Courtney Burton:  
One of my favorite professors, his name was Professor Bill Todd. He was a professor of the practice. Bill Todd's the man, and not-

Taylor Goss:  
He sounds like he would be the man.

Courtney Burton:  
Canonically, no. He did all of the healthcare work. I took all of his healthcare classes. I did a practicum with him where we basically did a mini-consulting project with CHOA, which is the Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, and gave them some recommendations on their path forward on a specific question, and I loved it.

I guess that makes sense why I then went into consulting because I was like, "Oh, I did this mini-consulting project. I don't think I ever put that together." But yeah, that was... Bill Todd was a formative professor in my time at Georgia Tech. And then when I started at Deloitte, I met some of the most wonderful human beings who worked in the healthcare space, who worked in the social determinants of health domain, people who are thinking about climate and health, people who are thinking about underserved communities, people who are asking fascinating questions.

And so I really prioritized my career and kind of when we talk about consulting, you have to network your way onto projects and you have to really focus on building your community there. I really focused on building my community in the healthcare group, and just the people who poured into me, my managers, some of the partners I worked for, people who wrote my recommendations for grad school, people I still keep in touch with. They really shaped my perspectives and challenged me to think deeper about the topics I was interested in.

Hi, my name is Courtney Burton. I'm a member of the 2022 cohort and a second year at the Graduate School of Business, as well as getting a joint master's in environment and resources through the EIPA program. I Imagine a World where healthy aging is not a privilege, but an undeniable right.

Taylor Goss:  
Welcome to the Imagine a World podcast from Knight-Hennessy Scholars. We are here to give you a glimpse into the Knight-Hennessy Scholar community of graduate students spanning all seven Stanford schools, including business, education, engineering, humanities, law, medicine, and sustainability. In each episode, we talk with scholars about the world they imagine and what they’re doing to bring it to life.

Willie Thompson:  
Today you'll be hearing from Courtney Burton, a joint MBA/MS student. During our conversation, you'll hear Courtney's fascination with health spans, discovering that she did not want to attend med school, building a diverse set of skills in healthcare, embracing her inner clown and so much more.

Hey, what's up y'all? Welcome to another episode of the Imagine a World podcast. I'm your co-host, Willie Thompson. I am a MBA student, and as of Friday also a master's degree student in the school education. I found out I got in Friday.

Taylor Goss:  
Really.
Courtney Burton:
Yay!

Taylor Goss:
Oh, really?

Willie Thompson:
Yay!

Courtney Burton:
Really?

Willie Thompson:
Yeah, yeah.

Taylor Goss:
We've been waiting to hear for weeks about Willie's acceptance to the program. Congratulations.

Willie Thompson:
I'll be at that school now. I have a extra year.

Courtney Burton:
Heck yeah. Are you sticking around for a third year?

Willie Thompson:
Yes.

Courtney Burton:
Eyyy! We love it.

Taylor Goss:
Anyone who has heard the past few episodes has heard him say, "Hopefully in the ED school." Don't have to say hopefully anymore.

Willie Thompson:
Yeah, it's fully actualized.

Courtney Burton:
You're in it.

Taylor Goss:
You heard it here live folks.
Willie Thompson:
So yeah, and I'm joined by my amazing, as always, co-host, Taylor Goss.

Taylor Goss:
That's my voice that was talking just then. I'm Taylor.

Willie Thompson:
All right. And as you heard from them, actually, let's just put our cards on the table here. We've heard the energy in the introduction and that energy belongs to no one, but the one, the only, Courtney Burton. Hello, Courtney. Welcome to the Imagine a World podcast. How are you doing?

Courtney Burton:
Hi, friends. Thank you for having me. I'm so excited to be here.

Willie Thompson:
How are you doing?

Courtney Burton:
I'm doing well. I'm doing well. It's been a good week. It's been a good quarter. Things are both winding up and winding down.

Taylor Goss:
Wow.

Courtney Burton:
Yeah, I was telling Willie that I feel like I'm putting a bow on my quarter, but at the same time, I feel like the finale is happening where all of the fireworks are happening at once. And so trying to just get my ducks in a row, figuring out who I owe what things to, what deliverables-

Willie Thompson:
What did I say that I would do?

Courtney Burton:
What did I say I was going to do-

Taylor Goss:
Right, that's true.

Courtney Burton:
... solo versus in a group, and who are those group members? And do we have time on the calendar? Just tactical things.

Taylor Goss:
What are my responsibilities to other human beings at this time?

Courtney Burton:
Exactly. And how can I fulfill them to the best of my ability.

Taylor Goss:
That's right.

Willie Thompson:
Little fireworks everywhere. What are some of the things that are on your mind right now as you wrap up the quarter?

Courtney Burton:
Biggest thing on my mind right now, I'm taking design for extreme affordability, which is the big D school class. And we're working with a partner in Costa Rica called Biblioteca David Kitson. They're a community center that also serves as a library for the local community in Nosara, which is like a beach town on the west side of Costa Rica. I'm traveling there for spring break.

Willie Thompson:
Oh, amazing.

Courtney Burton:
Yeah, which is super exciting and great and is part of the program, but there's a lot of things to do. I need to figure out who I'm interviewing on the ground, trying to get on their schedules, but also not being too structured with how I'm planning the schedule.

Taylor Goss:
For serendipity. I like that.

Courtney Burton:
Leaving room for flexibility.

Willie Thompson:
Beautiful. So designing for extreme affordability. So you got that class, that's wrapping up. You were telling us a hilarious story about another class. I don't know if you want to talk about that on the pod, but I would love to-

Courtney Burton:
Yeah, no, I can talk about it. I'm in the climate tech for rapid decarbonization class and as part of my EIPA program, but it technically sits within the business school and we have a big paper that's due next Friday, I guess.

Willie Thompson:
And what's a big paper for the business school?
Courtney Burton:
A big paper is just like a group paper. So it's a group of folks and we just all have to write in a cohesive voice together. And sometimes that can be a challenge.

Taylor Goss:
Oh, it's always a challenge.

