Agency for Change Podcast: Samantha Kris, Executive Speaker Coach & Certified Reinvention Practitioner, Stride Solutions

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Samantha Kris: 0:01

Opportunity shows up when you do.

Announcer: 0:05

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of changemakers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

Lyn Wineman: 0:29

Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman, President and Chief Strategist at KidGlov. Welcome back to another episode of the Agency for Change podcast. Today's guest is someone who helps changemakers not just find their voice, but amplify it with impact. Samantha Kris is an award-winning speaker, a best-selling author and an executive coach who guides people through meaningful transformation using storytelling, goal setting and the power of what she calls liminal space. And if you don't know what liminal space is, we'll go into that in a bit. Whether you are navigating a reinvention, preparing for a big moment or looking to elevate your message, this conversation is filled with practical wisdom and powerful inspiration. Let's dive in. Samantha, welcome to the podcast.

Samantha Kris: 1:27

Thank you so much for having me.

Lyn Wineman: 1:30

I can't wait to talk to you, and I'm really excited to just get started with having you tell us more about your work, because you are a speaker, something that scares a lot of people. You're a coach, something a lot of people can't do. And you're the founder of your own business, stride Solutions. Tell us about your work.

Samantha Kris: 1:51

Thank you. So my speaking career started probably about 10 or so years ago when I gave my TEDx Talk and I had no idea what I was doing. This was the first ever talk that I gave on stage as an adult, and so I

give that little caveat, because I did do some public speaking competition and got some stage time as a kid, but it was my first big stage and I fumbled. I forgot six minutes of my 12-minute talk.

Lyn Wineman: 2:18

Oh, my goodness, I can't believe it. Well, first of all, Samantha, that's a big stage to get started on right. Like, let's not go for a small group. Friends and families, colleagues, you're going straight to TEDx.

Samantha Kris: 2:32

That's right, that. If anyone who knows me knows that that's kind of my style, like go big or go home, and I was, you know, just a small fish in a big pond, totally out of my depth and, like I said, forgot six whole minutes and fortunately, what remained from that talk was a really raw, authentic version of me and what I'd forgotten were all the parts that I had stuffed in to sound more credible, to give myself more clout, really position myself as an expert, and I wasn't claiming the research to be my own, but I was relying on studies. I didn't quite understand that, I didn't know in and out and ultimately what was left was truly, you know, the most authentic version of me at the time. And somehow that talk still ended up being the number one TED talk on goal setting and catapulted my speaking career. So I started coaching TEDx speakers the year after and that's really where speaker coaching started to come into the fold and I loved that.

That stayed my side hustle for a number of years and I was working mostly with startups and scale-ups in marketing, communication role and storytelling and speaking became very much part of what I was doing within these organizations and how I was supporting thought leaders on the side, and about two years ago I decided to go full in. This became my sole focus, and now I'm working not only with TEDx speakers, but with a lot of impact driven CEOs, athletes and thought leaders who are recognizing the need to use their voice to amplify their impact, and that's what Stride Solutions does.

Lyn Wineman: 4:08

Absolutely. I want to give a shout out, Samantha, because you have coached two of our previous Agency for Change guests Kate Williams, who's the CEO of 1% for the Planet, and Miren Oca, the founder of Ocaquatics both amazing women but also now very polished speakers. I've heard both of them speak and and, knowing you just a little bit, I can see your coaching come out as they very authentically tell their stories. So I just want to give you that shout out from the beginning.

Samantha Kris: 4:44

Oh, thank you. I love them. They're wonderful and such great students too. I mean, these are two women who are so intent on developing, you know, personally, professionally, bringing their best self to every opportunity, and they've taken these stages to truly, you know, turn these speaking opportunities into global opportunities, which is really what it's all about.

Lyn Wineman: 5:04

I believe that you know, actually, as you mentioned that, Samantha, there also are top two downloaded episodes of the Agency for Change podcast - numbers in the thousands.

