

Episode 12:
Acting is Her Second Act:
A Public Relations Star Finds a New Role
 (4/6/2018)

Segment	Who	Copy
Intro	Judi Schindler	"I had identified myself as a woman business owner for so many years I felt like I needed some new goal of my life, something new. So I've said frequently that I could've taken a pottery class or a photography class, but I wound up taking an acting class because it was something I'd loved as a kid."
		INTRO MUSIC
Podcast Overview	Andy Levine	<p>Welcome to Second Act Stories, a podcast that looks at people who have made major career changes and are pursuing more rewarding lives in a second act.</p> <p>In today's episode, we meet Judi Schindler. For 40+ years she worked in the field of public relations. For most of that time, she ran her own firm called Schindler Communications. And she was a pioneer among women entrepreneurs in the Chicago area.</p> <p>But when she decided to retire, she went back to a pursuit she enjoyed in her youth...acting. And what started out as simply "taking a class" turned into a second career.</p> <p>Here's Judi Schindler's story....</p>

	Judi	<p>When I was 10 years old, my mother sent me to Little Theater Acting School, led by [inaudible 00:00:30], and I did a lot of children's plays there. And the height of my career was I got the lead role in Pinocchio. I had to change from a puppet to a real boy, so that was kind of a highlight. And then in high school I tried out for plays.</p> <p>By the time I was ready to go to college, I had already been involved in my high school newspaper, so I was torn between whether I wanted to major in theater or I wanted to major in journalism.</p>
	Andy	So, was it a difficult choice, journalism and acting or...
	Judi	I thought that in the long run, I would probably have a better career in journalism than in theater.
	Andy	So was your early thought after graduating to become a reporter?
	Judi	Yes, I wanted to become a police reporter like my two role models, Brenda Starr and Lois Lane.
	Andy	After graduating from the University of Illinois in 1963, she worked at a series of different public relations jobs. Women were starting to enter the workforce at an accelerated clip but it still was very much a man's world.
	Judi	I remember the first question my boss asked me when he was interviewing me was, was I going to get pregnant?
	Andy	Couldn't ask that today.
	Judi	You could not ask that question today. So I told him I was on the pill and I had a lot of faith in it, so.
	Andy	Tell me about the transition to starting your own firm. What year did you start your own agency in?
	Judi	My son was born in... Seventy three was 5, so '78.
	Andy	Nineteen seventy eight?
	Judi	Right
	Andy	So, if you were describing Schindler Communications to someone who you didn't know, you know, today, what was the firm like and what did you do?

	Judi	<p>At its largest, it was a 10-person firm and we had strong specialties in local clients, so we really were very media savvy for media in Chicago. Did a lot of real estate, real estate developers, real estate brokers, architects, construction. I had a full range of clients in that space, and also in higher education.</p> <p>I was in business for more than 40 years, so I probably did every kind of client you can imagine.</p>
	Andy	Did you enjoy what you were doing?
	Judi	It was totally absorbing and I loved it tremendously. It was a hugely rewarding job. I felt that I used every talent I ever had, skills that I had to learn, that I used all of me all the time, whether it was from selling business, doing client work, managing people. It was a fabulous experience.
	Andy	This was the early 1970s and Judi was a trendsetter in starting her own agency.
	Judi	It was the very beginning of a women's entrepreneurial movement. And I did help found the Chicago chapter of the National Association of Women Business Owners, and, you know, it was an era where we really had to fight for recognition and for credibility.
	Andy	But let's fast-forward to 2006 when Judi started to look at selling her firm.
	Judi	I was 60. And I realized that I was running out of time...I was going to be aged out of the public relations business, and I felt bad about it, but I knew I couldn't make decisions like, "Do I order a two-year subscription to Wall Street Journal or one? How more on the lease do I sign? Do I hire more people?" Not knowing exactly what my endgame was. And so I merged my business with somebody else, another woman who is about 10 years younger than myself.
	Andy	How long did you work together?
	Judi	About five years.
	Andy	So how did you, kind of, rediscover acting and what drove you to take acting lessons?

