

Angela White ([00:11](#)):

In order to recognize it as yourself in a leader, you have to be ready for anything that could come your way. You have to reach out for help, you don't have to solve everything that comes your way by yourself.

Stephanie Krievins ([00:28](#)):

Hey there friends, this is Stephanie Krievins, and you're listening to the mid-level leaders Hot Mess Hotline, where we have conversations with CEOs so that you can learn to lead like them, with strategy, focus, and innovation. Today's guest is Angela White, she is the CEO and senior consultants with JGA. So JGA, is known in the philanthropic services as rock stars, they take an authentic approach to providing strategic and philanthropic consulting services to non-profit organizations and foundations across the country. Angela has been with them since 1996, and is now the CEO. She's responsible for providing day-to-day leadership to the firm and guiding the staff, all while continuing to provide tailored consulting services directly to their clients. Friends, it is such a pleasure to bring to you this conversation with my dear friend, and she is going to share with you a pivotal moment in her firm's culture and growth.

Stephanie Krievins ([01:33](#)):

She will take us back to a specific day in 2014 that changed them for the better, and broke their hearts at the same time. And ultimately prepared them to face the global pandemic as a team with even more resilience, with more compassion for each other and for those that they serve, and with a strength that they would not have had without this critical incident in 2014. So remember, my friend, resilience is all about the ability to bounce back from adversity with even more strength, to be like that slinky that gets stretched, but then snaps back into its original shape, it doesn't get stretched so far that the metal gets out of shape and it won't come back. It stretches itself just enough that it can then bounce back to where it was, and resilience is all about the ability to do really hard things but then come back to center with who you are, and it applies to teams, people and organizations. So I hope that this episode touches your heart as much as it touched mine, so let's dig in to Angela's hot mess. Angela, set this up, tell us about your hot mess that you've been through.

Angela White ([02:51](#)):

So thanks so much for having me, I'm excited to talk about this today in a weird way, it's hard to talk about your hot messes, right?

Stephanie Krievins ([02:59](#)):

Yes

Angela White ([02:59](#)):

This is a great opportunity, and I will just be open and authentic with you about the hot mess and how we got through it. And so as you know, I'm the CEO of a consulting firm and so at the time of our hot mess, we had 13 employees, and we're in the service industry, right? So my people are those who bring in the new clients and also deliver all the products and services that we offer. So my people are my machinery, if you want to say it that way, I use to produce the wonderful, I believe wonderful content that we deliver to our non-profit clients.

Angela White ([03:37](#)):

At the time of this hot mess, I was just at the end of my first term as CEO. So I had taken over as CEO having been here already a long time, I've been there 25 years now, but this hot mess we're going to talk about happened in 2014. And so, I had just finished my first term, so if you do anything for the first time you get [inaudible 00:04:00] first, right. And then you're really kind of ready to leave maybe. So that's where I was, the hot mess really goes under the coming out of it, which we'll talk about, goes under other duties as assigned that the CEO could never envision herself.

Stephanie Krievins ([04:15](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yes.

Angela White ([04:16](#)):

So here's the hot mess, and when I say those words and I tell you the hot mess, I don't mean it to sound disrespectful to the event, the event was tragic and then the hot mess followed. It was the morning of July 15, 2014. And as happens in the consulting world, as you know a lot of times you're in evening meetings with clients. So the night before, I had been in an evening meeting, I don't know ended like seven not real late here in Indianapolis where we are headquartered, with one of my colleagues, Kris Kindelsperger, a long time JGA consultant, known him my entire professional career, just an awesome colleague.

Angela White ([04:55](#)):

So Kris and I were in a meeting with a client until kind of late and he said, "I got to get home, I have a meeting at church tonight and I don't know what I had." So off we went from our meeting. So the next morning, July 15, I'm up and I've been showered and I'm drying my hair. I remember vividly, I was drying wet hair and my cell phone rings, because as we have the phones with you 24/7 no matter if you're drying your hair or not, and the cell phone rings and it's my colleague, Kris. And I thought, "Well, jeez, I just left you last night at seven and it's not even like it's 7:30 in the morning." Now, but again, as our work goes, that's pretty normal. So I turn off my blow dryer answer my phone, "Hi, Kris, good morning," and there's some silence, and it's Kris's wife, Roxy.

Angela White ([05:46](#)):

And Roxy says, "Angela, this is Roxy, Kris died this morning." And that was the situation. And I said, "What do you mean died, I just was with him." Probably, Kris was in wonderful shape, took very good care of himself, was 64 years old, and died on the treadmill of a massive heart attack. I'd known him my entire professional career worked side-by-side with him for many years at JGA, and so this is other duties as assigned. So as a leader what you can do so to unfold what ensued after that a little bit, tell you more about the hot mess, if we can call it that, Kris, not only was our beloved colleague, wonderful friend, just unbelievable person connected to our team, a small team of 13. He was also a major revenue producer, he had a full book of business of clients and we were halfway through our calendar year award. So July, where our fiscal year in the calendar year are the same.

Angela White ([07:05](#)):

So in immediate moment, just to kind of tell you a little more about the situation, in the immediate moment, of course, my initial reaction was to ask Roxy, "Who was with her? What did she need? Should I come over?" Because their children are grown and don't live here. We had people there and so I said, "All right, let me get a hold of JGA off the bat." So then, we work in a world where our consultants travel all the time. And I had no idea where people were literally.

