

Podcast Episode #015
A Real-Life Reinvention Story
with Special Guest Rory Verrett

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Announcer: Welcome to the LiftOff Project with Coach Pamela.

Pamela: Hi and welcome to the LiftOff Project I'm Pamela Mitchell your host and your coach and this is the podcast devoted to helping you meld your professional self and your personal self into an enhanced version of your best self. My goal is to help you take control of your work and your life for more relaxed and confident and experience a satisfaction and fulfillment of a sustainable successful life.

Today's topic is a real life reinvention story. We are going to hear some truth telling today. To talk about his story, I recently spoke with Rory Verrett. Rory was a client of mine and he currently leads the sports practice at the Raben Group where he helps organizations develop advocacy solutions at the intersection of sports and social change. Immediately prior to that he was at the National Football League where he was vice president of public affairs in their first ever head of talent management.

Before the NFL, Rory worked at several recruiting firms including Spencer Stuart and Russell Reynolds. He began his career as legislative counsel to a member of congress. Rory's eclectic background highlights the twists and turns and the power of reinvention. I'm excited he's agreed to share his story with us today. Let's dive in and get this show started.

Hi Rory. Welcome today.

Rory: Hi happy to be here Pamela.

Pamela: I am thrilled to have you here. You said you're caffeinated and ready to go.

Rory: That's right.

Pamela: Got to have that shot. It's perfect for this particular conversation today because really what I wanted to talk to you about Rory and I think it's so important for



our listeners is what it's like in real life to go through reinvention. So many times we see these stories on TV. We read these profiles in magazines and it all sounds very lovely and glamorous. Like I was a Wall Street hedge fund person and now I'm raising goats in Maine or something like that.

That sounds glamorous on its surface but ultimately to take yourself from point A to point B is really a very interior journey. There's a lot of fear. There's a lot of hurdles. Our conversation today really about pulling back the curtain on what real life reinvention means. Why don't we start by your just telling us a little bit about your background and what brought you to that moment of reinvention?

Rory: I am lawyer by training. I think I went into the practice of law and into law school like a lot of law students do. This a risk averse choice. You're never going to be unemployed and rarely underemployed if you have a law degree. That is actually proven to be true. I walked away from the practice of law fairly early in my career. One of the things I figured out early on is that this is really an act of courage. It's an act of courage because a couple of things are happening that you don't even realize at the time that you're making this reinvention.

You're walking away from an easier path in your career where people will recognize you as a lawyer. Law firms recruit you. Companies recruit you as a lawyer. It's a credential that separates you from others in the market. It's an advantage you have from not being a lawyer. Non-lawyers can't practice law. Lawyers can.

Pamela: Wait! You know me Rory. We have talked. You know what I'm about to say which is own that please. Just as a little side for listeners. When I am coaching clients one of the things that I really request from them is to actually own that by saying, "I am the one who's going through this." as opposed to you or third person there's a way in which you separate yourself emotionally from the experience when you shift into that third person. Own that please.

Rory: That's right.

Pamela: You were walking away from your identity. That's a huge thing.

Rory: I walked away from an easier path in being a lawyer and then moving into being an entrepreneur and then being a policy advocate, being an HR executive and a head hunter. I walked away from a fairly consistent and stable path in the law. Not to brag but I had a Harvard law degree so I was going into the top law firms in the country. I walked away from that to craft a route for myself that I couldn't really see beyond the bend. I couldn't even see the road. I was just walking through the woods making my own path.

The second thing you walk away from that I walked away from is I walked away from the comfort that I gotten accustomed to with the law. I had spent years studying the law. I had friends. I had a network. I had relationships. I had learned how to survive



inside the law firm and I was walking away from all of that stability and all of that information that made me comfortable and walked into a series of career choices I made where I didn't have the relationships. In some cases, I really didn't have the expertise in what I was doing. I was gaining it as I was going along. I certainly didn't have any comfort in the stability of the past. Again, I was walking through the woods making the path as I walked.

Pamela: I want to unpack that a little bit. I want to pull something out. Let me ask you first because this idea of giving up the known, giving up that stability is a really huge one and that is that first moment where we are looking at our lives and it looks good to everybody especially something like Harvard law where you are on a track. To step off that track, to do something else is a very fundamental shift especially when you're dealing with expectations. Talk to us about what within you made you make that decision to give that up, to walk away from the stability and actually walk away from that whole identity that was there waiting for you?

Rory: That's a great question. One thing that happened to me was I noticed that my peers had a different set of experiences that put them in the same places that I wound up joining them. At the law firm or at law school the folks that got into Harvard law, the people that got into these top law firms our paths were completely different. It was just being in social settings or being in professional settings and talking to people realizing, "I'm kind of an odd bird here. I didn't do what these people did to get me here."

It was that realization that was the eureka moment for me that I had to take a nontraditional path because my path had been authentic and original from the beginning. There was no lawyer in my family. There was no one who had gone to an Ivy League school in my family. There was no one who had worked at a big company in my family. All the things I did to get there learning about the law school application, learning about how to interview at these law firms. I had to figure that out on my own.

