

**INTRO:** This is the Elegant Warrior podcast. It's the podcast about elegance in all of its forms. We're talking about our definitions of elegance and how we maintain it in times of trial. We're also talking about how we can advocate for ourselves with elegance, and in a way that makes us most likely to win. I'm your host. Heather Hansen: author, speaker, consultant, trainer and self advocacy expert.

Let's talk elegance.

**HEATHER HANSEN:** Hello, my elegant warriors. This is episode number 215, Karen Hardwick and Being Connected. Karen is a psychotherapist turned leadership consultant with a Masters of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary. She is the author of the book *The Connected Leader - Seven Strategies to Empower Your True Self and Inspire Others*. Welcome, Karen.

**KAREN HARDWICK:** Oh Heather, I'm so glad to be here and I have to say I love the title, *Elegant Warrior*. Just love it.

**HEATHER HANSEN:** Well, thank you very much. I love your book, and I love where you come from in writing this book. And that's sort of where I wanted to start, because I think that often we think that our spirituality, our faith, doesn't have a place in leadership or business. And yet you really embrace putting the two together in a really lovely way, and we're going to dive in deeper. But how did you find the courage to do that, just say that in a world where a lot of people are pushing back on that idea?

**KAREN HARDWICK:** For me, it is about being elegant. I love how you define elegance, Heather, as being very tied, knowing who your true self is. And for me to not talk about spirituality or my relationship with God is like ignoring the fact that I have a son. It's just such a part of me that to not talk about it feels very inauthentic. And yet I say that fully realizing that it doesn't work for everyone. And though I was raised in the Episcopal Church, so one of my most favorite things about the Episcopal tradition is that it has a theology of hospitality. So as clear as I am that I'm a Christian, and as I say in the book, Jesus is my guy, I also realized that other people have different paths and we all have to be welcomed at the table somehow. So when I talk about spirituality, it's also with this invitation for people to show up present to who they are and where they are in that journey.

**HEATHER HANSEN:** And it's such a friendly, welcoming book in that respect, you know, you really it's very clear. Well, I mean so much that the book is called *The Connected Leader*, and on every page there is the argument for the power of connection. And one of the things, it's kind of a weird place to start, but I saw in your Acknowledgments, and I loved this, that you acknowledged other authors whose work had contributed to your work. And first of all, I've never seen that before. And I wish I had thought to do it because I am an avid reader and I love to read, and every book that I've ever read has contributed to my work. But I also think that books can be connections. We can feel connected to authors. Do you think that that is the case and that we can connect in ways other than in person?

**KAREN HARDWICK:** I think so. I really do. If you were to come to my house, you would see honestly, I have a sickness because, I have a lot of sicknesses, but one of them is that there's like 68 books on my nightstand and 244 in my keeping room. And one of the things about social media, like I have this love hate relationship with social media, is that it leads us to really cool people. That that's how you and I met. And now when I read someone's work, I get to reach out to them and oftentimes be connected, right? Isn't that wonderful?

**HEATHER HANSEN:** Oh, it's, I feel the same way. I mean, that's how I got you in this podcast. And there's so many authors that otherwise, and I grew up obsessed with books and never could speak to the authors I wanted to speak to. And so this idea that I can just reach out and sometimes they respond, and sometimes they come on and sometimes we can have these conversations. They build connections that begin with the book. You know, you feel like you if you're lucky and the book is a one that speaks to you, you feel like you know the author, and you start to feel that connection. So I just loved that you did that, and I thought it really reflected how much you love to read and how connected you are to those authors.

**SPONSOR:** Today's episode is brought to you by me. As good as I am at selling my case in the courtroom, as good as I am making a case for my clients and my evidence in the courtroom, I sometimes forget to sell myself, and I want to make sure that you all know exactly how I serve people like you.

So I do a couple of things. I go into companies into associations, and I give keynotes or trainings or master classes, on how you can make the case for your team, for your ideas, for your leadership, for your products and for your services. And we talk about things like credibility, and seeing things from another perspective, and using evidence and overcoming objections. And so I do that for all kinds of groups, like Google, and LVMH, and the American Medical Association, and SavATree. But I also work with some people one on one, and with those clients, those people, I tell them all of the ways that they can use the tools I used in the courtroom to make the case for themselves, to make the case for more money, more resources, more time off, the ability to work from home.

So whether you work in a big organization and your leader, who needs someone to come in and work with your team, or whether you're an individual who wants someone to help you to sell more houses, or be a better teacher, or get more raises, I am the person for you. If you're interested, there's a link in the show notes for us to have a chat. I would love to talk with you about all the ways that I can help you to make the case for yourself and your dreams.

