



Are Moms Allowed to Make Career Moves that Impact the Family?

Guest: Jodi Chowen

Shelley Hunter: You're listening to the *Faithful Career Moves* podcast. I'm your host, Shelley Hunter. This is the place where we talk to people who have found the career they were born to do and can see God's hand in the process.

Thank you for joining me on this episode of the *Faithful Career Moves* podcast. Funny thing about my guest, having just certified as a Gallup-Strengths coach, I wanted to interview another coach with more experience than me, to really introduce this concept to all of you.

I went to the Gallup directory and looked for another coach with a faith-based background. That's where I found Jodi Chowen. Jodi is the managing director of careers and experiential learning at Brigham Young University.

The problem is when we talked before this interview, I found her career story so compelling that we both agreed to let someone else tell the Gallup story so we could focus on her journey instead.

As Jodi puts it, while raising a family of five children, she enjoyed a successful career in real estate before stumbling into a career in higher education. She earned her bachelor's degree in communications from BYU, completed an online master's degree from Kansas State University, and is presently working on a doctoral degree in educational leadership from BYU. It's the stumbling though that caught my attention.

As you'll hear in this interview, despite working for many years, Jodi didn't consider herself as having a career until she got a position in higher education. Up to that point, she was just doing jobs to help pay the bills. Finding her calling in life meant she had to both step up to the position and make sacrifices to obtain it. I'll let her share the details.

Jodi, can you start us off by telling us what you do for a living?

Jodi Chown: I am the managing director of careers and experiential learning at Brigham Young University, which is all a mouthful to say. Essentially my colleagues and I work in the space of helping students find and prepare for internships and employment after they finished their degree. We work with employers who want to come to our campus and recruit our students. We support the internship program on campus, so students who are completing an internship for academic credit, they'll touch our services and supports in helping them get ready. It's actually a really fun space to be.

Shelley: It sounds amazing. You're helping students launch into their first real jobs.

Jodi: Yes. We do teach classes, we see students one-on-one. We have people who are situated in each of the colleges across campus. The help is tailored to their particular area or industries that they're considering. I worked a lot with students prior to coming into this role. The role that I have now has been more administrative. It's a lot of strategy and planning and alignment of supports to help my team be successful.

Shelley: I love that. I've heard from people in similar roles, in other colleges, that often students don't take advantage of the resources you offer until they're well down the road of their education. Do you see that?

Jodi: That is very true. In fact, we did a survey recently of our clients. Predominantly upperclassmen—were working with juniors and seniors, and very few freshmen are coming into us. It's understandable because students are not wanting to think about life and life planning, especially if you're an incoming freshmen. That seems a long way away. There are a number of students that will come in and start very early on with us and in their planning. Frankly, the earlier the better. I want everyone to feel like they can come in anytime. I think because career services can feel intimidating. Like, "Oh, I'm scared to go in those doors."

Shelley: I definitely have heard people say, "I will go when I'm close to graduation."

Jodi: Yes, definitely. We're working on things. We opened a career studio a few years ago. It's positioned well right across from the Cougarreat. It's drop in, ask any questions, stay as long as you want. No appointment needed to try and break down that barrier a bit of accessibility. If you have a question, just come in and ask.

Shelley: I think that's so important and smart, to start early. I've been thinking a lot lately that with all of the advancements in technology and business and science and so forth, there are many jobs available today that didn't even exist 10 years ago. If you're asking people in your community or congregation for career advice, it's possible they don't really have a grasp of what is available to you today.

Jodi: Absolutely. If career services did exist and, I'm sure it did when I was in college, I didn't know about it, I never went to it. I did not go to college to do this job. It speaks to your point of preparing well, and then being really open because you don't know where you're going to land.

Shelley: I love that. Tell me about the journey then. How did you get where you are now?

Jodi: I was a student at BYU. I was studying communications and I determined that I wanted to go to law school. That was my career plan. I actually did not know an attorney-- I didn't have any experience with someone who was an attorney or practicing law. I didn't know what it looked like, but in my mind, I don't know if I watched *Law & Order*, where I got the idea, but I just thought, "I'm going to be an attorney." When I graduated from BYU, I did take a job at a large firm in Salt Lake City as a file clerk and worked there for maybe two or three years.

I found that I didn't love that environment. The pay was good, but it just didn't feel like my thing. Maybe the role of a file clerk didn't feel like my thing. That whole experience just took the rug out from under me, because my plan was always to go to law school and then suddenly it just went out the window because I couldn't see myself working there as a career. I ended up doing various part-time roles for several years. In fact, president Tuminez of UVU recently wrote an article that was published in the newspaper.