So all of that work is paying off for all of us and I feel like I'm just honored to be in the orbit of the three of you and the work that you're doing. You have mentioned one of the things that's on my bucket list, which is a TED Talk, and you mentioned that very popular TED Talk that you did. I'd love to hear more about that you know really authentic goal setting methodology that you shared, because obviously that's been a big hit for TED listeners.

Samantha Kris: 5:46

Absolutely. Yeah, thank you. So TED is a pretty unique platform in that you don't have to be a great speaker, you just need to have a great idea. Now, of course, the more polished you are or the better you're able to convey your ideas and connect with your audience, the better the talk will perform, the more of an impact you can have. But, ultimately, what they're looking for are either new ideas or fresh perspectives on outdated ideas, and the idea that I brought to the TEDx platform was this new way of goal setting, because the only way that I had really been taught and knew was the SMART goal method, and I would say that one is probably the most popular and mainstream, and I think there's a time and place for SMART goals. I have used them in work settings, I have used them for actually a number of goals, but what I've also found is that we can set this goal. It can be specific, measurable, actionable, results oriented and time bound, and still sit on a shelf and collect dust.

Lyn Wineman: 6:49

That breaks my heart. When that happens, by the way, right like all the work that goes into goal setting and planning, and then on the shelf or now, even more recently, just sitting in your computer file somewhere to be opened later with a bit of remorse and regret.

Samantha Kris: 7:06

Exactly. And so what I found when I was looking at the goals that I had either wanted to set or had set and didn't achieve, I started to look at what the common denominators were in terms of you know, where am I falling short? Where am I lacking motivation to to really make this a reality? And it came down to one critical component which I felt the SMART methodology lost or lacked, which is it was not rooted in emotion. I have no emotional connection to this goal. And then, when I looked at the goals in which I set and did achieve and felt successful and this is, you know, an important differentiator it wasn't just about achieving them, but the ones in which I truly felt well, I got out of this, what I intended to with this one. They were the ones that lit me up, they were the ones that I couldn't stop thinking about before going to sleep and which were the first things that I woke. Like that I thought about when I woke up and I thought, okay, we've got some, we've got something here. So let's reverse, engineer and see of those goals, beyond emotion, what are true for all of them.

And it came down to four core pillars. They resonated with my core values. They empowered me to take action. They were actionable in that the next best step always revealed itself, and they were lucrative, meaning I stood to gain something, not always financially, not always a monetary incentive, but there was very much something in it for me, and I think so often we set goals that benefit our teams, our communities, our families, our partners and, yeah, we get something from it, but it really is to better the world outside of us, which I love, and you know a little bit of a cliche, we've got to fill our cups first, and so, when I thought about the goals in which I stood to gain to gain something first and foremost it became very clear how that could create you know, to quote Miren Oca a ripple of impact in the world,

and so the real goal methodology was born. So resonant, empowering, actionable and lucrative was the idea that I brought to the TEDx stage, and it is truly about anchoring goals in purpose.

Lyn Wineman: 9:25

What a cool idea. So, Samantha, I am used to being in marketing and branding. I'm used to talking about creating an emotional brand or an emotional marketing appeal, and I am well versed in the idea of building oxytocin, which moves people to trust and action. I have never heard anyone speak of emotion in goal setting. That is such a great idea, and what you said and I know resonate is part of the formula, but what you say really resonates with me as well.

As an emotional person, there are goals that I set as a business founder or as a thought leader. That's like well, I should set this goal because this is just what people do, right, but the goals that you have the heart for are the ones that are going to happen. That is just beautiful. Well, let's take this thread a little bit further, because I have heard you on stage at Real Leaders Unite, which is a great event for anybody that's listening. I have heard you talk about emotion in storytelling and I'm really curious when did you first discover your passion for helping people amplify their stories and their impact through speaking?

