you have any questions or need clarification, please email editorial@careercontessa.com

Hi Ruchika. Welcome to the show. Hi, Lauren. So excited to be here. So you have a lot of things that you do, but try to tell the listeners a bit about who you are and what you do. Yeah. Thanks. So, Lauren, I started my career as a business journalist, and, a lot of what I was covering then was around, you know, businesses and money sort of. How does how do markets and economies work? One of the stories that I was worried, wasn't being told or wasn't being told, well, was around women's leadership and women in the workplace. So a lot of what I wanted to do and, and I kind of got this fire in my belly like, hey, we got to tell women's stories differently. We got to look at the data about what it takes for us to succeed in the workplace. As you can imagine, this is, you know, almost two decades ago, most of my editors were not pleased about this.

And, I then made a transition out of, journalism into tech, where I saw the problems really writ large, you know, again, a very cool time for tech about, you know, 15 years ago where there was a lot of energy and also concern, like, hey, women are being part of, you know, our office. We're not being considered when, you know, tech is being created, safety, etc., usability, wearability.

And so I kind of left my last corporate job back close to 15 years ago and made the transition to be someone who researches and writes about women in the workplace equality. And opportunity in the workplace. And it's been great.

So I'm three books in and my third book, and compete, comes out on November 4th, and it really looks at how we can create a better workplace and workplace and world for all. So really looking forward to talking to you about that today. I'm very impressed that you're on book three. I wrote one and I was like, I'm never doing that again. Like, cool. To be able to say I did it, but I have so much respect for people who can do it and like their full time gig and make a whole career out of it.

It's so hard, you guys. Thank you Lord. I'm clearly a glutton for punishment. Yeah, totally. That's amazing. And I feel like, I mean, I'm really interested in I mean, I remember you actually, from your. I guess I was your second book inclusion on purpose. Yeah. That's right. That was when I started to. And I'm sure I had read your work before, but I think that's when I started to connect the dots a lot more.

So I'm really excited that you were willing to do it again for us with non-compete. I am kind of curious. You know, you've said that competition is, quote, the water we swim in. Can you share maybe a personal experience that made you start questioning whether competition

really leads to success? And just like maybe where competition became sort of a focus for you?

Yeah, I would say the seeds were planted pretty early. And in the book I write about sort of the diametrically opposed, you know, kind of focus on competition. I saw among my parents. I saw that really young. But I will say in the workplace and I start the book with this example. So I'll be really curious, you know, when folks read it, especially again, women do do we read it and think, oh, this really sounds like me?

Or is it like, no, the world has changed. But essentially I write about my first workplace experience was really excited. I had joined a very premier organization in Singapore where I'm from, and that was my first work experience there. And I, you know, came up with an idea that I was really excited about. I was, you know, and then there was another newbie at the same time as me, another woman.

And the two of us really bonded. We became good friends. We shared all about our lives. I felt like really connected to her. And I shared this idea with her as like, hey, like, we're working for this magazine at this organization. I've got this great idea. I'm super excited about it. And she was like, yes, this sounds great.

I'm so excited for you to share it with our bosses. And you know, I'll support you however I can. And then I started noticing a little bit of a change in her demeanor. Right? Like in the beginning, it was very much like when she go, you're doing great. I'm so excited for you. And then slowly, I started noticing that I was being left out of things.

Should be a little bit cold, you know. In fact, there was a lot of, like, hot and cold behavior. And then one day, my boss called me into the office, into into their room, and they were like, guess what? You know, your colleague Nadia has an amazing idea. We're going to do this very cool thing with our magazine.

We're going to bring in a lot more readers by doing, you know, this idea I want, oh my God, it was a detailed. Yeah, of course it was my idea. And it was an it was it came completely out of left field. And, you know, the, the part about it which actually I haven't written. So I'm, I'm glad I get to kind of must process like some of the therapy.

What I started realizing is I actually, instead of feeling hurt and or upset or betrayed by her behavior, I actually internalized it as that I was too naive. I was too stupid. Like competition, of course, is how it works in the workplace. Like we you should have been more strategic. You should have been more guarded with your ideas.