Now back to the show..

**HEATHER HANSEN:** On page, well it's in the introduction to the book actually, it's in the section called Connection As a Superpower. You say, "the ability to deepen connection lies in awakening to self discovery. Period. That is why self discovery is so important." Tell me a little bit more about that.

**KAREN HARDWICK:** Mm, it's the hardest work, right? How do we dive deeply into ourselves in a way that's rigorously honest? Because I do believe, and this is learned over many years, right? I mean, this is not like, we don't like wake up in our twenties thinking all of these things. But this is about the journey. Life is messy, and one of the things I've learned over the many, many moons is we truly can't connect to other people, or do even a spiritual presence, without honestly diving deeply into who we are. In order to have healthy, sustainable connections that are really meaningful, we have to be able to show up with our mess, with our vulnerability, with also our discernment, right? You and I chatted about this a little bit on social media. You were posting about vulnerability, and we were talking about how important it is. And discernment also has to ride shotgun with that. So us humans are wired to connect, our brains are neurologically wired to connect. And so many of us don't know how to do that in healthy ways, or we think we are, and then we wind up in toxic relationships. Or we think we're connecting and we're really hustling for approval. So how do we slow that whole process down and figure out, with the grace of God and the people in our tribe, who we truly are, who our true self is?

**HEATHER HANSEN:** Yeah, and I think that that is, we are wired to connect, but without doing that work, the inner work which may be less wired to do right? We are wired to connect with each other, but maybe that we're less wired to really do that deep work. But without it, those connections just can't be the same.

**KAREN HARDWICK:** No they really can't and it takes time and it's not a one and done. This is a lifelong journey. We think we're connecting, we think we're being really honest. And then something happens in our life where you're awakened even more deeply, and you realize, Okay, I've got to peel another layer back. I've got to learn something else about myself. So I invite people to do this all the time with tremendous self compassion, to do this very softly.

**HEATHER HANSEN:** I love that idea of doing it softly and understanding that it takes time. You know, so many of my clients right now are obsessed with time and feeling time famine and feeling like there's just not enough time. And so when they hear this takes time, there's probably some frustration. What do you say to that? To people who are like, "time is the one thing that I just feel like I don't have"?

**KAREN HARDWICK:** Mhm, yeah, and we all only get 24/7 of however many days we have on this Earth, so it's a very precious resource. In the 12 step rooms, we say time takes time and there's no way to rush the process. And I hate that. I hate that for me, I hate that for you, I hate that for your clients and my clients. But time takes time. And the interesting thing is, the busier I sometimes feel, the more time I actually have to take Heather, to do nothing. To rest, to meditate, to do those things that feel like, Oh my goodness, I'm not being productive. But we have to give into that rest.

**HEATHER HANSEN:** Well, we have to choose it right? We have to choose it, and I think that that's that's a big part of- People feel like, in other aspects of their life, you know, they realize they don't have all the money in the world, and so they have to choose what they're going to buy. And they don't have stomachs that are never ending and so they have to choose what

they're going to eat. But when it comes to time, we seem to think that we don't have to choose, and you have to choose to take the time to make connections. You have to choose to take the time to do the seven steps, the Seven Strategies of Connection, that we're going to talk about in your book. But it's a choice that they have to make. And it really feeds into the first strategy of connection, which is to connect consciously, because that, too, is choosing to do so right?

**KAREN HARDWICK:** Life is a series of choices, right? I mean, we have more agency, then we sometimes give ourselves credit for. We're making choices as human beings, even when we realize we're not making choices. Like, I'm choosing to be on this podcast right now, which is a huge priority for me to deepen our connection. But that necessarily means that neither you or I are doing anything else right now, so every choice means we're choosing something over another thing.

**HEATHER HANSEN:** That's right, it's, it's you've got to know that you're choosing because you're always choosing, always, and that to a lot of people just stresses them out. But when you talk about connecting consciously, and that's the first of your seven strategies of connection, you talk- and this is on page 33, when you talk about the connection reflection for strategy one. You say Come to your work every day with an intentionality to slow down, hit the pause button and be mindfully present to the work and people. One conversation at a time, one email at a time, one meeting at a time. And it's just perfect for this conversation. Why is that mindfulness so important to connection specifically?

**KAREN HARDWICK:** It's a pretty radical thing to do one thing at a time in this world that is calling us to multitask constantly. The more we do one thing at a time, Heather, the more present we are. So if I was focused on looking at my phone while I'm talking to you, the richness of what we're doing here together and wherever it's going to lead would not be as powerful. It's hard to put other things aside and just be present, but it gives us such a richness.