Everything that I did was really DNA of an entrepreneur and there was a lot of hustle, a lot of grit, a lot of tenacity. I don't know if the traditional practice of law in many ways encourages or promotes that. In some ways it does but you can be very successful in the law without being entrepreneurial and without having hustle or grit or what not. It was just this eureka moment that I was actually getting off the path or I was not doing the things that had gotten me to this point of success and so whatever this brass ring I was getting by joining some of these elite law firms that was actually going to take me out of my comfort zone for the last 15 years of what have been my secret sauce for success.

Pamela: What I'm hearing then is that what you woke up to realize is that what ... I guess if I were to say what really was required for success or really what was rewarded for success in the industry that you were in was not a great fit for your highest most unique qualities. Therefore, you were looking at going down a whole path of a mismatch where you were going to have to slot yourself into something that you could do but it really wasn't the most fulfilling highest part of you.



Rory: That's right. I know now at the ripe old age of 45 that I'm at my best when I'm creating something and leading a small team. That's just where I'm most comfortable. It goes back to ironically my time in high school. All of my great achievements have some version of those 2 characteristics; leading a small team and creating something almost out of thin air and then executing on it. It lies as a law firm [program lease 00:10:51] as it was given to me and the choices I made to go to certain law firms they were not going to give me that.

I actually started adopting some of the values that they weren't negative values but weren't again the values that had gotten me there. You know prestige and money and safety and stability and all of those values of joining essentially the establishment. Nothing wrong with that but it just didn't connect with what made me tick and what got me up in the morning rearing to go.

Pamela: Let's talk about that because that piece of if I we were to put it in more I guess socially used term it would be passion. Whatever your passion was that part that spirit, that little spark that's like, "Yeah this is what I'm excited about. This is what engages me wasn't really there although on its surface it looked like it should. Talk to us about the fears because there's a way in which when we first admit to ourselves that thing that we thought was going to fulfill us actually doesn't it's a very scary moment.

Rory: I think there are some ghosts that I had to confront that I didn't even know were impacting me. They were all made up by me. There was not pressure put on me from external sources. I created the course of ghost that would whisper in my head "Why are you doing this? You're crazy." One set of voices that I created was the voices of my family. My parents, my grandparents, my ancestors like "You big dummy. You just made it to Harvard law school. All you have to do is not screw it up and you're going to be a millionaire lawyer. Isn't that considering how far your family has come?

Your father never went to high school. He had to work manual labor. Your mother was First Generation College. All you have to do is just keep on going down this path and boy you got to be tremendously successful and wildly wealthy." There was a real pressure from my family about that but I created that. There was this burden that I had on my shoulders of being the rich successful kid who had gone to the Ivy League school and had to be a role model for my whole family.

The other set of ghost I created is the ghost of my peers. What would my peers say to me if I show up at the reunion? The mythical reunion, where everybody gets judged and my name tag says Rory Verrett, CEO of ridiculous dumb startup company that's failing.com. My buddies have partner at big well to do law firm in New York and big well to do law firm in Silicon Valley. I've got this ridiculous company I've started that's failing. I don't have the nice car. I don't have the nice house. I can't even afford to go to the after parties because I'm broke.



All of those ghosts that I've created among my peers constantly well like "Don't do this. Take the easy path. Take the safe path." I just finally got up enough courage to take a sock in the mouth of those ghosts and say, "I have to do what makes me authentically engaged and happy and what I think I add the most value to the world." That's not this. Lawyers are very loath to give up the notion of being a council. I kept the word council in my title for years even though I did nothing legal because I still wanted to have that foot in the legal world just in case I got scared and pulled myself back into it. Those ghosts that I created my voice had to be louder than theirs in my own head.

Pamela: In coaching we call those committee members. These committee members are weighing in on what they think you ought to do and to your point some of those committee members are generated from the voices of our family. You were fortunate in that your family wasn't actually saying those things to you because many times there are people whose families are. Really what they're doing is they're giving voice to our own fears.

Then of course the peer committee members, your friends, your worst most judgmental friend that's in there saying, "What's wrong with you. Get it together already." All of those committee members that we have to face and run the gauntlet of on the way to that moment of fulfillment. How did you need to grow in order to face those committee members and stick a sock in them to the mouth?

Rory: I had to redefine what was success for me. For much of my life success was a gilded resume and a lot of money. That was one thing. What ultimately knocked me into my senses was I realized that time I guess when you get in your 40's you start really understanding the skills you have time. I was like, "Wow I don't have a lot of time. I only have as much time as I did before to really do what it is that I think is my life calling." If you don't get on with it now, you'll never do it. I married. I've got an 8-year-old daughter.

There are real financial goals that I have and I remember when I was transitioning out of corporate, I was interviewing for a position as the head of HR of a company and the job paid like a multiple over my last job paid which is a fairly high salary. As I sat there interviewing with the recruiter, I was listening to myself and I said, "Here you go again. You're going to go to this company. You don't want to do this work. You don't find it uplifting or meaningful but it pays a lot of money and all you got to do is find more time to defer making the hard decision again that I'm going to live my authentic life."

