

## **Engage360 Episode 121 | Building a Career from Training and Mentoring; Dr. Liz Selzer**

**Intro** Welcome to Engage360, Denver Seminary's podcast. Join us as we explore the redemptive power of the gospel and the life changing truth of Scripture at work in our culture today.

**Don Payne** Welcome again, friends. This is Engage360 from Denver Seminary. Glad you've chosen to spend a little bit of time with us. I'm Don Payne, your host. And we are going to have another really interesting conversation for you today. Periodically, we like to offer an alumni spotlight to give you a sense of what our graduates are doing, especially those who are serving in perhaps unusual environments and making creative use of their Denver Seminary education. It gives you a sense of the wide range of ways people can fulfill our mission statement, which is to engage the needs of the world with the redemptive power of the gospel and the life changing truth of Scripture. It can offer you some encouraging ideas for ministry possibilities, and it can offer really some hope for how God can orchestrate our vocational paths when they seem unclear and uncertain at the moment. So, it's a special treat for me in this episode to introduce you to Dr. Liz Selzer, who's both one of our graduates and a longtime friend. Welcome, Liz.

**Liz Selzer** Thank you for having me. It's great to see you.

**Don Payne** It is. It is really great to have you here with us. Liz completed her MDiv, I think in 2001.

**Liz Selzer** I believe that's correct.

**Don Payne** Since then, she's been involved in some really fascinating opportunities in both the public and the private sectors. Liz, you currently serve as the, I think you called it, enterprise director of talent development for the Wilbur Ellis Company. And in a minute, I want to hear a bit from you about what that position entails. But first, and maybe leading up to that, there was a particular aspect of your experience here at Denver Seminary that ended up launching you into some of these arenas. Tell us about that experience and how that happened.

**Liz Selzer** So how it happened was I was getting just a general MDiv without a concentration. And as I kept going through those courses, I realized that such a key part of that would be the counseling piece of it. Counseling and coming alongside folks in those softer skills that were important. Not that I wasn't learning the theology and all those things that were very important as well. But I realized that was a piece that I wanted to look at. And so, I actually ended up getting my counseling degree. I had moved to Omaha by that time and got my counseling degree, my masters in counseling there at Grace University in Omaha. And during that time, I came to understand this new thing called coaching, because it was actually new back then. I'm dating myself, I know, but it was this new idea of coaching, and it was this positive psychology place. And I started really falling in love with that. And then my work at Denver Seminary and my interaction with the mentoring program kind of launched everything into, when I finally looked at getting my Ph.D., I looked at trying to do something in coaching or mentoring, but they didn't have that. So, my Ph.D. is actually in education with a training and performance improvement emphasis, and that allowed me to do my Ph.D. on the mentoring program here at Denver Seminary. So, it kind of came all full circle.

**Don Payne** Yeah, full circle. And in an interesting full circle, I think, because I remember some of the early interactions you and I had as you were involved in the mentoring process here at the seminary, which was new at that time, relatively new, and I think there were some shifts. Would that be accurate to say, some shifts of perspective?

**Liz Selzer** It's funny because when I train in mentoring now, I always start with this statement. Mentoring is a huge waste of time. And everybody's looking at me going, wait. This is a mentoring training.

**Don Payne** Yeah, I thought we were paying to train on this, right?

**Liz Selzer** And then I go, at least that's what I thought when I was doing my seminary degree. And I was told that I not only had to have one mentor; I had to have two. And I remember sitting in the back of the classroom with you, Dr. Payne, you were my professor at the time, and I was so angry. I was like, just let me take my tests, let me write my papers. I was a young mom. I had three kids, a husband that traveled all the time. I was like, you've got to be kidding me. I don't have time for this touchy-feely stuff. I was really angry. And I remember you saying.

**Don Payne** I do because, even though that's been, oh, gosh, 25 years ago, maybe, or close to that, I still remember you sitting in the back of the room with a scowl on your face. And I remember after class was over, you came up and gave me quite an earful about that.