You know, like, team work sounds good in theory, but in practice it doesn't. And it's just to me, that's like the big takeaway I had from that moment, that I think that we're taught like,

hey, what, like competitions, water, swimming. And actually, if your natural instincts which actually are to collaborate, kick in and you get hurt, you actually start blaming yourself for not being smart enough rather than questioning like, hey, is this the right way to be? You know? Yeah, I think a lot of times you hear these sayings like competition breeds, you know, innovation. And so it always sound like it's the thing that comes right before the big like you kind of need it in order to have that push. I have had similar experiences. I remember in my first recruiting job, she was having us compete against each other and who could make the most hires.

And you realize, like, that's not even a good thing for the company because then you're just trying to make offers for what? So that you have no number, you know, like you you do. I feel like see that? And there I also feel like there's sometimes that trend of like, oh, we're not competing against each other. But when someone takes your idea and it hurts your career, you feel that, you know.

So I can understand why internally people do have this like very difficult relationship with competition. I'm kind of curious. In your book, you introduce the concept of, competing. What does that mean? And practically, you know, to, to, compete, especially when we're, we're so I think wired to feel like competition is a good thing. Yeah. And this is where I really feel like I need to do a good job because, you know, there is a lot of nuance to this.

And I want to acknowledge that a lot of what we see around competition isn't necessarily our fault. Right? It's the way that the system was designed, to extract a lot out of us. And so I think there's this idea that like, oh, you, you snap your finger and you can, compete. And I really try in this book to say, no, that's not possible.

It requires a lot of intentionality. I often fall into, you know, ideas and patterns that that make me competitive. And it's really about being as, mindful as possible, but essentially to compete looks at, you know, or to, compete really requires us to rethink the idea that competition everywhere, at all times is the default. Right. And to and to mindfully choose, abundance, mindfully choose the idea that, like success doesn't have to come at the cost of others.

It's not winner takes all. It's not scarcity thinking and zero sum approaches. And so it sounds good, I think when I say it again in practice, it can be really challenging. I write in the book about what it's been like to try to practice, and competing with other people, whether it's in business, whether it was in the workplace, especially when you have, moments where you're pitted against each other for, for a promotion or for a big opportunity.

And it really requires us to step back and ask that question. A, do I want to compete in this situation, or is it a default that's being placed on me? You know? And then number two, really ask yourself this idea of this question of, you know, do I win or do I lose even if I win this competition?

And, and I think that's a really big question. Like, for me, I'm sad that I in this, competitive situation I was put in, you know, decades ago, actually very early in my career, I can still think about how I was saddest of all that I lost a relationship with someone whom I really enjoyed being around right after that.

Obviously, we were never able to get our, our relationship back, our friendship back, and that's it. Like, now, I have no idea what she's up to all these years later. And so I think some of us think like, okay, it's compete or that's it, but I want to I want to present that there are other options. I've also heard of situations where two people were put up for, promotion at the same, you know, at the same organization.

And they actually went to their boss and they were like, is there another way? Is there a way we could either both be promoted, or is there a way that we could share opportunities? Or is there a different career path where my quote unquote rival gets the promotion, but I'm still considered for other ways to progress. And so I think that it does require us to rewire and reset some of those defaults.

But again, I think that the longer term, just whether it's like the culture of the organization, whether it's innovation, whether it's being able to create true teamwork changes when you, compete. Yeah, absolutely. And in your book, you also outlined eight practices of compete from re reframing comparison to choosing joy. Which do you think professional like which one do you think professionals can start with Amy today or tomorrow.

That makes the biggest difference in the eight practices that you talk about? Yeah. Thank you. Well you know and it it does take us through choice action and resistance. And I think choices where we start. And I think a lot of our actions really and resistance to systems start with us making deliberate choices that we want to do things differently.

So for me, I would actually say the one that that I found helped a lot in my own career and sometimes is very counterintuitive because we don't talk about it enough, is envy. And in the book, I look at the emotion of envy, and the difference between what's called malicious envy, which is when you're, you know, trying to take others down where you see someone doing something or getting something, you know, again, being promoted or getting an opportunity at work, which really makes you feel like, oh, like, I hate that.

And let me think of ways to tear them down or even think of ways to take it away from them versus what's known as benign envy, which is an emotion of, you know, I really I'm I'm kind of I feel a little twinge. I'm not sure what it is like. It's cool that they got ahead. Maybe maybe I feel some type of way about it, but how can I channel that to actually improve myself and make myself, you know, and, and tap into the emotions?