Samantha Kris: 10:44

I've had such a windy professional road so I actually started as an addictions counselor. That would be a whole other episode. But I studied criminology and my first job out of school was as an addictions counselor. I was working in an inpatient facility and I was working with men and women, most of whom were court mandated, who were there as part of their parole, and they were, you know very much, turning a new page and starting this new chapter of their story of sobriety, story of re-beginning, coming home to themselves, starting over and, unfortunately, having been in that space, uh, for some time, I realized it wasn't for me. I was not able to leave work at work, and I was. I was, I was 19. And I was dealing with men and women who were battling addictions, in most cases older than I was.

And I just didn't have the life experience to separate work from home. I found it very difficult to stay in the field and I looked to do something different, something creative, something that I perhaps never thought that I would do. And in a car drive with a friend of mine, she said you know, what have you ever thought of event planning? No, you're really organized, you love people, you like making things pretty. And I thought never once have I considered let me, let me try it. I was desperate to try something different and to discover parts of myself that I hadn't really given much thought to. So I emailed every event planner in Montreal and I said I'm willing to intern for the summer. I just want to see if I can do this. And I ended up working with a wedding planner. I co-planned 40 weddings that first summer and became an integral part of these couples love stories.

Lyn Wineman: 12:31

Wow, 40 weddings in one summer. That's a lot of brides and mothers and bridesmaids and all the things.

Samantha Kris: 12:41

Yes, and napkin folding. Oh yeah, tying bows. But I loved it and I stayed in that for the next three or four years. And only in a conversation with another friend who was looking for a referral bonus did he say hey, we're hiring a marketing coordinator to manage our trade shows and events. Is this something you'd be interested in? And at that point I had addictions counselor and wedding planner on my resume and I thought you know what, let me try it. And when I ended up in this marketing role, I got five promotions in five years, grew really fast in corporate and learned storytelling from a different perspective.

That ultimately led me to, you know, several years later, working with the world's leading motivational media company, where my understanding of storytelling was taken to the next level and helping people not only tell their story and connect with their audience, but understand what is going to perform, what is going to work online in the digital landscape to ultimately, you know, trigger change, to really connect with people so that it impacts the way they think, act and feel in the world. So, combined, I use this, as well as the training that I have with the reinvention certification, and you know, I've become deeply passionate about identifying which stories to tell, helping people craft that narrative and better connect with their audience so that they can have the impact they want to have on this world.

Lyn Wineman: 14:08

Yeah, I mean, Samantha, one of the things I've heard you say is it's not just about the story or the speech, but it's about creating that meaningful change through storytelling. I mean, I'm really curious how do you approach guiding people through that meaningful change with the storytelling and the speaking?

Samantha Kris: 14:32

So I do have a storytelling framework. That would probably take again a whole other episode, it comes down to a few core components. I always, you know, whether it's with goal setting or anything else, I like to start with our values, our purpose, what it is that we feel we're here to do, and root our talks and our stories to that purpose so that if we fall off script, if we lose our footing in what we're saying, we can trust that as our North Star and we don't have to worry about much like I did in my TEDx experience putting on a show of what I think will perform, what I think will do well, how I think people will perceive me. I don't want my speakers to go through that, and so I really like to root in purpose and I've taken the goal setting methodology, the real goal method, and I've actually reinvigorated it, I'll say, as a storytelling framework. So the fact that it is rooted in core values, that it resonates not only with our values but with the values of our audience, is the first pillar. I have changed my tune a little bit in the real goal method. In the initial version, E was for empowering, and I've since discovered that, whether we are setting goals or telling our stories, it does not have to come from an empowering place.

It could be, we could have been triggered, we could have moral outrage, we can be really sad, and these things can propel us into action in a deeply meaningful way. So E does not stand for empowering anymore, so much as it is about evoking emotion. So we tell stories in which we are deeply connected to on an emotional level and that will connect with our audience on an emotional level that will evoke some emotion in them. You know whether that is again anger, curiosity, excitement, possibility. We want them to feel something in the stories that we're telling. Actionable is about really understanding the transformation that we want our audience to experience as a result of hearing us speak and then breaking that down into something that can be followed, that can be applied or integrated in their own

life. And L no longer stands exclusively for lucrative and the evolution of the real goal method as it stands as a storytelling method is about leaving our impact.