She talked about graduates who take lower paying jobs or lower skilled jobs right after they graduate are 5 times more likely to remain in mismatched jobs, 5 years down the road and onto 10 years later. I really resonated with that because I just tried different miscellaneous part-time jobs, not really having a goal in mind other than to bring in some income for my family. I fell into real estate and did that for eight years. I actually really did enjoy that. One thing I learned from that is like, I like helping people. That was a lot of fun.

There was flexibility there, but our family moved to Hawaii. My husband took a position as a professor over there. That's when I had this moment in my life, I'm like, "So am I a realtor? Is that who I am? Is that what I do?" I do real estate, so I should do real estate again. It just was a moment that I paused to think about what I wanted to do. I thought, "Let's try other things." I did all the things you need to do to be a substitute teacher in elementary. I lasted less than a month, that didn't turn out to be my venue.

I love, love, love all teachers out there. I have such respect for that labor of love. Then there was a job as a part-time academic advisor, which I'd never heard of that before. Mostly I applied because the hours worked well with my family. When I got into it, I just fell in love with it. I loved, loved, loved working with college students. I was assigned to work with international students, which actually terrified me initially.

I didn't feel like I was prepared or had the skills to know how to do that. They turned out to be just delightful and kind and so appreciative. Even though I made far less than I was making in real estate, I found that I loved helping in that way. I loved helping this group. That really was my transition into higher Ed, where I've been for the last 15 years.

Shelley: If I understand correctly, when you started you were just a member of the staff.

Jodi: Part-time staff. Really, if there is a pecking order, I'm at the bottom. The thing that was amazing is that, that particular role I was having meetings with department chairs about curriculum. I was on campus committees that track student progress and scholarships. For a part-time job, I thought this has got some real meat to it. Like this is really fun.

Shelley: Then how did you get to where you are now?

Jodi: I just was really open. I've learned a lot. There was an opportunity to do career advising. I thought, "What is that?" This is just a whole new world to me. I learned a little bit about that and I think advising has changed since when I started. At the time, it felt like I was helping students map out their time in college, get to the end and move on. Career advising, just widened that to, "Oh, I can talk to students about their background and their families and what exposure they've had to the world of work, and I get to talk to them about their future planning."

Then this middle piece about, "So what do you do while you're here?" What kinds of experiences should you be having.

Every time these sorts of opportunities have come up, I counseled with my family, moving into a career advising role was going from part-time to full-time. I didn't really mention, but that first decade I'd say of my life, just a lot of angst about working. I had a young growing family and should I be working? It felt okay if I could say, "I'm doing this to help make ends meet, my husband's in graduate school."

It got to a point where I was like, "I actually am interested in that. Is that okay, to go learn about that?" It didn't mesh with what I'd been standing on my reason of, "I need to do it to earn money." This was now like, "I want to do it because it interests me."

We did have a family council and our family has made those decisions, both moving and when we've had these opportunities, we counseled as a family.

I will sidebar and say that when we were making the decision to move to Hawaii, my oldest son was 14 at the time, and we gave everyone the invitation to pray about if this is the right move for our family. We came back a week later, went around the room, and one by one the kids said, "Yes, we think this is right." We got to our oldest son and he said, "I didn't pray. I'm not praying. I'm not asking."

[laughter]

Jodi: He didn't want to know.

Shelley: "I don't want to know the answer." I think we're all like that sometimes.

Jodi: Yes, but it turned out to be a big blessing. I stepped into career advising, and then there was an opportunity to apply for the director role, which frankly, I had no intention of doing. I didn't see myself as a director. I think I very much lived the imposter syndrome in my career, and so it just never occurred to me that I should apply for that. That needed to be someone with a master's degree. I was just starting

mine, and surely, I didn't have the skills for that. Anyway, as it turned out, I did apply by the encouragement of others and got it. That led to then moving to the role that I'm in now, here in the Provo campus.

Shelley: I'm picturing you in Hawaii, and I'm wondering what it took to get you to Provo.

Jodi: I'll tell you a little bit about coming into this position. At this point in Hawaii, we'd been there eight years. We realized that we had a really good life there. We loved the students that we were working with there. My husband was faculty at BYU Hawaii, and I was working as the director of career services. Our kids had grown up through the school system, and it just felt like, "We're here. Let's just stay and finish raising our kids." I, from time to time, would just look around for positions for my husband.

One of these times, I looked, and there was this position posted that said, "University career services manager at BYU." I opened it and looked at it, and I said, "I do that. I do that. I do that. I do all of those things." The Spirit spoke to me and said, "You need to consider more options." I just realized that the Spirit was saying to me I need to consider more options, not just like we, our family, my husband. I need to consider more options.