	Judi	<p>So in this merged business, it became soon very obvious that the women I'd merged my business with really didn't want my opinion about anything, and so I had identified myself as a woman business owner for so many years I felt like I needed some new goal of my life, something new.</p> <p>So I've said frequently that I could've taken a pottery class or a photography class, but I wound up taking an acting class because it was something I'd loved as a kid. And I'd heard about classes being taught at one of the local theaters and so I took a class there, and from there I learned people and learned about better classes. And taking other classes, I learned that people were getting head shots and auditioning and I learned how to find out about local auditions.</p>
	Andy	I wanna take you back to your first acting class. Do you remember walking into that acting studio or theater the first time and, sort of, what your sense of things were the first time you went to class there?
	Judi	I remember that there was one other woman that was about my age and I was so happy to see her because everybody else was in their 20s, because I said to her, "I'm so glad that you're here" and she always remembered that afterwards that I was looking for another older face, grey hair and a few wrinkles to be my friend.
	Andy	Was that challenging or invigorating? I mean, how did you react being in... You were, at this point, you're in your...?
	Judi	Sixties.
	Andy	Sixties, okay.
	Judi	I don't think I was intimidated by it. I'm just not that kind of person to be intimidated.
	Andy	Encouraged by the classes and her progress, she got headshots taken, started auditioning and was eventually approached by an agent.

	Judi	One of the agencies contacted me because there was a need for non-union, older women, and older men as well, because a lot of commercials and a lot of the...are shot with non-union. And while there are thousands of 20-year olds who are non-union, if somebody has been acting their whole lives by the time they were 60 or 70, they're union or they've retired. So to have a new influx of older people, and I'm not the only one. I know several others who, in their retirement, took up acting. That made you somewhat, of a hot commodity. So the agent came looking for me.
	Andy	So, and how many years have you been doing this for now?
	Judi	At least ten.
	Andy	And you are in your mid-seventies?
	Judi	Mmmm hmmm. That's right.
	Andy	And you're still enjoying what you're doing 10 years into it?
	Judi	I'm really enjoying it... Instead of worrying about my clients, I'm worrying about myself. But, yeah, I'm very busy. I have something on my to-do list every day, and I'm the kind of person where I have to have a lot of stuff on my to-do list.
	Andy	What are the major differences between running your own public relations firm and being an actress?
	Judi	Well, one of the things is the same is that you're working with a team and you're communicating ideas, but everything else is different. I mean, especially, since I am not running the show and I have to remind myself all the time that I have to be deferential to everybody else. You know, I go in and I have a tendency to think that I am in charge. If there's a problem, I believe I'm the one that's supposed to fix it, and I have to remind myself to lay back a lot and let somebody else come up with the solutions.
	Andy	Do you think acting keeps you young?

	Judi	Oh, for sure, because I have to be physically strong in theater to do those kind of hours and to have the energy. I mean, energy is very important in acting, and the fact that I have so many 35-year-old girlfriends these days.
	Andy	You mentioned, at one point, that you, sort of, had a group of friends that, sort of, pushed each other to be...
	Judi	My accountability group, right.
	Andy	Tell me a word about that.
	Judi	At that time, all four of us had the same agent, and we decided that we would meet on a regular basis to, first of all, trade information. Sometimes you know about what's happening if there's different theaters, different auditions, opportunities, and to help each other with auditions.
	Andy	Susaan Jamshidi was part of the accountability group.
	Susan Jamshidi	<p>Judi and I met in an on-camera class here in Chicago. And Judi was just very friendly. We started talking, you know, when we had downtime in class, before class, after class. And afterwards, she contacted me and asked if I wanted to be part of an accountability group with some fellow actors she had met in Chicago. And I thought that sounded really fun, and it was like meeting, I think it was once a month, at that time, maybe once, twice a month.</p> <p>And we just met, had our coffees, and we talk about our career goals, what we wanted, what, you know, auditions we had coming up, who we could contact for anything from headshots to coaching, to agencies. Just sort of a proactive way to get our careers where we wanted them to be.</p>
	Andy	How would you describe Judi if you were describing her to a friend? What would you say about her?

