

EPISODE: 19 See Jane Diversify Mentoring with JANICE OMADEKE

Kelly: You are listening to the See Jane Invest Podcast, episode 19. See Jane diversify mentoring, with Janice Omadeke, CEO and founder of the Mentor Method, an enterprise SAS Platform that matches diverse talent to mentors in Fortune 1000 companies and helps those companies with their inclusion and retention.

Kelly: Hi, I'm Kelly Keenan Trumbour. As Angel Investor and film producer, there's one question I always ask myself and the women I mentor. What does it mean to invest in yourself, and not simply wait around for someone else to invest in you?

Kelly: If you wanna play big in that places that might not be familiar with your voice, your brand of leadership, and your place in the world, the first person you should be expecting to back you is you. So if you're craving a conversation that goes beyond fighting for a seat at the table and instead talks about how to take over the whole damn lunchroom, you're in the right place.

Kelly: Welcome to the See Jane Invest Podcast.

Kelly: My next guest, Janice Omadeke is a female founder I had the pleasure of meeting at SXSW this year. I judged a start-up of the year competition and she was one of the finalists. She was so impressive I actually really wanted her to go on and win the whole thing, but unfortunately me and several other female judges didn't get our way. But we really put the plug in for her.

Kelly: Janice is the founder of The Mentor Method, which is an enterprise SAS Platform that matches diverse talent to mentors in Fortune 1000 companies. Besides just matching talent, she helps these companies with their inclusion and retention. She really spotted an issue that I thought was important which is there's a lot of companies out there that are giving lip service to the idea of diversity and making sure that diverse talent pools have a sense of inclusion. But what are they actually doing to make sure it happens, and that it happens the right way?

Kelly: So she came up with this platform that I think is just great. She's got a lot of momentum behind her as SXSW has shown because in addition to that, she was a DC Inno 50 on Fire, a 2018 start-up to watch, and is the MassChallenge Texas Accelerator ... she's in that program. She's passionate about mentoring as a means of maximizing the potential of employees as well as increasing their commitment to a company.

Kelly: You'll wanna check out her company after you listen to this website, because I'm sure a lot of listeners out there would love to know more about best practices. So take a listen and let's dive in. Enjoy the show.

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Kelly: So today we have Janice Omadeke on the program. I had the pleasure of judging her at SXSW 2018 start-up night. My only disappointment was that she came in third which is still incredibly impressive, but in my book and in many of the other female ambassadors who were there, we wanted to see her walk away with number one or number two place. Still an incredible showing.

Kelly: She is the founder of The Mentor Method. This is a company that is trying to see how the world can look at people in tech, women, diverse populations, as something more than a box to check and a way to actually really diversify the workplace in important ways. So Janice, welcome and why don't you tell us a little about you?

Janice Omadeke: Thank you. Thank you so much for having me. As you said, CEO and founder of The Mentor Method, based in DC. However, our customers are national and soon to be global. The Mentor Method is an enterprise platform that helps companies create better mentor relationships for their diverse talent. It helps those companies increase their inclusion and retention of that diverse talent base.

Kelly: Let's break that down a little bit because I think-

Janice Omadeke: Sure.

Kelly: - that most people think about diversifying the workplace I think what comes to mind is really boring luncheons where somebody gets up and tells a room full of HR professionals or the corporate team, like, hey we are not diverse enough! Let's change things up. Here's some good practices. Or you're talking about headhunters or recruitment platforms. What makes you different from what I think most people kind of think of when they think of hiring tools or ways to find new talent?

Janice Omadeke: What really sets The Mentor Method apart is the way in which we're creating the mentor matches. In talking to the Fortune 1000 companies that we work with and are in our pipeline, they're still using a member of HR at the senior associate level, creating a spreadsheet to build a mentorship program from scratch. That's not scalable and it's not efficient and it doesn't take into account who your actual team members are as professionals and making sure that they have the right matches in order to be successful.

