

Alison Dean (00:09):

This is The Breakthrough Podcast, an ongoing series where we interview game-changing leaders in technology, business, government, and entertainment about their experiences and perspectives in life and leadership, learn about their latest breakthroughs and hopefully inspire you to have some of your own. Welcome to The Breakthrough. I'm Alison Dean, and today we are talking with Felicia Alexander, currently Chief Revenue Officer at Title Boxing Club and co-founder and president of Box Union. Felicia sent me this quote from Maya Angelou, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." I agree with that. Hello, Felicia.

Felicia Alexander (00:55):

Hi, Alison.

Alison Dean (00:56):

Okay, so I want to know what that quote means to you.

Felicia Alexander (00:58):

It's a philosophy that I've always grown up with. I grew up with the most outgoing mom. My mom makes friends, to this day, everywhere she goes. When I was young, oftentimes the gentleman who would graciously bag our groceries at the grocery store would be invited to our birthday parties, no joke. And that's because she really treated everybody with the utmost kindness, respect, and made people, no matter how big or how small their job was, really feel like they were a value and that her life was better for being able to interact with them.

Alison Dean (01:40):

That's a beautiful thing. We all should have a mom like that.

Felicia Alexander (01:43):

Yes, absolutely.

Alison Dean (01:45):

Okay, so I want to take it to the first breakthrough that you remember that set you on your career path. We all have a moment, but what's your first breakthrough that you remember?

Felicia Alexander (01:56):

My first breakthrough was really landing my first real job out of college, and it's a really funny joke amongst my friends from college, because I was the individual that literally would go to my engineering roommate for questions about how to print a paper out on my Mac. To say that I was not technologically savvy amongst my friend groups would definitely be an accurate statement. And coming out of Stanford University in the late 1990s, I got a job with Sun Microsystems. So if you knew anything about Sun Microsystems, it was that they had their own operating system. It wasn't Windows, it definitely wasn't built on Mac, and one needed to know Unix command prompts to do anything on their computer.

Felicia Alexander (02:48):

So lo and behold, I got a job as a competitive analyst in a marketing group at Sun Microsystems, and I think that that really was my first breakthrough moment in terms of being absolutely terrified to start something that I knew nothing about, but to really understand that most people know very little about anything that they're doing until they start doing it, and that's when learning happens and when the experience helps develop whatever skills that you're working on. So I would say that that was really an opportunity where I was able to get my foot in the door, and I think it really taught me that it doesn't matter how you get to somewhere, but once you get your foot in the door, you really have the opportunity to become a sponge, to be really inquisitive, to take advantage of every opportunity that is presented to you, and to take risks and be okay with failing.

Felicia Alexander (03:53):

In this particular job, I was at least eight to 10 years younger than my coworkers. And many of them had already started families, they had small kids at home, so I had opportunities that were put on my lap by default because my colleagues couldn't travel and go to certain meetings or certain events. So that left me, who had no ties, who really was unencumbered, and it was such an amazing opportunity because, from a really young, naive, and inexperienced age and juncture in my career, I got exposure to a lot of conversations, a lot of meetings, and a lot of experiences that I probably wouldn't have otherwise.

Alison Dean (04:38):

Yeah. I bet you could write a book on that.

Felicia Alexander (04:40):

Oh, I sure can.

Alison Dean (04:42):

Do you have a morning routine? Do you start with a workout? And can you walk us through what a typical day looks like?

Felicia Alexander (04:50):

Yes. Although a typical day, I cannot walk you through because no day is typical, as I'm sure you hear often from people. I'm a morning person, I love to get up early. I'm not like a crazy morning person, but I'm usually up somewhere between 5:30 and 6:00, my eyes are open and I'm ready to go. I'm still on the Wordle bandwagon. I don't know if I'm the only person who still does Wordle on a daily basis, but I've convinced myself that it's really good for my brain health, and so I do Wordle every day. I have the somewhat controversial habit of checking my email right away when I wake up because I don't like surprises. I want to know if there's anything that I need to deal with and it kind of sets the tone for my day. Coffee is definitely a must. The coffee maker is programmed the night before, so when I go downstairs, it is always ready.

