



A Business Born Out of Grief

Guest: Jennifer Hilton

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

Welcome back to Episode 24. It is the start of a new year and I am excited to share some new stories with you as well.

Today I'm talking to someone who had quite the journey to finding the career she always had inside of her. It's another testament to me that we rarely get where we need to go in one grand move or in easy strides. More often your perfect path looks like a mess until one day you look back and realize the road has actually been perfectly paved for you. That doesn't make it any less frustrating when you're in the middle of it and all you can see are speed bumps and detour signs and roadblocks, giving you the experiences you need to progress. I assure you, I know how this feels and it's hard, but let me introduce you to Jennifer Hilton for some words of encouragement.

Jennifer is an accomplished recruiter who helps startups and small businesses get amazing employees by teaching proven and effective recruiting, hiring and onboarding practices. I brought Jennifer on this show for three reasons. One, she's a woman of God who is deep in the trenches of faithful career moves of her own, and I appreciate her vulnerability in sharing her story. Secondly, she has years of experience helping people return to the workforce, and job searchers in general. Finally, she really knows what employers are looking for or should be looking for. Her advice is spot-on. Now let's get to it. I asked Jennifer to share what it is she's doing professionally.

Jennifer Hilton: I am starting up some businesses. One is using my recruiting skills, which I've had over a decade of recruiting. That is something that I'm looking into, trying to get a virtual course started for businesses to understand the basics of recruiting and hiring, because I've noticed that a lot of people have great sales skills, they've got great accountants, they've got good customer service, but they don't understand how to hire. One of their biggest concerns year after year after year is

recruiting and hiring. I'm just trying to break it down for them, show them just how simple it really is when you have a plan.

Shelley: What did you do before? How did you get to that part?

Jennifer: Well, that's a long story. Here we go, settle in, get yourself some tea.

Shelley: Okay, I'm ready.

Jennifer: My biggest dream as a kid, a lot of girls played with dolls, played house, I played businesswoman. I don't know if you remember, but McDonald's used to have little briefcase-looking Happy Meals. Now they come in bags. I used to carry that little briefcase box after I ate out of it, and I would put crayons in it and paper and just pretend like I was going to work. I put on mom's high heels, I'd be clunking around, I was a CEO. I didn't know what a CEO was when I was three or four or so but I was in a business suit, big power.

I always had this passion for business and I didn't understand why, but I'd always read business books and I'd get involved in business. I like finance, I love all these different fields in business, just anything business-related. I went to college, that was a huge stepping stone for me. In the meantime, my dad started up a recruiting business. He had 30 years of Human Resources experience. He'd been director, VP of all these different Fortune 500 companies.

He started an employment agency, and for six years, that's what I did. I worked in the employment agency. I did everything from answering phones, cleaning toilets to interviewing different positions whether it was day labor, executives. It was a whole gamut of people. Then I moved away from Texas where I'm from and then moved to Florida. I actually did telecommuting before telecommuting was a thing. This was early 2000s. It was literally just working on marketing for the company and that kind of thing. Unfortunately, the cash flow wasn't there. The sales were great but the cash flow wasn't.

My parents called me one day, I was working a part-time job at Toys "R" Us as a seasonal recruiter, called me as I got to work and said, "We had to shut down the business, we can't pay people." That was probably one of the worst days of my life. It was terrible, very devastating to me. I had all these dreams of being this business owner and taking over for dad. It was just something that I assumed was always going to be there. It was devastating. Here I was working, I think it was 7.25 an hour, part-time, that was where I was left.

I thought, "Okay, once I cleaned myself up," once I went through the grieving process of that, I started applying to jobs, and because I had so much experience already, I was 24 years old, I had a degree and I had experience, which is unheard of sometimes in this field, they were telling me I was not qualified for them, but then I'd try to go for entry-level positions and they said I'm over-qualified. It was a very confusing time for me. Finally a year later, I break into a full-time position as a Human Resources Processor. I was basically running backgrounds on people, entering them into a system.