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Janice Omadeke: With The Mentor Method, we have an algorithm that reduces implicit bias and makes a stronger match. Also, we have a four month methodology in our platform that allows the company to essentially plug and play. Put in their employees as mentees and mentors. Walk them through this four month professional skills development process, and the company gets a dashboard in reporting to see their inclusion metrics. See what areas of improvement need to happen within the company, so they can make better business decisions about the right succession planning, budgeting, etc.

Kelly: So what you're saying is typically what happens inside of a corporation is you have one HR person. They create a spreadsheet that looks at who's in house. Who can be a mentor to people who are either in the company already or who might be coming from outside the company. Your concern is, hey that's just one person and there may be some biases there. There may not be enough information for what's actually needed.

Kelly: So you created something that's using an algorithm. It's actually a platform that's taking into account what the company has in its Human Resources, in the people in the company as mentor assets. Is that right?

Janice Omadeke: Absolutely because even if you're in HR, everybody has some level of bias. That can easily come into account when matching up your talent to mentors at a human level. So our double blind system allows companies to make a match based on who their employees are versus what they already know about them.

Kelly: Let's back up a little bit. Who's your primary customer? Is it the companies that wanna diversify, or is it the people who are looking to get jobs in those companies?

Janice Omadeke: It's the companies that want to diversify. So our key partners are chief diversity officers, heads of talent management, and learning and development. They're tasked with the incredible yet sometimes daunting task of increasing workplace inclusion and increasing retention of their diverse talent within the companies.

Janice Omadeke: Our end users, however, are diverse talent and those that are mentors within the company.

Kelly: What happens after somebody from a corporation finds you and decides that you're a great fit for what their company needs? What's the experience like? Why would they use you and not what else is out there?

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Janice Omadeke: The reason we have customers, and the reason people come back to The Mentor Method is because we have a stronger understanding of their real pain points. We don't add a lot of fluff. We don't add extra bells and whistles. If somebody needs an airplane to get from point A to point B and they don't need a rocket ship, that's exactly what we build.

Janice Omadeke: Our platform is also very plug and play and customizable. So you're able to get data and reporting as per your success metrics and what matters to you and not something very boiler plate that isn't personalized to your specific company.

Kelly: Why even do this? I think from a big picture standpoint it seems apparent that so many different work spaces need diversity. Whether that's inclusion of more women. Inclusion of minorities. Inclusion of just any different community that isn't well represented in Corporate America. I think everyone can get behind that. But why is it so important that the way it gets done is done in the way you're trying to do it?

Janice Omadeke: It's important that the workforce development and inclusion of diverse talent is done the way the Mentor Method is doing with Fortune 1000 companies because we've seen the past models and they're not working. That's why there's a space for us, right? We've seen the job boards. We've seen the brown bag lunches as you were mentioning. We've seen the consultancies. There's still a big issue with how companies develop and retain their diverse talent.

Janice Omadeke: Companies are spending easily 50-400 percent of each employee that leaves, their salary and turnover costs in order to replace them. If you spent more time getting to know those employees and developing them in a way that shows your investment in them, while also aligning their goals and metrics to what the company's objectives are, everybody wins. You create a more inclusive company, keeps the company more competitive in the market. You're also creating in the next future leader, that next great idea generator that you need in order to stay competitive in the market.

Kelly: Talk to me about some of the stats that are out there. What does Corporate America look like? Why do the people that you're trying to recruit to use your platform need you?

Janice Omadeke: Yeah, so 14 million women and people of color, cite a lack of inclusion on the reason for leaving an employer. That equates to about 37 percent of a company's workforce. When that happens, it takes between six to nine months to replace that one employee. It can cost between 50 and 400 percent of that person's salary in those replacement costs.

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Janice Omadeke: Let's say you're at a company with 100,000 employees or greater, if 37 percent of their workforce is motivated to leave because you're not taking inclusion seriously, they're each making between 80 to let's say 150,000 dollars, that's millions of dollars being spent just to replace them.

Janice Omadeke: A company could have saved had they focused on workforce development that has a specification in inclusion.

Kelly: Let's talk a little about what brought you here. I read that for you as a woman of color in tech, you actually have certifications from MIT and the Harvard Extension School, but you still had moments where you felt like you were the check box. You were the token. Can you talk a little about that?