**HEATHER HANSEN:** Yeah, it's so it reminds me of a quote from one of my favorite books. It's called You're Not Listening by Kate Murphy. And she said, You don't have to act like you're paying attention if you're paying attention, and I think that that is what we're talking about here. You know, one thing at a time in conversation, paying attention, not pretending to pay attention not, you know, trying to make eye contact while you're thinking about something else. And that really does allow for the connection.

And it also perfectly leads to your next one of the Seven Strategies, which is listening deeply. And Karen, I can't tell you. I mean, I don't profess to be the best listener, but I work at it, and I work at it hard because I know the value of listening. And so many people come to me and they want coaching on presentation skills. How can I speak? How can I be on stage? How can I be on camera? But really, if they worked on these listening skills and what you talk about in this chapter of the book, their presentation skills, their influence, their charisma, just their energy would be so much better. How did you see the value of listening so clearly?

**KAREN HARDWICK:** I think it came to me, Heather, through my own life experiences, it was always something very important to me. So I trained as a therapist, went to seminary to be an Episcopal priest. If you're not listening in those professions, you're a little bit behind the eight ball. However, it was also something taught to me in my childhood, my mother did it beautifully. However, it wasn't until I had some really big challenges in my adult life. Like when I was diagnosed with breast cancer nine years ago, that that became even more important. Like if I'm going to listen to the world and listen to other people, I necessarily have to learn how to listen more deeply to me. So all the things I talk about in terms of connection have to start with ourselves. I can't listen to others if I'm not listening to myself.

**HEATHER HANSEN:** Oh my gosh, You're, I mean, you're preaching to the choir because I talk about the inner jury. We have to persuade our inner jury first. And so that's exactly right. I mean, everything that we want to give to others we must give to ourselves, including the listening. I have to tell you, Karen, one of my favorite stories in the book is the Praying Mantis story in this chapter, can you tell the listeners about your story of the Praying Mantis?

**KAREN HARDWICK:** Yeah. So on the day that I was diagnosed with breast cancer, I was in Ohio with my husband and our then 10 year old son, and I got the news in the hotel room. You know, as you can imagine, for a mom of a 10 year old boy, the news was just shattering because the first thing I thought of is, I can't die. So I went down, it's strange how we do these things while our world is collapsing. So I get this news and then what do I do? I go down to the pool at the hotel where my son is swimming because life goes on. And he's swimming like nothing happened and he doesn't know, and I'm sitting there and a Praying Mantis landed on me. And Matthew saw me trying to swap this bug away, and he's like, Mom, that's a Praying Mantis! Okay, who knew that? But he did. And it was meaningful to me because it seemed odd.

And so here's listening deeply, I decided to listen to my question, which was like, Why would a praying mantis land on me like, now of all times in the middle of Ohio? And when I did some research on it, the spiritual symbolism of a praying Mantis was really meaningful. The praying Mantis goes really quiet and maintains a prayer position before they go into battle. And I believe that that was sent to me to remind me of how prayerful and quiet I'm going to need to be in order to do the battle I was about to do.

**HEATHER HANSEN:** It's such a great story, and it would not have come to you had you not been paying attention and listening. And listening to that inner voice, and listening to that inner voice that led you to look up the meaning of a praying Mantis. I mean, there's so much there that takes mindfulness in order for those gifts to have been manifested for you.

**KAREN HARDWICK:** It was just, you know, when we listen to ourselves that we never really quite know what we're going to get. So I remember when I was, um hearing Go look up what praying Mantis means. But Heather, honestly, I was afraid. Because I thought, Well, what happens if it means, like, imminent death?

**HEATHER HANSEN:** Yeah, of course. Of course. Yeah. You'd have to spin some sort of story about that, right? Oh, my gosh. Yeah, that's a really powerful story in the book. Now, the next tool is, exhibit empathy, but not too much. So tell us about that.

**KAREN HARDWICK:** I am an empathy-holic. It is. My empathy is my superpower, but it also can unravel me. And so I believe that in order for empathy to be really as powerful as it can be, we first have to show it to ourselves, that self compassion, that really soft self love. And we also have to learn that empathy doesn't mean I'm going to fix someone, or rescue, or address the problem, or step in with my superhero cape. Along with empathy comes the ability to tell somebody, "You've got this like I'm with you. I'm feeling this with you. I'm keeping sacred space with you, and I trust that you can find your own way." So it's that whole dance we do between showing care and also having boundaries that are healthy and flexible and protective of our space and somebody else's journey.

