

Life Skills 101 Podcast – Ep. 1 with Emily Kate Gray

Becca Weston – BW

Emily Kate Gray – EK

BW – 0:00

Hey, I'm Rebecca Weston and you're listening to the Life Skills 101 podcast from the Student Experience Office.

We will be joined by Emily Kate Gray, a Carleton alum who studied international business and was involved in the Carleton community being a peer mentor, Summer Orientation leader, SOAR presenter, and the executive director of the Campus Activity Board. She currently works as a senior associate at Export Development Canada or EDC, and has used her skills that she learned at Carleton and applied them to her job. She currently chairs the growing professionals committee and is a member of the inclusion, diversity, and equality committee at EDC. Today, Emily Kate tells us how her community engagement has helped her and her current career.

Hi Emily!

EK – 0:56

Hi, Becca. Thanks for having me.

BW – 0:58

Thank you for being here. So, you've been out of school for a couple of years now? What's the transition like going from school into the workplace?

EK – 1:06

I think that's a great question, and to be honest, it's kind of an interesting one for every new graduate or person coming out of school. For me, to be honest, it was a little bit tough going right into working full time. I also didn't give myself a break, which wasn't super helpful as in like, I kind of finished my exam on the Friday and then was in a full-time position on Monday. So, that wasn't the best idea. If I were to give any advice now would be to take that break because it's really helpful after a long degree of 4+ years.

One thing I'll also mention is I started working sort of on a contract basis throughout my undergrad, and then started a full-time position at EDC, which is where I currently work. Now, I'm happy to go through my career in the course of the interview, but it's been a really interesting experience so far and I've

gotten to move into different lines of business. If I were to give any advice for someone coming out of school, the first thing I'd say is that all employers are very aware that it's going to be a steep learning curve for young professionals or a new graduate, so you're hired under that basis. One thing that I didn't give myself enough grace for was that you're going to make mistakes, and it's okay to fail, because you'll learn from those and you'll learn very quickly.

And lastly, you're not paid enough to worry about these things when you come into the workforce, as typically you'd start in entry level roles; and everyone on your team/manager knows that. So, just remind yourself that you don't need to be as hard on yourself as you potentially thought.

BW – 2:40

Before you graduated, you had a couple of leadership roles on the Carleton campus as a Summer Orientation Leader, you were the executive director of the campus activity board. Why did you get involved with all of those things?

EK – 2:56

Yeah, I mean, great question. Again, I think for me as someone who is an extrovert, being in a community was something that really supported even my academics because I was able to be involved in multiple things that ultimately supported all aspects of my life. So, for me, it was really important to be in that community, but also to step into some challenges in a fun way to see if you can overcome them and also learn from these really cool opportunities. Really, I wanted to grow and develop my skill sets. So, when I started at Carleton, I had some work experience, but I was really hoping to explore where I could and so some of the leadership roles were some really exciting ones.

Also, it creates a snowball effect. If you're involved in different areas of the school and different areas of the organization, people see that and then your name can get brought up and then different opportunities present themselves. So, that was sort of a little bit of my journey.

Lastly, when I took on the position as the Executive Director of the Campus Activity Board, for me, that was really about giving back to the community since Carleton served me really well. I was able to be involved in a lot and taking that role, I wanted to give back a little bit and support our student body through fun programming through that community.

BW – 4:15

Amazing. When you were part of all these things, have you used anything that you learned from back then when you were involved with campus to your job now?

EK – 4:23

Oh, absolutely. Stepping into those leadership positions were actually really helpful when I was interviewing for different roles outside of school. And I always come back to some of the fun experiences when I'm in interview settings. I mean, specific things like adoptability, a little bit of project management from working within the Campus Activity Board; we directly contributed to projects, which would have been considered our events and so I'm able to talk a little bit about some of that stuff, as well as even corporate outreach. So, if we needed to have some buy-in from a specific department within Carleton, that's something our team did. So, there is a lot to have really great sort of real world, real life experiences.