How do we tell a story that resonates with our values, that evokes emotion, that is actionable and transferable to our audience so that they can leave their legacy?

Lyn Wineman: 16:57

Yeah, I love that your acronym is REAL too, because it ties back to your TEDx story, right? The real parts of the story were the parts that you remembered, that you delivered, that connected with the audience, the kind of window dressing that went around. It was the more difficult part, so I really like that. Samantha, I've also heard you talk about liminal space and I'm going to be honest, I had to look it up. What is liminal space? So, just for the benefit of everybody else I'm sure I'm not the only one. Can you explain what liminal space means and how it plays a role in personal and organizational growth?

Samantha Kris: 17:40

I'm so glad you asked. I am obsessed with this topic. I will talk about it to anyone who's willing to listen.

Lyn Wineman: 17:45

And I feel the passion behind that too.

Samantha Kris: 17:47

Yeah, so you're absolutely right, you're not alone. Most people do not know the term, but everyone has experienced it, everyone has felt it. Liminal space is the transitionary space that you enter once you've left what was, but you've not yet arrived at what's next.

Lyn Wineman: 18:05

The messy, middle, the in between, got it.

Samantha Kris: 18:09

Yeah, it is very much the period where you are no longer who you were, but you're not yet who you know you can become, and you're suspended between these two realities. And this space can feel very creative, very exciting, very liberating, but it can also feel very isolating, very intimidating and and scary. Yeah, you kind of have this blank canvas in front of you, and what you relied on in terms of habits, thoughts, behaviors, strategies in the past don't quite serve the new version of you anymore, and so you're feeling a little bit of friction or like something isn't quite adding up. But those new habits, behaviors, strategies haven't formed yet. So it feels like there's a lot of trial and error and as though you've kind of had the carpet ripped out from under you and you're looking for something to hold on to and you're just kind of floating in space.

And I think this is particularly important for leaders is that we are moving in a very fast-paced world. Change is happening at an unprecedented rate. We don't particularly take into account the very human

side of change. We're behind every big decision, every pivot shift in direction. Are people looking for something to hold on to Hang on a second. We just got used to these habits and ways of thinking and strategies, and now you're asking me to go over here. Habits and ways of thinking and strategies, and now you're asking me to go over here. And so where I really like to bring awareness is humanizing the, those human implications of change and helping leaders recognize that, embark on these changes, feeling much more united, not necessarily always knowing how it's going to end up, but with the confidence that we're at least all rowing in the same direction.

Lyn Wineman: 20:05

Yeah, yeah, that's great. I love the way that you explain that. So, Samantha, as you talk, through the coaching and all of the different leaders you've worked with, including our friends that we mentioned here, is there a standout story from your speaking or coaching that really highlights the impact of the work that you do? That also could probably be another episode. We could just keep booking sequels to this one.

Samantha Kris: 20:36

In what way. Can you give me a little more direction?

Lyn Wineman: 20:39

Yeah, I think for me, Samantha, I appreciate that. For me. I always like to hear about the work that people are doing and then hear a story that gives us an example of how the work is going working with Miren or Kate and seeing kind of them evolve and change or maybe even a speaking engagement or a connection that you have for yourself.

Samantha Kris: 21:08

Sure, okay, I've got one that comes to mind and I think this is really great for leaders. I say that as business leaders, thought leaders who are listening. Oftentimes I am approached by executives who have a very clear understanding of the message that they want to give, but there is a slight disconnect between that vision, that big picture, and the feeling that they want people to get as a result of hearing them, and what is actually happening on the ground. And so I work with a lot of CEOs who are giving company addresses, industry talks, all the time and, particularly for the opportunities in which they are addressing their team, there is this real desire and passion for them that they want to motivate their employees, they want to get people fired up, they want them to see the big picture and they are the visionaries, so that picture is so clear to them. But it's been a while since they've been on the front lines or on the ground and doing the work that connects, that is the connective tissue between the day-to-day operations and that vision. So it's not just about creating a great talk and writing an incredible script and delivering with confidence and conviction. But we've got to start a step earlier. And understanding will this resonate? Will this meet your people where they're at?