I kept working my way up the ladder, and then my dad passed away from cancer. That again was another blow I was not prepared for. It was something that really, really hit me straight to the core. After about a year I said, "You know what? I want to get out of Human Resources because it's just too hard. It hurts." I went into financial advising, I became a financial advisor.

Then eventually I got tired of that and thought, "I want to go into real estate," so I became a realtor for a year. I was a million-dollar producer. I wasn't a multi yet, but I was getting there. Again, just like the employment agency, the numbers were there on paper and it looked great, but the cash flow wasn't there. I was actually losing money being a realtor, so I quit that after about a year. It was just costing too much, unfortunately. It's been a rough ride. I went into marketing for a little bit for a real estate-related company and did that for a few years, and then I was let go because I was told that they were just going in a different direction.

The good thing in all this, when I got let go for years, probably a decade now, I have wanted to open up a business. I did everything. I tried cupcakes when they were popular. I made vegan cupcakes and didn't make a dime off of them, but everybody loved them when I brought samples. Let's see. I tried grant writing, writing for grants. I tried resume writing, and I've done that for a couple years. That's actually something that keeps coming back to me, so I'm like, "I'll help you out." It's just a whole gamut of things that I've tried.

Finally one day, I was just crying out to God because you get to a point where you think, "Okay, I'm at the end of my road. I don't know what to do. I'm not happy with where I'm at and I know you've made me for more than this. What is it I'm supposed to do?" I heard Him clearly say, "Use what you know in Human Resources." That's just paraphrasing, but I've been trying to run from that for years and avoid it, but that's what I know and that's what I'm passionate about.

I started formulating these ideas and researching and finding out what people know about hiring and recruiting in general. Unfortunately, it's not a lot. Recruiters know, that's their job, that's what they're supposed to do. Employment agencies are great, but if you don't know who you're looking for as an employer, none of the resources matter. They can't read your mind, and you can't articulate who you need. I'm creating that bridge between candidate, employer, and recruiting agency, whoever they're working with, however they're doing it.

Shelley: It all makes perfect sense that you were running from what you knew for some valid reasons, but because you did all those other jobs, it helped you be more effective where you're at right now. If you had never left the HR arena, you wouldn't know how big of a need this is.

Jennifer: True.

Shelley: You had to go taste all of that, but the thing that you've said to me that's just really standing out as it pertains to this podcast is a recruiter can be fantastic and get you the best people possible, but if you as the employer don't know what you actually need, then it doesn't matter.

Jennifer: That's right. I feel bad for recruiters right now because they are in such a weird market right now. Trying to place people, it's very high demand right now. Employers left and right are saying, "Please bring me people. I don't care who it is, bring me people. I just need bodies who can do the job." You get them bodies that can do the job, and then they come back and say, "Oh, but wait, we wanted this too." It's a lot of time and effort for a lot of people when employers don't know what they're looking for.

When we're talking about people that are applying right now and are probably very frustrated and getting a lot of, I say rejection letters, just because everyone's used to that, but I like to call them God-knows letters because God says no to this job, but also God knows there's something better suited for you. It works in two ways, but when they're getting all these rejection letters, they're not really explanatory. It's just, "Hey, thank you for your application. We've moved on with other candidates that better fit everything. We've got your application on file. Thanks." That's basically the breakdown.

Shelley: Yes, and it's so frustrating. Even when you have that perspective, the God knows, still hurt a little bit. Let's talk real quick about returning to the workforce. I think it's interesting what you said that labor is in high demand right now. That's a good sign for people who want to come back, but also there's never been a better time to demand work-life balance because this last two years, employers have been forced to give people that. What advice do you have for someone who's going back to work?

Jennifer: That's a really good question because we are in a unique time where it's not as taboo, if you want to think of it that way, to return back to work after being at home. Some tips about applying back into corporate America, definitely research the company. That is going to be one of your biggest things. You are family-oriented. Your family is a big deal to you. You did sacrifice your professional career to become a mother and to be at home. That's fine. There's nothing wrong with that. There's no belittling or anything like that there. It's just a different choice and you are blessed to be able to do that.