Angela White ([07:38](#)):

But the first thing I had to do, was deal with the immediate moment because Kris also had a full day of appointment. So I called the office immediately, had to break the news to people over the phone that were there in the office and asked them to try to compose themselves as enough to cancel out, to call Kris's day. Just with who's waiting on in this moment and then I had to find out where everyone was, and then I had to call them home because I knew we needed to be together in the hot mess. But you don't want to scare your people to death, right?

Stephanie Krievins ([08:16](#)):

Right.

Angela White ([08:17](#)):

I knew that two of my consultants were together in a meeting and so I texted one of them and said, "I have an emergency, it's not your family, you're fine but I need you to step out of the meeting." And he did and I told him what happened. He was in a meeting with our founder, Ted Grossnickel, who was extremely close with Kris. And asked, "I'm sorry to ask you to do this, but you have to end that meeting. Get Ted along and tell him what has just happened, and you have to come to the office," so they did. So that day, interestingly enough, no consultant was out of town, so with our internal staff who's primarily in the office and with the consultants, we all came together in our conference room which is now by the way named The KWK after Kris Kindelsperger, with a beautiful picture of him on the wall. And we talked to him a lot now, "Kris, what we can do about this situation?"

Angela White ([09:18](#)):

We gathered in that conference room and began to take stock of what just happened to us. We did not leave that conference room for three days, other than to go home, or as Ted and I did to go to Rocky's house, to go to their house and help her. The business side, and I want to talk about two sides. And I don't want to get too far ahead about how we got out of the hot mess, so I'll stay in the hot mess.

Stephanie Krievins ([09:46](#)):

Yes, because I'm going to need a moment, because I'm feeling the pain in this day with you, this is Oh...

Angela White ([09:53](#)):

It was... We've been talking about it today and reflecting on it, it feels like it just happened to us. So as a leader, you have to pay attention to the human and business side that cause financial growth, right. So now I have a team who's devastated and shocked, obviously, I am devastated and yet I have to lead us, right? I have to think about how do we lead in the immediate moment and how do we lead long-term, which we'll talk about a little bit later. But the first thing that we did as a team was, as I said, we stayed together, we canceled everybody's appointments. And at that moment, even though that might have seemed like an odd business decision, because consultants don't make money sitting in the office, there's no way we could go deliver our work, we don't know.

Angela White ([10:49](#)):

And so, in the immediate moment, we canceled all of our appointments. This was a Wednesday, we canceled them for the week, I remember. And we decided we were going to do what we needed to do together, we knew we had to get out of a hot mess in terms of the business side, but that was not the

response we needed on day one, hard enough, day 82 when you go through this, but not a day one, two or three. You have to take care of your people, you have to spend time together, you have to take night deliver a eulogy at his funeral, we did a tribute on our website, we dealt with the people and Kris and his family. And that was absolutely the right thing to do in that hot mess of a moment.

Angela White ([11:42](#)):

The other thing that was the right thing to do, was let it be a mess. And let people cry, we had Kleenex everywhere, we were like the funeral home when you go in and have Kleenex everywhere. We had a range of emotion, you know how that goes. We'll talk more about that later in the [inaudible 00:12:03] but not everybody reacts the same way.

Angela White ([12:06](#)):

And we're human and so part of it is living in the mess, living in the grief and not rushing through that process. So I would say in those first few days, it was really about the team, what we had been through, how we needed to communicate, also our clients loved Kris. You don't work with a consultant for years and not have built a strong relationship and so we also had to help them. How do you kindly tell them? One of my favorite stories is the CEO of the Zoo, who he's retired now but at that point for the Indianapolis through Mike said, "Kris was to had been at his office at 8:00 AM that morning and Kris was not there." And Mike is saying, "Where is Kris? He's late? We have a meeting, let's go." Obviously, he was the first work call we made, and he was just blown away. Like, "Oh, my gosh, I was sitting here being upset that Kris wasn't here on time, never in my wildest dreams did I think this is what had happened."

Angela White ([13:17](#)):

And so again, to be able to be present to those clients who as an extension of our team, were also feeling that devastation. Never part of a hot mess than when you need to sit in the mess, is the mess can also paralyze you.

Stephanie Krievins ([13:32](#)):

Yes.

Angela White ([13:34](#)):

And so when we talk about digging out of the mess, that was another important piece. At some point, we had to get back to work, and at some point we had to move forward. And that doesn't mean leaving the grief and the sadness, doesn't mean we had to have moved through all of that but we had to be able to hold that, while we went back out and did our work.

Stephanie Krievins ([13:57](#)):

Yes, I can completely empathize with that process. When I was in the process of our foster children transitioning back and it was kind of every weekend, it was well, they might go on a visit and they might not come back this weekend, which is traumatizing to do to somebody. And the aftermath after they left, I've got move forward because I refuse to lose my business because of this. And so I will do what it takes to grieve and be successful, and you don't always want to move forward every single day but you must in some ways, yeah.

Angela White ([14:32](#)):

And that's what Kris would have told us to do. Get a famous phrase, if we had a tough client situation, if we didn't win a job. He ends his emails with onward and an exclamation point like, "Onward! Let's go." You know in your heart what you have to do, but when you have to actually put it to work and kind of compartmentalize to be with the client and we're fortunate because, we'll talk about this, but our clients really care too and they gave us a lot of grace to get back on our feet.