And oftentimes the talk they want to give is not the talk that we deliver. First, because we have to address some of the communication breakdowns or blind spots so that it doesn't register as tone deaf, so that they're not delivering this raw, raw vision that they can't execute because the systems are not in place or the communication practices are not in place to support that vision. So communication in the

ways that I work with them, which I feel most fulfilled, goes beyond the stage and really helps them enhance that storytelling at every touch point so that when they get onto that stage, everyone knows they're oriented, they feel like we know exactly what you're talking about and how to get there, as opposed to wow, that sounds great, now what? And then they go back to work because what happens is when that disconnect is there, trust starts to erode the vision of leadership in the capabilities of the team, and so I'm most excited about the work that starts before the stage so that we're able to make these stories truly connect with the people who are absorbing them and that they feel again, we invoke this emotion and we carry that through to the action. They know that once they go back and they have their team meeting, or once they go back and they're leading their teams, that they are supported in this vision and it's not just writing on the wall.

Lyn Wineman: 23:51

Yeah, Samantha, that really resonates with me, because what you just explained happening with CEOs or founders or leaders of all kinds in speaking we see at KidGlov also happens with them with branding, because the leaders have this clear vision of where they want to go, but it may be very different from where their internal and external audiences are and if you just go straight there, it's not going to feel authentic, it's not going to be trusted. But you have to take the steps and even first of all, before you can take the steps, you have to understand the audience and where they are and how you're going to nurture them to that point. It's the whole reason I wrote the book Untangling Spaghetti so that people could understand that process right, but it's the pre-work.

The pre-work is almost, dare I say, more important than the delivery, because if you don't have that pre-work, you don't have that real understanding, that authenticity, that connection that carries you through. So I love what you're saying there. So, Samantha, I'm really curious what's on the horizon for you? What's next? You've accomplished so much and done so many things. What are you excited about?

Samantha Kris: 25:12

Right now, I'm working on the liminal space keynote, so I've sprinkled it in to certain talks and workshops that I've done. But the enthusiasm around this topic once people start to understand a little bit more about what it is and how they've already experienced it is so exciting for me because people start to feel really validated in their thoughts and their emotions once they have a name for this space. And with that validation comes a great sense of community and an understanding that we're not in this alone. This is not a me issue, in that it's not just on me for not being able to figure it out. But oh hey, there are other people experiencing this, there are people navigating this space in real time and we can be joining forces to help each other appreciate this space.

And I think this is, you know, my own thinking has evolved in that I used to think it's about making it out and to the other side, right where we're in this transitionary space, and once we get through it, that's where the confidence is, that's where the opportunity is, that's where we'll feel like we can stand on our own two feet.

But I've really come to appreciate that this space is where we lay the brickwork and where we're able to kind of build our way through. And it's in that experience of navigating the space, in building, that we truly discover who we are and who we're becoming. And I just want to bring more awareness to the fact that this space is complex and there's a duality of emotions and feeling, like I said, very exciting and very

isolating. And the more we can rally in this space, I think, the more we can make use of it without the need to rush out and come out, to emerge on the other side and to really appreciate this space of truly understanding who not only who we are, but what's possible. And I say this not only on an individual level, but on an organizational level as well. If we can meet in this space and know that we're in it together, there's so much possibility for connection, for change, for impact.

