



**PRODUCTIVITYIST**

# **FEARLESS AND FREE**

**with Wendy Sachs**



**Mike:** I'd like to welcome Wendy Sachs to the Productivityist Podcast. Wendy, thanks for joining me today.

**Wendy:** Thanks so much for having me.

**Mike:** So, I'm a big Green Lantern fan. A lot of people know that I'm listening to show for a long time and Green Lantern, this is more a comic book lesson for you at this point.

**Wendy:** Yes, I get it. I get it. I'm down with comic book heroes. My husband's a big fan of Green Lantern.

**Mike:** So, when I see the terms fear and fearless in the book Fearless and Free, I immediately gravitate towards that because Green Lantern's main enemy is--well, his weakness is the color yellow. But we'll let that cast to the side, it's representative of fear.

So, I want to dive into fear in our conversation today. The book is called Fearless and Free: How Smart Women Pivot and Relaunch Their Careers. I want to dive into the element of fear right away. When women or anyone really, feels fearful, how does that impact a wide variety of just their lives on the



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**Mike:** whole in terms of not just the career, but it kind of infest everything, especially if they're in some places that they're not happy and fear is keeping in there, right?

**Wendy:** Sure. I think, really, fear comes down to inertia, right? So, women are much more hesitant to take some sort of action and that-- we see that in not only in their careers, in their professional lives, but also in their personal lives. When things aren't working out in a relationship with a spouse, with a partner, or just dating, that sort of fear of being alone, fear of getting divorced, fear of never getting married, whatever that may be, that fear often holds us back. I don't necessarily know if that's so much of a gender thing, but we do see--I mean studies really do show though that women are much more less likely to take risks than men are because we want to be perfect. We want to get it right. So, we're afraid. We're afraid of failing. We're afraid of taking chances, and they put us into uncomfortable places that we can't control and that are unknown to us, and that is what I think really precipitates that kind of fear.

**Mike:** It's interesting as we're having this conversation, my wife had just transitioned, not necessarily what she does but where she



**Mike:** does it. I think that-- so, she's an acupuncturist and she's just moved on from her 13-year-- I think it's about 13 years where she stayed at one clinic where drawing a salary, which is very rare in the acupuncture space, to now running her own clinic. What you're saying, we saw it firsthand. I think she saw it happening. She's like, "I don't understand why I'm being so hesitant. Mike, you jumped from Costco with-- you went from manager at Costco to door-greeter at Costco and didn't bat an eyelash when you did that. Sure, you mitigated the risk of it, but you were like, "I'm moving on," and I've done that countless times." But she had a real struggle with that. Part of it was monetary because I mean-- when I'm running my own business and paycheck, that's really paycheck to paycheck but it's like you don't know what's coming in a business that I run where she had the solid income. But it wasn't just that, it was the security, it was the--

**Wendy:** The comfort probably. The comfortable surroundings, knowing what to expect every day when she shows up?

**Mike:** Right, and the other thing is she was still doing what she loved to do, but thing was the environment. It's the environment. How does environment when you're thinking



**Mike:** about a pivot when women are thinking about a pivot or a shift, how does the environment of where they currently are, play a role into where they-- keeping them from moving on? Because there's that familiarity there, I guess. But why does that hold people back in general? It was a very interesting thing to watch because she loves this thing, but I watched her love for the things she does diminish because of where she was at.

**Wendy:** Sure. Well, I think there's a few different things that are happening. I mean women, we thrive in environments where we have friends, where we have a tribe of others, where we feel supported and where we feel good at what we're doing and have a certain sense of peace and comfort I think that where we're at. So, I think if you are working at a company, you're in an organization that has all of those things for you. There's not a fear of the unknown. You like the people you're working, things are going relatively smoothly, but maybe you're realizing you really should move on and maybe there is not a lot of more growth that you're seeing where you are or frankly, you're getting a little bored. That can sometimes come a little laziness because like, "Well, I don't really know what's on the other side." and "What if I leave and I



**Wendy:** So, we start really ruminating about all of the unknown, and all of the other things that could be happening, and we could be a little bit unsure if we should move a move, thinking, "You know what? It's pretty good with what I've got. I'll just stay put. All is okay. I'll write it out. My kids are young. Maybe I want to stay under the radar a little bit and not-- I don't want to amp it up."

Now, there's a whole bunch of reasons of why people don't take action. It's much harder to actually take action. I think when you get into a place where things are terrible and you're really stressed out or you get fired, well, that's the other extreme. So, that's where you have to actually make a move, it's being forced upon you. I think maybe you see the downside of failure maybe isn't so great if you really don't have much further to fall, so you're more likely to take that risk, it's almost like sink or swim here. So, if things are just relatively good, it could be harder to really try to make a move and push out.