Janice Omadeke: Yeah, I think you hit the nail on the head. I've always been very driven just naturally driven to make a strong career for myself. Being in the DC area, typically worked in the Fortune 500 world, but more specifically in defense contracting. It was always the old boys club, so even if I was the most qualified or a top performer, when it came to cooperate mentorship programs often times I was matched with the only other woman. Or they only other person of color versus seeing my potential and seeing where I could go.

Janice Omadeke: When that happens, exactly like the other 14 million women and people of color have experienced, I took my ideas and found other opportunities where those investments would be made in me.

Kelly: What was the experience like when you got paired with somebody that you had the inkling that the only reason you were paired together was that you shared either the same gender or you were put together because of race? What was it like for both you and the mentor in those relationships?

Janice Omadeke: It was interesting because we both knew what it was. In that situation, we were both like, yeah okay, hello other woman. Oh that's right, you are the only other black person to sign up. Awesome. It can be demoralizing. There's obviously this [inaudible 00:12:57] comradery like, well okay, we know why this company is doing this, and we could talk about it, but at the end of the day the engagement dropped off because we knew that it wasn't because there was something deeper there. We were just checking boxes.

Janice Omadeke: That didn't build a strong mentor relationship. Even if you're going through the process and putting in as much effort, if you don't have anything else in common besides the way in which you were born, that's just not enough to make a strong mentor relationship no matter how hard you try.

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Kelly: No, it's true. Even with what I do with See Jane Invest, when I first started my one criteria for investments was that I wanted to invest in women start-ups. That's kind of like a giant wide vertical for most investors. Usually people narrow down into something like thin-tech, ed-tech, med-tech, something like that, and I was like hey, I wanna back women.

Kelly: It was interesting because in the years that I've been doing this, I sometimes would get people who would come at me and say, so you just invest in women and that's all? It's like, no actually, I would actually find it insulting and I hope another founder would too, if I said you deserve money just because you're a woman. It's like I'm only going to back the start-ups that actually have resonance with what I think is going to work in the market and have a good idea that I feel like I can bring some expertise to.

Kelly: So I can only imagine in those early days of starting your career that as nice as it might be to be paired with somebody else who is perhaps another woman, another person who shares your race or background, that's not gonna guarantee that you can benefit each other. You may be looking for skill sets that somebody else entirely could offer.

Janice Omadeke: Correct.

Kelly: Yeah. Were you able on your own after you got paired in these weird ways to find those mentors for yourself?

Janice Omadeke: First off, that is a great point. I think it's also a little insulting when a corporation assumes that's all that's needed to create a strong mentor relationship. You need somebody that really gets you beyond just demographics.

Janice Omadeke: But to answer your question, I did the typical route of networking events, LinkedIn stalking, trying to find people within the companies that I worked for on my own, but it was a challenge. It was very difficult. It took a really long time for me to find the right career mentors.

Kelly: What led you to come up with this system? Clearly this is your start-up and you're putting this out there for corporations to use and you're saying it works. What led you to think, okay, this is how you do it?

Janice Omadeke: A lot of user testing. Also being married to the problem I wanted to solve-

Kelly: Yeah.

Janice Omadeke: - and being flexible in the solution. Right?

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Kelly: Yeah.

Janice Omadeke: I had some hypotheses. We started off actually as a consumer product to test the algorithm while we were going through patent filing and all of that. See who the buyers were. Get some more data on the pain points in industries that people were coming from. That helped us build a strategy for our enterprise pivot that took place last summer. That helped us really position ourselves strongly. We listened to the market. We listened to the end user as well as our initial buyers.

Kelly: I think that's really important. I've had a lot of conversations where what can often drive a company to do well, is the founder, like you said being married to the problem a little bit, cause it gives you such unique insight as to why this has to exist. I can imagine when you're looking at all these different ways to grow and scale, you could lose your path unless you have that sense of, nope, if I had to live this problem again, this is what I would expect to happen. This is how we're gonna cut off those problems or open up these opportunities.

