

Episode #43
 The Proximity Principle:
 Ken Coleman's Formula for Second Act Success
 (5/20/2019)

Who	Audio Segment
Ken Coleman	<p>Fear and doubt is what the proximity principle kinda destroys. Fear of failure, right? If I go after this and I don't successfully make the switch, I'm gonna set myself backward financially. Fear of what others are gonna say, "Well, you got a really good job here. You got a degree in this. You got a good job. Why in the world would you make a switch? This is crazy." That's fear.</p> <p>Now, doubt is, "I doubt that I actually can do this. I might be able to see some opportunities here, but I doubt that I can actually pull this off because I don't know if I have enough time. I don't know if I have enough money." I doubt. So doubt is huge. So what proximity does exist takes the reader by the hand and says, "These are the people. And when you find them, here's how you connect with them. And here's what you're looking to get. And they'll help you." Right people plus right places equals opportunity.</p>
	INTRO MUSIC; FADE TO BACK DROP FOR 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. I'm your host, Andy Levine.</p> <p>For today's episode, I traveled to Nashville, Tennessee and sat down with Ken Coleman. We actually recorded the episode in his studio which was great fun.</p> <p>Ken is a highly successful radio personality and career expert who hosts a daily radio show, aptly called "The Ken Coleman Show." Every day, he counsels his listeners on how to best find their dream job. The show reaches thousands of people. He also hosts the highly-successful EntreLeadership podcast which consistently rates among the top 5 business podcasts on the iTunes charts.</p> <p>Ken is a genuine "Second Act" success story himself. He started to pursue a broadcast career despite zero background and training in the profession.</p> <p>He's now written a book that draws heavily on that personal experience as well as literally hundreds of telephone calls with his listeners. It's titled "The Proximity Principle" and it is a strong guide for anyone exploring a second act.</p> <p>Here's my interview with Ken Coleman about his new book, "The Proximity Principle."</p>

Andy	Ken Coleman, welcome to "Second Act Stories."
Ken	It's good to be with you, sir. Thanks for having me.
Andy	So I'd love to start with just a little background in terms of the book itself. When did the idea for the book emerge? And when did "The Proximity Principle," that phrase, come to you?
Ken	Yeah. So it was probably, I wanna say, 8 or 9 months ago, 10 months, somewhere in that range. It's not even a year old. I was on the way into the office one day, and I've got about 12, 13-minute drive, and I was gonna be on a podcast, much like this, that morning. And the host had sent me the questions. And so I was looking at his questions on my cell phone at a stoplight. And I was just scrolling through it real quick, and I got to the last question. And it was worded basically like this, "If you were going to sum up your success and broadcasting starting from nothing, no connections, no degree to where you are today, what's the one thing that allowed you to get where you are?" And I kinda chuckled because...
Andy	Hard to summarize in one thing.
Ken	Yeah. I was kinda, like, "Oh, boy." And the thought came to me that the thing that worked for me that I can singularly point out to anybody in any field was that I got myself around the right people and I put myself in the right places. And I didn't always do it perfectly, but I did do it consistently. And by doing it consistently, that's what gave me the opportunities. And so if you ever have a thought like that, Andy, where you go, "Oh, you know, that's not just true, I think that's transferable." So I do a radio show every day. So I immediately say, "I'm gonna share that on the show today to encourage people, my audience." And just keep it really simple, the right people plus the right places equals opportunity.
Andy	I love simple.
Ken	<p>Yeah. Well, so does everybody else. Right? So then I come to another stoplight, and I'll never forget this as long as I live, and I'm just sitting there and I'm just kinda remunerating through this whole thought. And this when the word proximity pops in my mind. And I said it's all about proximity. And then my mind kept going. And I literally came up with "The Proximity Principle." Not even knowing what it was, but I just was playing with it in my mind. And then I pulled out my phone, and I hit record, and I said, "The proximity principle says, 'In order to do what I want to do, I've gotta be around people that are doing it and in places where it is happening.'" And I hit stop. And I listened to it again, and I went, "That's it."</p> <p>So I taught it that day on the show and left it alone. And I would, you know, as the calls would come in where it was relevant, I would teach it again and say it again. And callers, listeners started to pick up on it. And they'd email me about it. They would call in on the show and say, "Hey, Ken, I'm practicing your proximity principle." And so it just kinda took off.</p>

