

Inspiring Women

Episode 68: Johanna Fic

Laurie McGraw:

Welcome to Inspiring Women with Laurie McGraw. I am your host, Laurie McGraw. I have spent the past 30 years in leadership and over the years I've come to learn one thing, women need women, and not just any women but inspiring women. Tune in every week to hear from women at the pinnacle of their careers and from others who are just starting out. Episodes can be found at inspiringwomen.show or subscribe on your favorite podcast app. Thanks for listening and I hope you will be inspired.

You are listening to Inspiring Women and today we are speaking with Johanna Fic. She is a senior manager and an engagement delivery professional at Salesforce. She is a technology consultant who is a professional that understands business processes and helping her clients achieve their objectives at Salesforce with experience from Deloitte, a business degree. And Johanna, I delighted to be speaking with you this morning.

Johanna Fic:

Thank you so much for having me on, Laurie.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, it has been quite a year, 2021. We tried to connect all last year, but this is the first time we've had the chance to do it at the beginning of 2022. Johanna, I'd love to start inspiring women with what are you doing right now? What is your day to day at your job responsibilities at Salesforce?

Johanna Fic:

Absolutely. So you summarized it perfectly. I'm a senior manager of engagement delivery at Salesforce. Now, for anybody who might not know Salesforce, we are a CRM or customer relationship management solution in the Cloud and as an engagement delivery manager, that means that I help my customers at Salesforce plan for and implement those products that they've purchased from us so that they can really get the value out of their investment.

And I specifically focus on products that serve customers in the communications industry. So usually, I lead about two customer engagements at one time and I'm responsible for the team of solution architects and developers that we bring to the table but at the same time, I'm also a people manager. So right now, I have a team of five professionals who report to me and some of them might be supporting the customer engagements that I'm working on. Others may not be, they might be paired with other engagement delivery managers.

So my primary role really is to be their manager, helping them with their professional growth rather than their day to day.

Laurie McGraw:

And Johanna, how long have you been managing people? You've been through a couple big companies as well as a startup, so I want to talk a little bit about that, but how long have you been a people manager?

Johanna Fic:

Yeah, I actually became a people manager twice. I got to be a people manager at Deloitte just at the tail end of my stint there, my six years with Deloitte, right before I ended up moving on. And then coming into Velocity, I made it clear that it was my goal and intention to manage a team again. So I joined a small startup but that startup was focused on industry expertise which meant that I was really part of, not only a smaller team by virtue of it being a startup, but also on the more junior side comparatively.

So I didn't really start out with direct reports there. I still got a little bit of that experience by virtue of leading engagements but it was in my second year at what was then Salesforce got acquired that I officially became a people manager again. So I've been a people manager with Salesforce now for going on six months.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, that's great. Becoming a people manager is a big step on the path to leadership, so that's wonderful. Let's talk a little bit about the cultures of these companies. So you've done Deloitte, large company. You're at Salesforce, large company. You have done a startup. As a younger professional, tell us about the differences in the culture. What speak to you? What are things that might be either challenges or things that you find exciting depending on the different types of cultures?

Johanna Fic:

They do really have a lot of differences. I think a lot of the differences, as you might imagine, they tie back to the size difference between the two. When you're in a consulting environment, you're in a huge and well oiled machine. A startup environment much, much smaller, and so what I found is that in that startup environment, you get really a very close-knit group and you can fairly quickly get to the point where you know the team and the key players for any discussion quite well.

The other big difference, I would say, about my experience in consulting versus in a startup is with consulting, there was a really strong clarity and structure around career paths. So the expectations for succeeding and getting to the next level, what that next level was, was very clearly laid out. Whereas coming into a startup environment, it was less structured in that regard, but in some ways it also afforded more possibilities to move across the organization based on where needs were and based on where your interests lined up.

So those were some of the key different says that I picked up on. But I actually think that there's some commonalities that they share as well. One that comes to mind right away is they're both scrappy and the number of times in both that I've come into situations that were a little chaotic or had to find a quick way to organize and harness that chaos or fill a void, it's countless on both sides.