**HEATHER HANSEN:** Yeah, and that chapter, You know, one of the things about this book. I mean, it's a wonderful book, but it's chock full. I mean, that chapter especially, is just chock full of tools and ideas, and you've got the ABCs of empathy and you've got the buzz words. I mean, it's just, that chapter in and of itself is worth the price of the book, you know, to really dive into it. It's truly phenomenal.

I love, though, the next tool celebrates curiosity. Because curiosity is one of the five Cs of an advocate. I always say that people think, you know, when I tell people I'm a trial attorney or was a trial attorney, they often will say, "Oh, I should have been a trial attorney, I'd like to argue." But we don't win our cases by arguing. We win by asking questions and showing curiosity and being curious. And, um, you know, you really dive into celebrating curiosity, which is more than just being curious. So tell us why celebrating curiosity is so important to being connected.

**KAREN HARDWICK:** So that chapter in your book, *Elegant Warrior* I really highlighted a great deal of because I was hoping we'd have a chance to talk about the gift of curiosity. Oftentimes, I will say to the leaders I work with, asking questions doesn't mean that the person on the receiving end of your questions feels like they're on the witness stand. Like questions are not supposed to push somebody back on their heels. It's supposed to be an invitation. Like "Tell me what you want me to know. Tell me more," right? You talk about the judges story in your book, it's beautiful.

**HEATHER HANSEN:** Yes, but so do you. I mean, it's very similar, you've got *Tell Me More* on page 89. I mean, we're both saying the same things which I loved, but yes, yes.

**KAREN HARDWICK:** So, curiosity, I look at it. Look, I don't do any of these seven strategies anywhere near perfect. Like my son will literally pick up the book and say, "you're not exhibiting empathy right now."

**HEATHER HANSEN:** I love it.

**KAREN HARDWICK:** However, with curiosity, I always say it's an invitation. The questions are supposed to be to help people discover, to feel safe, to dive within themselves, and to take some risks. Like a perfectly legitimate answer to a question is, I don't know. Let's figure it out together, right?

**HEATHER HANSEN:** Yeah, and I think that your point is really well made, that questions can serve so many purposes. I teach my people that you can sometimes question to tie people down and make a point and to challenge. But that's not curious, those aren't curious questions. Those are cross examination. When I'm cross examining, I'm not curious, I already know my answers. I am trying to do something very different with those questions than I am with the questions that are meant to connect. And that's what you're talking about here. The questions that are meant to connect are the curious questions.

And then you throw in this little thing in this chapter that has stayed with me ever since I've read the book. And in this chapter you talk about finding ways to step into the Sacred Awe. Tell the listeners about the Sacred Awe.

**KAREN HARDWICK:** I want to ask you a question about that, if I may, though. What about that, the Sacred Awe was so important to you, Heather?

**HEATHER HANSEN:** I feel like one of the things that I aspire to is spending more time in wonder instead of knowing. And I and I can slip into it, you know, this weekend I was at an event. And I purposefully at the beginning, I could feel my attitude, sort of meh, at the beginning. But I said to myself, What can I learn here? What? You know, I want to be in wonder. I want to be open to things instead of closed down. I want to be always wondering, what am I missing? You know, it's one of the questions that I often tell people to ask, What am I missing? And so and I just love the word 'awe', I think it's a juicy word. And so the sacred awe I mean, that just put everything together for me.

**KAREN HARDWICK:** You know, I think that God is in everything, and part of the Sacred Awe is unpacking the ordinary glorious moments of every day. I mean, the fact that we're here, that we're breathing, that we're safe, that there's so many things we can go on and on about that we are grateful for right in this very moment. This is a spectacular moment.

**HEATHER HANSEN:** Well, and I think that that's part of it. I love gratitude and gratitude, journals and all of that. But I think that we say it so much that it doesn't have the same meaning as to be in awe of it. Like I'm grateful for my feet. But like I'm in awe that they can walk five miles a day with the dog. All these little bones, like when you really start to think about these things, you go beyond gratitude and you get into wonder and awe about all of the things in our lives. And so I thought that that part of the chapter was such a great reminder of that, and just a great thing to remember as we go through our days.

**KAREN HARDWICK:** Look, life is really messy, right? I mean, it's messy. We're all carrying a whole variety of stuff. And yet I do believe we live in the middle of the miraculous. And part of our job is to be intentional about noticing as much of that as we can.