BW – 5:04

Sorry, I forgot to ask you at the beginning of the interview. What is your job now?

EK – 5:19

Yeah, totally. Like I said, I started at EDC, and I've still been there. Since I had graduated from Carleton, I started out at EDC and technology and EDC, for those of you who don't know, is Export Development Canada. Essentially, the mission of the organization is to support Canadian companies as they export internationally and help them to grow and succeed internationally. So, it's a really cool mandate and not something that you see quite frequently as we're the only export credit agency in Canada. So, my job is to basically support our team and international engagements with groups like the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and a few insurance organizations.

I won't bore you with the rest. But, it's really interesting work because I got to use my bachelor's degree in International Business and Marketing and trade, and I'm actually getting to use a lot of the core competencies that I learned in school. So, that's a little bit about what I'm up to.

BW – 6:11

That's amazing. Yeah, I know a lot of students are worried that maybe they won't be able to use their undergrad degree in the job that they possibly get. So, that's amazing that you were able to do that.

When you were in school, was it difficult to balance school and working in leadership positions, especially those which are pretty demanding?

EK – 6:28

Yeah, it was difficult to be honest, but it also promoted really great time management. I think that I look back and I've said this in the interview already, but I've looked back at my experience at Carleton and I'm just so grateful because having the opportunities to step into those leadership roles really helped me as a person and to support what I wanted to do in that moment.

But also, what I've wanted to do sort of since then – I think that one of my new life models, so to speak – is to be bold, fail forward, and stay well. I think that those are all aspects that I had to learn when I was in those positions. So, as much as it could have been hard to balance, it taught me some really great soft skills that have supported me and through the rest of my career to date.

BW – 7:15

Was there an experience that you had in those roles that was just really cool or a fun story that happened?

EK – 7:22

Yeah, there are a lot of really great things to be honest. I think if I were to look back at all of my role models, etcetera, at Carleton, I think one of my most fond memories was working with the Student Experience Office as a Summer Orientation Leader. I worked there between my second and third year, and then I actually moved to Spain to study in exchange in Pamplona. So, I think if I had to look back, that was probably one of my most fun and exciting roles because I got to support new, first-year students as they embarked on University and what that looks like and the ambiguity of potentially moving to a new city or just coming to a new school and a new situation for some people.

So, that was just a really great experience to get to know the people coming into our school and just help ensure that they had a smooth transition and to get the great programming that Carleton has to offer outside of the academics. So, I don't know if I have, you know, fun stories. I got to speak Spanish with some international students in that role, and got to support some international students moving to Canada and Carleton, so there were definitely some fun experiences there for sure.

BW – 8:32

Did you have any advice for the incoming first year students who might have been a little bit nervous about coming to Carleton?

EK – 8:38

Yeah, I think the advice that I give to most people who ask for advice, I kind of provide the same thing, but I think just coming in authentically and coming in ready to participate and get to know people and coming in with an open mindset was really important coming into a new situation, and a new school can be really daunting for people but if they can really establish themselves and participate in different things, it's just going to enhance their experience. When I've talked to some of my friends who maybe didn't participate in their beginning years, that's their one regret is "I wish I had participated more and put myself out there a bit more."

BW – 9:22

Why did you decide to get involved in those roles?

EK – 9:24

I think for me, there was definitely giving back to the community, which is really helpful. I also, like I had mentioned, was really wanting to develop that skillset for myself. I just really enjoyed being involved. And one of my other great... Actually, I'll tell you a quick story about one of my fun experiences.

So, when I was in second year, I was a peer mentor for incoming students. So, that was probably a great segue into the Summer Orientation role that I eventually took in that summer, and I'm even still in connection with one of my mentees. She was in the same program as me and we actually now work at the same organization – and we're still in touch. We're both involved in a committee that I chair at EDC, which is the Green Professionals Committee. So, I think that's just a story about life coming full circle. I didn't expect to have met someone who I could really support in that time, but we've been in close relationships since then and actually work at the same organization now. We still talk to each other about what's next. And there is an element of still having that mentorship role for me, but it's also blossomed into a great friendship. So, there's just some really cool things that have come full circle from my experiences there.

