

Donna Cole 2.26.2020.mp4

Donna [00:00:02] Tell those great stories about strong women and supportive men to inspire others and motivate them to do good things. So that's my new mentor world?

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Linda [00:00:34] We have a very special guest with us today, someone whom I've admired for quite some time, not only because of her prowess in the business world and what she's been able to accomplish, but just who she is as a human being and and what an amazing story she has to share. So please welcome Donna Cole the CEO and president of Cole Chemical. And also one of the founding directors of Pantheon producers. So you're bringing the industry and art together and right side, left side, right, right, right side, left side of the brain. It's all it's all good. And Donna, it's a pleasure to have you on. Thank you. So here. So I don't even know where to start with. Let's start with this. You founded Cole chemical when you had, what, 5000 dollars in your pocket? You're recently divorced. And my partner with children and your daughter was four. And your company is now like a billion dollar.

Donna [00:01:37] Well, I wish it were closer. We're still striving.

Linda [00:01:40] Oh, you're still striving. OK. So hundreds of millions, whatever. Highly successful energy, chemical company. How'd you do it?

Donna [00:01:49] You know, I just had a lot of people who encouraged me to do this. And then I had a mentor, a mentor who said, why not? You know, cause you always doubt yourself. And I haven't. I had no ambition of owning my own business. He's like, you've bought chemicals. You sold them. You did the financials. You did collections. You did invoicing. Why not? I'm like, oh, OK. And so then we worked till 3:00 in the morning trying to think of a name for the company.

Linda [00:02:17] And you came up with Cole chemical.

Donna [00:02:19] Well, because as divorced, Tammy was four. And I just didn't want to go to school and have to introduce myself in their different name than her. I think it's bad enough that parents get a divorce. But then your kids feel like they're divorced too because now your mommy took on a different name than you. And you had the same name before, so. Yeah. So I just kept it in at the time. So, you know, I'm Japanese-American. There was still Japan bashing going on. So, you know, you really have to think about. Right. Strategically. Yeah. Is this going to hurt you or help you? And at the time, I just thought making it Fujimoto chemical was wrong.

Linda [00:02:57] OK, so what was it like as a Japanese-American woman? First of all, as a woman. Second of all, as a Japanese American woman to start your own business at a time when, as you say, Japan bashing was still going on.

Donna [00:03:12] So I had my challenges in the beginning. Then I had a lot of customers who already did business with us. So they they knew who I was, that they knew I was honest, that, you know, I was responsive. And so that's why they asked me to start my own business, because they had government contracts and they couldn't meet their minority woman small business goals because you can only buy so much paper and pencils. Right. Yes. And back then, you could count travel or furniture. But even if you buy furniture, at last you work 20 years, you're going to buy furniture every month or every year. So it was a good fit for for them to work with me. And I did have my challenges when I started to grow the business outside of these people. Are these men actually,

Linda [00:03:57] You could give us an example.

Donna [00:03:58] So I met with a guy from a big energy company and we had lunch and I said, you know, I just started my company would love to sell you some amines. He said you probably can't even spell diathaolamine. So here are you surprised?

Linda [00:04:15] Whoa. How did you respond to that?

Donna [00:04:17] You know, being Asian. Right. I was just very quiet and said, oh, well, you know, I have time to learn. I had another man who who who is doing this to me saying, you know, you're never gonna be successful because I know all the wise presidents of purchasing for all of these chemical companies and energy companies and you don't know them. And I said, oh. And so I did have a response for him. So I said, well, you know, you're probably forty five fifty. You're going to hit retirement soon. And I'm only twenty seven. So I have another 40 years. So I will learn who they are.

Linda [00:04:55] I love it good for you. Yeah. And he probably looked at you like yeah. If looks could kill. Yeah. Yeah. So you stayed the course and you made decisions to just do whatever it took to get where you wanted to be.

Donna [00:05:11] You know, my mentor, when you asked me, well, what were some of those other challenges was that people didn't want to sell to me. Right. I had customers. But then you have to go buy the product. So there were several times I needed to buy some barges and I had to go to him, my mentor, and say, will you go buy this for me and sell it to me and add a little more profit so I can sell it. So have it not been for even those kind of situations?

Linda [00:05:38] Wow. Yeah.

Donna [00:05:39] Well, I don't think I'd be here today.

Linda [00:05:42] How how many years did you have to do that before it got to the point where you could literally go out and buy your own product instead of having to go through a third party?

Donna [00:05:52] Probably about 5 or 6 years.