Janice Omadeke: Absolutely. I think as an entrepreneur and as a founder you have to be able to make those decisions and make them quickly. I'm a big believer in following my gut. It still hasn't led me wrong in the 30 years I've been on this earth. I trust it no matter what. If my gut is saying, well lets test this for three months and see what happens, I'm flexible with it. I think you have to be adaptable and also listen to who's paying. Listen to your buyers and figure out how to make sure that you're building something that's really an aspirin versus a vitamin.

Janice Omadeke: One thing that was also helpful for us was making sure that there's a business case behind what we're doing. Often times mentorship and workforce development and diversity and inclusion, human capital, whatever synonym you want to use within those names, can often be put into just social impact, only meant for non-profits, and The Mentor Method is for profit, and an actual business case.

Janice Omadeke: So making sure that if we were speaking to, even if it is someone within HR that would understand this, making sure that we have the numbers and the studies and being able to illustrate the real business case for why companies should focus on inclusion. Why The Mentor Method helps with the development and matching of their diverse talent and what that can do for them in terms of market expansion and future growth as well as profit gains. That was very important and that really helped us increase our pipeline and opportunities.

Kelly: I think that's interesting that you mentioned you trust your gut. This is something that as an investor I listen for and it kind of has a spectrum. Because I think one of the more over used concepts in the start-up world is the just do it mentality.

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Janice Omadeke: Right.

Kelly: Just do it has a lot of risks, but there's something different between jumping in without any sense of what you're actually getting into and trusting your gut. I also think that women especially are very good at listening to their gut but they're not often great at understanding why they should trust it. I believe Malcolm Gladwell was one of the people who talked about how we really have like our own little inner computers and when you have a gut response to something, sometimes it's actually a very quick and precise calculation. As opposed to some woo woo, hey, I think the stars are in alignment and I should just do this.

Janice Omadeke: Right.

Kelly: Can you talk about how you distinguish as an entrepreneur between that kind of gut response and just the sense of hey, I'm gonna wing it?

Janice Omadeke: That's a great point because sometimes you do have to wing it. I do not know everything. No one does, right? Otherwise, we would all be yachting with Beyonce, right? Even then, she's amazing but even she doesn't know everything, right? We're all humans.

Janice Omadeke: There are definitely moments where I'll sit back and say, you know what, let's try these three outbound strategies and see which one sticks. Then those moments [inaudible 00:20:35] because it could sit there and tinker between changing the word a to the, or pulling out different synonyms for other words but you have to go out and test things otherwise nothing's ever going to get done, right? So certain things you just have to jump in.

Janice Omadeke: Other times, let's say for example, speaking with investors or having a sales call or team building, or reviewing the market and figuring out okay, what are who are going to be our next 30 targets and why? I do trust my gut on that simply because ... I mean again, it hasn't led me wrong. I think whatever vibes or energy you're picking up from the other person, you should definitely pay attention to those. Especially if it's something that makes you feel uneasy, I typically take a moment and figure out okay, what is making me feel uneasy? Did I not eat today or is it actually because this person makes my skin crawl? Take a moment to be very self aware but if it's a matter of chemistry or something else I always listen to it.

Kelly: I think that's really an important point too of understanding the situation you're in, the environment your body and mind are reacting to-

Janice Omadeke: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

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Kelly: - because there are a lot of just self defense and self preservation ways that we navigate the world, but I really think in terms of digesting lots of information, technical information, relationship building, I think a lot of entrepreneurs discount what they already know. That's where the whole gut response comes in. A strong entrepreneur knows how to take that and mobilize it.

Janice Omadeke: I agree completely. I'm very proud of that fact that I was naturally wired to do that. Naturally where I came from, but it's just sort of a natural instinct for me to do that. Its been very helpful.

Kelly: I would imagine that you probably had to be adaptive. Can you talk a little about your background? I know that you're a first generation American.

Janice Omadeke: Yes.

Kelly: Can you tell me about your family's background? How you got here and what that means to you?

Janice Omadeke: Absolutely. As you said, I'm first generation American. My parents immigrated from the Congo back in the 70's. They didn't even know each other. They just came with faith and the dream to make it and to build a better life for a family that they didn't even know they would have.