Courtney Burton:
So that's due next Friday. Everyone has to do it. And we had to submit our outline to the professor yesterday. Writing it with two of my good friends, and we just submitted a pretty quick, simple outline to say, check, check. We got it done. And then the professor in class was like, "Hey, we're going to pick the 10 best projects to present." And we got an email this morning or last night being like, "Congratulations, you were selected to present on Monday."

Taylor Goss:
On Monday.

Courtney Burton:
When-

Willie Thompson:
A week from yesterday?

Courtney Burton:
Yeah, a week from yesterday when the paper is due next Friday. And so we emailed-

Taylor Goss:
Now you have a paper and a presentation to-

Courtney Burton:
Yeah, yeah. It's a privilege to learn so much.

Willie Thompson:
And you have to know everything. You got to write in the paper earlier so that you can give a coherent presentation on that, right?

Courtney Burton:
Yeah. And I think there is space for improv in this presentation.

Willie Thompson:
Okay. All right.

Taylor Goss:
Well, well.

Courtney Burton:
And so we’re... Well, well, and that brings us to something else that’s happening. I have an improv show tonight as part of the Archuckle Fellows.

Taylor Goss:
Tonight? This very night?

Courtney Burton:
This very evening at 8:00 PM in G101 at the business school.

Taylor Goss:
This is March 5th, 2024.

Courtney Burton:
Oh, that’s fair.

Willie Thompson:
Do not show up at G101 whenever this podcast airs.

Courtney Burton:
We’re really excited about that. We bought new lights. The theme of the show is Wet and Wild, so it’ll be a great time.

Taylor Goss:
And what are the other features of this improv show tonight?

Courtney Burton:
Yeah, a lot of short form improv games, so I’m really excited about that. We’re also going to do half of the show of long form games in our favorite format. So the format we’re using is, and this will be in the future, so people have already seen the show, but what we do is we do an Instagram interview. So one of the Archucklers, they select someone from the audience. The person opts into having their Instagram feed-

Willie Thompson:
I remember this.

Courtney Burton:
... showed on screen.

Willie Thompson:
I remember this. It’s hilarious.
Courtney Burton: And then we talk about what's happening in their Instagram.

Taylor Goss: I have some juicies back in the day, just running for 4-H State Executive Board or something like that.

Courtney Burton: Love 4-H.

Taylor Goss: Oh my God. You should see some of the posters I made, and not Photoshop, but probably like Windows Paint.

Courtney Burton: Windows Paint that takes me back. But yeah, so interview folks, and then we use their stories as inspiration for our long form improv.

Taylor Goss: Oh, that's fun.

Courtney Burton: It's so fun. It's so, so fun. But yeah, we have a new crop of MBA ones who are joining us for their first show, and they're really jazzed. They're really excited. I got a WhatsApp that they were doing an MBA one only practice last night, and I was like, okay, improv-

Taylor Goss: Oh, wow.

Courtney Burton: We love it. We love it.

Willie Thompson: They want to make sure they're presenting their best work to the audience. I feel that. That's great.

Courtney Burton: Yeah, but it'll be a good time.

Taylor Goss: That's amazing.

Willie Thompson: And just real quickly, our chuckle is, just in case, I don't know if we cover that, but just before-
Courtney Burton:
Yeah, our chuckle is the improv comedy troupe that's at the GSBA, and it's a playoff of Arbuckle, which is the Arbuckle Fellows, is a leadership prestigious fellowship, and we're just like hehe, haha, we're the Archuckle Fellows.

Taylor Goss:
That's great. Well, that's awesome. And I'm sure that we will pick up on the three line of what improv, where that comes up in your life and where that came from. But do you want to rewind it a little bit first?

Willie Thompson:
Yeah, for sure. So Courtney, before we talk to you about the world you imagine, you have this very interesting imagined world statement that I think is very unique in this orientation, but we'll get to that. But let's talk about the world that you were born into and the world that you've experienced thus far. Where are you from and what was your journey here to Stanford?

Courtney Burton:
Yeah, absolutely. So I was born in San Antonio, Texas. Both my parents were military, so I was born on an army base there. But I spent most of my life growing up right outside of Atlanta, ATL. We love it.

Willie Thompson:
Hotlanta here too.

Courtney Burton:
Oh, Hotlanta, God bless. But yeah, I grew up in Atlanta. I love Atlanta so much. I feel such a deep connection to the city. So I grew up in the suburbs. My family were really close, unit of four, my mom and my dad, my older sister, Jazz, she was two and a half years older than me. She was a senior when I was a freshman in both high school and college. I would say she's my best friend. She is incredible. We went to the same college. We both went to Georgia Tech, Go Jackets! Sting 'em!
I studied operations and supply chain in the Scheller College of Business, and we called it the College of Happiness. And it was the happiest place on the Georgia Tech campus.

Taylor Goss:
Without a hint of irony?

Courtney Burton:
Without a hint of irony. I loved Scheller. I was a Scheller student ambassador. I would have donor events in the atrium. I loved Scheller so much.
We had this whole hashtag, it was shcelebrate. I was really big into school spirit, which I mean reminds us of-

Willie Thompson:
I think it was in the spirit period. I think that's-

Taylor Goss:
In the spirit.

Courtney Burton:
Yeah, I guess. I guess.

Taylor Goss:
She's in the spirit and she has the spirit. I mean, that was the most spirited intro to a podcast-

Willie Thompson:
Of the season, so you have to count that, right?

Courtney Burton:
I'm feeding off of y'all spirit. We're giving and receiving at the same time. But yeah, loved Georgia Tech. Loved my time there. I decided to stay in Atlanta after I graduated and started my career at Deloitte Consulting. Was always interested in the healthcare space. I was one of the kids who growing up I was like, "I want to be an orthopedic surgeon." Just very, very focused, very serious about being a physician.

Willie Thompson:
Very specific too.

Courtney Burton:
Very specific. I was really into bones. Growing up, I went to a lot of summer camps, and one of my favorite summer camps was a med school summer camp. So I-

Willie Thompson:
A what?

Courtney Burton:
I cosplayed as a med student at the GW Medical School for a summer before my junior year of high school. I was very focused. I was a very focused child in that regard. But when I got to college, I realized I didn't love blood and I also despised chemistry. And so I was like, you kind of need to be able to do both of those things if you're going to be a surgeon.

Taylor Goss:
They're so important.