Lyn Wineman: 27:19

Yeah, I think what I want to say about, as you explained, liminal space today I instantly went to oh, I remember times that I felt like that and I think, without that validation, Samantha, for me at least, and I can imagine for others it can be kind of a frustrating, maybe even anxiety-producing space because, as somebody who's used to and driven to, move forward, move forward, move forward, you can kind of, in this liminal space, if you don't realize what's happening, feel stuck in it, and then you're not. I imagine when you feel stuck, you're not taking advantage of the beauty or the energy of the space to move forward. Am I on, am I echoing, understanding this properly?

Samantha Kris: 28:10

Absolutely it is. It is a hugely frustrating space for me as someone who you know, especially someone obsessed with goal setting. It's like I've got things to be and things to do. Right, you look around and you're like, but I don't know where I am or how forward it is. It can be incredibly frustrating and I think that you know, you nailed it when we're so focused on achieving, it robs us of the experience of being and it forces us to be present and I there is no forcing your weight out of this space. The harder you push, the slower you'll move. The more you embrace this space and look around and recognize kind of the artifacts that will actually help you become and to evolve. I think that the more beautiful this space, the more impactful, the more purposeful this space can be for you.

Lyn Wineman: 29:08

Wow, I'm going to say. I really appreciate the fact that you have taken something that for me, feels like stuckness and anxiety producing, and I've given me a new way to think about it as beautiful and creativity producing and the learning space. So I can't wait to hear more from you as you develop this messaging and the story on liminal space. Samantha, I know you do great work. I've loved what you shared today For our listeners who'd like to learn more, maybe connect with you. How can they reach you and find Stride Solutions?

Samantha Kris: 29:44

Thank you. So samanthakris.com will have all the information about me and my speaking and if you're interested in Stride and what I can do from, you know, speaker coaching perspective, the website is gowithstride.com, which I love there's so many terms for Stride. It’s very much about walking the talk. And if that speaks to you, all the information is on Go with Stride as well.

Lyn Wineman: 30:10

We'll make sure to have that link in the show notes as well on kidglov.com with this episode. So, Samantha, I'm going to ask you my favorite question, and I've been thinking all day, knowing that this

conversation was coming up, about what your motivational quote might be, because the listeners know I am inspired by motivational quotes. Every guest on the Agency for Change has given us one and I actually keep a list and go to them because I just feel so grateful to get to talk to such interesting people like you. But could you give us a few of your own words of wisdom to inspire our listeners?

Samantha Kris: 30:49

One that has stuck with me since I started my business just over eight years ago is opportunity shows up when you do.

Lyn Wineman: 30:57

Oh, I love it. Opportunity shows up when you do. It doesn't show up when you're sitting on the couch. Doesn't show up when you're stuck behind your desk or in your social media. Opportunity shows up when you do. That's so beautiful.

Samantha Kris: 31:14

And it also it doesn't demand you to have the answers or to know the next step. It just requires you to show up. I'm a firm believer that if you just put one foot in front of the other, the road will always rise to meet you.

Lyn Wineman: 31:28

That is beautiful too. You gave us a bonus quote there. I like that. I like that, Samantha. I've loved this conversation. I feel like I have learned so much from you just in 30 minutes here. As we wrap up this time together today, what is the most important thing that you would like our listeners to remember about the work that you're doing?

Samantha Kris: 31:50

Your story has the ability to change this world. The sooner you tell it, the greater your impact will be.

Lyn Wineman: 31:58

That is so beautiful. I love it, Samantha. I hope we've inspired a lot of people today to tell their stories, to love that liminal space. Samantha, I'm gonna say I fully believe the world needs more people like you, more consultancies like Stride Solutions, and I just thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to talk with us you too.

Samantha Kris: 32:21

You too Lyn, this has been awesome, thank you.

Announcer: 32:25

We hope you enjoyed today's Agency for Change podcast. To hear all our interviews with those who are making a positive change in our communities or to nominate a changemaker you'd love to hear from. Visit kidglov.com at K-I-D-G-L-O-V.com to get in touch, as always. If you like what you've heard today, be sure to rate, review, subscribe and share. Thanks for listening and we'll see you next time.