	Susaan	<p>Oh, she's very smart, very tenacious. She's got a big heart. She's very generous. And she's always looking towards how she could improve herself and what is important to her, like her career, her business, people's lives around her. She's a really generous person.</p> <p>And she's got a huge...she's got a never-ending supply of energy and, you know, gumption, go get 'em. So she's just as active as any young person starting out in the business really.</p>
	Andy	Speaking of energy and gumptions, let's jump ahead to to the one-woman show which Judi created: "Husbands, An Owner's Manual." Here are some excerpts that she shared from our interview.
	Judi	"The secret to my marriage is that in 53 years, my husband and I have never had a single, meaningful conversation."
	Andy	Or her unorthodox belief in same-sex marriages...
	Judi	<p>I believe in same-sex marriage even for women who aren't gay because men and women are so different. We're told from different planets. Men are hunters. Women are gatherers. We're really not built to live with each other. My husband and I have absolutely nothing in common, which may be the whole saving grace of our marriage, too. You never know.</p> <p>But if you were married to another woman, you'd like the same movies, you'd read the same books, you could even say to her, "What do you think of this outfit?" You might get a reasonable answer. If I asked Jack what does he think of this outfit, he always says, "What's wrong with that?" I don't even know what that means, so I think there are some advantages.</p> <p>Then, of course, there is the issue of sex, but I always point to the audience and say, "Just think about it. How much of your life is spent having sex and how much is spent doing other things like emptying dish washers?" So I challenge them to see if there's anybody in the audience over the age of 30 who has sex more often than she empties the dish washer. Hasn't disappointed me yet.</p>
	Andy	So, you've recently turned this into a book as well. I know you're marketing and talking about that. You were good enough to send me a book and it's very, very funny.
	Judi	Thank you.
	Andy	If someone wanted to order the book, how would you find it?
	Judi	They can find it on Amazon, or they could go to my website which is Judi, J-U-D-I, Schindler, S-C-H-I-N-D-L-E-R, .com.

	Andy	And it's "Husbands: An Owner's Manual."
	Judi	Yes, "How to Survive a 50-year Marriage."
	Andy	So I want you to imagine you're advising someone else on starting what I call a Second Act, which is clearly what you have done here. What advice would you give them about trying something new and trying a second career, let's say?
	Judi	Well, I mean, I started mine by taking classes, and I think that's a really good way no matter what you would be interested in because there are plenty of classes say in entrepreneurship, if what you wanna do is start a business. But when you take classes, you not only get good, solid information about what you wanna do, but you meet other people who have the same interest, and those people become resources for you as you move forward. So, I think, a classroom and, you know, reading books, of course, is helpful, but I like the classroom because of the aspect of meeting other people.
	Andy	If I take you back, you know, 50-plus years and you're at that decision point in high school, would you still have chosen journalism over acting.
	Judi	I think so. You know, if I'd come out of college at 22 and started an acting career at that time, I would've been competing with thousands of other 22-year-olds. Entering it as late as I did in my 60s, I had more opportunities. I can get cast more readily than I would've in my 20s, so... Unless it turned out I was super, super talented and I'll never know that because going back now and starting up acting as late as I have, I don't think I'll ever be great, but I wanna get better all the time.

		OUTGOING MUSIC
Thank-You and Show Credits	Andy	<p>Of course, we want to thank Judi Schindler. As an aside, we had to record this interview twice at Judi's town house in Chicago due to a technical glitch in my first session with her.</p> <p>We also want to thank Susaan Jamshidi for taking the time to speak with us by telephone.</p> <p>If you are considering your own second act, we hope Judi's story will provide some inspiration. You might take her advice and start your exploration with a class just like she did.</p> <p>And if you are interested in Judi's book, it's "Husbands: An Owners Manual" - available at Amazon and www.JudiSchindler.com.</p> <p>We hope you'll keep listening. A new "Second Act Story" is just around the corner.</p>