Felicia Alexander (05:50):

And then a workout happens in the morning. It depends on what time my first call starts and if I am dropping my son off at school or if my husband is dropping him off at school. But definitely a workout is part of my daily ritual, and, if time allows, I go to one of our studios and hop into a class. I would say that that is the most desirable workout for me to do in the morning. If I'm more compressed on time, I will go for a quick run outside, do a treadmill workout, or do something with

free weights that I have at home. I also make my almost 16-year-old son breakfast, but now I do it by choice because I know that the days are numbered. I used to tell him, "Hey, you have to make your own breakfast." He's perfectly capable and competent, but now that I know that he's a sophomore and the days of me making him breakfast are few and far between, I actually really enjoy it.

Alison Dean (06:50):

I love that.

Felicia Alexander (06:50):

Once he is off to school, my day spans across a lot of different facets of the business. We have our own owned and operated business. So we own three boxing fitness studios in LA called Box Union Studios, we own two Title boxing clubs, and then we are franchisors and have about 133 franchisees across 31 states. So on any given day, I could be having internal calls talking about any one of those three businesses, I could be on calls with prospective candidates looking to purchase a Title boxing club, and I might also be on calls or doing research on potential partnership opportunities that would work across one of our lines of business. So I have to say it's really exciting because I get to wear a lot of different hats and be in a number of different conversations.

Alison Dean (07:54):

Every day is different.

Felicia Alexander (07:55):

Every day is different.

Alison Dean (07:55):

Every day is exciting.

Felicia Alexander (07:56):

I will say the through line is, since COVID, the days all tend to involve more meetings than usual, and more camera on meetings, which I have yet to really develop an appreciation and love for.

Alison Dean (08:11):

I feel you, girl. I'm right there with you. I'm like, "Wow, this really has shifted." I remember the days when I was using Uber Conference and it was just audio.

Felicia Alexander (08:21):

Yes. Or [freeconferencecall.com](https://www.freeconferencecall.com).

Alison Dean (08:24):

Yeah. And now it's like, "Camera on please." I get that. Okay. So before Title, you co-founded Box Union. What was the initial draw for a boxing business given your tenure at Sony, Demand Media? That kind of came right before, so what pulled you in?

Felicia Alexander (08:42):

Well, if you were to talk to any one of these college friends who could tell you about my technological deficiencies, they would tell you that I would talk a lot in college about how I wanted to do something in the fitness space. So I knew from a very early age that at some point in time I was going to work in fitness. I loved fitness. Personally, it's helped me manage my mental health and my depression. I love fitness because it's such a great way to create and cultivate community. I grew up playing competitive soccer. My best friends were my teammates. And during college, oftentimes my roommate and I would be organizing people to go run the stadium stairs or run around campus.

Felicia Alexander (09:31):

When gyms were on my radar, at the age of 12, because my sister is four years older and she got to join a gym, I was obsessed. I had to join a gym too. I worked at a gym in order to get a free membership. I spent a disproportionate amount of my student loans belonging to a really nice athletic club. After college, it was really important to me that I went to a certain athletic club and had that membership, because that's something that I prioritized and really valued having in my life. So yes, it seems like she was on this corporate trajectory, and then she made this hairpin turn and opened a fitness studio, but that's not exactly the case.

Felicia Alexander (10:13):

My exposure to boxing happened at a really young age. My maternal grandfather was an amateur boxer, and though he had long since hung up his gloves by the time I was born, I do recall watching fights on TV with him and having an appreciation for the sport. When I was 16, my dad died suddenly of a heart attack, and that summer I looked in the Yellow Pages because, let's face it, the internet did not exist, and I sought out a boxing gym. I think I was looking for an outlet. Clearly I had a lot of anger and sadness. I also felt scared to sleep at night because my dad was no longer in the house, so who was going to protect us?

Felicia Alexander (10:58):

And the minute I went to this boxing gym, it was your stereotypical boxing gym. It was dirty, smelly, I walked up these stairs, and all of a sudden any noise inside the gym stopped because one of these things, that being me, did not look like the others. But it was such a unbelievably welcoming and encouraging place. And the minute I put on gloves, I felt my whole persona... I felt my stance completely transformed, and that there was this inner badass inside of me that was becoming unlocked.