You want to make sure that they are family-friendly, that they're flexible with time off or whatever you need, make sure that they fit your needs before you fit their needs. That's a huge key, because a lot of times I think what we do as women is we are so eager to please, and we're so eager to accept whatever comes our way because we're so excited that we're accepted. "People liked me, and I'm accepted now and I'm in the group," but the problem is that we have to adjust ourselves to be in that group and we can't really be ourselves. Just make sure that you are being taken care of first, before you take care of that company.

Also to not forgetting our purpose. We have it so easy. Our purpose is to serve God and honor Him and go and tell people about Him. That's our purpose. That's our main purpose. Everything else is icing on the cake. If you like data entry, if you want to be a manager or VP, that's great. God's going to give you ways to do that. You don't have to worry about how to climb the ladder or anything. He'll provide ways for that. Rest assured in that.

Another key is don't underestimate what you offer. Maybe, just as an example, you graduated college and you started a family right away, so you don't have any corporate experience. That doesn't mean that you're not an asset to a company. You offer all the things that you learned in college and any volunteer work and any outside activities that you've done. It doesn't matter if you have a book club and you organize that, maybe you're head of it, you do event planning, you plan events, you host, you are providing a space for people. That's a huge deal.

It takes a while to really write all the skills down, everything down, but in essence, everything that God has put into us, all those yearning and those passions that we have, those can all be very big assets in a corporate setting. We just have to know how to word that so that we can get across to corporations and companies that you are useful.

Shelley: If we were going to couple that with the first piece of advice you gave, you look at the job description and you say, "Okay, they're asking for leadership experience or organizing experience or marketing. I've done those things as a volunteer. How can I list what I've done on my resume in a way that will match what they're looking for?"

Jennifer: Yes, exactly. One of the things I would suggest for format is having a personal statement, explaining I'm really looking to be employed by this employer, for this job because X, Y, Z, and then listing skills right away and bullet-pointing those out, because a recruiter or anybody looking to hire spends an average of seven seconds on a resume. You want to list it out. You want to make sure you make it easy for that employer to read it and to know that you've got those skills that they're looking for.

A lot of times what they're going to want to see are ratios or percentages, and I know that sounds really boring. If, for example, we go back to the PTA mom, maybe you had a budget of \$2,000, you were able to save 10% of last year's earnings over a calendar year, something like that, because we can talk all day about our skills, but until you put the proof on the paper.

Shelley: Right. Okay, give me another one.

Jennifer: Let's talk about then growth, how we grew the book club. We can say that we set up the book club in 2000-XX, whatever year it was, and grew membership to 20 people within X amount of years using social media, using word of mouth, using referrals, however it was. You may not have gotten paid for it, but you're showing it got those skills. It doesn't really matter. What the recruiter or the employer's looking at, they're probably not even going to notice that it says book club, it's just going to look at percentages and go, "Oh, wow, that's really impressive, growth by 10%. That's crazy."

Some of the bigger skills that employers are looking for right now are soft skills. Soft skills are people skills. How you handle situations, how you handle your interactions with people. That's leadership, anything to do with conflict resolution, anything to do

with people, not necessarily software or knowledge that you've had to learn through school. That stuff's really, really big right now.

Shelley: I love that, that's good. Because we're talking about people going back to work, let's talk about age for a minute. Do you think an employer will care?

Jennifer: It's a 50/50. I wish I could be more definitive on that. You've got employers who are awful. They're looking for best friends, they're looking for people they can hang out with. They're not looking at the job itself. They are looking at things like age and what you do and your personal interests. They're not as concerned about your skills as they should be.

Then you have the other employers who make an effort to actually try to fit you well into a position. Yes, a lot of times it's going to be on the candidate, because if you walk in saying, "I'm too old for this position or I could be someone's mom or dad," it's going to come through on how you answer. Take that experience you have, that wisdom and use it to your advantage and say, "I have been in this field, and I have seen things, and I've seen developments, and I'm able to keep up with them just as if everyone else was that age." You don't have to worry about your age.

The ones that are more looking for best friends or to be liked, those needy people, those codependent people, you don't want to work around them anyway. You want the companies that are going to appreciate you for your experience and your input.