Linda [00:05:53] Really? Yeah. So what's your what's your advice to to women now who are trying to start their own businesses, whether it's in the energy space or or whatever it sounds like? One thing would be for sure to get a mentor and someone that you can trust. But what what other. And I know you do a lot of speaking and there's been to women's groups and others. But what what's your two or three tidbits of advice there?

Donna [00:06:21] I think today in particular, you really do have to know your your financial position. Right. How much cash do you have? Where can you get cash? How do you leverage? Right. So so all of those are so important today. And, you know, your costs aren't as high as they were back when you can actually work out of your home now. So I encourage people start there. If you have another job, do that job and do what you think you're passionate about and want to turn into a job because it makes it just so much easier. And, you know, there's so many small businesses that fail in the first five years. So give yourself a chance. Right. And you can never tell enough people what you do. You just have to keep telling people over and over. You get a new piece of business. You're doing something with some something new with somebody, a new service or a new product. You have to keep telling people you can never think that people know what you do.

Linda [00:07:17] Yeah. Boy, that is so true. That's something that I've learned a lot in the last 10 years that I've had my business. Is that especially because I came from a place where people knew me for one thing, and they didn't know me as a business woman, and I'm still just out there telling people what I do because you can't assume that that everybody knows.

Donna [00:07:36] No, that's right. You know, I just love what you guys are doing now. You know, all the PR and the marketing and and planning, it's just so much bigger than people think.

Linda [00:07:47] People know they will realize. Absolutely right. So let's talk now about the other side of your brain, the creative side that that that you're so passionate about. Tell us about Pantheon Productions. And why you started it and what your goals are.

Donna [00:08:05] There's only 24 hours in a day.

Linda [00:08:07] OK. All right. So the short version.

Donna [00:08:10] I have a lot of people who come to me and want to be mentored. Right. Or want me to be their sponsor. And what I realize is I just don't have enough time to do a good job there. And at Cole chemical. So if I could tell stories about strong women and supportive men who are mentors and sponsors of women, that maybe men and boys will treat girls and women better. And women can look at their selves and girls in a better way and that we can go out and do great things. You know, we can improve the quality of life not only for ourselves, but our family and our community. And so tell those great stories about strong women and supportive men to inspire others and motivate them to do good things. So that's my new mentor world.

Linda [00:08:58] OK, ok. So you're multiplying it.

Donna [00:09:00] It's millions. You can help millions.

Linda [00:09:03] Right. OK. So what have you produced thus far?

Donna [00:09:06] So we did I dream too much? Was it a full feature film? And it was a it was a great production. And we had a lot of fun. It was a upcoming young woman who doesn't quite know what she wants to do, but she wants to travel. And her mom says, well, then go get a law degree and you can work and make money and then you can travel. And she was like, I don't know about that because, you know, she'd love to write. She loved poetry. And she met her great aunt and spent some time with her because her grant and had a fall. So she says, I volunteer instead of going to law school, I'll go take care of great aunt. And then that she finds out that her great aunt, who she really didn't care much about the life that she wants to live. And then they became like this. Right. So it was wonderful story. And Diane Ladd was in it. So, you know, she's wonderful. And we gave Eden Brolin her debut. She looks just like her daddy. Josh was so funny. And then we had another young woman and she was in Orange is the New Black. And she made her debut singing. And now she she went to Broadway and she was in The Color Purple and she got a Tony nomination. She didn't win it. You know, Hamilton took everything, but she was great. So that was fun. And then I thought I was only gonna do movies. And then somebody came to me with a play as a friend of mine. And I read it and I laughed and I said, you know what? This is great. It was about three women, older women who escaped out of old folks home, basically. Right. Yeah. And it was hysterical. So we did that last year at Queensberry Theater here in Houston. And then this year, I have a musical. I never thought I'd do a musical. Yes. And I learning a lot, too.

Linda [00:11:05] I bet. I bet. So this is Lady of Agata. Yes. Yes. Yes. What is this story? And in kind of a nutshell if you can.