Felicia Alexander (11:33):

So fast-forward to, I had the corporate job, I had the paycheck that came every other week, I had the health insurance, and my husband was the serial entrepreneur, and he started a business based on my pain point that I had in fitness, and that was scheduling classes at this boutique studio that I was going to. And we got to a point where his company that he started was acquired by a larger company and he said, " Hey, if you want to do something entrepreneurial, you-

Felicia Alexander (12:03):

Hey, if you want to do something entrepreneurial, you have my full support. You've always supported me and my endeavors now if you want to go do something.

Felicia Alexander (12:09):

So I was really fortunate in that one of my dear friends, her husband, who was a career investment banker, a founding partner at a global investment banking firm called Moelis & Company, was looking to do something entrepreneurial in the fitness space. And although he was my friend's husband and we would have dinners together and hang out a lot with our kids, we really didn't know each other in a business context.

Felicia Alexander (12:37):

So it's really a leap of faith that we ended up starting BoxUnion together. And he came at it from a very logical mathematical, let's look at the landscape, let's read research reports. Let's see where there's opportunities in white space. And while I had this connection to boxing and tried every workout place in LA and anywhere I happened to be traveling, we knew there was no shortage of boxing in Los Angeles.

Felicia Alexander (13:06):

But we really felt there was an opportunity to bring people into boxing who would've never contemplating putting on gloves before. And to take something that had traditionally skewed male and older, which was not the characteristics of boutique fitness and draw a younger female crowd.

Felicia Alexander (13:27):

So it was under those auspices that BoxUnion was born and people told us that we were absolutely crazy. Of course, LA didn't need yet another place for people to work out. It definitely was a pretty saturated fitness market with a lot of competition. Neither of us had aspirations of teaching the class, knew how to teach the class, but we had an idea. We hired really smart, great people, and with that BoxUnion was born.

Alison Dean (13:58):

It's such a cool story. It's also interesting how stars align. Right? It was the right moment for you. Right?

Felicia Alexander (14:04):

Yes.

Alison Dean (14:04):

Everything kind of came together. I love that.

Alison Dean (14:15):

Okay, so continuing our tradition of past guest questions. This week's Breakthrough Club question is from Raf Franco, who is the Chief Product Officer at Influencer, which is an influencer marketing platform. You might be familiar. I'm sure you are. So he asks you, "Being that you have stepped into an executive role at Title Boxing Club where you are not a founder, how does that affect your commitment towards your new company?"

Felicia Alexander (14:42):

Oh, that's a really, really good question. Because all of the sudden it feels as though I have a stepchild. I have a stepchild or stepchildren that completely outnumber my BoxUnion birth child.

Felicia Alexander (14:59):

I would say that my commitment remains absolutely steadfast across both businesses. And at the end of the day, we are really lucky because we get to use boxing fitness as a vehicle to help people decrease their stress to lead better, healthier, happier lives.

Felicia Alexander (15:23):

We're living in a day and age where anxiety, depression are at an all-time high, and we're creating these really amazing, welcoming warm communities where we're inviting people to bring in all their baggage and just take it out on the bag.

Felicia Alexander (15:43):

So I would say that while aesthetically the two brands have a little bit of a different look and feel from a programming standpoint, there are some differences. At the end of the day, the customer is very much the same customer going through both clubs. And the owners of title boxing clubs have made significant investments to build the brand and to cultivate and create local community.

Felicia Alexander (16:13):

So it's actually a really big privilege and honor that I get to be in this capacity and work with the team to take some of the learnings and best practices that we developed at BoxUnion and be able to introduce them to Title. As well as to be open to feedback that comes from Title and figure out how we can introduce that to more franchisees as well as bring that back to our BoxUnion clubs.

Alison Dean (16:41):

I love it.

Alison Dean (16:45):

All right. You're on the Board of Directors for Rock Steady Boxing, a 501 (c)(3) that offers people with Parkinson's a non-contact based boxing curriculum. How did you get involved with Rock Steady? I mean, I can infer why it's so meaningful, but you tell us why it's so meaningful to you.