**Liz Selzer** I'm sure. I hope I was respectful.

**Don Payne** You were, but it was an earful.

**Liz Selzer** Yeah. So, it's funny. I went from there and, of course, I wasn't allowed to graduate without doing that because that was the program. And what I loved was that ended up being my favorite part of seminary, is my two mentors, we had a character mentor and a competency mentor, and I learned so much from both of them. And I remember thinking, you know, you see, if you started looking at the research on seminary grads and how many of them are still in the ministry five years after they've graduated from seminary, and the numbers were kind of dismal. And I remember thinking, I kind of get why, because when you're in seminary, you're learning all this stuff and it's really heady and it's theoretical and it's a lot of stuff, very important stuff. But I find, I was thinking, you know, when they're getting out in the real world, they may not know actually how to function. That's why I ended up getting my counseling degree was partly because of that, because I kept going, I need those skills because I don't necessarily have all those skills so that I can be a good pastor. So anyway, I realized that was a gap and that Denver Seminary was trying to attack that gap and make it so that the people who were in their program truly understand what it takes to be in the ministry. It's not just understanding theology, it's not just understanding Greek or whatever. It is about the people and how you pastor those people. And if you don't know how to do those things, it can help you crash and burn in the ministry. And it was other things too, like learning how to have a good work life balance and, you know, making sure you've got boundaries. It was just all those things that mentoring provides that are so intangible and aren't in textbooks. But that's what I learned from my mentoring folks.

**Don Payne** Well, that was really among the reasons we launched the training and mentoring program in the first place in the mid to late nineties, because of some of the studies, I think you kind of alluded to about ministry washout rates, ministry struggles that were very widespread, predictable, and it was clear that some of those make or break factors for longevity and sustainability in ministry were not really things you can teach in a classroom. I mean you can talk about them, you can read about them, but you can't really develop them in a classroom. And those were the make-or-break factors. And that does not, you know, in any way diminish the importance of the classical disciplines in scripture, in theology. But for so long people went out only with that and floundered.

**Liz Selzer** Yeah. And so anyway, so that was my Ph.D. work. So, I'm going to actually read the title of my PhD because no one ever remembers these things. Right? And it actually was put in a peer reviewed journal because it had statistically significant results, which is very fun. So, it was called the effectiveness of a seminary's training and mentoring program and subsequent job satisfaction of its graduates. And it just showed that the training and mentoring program, particularly the mentoring relationship, was one of the key aspects to subsequent job satisfaction. The other thing were the competency and character contracts that we did, which was where you developed an area of competency with your competency mentor and a character area with your character mentor. And I love that we did those two pieces because I think both of those pieces are really important to being successful in ministry. So anyway, the results of the study were that those things were also statistically significant, that the whole program had really elevated the job satisfaction for the graduates of Denver Seminary.

**Don Payne** Yeah, well, that was really a gift to us to have you do that fine piece of research, and really, really glad you did that. Now, since graduating, you've done a lot of things. In fact, you and I did a little bit of mentoring training together. And you've had your own mentoring and consulting business for some years. Tell us about that and some of the other training opportunities in mentoring that you have been able to do.

**Liz Selzer** Yeah, so I actually worked for MOPS International. Some folks might be familiar with Mothers of Pre Schoolers.