Does that mean that's something I want for myself, i.e. a promotion or a book deal or, you know, I was on my friend was on Oprah, for example, or is it something like, that's so cool,

they got to do it. I'm really glad that I'm doing something different. And so it's really understanding yourself and getting good at identifying, you know, where do these emotions come from?

How do we channel it in a way, to have better relationships in the workplace? Yeah. And I'm thinking about my, like, my own self in my workplace and sort of like I recognize when I have and be like, we're a slack culture. Like some people are so good at writing these, like, slack announcements, but, you know, they format it perfectly.

They have all the right emojis, you know, that kind of thing. And I'm like, I'm envious of like, how good you are at taking a complicated message and making it so concise. You know, I wish that's something I would like to work on for myself. And I've also seen probably more in my entrepreneurial career, like when somebody to your point, like got Oprah or did something like that and I was like, oh my gosh, like, you know, why am I not getting those gigs?

Or why am I not good enough to get that stuff where it's like, you have this immediate kind of more negative envy, I guess. So I definitely recognize that I'm kind of curious too. And like, I think one of the struggles with competition in the workplace is that sometimes, like The Loudest Voice does when like one thing I've known as being back in corporate is just the importance of making sure people know what you're doing, you know?

So the advocate for yourself kind of self-promotion, that stuff is so real. You can't talk nonstop because then nobody listens to you. But you have to talk about that. People like, do know what you're working on. So can we talk a little bit about like, healthy competition versus healthy collaboration and how this kind of feeds into making sure that you are, quote, getting credit for the things that you do.

And again, I think that research, especially around women in the workplace, really helps us to understand why competition, can be extremely negative. Like for example, I think of the research that shows, you know, that even in the highest sort of offices in the Supreme Court of the United States, women justices, Supreme Court justices get interrupted at more than twice the rate of male justices when making arguments.

I'm sure every one of your listeners can think of an example where they said something that were either ignored or they were talked over, or their idea was ignored until a man, they repeated it. Right. That's called hip heating. I, I wrote about this in my in my last book. And so if we look at that research, we look at that data, we look at the fact that actually, for a lot of us, the way to get ahead is through collaborating.

Right? And even just interrupting a bias like that. Indeed, I would love it if more workplaces put, measures in place to make sure that everyone got an equal opportunity to speak. And I think that as, you know, companies think about, like, what can I do to create a more inclusive culture? I have seen evidence of, you know, more sharing of air time, ways to like

even I've seen some AI tools used to disrupt people, you know, who who kind of take up all the air time in meetings.

But at the same time, as a woman, one of the ways that we can really disrupt that is in the power of numbers. And I love the strategy. That was kind of popularized in the Obama administration, where women staffers in the administration were actually being talked over in meetings. They were being ignored. And so they came up with a strategy of repeating and amplifying others voices so that the right person would get credit.

So the way it would be is, you know, Lauren, you say something in the meeting and I'm like, and you say that and I kind of take the baton and I move forward with it. So I'll say, oh my gosh, Lauren, that was a fantastic idea. I'm so glad you said that. Here's me building on it. And then our third friend would say, or our third colleague would say, Lauren chick, I love that idea.

Here's how I'm building on it. And that way ideas wouldn't just, you know, float away into the ether as we know they often do. So there's this idea, there's this belief that it has to be like one individual voice that's constantly being, that's shouting louder than anyone else. But actually, there's research to show that one of the best ways you can do this is actually, again, in a group and in a, in a collaborative situation.

I love that. I, I do and that you mentioned I do remember the story from the Obama years. I am curious for the leaders and managers who are listening to this who are like, I do not want my team to feel like they are just competing with each other because I know that collaboration is the the the better avenue to success will come up with better things. How do they create a culture of collaboration over competition? Yeah, I think you have to model collaboration over competition, right? Part of that is also giving credit where credit is due. I think that's really important. You have to reward collaboration over competition. And so I do think and this might cause a lot of chief H.R officers and other people to get annoyed at me and roll their eyes.

But again, when you have a competitive system where you pit, you know, person A and person B against each other for a competition, again, it's easy to think like, okay, that's the best way, because then, you know, that's just the way it's always being done. But I think to disrupt and to make real, you know, long term impact on your team culture, it's rethinking that model of like, we're just going to pit person A and B against each other and the best person will rise because what we actually find is in situations like that, people do resort to the most terrible things to, to quote unquote, rise to the top.