Felicia Alexander (17:02):

I honestly received an outreach from the then CEO of Rock Steady Boxing. She had done development work at UCLA and knew that I was a UCLA Anderson alum, knew my involvement with BoxUnion and Title Boxing Club and said they were looking for additional board members, wanted to tell me a bit about it.

Felicia Alexander (17:26):

I was familiar with Rock Steady. When we started BoxUnion, we looked into getting certified to be a Rock Steady approved venue. Rock Steady has a process in place whereby they want to make sure that their affiliates have a good clientele that they could draw from. So there were actually already people in Los Angeles that were offering Rock Steady boxing classes.

Felicia Alexander (17:55):

And when we acquired Title, I learned that there were a number of Title boxing clubs that had gone through Rock Steady training and I visited a number of our clubs and actually got to see firsthand a few of these Rock Steady Boxing classes take place and I was able to talk to some of the participants themselves as well as the caregivers of some of the participants.

Felicia Alexander (18:21):

And whether it was an individual who had been diagnosed with Parkinson's, talking about how this is really the one hour in their day where they feel removed from the disease and the diagnosis and that they get to be this fighter and they feel this strength and power that is often missing in their lives. Or it's the caregiver who talks about the fact that this is a community where their loved one who often feels isolated and alone can come together in a really healthy environment with others who are going through the same experience.

Felicia Alexander (18:59):

I have since had the opportunity to travel to Rock Steady's headquarters in Indianapolis, and they have a huge, really impressive facility with over 500 members. And to witness and watch some of those classes and what these people are able to do ... Quite frankly, some of their athleticism far exceeds mine, and I'm not dealing with any neurological limitations. It's really amazing.

Alison Dean (19:26):

Right. On a similar wavelength, can you tell us about Knockout Stigma and bring change to mind?

Felicia Alexander (19:34):

Yes, absolutely. I was diagnosed with depression in my early 20s, and it was something that I hid for almost 20 years. I didn't want anybody to know that there was anything less than perfect about me, and I was really worried about people finding out that I took medication for depression.

Felicia Alexander (19:57):

The minute I decided to open up about that was an unbelievably terrifying and freeing experience. And I did that largely because people would look at me after I started BoxUnion and think like, "Wow, she just has it all. She's got everything together." And I don't want people to perceive me like that because my life is messy too. I've got high highs and low lows, and just like everybody, I'm probably guilty for only sharing the good stuff. Because when things aren't good, I go insular and get quiet.

Felicia Alexander (20:33):

I also learned from my staff that many of them dealt with their own issues, whether it was anxiety, depression, you name it. And they were so open about what it was they were dealing with and how boxing and BoxUnion provided them this really safe space to help work through whatever it was that they were dealing with alongside a really open and supportive community.

Felicia Alexander (21:03):

So we knew that we wanted to partner with a cause and align ourselves with a cause, and mental health, there's a lot of great causes out there. But it was something that a lot of people within our community really resonated with. And bring Change to Mind is a national organization, and that was important to us because we have franchise partners across most of the United States. And the really great thing about Bring Change to Mind is a lot of their funding goes to developing curriculum and education at the high school level so that high schools can have Knockout Stigma clubs and begin the dialogue around anxiety, depression, overall mental wellbeing.

Felicia Alexander (21:51):

And the idea is that much like you'd put on contacts or glasses if your eyesight wasn't bad and you'd have no hesitation telling people, "Yeah, I wear contacts, I wear glasses." But the conversation around mental health will become as commonplace as that of wearing glasses.

Felicia Alexander (22:12):

So we really love what it stands for. We love being able to introduce this to our franchise partners, and they in turn have done such a great job doing their own Knockout Stigma events within their own clubs. It's given us a great window into some of their stories. We have coaches who've shared their own stories. We've had members who share their own stories. And the statistics are such that all of us are touched by somebody, whether it's ourselves or someone we love that deals with a mental health disorder.

Felicia Alexander (22:49):

So Knockout Stigma was really born from something that we align closely with at BoxUnion and that we were able to bring to an even wider stage with Title Boxing Club in partnership with Bring Change to Mind.

Alison Dean (23:03):

Yeah, I've got ideas percolating that.

Felicia Alexander (23:05):

You always have ideas. I love them.