So the part that I really enjoy and that I think drew me to both is that there's really that opportunity to just roll up your sleeves and start creating.

Laurie McGraw:

So the scrappy culture, that strikes me as something that would be something that is a great fit for, again I'll just say, younger professional like yourself, Johanna, and so that exists at Salesforce. You feel that. Is there something else that you look to that's important to you? I was having conversation with my son, 28 years old, and he was really clear with me, it's like, "Mom, I don't see myself ever working in a large office with cubicles. I can't see it." And that's his view of professional trajectory where he needs to be.

What about for yourself? What's important to you and I would just say other of your peer group, in terms of what they're looking for out of an employer today?

Johanna Fic:

I don't know if I can speak for the whole peer group but just speaking for myself, it's actually really funny. I've not found myself in a situation where I've had my own cubicle and I think coming from consulting pre-pandemic, when we were all traveling, getting an assigned space seemed like such luxury. So many times we were huddled around maybe slightly too small tables to collaborate with the team that's flown in to help that client or that customer and then once I made the move into the startup and suddenly then into Salesforce, I've actually been in a remote mode for longer than the start of the pandemic.

Some of my customers realized that there's ways to be very, very efficient working across technology rather than spending time in the same room together and so I actually transitioned to being remote, I think about a year before the pandemic hit, and have been ever since.

So I've never had that typical pack your bag, pack your lunch and make your way to the office to sit at your cubicle experience. And actually, I've sometimes day-dreamed about what it might be like to be able to walk the halls and know who's in the cubicle next to you. And so hopefully at some point I'll get a chance to experience that but right now the situation demands flexibility from us. But I would expect that as we come back from pandemic life that it's going to maybe turn on its head and we're going to be expecting flexibility from our employers. Flexibility to do exactly what we're doing right now, if that's what fits our lifestyle.

Flexibility to be more collaborative and, and have office spaces to go to and shape what that looks like. For certain roles that need heads down time and focus, maybe a cubicle or even an office is best, but I think there's certain conversations that are best had in open and shared spaces. So I think, hopefully, sometimes soon we'll get to have that and really shape how we best work together.

Laurie McGraw:

Will you be coming back to a in-office environment with your team? Are you all in a same geography or is your team remote? It's obviously remote now. What are your plans over the next several months? Do you even know yet?

Johanna Fic:

It's starting to open up a little bit. So we do have an office space here in Vancouver, where I'm located, and I can go in and work directly with people there but as you pointed out, my team may not be here and that's the case. So I've got a few team members who are also Vancouver-based but the vast majority of our team is spread across all of Canada and the US.

So going into the office doesn't necessarily mean I'll be sitting with the people that I'm working with day in, day out, and as a result, I'm actually designated as a remote employee right now. It entitles me to be able to seek that connection and go into the office for meetings as and when I want to but there won't be an assigned space for me right away and there's no expectation for me to go into the office.

Laurie McGraw:

Okay. So you're figuring it out and you're figuring it out with your employer. How about with your team, Johanna? So as a new people manager past several months, how is that going from a one, being prepared for that to lead people? Are you ready and how are you doing it in a remote fashion? Does that make it easier or is there literally no complication, just it being remote? What's your experience?

Johanna Fic:

Going to your question of was I ready? I thought I was. I asked for the opportunity. I advocated for myself and I sought out any opportunity that I could to prepare. I did mentoring and new hire onboarding. I even took a training program. I'm really glad that I did all those things, but ultimately, I don't think I was ready. I'm not sure if anything could have truly prepared me going into the role.

I thought about how fortunate I had been that I had a chance to work with a few different managers and to have seen and learned from their styles, the styles that I liked, and to have also experienced ones that I maybe didn't want to emulate. But what I didn't realize at the time was that what all those had in common were actually me. I like that style, it worked for me, or I didn't respond to that other style.