Stephanie Krievins ([15:08](#)):

Oh, my gosh, so powerful emotions those first three days and just the logistics of doing the right thing for other people, allowing them to feel their emotions, making sure they understood why Kris was late and not there, which just opens the wound, touches the wound every single call you have to make. You knew as a leader, you needed to bring people together, be present to them. How were you taking care of yourself in those initial days and weeks?

Angela White ([15:40](#)):

Yeah, so I remember vividly when I would go out to walk at home at night, I would always listen to music upbeat music, get your walk going. And in those first few days, I couldn't even listen to music, it was all silence in my head, I was like, "I can't, I just need silence." I can't even be happy via listening to music, I just need to be in silence. And I think a good piece of advice I got a few years ago from a very successful CEO was, what it takes to be a good leader is both stamina and self-care.

Angela White ([16:20](#)):

And luckily, I've gotten that advice, and so I think that the merging for me of stamina and self-care is important. But I also know that when... And of course as leaders, maybe like when you talked about the foster children and the transition, we've all had things in our personal lives that weigh on us tremendously, yet we go to work right?

Stephanie Krievins ([16:44](#)):

Yes.

Angela White ([16:45](#)):

But sometimes I also believe as a leader, you have to step outside of yourself, and you have to be able to walk in and think it's not about you, it's about the people and the clients who are relying on you. And you have to sometimes just step out of yourself a little bit. And that's about the best I can describe those days for me, was being able to step outside of myself, and do what needed to be done to properly honor Kris and take care of my team. And I think, certainly I'm not perfect at this, but if I try to balance the stamina and the self-care, that sets you up more to be able to do that, be able to step outside of your own feelings for a minute, not that you can deny them. And your team wants to see your feelings too. They want to know it's okay to cry and they want to know, it's okay to just not want to do anything.

Stephanie Krievins ([17:40](#)):

And that you're human, they need to see that you're human too.

Angela White ([17:43](#)):

Exactly, and they also need to believe by your actions that we'll get through it.

Stephanie Krievins ([17:48](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Wow.

Angela White ([17:50](#)):

They have to see you and believe, "Okay, we've got, we'll be okay." That's kind of how I handled it I think.

Stephanie Krievins ([17:57](#)):

Okay, but it sounds like even in the midst of the grief, you were taking time to do your walk which is part of your ritual, whether you're successful or not. And also allowing you to feel the feelings of the moment and adapt that self-care to what you needed in the moment. So you're not rocking it out to some uptown funk, you're like, "Okay, I need silence right now."

Angela White ([18:19](#)):

That's right, I need to be alone with my thoughts, this is what I need. And also, the piece that sticks with me is just an extremely vivid memory is Kris's funeral, at which point all of us were there and our significant others, so many clients and I just remember the very first person I saw, it is kind of humorous to me now. When I walked out of the funeral and again, 10, nine days we went up together, we stood together. That was really important for us to like one of us can step in if the other one was faltering, right? So we walk out and I see a client that... Some of my clients have become my dear friends. I really liked this gentleman but he wasn't a client, I liked him a lot but we weren't like close, close, right?

Stephanie Krievins ([19:12](#)):

Sure.

Angela White ([19:13](#)):

I walk out, he's the first person I see. He says, "Angela," and reaches out, I fell into his arms and sobbed like a bit. And now I am the definition of hot mess.

Stephanie Krievins ([19:23](#)):

You let it out girl.

Angela White ([19:26](#)):

Who gave me the guts to do that, because sometimes it's okay to just not to know. I held it together all this time, luckily, he was a wonderful person, and he wasn't like, "Oh my gosh, how did I get this crying person in my arms." But I remember that how good it made us feel as a team in that mess, pretty surrounded by not only each other but our clients. And we had a couple consultants who had moved on JGA to do other wonderful things, they came to be with us. So it was that feeling of family that I think in a small business you have and in times like this and in a really good time, right? That's when that shows itself the most.

Stephanie Krievins ([20:17](#)):

Wow, what a beautiful story, thank you for sharing that and bringing that to our listeners into me today. It's a beautiful reminder of what becomes really important when things just fall apart. So we talked

about the week, we talked about the funeral afterwards, walk me through the next six months of ending that year. Well, let me say this and check me if I'm right or wrong, Q3 is probably extremely busy for you all, because folks are preparing for their end-of-year fundraising efforts and so they're consulting with you then to wrap up the year strong. So walk us through the next six months from a human perspective and a business perspective.

Angela White ([20:57](#)):

So I think that's where you learn everybody responds to a crisis differently. So I remember on the human side, I remember this again vividly. So the office I'm standing in right now to talk with you is next door to the office that was Kris's. So Kris and I were neighbors at work also, and you get to [size 00:21:14] office every day that as an office. I remember, this was a few months after he died, it was quite end of August, so maybe six weeks, and I was going on a business trip for JGA. And I got an email that we were going to go ahead and take down his office, take his things off the shelves and the walls and take it off to his wife and I was livid. I was like, "You will not take apart that office until I am there again to see it. No, I'm not ready. I don't want it to come down, I'm not ready." Whereby, I had other people who were saying I can't take it anymore to look at [inaudible 00:21:55] I need it gone, right. So again, how people-

Stephanie Krievins ([21:59](#)):

Understandable.

Angela White ([22:01](#)):

... I was like, "Keep it, keep it, I don't want to see it empty," and others were like, "Please empty it out, I can't take it anymore, it's too hard for me." So again, I think that like most tragedies in life, you can't just get through the short-term and then think everything is back to normal.

Stephanie Krievins ([22:17](#)):

That's right.