And then it's a question of, are you rewarding people for being able to undercut each other, or are you rewarding people for doing this next level of the job better? So I think it's rethinking and really creating a system that rewards collaboration over competition. I think

it's been very vocal. I think sometimes, again, a lot of the rules in the workplace, because I've studied workplace bias for so many years.

A lot of the rules about workplace culture, are often those unsaid ones. And I think to be able to really say we value collaboration, this is what it looks like. This is what we reward when it comes to collaboration. I think those are ways to make a lot of the unspoken spoken and known and then rewarded. Yeah, I, I mentioned this a lot on the show.

So sorry everyone who's heard this before, but I talked a lot about I have toddlers and so I'm always like with, you know, the behavior, right? You're always like, oh my God, they are terrible. But they always say, like, you reward the behavior that you want to see more of. And I think it's just so funny because it's like it's not that complicated, but it's so complicated.

It's like the easiest and the hardest thing at the same time. And to your point, like if you're a manager and a leader, it's like rewarding people when they collaborate really well together. Versus and you know, this is another thing I think about, like with top performers, it's like you are not a top performer. If you are the lone wolf, a top performer makes, you know, all those rights kind of thing.

And I think it's really important, for that to be a message that people hear. And to your point, they can't just hear it because it's too abstract to be told it. You really have to model it and explain in plain English examples of what that looks like. So I, I feel that a lot in the corporate workplace.

It's like we can't just say things. We also have to actually do things and show what that looks like and point to an example of the time when it went well, because that's how people, I feel like, really understand these concepts. Right. And Lauren, just to quickly, disrupt, like I actually think one of the ways that companies can do this really well is if in performance reviews and even in sort of your one on one check ins with your manager, if you're a manager or leader leading those really important task, what were ways that you collaborated with each other?

How did you support your colleagues today? How did you support the values of the organization? Again, the way a lot of the way that a lot of systems have been put in place. And I and I am lucky that I have had, you know, insight into, into a lot of this in my work that I've done. And inclusion and culture strategy is a lot of the ways that the practices have been put in place do encourage that, like solo mentality, individualistic, like, who did I undercut to get ahead, even if it doesn't say it?

And those words obviously. So it's about shifting those paradigms and doing them very intentionally. Yeah. It's interesting. I, I just got promoted. And the big reason why I got promoted was because I cross collaboration. It was like the, the only way I got promoted

was because I was able to essentially show like I worked with people outside of my own organization or silo.

And I think that was like in a way, I was like, that was really interesting because they're essentially saying like, you're you're being rewarded for the collaboration that you were doing. So you would like that, but I love that. So I'm going to use that example. But indeed, and I, and I and I think and I hope that what it did for you as well is you were able to say like, hey, I really like the way that this organization makes me feel right, and working here makes me feel I appreciate the the fact that something that felt good for me was rewarded. And I think if you talk to a lot of people who have had to be, you know, elbows out competition at all costs, I talk in the book about the the research that supports how much, you know, women, suffer from having to be in these competitive models because I think, you know, we're obviously impacted by bias, patriarchy, etc., etc. in, in our workplaces as well.

And how much more when we fight for scraps, we lose so much more than. Yeah, elaborate. Yeah. I, I just like when you talk about that, like the immediate feeling of exhaustion, you know, just feeling like you're fighting for everything all the time. It's not a good feeling. It's like you want people not to feel burned out.

Like, let's talk about a some other practices. Yes. Okay. As we wrap up, if a listener finishes this episode or remembers only one idea from on compete, what do you want it to be? Oh my gosh, did you have to make it so hard? Oh yes. I always do this. I mean, I would say that really the number one idea is, you know, observe how competition shows up in your life and observe if there are ways that you can make different choices.

And again, there might be people who might say that actually, no, it's not possible. But I think in observing people start to recognize that actually. Yeah, there's you know, there are times where I have to compete, where I didn't have to I just kind of went into it because it was default. Yeah, yeah. And to your point, require like train to do that.

Right. It's like the default is to compete versus to collaborate. And that's what we're trying to change. For a more successful situation for everybody. Regina, I love this conversation. Let people know where they can follow more of your work by your book. Any links that you want people to know about? We love LinkedIn, if you're willing to share.

And I'll put all that in the show notes. Awesome. Thank you so much. I am very active on LinkedIn and otherwise please check out, compete Booking.com. I mean the I'll put all that in the show notes as well. Thank you so much. Thank you."