Courtney Burton:
Yeah, absolutely. So pivoted a little bit. My family is a big healthcare family, so I was saying, "How can I still be in the healthcare space while not being a physician or a surgeon?" I went into consulting, as one does.

Taylor Goss:
Really?

Courtney Burton:
Yeah.

Taylor Goss:
You know about that?

Willie Thompson:
I know a little bit. Consulting is the best place for two things, when you don't know what you want to do next-

Courtney Burton:
Heard.

Willie Thompson:
And when you need to find another job. Those are two places that are primed for those two things, I believe.

Courtney Burton:
And I mean, I always thought about it through the lens of I was a college kid and I was like, "I don't know what I want to do," like what you said, but I also didn't really want to grow up. And I felt like consulting was a way to Peter Pan it a little bit.

Willie Thompson:
Apprenticeship.

Taylor Goss:
I was about to say Peter-

Willie Thompson:
Peter Pan it.

Taylor Goss:
I use that expression a lot. I get it.

Courtney Burton:
Hey, I see you. I see you. I was like, "I feel like I can try a bunch of different things. I can basically have a bunch of different careers just under one umbrella." But I got there and I was like, "I'm going to be a
healthcare girly at Deloitte." But yeah, I was working a lot in the healthcare system space, working with a lot of hospitals. And in that exploration, I really got interested in the social determinants of health. So that is the 80% of the environmental, social, economic aspects beyond healthcare services that impact health and wellbeing for populations. So started doing more work in the SDOH space. That's social determinants of health, just so you know.

Taylor Goss:
Thank you. We're going to have a glossary at the end of this.

Courtney Burton:
I realize I speak an alphabet soup, so I will try to-

Taylor Goss:
You're doing great.

Courtney Burton:
... nail that down. Thank you so much. I was working in the SDOH space, loved it, and then started working more so in the health equity space because it just kind of made sense. One of my favorite things that I did at Deloitte is I was on the team that built and launched the Health Equity Institute, which is their social innovation hub that focuses on pro bono work and collaborations across the health ecosystem. So loved that. Did that for a few years and then decided it's time for change. So what happens when you still don't want to grow up and you want change?

Willie Thompson:
You go back to school.

Courtney Burton:
You go to grad school.

Willie Thompson:
Yeah, that's right.

Courtney Burton:
So I decided I wanted to get my MBA and really explore what does healthcare innovation leadership look like for me? And so applied to Stanford, applied to Knight-Hennessy, and if I could be very honest, I applied to both the GSB and Knight-Hennessy through the lens of what's the worst that could happen? The worst thing that they can say is no.

Taylor Goss:
Right, exactly. Yeah.

Courtney Burton:
I did not-
Taylor Goss:
Because it's such a moonshot.

Courtney Burton:
Yeah. I did not feel qualified. I might as well try, say yes to yes. And I clicked submit and now I'm here.

Taylor Goss:
Yes and, improv.

Courtney Burton:
Yes and. It's back to improv. But yeah. Now at the GSB, I added my EIPA second degree to really focus on that environmental aspect that impacts health and wellbeing. And so through EIPA-

Taylor Goss:
Is that what most people do with EIPA is add an environment and sustainability angle to something entrepreneurship related?

Courtney Burton:
Some do, right? So in order to do the joint MS, you already have to be on campus. It's either business students, law students, folks in policy school, they're all applying for that second degree. A lot of folks focus on hard tech or decarb things. I'm more so in the human system side of things. My concentration is-

Willie Thompson:
Human and planetary health.

Courtney Burton:
Human and planetary health. You know it, Willie.

Willie Thompson:
Yeah, we do our research over here.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah, I love that combination of terms, human and planetary health.

Courtney Burton:
It confuses a lot of people. For instance, my sister was telling one of her friends that I was doing human and planetary health, and her response was, "I didn't know Courtney had such interest in the solar system." Which is fair. Which is so fair. So I try to frame it around climate and health. And then the longevity aspect is, through the lens of social determinants, through the lens of health equity, I think about how can people be supported as they age. And so I've started looking into the lens of expanding health span, which is the number of years we have as healthy folks.
As opposed to lifespan, which is just the number of years.

Courtney Burton:
As opposed to lifespan, which is the number of years. So in a swirly, twirly way, that is a little bit about me, where I came from and how I got here.

Taylor Goss:
Wow. Hardly swirly, twirly. You've laid out a path for us. There's so many questions. I think I would like to step back a little bit, and you said you came from a healthcare family?

Courtney Burton:
Yes.

Taylor Goss:
How did they think about you also going to healthcare and your choice to not be a physician, and how did their perspective affect yours? And then who did you meet along the way that changed your perspective additionally?

Courtney Burton:
Okay, so backing it all the way up. My mom is an ENT. So your nose and throat surgeon, she did that in the army. And then she built her private practice when I was a kid. So I grew up going to her clinic all the time. My sister has a master's in public health, and my dad is healthcare adjacent because he ran my mom's practice. And so when I say I come from a healthcare family, everyone touched health in some way.

Taylor Goss:
It's a family affair.

Courtney Burton:
It's a family affair indeed.

Willie Thompson:
It's a great Mary J. Blige song

Taylor Goss:
It's Sly & The Family Stone.

Willie Thompson:
Oh, you're right.

Taylor Goss:
Excuse me. Fact check.

Willie Thompson:
Okay. Let's not fact check. Anyway, back to Courtney.

Courtney Burton:
No, I love it. When you asked about their feelings, when I didn't pursue med school, my mom was never pro me going to med school. I was kind of the one being like, I want to be a physician. I see you doing this. You love your work. I want to love my work. I want to help people. This seems like a good fit. And upon reflection, she always told me, she's like, "Courtney, you don't love chemistry. Courtney, you've never liked chemistry. You don't want to do this." She's like, "I think you want to want to do this, but you don't."

And so when I finally made the choice to pursue more of a business path, she was like, "Yeah, I think that this fits." She was always very supportive of me doing things that fit well within my realm of intrigue, that's what I call it, different things that I'm excited about. My sister has always been my cheerleader, so she was always like, "Sweet, do what you think is right." And my dad just, he's happy when I'm happy. But yeah, so that's the family.