Donna [00:11:16] So it's a true story about a cloistered nun. Her name is Maria. When she was a little girl, she wanted her mom to read her the Bible. And before you know it, after a year or two, she could spouse almost everything in the Bible. And then she started writing and she wanted to be a nun. And she was cloistered. So her mom actually designed the bars that she was behind. And these bars also had these long. Oh, gosh. What would you call them, spears? Right. So they were so long that you couldn't get but maybe four feet near her. And so in her penitence, she used to starve herself, but she meditated and she could levitate. Right. And then as she was in trance, she was bi-locating from Spain to the new world to West Texas, where she was converting Humanos Indians to Christianity. Right. And they first tried to kill her with arrows and they realized they were going through her and she didn't die. And she just reached out and she said why are you trying to hurt me? I'm only here to help you. And so she was teaching them about being kind. And before you know it, they were going in droves to see the missionaries and the priest to say, please baptize us, right. Because at this point in time, the Comanche and the Apaches were killing the Humanos Indians and they were traders. And she went there. She said that like 500

times. And the legend of the bluebonnets, when she had her last time there, they said wherever her blue cape touched, the ground, bluebonnets grew. So she was telling her confessor about these trips, and so he told the bishop, and so they did two Spanish inquisitions on her. You know, they had to check her out. So she was being tried for heresy and her punishment instead of killing her or burning her at the stake. They actually made her burn her own books, her writings. So you imagine how that hurt. But somewhere along the line, she met King Philip of Spain, the fourth, and they met three times in their whole lifetime. But when he first met her, there was something about her that was so spiritual. He said, look, he said, let's write. I'll write on one side of the page and you write on the other side of the page. We have there six hundred and thirty letters. There was a student that went to UT and she converted all 630 letters from Spanish to English. So we're using that as the basis for this story. But her story's big. Right. So this is sixteen hundreds. So she's probably the most powerful, most influential, most spiritual woman of the 17th century. So, you know, these letters back and forth. He would say, because this is during the Crusades. Yeah, tough times. And then he was sending Columbus off to go find more land and gold for Spain. But he would say he's not worthy. I'm not worthy of this position. And she would write back and said, no, you are stay in faith. God will protect you. Right. And then she would say she's not worthy. And he would do the same thing for her. Right. So they were mentoring each other. But I know he sponsored her because she wasn't burned at the stake. She wasn't killed. But what happened too is. With the Concho River comes in to play. The Indians believe were two or more rivers come together, it's very spiritual because there's water, there's plants, animals come to drink, right. And the trees grow in their shoulder. And in West Texas, there's wild pecans. So she did needlepoint back in Spain, you know, in her convent. And it was about the plains. And you could see the animals, the buffalo, you could see the horses, you could see the Indians in their markings. So how would she know if she really hadn't? She really? Yeah, right. But more importantly, there were these muscles in the Concho River because of the alkalinity. They make pink pearls. She had pink pearls in Spain. She had a little wooden crosses that the children made for her.

Linda [00:15:42] This is giving me chills, Donna.

Donna [00:15:44] So the priests and he gets on a boat. He comes over here. He goes to the missionary and he tells them, you know, find me these Indians. So the Indians are there. He goes, too. They're not called chief. They're called captains at the time, Humanos Indians. So he pulls out a portrait of a nun and says, this is who you say is coming to see you. They go, no, that's not her.

Donna [00:16:10] They pulled out another one. That was Maria. And they go, that's who comes to see us. Wow, so very interesting, right? I mean, this is a whole story about her, and then so during the Inquisition, she was already so weak. You know, she's starving herself. They bring her down in a chair and they make her kneel for 14 hours. And those needles don't have a cushion on them. Right. So you can imagine how hard that was on her. And also, the nuns didn't like her so much because, you know, they felt like she overdid her penitence. And so to speak. And so when she was levitating, they would blow air into the holes in her door to watch her move. Right. And laugh. And then the priest were starting to make money off of her because people would pay more money just to see her levitate. Right. And then, of course, after the first inquisition, they made her stop. Don't go there anymore. Right. You have to. So she forced herself not to. To think about going to the new world in her writing. She wrote these books. We can buy them called the mystical city of God. She sent them to the king after the first time they made her burned her books because she was hoping that he would save them for her. And he did so that she wouldn't have to burn those books again. Can you imagine writing four volumes of book and then doing it again?

Linda [00:17:45] So she wrote them all over again. Wow.

Donna [00:17:46] They weren't her words. She said they're not my words. They're the Virgin. Mary's was speaking through me. And her mother asked her at a young age, she's like, where did you learn how to read and write? And her answer was, The angels taught me. It's just a fabulous story how, you know, we can't we can't cram it all into a two hour musical. Yeah.

Linda [00:18:10] So I'm struck by the the faith piece of this that is, I think, particularly resonant for today because we're living in such a chaotic time. And so often it just feels like everything is. Is

the world as we know it is falling apart. And and it can be really easy to lose faith. As you know, as we we watch things happen. It sounds as though this this piece, this piece of art, this musical can help remind us about having faith in ourselves and in each other and in our common humanity. Is that one of the reasons why you were drawn to this?