**Don Payne** I had forgotten that, yeah.

**Liz Selzer** And I did their leadership development, and mentoring was huge. We had a whole mentoring group there because we saw the incredible impact that mentoring could have on young moms. You know, if you've got a mom that's been through it and she can mentor you and all those things that you don't know to ask, you know, again, not in textbooks. It's like, well, my baby's rash looks like this. What do I do? And so that mentoring piece is super important for that. And then when I left there, I had always wanted to start my own business, and I wanted to have my own business where I could do a third of it in the ministry as pro-bono or for free, you know, do that work and then have the other side pay for the work that I did. And it worked for ten years. I mean, I loved it for ten years. At the end, I was feeling like all I was doing was keeping the business going and all the people that worked for me got to do the fun stuff of the training. But the good news is, is it actually opened doors, that and my masters of divinity. So actually, the combination of my Ph.D. and my masters of divinity opened doors all over the world. I've trained on six of the seven continents, and in Zimbabwe, I was the only female speaker on mentoring for the whole pastors' conference for the entire country. And it was such an honor to do that. And just a lot of opportunities literally all over the world that I have had. You know, working with the underground church in China was one of my favorite things because we established mentoring groups with the women there because of culturally, where women were was kind of a tough place and how they could encourage each other and help each other see what their influence was and how important their influence was as women in Christ's eyes and as ministers, that they could do incredible things. So, I worked with that. And also, the leadership in the underground church got mentoring systems going. But really, just like I said, some great opportunities just opened these wonderful doors for me.

**Don Payne** Well, I have to tell you, in all honesty, it just brings a smile to my face every time I think about what God has done through your life, given the origins of all that.

**Liz Selzer** I know, when I was so angry.

**Don Payne** It's just been so fun. And to work with you, I mean, you and I and some other friends had the opportunity some years back to launch what we called the International Christian Mentoring Network, which lasted for several years, and we served together as board members for that organization. And that gave us the chance to travel abroad a bit and do some training together. So, while I'm thinking of it, you've published a book on mentoring.

**Liz Selzer** Three G Mentoring.

**Don Payne** Yeah. Tell us a little bit about that and what you've learned about mentoring that's expressed in that book.

**Liz Selzer** So, I learned just some very basic things about mentoring. When I train on mentoring, I train on five skills that I say are reciprocal skills that mentoring pairs can use. And if they use those five skills, their mentoring relationship will be successful. And it's a pretty bold statement, but I've actually tested it all over the world. And the skills are listening, building trust, inspiring, or motivating, giving feedback, and setting good goals. I didn't do them in the right order. But anyway, if the mentoring pairs do those things reciprocally, you know, listen to each other, build trust together, you know. If they do that, the mentoring pairs work. So that's kind of the structure of the bit of the book. And then the second part of the book was

looking at generational differences, gender differences, and global differences. So that's why it was called 3G mentoring and just looking how mentoring can build bridges with gender, with global differences, and with generational differences.

**Don Payne** Talk to us a little bit about some of those differences, what you've learned about how mentoring is impacted by each of those differences. Gender, global, and generation?

**Liz Selzer** Yeah. So, the generational piece is just fascinating to me. So now I work for an agriculture company. That's where I ended up after I stopped my business, and I went to working full time for an agricultural company. But I think generational differences are the thing that we really see a huge impact on just how different generations view things. And the point of the book was not about talking about how people are different. It was really trying to help them see what their touch points are between the generations, that there's certain things that all the generations value. And if you can build on those kinds of things, for instance, they all value family. Now, family may look different to the different generations. But they all value family and what does that look like? And they all want to know that they matter, their value, that they bring something to the table. So, there's a lot of things that are common among the generations. And then if you can kind of understand how people kind of come at it, looking at things from different perspectives. I mean, we do a lot of fun activities with that. Just the difference between our value of time spent in a job. You've got your older generations that if you're not putting the time in and we can't see you clocking in all those hours versus the younger generations going, no, but I'm getting the work done.

**Don Payne** Yeah, I'll get it done when I get it done.

**Liz Selzer** Right. So, there was that, the gender differences one, and I know it's a pretty heated topic now, but there's some really great research out there, like that women tend to have web thinking and men tend to be more linear. Now, again, all of this is on a continuum. It's not like you're one way or the other.