Folks I met along the way. Met a lot of folks in Scheller actually. One of my favorite professors, his name was Professor Bill Todd. He was a professor of the practice. Bill Todd's the man. And not like-

Taylor Goss:
It sounds like he would be the man.

Courtney Burton:
Canonically, no.

Taylor Goss:
Canonically.

Willie Thompson:
Canonically, no.

Courtney Burton:
In Scheller, yeah. He did all of the healthcare work. I took all of his healthcare classes. I did a practicum with him where we basically did a mini-consulting project with CHOA, which is the Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, and gave them some recommendations on their path forward on a specific question. I guess that makes sense why I then went into consulting, because I was like, "Oh, I did this mini-consulting project." I don't think I ever put that together. But yeah, Bill Todd was a formative professor in my time at Georgia Tech.

And then when I started at Deloitte, I met some of the most wonderful human beings who worked in the healthcare space, who worked in the social determinants of health domain. People who were thinking about climate and health, people who were thinking about underserved communities, people who were asking fascinating questions. And so I really prioritized my career, and kind of when we talk about consulting, you have to network your way onto projects and you have to really focus on building your community there. I really focused on building my community in the healthcare group, and just the people who poured into me, my managers, some of the partners I worked for, the people who wrote my recommendations for grad school, people I still keep in touch with. They really shaped my perspectives and challenged me to think deeper about the topics I was interested in.
Willie Thompson:
Amazing. And you're sort of laying this naturally as the next point, but how do you think about your Imagine a World statement in reflection of this interest in healthcare and health span? Because we are all by, I think objective measures, young people, and for a lot of people of our age... Well, maybe actually I'll speak to the business school real quick, Taylor, I know, but a lot of our classmates have to deal with the reality they are getting older. The number of injuries that happen to-

Courtney Burton:
Oh my goodness.

Willie Thompson:
... to business school students probably as a share of injuries amongst other grad school students is probably pretty high.

Courtney Burton:
Torn ACLs everywhere.

Willie Thompson:
Everywhere. Torn ACLs. Someone else had a fractured shoulder, apparently, from playing two minutes of basketball. So-

Taylor Goss:
Why did I immediately imagine basketball-related? I really did.

Willie Thompson:
Funny, most of the ones I know are basketball and skiing, which I think also is emblematic of [inaudible 00:21:26] school, but it's something that we don't really think a lot about as young people. I can count on my hand the number of times I have been like, "oh, I'm getting older." One being while I was off my parents' health insurance. I was like, "Oh, I need my own health insurance now." That's the thing.

Taylor Goss:
There you go, yeah.

Willie Thompson:
When these sort of injuries happen to people that you know who are similar age, and it's sort of this afterthought almost to think about, what does it mean to live a healthy life throughout one's life? And can you speak to more of that in the way that your Imagine a World statement came to be?

Courtney Burton:
Absolutely. There's a lot of different threads, so maybe I'll pull on the family thread first.

Willie Thompson:
Okay, sure.
Courtney Burton:
So was always really close with my grandparents-

Willie Thompson:
On both sides?

Courtney Burton:
On both sides. And so kind of watching them age, I don't think I necessarily put together the healthcare interests with the healthy aging interests, but seeing a lot of the challenges that they had growing up kind of stuck with me. So thinking about my grandparents, thinking about my parents now, watching them age, thinking about the different considerations around just everyday activities. Married with some of my work within the Health Equity Institute when I was working at Deloitte, when I was thinking about underserved populations, was really focused on women's health and then as it relates to women as they age. And I feel like that is a segment that no one talks about.

And going back to, Taylor, your question of folks who inspired me, I had a lot of mentors, a few in particular, who focused on menopause, osteoporosis, a lot of the health conditions that disproportionately impact women as they age. And I kind of kept that top of mind, was always interested in this cohort and also at a fundamental level, but I-

Willie Thompson:
Sure.

Courtney Burton:
...kind of feel like I was born to be like 67-years-old.

Willie Thompson:
Like an old soul.

Taylor Goss:
Old soul.

Courtney Burton:
I don't know if I call myself an old soul, but I-

Willie Thompson:
But do other people?

Courtney Burton:
I've heard it once or twice. I feel like I was born to be like 67-years-old. When my parents retired, I was like, "Wow, retirement looks great." I was born to be retiring. All of those things. And then last spring I took a longevity class within the business school. It was taught by one of the healthcare professors here in partnership with the Center on Longevity that sits at Stanford, was fascinated by this class. We had so many interesting speakers, folks focusing on the startup space, people in incumbent organizations in the healthcare domain and beyond.
And then the last piece that really clicked everything together was my internship last summer. I was in Mexico City. It was incredible. I was there all summer, working at a seed stage startup that was focused on older adult health, re-imagining what health insurance and preventative care looks like for folks in Mexico. I was put on building an osteoporosis education and fall prevention product. I loved it. I loved the stories. The space felt right. When I'm thinking about what's next? In business school, as I'm thinking about my future, I was like, I want to stay within the healthcare domain, health girlies for life. I want to still touch social determinants. I'm interested on the impact of our warming climate on older adults.

Willie Thompson:
The climate’s warming?

Courtney Burton:
Yeah, this your planet, it is warming. And so there are all of these-

Taylor Goss:
Willie’s going to the ED school folks.

Courtney Burton:
I'm trying to think through how I can braid all of these interests together and when it percolates up, it came to be into my Imagine a World statement. So high level, long story short, I guess that's kind of all the influences that impacted that statement.

Willie Thompson:
Okay. That's really beautiful. I know that just scrolling through your medium page, you have sort of a suite of writings on aging and health. What's your relationship with writing? What was the origin of the medium and what does the writing mean for you or for the audience that you're writing for?

Courtney Burton:
I started writing those posts this summer. I felt like I was learning so much so quickly and I didn't know where to put it. I was like, where do I put all this information that I'm gathering?

Taylor Goss:
You needed a medium.

Willie Thompson:
There you go.

Courtney Burton:
I mean, I guess. I mean part of it is going back to my family. My family, they're all writers. My sister writes a bunch of blogs.

Willie Thompson:
Your sister’s active.
Courtney Burton:
My sister's active. We love Jazz. She's wonderful.

Willie Thompson:
Jazz is super happy.