Angela White ([22:20](#)):

You have you continue to think about ways that people were expressing themselves or not. Or if somebody was short in a meeting or not on their game. It was like, "He was just plucked out of the air." So the lasting impact of that and how we got through that the next six months, I think was the awareness, that we needed to give people time and people might be acting in ways that they wouldn't normally act, that it was out of this... Moving through the cycles of grief, right, that anger, all of the pieces of that process. So, that's one thing, the other thing on the sole business side of it, our clients all have people... Our consultants excuse me, all have key performance indicators. No, on the business side, again, I'm not a machine, I'm a person that I know how much revenue, my goal is to bring in for the year as a consultant.

Angela White ([23:18](#)):

And we were right in the middle of our year as I told you, Kris was always a rock star, he always achieved his KPIs and he and I would always vie for the highest revenue, kind of teasing each other kind of thing. So we were right in the middle of the year and Kris, of course, perfectly on target, he was halfway through his year, and he'd earned half of the revenue he was to bring into the firm. The other side of that is now he's gone, and there's half of his revenue that nobody has responsibility for, right?

Stephanie Krievins ([23:46](#)):

Yes.

Angela White ([23:48](#)):

And because he had a full book of business, here are all of his clients. Well, what do we do with them? And so in our firm, you might be either you're one consultant to a client or you're a team to a client, but you're the leader of the team. When I say his clients, I mean the clients he would lead in and he was responsible, ultimately for the outcome.

Stephanie Krievins ([24:12](#)):

Right, he didn't deliver all of the work, but he was the project lead, the relationship manager?

Angela White ([24:16](#)):

Right, yes, perfectly said-

Stephanie Krievins ([24:18](#)):

And responsible probably for reconversion of sales?

Angela White ([24:21](#)):

Exactly.

Stephanie Krievins ([24:21](#)):

Yes, okay.

Angela White ([24:22](#)):

So now he's gone, what do we do? Well, I don't know if I want me to get into all that yet, but what we did for the rest of the year was, we divided up his book of business and we were able to retain all of his clients by assigning them to others and they have the grace and the understanding to stay with us. That doesn't always happen in any consulting work world because whereby you get JGA the company, you really get tied to the person who's delivering your work.

Angela White ([24:53](#)):

And I know sometimes we win jobs when a consultant has changed and the client just doesn't connect as well with the other consultants that might be given to them for the project. So we were able to save all that revenue, keep the revenue we had for the rest of the year, because typically our projects go longer-term, but then what happened to the other revenue? What happened to the missing revenue? So that's another piece of how we got out of a hot mess. So we had to transition all of his clients to others.

Angela White ([25:24](#)):

If we weren't up to speed, obviously, we tried to connect the client to the... If there was another consultant on his team, right? But what if I wasn't on the team, and I needed to take it, I had to get up to speed on the client situation, I had to build rapport and relationship with the people there, right? Meanwhile, still doing all my client work, your other work didn't go away when this happened. So we

had the next six months to deal with the lingering human impact of his death, and then the book of business impact of his death.

Stephanie Krievins ([25:58](#)):

Yeah, well, that's my question about capacity because I don't know a consultant that works 40 hours a week, most of them are averaging 40 to 60. Oh, gosh, no, most of them are averaging 50 to 60 hours a week, routinely. So from a capacity perspective, how did your team handle that stress from not only having to step up their game in terms of their expertise quickly, but then also more hours, finding ways to create more hours in the day.

Angela White ([26:28](#)):

I think it was the sheer impact of, "We will do whatever it takes to honor Kris and serve these clients of his like never before, we will take his projects over the finish line." I think that was sheer dedication to what we had ahead of us because also in our firm, our consultants don't just deliver the product, they also sell the product. So me included I'm in the sales force, and I'm the consultant, so you're doing both jobs, which means we need to create authentic way of handling it because if I'm talking with you, and you agree that we're going to do this work together, and then I deliver the work, right, so it's a seamless process. But it does mean that we're the sales force and the consulting force both. And so I think that where it got difficult was, I think the sales part was difficult because you were maintaining your client load, taking Kris' clients and what that squeezed out the time for sales [inaudible 00:27:30].

Stephanie Krievins ([27:30](#)):

Yes, well, and the reality is as sales as a profession, sales as a series of techniques, some are more trained in it than others, some are more successful than others. Most people don't become fundraising consultants or a consultant of any kind, because they're passionate about sales. They do it because they're passionate about the work and the technical expertise. And so there's just a learning curve that I would imagine most of those folks went through in terms of being as good as a salesperson as Kris was, because he was more seasoned and more practiced. Tell me if I'm off base, but-

Angela White ([28:04](#)):

No, you're right. And I would say that at this exact time, we had already made a hiring decision before Kris died, to hire our current senior consultant, Tim Ardillo.

Angela White ([28:15](#)):

Tim had worked with Kris on prior projects where Tim was the client, Kris was the consultant. Tim was to come on board in August, Kris died the middle of July. And thankfully, because Tim knew Kris so well and knew us, and knew how tight of a group we were, he came into that hot mess. And he knew what was going on, it'd be so different if we had hired somebody that did not know us or Kris and he was like, "Why are all these people crying all day long? "Let's get to work."

Angela White ([28:50](#)):

Tim came with us from the beginning. He hadn't even started yet, and he was here with us, he was at the funeral with us. And so it was such a great and wonderful blessing that his onboarding during this time was facilitated by the fact he knew Kris, and he knew us. And that was a blessing and now Tim Ardillo is in Kris Kindelsperger's office, so we've come full circle, right?