Andy	This has been, like, nine months of this?
Ken	Oh, yeah. I mean, this is about 10 months ago. We finished the book, like, there was no book. It was this thought. About four months after the first day of kinda launching it out there, we started talking about a book. Just from a leadership standpoint, we all sat together and we greenlighted the idea as a book because it's so easy for people to grasp and it's so practical in its power.
Andy	Speaking of simple, you have this pretty simple formula in the book, "The right people plus the right places equals opportunity." I love to start with the right people. So when you say the right people, who are they?
Ken	Well, in the book, we give you five archetypes. But before I list those real quick and you can decide what you wanna do with those, the right people are people that, again, can add terrific value to you. So don't overthink it. Okay? But just always know, the right people are people that have knowledge and wisdom and connections. So that, at its core, are what we're talking about when we say the right people, but in the book we're talking about the professor, the producer, the professional, the peer, and the mentor. And those are the five archetypes that are in the book where I unpack who they are, where they are, how to connect with them, and when you connect with them, what are you doing so that you can maximize the opportunity to be in proximity to them.
Andy	The group I'm really interested in is the producer group. It seems like that is probably the one that's most difficult to access.
Ken	Absolutely.
Andy	But in a way, the most powerful.
Ken	Oh, you've nailed it. And let's throw one other adjective in there, the most intimidating. And the reason this is because in the book we describe the producer as a man or woman who is a top producer in the field you wanna be in. So whatever field that is, you pick the field. I wanna be a marketing executive eventually or I wanna be in, you know, publicity. Or I wanna be in the medical field. It doesn't matter what the field is. Who are the men and women that...they're not celebrities now. Okay? They're not super well-known, but they are super successful. They have done it. They are doing it.
Andy	The example you give in the book, which I really love, was Jimmy Fallon and Lorne Michaels. You wanna just tell that story?
Ken	Yeah. Well, in this particular situation...
Andy	He's a real producer.

<p>Ken</p>	<p>He's a real producer by title. And so, you know, Jimmy Fallon always wanted to be in that whole comedy world, "Saturday Night Live" is pretty much Mount Everest, you know, if you think about it. And so many stars have come out of that amazing television show. And Lorne Michaels is kind of a kingmaker. So he realizes this is an uphill climb, and we basically unpacked the story in the book of how he gets very intentional to get in proximity, to get close to Lorne Michaels, and does whatever it takes. You know, he's just gotta be around and let Lorne Michaels, A, become aware of him. Right? If somebody is not giving you an opportunity, it's probably because they're not aware of you. So awareness is first, and then likability. Right?</p> <p>And then after likability come some trust and credibility. And so the story is really fun. We unpack it in the book. Ultimately, Lorne Michaels could, in this situation, give him the actual job. So that's the benefit of a producer. You may go to them just for insight and knowledge and things of that nature and they eventually might actually hire you if you're humble, if you're hungry, and you provide value to them by not wasting their time because producers, they don't have a lot of time.</p>
<p>Andy</p>	<p>You had a really interesting rise in the broadcast field. Can you tell us who is a producer that helped you make it up to your Everest?</p>
<p>Ken</p>	<p>Yeah. So, in this situation, there were several, but there were some early producers that gave me great confidence by giving me an opportunity. So it wasn't a producer like in the Jimmy Fallon situation where "Saturday Night Live" happens because of that. I'm thinking of a couple of people, one is a lady named Jennifer who was a producer of a nightly sports show, sports talk show on a regional cable network, so 12 states. And we had a mutual connection. And I asked that mutual connection would he vouch for me and get me a five-minute meeting with her. And he did. And so I walked in and said,</p> <p>"I really appreciate this, Jenn. I've got an idea. And I'm willing to get it done, and I know you don't have money, you don't have a budget. I'm not even looking for a full-time job. I just wanna pitch you an idea for your show." And I did. I pitched it. And she said, "I really like that. I think that could be an ongoing segment. But you're right, you've done your homework. I don't have any money to pay you, and I don't have money to produce it. So if you can go produce it," meaning, it's gotta be, in your opinion, good enough for me to air it, lighting, sound, you know.</p>
<p>Andy</p>	<p>You gotta bring me the final product.</p>
<p>Ken</p>	<p>Final product. And I did. And she aired four of them. And I couldn't keep doing them because I didn't have an unlimited budget. But she gave me the opportunity to prove myself, and she put it on, and what that did for my confidence, Andy, in the early days, was as valuable as any opportunity that any producer gave me.</p>