**Mike:** Do women, in your experience, sabotage current situations to move on to something new? I mean, I know I did that. I know at Costco, I basically started to tank at my job so that it kind



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**Mike:** of-- I had that pain of like, "I'm not doing so well. Why am I not doing so well? Why am I tanking? Oh, it's because I want to get the heck out of here." Do you see that happening as well?

**Wendy:** That we're sabotaging our jobs on a daily basis just so we can feel forced to make a move. I would say probably that's not the case because I think if we're going to really have sort of a girl stereotype and put something on what women do in the workplace, is that we try to get along, we're more collaborative we're not really trying to be so abrasive. In fact, I write a lot about this in the book, I talk about the double bind that women in leadership face and how I was called too abrasive, that I needed to dial it back. I got this very depressing performance review and they basically said, "Keep your head down. Don't be so loud." That to me was my message that I needed to leave. So, I actually--  
I don't think I was trying to sabotage my job, I was just being me and it wasn't well received in my workplace. Interestingly enough, my boss was a woman. I did try to dial it back and I started-- at my next job, I started apologizing a lot and saying sorry, using all the shrinker words that really diminish a woman's power, but because I wanted to be well-liked and



**Mike:** Yes, and I think what I did was the last resort thing when you just don't kind of-- when you feel like trapped and you do something that-- because it's not healthy. It's not wise to do that either because you're burning bridges and you're probably putting yourself-- you don't want to go out like that and then come into another situation with that being the last taste you kind of left in somebody's mouth..

**Wendy:** You don't want to burn down the house as you're leaving, no. [laughs]

**Mike:** No. No, that's not a good thing.

**Wendy:** It's not such a great strategy.

**Mike:** No. No, I would not recommend it no matter what gender you are. [laughs] So, my wife, when the situation came along for this new opportunity, it literally was something that popped up in her Facebook feed, this new clinic, and it was very serendipitous. She obviously saw the opportunity there and took advantage of it. But you talked about how we could engineer our own serendipity. Can you dive into that and unpack that a little bit?



Wendy: Yes. I love this concept. It does sound a little bit vague and it's a little hard to try to explain. I give anecdotes in the book just to try to bring it to life. But really I think that concept of serendipity, we think of it-- most of us really think of it as like a happy accident, right? Great things happen. They just sort of magically happen.

But actually, we can engineer our own serendipity and this has become sort of trendy in this startup world and creative agencies, advertising agencies in places like that where they realized that creative forces when they collide, great things unexpectedly happen.

Apparently, that was the origin story of the birth of Gmail. At Google, is random different people from different parts of the organization and different engineers came together. They were sitting at the cafeteria and boom, there was Gmail. The concept is sort of like putting yourself into places where great things can happen. But you have to actually--  
Going back to your wife's story, now, I don't know the full story of her going out on her own, but she has obviously laid the groundwork, right?



Mike: Yes.

Wendy: Thirteen years of working as an acupuncturist for a clinic, not for herself, she now-- she has mastered acupuncture, right?

Mike: Yes

Wendy: So, she's ready to rock and roll on her own. Then suddenly, I guess you're telling-- you're saying before she sees an acupuncture center pop up on her Facebook. Is that when she actually decides to take the initiative and say, "I'm ready. I'm going for this on my own"? Was that her mindset?

Mike: Well, it wasn't just the clinic. I mean it was interesting. She's running her own practice before and all that stuff. So, she was quite happy to be in the salaried role for a long period of time. But what was interesting is it wasn't just an acupuncture center that popped up, it was an overall clinic looking for an acupuncturist. It wasn't even like just-- it was literally like grabbing her by-- she was going, "Hey. Hey, you. This thing you're looking for." I mean obviously she had to investigate but as she dug deep-- that was the trigger moment for lack of a better term.



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**Wendy:** Right. Well, it's like the acupuncture gods were looking down upon your wife and like literally arising [laughs] in her Facebook feed. Well, that's fantastic.

So, at that moment, so maybe if she were in a different headspace earlier in her career, that would come up and maybe she would think, "Oh, that's interesting. I know someone who should take that job, right?"

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**Mike:** Yes.

**Wendy:** But now she's ready for this opportunity. So, part of engineering your own serendipity is to have really an open mindset about what it is that you're looking to do and to be able to explore those other boundaries. This whole, there's a lot of sort of sociological concepts that go into this and studies and science behind this whole idea that doors open doors open doors.

When you get yourself into the right place, sometimes, that's literally the right room of people at networking events and you see how your skill set may be able to overlap with someone else and you can see how collaboratively you may be able to work together or help someone else or benefit



**Wendy:** someone else and also benefit yourself in the process, and you see and you're open to other ideas.

So, it's sort of your background, your experience coming together with matching your vision of where you want to be and then seizing on that moment. The final and most important piece of all of this, of course, is taking some action. Circling back to your wife, if she sees this popping up on Facebook, that she decides not to pick up the phone and make a phone call, well then, she will never move forward with this project.