Janice Omadeke: Growing up there was that mentality of you've already made it. You're here in America. Things could be a lot worse and we've seen a lot worse. So I've always had this strong understanding of gratitude for the opportunities that could happen here and making sure that I'm capitalizing on those. Really maximizing any door that was opened so that I could continue that process and sort of build the next step in the story that my parents built for us.

Janice Omadeke: I think that I'm a byproduct of tech and mentorship, and what happens when those two come together. Growing up, my parents did great. They did what they could but there was a point when there were six of us in a two bedroom apartment with roaches. My dad was working three part-time jobs and this guy gets into his line at the bank where he's working. This white male and has a conversation with him. Sees his potential and sponsors him to take computer classes. This was back in late 80's early 90's.

Kelly: Wow.

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Janice Omadeke: My dad did it. In a three year span he went from those three part-time jobs to getting a security clearance and working in IT at the Pentagon. That took us from that two bedroom situation to a nice home with a yard and in a good school district.

Janice Omadeke: When I think about the 2 a.m. mornings and why I'm perfectly fine with going to bed at 2 and waking up at 5. Whether it's for a job in a Fortune 500 or building the Mentor Method, it's because I understand the privilege and the opportunity to even have the option of doing that. We have a lot of family overseas that would kill for even the slightest chance to do what we're doing today.

Kelly: I think that story of your dad, I mean talk about emblematic of everything that you're trying to do with the Mentor Method that he's in line at a bank and some random white guy comes up and they have a conversation-

Janice Omadeke: Right?

Kelly: - and they spot the potential in your father. That's a classic example of, who would pair those people together? It happened and they wound up being exactly made for each other. That's an amazing story.

Janice Omadeke: Thank you. I think it also, in thinking about that, I'm like there's the business case right there. When I think about if people would say, well shouldn't there be some sort of demographic similarities that way people feel comfortable, I always push back on that. Obviously I don't share this story every time in a sales meeting. Who has the time for that? I think about that and that's absolutely ridiculous. You do not need to look or sound like the person you're being matched with in order to change someone's life. You really just need to have the willingness to step up on both sides. Have some sort of ethos alignment and be willing to make it work.

Kelly: It's really interesting you say that because when I was growing up in the 80's the bring your daughter to work day started.

Janice Omadeke: Oh yeah.

Kelly: It's a great concept but when it first started there was a tendency for it to be about women bringing their daughters to work so that little girls could see a woman working. Which is fantastic, but I remember my dad making a comment about it and he said, cause again, this is the 1980's, he said I like what they're trying to do, but I really think the emphasis should be on the daughter's going to work with their fathers.

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Kelly: Right now, the majority of women are working outside the home as nurses, teachers, in these roles that are wonderful, but they don't represent everything that's out there for intelligent young women. I always remembered that cause I loved seeing other women do work but it was really in kind of looking outside of what I knew as a woman and outside of just the network of women that were in my immediate grasp that I could even understand what potential was really out there.

Janice Omadeke: I think that's amazing. Good for your dad being ahead of the curves. I think it's so true though. Being able to diversify your perspective and see what's out there can really change your life.

Janice Omadeke: Growing up, entrepreneurship was not something I ever saw. I did not know that I would be an entrepreneur until I came up with the idea of the Mentor Method and was no, this is what we're doing. A bit of a gut reaction, but also a bit of a just do it. Going back to what we were previously talking about.

Janice Omadeke: I think seeing women like yourself and seeing others out there and even seeing men. Shark Tank is like what, 80 percent men on the panel?

Kelly: Yeah.

Janice Omadeke: Often times. But seeing other entrepreneurs regardless of whether or not they look like me or came from a similar background, showed me that it's possible. I looked at their best practices. Saw what they did wrong. Listened to all of their past hang ups and things, and it really helped me. They were like my virtual mentors because I hadn't seen those examples. I think it's really important to broaden that scope for people that way they know what's possible.

Kelly: I think it's no accident that immigrants and children of immigrants wind up being some of the most phenomenal entrepreneurs.