Alison Dean (23:06):

I do always have ideas. Okay, so now we're going to switch gears a little bit. Kind of given the corporate jobs and everything that you've done, Sun Microsystems, et cetera. What does digital transformation mean to you, and is it a different answer if we frame it around the fitness industry specifically?

Felicia Alexander (23:29):

Definitely. Yes.

Alison Dean (23:31):

So tell me more.

Felicia Alexander (23:33):

Well, I think that the fitness industry, especially during COVID, really transformed and had its massive digital transformation.

Alison Dean (23:46):

Agree, agree, agree. Yeah.

Felicia Alexander (23:47):

I mean, during COVID, we learned how to work out at home. That's not to say there weren't some of us who had Pelotons and were already working out at home, or even the people who have the Beachbody P90X and were doing them on DVD. I mean, I grew up doing Jane Fonda on Betamax in the living room with my mom and sisters. But that being said, fitness studios, fitness professionals were really forced to get creative. So we saw Zoom being used as a delivery vehicle

for at-home fitness. I guarantee you Zoom never saw that on their radar when they were thinking about their product roadmap and the different use cases. We saw a number of different companies, especially if you were a fitness studio provider, different platforms emerged. For example, there's a company out there called Arketa, and they really were facilitating a platform for the individual trainer to be able to monetize their offering to their audience by giving them the tools and the platform and allowing them to do what they do best, which is to teach and coach. So fitness saw a huge and continues to see a huge digital transformation.

Felicia Alexander (25:12):

I think that we're also switching from fitness to this idea of wellness and whole being. We've always talked at BoxUnion, and now TITLE Boxing Club, about bringing your whole self with you and that we're not just building better boxers, but we're building better people. And that coming into the club, yes, it's great for your physical health, but it's going to do wonders for your mental health. So we're seeing a lot of, not only other brick and mortar, but businesses talk about that.

Felicia Alexander (25:42):

And then I think the transformation that we've seen in the wearables space has been huge. If you look at a company like Oura and the amount of data that wearers have on themselves and their ability to actually go to a doctor and maybe even show the doctor things that a doctor wouldn't be able to uncover or surface without running extensive and very expensive tests.

Felicia Alexander (26:13):

So I think that we've seen a tremendous transformation. I think that we've also seen a lot around the convergence of fitness and gaming. There's some companies out there doing really cool stuff with AI as well as VR to make it feel as though you're working out with a trainer in home right with you for a fraction of the price and actually getting feedback in correction on form and technique and having somebody technology that's counting your reps and keeping track. So it's absolutely fascinating to me how far we've come and I'm really excited for what's yet to come.

Alison Dean (26:58):

It's also interesting, I think people that generally would just have a gym membership or maybe select studios, I think that there's now this desire to have it all, like have the in-home gym as an option, but then also keep your gym membership for the connection with humans. It's interesting just how much everything really expanded on all fronts. I think people that didn't necessarily think they'd ever have home gym equipment, it's very commonplace now. I have friends that I think never thought that they'd be really stuck in their garages with gym equipment, and now they've done some pretty impressive things in their garages. So it's definitely an interesting time for the fitness industry.

Felicia Alexander (27:37):

Well, and I think to your point, I think that equipment, I remember growing up and we had a stationary bike. And either clothes were hanging on it or when I had a friend come over, I would get on one pedal, they would get on another because we weren't tall enough to sit and actually ride it and it would be a seesaw type of thing that we would do. And now the technology on something like a Peloton, the content is amazing, the leaderboard technology, the way that they're carrying you on and tracking your milestones and engaging people in different challenges. Not to mention

the affinity groups that have developed in the communities that form on Facebook and other channels of people who share this common love and bleed the Peloton brand.

Alison Dean (28:26):

Yeah. So the producer for the Breakthrough, he uses a program called Fight Camp. So there's like trackers in the glove, measures their punch counts, all that stuff, live instructor. So in what other ways do you see technology playing a role in boxing as we continue forward down this path?