Stephanie Krievins (29:16):

Yes

Angela White (29:18):

But that was helpful too because can you imagine, as we're down in business, we're grieving and we've got to onboard a new person, that was a mess. And [inaudible 00:29:27] made that so much easier because he got what was going on.

Stephanie Krievins (29:30):

That makes sense.

Angela White (29:32):

If you can tell the story, but it's you know how you say, "We were really close." If you want people to really feel it, right? So to have him walk in and understand it from the get-go, just made that transition a lot easier but he was a brand new consultant. So the brand new consultants not going to take the lead on a project that a senior consultant had back many years ago, and Tim was brand new. So whereby we had a new person, it wasn't like he could just be the replacement for the clients Kris had.

Stephanie Krievins (30:03):

That makes all the sense in the world. Yeah, because if that would have been someone that was new to JGA, their first impression of your organization, would have had a lasting impact on their relationship. And they probably wouldn't have made it a year, just because they walked into folks crying, folks transitioning, which there's nothing wrong with that but with a new relationship that's just too much, that's probably too big of a burden to bear in those moments.

Angela White (30:29):

Right.

Stephanie Krievins (30:30):

Amazing, isn't serendipity, and God so good to us [crosstalk 00:30:33]. Amazing-

Angela White (30:36):

Very true.

Stephanie Krievins (30:37):

Anything else that you feel is important for our listeners to understand about what you were going through as a leader during this time?

Angela White (30:46):

I'll talk about it when we talk about getting out of the mess. But I think that you referenced it earlier, that when I said that you have to step outside of yourself, and be able to lead the team, you also need the team to understand you're human too, and don't be afraid to ask for help and accept help. I think that's a strong lesson I learned.

Stephanie Krievins ([31:07](#)):

Makes all the sense in the world. Well, let's pause there, Angela, let's go to commercial, so folks can get an opportunity to figure out their first steps in fixing their hot mess, and then we'll come back and pick up this conversation. This season of the hot mess hotline is brought to you by my hot mess quiz. One of the common lessons that my clients learn during coaching is how to really evaluate a problem, dissect it for clarity, and then take action on the tasks that really move the needle. The hot mess quiz can bring you that focus too, as a leader your work life is full of well, work, but according to Pareto 80% of that work isn't even impactful. If you need to create growth and change, you need to focus in on what truly matters and what will drive new results. Take the hot mess quiz by clicking on the link below which is [stefaniekrievins.com/hotmessquiz](http://stefaniekrievins.com/hotmessquiz)

Stephanie Krievins ([32:03](#)):

Just like this podcast promise, this is in the real world. What happens when people stop being polite and start getting real, that's what you're going to get in this report, it's going to be tailored to your business hot mess to tell you exactly where to focus your efforts first, and then how to bring your team along to get the change that you need to create. Go to [stefaniekrievins.com/hotmessquiz](http://stefaniekrievins.com/hotmessquiz), don't wait another minute to start becoming the pro-troublemaker you've always wanted to be. All right, there it is. Oh my gosh, Angela, what a great story. Oh my gosh, thank you.

Angela White ([32:43](#)):

That should be the story because I didn't want to put Kris' death in the category of a hot mess. So I didn't want to be disrespectful but I thought it was a really good story about what happened, what can happen.

Stephanie Krievins ([32:54](#)):

Yeah, no, you set it up perfectly, no disrespect at all. Yeah, that just it, but I knew as soon as you said the date, I was like, "Oh, this is going to be doozy."

Angela White ([33:06](#)):

I'm delighted to hear of that, yeah. There have been a lot of other hot messes but this was clearly, I had such a business application to also, as we'll talk about in a minute, how did we fix the financial side?

Stephanie Krievins ([33:19](#)):

Yes, no, this is so spot on because when we think about mid-level leaders, and their perception of the CEO suite and what it takes to be in there, they're very wrong. And they think like, "Oh, I when I become a leader, then I can have some self-care things but until then, I just got to go." And they can take these lessons now, it's going to be awesome.

Angela White ([33:40](#)):

I think you're right. It's like, "Oh, well, this is how you do it. Well, again, I'm going to start off here with other duties [inaudible 00:33:46]. Not on my list, what happens when the employee dies?"

Stephanie Krievins ([33:51](#)):

Oh, my gosh, yeah that's so traumatic. Well, so Angela, as Kris would say, "Onward."

Angela White ([33:59](#)):

Onward.

Stephanie Krievins ([34:00](#)):

Onward and JGA has continued to thrive since then. We talked a lot about the steps that you took in those initial first six months, and continued goodness after that. What did you learn as the CEO during this crisis that has made the business successful since then?

Angela White ([34:24](#)):

I think there are a couple things. The first thing is, I told you that Kris and I were always vying for who was number one on revenue, just a fun conversation about it not because it was always about the numbers. But in the end, it's about hitting your revenue goals. That is what I learned long-term which has been a part now in every strategic plan we've done at JGA is how better to spread revenue across consultants. So we are not in a situation where one consultant has such a big book of business, that if that consultant were gone in an incident like this, how would the company move forward?

Stephanie Krievins ([35:03](#)):

Oh, yes, because that that ends up becoming a business weakness if you can't mitigate for it.

Angela White ([35:10](#)):

Exactly.

Stephanie Krievins ([35:10](#)):

Oh, fantastic.