Janice Omadeke: Oh yeah.

Kelly: I mean if you think about the skill set that you have to adapt to just by nature of basically living at home in one culture and then out in the world in an entirely different one. Often going between multiple languages. Then throw into the mix the time period when you and I were growing up. The internet came into existence when we were young. You were probably younger than I was, but to able to adapt to that. To translate it back to your family. To then go out and excel in the world. That you're the pioneer of doing things in that world that your family can't give you guide posts for. That's pretty much the training ground for being an entrepreneur I think.

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Janice Omadeke: Yeah. I was fortunate in that my parents took a strong liking to tech and that's how I got excited about it, early on. My parents have this picture of me sitting on my dad's lap when I was four or five, while he's building a computer because my dad is a fabulous nerd like that, and I love him.

Janice Omadeke: I grew up in a home where tech was acknowledged. I remember seeing PC World magazines always coming in and things like that. In fact, I remember being 10 or 11, and this was back when AOL was coming up and all those things and I wanted to go to a Backstreet Boys concert. My dad brings out this HTML for Dummies book. Had no idea HTML was on my end. He's like, I'll consider letting you go to a concert if you follow these instructions in this book and then each page you make is a reason why you think you should go. I wanna see five of them. He put together tabs. He's like, look you can even make colors if you out these numbers ... I had no idea that I was learning to code. I just knew I wanted to go see Brian Littrell on stage and give him a teddy bear. Right?

Janice Omadeke: Fast forward 10, 11 years in my first cooperate job as the lead graphic designer for a defense contracting company and they put the rule of updating the entire cooperate headquarters website on my lap, looking at the code there was that bit of muscle memory there that I didn't realize I had until looking back and I was like oh, god that's right. That's perfect.

Janice Omadeke: So I'm grateful for my parents for teaching me the importance of tech early on. I also think that being a first generation kid made me a work horse. A thousand percent. I've seen my parents work extremely hard. All of my relatives and family members work hard. There was definitely this school of thought of well, I'm sorry you have a slight sniffle but you don't have malaria. So feel free to take some DayQuil and let's go to school.

Janice Omadeke: I'm grateful for that now because I'm just much tougher and more resilient and more adaptable because of those sorts of things.

Kelly: Absolutely. I think it speaks to the fact that your father was getting you to learn HTML. Was he interested in tech when he was living in the Congo? Or was that something that he was interested in once he arrived in America?

Janice Omadeke: I believe it was something that he's always been interested in. He would tinker with speaker systems and things like that. Wiring and stuff. Then coming here, there's many more opportunities to really explore tech in the States. So I think that definitely brought in his scope of possibilities when he came here.

Kelly: Were any of the part-time jobs that he had before he met the guy at the bank, were they on the tech or [crosstalk 00:32:37]?

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Janice Omadeke: No. I mean they involved computers, like being at a bank and such, but they weren't full blown tech jobs until after his additional computer lessons that he took.

Kelly: Yeah. Just to see how far you're own education not to mention your father's job experience exploded just because of the right connection and the right education. Yeah, more fuel for what you do today, right?

Janice Omadeke: Absolutely. I wanna create a world where my story and dad's story ... yes they are remarkable and I'm grateful for them, but I wanna create a world where it's like yeah, of course. Versus it being so outstanding, if that makes sense. I think that this is something that should be happening, especially in Corporate America, from the beginning.

Kelly: Yeah. And I think the whole disjointed nature of it, even with what I do with See Jane Invest, it's like the best case scenario there isn't a need for what I do in the near future, you know?

Janice Omadeke: Right.

Kelly: Until that happens, there's trying to get out there and give a model of how it might work and I think what you're doing is trying to get into, hey corporations for whatever reasons, I think some of them have the right intentions. I think others are probably just checking a box, but for both scenarios, there's a better way. There's a better way of actually diversifying the workforce while also recruiting the exact skill set you need into your company.