So, it's being able to have enough confidence in yourself at that moment to say, "Hey, I can do this." or "How can we work together?" or "Can we meet?" Taking that-- starting that momentum to drive yourself to create this great opportunity. We can actually engineer these great moments for ourselves. We need to be aware of them and we need to seize on them.

**Mike:** I want to dive into something that I think a lot of people struggle with, both men and women, and this is kind of the idea of branding without bragging which you touched on. Because a lot of people, they struggle with that. The balance, where's the fine line between, "Okay, this is me kind of



**Mike:** myself out there," versus this is me, putting myself out there to the point where it's like, "Okay. Okay. Relax." [laughs] No, we get what you're doing and we know you do it well. How do you do that? Because I think what happens is a lot of people are afraid even to brand or to put themselves out there because the more the-- I think everybody comes across this, where the higher you climb in your career ladder or even prestige, the more that imposter syndrome can kind of rear its ugly head because we're human beings. So, you feel like, "Okay. Am I really all that in a bag of chips?" for lack of a better term. [laughter] That's a Canadianism.

**Wendy:** I love that term.

**Mike:** That's a Canadianism right there, I think.

**Wendy:** I love that Canadianism.

**Mike:** So, let's talk about that a little bit.

**Wendy:** You're going to make one, I know it.

**Mike:** Yes, now you're going to go get a bag of chips when you're done here.



Wendy: Absolutely as I work out my own imposter syndrome. So, here's the thing. I do think that-- we probably have a gender divide when it comes to that professional branding of ourselves because it does seem-- and this is not just my own opinion. I mean from studies we see this, too. Men will raise their hands for jobs when they're not even meeting all the criteria. There's this very famous study. It came out from that, from Hewlett-Packard. Men will apply for a job if they meet 60% of the criteria, women only apply for that job if they made a hundred percent of the criteria. So, why is that? That comes down to confidence and how we feel about ourselves and then we're going to push out and we're going to go for something. So, how I would relate that to even the sort of branding space is that women do not like to boast about themselves in the same way that many men in the workplace will.

I was actually just having this experience. I was in Washington DC talking to 50 female attorneys, almost all whom had worked either at the White House or at the Department of Justice under Obama, so all of these women are unemployed. They literally three months have been out of a job.



**Wendy:** They were talking about writing their resumes. They knew their time was up after the election, they were putting their resumes together, and they were saying the guys at the justice department, you would have thought that they were running the justice department from their resume. This is actually their own branding. Your resume is your brand. You're putting yourself out there. I mean maybe it's not a post on Twitter or an Instagram or on Facebook, but for all intents and purposes, your resumes is your professional branding, right.

**Mike:** Right

**Wendy:** So, they would really own all-- they were like doing everything. They were running immigration. They were civil rights. Whatever the unit, they were they were running that and where the women would say, "Well, you know, I was on that team and I went to some of those meetings. I don't know if I can really say that I did that."

So, we have such a harder time with owning what it is that we've done. We like to put it all on the team rather than us and that's a real problem because in today's world, we need



**Wendy:** to brag a little bit and we need to get comfortable with that. Bragging isn't necessarily a dirty word. Obviously, you're super aggressive and obnoxious about it and constantly in people's faces.

Well, that's also just not good protocol and people just won't like that. But on the other hand, women seem to do the opposite and we really just hold back on what it is that we do well and we don't like to put a spotlight on our skillset or ourselves.

Also, it's interesting because clearly, the job that you're doing with your podcast and getting all the recognition, you are in the spotlight and that is part of your job frankly at this point is to make these, it's like to get on, to get included in an ink list and that helps grow your business.

But as these women at justice pointed out to me, their job was not to be in the spotlight. Their boss was President Obama. He's the boss. They're actually not used to having to really brag about themselves or boast about what they've done because they truly are part of a team. So, depending on the industry it, can be challenging for women to really get in



**Wendy:** front of all of this. There's definitely also generational things happening. I mean I've got kids and my kids have no problem with their personal branding. I mean they know they are out there and full force on Instagram. My teenage son even is running his Instagram marketing company. I mean he is all over the place and he has-- again, it's it is part of his DNA at this point. So, I do think clearly there's a fine line between being super obnoxious out there but also, we do need to really sort of take ownership of what it is that we do well and if we don't have-- create that visibility for ourselves, particularly today when everything is social, everything's on social media, we're going to have missed opportunities. If we're not-- if people are not thinking of our name, if we're not on that list, if we're not a part of that conversation, that great magic, this job, all of these opportunities are just not going to happen for us.

**Mike:** You know, it's amazing when you start to do-- when you start to take advantage of that, where you start to put stock in that because it does things like grow your confidence. It allows you to do things that you kind of felt inhibited to do which is exactly the kind of stuff you touch on. I want to ask you, what are you fearful of and then how do you get around it?