<p>Andy</p>	<p>I wanna move ahead to the right places. So you also five places that you talk about. But I really like where you start out, which is the place where you are, you say, there is a line you have in there, "Everything you need to get started is right in your own zip code. What are you trying to communicate to people there?"</p>
<p>Ken</p>	<p>That's the law, the zip code. And what I'm trying to communicate is you don't have to move somewhere to go somewhere. You don't. Perfect example, I had a guy call the show a few months ago in Charlotte, North Carolina. And he said, "Ken, I need your help. I know what I wanna do, but I just don't know how to get there. And quite frankly, I just don't think I can get there." I said, "What do you wanna do?" He says, "I wanna go into TV production. I've always been interested in television production, movie production, all things broadcasting, movie, that kind of thing, video." He said, "But I've got a wife, three kids, a mortgage, still paying off some debt. We've got family here. I can't move to L.A. or New York. And so I just don't know what to do." And so I said, "How many production companies that do some type of television production, work on movies, create local commercials, how many production companies you think are in Charlotte, North Carolina?" And he immediately started to chuckle.</p> <p>I say, "Come on." And he knew what I was saying. And I pushed him a little bit, and he said, "Probably dozens." I said, "You're right." I said, "You need to go find out how many there are and what do they do and what are they producing."</p> <p>So the law of the zip code says, "Everything I need to get started is already around me." So he could begin to get some qualifications. He could begin to get some experience.</p>
<p>Andy</p>	<p>So proximity is almost everywhere to get started anywhere.</p>
<p>Ken</p>	<p>It absolutely is.</p>
<p>Andy</p>	<p>Okay. You then go through a progression, a place to learn, a place to practice, a place to perform, and a place to grow. Can you walk us through this progression using yourself as an example and some of the different stages, maybe not hitting each of those things but just some of those different stages?</p>
<p>Ken</p>	<p>Yeah, I'd be happy to. And so the place where you are, we just discussed that. And so what you're doing there is it's really about having that roving eye to see all the different places around me that I can get in proximity to that get me in the space that I wanna be in. So, for me, I started looking around and I saw a broadcasting school by a local television producer. It was called Complete Game Broadcasting. I talk about Jeff in the book and this particular school because I was a situation with three young kids, all the stuff, and I couldn't go back to school. That was not a realistic thing for me to go back to school and get a broadcasting degree and start that way. So I had to look at some other different ways to learn what I needed to learn.</p>