**HEATHER HANSEN:** Well, and I think that's something that you have done is not just notice it, but give people a way to point it out and to talk about it and to honor it and so that we can continue to sort of, you know, with the things that we focus on grow. And so this entire book, we're not gonna have time to go through all seven of the strategies of connection guys. But they are beautiful, the three that we haven't talked about are Demonstrate Accountability, Navigates Chaos, and Walks with Confidence.

And you want to get this book for the conversation about the sacred awe, for the conversation about the praying mantis, for the conversation, the big, juicy chapter on exhibiting empathy. But it is a beautiful book, Karen, and one that is going to impact your leaders for years to come. What do you think, you know, you have worked with leaders for so many years across so many different types of business. And before we wrap up, this is a question that I wanted to make sure I asked you. What do you think is the biggest roadblock towards connection for those leaders that you work with. Is there one thing or one of the seven strategies that they struggle with more than others?

**KAREN HARDWICK:** I'm going to say it's about a leaders inability to do the courageous inside work, to connect consciously. Connecting consciously in that whole self discovery process is so difficult. And were such masters at self deception and denial. And the more successful that people become, the more the outside trappings kind of protect them from that. "Why do I have to look at anything? Look at how much money I make. Look at my position. Look at my role." So I think the great resignation didn't just happen. We have been creating this for a long time. So the great resignation can actually morph into the great awakening as more and more leaders realize that the work and their businesses is really about looking on the inside and not just to the outside for a solution.

**HEATHER HANSEN:** Yeah, I love that. I love that you go back to where you started. I mean, your answer to that question is where the book started and the importance of self discovery and and the research backs it up. I mean, HBR did an article recently about self awareness being one of the key traits of a leader. And so, you know, the way that you lead this book and it's inherent in every page of the book. So guys, we'll have a link to the book in the show notes. The book is *The Connected Leader: Seven Strategies to Empower Your True Self and Inspire Others*.

Karen, before we let you go, we want to make sure that we ask you the same three questions that we ask every guest. And the first question is about elegance. And you so kindly pointed out my definition of elegance as we began. But the root of that word is to choose. And so we believe that you choose your elegance. What does that word mean to you?

**KAREN HARDWICK:** Yeah, I gave a lot of thought to this Heather. I reread your book last night. For me, elegance means showing up real graciously, honestly and also saying “I am authentic. And in that authenticity, I want to be able to tell my story in ways that inspires other people.” I had to laugh because I got this email from somebody who had spoken to me a couple of days ago and in the email Heather, they said “I was so starstruck when I spoke to you, Karen, that I could hardly speak.” And this is the elegance part for me, that made me laugh because I'm thinking, if only they could see right? Real and raw, and I try to show up as real and raw as possible because I think in that there is a gift of elegance

**HEATHER HANSEN:** Well, and I think that part of that email from that person is probably that they saw the best in themselves and you. You know, you showed them. But I think that that's often the case. And so I think that that is, it is beautiful that you received that and probably helped that person with a little bit of self discovery, too. So it's lovely.

So the next question is, what book, other than your own, would you recommend for my listeners?

**KAREN HARDWICK:** So I recently read, last weekend actually, it was snowing here in Atlanta, it was a perfect weekend to just read, a book by Sarah Sentilles called Stranger Care. And it's a heartbreaking book about her journey as a foster mom. But in the book, she talks about the power of love and connection and how we are bound together as strangers and how no one really belongs to each other. And it's in the midst of this raw and real pain and love and breaking wide open. So it's beautiful, and it's a hard read and a wonderful read.

**HEATHER HANSEN:** What a great recommendation. I had not heard of that book, so I will add it to my own list as well. And then my last question is my favorite question. It's the most fun question. Your answer to this question will be added to the elegant warriors. Spotify playlist. Karen, When you are walking onto the stage of life, what song is playing in the background?

**KAREN HARDWICK:** Oh, man, it's so hard for me. But I chose rescue by Lauren Daigle. Are you familiar with it?

**HEATHER HANSEN:** Oh, yeah. And I love her. I love her.

**KAREN HARDWICK:** Love it because, you know, it reminds me that how when we walk on the stage, metaphorically or literally, people really think we've got it all together. And how many times have I sent up an SOS to God to say “I can't do this anymore.” And how God shows up with his army of angels in some miraculous way that creates awe for us. So God is there and always meaning to walk beside us, to rescue us and love us and lift us up. So I think that would be my song.

**HEATHER HANSEN:** I love it. Karen, Thank you for your work in this book. Thank you for the work you bring to the world. Thank you for connecting with me and the listeners. And thank you for coming on.

**KAREN HARDWICK:** Thank you. Heather was a real joy. I really enjoyed it. Thank you so much.