Shelley: Yes, it takes us back full circle to you saying, make sure the employer is what you want first. Secondly, God will direct you where you need to be anyway, so we don't need to overthink it.

Jennifer: Exactly.

Shelley: Can you tell me a leap of faith you had to take to get where you are now in your career?

Jennifer: I really think it was the leap of faith going into real estate. I had had some really difficult jobs where I was getting let go a lot. The employers would evaluate me, give me stellar reviews and then a week later tell me, "We need to let you go." The budget would be low, "Well, you're the last one in, so we need to let you go." Just crazy reasons to let me go. They were catching me off guard.

I thought, "I'm tired of someone else being in control of what I need to get done." I went into real estate, and I knew it was going to be a rough game. I knew it wasn't going to be easy or I just made a couple phone calls and I'd be a millionaire. I knew that. I knew it was going to be a lot of hard work, a lot of getting to know people, which I didn't mind, I can put in the hard work. Even though I was in a really lucrative industry, it wasn't for me and I wasn't excited about it. It didn't wake me up and get me pumped up in the morning.

It was something I thought I could just make money with, but I learned a lot of great lessons from it, and even though I was in it for one year, it, a lot of great lessons

came out of it, including how to sell, and how to be confident in myself, and how to approach different situations, and be able to be more confident in those situations, and realizing that action is important, but sometimes the circumstances aren't exactly ideal, if that makes any sense.

It can be very difficult, but outlook, attitude, everything that the Bible talks about when it talks about don't worry about the things of tomorrow, and all the different scriptures that I've read over the years, all the sales things that I was being taught and learning how to establish my business, all those were biblical, all those had already been told to me. It was just in a different way. I tell you, I have much more compassion now towards realtors than I did before. [laughs] That was one main thing I learned, yes.

Shelley: What's an unexpected blessing that you have found in your career, something you couldn't see for yourself? Maybe I'll liken this back to you thought you were going to take over your dad's business, but it didn't work out that way. What's an unexpected blessing that's come from that disappointment?

Jennifer: My dad had passed away, it was the first Thanksgiving. He passed away in April, and Thanksgiving was coming around, it was the big holiday coming up the first time he wouldn't be there. I was just crying my whole eyes out. It was ugly crying and I couldn't control it. I had told God, I'm like, "God, I miss him so much, this is horrible, why did you do this?" We get angry and we don't understand things, and I was still grieving. I was having a really hard time with it.

I just remember God giving me peace and calm and just this rush of love and saying, "Call me Abba." After that, even though it still hurt, even though I still miss my dad, I knew that I had my heavenly father to guide me. Even though I didn't have that same everyday phone call and the voice and all that, I still knew that God was still with me. Ever since then, even through all the tragedies and even through all the hard times and the unexpected things that happened, like layoffs, and let-goes, and disappointments, and hurts, and toxic work environments, it's all boiled down to God being right there with me.

If I just would have listened to him in different situations a lot clearer and done what he said, I probably wouldn't have stayed as long as I would in certain situations, and I wouldn't have made the choices I made, but I don't believe there is a wasted opportunity or a choice. I believe that God's with us. He may want choice A for us, but we choose choice B. Choice B may not be as good as God's choice, choice A, but He's still going to be with us, He's still going to walk with us, He's still going to say, "Honey, I love you and I want the best for you, but your best is over here, not here, but I'm still going to make it okay. I'm still going to make it worth your while here."

Shelley: If the business with your father hadn't ended, maybe you wouldn't have gotten to learn all of that.

Jennifer: I completely agree with you because I really was- I wouldn't say slacking, because my family is not known for slacking.

Shelley: No, but you weren't venturing out either.

Jennifer: Correct. I was staying in my comfort zone and I was almost cocky to the point of, "No matter what happens, I still have a business." I almost looked down on people. That's not how God wants us to live. He wants us to be a blessing to others. Whether we're called to just go to an employer and be paid for our work, then employer is a blessing because they're able to feed your family. You got the resources there, God gave you that opportunity for those resources. If you're an entrepreneur, He's giving you the ability to help other families, including yourself, to feed and clothe and shelter.