	<p>So the place to learn for me was Complete Game Broadcasting. You know, I knew how to talk on a mic but other than that, I didn't know anything. And so this was a six-week course. And, I mean, we learned how to everything, from how to create a news blurb, you know, where you're doing five or six hot headlines stories, how to write it, how to record it, how to edit it for talk radio, sports talk radio. And it was huge, again, for just learning some things that I would have never learned.</p> <p>So that's a place to learn. Moving forward, a place to practice. So in that broadcasting school, I did get several opportunities to go do some play-by-play high school football.</p> <p>So a place to practice is low pressure, low risk and I'm getting the chance to essentially do the craft. So I was doing play-by-play on the internet. High school football, Andy. Do you know how many people were listening to that? The kid next to me and my wife.</p>
Andy	But if you screwed up, it was okay.
Ken	A place to practice. And then a place to perform. Now, okay, this is for real. So a place to perform for me, in my journey, I paid to get on Saturday radio. I paid \$250 an hour so I got one hour on Saturdays at 2:00. That's where I started, on a local talk station, and I launched the first version of "The Ken Coleman show."
Andy	So you're not even making money, you're paying too for the honor of doing this. Okay. Got you.
Ken	<p>You got it. But I'm actually live and now on a real radio station. So it was a lot different than doing, you know, play-by-play football on this professor's website if you follow what I'm saying. So a place to perform is now, I've actually gotta get the job. You understand what I'm saying? We're moving from intern, voluntary, you know, actions and functions to I'm getting paid. I'm stepping in at a lower level, entry level, but I'm now performing." People are paying attention. I have to do the job. I have to do the job well or I don't move to the next ladder. That's what I mean by a place to perform. And this really is to think your mindset early on, entry level, I gotta just get in the field. Is it the dream job? No. But rarely do we step right into the dream job. In fact, almost never. Think of it as a ladder. I stepped on the ladder, and I'm on the lowest rung or one of the lower rungs, but I'm there.</p>
Andy	This podcast that I do is all about second acts and so people have been doing one job for a period, a number of years, but then make a really dramatic shift, a dramatic change. And so in your radio show, you talk to a lot of different people. You talk to people, some who are just looking to move up the ladder or move to, you know, if they're a teacher, to a different school, that sort of thing. I'm more focused on people who are making really complete changes into different industries. You know, moving from industry A to industry B. What I'm wondering is does the proximity principle work equally or perhaps even is it more relevant for that group of, really, switchers to a different industry?

Ken	Yes and Yes.
Andy	Okay.
Ken	<p>It is more powerful to someone who is switching because they're probably a little bit older. Obviously, it's plausible that a 27-year-old says, "All right, I did this for 5 years out of school. I don't wanna switch." But it is really powerful for the switcher because they went most of the time to a school, got a degree in field A, and now they wanna move to field B. And it's particularly powerful in that if they grasp this principle, Andy, then they're gonna realize this is not as scary as it feels. See, fear and doubt is what the proximity principle kinda destroys. Fear of failure, right? If I go after this and I don't successfully make the switch, I'm gonna set myself backward financially. Fear of peers, even family, let's put family into that one, fear of what others are gonna say, "Well, you got a really good job here. You got a degree in this. You got a good job. Why in the world would you make a switch? This is crazy." That's fear.</p> <p>Now, doubt is, "I doubt that I actually can do this. I might be able to see some opportunities here, but I doubt that I can actually pull this off because I don't know if I have enough time. I don't know if I have enough money." I doubt. So doubt is huge. I would say 50% of our phone calls now are people who just say, "I know what I wanna do. I just need your help to guide me on how to get there." They're looking for me to shine a light on the path. So what proximity does is, as you know, you have read the book, it takes the reader by the hand and says, "These are the people. Look for these people. They're there. And when you find them, here's how you connect with them. And here's what you're looking to get. And they'll help you." Right people plus right places equals opportunity.</p>
Andy	<p>I wanna take you in a direction here. You use a quote in your book. I've heard it also on your podcast, but it sort of starts out the book. It also ends the book, and it's a quote from a Scottish mountain climber, William Hutchison Murray. I just wanna read a portion of it and then have you tell me why this passage is so important to you. "Until one is committed there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative or creation, there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans, that the moment that one definitely commits to one's self, then providence moves too." He continues on, "Whatever you do or whatever you dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it." So why is that passage so powerful to you?</p>
Ken	<p>Because it was something that I read in my darkest days of doubt before I had ever landed any kind of broadcasting gig. I had been rejected. I had not had much momentum at all. And I was just overwhelmed with doubt that I had maybe become delusional that I wasn't in touch with who I really was, and that I was just exploring this fantasy thing and maybe it just wasn't right because things weren't happening for me. Opportunities had not presented themselves. I hadn't gotten any opportunities, or I might have had a few, but they didn't turn into anything, and I was really, really down.</p>