Angela White ([35:13](#)):

What a way to learn that lesson, right, I opened it for retirement but what happened, happened. And also what if an employee quits? What if the consultant moves on? We've had a couple of consultants move on in my time here, again, so you don't want one or two people to hold the bulk of your revenue. Now, that's easy for me to say, and some years we're better at it than others because in the world of consulting, sometimes jobs come to you, where they want you and you can not successfully facilitate a different consultant to be the leader. So sometimes we're not as good as you realize that we want to be at spreading the revenue, but it seems like you would say to yourself... Okay, of course, you want to spread the revenue, because want everybody to be busy but you also want to mitigate risk.

Angela White ([36:03](#)):

So anybody listening to this in a personal services firm, I think that is a very important piece to look at in your own work. So how do you look at revenue producers and how you spread that out more equally, if you can, so that you mitigate risk, if one of them all of a sudden is gone.

Stephanie Krievins ([36:22](#)):

Oh, that makes sense all... And I have a client that is going through that too. It's baby boomer is the owner, and as a firm, he gets the call because they want to work with him. And so when you think about succession planning and the names that we have at the top of the letterhead, the folks that are known

for this work, you've got to create an intentional strategy so that your other team members are known for that work as well. So they're getting the first call, so that you can retire and the business doesn't suffer, when we think about the transition of leadership from baby boomers to Gen X, so that, is happening, was happening, will continue to happen for the next decade, key problem to solve for, love that.

Angela White (37:03):

And I would say we do that in a couple ways here at JGA, what I want to say is, I do and others here, but I do a lot of public speaking, and a lot of webinars delivering that kind of thing, I don't have to do that, right? Have your other consultants, have your other team members out there doing those presentations and running webinars, et cetera, because then their name is out there more, they're going to call Andy, they're going to call... We have consultants that have grown into such tremendous senior consultants by building those relationships.

Angela White (37:34):

So, as the leader don't... And I love to do it but I shouldn't do it. So don't suck all those opportunities into yourself, either because you like them, or you think you're the best of them, because you're probably not. So how do you let other people have that experience? Also, that's sometimes why we build a consulting team. Because if I'm on the team, but I have another consultant with me, then I can transition that work to that other consultants, right, as they've had experience with the client.

Angela White (38:05):

And the third way we do it is, I might take the lead and in all honesty, it's true what I say to the client which is, "I would like to do this but Steph really has the better experience of this. I'd like you to meet her," which is true. We match experience, obviously, to what the client needs. Whether you're in the hot mess or not, that piece of growing your next layer is so important to mitigate risk to the firm.

Stephanie Krievins (38:35):

That makes all the sense, what other lessons emerged for you?

Angela White (38:38):

So that was a big one that stayed with us, right? Because we thought we would have thought of that before but it stayed with us.

Stephanie Krievins (38:44):

Why do we have to learn things the hard way?

Angela White (38:49):

I also think it has taught me, and as firm taught us that the CEO really does have to be ready for anything. And in fact, today thinking exactly about this podcast, I had an internal teleconference at 8 AM, this morning, and one of my senior consultants didn't show for it, which was really weird because people around here don't know show meetings. So I thought, "Oh, he must have emailed me that he had a client conflict and I didn't see it or whatever." But the minute I got off that call I called because all of a sudden, it was back to that day. I was really afraid like, "Did something just happen?"

Angela White ([39:32](#)):

Now, I don't have that response all the time. It's not like every time I look at an office, I think is everybody okay but that got me this morning like, "Is everybody okay, is he okay? He didn't join the call, is he okay?" So I think that part of embracing your role as a leader, again, you can't be looking over your shoulder, you can't react like I did this morning every day like "Oh, no, why is somebody calling?" No, we can't live like that, but to me knowing that you have to be ready for every anything that comes up. And to know that you don't have to be ready to respond by yourself.

Angela White ([40:10](#)):

Create of a good leader is reaching out to others and asking others for help, and I did that throughout the entire year of the crisis when Kris died and after. "Can you help me look at these numbers? Can you help do this? Did you reach out to this client?" But I was simply asking for help and engaging others around you. Quite frankly, here at JGA, who are a lot smarter than I am, how can they come together with me to help solve a problem? So whether that's the lesson learned is really delegation, I'd say one lesson learned is spreading revenue another lesson learned is, in order to recognize it as yourself in a leader, you have to be ready for anything that could come your way, you have to reach out for help, you don't have to solve everything that comes your way by yourself.

Angela White ([40:59](#)):

As a leader your role can be lonely, because you do have to bear the burden of things that you're not going to share with everybody, right? But it doesn't have to be isolating you can reach out for help. And that's in your firm or outside your firm, you just need to talk to somebody and get some advice.

Stephanie Krievins ([41:21](#)):

What resources do you bring to yourself to lessen the loneliness and connect with folks outside of JGA?

Angela White ([41:28](#)):

Well, I might be different in this than others but when I get home at night, I'm not really into talking about work. So my spouse works in a similar industry and so we get it. So we might talk a little bit, but I know I would like to talk about something else. So certainly I do talk to my spouse, but also we have a terrific board of directors here at JGA, some outside folks so I've got strong relationships there. I've also built relationships with other women CEOs to be able to talk to, so that's really important to me to be able to go to for advice.

Angela White ([42:05](#)):

And we work in a friendly industry, I've got several other consulting firms similar to JGA, where we reach out, share information, we do compete for jobs against each other but by and large, the firms that we have relationships with, I know if the client picks us or them, they're going to have great counsel. So I still feel fine talking with those firms, asking their leaders for advice. So I would say those are probably my three key areas at home a little bit, so as not to just drown in work 24/7 but then our board, women leaders and our competitors, in a good sense of that world.