Either way, you're still doing God's will, and He's still going to be there, and He's still going to love you and walk you through whatever hurt or pains you feel. All the times that I have been let go from a position, it actually inspired me to create, years and years ago, this was a while back, but it's still applicable to today, a termination checklist for the employee, not the employer, but for the person that got let go. One of the first things I say on it is, always take time to grieve because you just experienced a loss.

Whether you've been there for a week, you lost your ideal vision of what this company could be for you and your future. If you've been there 20 years, you're experiencing that loss. Either way, it's a grieving process. Give yourself time to grieve. When you're ready to pick yourself up, do this stuff. It's literally walking somebody through the process, it's a checklist where they just literally say, "Okay, I've realized that I'm laid off, check. Did I look into my 401(k)? Do I have my life insurance still?" It's going through everything.

Shelley: You just simply would not have gained that experience if you hadn't been on that side of the equation.

Jennifer: It's funny that you say that because this course has birthed out of not only my experience as a recruiter, but also seeing how poorly employers don't understand what they need.

Shelley: Yes. Hearing that, honestly, I know it was a rough journey for you, but it seems really purposeful to me. My last question for you is how have you seen the hand of God in your career?

Jennifer: Every single move I've made, he has always provided for me. I've had the hard times financially, but I've never gone hungry, I've never lost a roof over my head, I've never had to wonder if I'm going to make it to tomorrow. I may have had questions about bills, but it was never an issue of life or death. He has always provided for me, and He's always there to comfort me. It's almost like every time I went through a bad experience with an employer, He was lovingly telling me, "Honey, I knew this was going to happen, that's why I didn't want you to do it, but it's okay, cry on my shoulder, it's going to be all right." He's opened new doors for me and He's given me that time.

Really, my last layoffs, it was very much a blessing because I had a lot of personal stuff going on. We had a death in the family, I got married, I moved. We had so much going on, and there was no way my old employer would have let me have time off, there's no way. I would have had to figure out how to work 40-plus hours, plus get everything done, and still be able to do everything I needed to do. There was no way. God was moving in that situation. He knew I was unhappy, He knew I was hurting, and He knew that that was not the place for me to be. He removed me from that situation and prepared me and said, "Okay, I'm going to let you be silent for a while. I'm going to let you hang back."

It's been such a great opportunity for me to explore. For the first time in my life, I have hobbies. I never knew I had hobbies. I've always been so busy with work and volunteering, and it's all I did. It's a whole new world for me right now, and it's really exciting, and God's been here the whole time. It's really up to you in every situation, in every second of the day to either invite Him in or to push Him away, because He's not going to invade your space, but He will come if you welcome Him.

Shelley: I love that. Thank you for being on the show today.

Jennifer: Of course, thank you so much. I am so honored that you even wanted to invite me. I was like, "Oh my, I get to do a podcast. I'm so excited."

[laughter]

Shelley: It's been great, I've learned a lot from you.

I want to thank Jennifer for being on the show today. If you are looking for help in the hiring process, or you want to connect with Jennifer for any reason, you can find her on [recruiter.com](#). I will link to her bio and her website in the show notes for you.

I loved a lot about this interview, but there are a couple things that stood out to me. The first is that you need to decide if a company is right for you. You really don't want to work at a company that doesn't value you, or they're a great company, but just not a fit for you. Research that and be choosy upfront. Secondly, I love Jennifer's name for rejection letters. I've had plenty of those in my life, but they're not rejection letters, they're God Knows. By that, she means both a no from God and God knows something better is going to happen for you. I love that, helps to reframe it a little bit.

As I wrap this podcast, I can't help but think about Jennifer's dad and how proud he must be of her and the work she's doing, knowing that she's actually building on the things he taught her while he was working on his own career. That makes him the ultimate recruiter.

I appreciate Jennifer for sharing her story and for that personal side of her life as well.

Before I let you go, remember, if you are returning to the workforce and you need a guide, check out my website. I have a workbook you can download, an online course you can buy, or you can sign up for private coaching if you want me to work with you

individually. Either way, you've got this, I believe in you. That's it for now, thanks for listening.

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