	<p>And I read this quote and it grabbed me because it basically put the responsibility on me, not on others. And I got it. And I was, like, "I've got to be bold. I've gotta keep stepping out, keep putting myself out there. And if I stay the course, then opportunity will happen." But I realized that I had not been doing that. I had just been sitting around feeling sorry for myself.</p> <p>I had shown up a few times in a few places, but I had not done it consistently. The whole thing was beautiful because I realized this guy was a mountain climber. And that's when the analogy of Mount Everest really first came to me. That's it. It's the climb. And it's gonna take some time. And it's gonna take plotting attitudes and plotting steps, and days were sometimes you just have to hang on to the side of the mountain and let the weather pass.</p>
Andy	As I have listened to your podcast probably a dozen times in preparation to this episode, it seems like this is the barrier that most of your callers have, sort of, "How do I take that step to be bold?"
Ken	Absolutely. It's terrifying. It's absolutely terrifying. Let's step back from Mount Everest for a moment and let's all just picture for a moment...let's just take your listeners to the base of Mount Everest. Let's say that we're there. And we can look up and see that majestic summit, snow-capped, blue-skied, gigantic clouds at the top. It's kinda majestic. Right? We're taking pictures. We're going, "Oh my gosh. This is unbelievable." But then if we let our eyes drop, there is probably some clouds in front of it. It's such a high mountain. And now weather begins to move in and all we can see is the tip. But we can't even see the base. Right?
Andy	And the last troupe died on the way up.
Ken	<p>Yeah, we start to go, "Oh, my gosh. It's a gorgeous picture, but when I start to think about scaling it, I don't even know what to do." And the reason we feel like we don't know what to do is because we look at it and we go, "This is going to be close to impossible, and if not impossible, it's gonna be really, really hard and I could get hurt. I could die." You know, all the things. Right? And so what happens is we retreat back into the voice of fear and fear is always lying to us, always telling us that it's stupid, that it's not possible, that you're not the right person for it, whatever the lie is. And that's where, again, clarity comes in. "I know I have the talent to do this. My heart comes alive when I think about doing it. And now, I'm just afraid of what it's gonna take."</p> <p>And so when I can help people see the path, and they go, "Oh, okay, this is doable."</p>
Andy	You end every podcast with two words. It's the same two words that you used at the end of the book, which is, "Press on."
Ken	That's it.

Andy	So tell me, what are you trying to tell your listeners, your readers with those two words?
Ken	Don't quit. It's a fancy way of saying don't quit. Keep moving. It is so important to me, and I'm so glad you called that out. I'm very intentional with those words because some days pressing on is all you can do. Some days just simply not quitting is pressing on. Horrible day. Nothing happened. Everything I tried failed. Total discouragement, depression, confusion, fear, doubt, rejection. And you have to press on. You get up the next day and you keep moving, you stay the course. And so that's why I use those words. It's meant to be a challenge, "Press on." And also it's meant to be an encouragement, "Press on."
Andy	I think that's a good note to end on. The name of the book is "The Proximity Principle." It comes out on May 13th?
Ken	Yes sir.
Andy	May 13th, Ken Coleman, "The Ken Coleman Show," thank you very much for giving your time. It's an honor to interview you today.
Ken	Well, it's my pleasure. Thanks for having me on your program. I appreciate you so much.
	OUTGOING MUSIC; FADE TO BACK DROP FOR PODCAST CONCLUSION
Andy	<p>So that is a wrap on Episode 43 of "Second Act Stories." Our sincere thanks to Ken Coleman for taking the time to sit down with us. Special thanks as well to McKenzie Masters and Madison Crowder at Dave Ramsey Solutions for facilitating this interview.</p> <p>If you go to any Barnes and Noble or even local library, you'll find hundreds of self-help books. What I like about The Proximity Principle, it's a simple and logical approach. When I was reading it, I found myself saying "well, duh...that makes complete sense. But how come I've never done that before?"</p> <p>So I'd encourage you to pick up the book. And if you get a chance, listen to an episode or two of "The Ken Coleman Show." It's one of the rare shows that is both entertaining and educational.</p> <p>We hope you'll keep listening. There are more second act stories just around the corner.</p>