**Mike:** Because I mean, I think no matter who we are, we might have been afraid of something before, but now we've have gotten past it, but something else kind of rears its head. What still gets to you and how do you get around it because I think that would be really helpful for my audience.

**Wendy:** Yes. I mean there's a few different things. It's funny that question just came up earlier for me today, it was something else. I think I'm fearful of not being relevant. I think I'm fearful- - I think that is what really was the origin for me writing the book was that my industry is-- I've been in media, television, PR, the whole sort of storytelling. It was not called storytelling when I started, by the way, which is why I'm feeling like I could become irrelevant soon. It wasn't called content, it was called writing, it was called journalism. By the way, I'm a solid Gen-Xer. I'm over 40. I feel like the ageism is starting so much younger than ever before. I feel like that I'm becoming too expensive for my industry and I don't want to say for companies. I don't work in finance. I'm not at a hedge fund, places where they value people with a little more experience and can compensate them for that experience. So, my fear is that the industries of media in advertising, marketing,



**Wendy:** entertainment, all of those have really cheapened themselves. I don't mean in the quality of the content as much as that they're not valuing good writing or paying people for the experience that they may have because they realize that there's all of these platforms where they can get things, if not for free, they're getting things incredibly inexpensively. Digital has transformed the entertainment world. It's very hard for myself. I was a TV producer and I've done some documentary work, but for other friends of mine in the industry, to make a living anymore.

So, the real fear is monetizing my skill set, staying relevant in a disruptive world where it's not --just the people who are younger said they just are not paying for experience anymore. That to me is actually very-- it's a very real, that's why there's this whole gig economy and people are doing 10 jobs which by the way is really exhausting. [laughter]

**Mike:** Yes. It doesn't allow you to necessarily give your all if you're trying to split your focus amongst 10 different gigs. You're right. The gig-- how do you-- as we get closer to wrapping up, the big golden question. So, if a woman is looking to pivot in their careers. We touched on what my wife's doing to a point.



- Mike:** She's not really pivoting career. She was transferring her skills from one location really to another that's going to hopefully-- I mean, she hasn't really gotten into it yet as we're recording this, but we'll see. By the time this episode comes out, I'll be able to say, "Yep, it worked" or "Nope, you know what?"
- Wendy:** "She's a success. Yay."
- Mike:** Yes, exactly. If you were to give one piece of advice to a woman who's ready to-- who wants to pivot their career but doesn't know where to start, what would you-- what's the first thing you would tell them to do?
- Wendy:** Do something today. It really, truly, is about taking some action. For some people, that could be they need to write their resume again. They need to start from scratch. They need to make a first phone call to someone. They need to go to a networking event that day. They need to do something. It's taking some action you know wherever you need to be, whether that is meeting a former colleague and reconnecting or truly like figuring out what that summary is going to be on your LinkedIn page. Do something. Because action sort of



**Wendy:** starts the momentum, and so much of it is truly just being paralyzed by inertia. That's how we started, basically saying, "What does fear do?" Well, to me, it creates inertia. So, get over that and then the more you do and the better you get at it, you started mastering it and that is starting to build your confidence and it's sort of even what you said before as you've been doing this. So, now you're feeling really confident in your podcast and the other things you're doing in your career now because you're reaching that point of mastery. I mean that's Malcolm Gladwell. But that's where confidence comes from. The more you do, the more you do. So, for the woman who's trying to make her first move and trying to pivot, just start somewhere and every day, do something. Make it become part of your routine. Then the more you do, you will become more confident even in the journey of it all and that's really important.

**Mike:** Wendy, you've done a lot in your life and taking the time to stop by on the podcast has been great. I mean, chased tornadoes, jumping out of airplanes. We could talk about all that stuff but we got a bonus episode we're going to talk about one of your story here in a little bit for those people who are Patreon supporters.



**Mike:** But people go out and pick up your books. I mean obviously, you have the-- your first book, [How She Really Does It: Secrets of Successful Stay-at-Work Moms](#) and then [Fearless and Free: How Smart Women Pivot and Relaunch Their Careers](#). Where else can people-- where can people find your work online and connect with you if they want to keep moving forward with these kind of being fearless, being free, and learning how they can pivot and get past that inertia that fear brings along?

**Wendy:** Sure, you can find me at [wendysachs.com](http://wendysachs.com). You can find me-- you can find the book, really. It should be in any bookstore right now. If it's not in your bookstore, find it on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) or [barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com). You can reach out to me on my website also. I respond to every email, every note. Ping me on LinkedIn, I'm happy to respond, too.

**Mike:** Awesome.

**Wendy:** I really enjoyed this, Mike. Thank you so much.

**Mike:** Thanks for joining me today, Wendy.

**Wendy:** Thank you for having me.



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