Felicia Alexander (28:47):

Yeah. And fun story, those guys at Fight Camp are great guys. In their early days before they had a studio, they used to rent out BoxUnion on Saturday evenings after class and film their content there. There's a company out of Portugal that's developed an AI bag, and not only is it measuring your speed, your velocity, but it's also doing stuff around technique. And are you in fact striking the bag appropriately? There is Liteboxer, which is a company that has VR, so you can be doing a session and it looks like there's a VR trainer that's holding focus pads for you.

Alison Dean (29:29):

Wow.

Felicia Alexander (29:31):

So a number of different applications, different ways to not only get your punch scores, which the sensors, depending upon who's you use, they're not always well calibrated. Some of our clubs have punch tracking in the clubs, and one of the things that we've seen is that if you're trying to create this really great communal group class environment, sometimes the participants go rogue because they're focused on getting a score and their technique diminishes because they're so fixated on the score. So as we think about what role we want technology to play inside our clubs, we're having a lot of really deep discussions with a lot of really different viewpoints because there's something to be said, BoxUnion, for example, we have no timers, we have no clocks. We use the BPM of the music to pace the entire workout.

Alison Dean (30:29):

Which I love.

Felicia Alexander (30:30):

I really like that because for 45 minutes, it's the only time in my day where I feel like I'm truly in the present moment and lose all sense of space and time.

Alison Dean (30:42):

Right. Dance boxing. It's been so long since I took a class, but I loved it when I did it. Okay. It's time to break on through. We're going to do a quickfire round, fun, fun, and then we'll move on. All right, here we go. Heavy bag versus kickboxing?

Felicia Alexander (31:05):

Heavy bag.

Alison Dean (31:06):

Twitter, Instagram or TikTok?

Felicia Alexander (31:09):

TikTok.

Alison Dean (31:09):

Favorite food?

Felicia Alexander (31:11):

Dark chocolate.

Alison Dean (31:12):

Boxing or MMA?

Felicia Alexander (31:15):

Boxing.

Alison Dean (31:15):

It's kind of rigged. AM or PM workout?

Felicia Alexander (31:18):

AM.

Alison Dean (31:19):

I kind of know that. Favorite place to travel?

Felicia Alexander (31:22):

I haven't been there yet.

Alison Dean (31:23):

Oh, wow. Sauna or steam room?

Felicia Alexander (31:26):

Sauna.

Alison Dean (31:27):

Favorite book?

Felicia Alexander (31:29):

Oh gosh.

Alison Dean (31:30):

That's a hard one.

Felicia Alexander (31:32):

That's a really hard run. I've read so many great books. I could reread *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Alison Dean (31:38):

Oh, okay. Last TV show that you binged?

Felicia Alexander (31:42):

White Lotus.

Alison Dean (31:43):

Favorite movie?

Felicia Alexander (31:44):

The one that always stands out is *Shawshank Redemption*.

Alison Dean (31:47):

I was going to say that. You can just always watch it.

Felicia Alexander (31:50):

Yeah.

Alison Dean (31:50):

Favorite holiday?

Felicia Alexander (31:52):

Definitely Thanksgiving.

Alison Dean (31:53):

Favorite podcast?

Felicia Alexander (31:54):

Wild Ideas Worth Living. It's my sister, Shelby's.

Alison Dean (31:57):

I love that. Check it out. What comes to mind for you as the most memorable project that you've been part of, and why?

Felicia Alexander (32:12):

I mean, definitely current state, making the acquisition as owners and operators of two studios in Los Angeles with a third that was under construction, LA being totally shut down during COVID and purchasing Title Boxing Club January, 2021. I would say that that's probably one that definitely is at the forefront of my life.

Alison Dean (32:36):

Yeah. I feel like that was another rigged question. Do you feel like that's also the most difficult project that you've been part of?

Felicia Alexander (32:43):

Absolutely. Acquiring another fitness business during COVID when depending upon the state, the county, the local restrictions, businesses were forced to be shut down for any number of months. Acquiring a system of franchisors that maybe didn't have the level of support that they thought they were going to have or that we thought would be in place launching, hiring an entirely new team. Learning a new language. Franchising is very different and the franchisor franchisee relationship is different than the relationship with our owned and operated clubs and the employees and what and how you are able to get people to be able to do. The way in which we introduce new initiatives and having to think about, well, I can just go here and show them how it's done and spend time to figuring out how do you use technology to deliver meaningful training and then doing some things wrong.