So, to your question about why I stepped in those leadership opportunities... I think for me, it was experimenting with the unknown and also utilizing and pushing those muscles of leadership and what does that look like? How can I and my team create an impact in a positive way?

BW – 10:57

Why do you think people should get involved with their communities?

EK – 11:00

I think it's really important to get involved. It's something that I've always done I guess since high school and since I was a little girl, but I just think it's really important, because the more you can be involved, the more you can understand the experience of the people around you. Right now, diversity and inclusion are huge subjects in schools but also in the workforce, and I think the more you can get involved, the more you can just understand and meet different people and learn about different people and just be curious.

There's also trends of young people not getting involved like they used to, or not being involved with NGOs or different organizations as a way to give back. It's also just helped cement sort of who you are and your core values if you're constantly evolving and meeting new people and understanding their stories and things like that. So, I think a huge emphasis on getting involved, it doesn't have to be hours upon hours, it could just be a small commitment. I think it really expands your repertoire as a person.

BW – 12:05

If you weren't involved in the Carleton community, how do you think your time at Carleton would have been different?

EK – 12:11

I don't even want to think about that, because I don't think I would have been molded into the person I am today if I wasn't involved. Some of my greatest friends are people who I did presentations with at the SOAR conference are some of my fondest memories have been within some of those positions and supporting my team at the time or supporting the various groups I was in. So, if I were to look back, I don't think that I would have been as open to new opportunities. I don't think I would have been as articulate as to what I would like in life, or as articulate in leadership conversations. I don't think I would be doing some of the things that I'm doing like chairing our Growing Professionals Committee. If you're not involved, then no one sees you. You don't have that exposure/visibility to create change, or to work on the things that you're passionate about. So, if I were to look back, I really don't think that I'd be where I am today without some of those critical experiences.

BW – 13:18

There are a lot of students who feel like they don't have the time to get involved with the community or that they just don't know where to start. What piece of advice do you have to somebody who wants to be involved but just doesn't know where to begin?

EK – 13:33

There's no work-life balance quote unquote. I found in university where it was almost like, if you weren't pulling all-nighters, you weren't working hard enough. And I just don't like that culture, because I don't think it's helpful. One thing I remind myself of all the time is every single person has 24 hours in their day. So, we get to choose and we have full autonomy as to how we choose to use that time.

So, from a timing perspective, I think when you make time for the things that are important are the things that fuel you, which could be giving back or being involved. I think that time will just revert back into productivity hours later on if you're really fueled by the work you're doing. From a timing perspective, that's what I would say.

From the perspective of not knowing where to start, I think it's just important to assess what you like to do, what things would you like to participate in, and then do sort of that self-analysis of like "well, I'm really passionate about art" and then from there, maybe narrow it down. So, you can find the specific group that might support what you want out of that involvement, and then the other thing is, if you just don't know and you don't know where to start, reach out to the Student Experience Office or reach out to different organizations on campus that are involved and you can just say "Hey, I'm looking to get involved. Do you have any suggestions? This is my interest or this is my skillset."

Lastly, if you don't want to do that, just look on some pages and see if there's anything you can immediately get involved in and then send out a quick note. It doesn't have to be laborious, it doesn't have to be intensive. It's just getting yourself out there and support and volunteering, or getting involved as you need.

BW – 15:17

You mentioned SOAR a little bit earlier, were you a presenter for SOAR?

EK – 15:20

I presented three years in a row in second year, as well as third year and fourth year. When I was in third year, I was actually in Spain and we did a virtual session. So, pre-pandemic, we actually did that sort of virtual session, which is really cool. I think we had about 45 participants in that one year, we did it on global leadership from the perspective of students on exchange and what that leadership looks like in different contexts like cultures, etc.