Donna [00:19:10] It is. There's so much relevancy for today. Yeah, right. And okay. So what really drew me to this? So I'm in the backseat of an Uber leaving out of our subdivision. And I look over and you know, how these electrical boxes around town are being painted and they're beautiful. The one at my subdivision has bluebonnets.

Linda [00:19:31] Oh, wow.

Donna [00:19:32] And I just looked up and I said, I got this. God, don't worry, but we need your help. We need your wisdom, your strength. You have to put the right people in my path. And we're gonna do this right because she's up for sainthood right now. So I think if more people around the world knew about her, maybe she would get sainthood. Part of this music has already been played for the pope. Really? They went this last May and the pope was said it was just the most beautiful music he'd ever heard. So our lyricist composer is in West Texas in San Angelo. And, you know, I met her out there. So all of this how this all unfolded is just crazy. You're just not going to believe that God was who had this plan for a long time, because the lady who actually got me to San Angelo is Katherine Louis, who I worked with with Pipeline for the Sciences to help underprivileged kids learn about chemistry and physics.

Linda [00:20:34] Are you kidding me?

Donna [00:20:35] She marries a guy. They moved to San Angelo. She calls me five years ago and she says, hey, can you come out here and speak to the Chamber of Commerce about women in business? Yeah, sure. So I'm there we go to a café afterwards because you don't usually eat lunch, right when you're speaking. And this woman walks in. Who who's the writer, the music, the composer of this Maria story about Maria. And she was telling me the story. And I just kind of poo pooped it off. I never gave it much more thought. Right. So here I am in Houston. You know, I'm in the energy industry. And this woman's daughter works for Baker Hughes. And she asked me to come speak for the Baker Hughes employees. Well, her mom has to come. Right. Right. And she brings this director, Bruce Lumpkin, who used to play here at the TUTS and was with Tommy Tune's up in New York and says, I've talked to him and he and I want to do this musical. Can you help us? Again, really wasn't on my radar screen, but I knew about the story and I thought it was great until I saw those bluebonnets on my street and I'm like,

Linda [00:21:48] OK, that's a sign that I need to do it and I had to do this.

Donna [00:21:51] Yeah, but, you know, it is about all of this chaos going on and having faith, knowing that there's God, there's somebody something out there bigger than all of us, and that we do have to come back to find love, to be love, to be kind to people and do the right things. Right. So I'm a friend of mine. She does energy work. And so she was telling me yesterday. You know, there's there's a word for it. I can't remember what it was. But she says all of this is happening. All of this chaos, she said. But there's also this underlying spirit of God that's gonna come through and break all this up. She said companies who are in it for just the money and greed and power and in doing unethical things will be going away. I'm like, whoa, whoa. Right. And I'm thinking, is this part is this part of that movement? It could be.

Linda [00:22:46] Did she tell you when you to call her back? When is this chaos going away?

Donna [00:22:56] But she says that a lot of people who do energy work in Reiki and healing will know this and know that it's happening. It's you know, so please find more of those people.

Linda [00:23:09] Yes. Yes, absolutely. This is so fascinating to me to see how I just feel like you are doing exactly what you're supposed to be doing. That as you say there, you know, there is a divine plan for each one of us. We don't know what it is. We're just going about our merry way, trying to figure it out as we go along. But just listening to you tell all these different I mean, the whole energy connection along with the the the creative side of it and how all of those dots are

connected is just to me says that you are doing exactly what the divine plan is for you in your life. And what so what would be your your message to, I guess, to our audience and to the world in general in terms of how we can navigate this chaos as we try to recognize what the divine plan is for each one of us and just find our way back to love. What what's your what are your thoughts on that.