Courtney Burton:
She is active on Medium. She contributed to a children's book that's coming out.

Taylor Goss:
Oh, wow. Nice.

Willie Thompson:
School board.

Courtney Burton:
She does everything and we love her. My mom right now is writing a children's book that I'm beta reading right now, which is wonderful. And growing up, I always wrote in my journal, I was a writer growing up, and so it felt like a natural outlet to talk about what I'm learning. In terms of my audience, if I can be really honest, I really didn't consider an audience when I wrote this. I was like, "I'm going to write something for me that I can track what I'm learning in a way, and if this is instructive or helpful for others, sweet." And it turns out a lot of people read it, which is cool.

Willie Thompson:
How do you think they found it?

Courtney Burton:
I hope that they found it interesting. The way that I framed it is I don't have all the answers, that is obvious. I'm percolating on a lot of different things right now and I'm just trying to learn and discuss. And the framing of those blogs is through the lens of here's what I'm learning. I want to share this, I want to process this. I want to ask additional questions that can spur additional thinking and conversation. And people responded. People commented on my posts. Not always in a positive way, but I mean when you put things in public that kind of happens. Yeah,

Taylor Goss:
Yeah, you're going to get feedback.

Courtney Burton:
For instance, going back to climate and how our climate is-

Willie Thompson:
Warming.

Courtney Burton:
... changing and warming.

Taylor Goss:
As Willie has just learned.

Courtney Burton:
As Willie was just talking about, I wrote a blog about the impact of extreme heat on-

Taylor Goss:
Scorching, yes. That's what made me think about-

Courtney Burton:
Scorching summers.

Willie Thompson:
Scorching summers.

Courtney Burton:
I mean, being from-

Willie Thompson:
Which in the South, I mean-

Courtney Burton:
Being from Atlanta specifically, we know-

Willie Thompson:
Hotlanta.

Courtney Burton:
Hotlanta, Willie.

Taylor Goss:
Hotlanta.

Courtney Burton:
You know it well, I know it well. A lot of people comment and they're like, "The climate is not actually changing. It's actually not that hot outside."

Taylor Goss:
"Actually, no. There's a brisk breeze out today."

Courtney Burton:
Which is also instructive for me.

Taylor Goss:
True.

Courtney Burton:
Sometimes I find myself, especially here at Stanford, we might not all agree, but generally we buy into science or people I surround myself with, I guess we buy into science. And it's sometimes helpful just to see what other people are thinking and feeling. So it's been a really interesting exercise writing those blogs. And honestly, I need to get back to it. I think once I came back to campus, I got swept up in the everyday activities, but trying to make some space to do more reflection.

Taylor Goss:
Good term on that, because I mean it really is reflection when it comes down to it. If you're writing it for yourself and using it to organize your own thoughts. For me, that is sitting in my bedroom and writing songs into a voice memo demo kind of situation. And whether I show them to people, whether or not I have organized my thoughts about my life and expressed them in some way, and doing it through writing or through art or however it is, just seems to be one of the most productive ways that you can reflect, at least in my experience.

Courtney Burton:
Yeah, absolutely. And for instance, the center of longevity reached out to me. I did some research with them last fall, but they reached out to me early this winter and they're like, "Hey, we're throwing a healthy aging 50 plus conference at the med school in February. Do you want to be one of our moderators for panel?" I said, "Absolutely."

Taylor Goss:
Absolutely. Yeah, yeah.

Courtney Burton:
Yes, please. Yes and, is what I said.

Willie Thompson:
Yes and.

Courtney Burton:
And I got to interview Kelly and Juliet Starrett, who are leaders in the mobility space, and I still need to write a blog about all I learned from them.

Taylor Goss:
Amazing.

Courtney Burton:
Fascinating people. They come from the fitness world. They come from working with elite athletes, and honestly, they were telling me in their reflection, they turned 50 and they were like, "Everyone's an athlete." So how can we rethink or reframe a lot of our recommendations in a way that can be really accessible for everyday people?

We did a lot of exercises on stage during the conference that focused on mobility and balance. I was their dummy on stage doing the exercises and was deeply humbled by the fact that my balance is not great when my eyes are closed. And so I-

Taylor Goss:
Oh, interesting.

Courtney Burton:
... I learned that I need to work on that. It's something you don't think about. And what they mentioned to me that really stuck with me is as you age, you want to practice these things. These are skills, especially as it relates to balance. Balance is so key. And the purpose of this exercise of balancing on one foot when your eyes are closed is because if you can't do that well, there is an indication that you might fall in the dark as you age.

Willie Thompson:
Right, right. Okay.

Courtney Burton:
So I was like, I need to start balancing more often. And so now in the morning and at night when I brush my teeth, I brush my teeth on one foot.

Taylor Goss:
Oh, I like that. With your eyes closed?

Willie Thompson:
With your eyes closed?

Courtney Burton:
No, no, no. I keep my eyes open. I try to do my eyes closed things when there's nothing else around me.

Willie Thompson:
Okay, okay, cool.

Courtney Burton:
When there's not a negative to falling,

Taylor Goss:
That's pretty cool. I like the concept of everyone is an athlete. However, I do think that if you threw me a basketball, I could fairly quickly disprove it.
Willie Thompson:  
Well, I think it's about broadening the aperture and access-

Courtney Burton:  
Eyyy! We love to broaden the aperture, Willie.

Willie Thompson:  
To use another word, to really access. I think it's all about language, and I feel like even when you talk about your writing or some of the stuff that you've done, even Nike's tried to do, well, they've done this pretty well, I think, in terms of making the idea of an athlete be more inclusive for people.

Courtney Burton:  
Oh, for sure.

Willie Thompson:  
I mean, Taylor, you play guitar. That's a lot of dexterity going on there, athletic dexterity. I actually want to take this maybe to another part of your life, in that, you mentioned healthy life, healthy aging, being a right and not a privilege. What are the things that have precluded people from having access to those things? And what are some of the things that are giving you hope about people having access to these ideas and these opportunities more frequently and even earlier in their lives?

Courtney Burton:  
Yeah, there's so much there. Maybe we'll start from the educational aspect.

Willie Thompson:  
Sure, that works too.