I nudged my husband and said, "I just found this posting. I know we're not looking to move right now, but what do you think?" He says, "You should apply and maybe you'll learn something from it." I did apply. I had two sons graduating high school the following year and one graduating college. I just want to frame it, like that was not the year to move, but I applied. I honestly didn't find out until just a few days before I came up for the interview that it was the director role.

Because of the way it was posted, I thought it was associate directors, you know, university career services manager. I didn't put it together. I would have never applied. I just wouldn't have applied. I wouldn't have guessed. Even though I met the job description, I had the experience, I just wouldn't have guessed that I could come to a big university and be a director.

I came up and I went through with it thinking, "I'm just here to learn. This is a learning opportunity." I really didn't feel nervous because I was quite confident I wasn't going to get it, and I could just meet people and have a great time, but I did have inspiration along the way in my interview process and the presentation I gave, and I will say actually some other experiences that encouraged me to stay in the process.

As it turned out, the job was offered to me. Then my husband and I needed to have that conversation about, "Well, now what?" He couldn't leave, and yet, I'd been offered this job. We decided that I should take the job and leave Hawaii and come to Utah. He stayed with two kids to facilitate graduations, and I came to Utah with two kids.

Shelley: Wow.

Jodi: We lived apart for 11 months. That was the point that I realized I was having a career because prior to that, I could easily say, "I'm doing what I'm doing to support my family, to support my husband. I'm bringing in extra income." When you're making a decision to separate the household for a period of time, then it seems to be bigger than that. It seemed to fly in the face of things that I valued that just didn't seem to make sense. I remember arguing with the Lord about it and saying, "This doesn't make sense." It felt scary to me that I wasn't making a decision for the right reasons.

It was interesting that I had a handful, not many, but a handful of comments questioning my decision. Very few wondered if we were getting divorced. We weren't. We probably talked to each other more that year that we were apart than we do now that we're living together and I think that's-- [chuckles] We made a point to be on the phone every day with each other. Anyway, that was the moment that I realized God has opened a door for me to grow and learn more, and that that's okay.

Shelley: It's actually really cool. If I can summarize this a bit. You had no qualms about working when doing so felt like it was in the best interest of the family as a whole, part-time jobs, work around the kids' schedule, money needed to help out, but you started to feel uneasy when it turned into something you really wanted to do for yourself.

Jodi: Yes. I don't know if envy is the right word, but I marvel at other women who just knew at a young age and felt called and made those plans early on. I don't know if it's because I'm a first-generation student. I just didn't have those expectations for myself, and so it's been a surprise, and that it's okay, and I've had enough experiences to say, "This isn't just me." This isn't just a selfish, "I need to become something. I need to find myself." It isn't that. It's that God's opened some doors and given me experiences. He's expanded my capacity so I can help others.

Shelley: Besides moving, tell me how the family adjusted when you first went back to work full time?

Jodi: One of the blessings of living where we lived in Hawaii was that the kids could walk up to my office and see me and they did, or would come and do homework at computer stations that I had in my office. It's a small community, and so we could do that kind of thing. My youngest daughter was still in elementary school, and I'd always been home with my other kids after school. In fact, I was the mom who watched other people's kids after school for many years.

I worried a lot about that, not being home for her, but we were just really blessed to have good friends. My kids had good friends. She got to go to a friend's home and have a mom who was making cookies and things every day and loves that. While I didn't get to do that experience for her, I felt like there was some compensation that she did still get to have that experience.

Shelley: Yes, I hear this a lot. Once you get into having multiple kids, the older kids often have a different version of mom than the younger kids have. I'm learning from

so many women I've talked to that you were probably more aware of what she was missing than she was.

Jodi: Absolutely. In fact, I'm 100% confident my friend, the other mother, made way better cookies than I did.

[laughter]

Jodi: 100%.

Shelley: It'll be interesting as she grows up to find out what are some of the things that she needed to learn in that other household.

Jodi: I concur with that. I think about people in my life who have blessed my life. Even in my growing up years, the time I spent at my friend's house and with her parents had a wonderful impact on me and my development and the opportunities that I had. My friend's mom drove us to basketball practices and things like that. My mom had cancer and couldn't do it.

My friend's mom did it. I feel blessed like I got to have two moms. I do think there are blessings there that are important, and I'm grateful that you're pointing that out. We can otherwise, as I feel like I did for too many years, feel guilty, feel bad, I didn't do enough, but I do see the blessings that they've had from an expanded circle.

Shelley: What advice would you give to someone who is considering going back to work or just trying to figure this out for themselves right now?