Janice Omadeke: Exactly. It doesn't have to be hard. I think sometimes people are worried that if they're bringing one a new initiative for mentoring or diversity inclusion within such a large company that it's going to become their full-time job. So the Mentor Method helps them be the rockstar that they need to be in their role, but then also make it easy to build a sustainable mentor relationship, mentorship program with the lens on diversity and inclusion. Easily. Right now our customers take about 30 days for customization and set up. That's to make sure that we're following all of their KPI's and what they need to be successful.

Janice Omadeke: Yeah, it doesn't have to be a big lift.

Kelly: Tell us a little about your journey. What's been happening for you since SXSW?

Janice Omadeke: Things have been great since SXSW. It was wonderful seeing you. Thanks for your vote of confidence and support. I was thrilled to place third, and I know that we'll get higher up on that list as things progress.

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Janice Omadeke: The Mentor Method platform as I said before, is strictly enterprise. We have customers including Fannie Mae. We've been shortlisted for some other large opportunities. We are currently speaking to you from Austin, Texas because we are in the MassChallenge Accelerator, one of the top 20 accelerators in the country. So out of over 500 applications, The Mentor Method is one of 79 ventures here growing our business's for the next four months.

Janice Omadeke: Yeah we are a headliner company so one of the first 100 investments for Backstage Capital, which is very exciting. I'm thrilled and humbled to be a part of that portfolio with all the women of the Backstage team.

Janice Omadeke: Yeah, things have been going very well.

Kelly: Yeah.

Janice Omadeke: We're excited to be launching initial engagements and pilots with several more companies. Now we're just building out our founding partner base to launch more pilots.

Kelly: Yeah, congratulations. That's wonderful. For start-ups who might be listening that are in the really early stages and they're trying to figure out what's best for them, can you talk a little about why you wanted to go the accelerator route and just what you're getting out of that program?

Janice Omadeke: Yeah. For me, one of the big things ... well actually there are a couple. The first one is network. Right? I've spoken to entrepreneurs that are making millions and millions of dollars. I ask them, how did you get your first 10 to 15 customers? I would say about 90 percent of them, said that it was their network.

Janice Omadeke: Being in a different industry, my background is in graphic design, and although we were in Fortune 500 world, as some people may know, in a large corporation you don't always know everybody or the right decision maker. So building up our network of potential buyers is really important to us. So that's been great. Also helping us reach the right people to develop our advisory board.

Janice Omadeke: But then also as an entrepreneur, I don't believe that I know everything. Like I said, it's impossible. So I want to surround myself with people that will humble me and help me become a stronger entrepreneur so that I can really learn everything I need to deliver more value to our customers.

Kelly: Can you talk a little about what you saw as the difference between an accelerator and an incubator?

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Janice Omadeke: Absolutely. An accelerator is really ... it's more pressure in a great way. So accelerator, as the name says, helps you think about your growth strategy. It helps you grow the business at an expedited rate.

Janice Omadeke: An incubator is good for the idea stage level. You have an idea. You're kinda thinking about it, but you don't have the fundamentals in place. That's a great place to start with an incubator.

Kelly: Would this accelerator program ... is it structured? Is there anything at the end of the four months? Do you have to go through a competition for additional investment? Or are there opportunities for that?

Janice Omadeke: Yes. There's no initial investment. They're a non-profit but at the end of the four months, 20 of us will be chosen to pitch for an opportunity to win a portion of non-equity funding at the end.

Kelly: That's fantastic. Yeah.

Janice Omadeke: Yeah, I'm excited about the opportunity. Now we're just really focusing on building up our pilot base and showing those growth metrics so that selecting The Mentor Method becomes a much easier option.

Kelly: Yeah. What stage do you consider yourself at right now? Cause you're early stage but you're well advanced beyond an idea. Where do you put yourself in the whole spectrum of how you pitch to investors?

Janice Omadeke: I say early stage. So we're raising our [inaudible 00:39:10] round. But we're in the market. We have paying customers, and the product is ready to go. Obviously I always want to do a thousand other things with the product, but the customers love what we built and we have our road map ready to go. We're in a very exciting phase of the company, where we're looking for those Angels to come in on the ... not necessarily the ground floor, but maybe like ground 1.5 and help us really start taking off. Help us become that 314 million dollar company that I know we'll be in the next five years.