Courtney Burton:  
I think that there's a big gap as it relates to health literacy, as it relates to understanding what is healthy for you. Going back to what I was mentioning around balance, stability, et cetera. But an awareness is key. So when we think about health literacy, getting the word out about healthy behaviors, when we think about changing behaviors or even more expansively thinking about language.

I was having a conversation the other day around ageism and how language has a lot of power, and how ageism is the last "ism" that is tolerated in our society.

Taylor Goss:  
Sure.

Courtney Burton:  
Or more openly tolerated, I guess, that could be debated. But people are more freely ageist than they are of a few other isms. And the way that we talk about older folks frames what's available for them or how they they're able to move through the world. So as it relates to the economic aspect of social determinants of health, retirement, when we think about people staying in the workplace, when we
think about older adults in the workspace, there are a lot of implications of ageism. And so that impacts people's ability to retire, their ability to stay economically viable, et cetera.

And so things that I wish were different? I wish that people were less ageist, and I actually wrote about this in one of my blogs, is I feel like ageist language is baked into how we're socialized. And so even as I'm going on this journey in the healthy aging domain, I'm trying to retrain myself. And it's interesting, the biases that we hold around age, when we talk about, oh, just the old folks home and considering how do we frame when we talk about older adults and aging? And usually it's in a negative light. And so it's how can we reframe our language and change hearts and minds as it relates to what does healthy aging mean as an opportunity and as a positive? And so that's something that I'm trying to do every day. And so for instance, there is a growing number of folks at the GSB that are interested in the longevity space and putting together a WhatsApp so we can stay connected-

Willie Thompson:
Oh, cool.

Courtney Burton:
... and talk about things that we're learning, the care economy, talking about how people are building in the healthy aging space. And I'm always struck by the language that we use when we talk about elder care. There's a lot of tension around using the word elder in different communities, in different groups. I am indigenous on my dad's side, and when we talk about elder, there's a lot of weight to that, and there's a cultural norm and aspect to that.

Taylor Goss:
Would you characterize that mainly as a respectful weight?

Courtney Burton:
Yeah, it's a respectful weight. For instance, during powwows, I'm thinking about powwows because I went to the Stanford powwow last spring. It's the biggest student run powwow. It's amazing. If you haven't been, I highly recommend it. The first thing you do at a powwow before you dance, as a dancer, before grand entry, is you introduce yourself to the elders. So just like that's a small example, but there is just a lot of respect for elders, but in a broader capacity, using elderly and saying kind of terms like that in a derogatory way kind of exacerbates thoughts around ageism. So I don't know. I wish that people were less ageist. I wish that we all started doing the work to retrain how we speak about folks as they age.

Taylor Goss:
I was just watching this earlier today, so it comes to mind, but I wish that everyone would watch the video of Aretha Franklin at the Kennedy Center Honors event. It was during the Obama administration, Carol-

Willie Thompson:
She had the fur on.

Taylor Goss:
She had the fur on.
Willie Thompson:
She had the-

Courtney Burton:
I know exactly what video you're talking about.

Taylor Goss:
Carole King was being honored, and Carole King wrote, You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Woman. And Aretha comes out in all of her grace and royalty and just kills it. And it's one of the coolest examples of someone who is late in their career, who is past what some would say is the prime of her career and just gives this mind-blowing performance that can do nothing but knock away anybody in the vicinity. And you just get this sense of like, wow, she hasn't lost anything. There's so much lived experience that is fueling that performance and that fuels anyone who's had the blessing of having a long life.

Courtney Burton:
I know exactly what you're talking about. It is incredible. It's interesting, in the longevity class, we always talked about the reframe of framing aging as an opportunity. And I always get really interesting reactions when I tell people that I'm interested in the healthy aging space, and I'm also getting a degree in sustainability. They're like, "Aren't those two things at odds?"

Willie Thompson:
Interesting.

Courtney Burton:
"Don't you not want people to live longer because that's bad for the planet?" And I think that's an interesting question. One, I respond talking about health span. It's like I'm not necessarily in the camp of everyone needs to live as long as possible. I don't necessarily identify that way. I'm more so of how can we help people live in a healthy way where they can do the things that they want to do and they're liberated for a longer amount of time. So I focus on the health span piece, and then that connects into the environment, that connects into... For instance, I am looking to take a class in the Doerr School next quarter that focuses on migration as it relates to climate change.

Taylor Goss:
Oh, wow. Yeah. Big topic in Louisiana, with people moving away from the coast because of sea level rise and wetland loss.

Courtney Burton:
As we think about migration and who's able to get up and get out of a specific location. I think that's a fascinating point. But there are just so many different threads within this domain that I'm interested in, that I'm interested in learning more about, talking to more people and doing more reflection myself. As I mentioned, I don't know as much as I would like to know about this space, but I'm interested in building my capacity there.

Willie Thompson:
So you mentioned where you're going to for spring break, and it's one of, what? Five blue zones, I'm assuming.

Courtney Burton:
It sure is.

Willie Thompson:
It's five, right? And first of all, what are Blue Zones for folks who might not know? Can you talk a bit about how feasible is it to bring some of the learnings from places like blue zones to places like the US or Palo Alto or maybe other places that are afflicted by either a confluence of things that keep them from being able to live longer, healthy spans or better healthy spans? I don't know. What's the best way to say healthy span? Better, longer, stronger? I don't know what-

Courtney Burton:
Health span?

Willie Thompson:

Courtney Burton:
Longer health span, I guess.

Willie Thompson:
Longer health span. Okay. Trying to be mindful of my language.

Courtney Burton:
Starting with blue zone. So what is a blue zone? Blue zones are areas in the world where folks tend to live much longer than average. Also, not everyone's on board with the concept of Blue Zones-

Willie Thompson:
Interesting.

Courtney Burton:
... which I've found interesting.

Willie Thompson:
Netflix will have you thinking totally differently.

Courtney Burton:
Yeah, Netflix will have you thinking differently, but some people think that it's more of a marketing ploy. Where I'm going in Costa Rica, it's one of the five blue zones. It's the only blue zone in Latin America. I'm really interested to learn more about the things that are underlying the cultural norms there that are impacting its ability to be a blue zone.
I've done a few interviews with folks for the project, and I ask about the Blue Zone all the time, and I ask about cultural norms and daily life. They talk about life being slow. They talk about access to food, they're close to the coast, and they talk about surfing. They talk about staying really active. They talk about how people walk around. I mean, that was just an example that they gave. And so when we think about Blue Zones, there are so many different aspects that impact an area's ability to sustain life for a longer amount of time.