Jodi: To just trust and walk with God on whatever the path is. Develop that communication, and so when He's whispering-- Probably too many times, He's whispered to me, and I've resisted like, "That's not the program. [chuckles] That's not the way it should be done," to have a developed relationship enough to really recognize that and to be able to walk forward into that, even though it might be contrary to what you thought, and also, that we don't have to do it all in every season of life.

I had a season that I was at home when my older kids were growing up. In preschool years and elementary school, I was home more than I was working, and that's where I needed to be for that season. When we're making the decision to work, there needs to be an understanding with the family, why, and definitely a family council style approach to it.

Shelley: Yes, I love that.

Jodi: So that everybody's on board together and that you can talk through things when it doesn't go well. My youngest daughter once had a performance that she needed her hair done for. This is when I had taken this job. We were living with family in Centerville, an hour away from Provo. I couldn't make it home in time to do her hair and she found a friend's mom to do it for her, but to know that- my daughter knew what she was signing up for and so she navigated right through that.

Again, I probably spend a little too much time feeling bad about that, not being there for that moment, but I can also say that because of the work that I've been allowed to do and the things that I've learned about college, navigating college, planning for life, skills, I've been able to really help my kids through this season and navigate now like I would have never known.

Shelley: Yes, part of why I called this whole thing I'm doing *Fateful Career Moves*, is because I want people to know I am not at all encouraging you to not be a stay-at-home mom. It has nothing to do with what I think or anybody else thinks. It really is between you and the Lord about where you spend your time for the season that you're in.

Jodi: Really walking through that season with God and your family, of course, your spouse, of course, to be wise in terms of what you might take on or might let go of.

Shelley: Jodi, before I ask you my final questions, what haven't I asked you about your career journey that I should have?

Jodi: It's been a wonderful surprise. It hasn't also always been easy. Those years of doing part-time work, I could look at that and think, gosh, that was a waste of 10 years, but in reality, I learned a lot about myself. I learned that I didn't love sitting in a cubicle and never talking to anyone. I learned that I didn't love data entry. That wasn't my favorite thing. I learned that I really enjoyed opportunities to work with others. I loved opportunities to help each other, so I can look back at each of those part-time jobs and see the good things that I learned, even out of jobs that I didn't really love.

Shelley: Yes, it's interesting. I think when you started the academic advising and you knew that you love, love, loved it, you had something to compare it to.

Jodi: Absolutely, and you realize the whole paradigm, I'm doing this so I can make money, well I made more money doing real estate. [laughs] I really did.

Shelley: As a lawyer, you would have probably made--

Jodi: I would have made more money doing that, but I really loved- and gosh, if there was advice to anyone who's thinking about it, find that thing, because you're going to be happier. You're going to be really good at it and you'll likely make more money at it. Life's meant to be more than paying the bills. We get to grow along the way. It's okay. It's okay to grow along the way.

Shelley: Can you describe a leap of faith you had to take to get where you are now?

Jodi: Definitely taking this job was probably the biggest because moving here, having our family in two locations very far away from each other was probably my biggest leap of faith but I'll tell you one other, our move to Hawaii I wouldn't have imagined being the leap of faith for my career, but in fact, I would have never started a job in higher Ed had we not made that move.

We had gone to Hawaii for my husband to be interviewed and so we could check it out, and they had the spouses come to because believe it or not, it's different living there than vacationing there so they want to make sure that it's a good fit. We went back to Texas, which is where we were living at the time. I just got looking around at what a great life we had there. We had wonderful friends.

My kids were established. We had great schools. There's so much easy to have stayed in Texas and finished raising our family. Before work one day, my husband called me and I just told him my thoughts. I just said, "I just don't think this is a good idea. I think we need to stay here." That is a big move for our family and our oldest son was 14 and we'd be taking him away from his friends and at such a critical time.

Anyway, he was so sweet and listened. He was like, "Okay, I have to go, we'll talk about this later." [chuckles] I just unloaded on him. I went and sat down at the kitchen table and I was going to eat breakfast and do my scripture reading that morning. I was in 2 Nephi 10, these verses popped out to me. "Great are the promises of the Lord unto them who are upon the isles of the sea, and let us remember him and not hang down our heads for we are not cast off. We have been led to a better land. The Lord has made the sea our path."

Shelley: Wow.

Jodi: I just knew in that moment that it was important for us to go and in fact, after a total of nine years there, I can absolutely say that the Lord keeps His promises and great have been the blessings of the Lord to those of us who were upon the isles of the sea.