Felicia Alexander (33:49):

And then when you find the right people to join your team. We launched a learning management system and 1.0 of Title University was an accomplishment. And it was good, but then we hired a director of training who really has had a whole career in curriculum design and development. And the 2.0 and the things that we're releasing now are so much more impactful and so much easier for people to digest and consume.

Felicia Alexander (34:21):

Our team, learning a new class and then figuring out how to go and build confidence and trust. You said BoxUnion was like dance boxing and a lot of people are like, it's dance boxing. But it's actually, yeah, we use the rhythm of the music. A fighter doesn't fight full speed ahead. There's ebbs and flows. So we have a gentleman who works out in one of our clubs and he actually just had a fight recently and he was telling the coach, he's like, "I have no way of properly conveying to you how beneficial taking these classes were in preparing me for the fight." He's like, "My conditioning was amazing because of all the pacing and the fact that you do throw so many punches in a class."

Felicia Alexander (35:05):

But there was this perception within Title that they were authentic boxing and we were dance boxing, light boxing and BoxUnion. And our coaching staff has done such a phenomenal job of going out there and building the relationship, establishing the trust, and really helping to deliver a 52-week curriculum and framework for them to deliver more consistent classes that help take their members on a boxing journey. So that's been amazing. But all of it hasn't been without some blood, sweat, tears, and bruises along the way.

Alison Dean (35:50):

I'd be surprised if you didn't say that. I don't think it's a bad thing. I almost feel like having a portion of BoxUnion or Title that is a little bit more music-based potentially, like that really does emphasize the movement, the dance in it. I'd be curious if a dance troupe or many dance troops were to take BoxUnion classes, how that would inform what they do in their dance classes, right? Because it's just another element of strength, and assurance, and the confidence that you get in that sort of environment, how that feeds into their other art forms.

Felicia Alexander (36:26):

Well, we have some of our best coaches come from dance. The way that they move and the way that they can articulate their punches and the way that they understand music, it's fantastic.

Alison Dean (36:37):

Is there anything that you did before BoxUnion? So either at Sony, maybe at Sun Microsystems, maybe at demand, any project or program that you felt like really helped on the BoxUnion journey, something that was really transformative for yourself and how that just helped things move forward?

Felicia Alexander (37:00):

I think a through line in my life has always been getting into places, and positions, and opportunities where I don't have the experience, I'm not necessarily qualified, but just knowing that I have the wherewithal and the aptitude to just figure things out, to ask the right question, to find the right people and resources to help, so I would say that those skills are transferrable and have proved me very well my entire career.

Alison Dean (37:32):

Love it. What are some of the biggest leadership lessons that you've learned?

Felicia Alexander (37:36):

I think probably the biggest would be how important core values are and how we really have to be true to our core values. Early on in the acquisition, we brought some additional people onto our team. We've done a really great job at BoxUnion of cultivating and nurturing talent and given them opportunities to grow such that the gentleman who was once our lowest coach on the totem pole is VP of product and experience across both brands.

Alison Dean (38:09):

Wow.

Felicia Alexander (38:10):

And when these additional people came in, they had ideas for what our core values should be and it was watered down versions of what our original core values were. And I think we wanted to be open, we wanted to make people feel like they were a part of the company and the culture, but they definitely introduced things that were not us. That's not to say we don't have fun at work, but have fun is not one of our innate core values.

Felicia Alexander (38:44):

So, detracting and departing from those and making them negotiable and watering them down was definitely a hard lesson. And I think it led us to attract people who weren't necessarily the right fit. So now, we're really steadfast in making hiring decisions based on those criteria. One of our core values is challenge the status quo as well as leave your ego at the door. So on the coaching side of our business, the coaches get so much feedback to the point where you could be a coach and work for us for five years. And if my business partner's in your class, you better believe he's going to have notes for you after class, because there's just this culture of constant never ending improvement.