But I'm not managing a team of five me's and I learned quite quickly that as a manager, I need to flex my style to my team member's needs to help them be successful and I think that's maybe something that's a bit more challenging to do when you're in a remote setting, because you don't get that face to face contact the same way. Sure, you can turn on video, but maybe there's a lag or the connection's not quite that great. It's not as easy to read facial cues to see how your style is landing and whether you're making that impact that you're hoping to make in your team member's life.

Laurie McGraw:

And so Johanna, as you do that, again, as a young professional, who encourages you? Who do you look to for advice, whether you're aspiring to be more like them or whether it's a coach or a mentor or somebody who supports you. Who are those people? How do you know them? Do you seek them out? Do they seek you out? Is your employer supplying them? Love to get some perspective on that.

Johanna Fic:

Yeah, I would say it's a combination of all of the above. On my team at the moment, I'm surrounded by some incredibly inspiring women, actually. My leader and her leader are both women. I work with really knowledgeable and successful peers as well and in the IT world, I would say, that's pretty rare, and I found mentorship in all of these women.

I think it's definitely something where at the start of my career, I thought of mentors as synonymous with superiors but I've gotten some of the best career advice from my peers and I think it comes from the fact that we face similar challenges and by nature of working closely together, we also understand how the other person works, what motivates them and drives them. And I think that's key to making really good career decisions, so some of my advice has come from my peers.

Laurie McGraw:

That's awesome. And then Johanna, you also said that you sought the opportunity to take this step into management, to become that people leader, but you're also a busy person, and I know this just because of the times that we tried to connect all last year. So what were some of the first moments for you that you knew you wanted to be a leader, or you had the skills to be a leader? Was there a moment in time? Was there some indication or was this something that you've always seen or desired for yourself?

Johanna Fic:

I think it's something that I've always been kind of working towards and really wanted for myself. I am the older sister, so my younger sister suffered through years of playing school where I was her teacher with me and I think that translates into just how I view the world. I love teaching others and guiding others and so throughout my school, university, and then in my career, I've looked for those opportunities to be able to work with younger professionals than myself and help them grow.

And that translates into those activities that I was mentioning, whether it was just the ability to sign up to be a mentor for someone or going beyond that now. It's always something that's been important to me. I've benefited so much from wonderful guides and mentors that have given me advice or steered me through my career so far. It's just a great feeling to be able to try and give that back to somebody and pass it along to the next generation.

Laurie McGraw:

So you've had a vision of this for yourself and you have taken actions and steps to pursue it. Let's talk about this pandemic. So we're almost two years into this once in a lifetime, let's hope so, global pandemic. It's changed all of our lives in a whole variety of ways and there's a lot of discussion these days about whether it's the great resignation, or probably more aptly, the great reevaluation.

So as somebody who probably had a vision, a direction that you wanted to go career-wise, how has this time maybe changed your thinking? Or how is it impacting you in terms of how you think about your career trajectory of what you want for yourself professionally, Johanna?

Johanna Fic:

I think one of the things that it's pointed out most to me is that especially in this remote world, we need to make time to be humans together. Those are the aspects that most quickly fell by the wayside by virtue of jumping from Zoom to Zoom to Zoom. What I noticed motivates me to show up as my best self at work is the connections that I have to my team, to my leaders, to the mission of what my team's meant to accomplish and to my customers as well.

And I think that's something that I'm always going to look for now. I'm lucky that I found it in the work that I'm doing today but I imagine that quite a few folks who have made the decision to look for something else maybe are doing so because we're quite limited right now. There's lockdowns. There's very limited activity that you can fill your time with. So you start to evaluate what you're spending a good chunk of it on during the work week a little bit differently and you want to see that fulfillment from what you do and who you spend your time with a little bit more at work.

I think that's partially what's driving that momentum and right now, those aspects are really kind of checked off for me, they're fulfilled. So I don't feel that the need to go out and look elsewhere but I'm definitely going to keep that at the forefront whenever I do start looking again.

Laurie McGraw:

Okay. And so, as you think about just where you're going or what you're pushing yourself to do professionally, where do you see the next five years? Do you have something that you're aspiring to next? Or are you just aspiring to get the work done that's on your plate every day?