**Don Payne** Yeah, lots of exceptions.

**Liz Selzer** Exactly, but it just helps us understand each other. And the reason I talked about those three areas, and the global, I was able to pull on all my experience from teaching around the world into that piece. But I think the main message of that is that mentoring helps us find those touch points, those human, important touch points that we can have with folks. And it helps spur that learning and that growth that I just don't believe can happen just from a textbook.

**Don Payne** Yeah, that's a great insight. And when you speak about the global peace and having trained on so many different continents and the cultures on those continents, what are some of the things you've learned about how mentoring works effectively, but uniquely, in some of those other cultures, non-Western cultures, for example?

**Liz Selzer** Such a good question, because I remember before I went on some of the trips, I tapped into some of the folks I know from those types of cultures. But I will say there is one thing that, and Les Hurst, who we worked with, Dr. Hurst, he told me this, and it's so true, that one thing that is common in all cultures is listening builds trust in all cultures. Listening builds trust. And that's one of the main, you know, tactics or, you know, practices that I talk about. One of the five is listening, and that's how you build trust. So that was interesting. But like when I would go and they would want to talk about, say, conflict management in more of an Eastern culture. And I remember I was talking with one of my mentees, which I love. She's from the Hmong culture, and I was going, okay, I'm going to go over and I'm going to talk about conflict and we're going to talk about how do we work through conflict? And she's like, no. And I'm like, well, of course we should. And she's like no, they will nod at you and act like they're listening, and they will not listen to you because you cannot go after conflict like we do in western cultures.

**Don Payne** More direct?

**Liz Selzer** Yeah, you cannot go direct at it at all. She said, you've got to kind of go back door and you've got to have different ways of doing that. So that's when I kept testing my five skills to see do, they really work in each culture? And yes, listening 100% works in all the cultures. Building trust looks different in every culture.

**Don Payne** It's important in every culture, but not built the same way, perhaps?

**Liz Selzer** It will be built in a very different way. And, you know, same thing, setting goals, in certain cultures, you have to make sure that there has to be that passion behind it. Because, you know, another thing I found, like when I worked with the people in China, man, those people, they accomplish their goals, like ridiculously. Their work ethic is beyond anything I've ever seen. And so, they're like, yeah, goals, goals, goals. And I'm like, yeah, but tempered with these other things, you know, tempered with building trust, tempered with listening to each other, not just dictating and some of those things. So, like I said, those five skills have held up on all the continents that I've been on.

**Don Payne** That's really interesting. And it really encouraging to know because it is sometimes tempting to focus on the differences, whether it's cultural, generational, gender, just to focus on the differences. But I appreciate how you've dialed in on what's in common in all of those and helping us find ways to speak to those common themes.

**Liz Selzer** Yeah. Appreciate the differences. Look at them as things of, wow, I can learn that because it's not like me. I can learn that, or I can learn this because it's a different perspective and I'm all about really appreciating diversity, just not using it to judge people.

**Don Payne** Yeah. So, your current vocational expression with Wilbur Ellis, you mentioned that's an agricultural company. Tell us briefly what you're doing with them.

**Liz Selzer** So I do all their talent development for them, which is everything from learning and training. All their training is kind of where I started and now it's in more like succession planning and, you know, workforce planning and onboarding and all the pieces, the whole talent lifecycle when you think about it. I'm not responsible for every piece, but I have fingers into just about everything because it all works together to help our folks have a really good experience. And I picked Wilbur Ellis because it's a 100-year-old family-owned business, and just good farm folk. I just love the people. As I interviewed, I was like on my eighth interview for this company and the people are just so good. It's interesting. And I found this. This is one of the themes kind of throughout my life, because I have made it a practice of talking about my faith in secular situations. Yes, I've worked in a ministry, I've done a ton of volunteer work in the ministry, but I find it's a unique ministry for me that once they know me and they hopefully respect me and then I talk about those things, it is so interesting to me that that's, you know, that's where my hope comes from. And that's where my compassion comes from. And it's been my own ministry in the secular settings, because a lot of people are like, wow, you're not in full time ministry anymore. I'm like, yeah, but I feel like I'm doing it full time in my secular world because, you know, they see me, they see how I do things, they see how I talk about things. And it's been a beautiful ministry. Actually, it's interesting, my team, I think I would say 80% of them are Christians as well. And we talk about our faith a lot, but it's been a really beautiful experience, just mine, in the long list of experiences.