Felicia Alexander (39:32):

But we weren't necessarily doing that with the front of house. And I would see things happening on the front of house but I wouldn't say something or give them the feedback in real time because I'm thinking, "Gosh, they're young, they're part-time, they're just hourly. I don't want to demoralize them or make them feel like they're in trouble." And obviously, getting the feedback from one of the owners is a lot different than getting the feedback from their direct manager. So, one is maybe I'm not the right person to give the feedback.

Felicia Alexander (40:04):

But just making sure that if we have a culture that is really grounded in feedback, to know that feedback is not a personal attack or a front, that feedback is really a gift and it's a gift in wanting to help somebody grow and develop and be the best person that they can be. So, those core values of we not me, if you are all about yourself, we're not going to be the right place to work. But if you are putting the team above your individual needs and stepping in, whether you're the coach and you're on the podium but you realize, "Hey, coach, before you ran late and you need to help flip the room and you need to do things that are outside of your job description, then you're going to do that, that you're okay challenging the status quo.

Felicia Alexander (40:51):

Just because we've done something one way doesn't mean that it's always going to be the way that we do it or that it's the right way to do it, that you stay true to your word. If you say you're going to do something, do it. Hold yourself accountable. Passion with purpose. It's really hard for people who don't enjoy fit boxing for fitness to really love working in the company. You have to be passionate about this modality. And even better.

Felicia Alexander (41:20):

I mean, we've got some people who, they don't live near one of our clubs, but man, they're taking classes on our digital platform all the time. And when they're out in the field, they're going and visiting franchise locations and they're really participating and consuming the brand. And then I think the last thing is the ability to be humble and leave your ego at the door and know that who knows where the best ideas are going to come from.

Alison Dean (41:42):

Yup, Amen. I feel like there was a lot in that that you just said where I'm like, "Yeah, she could probably pass some of that onto your mentees." But is there one thing that you really want to pass on and how do you want direct reports to remember you?

Felicia Alexander (41:57):

I want people to feel like they learned something and they were better off for having had this experience, that they were valued and that they derive value from the experience.

Alison Dean (42:12):

That's beautiful. Okay, you've talked about some of the future tech that's going on in fitness. Are there any other future innovations that is really exciting to you or where do you see things headed? What's the next frontier for fitness?

Felicia Alexander (42:28):

I think we're going to see a lot more around personalization.

Alison Dean (42:32):

Mmm, yeah, I can see that. What's the timeframe that you're thinking personalization is just going to really be in our faces, if you were to venture a guess?

Felicia Alexander (42:39):

I think we'll start seeing stuff 2023.

Alison Dean (42:42):

2023 we'll see some stuff. What about a recent breakthrough that you've had?

Felicia Alexander (42:46):

It's not necessarily a recent breakthrough, but I think it's something that I have to continue to remind myself, and that is to just sometimes take a step back and pause and think about what has happened. Because I'm a really tough grader when it comes to myself and it's constantly like, "Well, this hasn't been done yet. I haven't done this, I haven't done that." And just taking a minute to be like, "Okay, a lot has happened." And you can take a minute and you can be proud and give yourself a pat on the back and then continue to push forward.

Alison Dean (43:25):

Here, here. That's an excellent one. I'm happy that you're doing this, Felicia. We all need to do a little bit more time.

Felicia Alexander (43:30):

It's hard.

Alison Dean (43:31):

I know, it's so hard, but it's good that you're focused on it. Is there anything I didn't ask you that I should have?

Felicia Alexander (43:37):

No. But I think another breakthrough, especially having a son that is a sophomore in high school, is it's not like, "Where do you want to go to college? What do you want to be when you grow up?" I feel like life is so much about learning the things that you don't want to do-

Alison Dean (43:53):

Oh, yeah.

Felicia Alexander (43:53):

... as much as figuring out the things that you really do enjoy doing. And every day I'm still continuing to learn that.

Alison Dean (43:59):

I think we all should be, as human beings, right, we all need to be like, "Hmm, yeah, then maybe that's not really for me." I totally think so. Felicia, thank you so much for being on The Breakthrough.

Felicia Alexander (44:10):

Thank you for having me.

Alison Dean (44:11):

Thank you for tuning into this episode of The Breakthrough. Be sure to subscribe on your favorite platform and follow us on Twitter and Instagram at Breakthrough Pod. I'm your host, Alison Dean. Until next time.