Kelly: I know you're still building, but you actually have revenue at this point?

Janice Omadeke: We do yeah.

Kelly: Excellent. Yeah, that's actually pretty tough. There's a lot of companies that wanna pitch pre-revenue, and that sometimes can work but it's a lot harder to do.

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Janice Omadeke: It's a lot harder, especially as a minority female founder I know that I have to really bring it. Know my numbers, but then also have something to show for it. Yeah, last year we did about 35,000 and then this year we're estimated at 100,000 ARR just given current commitments and we have a pipeline of over 500,000 in potential deals right now.

Kelly: So going from a background in graphic design even though you have this wonderful tech background as well. How has the whole fundraising process seemed to you? What have you been learning along the way?

Janice Omadeke: It's been fascinating. It's kind of like sales. The great thing about my graphic design background is that you have to know your customer, right? And figure out when you're designing something, what are they really looking for? They say they wanna website, but do they really need a [inaudible 00:40:55]? What do they really need?

Janice Omadeke: I find that it's kinda of a similar approach in talking to investors, right? I think one of the great things that I've learned is yes, money may be green, but where it comes from is definitely more important.

Kelly: Yeah.

Janice Omadeke: So making sure that there's that ethos alignment with Angel Investors and funds but that they also ... for us we want Angels and investors that can help us grow the business. Not necessarily like a babysitter or anything like that, but we wanna be able to come to certain people and get support in certain gaps or areas that we're not able to get into, right? Making sure that people understand what the Mentor Method is doing.

Janice Omadeke: So for example, if there's an investor that really doesn't understand why diversity and inclusion is important, perhaps they're not for us.

Kelly: Sure.

Janice Omadeke: Because in thinking about the outreach and the updates that we send and everything else, that's only going to slow us down from an efficiency perspective. Then have to educate them on why Deloitte and Fannie Mae are customers, and why we're going deeper into those relationships in addition to expanding to these 10 additional cooperations.

Kelly: How have you found the whole fundraising process on top of just doing your day job of being the CEO and founder?

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Janice Omadeke: It's par for the course. I don't know any other experience. As my first venture, I'm enjoying the process. It's crazy. It's definitely hectic, but I'm very organized and I try to maximize my time where ever possible. Plus my team is incredible. They know that this is fundraising season for the Mentor Method and they've taken on additional tasks, and we're developing the team and building as necessary. That way things stay moving forward.

Kelly: How many people are on your team right now?

Janice Omadeke: There are four of us. I'm full-time and we have three other amazing team members. CTO, VP of Marketing, and then a miscellaneous team member if you will. Then we have four advisors. Then we do have some offshore team members as well.

Kelly: Yeah. In the early days, it sounds like that's a great structure. It's very hard to have people who are full-time, unless they're just working for sweat equity. Of course advisors are so important. Have you enjoyed that dynamic of having advisors plus a part-time staff that's supporting you?

Janice Omadeke: I have. I really do love being on entrepreneur and building The Mentor Method. I think my team is absolutely incredible. They humble me with the things that they know a thousand times more than I do about. That's why they're on the team. My advisors ... I want people that will shred my ego when I need it but then also open their Rolodex and provide network opportunities for us to continue expanding the business.

Janice Omadeke: Yeah, I'm very happy with the team. I'm very happy with how far we've come in this short period given our enterprise pivot.

Kelly: Well Janice, thank you so much for being on the show. Before we sign off, is there anywhere that listeners can find out more about the Mentor Method? Or learn about anything that you're involved with?

Janice Omadeke: Yes, please visit our website www.thementormethod.com. You can follow us on all of the socials at The Mentor Method. You can also follow me if wanna learn more about my MassChallenge experience, it's Jomadeke.

Kelly: Great, well I hope our listeners check out what you're doing and of course I wish you all the best. I can't wait to hear about the amazing success stories that are coming down the road for you. Once again, thank you for being on the show.

Janice Omadeke: Thank you so much for having me. I've really enjoyed it.

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Kelly: All right, take care.

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