But I think the interesting question you asked of how can you take some learnings from Blue Zones into areas that are not, I don't know if you can. I think there's a mindset change that would need to happen, behavior change as it relates to working together as a community, like being communal versus individualistic. That has an impact on blue zones or location. So if you're landlocked and you have less access to maybe food in a certain way, that might impact your ability to be a blue zone.

I don't know. I'm interested to learn more. I've been hearing bits and pieces from folks that I've been interviewing, but I'm excited to get out there and see what I find.

Willie Thompson:

Yeah, it'll be really interesting to see what, even to the point of not being able to, because I think even that around having to take something from somewhere else and apply it somewhere else wholesale short changes the notion of even being able to add color to a situation or to a community. And so instead of making places blue zones, you could just make them bluer and add color.

Taylor Goss:

Bluer?

Willie Thompson:

Bluer, or more blue. Sorry. That might be bad grammar.

Taylor Goss:

I think it's great either way. Something I'm curious to note, if you've thought about it very deeply, what do you hope that your life will look like later in life? What do you envision for yourself?

Willie Thompson:

What does your healthy span look like?

Taylor Goss:

What would you like your health span to look like?

Courtney Burton:

When I envision my life, maybe at 67, the age that-

Willie Thompson:

Hey, there you go.

Courtney Burton:

The age that I feel like I was born to be.
Willie Thompson:
Your soul age.

Courtney Burton:
Is it lame to just be like, I hope to be happy?

Willie Thompson:
No.

Courtney Burton:
I hope to be happy. I hope to still be active and be able to go on my walks. I love going on walks in my neighborhood. I love spending time with my family. I hope that I'm still able to spend time with my family, whether it's the family that I have right now or if I have kids at that point, or a spouse, or the family that I find through my friends and relationships. I don't know. I hope to be settled in a community that loves me and that I get to love through just interactions, through community giving. I hope that I'm retired at that point, that I have full control over my calendar. I don't know. I hope that I've built something that has changed at least one life for the better.

I don't know if that's aiming too low, but that is... I hope that I create positive change as it relates to the health innovation space, as it relates to the environment, as it relates to different threads that I'm interested in my career. I don't know. I hope to do some good and I hope to be happy, and I hope to love on people for as long as possible.

Taylor Goss:
Oh, I love that. Thank you so much for sharing that. As we are posting toward the finish line here, something that we do with every participant in the podcast is talk a little bit about the Knight-Hennessy application.

Courtney Burton:
Yeah, absolutely.

Taylor Goss:
Briefly before we get there, could you talk a little bit about how the Knight-Hennessy community has impacted your experience at Stanford?

Courtney Burton:
Yeah. I've loved my time at Knight-Hennessy. As a student in the GSB, the GSB is a bit of a bubble, and I feel like coming to Denning House allows me to learn more about what's happening on campus and in the world. The conversations that I have at the GSB are incredible, but they're super different than the conversations I have here. For instance, I have so many different conversations with our lawyer friends, our friends in the law school about what they're doing, about clerkships, about impact of certain regulations on very specific communities.

Willie Thompson:
Very specific.
Courtney Burton:
And those are not conversations that I would have at the business school. And for instance, last spring, I went to Sierra Camp as part of the Knight-Hennessy Retreats and-

Willie Thompson:
Lovely space.

Courtney Burton:
It's gorgeous. I don't have the words, but was going on a walk with a few friends and was percolating on some ideas as it relates to my EIPA application, I believe. And they gave me incredible feedback and they were like, "Okay, I'm actually a PhD in the Doerr School. So let me tell you about some different programs that are happening in the Doerr School," and supporting you in that way. Being a Knight-Hennessy has allowed me to get this joint Master's in EIPA. It has given a lot of space to explore a lot of my different passions, to meet different people.
I was able to travel to Mongolia last August, would never have been able to go to Mongolia. Learned a ton, made some beautiful friendships, ate a ton of food, learned an immense amount about dairy, specifically in Mongolia through one of my friends in this program who focuses on food history as her PhD.

Willie Thompson:
Amazing.

Courtney Burton:
She's incredible.

Taylor Goss:
She's fantastic.

Courtney Burton:
Incredible human being.

Taylor Goss:
Drop her name.

Courtney Burton:
We love Julia. Shout out.

Taylor Goss:
Julia.

Willie Thompson:
Yes, come on, Julia.

Courtney Burton:
Doing fine. But yeah, I feel like Knight-Hennessy has really just made my experience at Stanford so much more colorful.

Willie Thompson:
Yeah. I was at a lunch with Julia and some other folks with John maybe in our first quarter here, and she was explaining something like the history of cheese or something like that. And I've never been more fascinated about cheese when she was talking about the history of I think it was cheese in that instance. But it's just so interesting to hear... Well, I think it's interesting to hear a lot of people who are experts or adjacent expert on something just talk about it. And she loves talking about it, you can tell. It's very animating.

Courtney Burton:
Oh, absolutely.

Willie Thompson:
So as we come up on the closing, as Taylor mentioned, another aspect that we'd like to talk about is you're improbable facts. They tell in our line that that's probably the place where we spent the most of our mind share and time on how to frame those appropriately. And for you, what are some improbable facts about you that you could share with us? I mean, we have a couple that we had thought of, but we'd like to hear from you first.

Courtney Burton:
Yeah. I feel like one of my favorite improbable facts was in my youth, I regularly attended clown camp.

Taylor Goss:
Oh, what?

Courtney Burton:
And I served as ringmaster during one of my performances. So that is such a fun fact. And I feel like I whip it out more than is appropriate perhaps.

Willie Thompson:
Why didn't we start the podcast there?

Taylor Goss:
I know, about the clown, yeah.

Willie Thompson:
Oh my gosh.

Courtney Burton:
Yeah. And honestly, I feel like there's such a through line at Stanford as it relates to clowning. And Hear me out.
Willie Thompson:
Go for it. Go for it.