Donna [00:24:26] Sow? My thoughts on that are good. People have to find other good people and we have to band together and we have to understand that it's our job. You know, in the past, somebody might have done you wrong and that was unethical or something happen. And, you know, do it to me twice. OK, I get it right. Who you are and what you're about. But I think now we we need to recognize that and we need to protect other people from them. I wouldn't have said this in the past because I would have said if somebody did me wrong, it was me. Right. And you just keep all that to yourself. But now it's like, no, you have to protect other people because maybe they're good people. Why should I let somebody come in and do something to them? Right. If they're not good people. So let's let's make sure we we let people know this is a good person. Connect them, help them write and connect other people. And if somebody says something about another person. No, no. You don't say what happened. You just have to say, oh, you should be careful. Yeah. I mean, there are words you can use. Yeah, right. And so I'm doing more of that. And I don't know if I'm doing it because I'm older now and then I'm OK with it. But I realized that my whole life, Linden, like yours, is really about connections. And how do you connect people? How do you connect people with their projects to help them succeed? Right. Right. And you want to help good people and you put people together. So here's here's the difference. I'm have a somebody else I know. And they go, oh, I know so-and-so. Oh, yeah, they could probably help you. But if you ask me, I'll go. Oh, I know, Linda. Let me see if I can arrange lunch with you and me and Linda and I'll introduce you. Right. Or if I can't do that, at least I'll do an introduction. I'll say who you are, who Linda is, and why you should come together. See, that's a big difference. That's a big difference, right? Yeah. So I think if more of us do do that because it does. Come back to you because you never know who knows who, etc. And just in this short journey that I've been with this musical lady of Agreda. People are coming into my life that I had no idea that they would be coming into my life. And it was for this purpose.

Linda [00:26:56] For this purpose. Wow. So when does the musical open?

Donna [00:27:01] March 12th. At Queensberry Theater, which is in town and country. The old town and country center. Exactly where it is. Yeah. It used to be the little old town and country that.

Linda [00:27:11] I remember.

Donna [00:27:12] Yeah, it's called Queensberry Theater. It's beautiful. They have free parking. So we'll play five performances a week through April 5th. And I just hope we can put butts in seat. And you know, I already have Inspire Women. They bought the whole balcony for the next to the last.

Linda [00:27:33] That's a Wonderful organization. That's a wonderful organization. And so the the goal. So the Pope is already aware of this musical. And he's obviously she's up for Saint Hood.

Donna [00:27:45] Well it was a musical ballet that was done for him. Some of the music is the same. OK. But we've got all new music. OK. Also, and it's a musical instead of a musical ballet. Yes. He's well aware that we're trying to raise her up. Yeah, recognition and awareness in the public.

Linda [00:28:04] So you think you're gonna get to go meet the pope?

Donna [00:28:07] Wouldn't that be wonderful?

Linda [00:28:09] Wouldn't it be wonderful? I just met someone recently who did meet the Pope. And I will connect you to her.

Donna [00:28:17] See, there it works.

Linda [00:28:19] I am going. I love you. You, two. And by having lunch with her tomorrow and you two need to know each other. I was thinking about her the whole time that you were telling me this story of Maria. And this is going to resonate with my new friend. And I just met her a couple of weeks ago. And.

Donna [00:28:33] Yeah, and I'm not Catholic. Right. I'm Presbyterian, but I don't I don't think this story matters.

Linda [00:28:40] No, it's about it. Know, it's it's about human. It's about spirituality. And it's not about religion. It's about spirituality. Yeah. And faith and faith.

Donna [00:28:49] And faith in mentorship and sponsorship and, you know, love and, you know, just believing that there is something out there bigger than us. A friend of mine yesterday sent me this video and is about Earth. And then the rest of the universe, I was like, oh, we are nothing.

Linda [00:29:08] Kind of puts it in perspective. Right. When you look at it from that vantage point.

Donna [00:29:13] Yeah, it's amazing.

Linda [00:29:14] Yeah. OK. Oh, Donna, this is this is just food for my soul. Having conversations like this and I'm so excited about this this new venture that you've got this musical and I can't wait to see it. We'll make sure to link everything on our on our Web site so that people can get to it and know when to buy tickets and get help get some butts in seats.

Donna [00:29:37] Oh we have group discounts.

Linda [00:29:39] Great. Yeah. Fantastic.

Donna [00:29:41] For 10 more people for a rate of \$10 off per ticket. Or if you're a senior, we'll give you ten dollars off if you're a student. We'll give you ten dollars off the air. Here's the thing, Linda. I think it's going to go all over the world.

Linda [00:29:55] You think so? Yeah. Yeah.

Donna [00:29:57] And we'll need all kinds of help because we're going to have to get this translated in all different kinds of languages, etc. But the music is beautiful. Right. I can't wait. All things are possible with God. It's these aren't my words. They're her words.

Linda [00:30:15] Oh, exciting times. So best of luck to you on the production and continued success with Cole Chemical. And I know everyone who has an opportunity if you ever get an opportunity to hear Donna speak. You really should take it. Take advantage of that. And for sure, if you're in the Houston area come March 5th, you definitely have to go see this amazing musical lady of Agreda. So, Donna, thank you so much. Thank all of you for watching and listening and giving Donna permission to speak. And for having the courage to listen with an open mind. We'll see you next time.