Johanna Fic:

It can be a challenge to step back out of that and make yourself be proactive and plan ahead and think through what's important and where you want to be. Something that I'm trying to be a little bit better about and keep at the forefront. It's definitely an important question to ask yourself. I find that when I make a five year plan, usually it's pretty impactful for shaping my next one to two years. I don't know that I've met any of my five year plans. Not because I fell short but just because there were other opportunities that I didn't anticipate that came my way.

So yeah, I think it's important to have a plan. My plan right now is to run a delivery practice and begin leading other leaders. That's what I'm striving toward and I'm looking for all the opportunities I think will help me on my way to getting there.

Laurie McGraw:

Yeah, I think that's actually really terrific advice. Five year plan helped shape the next one to two before you review it again. I just want to ask one more question before we close out here, Johanna. Just maybe just give some just insights into when you either already in your career hit a moment where you wish you could have done something differently. What did that look like for you? And then another counter example of a time when you felt like, wow, you really nailed it. What did that look like for you?

Johanna Fic:

Yeah. In terms of a situation where I thought I could go back in time and I could do things better, there's one that stands out to me. It was a few years ago and I was working on a project with a very tight timeline, I'm sure that feels familiar for many. And this one honestly, was too tight. Our team was too small and the entire team was struggling to make deadlines and had to compensate really by working weekends and late nights for months. It was not a good situation.

So we took those concerns to our senior management and even prepared suggestions for how to adjust the timeline or the team size to compensate for the, frankly, unexpected complexity of the implementation that we were doing. And we did that a few times but every

single time our management came back and said, "Sorry, bad news. No can do. The team needs to just work through it."

So we ended up pulling out all the stops and we pulled off the project and it sounds like it should be a great celebratory story, but it wasn't. It happened at a cost, both personally, but also to other obligations that each of those team members had to work on firm internal initiatives in addition to their customer work. And so then by the time that we got to year end evaluations, a number of our team members received poor ratings, and that included myself.

Because what turned out is that the partner responsible for the work and the project had no idea about the dire situation that we were in. He was never informed. Our senior year management actually never took it up to that level. And so as a result when we were giving our explanations for not being able to take on those additional initiatives, that fell on deaf ears.

And I think what I learned from that situation, what I wish I could have gone back and done differently, is I should have communicated at all levels of team leadership and now I actually encourage my team to establish a strong relationship with my manager and her leaders, just so that I pass that learning along and spread the benefits of making sure you communicate all the way up.

Laurie McGraw:

And boy, is it important? I do think for young professionals to understand how they are being evaluated and how they're being evaluated ties to compensation really matters. So that is great advice. Give us a situation where you absolutely nailed it.

Johanna Fic:

All right. I was asked to jump into an ongoing project a while ago and rescue it, and was brought in to replace a subject matter expert. And the subject matter expert had extremely deep background in the technology but really struggled to work effectively with our client at the time. And it had gotten to the point where that really eroded the trust between our two organizations.

So I was facing a bit of an uphill battle. I was getting caught up on in-flight work and learning a new technology and I needed to restore that relationship with our client that had suffered. So I made it my priority and on my second day on that project, I ended up facilitating the steering committee call about the implementation and I was able to provide a comprehensive project update and field questions from the client leadership team to their satisfaction.

And I could not have done it without the support of my team to prep but it really went such a long way to being that turning point and restoring that faith in our team's ability to create value for them. I was really proud of that moment. That conversation was the beginning of a really strong collaboration and in the end, we ended up having some really amazing successes together.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, that sounds amazing. You should replay that scenario in your mind again and again and again, before you ever go into your next really important presentation. Johanna, this has been such a great conversation. As we close out on Inspiring Women, what are your last thoughts, last parting words of wisdom for other listeners out there?

Johanna Fic:

I would say be courageous. You are ready for that next challenge, so go out and do it.

Laurie McGraw:

Fantastic. All right. We have been speaking with Johanna Fic, who is a sales delivery engagement manager at Salesforce. Johanna, thank you so much.

Johanna Fic:

Thank you.

Laurie McGraw:

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