Stephanie Krievins ([42:47](#)):

Okay, fantastic, seems crucial. What did you learn about your team that has strengthened the business since that fateful day in 2014?

Angela White ([42:57](#)):

Yeah. So I learned about the team, something I think I already knew, but I saw it more and more with the team is so committed to each other and to JGA, and to our clients that they will do whatever it takes to serve. I knew that, but then when you're in that you really see it, right? I again learned and again, you know this but then you really see it, that everybody responds differently. And we spend a lot of time at JGA working with Myers Briggs, and Strength Finders and understanding how we eat to work, right? And what motivates me to say, "I'd like to spend tomorrow." And what motivates others to say, "I need some time to think you through this."

Stephanie Krievins ([43:41](#)):

Create self-awareness.

Angela White ([43:43](#)):

Where does it all come from, right? And so I think that I learned for us to have built that foundation of understanding where each person comes from and the self-awareness was helpful when we saw people reacting differently, right? Like, no, "I get it." We spend a lot of time on team building here at JGA. We meet as a full team now we have 15 people, but we meet as a full team every Wednesday morning at 9 AM for an hour. So we do that together once a quarter, we have an all-day meeting with all 15 of us, either doing professional development from business, client situations, we try twice a year.

Angela White ([44:24](#)):

It's been a little more difficult in 2020 but we try to do two fun things a year or two volunteer things a year together. And so if you are then adding up all those hours, wait 15 people, non-billable, four days a year, every Wednesday morning, two fun days, okay. That is an investment in our people that we are well aware of and we know it is very important. Because if you do that on a regular basis, then you're stronger when the hot mess happens.

Angela White ([44:57](#)):

And that for me, it was an affirming lesson in all of this, that the more you spend on your team and keeping your team healthy together, working strongly together, then you're ready when the unexpected hot mess happens. So I think that set us up to be a little bit stronger in that stone to me during the situation.

Stephanie Krievins ([45:24](#)):

How did that contribute to how you were able to remain successful in 2020, then? Because 2020 was just the ultimate hot mess of all-

Angela White ([45:33](#)):

Right, well, that to me was important when think about the impact of the pandemic on lives. First, let's think about those who have lost their lives. So we didn't lose anybody at the firm, praise God that way. But then let's think about the bigger impact of the pandemic first on lives and then on dollars. So, I would think we kind of went from the inside out in 2020. We're all here together, thank God. Let's think about the health impact of the pandemic, on those who are suffering and those who have died, and then let's take it out to the numbers, okay. If we [say 00:46:16] like that, I think that's been a good way for us to approach it.

Stephanie Krievins ([46:22](#)):

I will say, that's how I felt too when the pandemic hit and the road kind of shut down in the spring, I thought because of what my husband and I had been through, a couple years before I was like, "Okay, I'm ready to serve, I have an internal strength that thankfully, other people haven't had to learn. And I'm going to share that with other folks to help support them." And you all were able to create stability for yourselves for your clients, because you had that perspective of what could happen.

Stephanie Krievins ([46:48](#)):

And an understanding that when it does happen, we are ready to emotionally support people because you work with a large range of non-profits that were impacted in a variety ways, not just because of COVID, but because of the social unrest too. So you could serve them with a different kind of presence because you've been through something really hard. And you understand that there is peace that comes on the other side of it and when we have to sit in the suck for a while, let's sit in the suck, and we can help be your guides back to the peace, because we know what it feels like to be here.

Angela White ([47:19](#)):

Well, that's beautifully because I think, when we think about the financial impact of the pandemic on businesses like yours and mine, that might be where our head goes for. And here, I think that Kris' experience taught us to look at the health of the 15 of us, to have empathy for what was happening in the world, 400,000 lives loss today, right? What's happening [inaudible 00:47:43]? And then taking it to the bottom line. And I think that's what set us up. Also, because we've been through a lot together, that switch to working from home and staying close knit as a team, even though we're on Zoom, was a little easier to do. And we had the trust factor, we trust each other.

Angela White ([48:05](#)):

So there was none of this. "Well, what [inaudible 00:48:07] doing? Is she working from home or doing her laundry?" No, there was no lack of trust among the team of who's doing what? How's it going to get done? No, I had people saying, "Hey, I live five minutes from JGA, I'll go the mail, you don't need to drive that far." Just everybody pitching in, whatever it took, right? "I'm going to Sam's I'll buy the PPE," everything like that. So I think that has helped us and again, the revenue side is important. Obviously, that's what keeps a firm functioning and keeps us able to serve as you so eloquently described. But you've got to also look at, all right, let's talk about the severity of this first, let's talk about the human impact first.

Stephanie Krievins ([48:54](#)):

Yes, the successful businesses I know that transition out of this stronger than ever, they focused on their humans first because they understood that the dollars would come if we can hold our team together.

Angela White ([49:07](#)):

Exactly. That's the way to 2020 I think.

Stephanie Krievins ([49:09](#)):

Yes, that is right.

Angela White ([49:11](#)):

How do you hold your people together? How do you keep them feeling connected? How do you keep them when your teammates are isolated? I had people working at home trying to e-learn with kindergarten, I had people working at home totally alone. Nobody else there every single day so, again, it's how you respond. If we put people first and we obviously have to look at the revenue side but that's how you respond I think.