I just had to get the clutter out and the blessing ... you told me this. You said time and space and quiet are the blessings you get from God to make and think through hard decisions. If I didn't have that I would have jumped from again the prestigious high paying job and not think that much about it and enjoy world class golf, a nice car and great vacations.

Pamela: That's it?



Rory: That's it. It was just realizing that that was enough and that my definition of success had changed. The people that I look at and I don't know if this a healthy way of thinking about it but what I tell people about managing their career is in your quiet moment who are the people who you really say "Boy I really would like to have a career like that." Not with you sit publicly, not who you applaud when you go have coffee or drinks whatever but who you [inaudible 00:18:42].

For me its people like Bill Maher. Its people like Chris Rock. I don't want to be a comedian but having a talk show, being impactful politically in a way that is funny and engaging that to me ... I'm like that's the kind of impact I want to have yet everything in my career all the trapping was about being serious and erudite and in the establishment. That's not really who I am.

Pamela: Let me ask you. What did you gain? What are the unexpected results that came from saying I'm going to follow that still small voice?

Rory: I am much more efficient in my life because I'm not wearing a costume and a mask. I don't have to be my authentic self at home and someone else at work. I'm the same person so I gained much more productivity in the work that I do if I'm being hired and if I have a career where leading and being creative is what I'm called to do and I'm not searching for moments to do that in my job that requires me to be an authority on rules and processes.

Well then that's very inefficient. I've gained a whole lot of productivity. The second I've gained is I'm getting better at the craft of leading and being creative because I'm doing more of it. The third thing I would say that I gained is I think my relationships personal and professional are just richer because I'm actually being myself. I'm giving people my authentic self.

Pamela: Really then what I'm hearing you say if I were to sum this up is that and this is really the promise of the podcast and the promise of doing this work is that you end up melding your professional self and your personal self into an enhanced version of your best self. You bring that best self to your entire world. It's one life now. It's not your work life and your personal life. It's one life.

Rory: That is absolutely correct. I have to thank you for giving me the structure and the vocabulary and the wisdom and just the gentle push to move into this new self. You are phenomenal in helping me recognize that and then pushing me to take this unique authentic path so thank you.

Pamela: You're so welcome. Let me ask you final one thing. Just words of advice that you have for listeners who might be wondering about starting their own reinvention.

Rory: I would say it's less scary than you think. The path of going the traditional route or doing what you've done it's like a slow boil. You don't know the water is getting hot but eventually it's boiling and you're going to suffer. we think of the authentic path as



giving up acute pain but we don't understand the slow pain, the slow burn, the slow boil that happens when we're taking the path that is not our authentic self or the one we don't have courage to get off of. I would say you're going to eventually pay a higher price if you don't get on your authentic path.

There is no joy on the other path. You may have brief moments of satisfaction. You may have brief moments where you're content but true joy and knowing that what you're doing is aligned with God's purpose that only happens when you walk in your authentic self and on that authentic path. It's absolutely worth it because the pain is not going to be as bad as you think and the joy is going to be higher than you can imagine.

Pamela: I love that wrap up. In fact, that was the real conversation that I had client with a client this morning and I said to her, "The thing about following this path is that the worst pain is right up front and then it gets easier."

Rory: That's right.

Pamela: That's what we don't realize. We think that horrible pain that we're feeling as we're growing and expanding is going to last. It actually doesn't last. What does last is the pain of choosing the other path because that pain is endless. It never stops.

Rory: Absolutely right.

Pamela: Thank you so much Rory for sharing your story with us. I appreciate your level of honesty.

Rory: Thank you Pam. You are a blessing to all of us that have had the privilege of working with you. I still hope that many others through the podcast will come to understand and appreciate your genius. Thank you for letting me be a small part of the podcast.

Pamela: Wasn't that powerful? If you've been on the fence wondering whether or not you wanted to embark on your own reinvention, I hope that hearing Rory's story inspired you to take that first step. If you want to know more about Rory he's got yet another reinvention up his sleeve. He's just launched a new podcast called Protégé Podcast. You can tune in for career advice, inspiration and unvarnished truth at protégépodcast.com. Definitely go check him out there.

That's it for this segment of the LiftOff Project. Be sure to visit our website theliftoffproject.com/podcast where you can download a transcript of today's episode. If you have a question for an upcoming segment of Ask Coach Pamela go to theliftoffproject.com/question and leave me a voice mail. If I answer your question in a future episode, I'll send you a free deck of reinvention cards as a gift. [Skedaddle 00:24:34] on over there and leave me a voicemail with a question.



THE LiftOff project *with Coach Pamela*

You can also connect with me on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram at The Coach Pamela and if you enjoyed this episode please leave a review for us on iTunes. Your feedback truly does make a difference. Today's lift off inspiration comes from Mahatma Gandhi who says, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." If you are looking for a change in your life, take that first step and make it happen. Thank you for listening and remember why settle for good when great is waiting. Take one small step this week to lift your life. Bye for now!

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