Courtney Burton:
During our storytelling class, first year in Knight-Hennessy, I loved the storytelling classes all around how you can tell really impactful stories.

Willie Thompson:
Shout out to Dan and Lisa.

Taylor Goss:
Shout out to Dan and Lisa.

Courtney Burton:
Exactly, exactly. Lisa was actually talking about how she went to clown school, and that was one of my first conversations with Lisa. And I was like, "I see you. As a reformed clown, I see you, Lisa." And then-

Willie Thompson:
This is Dan Klein and Lisa Roland for anybody listening, by the way.

Courtney Burton:
Exactly. And there is a class that I want to take next winter called Intro Clown.

Willie Thompson:
Introduction to clown.

Courtney Burton:
Yes, Willie.

Willie Thompson:
Yes.

Courtney Burton:
You see it?

Willie Thompson:
Yes. I was trying to take it last quarter, but the schedule didn't work out, but we might be Intro to Clown together next year.

Courtney Burton:
You and me-

Willie Thompson:
Probably clowning around.

Courtney Burton:
... finding our inner clown together.

Willie Thompson:
I love it. I love it.

Taylor Goss:
That was a great improbable fact.

Willie Thompson:
Oh yeah, it was. It was a great improbable fact. Anything else? Any others you want to share?

Courtney Burton:
Another improbable fact is when I was applying, I was taking beekeeping lessons

Willie Thompson:
Oh, to Knight-Hennessy.

Courtney Burton:
When I was applying to Knight-Hennessy, I was taking beekeeping classes in Atlanta because I should have talked about this in my dream as a 67-year-old. I want to keep bees. I want to have an apiary.

Willie Thompson:
But not yellow jackets. You don't want to keep yellow jackets.

Courtney Burton:
Not yellow jackets, unfortunately. No. I want to keep bees. And so I was trying to learn as much as possible about beekeeping. It started with an Airbnb experience that my sister bought for me as a gift because we gift each other experiences. But yeah, that was one of my improbable facts as well.

Taylor Goss:
That's so cool.

Willie Thompson:
Such [inaudible 00:48:05] with Airbnb.

Taylor Goss:
I know, right.

Willie Thompson:
Airbnb experience the bees on the bees.
Courtney Burton:
There it is.

Taylor Goss:
Okay, great.

Willie Thompson:
Thank you. I'm practicing for Intro to the Clown.

Taylor Goss:
Right. For the-

Willie Thompson:
I'm just getting ready.

Taylor Goss:
I just love all the how improv keeps popping up in this interview.

Courtney Burton:
Life is improv.

Taylor Goss:
It's fantastic. Life is improv.

Willie Thompson:
Yes. And for our close, would you share any advice or insight or thoughts that you would have for someone that's considering applying for the Knight-Hennessy program?

Courtney Burton:
I mentioned earlier that I was very nervous. I felt like I was out of my depth, and I am sure I'm not alone in that feeling.

Taylor Goss:
I'm raising my hand to the ceiling right now.

Courtney Burton:
And I think something... Thank you so much, Willie.

Willie Thompson:
You're welcome.

Courtney Burton:
I feel like if I could do it over or tell myself when I was applying that being myself is enough, I am going to do my best. I’m going to write down the truth about who I am. I want to show different facets of myself. I want to create a story that is compelling and true to me, something that I’m proud of, but that's enough. And I feel like if I had taken more time and been a bit kinder to myself during the application process, I would’ve enjoyed it a lot more. And everyone here, we are just people. I remember looking at the profiles of the current Knight-Hennessy.

Willie Thompson:
Oh my God.

Taylor Goss:
Core memory for me as well.

Courtney Burton:
Almost not applying.

Taylor Goss:
It's intimidating. It's really intimidating.

Courtney Burton:
I almost didn't apply because I was like, "That's not me." And now it is because I tried and I just said yes to yes.

Willie Thompson:
Love it. Yes to yes. And I would just say I had the pleasure of not meeting, but seeing Courtney twice before ever meeting her in person. This is both at the admin weekend for GSB, which we we're both part of the virtual contingent, that's when Omicron was going crazy. And also for the Knight-Hennessy interviews, which I also noticed her background, I think it was a brown chair or something like that. It was the same background, but it's this right here.

I will say, even seeing Courtney in those environments, those aspects of maybe imposter syndrome or a lack of confidence never came through to me when I saw her engaging or talking to people. So I just want to say to my friend, that is not what was being displayed, probably through a lot of practice and maybe self-talk, but that definitely didn't come up.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah, people can be far more nervous or uncertain than they seem.

Courtney Burton:
Oh, for sure. I did my power poses before that interview.

Taylor Goss:
Oh, nice. Very good, very good.

Willie Thompson:
Well, they worked. And the second is, and I actually did this, talking about the bios, I think it's something that we all relate to, in that, they can, I mean, maybe for some people they're magnetized by that, but for me, well, I guess magnetism works on both ends, that they're attracted to it. I'm very much repelled by it and like, oh, maybe I won't do that. And I think Courtney's done a really good job, even in her bio of looking at it. It's like it's great and it's also not over the top. And I think the more we have folks like Courtney in our communities, I think, the clear eyed we can be about the people we are and the spaces we assume.

So I just want to say thank you, Courtney, for being on this episode and for being such an embodiment of energy and spirit and brilliance in all the ways that you approach such an important topic. So I just want to thank you for being on the pond.

Courtney Burton:
Thank you for having me. This is fun.

Willie Thompson:
Of course, yeah.

Taylor Goss:
It's been such a pleasure.

Willie Thompson:
It's been amazing. So we appreciate you and thank you for stopping by on Imagine a World.

Courtney Burton:
Of course. Until next time.

Willie Thompson:
Until next time.

Taylor Goss:
Until next time. Enjoy your improv tonight.

Willie Thompson:
I know, enjoy our chuckle.

Courtney Burton:
I will. I will. I will. I'll be all chuckling.

Taylor Goss:
Thank you for joining us for this episode of Imagine a World where we hear from inspiring members of the KHS community who are making significant contributions in their respective fields, challenging the status quo, and pushing the boundaries of what is possible as they imagine the world they want to see.
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