Stephanie Krievins ([49:44](#)):

And as we wrap up this conversation here, I've just loved so many pieces of this. What do you wish that mid-level leaders knew about being in your shoes?

Angela White ([49:53](#)):

Yeah. Well, I would like mid-level leaders to know sometimes it's really helpful to come to the leader and just ask how can I help you? Can I take something off your plate? How can I help you? Because that leader might be feeling because he or she is so trying to protect the next layer, right? That they can't come and ask for help but if you come and offer the help, I think that's the piece I would say. I would also say to understand and be aware that the leader is human too he or she is not maybe showing as much of that in the moment, if he or she's trying to be in that zone of taking care of the people not [burning 00:50:39] the people, comforting him or her, offer help understand what you're going through is the same thing. How can you help and be supportive? I also would say, be authentic and be self-aware.

Angela White ([50:56](#)):

So if something's not going well come and tell your leader. "Hey, look Angela, I know you don't want to move Kris' things out of the office, but the other 12 of us have got to see something we need closure." If I know you don't want to do it but let me just be your friend here and say the rest of us need closure. Sometimes you need to come to your CEO and say, "This is how it is [inaudible 00:51:18] kind way, obviously, but this is how it is, I don't know if you're able to see this side of it. I wanted to share that with you kind of thing," I think that's important too.

Stephanie Krievins ([51:30](#)):

That's why self-awareness is so important, because it's easy in our workplaces to turn that conversation into, "Angela, how dare you want to leave that up? And traumatize us every single day so that we have to see it." So it turns into this blame game versus, "Here's what I need, and here's what I heard other people need, I understand you might need this, can we have that conversation?" Versus, "You're wrong and I'm right, you need to do I what I want."

Angela White ([51:54](#)):

Exactly.

Stephanie Krievins ([51:54](#)):

Without self-awareness people physically cannot have that conversation. And they make it your problem when it's really their problem.

Angela White ([52:02](#)):

Yeah, and the other piece, I think is to figure out that way however, you do it for yourself, to be able to step outside and keep doing the work. And I don't mean to rush that process. But at some point you have to get back to work when you're in a hot mess. You've all seen it, where you're just spiral by having the same conversation over and over again about the hot mess. And I hope and pray none of you were in the same hot mess situation listening to this that we were, or that you're not coming out of the pandemic having lost a key teammate or a loved one. But eventually, we have to have the onward conversation.

Stephanie Krievins ([52:46](#)):

That's right, yes, I agree completely. So last question for you and we'll wrap up. What do you wish mid-level leaders would do to support the organization and top leadership in their role now?

Angela White ([53:01](#)):

I think being an authentic team player, to be open and honest, also to be kind, to be an authentic team player, to be in it for the good of the mission of your organization. Whatever your organization's mission is, to be committed to that mission and to be committed to the teammates you're working with. That doesn't mean everybody has to be a best friend, right? To be committed to each other and to be authentic in that relationship.

Stephanie Krievins ([53:31](#)):

Amen. Could not have said that better, yes, be mission-focused, be authentic, and be committed to your teammates, yes.

Angela White ([53:42](#)):

Well, it's a pleasure to talk about our hot mess and to talk about our dear colleague, Kris, and talk about how we today, still refer and talk about him a lot in our office and he's with us in spirit. And I do think I at least I hope that some of the ideas around how to mitigate that kind of risk are helpful to others.

Stephanie Krievins ([54:02](#)):

Yes, oh, my gosh, thank you for sharing that story. Sharing your perspective, Kris and Roxy's perspective as well, and the teammates and how that has impacted and made your firm stronger, that's the best example of resilience. And that's a skill that's going to be needed in 2021 and beyond, so that we can come out of this disaster that 2020 brought us, and so what a beautiful story to be able to share his legacy with so many more. So thank you for our conversation today.

Stephanie Krievins ([54:35](#)):

Hey there, friend that wraps up my powerful conversation with Angela today of JGA Here are my takeaways and I would love to hear yours wherever you're watching or listening in. That big question that she had to ask herself and the team right after Kris's death, right? How do you lead in the moment? And how do you lead in the long-term? They might have very different answers but as a leader, you've got to keep that in mind as you continue to move forward through something that involves grief or big business transition, or just a big disruption in your business or with your people.

Stephanie Krievins ([55:16](#)):

The second thing that stood out to me and I just love this is as a leader, you have to have stamina and self-care, those two have a symbiotic relationship. So what are the ways as a leader, that you are taking care of yourself so that you can maintain your stamina? And in what ways as a leader, are you maintaining your stamina so that you can take care of yourself, right? I don't know about you but I think of work as almost a sprint every single day. And I get exhausted by Wednesday night, and I have very little to give on Thursday and Friday, unless I know how to build in stamina for myself, which oftentimes mean getting my bacon on the rowing machine, because that's my jam in terms of self-care. Angela had walking, I have a hot room when it's the hot room yoga when it's safe to do, and the rowing machine. So what are your self-care tools?

Stephanie Krievins ([56:02](#)):

Third, I asked Angela, what does it take to be a successful mid-level leader? What is your request of them? And I heard, being authentic team player, which means having self-awareness, be committed to the mission of your business. So be in it to win it with that big picture long-term vision for your company, and then make sure you're committed to your teammates. Are you displaying loyalty and trust to those around you? All right, my friend, let's get off the internet. Let's get the real important and urgent work done today that it takes to fulfill that mission, and I'll see you next time.