BW – 15:51

Maybe that's your first place to start the upcoming SOAR in 2022. What do you think makes a good leader?

EK – 15:54

Another good question. I think that leadership is interesting, I think what constitutes a good leader is really in the eye of the individual. I know that for me with leadership, it's really important to be authentic and transparent. In the few years I've been in my career and having various leaders, what's stood out for me is if your leader can just be really open and honest, and just authentic and how they are. I think it just promotes honesty and trust, and I also think that mutual trust is really important.

I honestly have very much excelled in environments where there's freedom to make mistakes, and also, I have freedom as to my time and the work that I'm doing. I find if a manager can be very micromanaging or questions sort of what you're doing, I just don't find it's a great environment, for me at least, to thrive. So, having someone who trusts you is really important, and it takes time to establish that trust. I think it's really important. Last, like I said, to have the freedom to make mistakes, try new things, and to fail forward as some would say.

BW – 17:05

Is there somebody who you look up to as a leader?

EK – 17:08

The current manager I have right now, her name is Leah Gilbert Morris. So, maybe she'll be listening to this podcast. She's a huge leader for me and a huge influencer and truly demonstrates those qualities I just mentioned. Another leader who I get to work closely with, which I'm really grateful for, is Mairead Lavery. She's the CEO and president of EDC, and I'm really grateful for the leaders in my life. I think Mairead again, that you know, has many of those qualities of authenticity and mutual trust and provides a space to fail. And part of, I think I had mentioned my new model of, be bold, fail forward, and stay well. Part of that actually came from a workshop from a meeting with Mairead and our team of young and growing professionals. So, those I would say would be two people who are in my life right now from a career perspective who have really shown great leadership for me.

BW – 17:59

As somebody who is in their fourth year and about to possibly enter the workforce, do you have any advice for students who are looking into next year and just don't know what to do?

EK – 18:13

I think that the first thing I'd say, a career is not something that you start and need to continue in. Specific to your job or your responsibilities, we live in a world where you can do so many things. And so, I think the first thing I'd say is "don't get bogged down in the logistics of specific jobs or specific things." I would look for specific attributes in a company that you would like to see. So, if you're keen on innovation, I'd say look for organizations who you think are innovative and then start potentially reaching out to people. That's, I guess, a piece of advice for people who want to immediately start in the workforce.

But that may not be the case for new graduates. I'd really encourage people to spend time to think about "what is it that they want out of life?". I know that seems like a pretty intense question, but I think it's really important. Because if, as a young person, you don't have direction, I think it becomes very scary. When I say you don't have direction, that doesn't mean that you've decided you'd like this position. It doesn't have to be as linear, but almost just acknowledging what's important to you as a person, and then how those values could be executed in your day to day, that is really important and changes for each person.

So, I would really recommend sort of that deep, self-analysis of what's important to you? What are your values? How can those be fleshed out in your day to day and then from there, you'll get a better idea of what next looks like for you and that could look like getting into a job, that could look like travelling the world, that could look like pursuing a Masters because you're really interested in learning and pursuing an academic education. I think that's what I would say, as a young person.

Lastly, don't be afraid to fail and just put yourself out there. I read an interesting statistic a few weeks ago, which is that men typically will apply to positions where they only meet 60% of the requirements, whereas women won't apply unless they reach 100%. I don't know how relevant that statistic is anymore, and I don't have a reference.



But I think that's a great example of put yourself out there and apply to things. Kind of like, the world's your oyster. Don't say no to yourself before someone else says no to you. Just put yourself out there.

BW – 20:40

Amazing. Thank you so much. That is all of my questions for today, and thank you again for just being on the podcast.

EK – 20:48

Absolutely, thank you so much Becca. It was lovely to chat with you today. I'm really excited for our next generation of future Ravens, so thanks for having me.

BW – 21:07

That's all for today. I'm Rebecca Weston, and this podcast comes from the Student Experience Office. Thank you to Emily Kate for joining us today, and thank you to the listeners for tuning and we'll talk to you soon.