Shelley: I love that. I'm also struck by the fact that we were talking earlier about how your daughter had a different experience because of this, that the move in your mind was for your husband's career, but the Lord knows about everybody involved in that change and you factored heavily into it. That was amazing.

Jodi: In fact, our oldest son, he did have a difficult year, but he really blossomed. He ended up being able to work at the Polynesian Cultural Center when he was 15 and made wonderful friends with students from all over the world, international students, that has really impacted him into who he is today.

Shelley: Jodi, what unexpected blessings? What could you not see for yourself in embarking on this career?

Jodi: It's a little bit embarrassing as someone who's in the career world to disclose how little vision I had for myself, frankly.

[laughter]

Shelley: Yes, that's funny.

Jodi: I completed a master's degree. I'm working on a doctorate degree, which- that was never on my bucket list but I don't have words for it, what a fulfilling experience,

what tremendous individuals I've met through that process and just amazing people, that I'm pinching myself. I get to be here with these people, I get to work with these people, and that's been so wonderful. Then I'll say one other thing that's been really interesting. I think it's okay to share this. My patriarchal blessing talks about being a peacemaker.

For a lot of my life, I've interpreted that as, okay, mediation, I should go into mediation. Individually in my home or with friends or in individual situations. What I've learned in just the recent years or what I've seen, it could be those things. I may yet go to law school and become a mediator, but what I've learned is through the experiences that the Lord has given me, I've developed a capacity for bringing peace to a workplace.

Peace through organizational alignment, and culture, and aligning strengths to job responsibilities and letting people go. It's been so gratifying to be in a position to be a director and to see people really thrive. It's just only come to my mind recently that that's a form of peacemaking too.

Shelley: The form that comes to my mind is the peace that you feel when you're working with somebody that can help you sort through your next move, your career, in college because it is stressful for these students I think. They know it's expensive, you're on your own for the first time and the next move is to be in a career and that can be a little scary. I think of it also as just the peace you must be giving students in working with them.

Jodi: I hadn't actually put that together so thank you for that. That's a great way to think about it. It's been fulfilling. It is so fun, honestly, to sit with a student who feels stuck and either able to suggest a person to talk to, or go look at this resource and have them come back and be like, "I know what I'm going to do now," and to feel like it didn't feel like that big of a thing, but it just was that little bit of information they needed to continue on in their journey. That's really fun.

Shelley: I love that. I think you've answered this multiple times, but I end my podcast every time by asking the question, how have you seen the hand of God in your career?

Jodi: His fingerprints are all over my journey, both through experiences that I didn't love and difficult experiences and it's always worked to a good. It's always worked to an end. I love that I can talk about some of those experiences in my early post-graduation life that I didn't love, but what I learned from them, and like you pointed out, how I can see now when I did get closer to something that I did love, I had something to compare it to. It seems- opposition in all things, but through all of these experiences I can see how He's expanded my capacity in ways that I never imagined, never dreamed of, and that I can bless my family, but I can also bless others because of the gifts that He's given me.

Shelley: I love that. Thank you for sharing all of those stories and thank you for being with me today.

Jodi: It's such a pleasure. Thank you for the work that you're doing. I do mostly, and my colleagues, we mostly work with college students, but we, from time to time get to work with sometimes alumni. Sometimes it's just friends or other colleagues on campus who are looking to make a move. I just see the need for- I feel like I've experienced it when others have affirmed me and encouraged me and like, it's okay, take the step forward and do it prayerfully. Get more information. I feel like this podcast is a wonderful way to get more information and to be affirmed in it.

Shelley: Thank you. I appreciate that.

I want to thank Jodi Chowen for telling her story today. It's so interesting to me how God prepares each one of us for the important things He needs us to do. I bet Jodi is exceptional in her field now because she knows what it's like to just make a career choice without exploring it first. She knows what it's like to just try different part-time jobs. She knows what it's like to not think of her journey as *her* journey, rather just little things to help the family.

It seems to me, she's the perfect person to help today's generation of college students be more strategic in their own careers because of how hers unfolded, because guess what? The job market has changed. Gone are the days of hiring on at a big company, just out of college and staying there until you retire comfortably with a retirement fund that can go the distance. Our kids go into the job market, knowing they will have to get really good at something to create financial stability.

Even then, they still have to be prepared to adapt, but it is so much easier to do that if you're partnering with God in the process. As Elder Bednar said of the Israelites walking to the banks of the Jordan River, "The soles of their feet were wet before the water parted." That's what happened to Jodi. Only after she applied for the job did the sea part and her family find a way through what seemed like an impossible change, but she'd already learned how to communicate with God and knew what direction to take when the time came.

It's a great story. Thank you again, Jodi, for sharing with us, and thank you for listening.

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