**Don Payne** That's really encouraging, Liz, to hear how you've been able to do that. And I'm not surprised, frankly, just knowing you. I think you have a way of inviting respect and trust so that it creates a platform for you to talk about your faith in these settings that are not always congenial to that, sometimes even hostile.

**Liz Selzer** Yeah.

**Don Payne** But the point is, it can be done. It takes some wisdom and shrewdness and skills at building trust, but it in fact, can be done. How has your seminary education shaped, influenced what you have brought to these opportunities, including those in the public sector?

**Liz Selzer** You know, I remember one of the hardest things for me in seminary was being systematic about it. You know, I kind of like this and I like this. Well can't just do it because you like it. You got to actually think it through and make sure it all hangs together in a good, systematic way. And I think being encouraged to think that way has helped me think that way. I am a much better strategist than I ever was before because I think systematically now. So, I would say that was one thing. I just love, as I interact with folks, and when I mention my faith, you know, I always get those folks that want to just badger me with stuff. Well, it's this in the Bible or it's that in the Bible. And I just I'm like, you know, well, actually, like Trinity, the word Trinity isn't in the Bible. And people think they're going to catch me on that. And then somehow, it's going to not validate the other things I'm saying. And I always just say, you know, well, no, I get that. That's not there. And I feel like they trust what I'm saying because I've done the work of going to seminary. They trust that. And like I said, it's opened tons of doors for me that wouldn't have been opened in other countries for sure. But I loved my seminary background. I love that I know these things. I love that through that process, I read through the Bible I don't know how many times. And every time it's new and every time it's different. And a little extra note I've been working with, she was the president of MOPS, Naomi Overton, and I've been doing some work on a new Bible, women's Bible that Tyndale is putting out so, not the theological research, but the kind of the side notes of how do you apply it to real life kinds of stuff, which I just love. But see, I wouldn't have had that opportunity to do that. And I feel like there's a real ministry there to help elevate women's voices. I do a lot of that. And I've done that a lot in a lot of my international work. Just helping them understand their influence and how important what they do is.

**Don Payne** Yeah, this final question, it may be a little bit more personal. How do you think you have been shaped by this particular vocational path that you've taken and the things you've been able to do? How's that shaped you?

**Liz Selzer** It's funny because I talk with people a lot about the threads that connect all these things that may seem random that I've done throughout my life. And one of them is empowering people, I think, with God's power, whether they recognize it or not. I just believe that empowering people, help them become all God has created them to be, again, whether they recognize him or not, God created them. And he has a plan for them. And I just love that. That's like my favorite thing. It's like my jam and everything that I've done has gone towards that, is how can I help folks become all that God's created them to be?

**Don Payne** That's the thread. That that is fascinating. And because of the variety of things, you've been able to do, probably during as well as after seminary, you're able to see now maybe somewhat in hindsight the thread that's run through all that. That's really cool. Liz, it is such a treat to see you and have this catch-up conversation.

**Liz Selzer** Yeah, you too.

**Don Payne** And I'm just really glad for our listeners to be able to benefit from your experience and your wisdom and all that you've been able to do. What a great ride.

**Liz Selzer** Well thanks for inviting me.

**Don Payne** Yeah. Doctor Liz Selzer. Friends, look her book up, you'll benefit from it.

**Liz Selzer** 3G Mentoring.

**Don Payne** 3G Mentoring, Dr. Liz Selzer. Friends. We're grateful that you've chosen to spend some time with this. If you get the chance, please leave us a rating or review wherever you listen to podcasts and please send any questions or comments to us at our email address, which is

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