

Elevate Your Career Through Storytelling feat. Mari Andrade

Music: Enters

Tommy: Welcome back to another episode of “Northeastern Next.” On today’s episode we have Mari Andrade, a messaging and storytelling strategist, we will discuss her co-op at General Motors, being an advisor for the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games, and the best tips for self-compassion and conveying your personal story. Let’s get into it.

Music: Fades

Tommy: Well, Mari, thank you so much for joining us on the “Northeastern Next Podcast.” We are so excited to have you today.

Mari: Thank you, it’s a pleasure to be here.

Tommy: Where am I talking to you from today?

Mari: I am in Brazil at the moment.

Tommy: So, why don’t we talk a little bit about your Northeastern experience and just get a background on who Mari is within the context of Northeastern. So, what was your Northeastern experience? I know that is a broad question but maybe what college did you graduate from, what degree do you have, just anything you would like to share with us.

Mari: Sure, I’m an industrial engineer from the class of ‘96 and my experience at Northeastern was amazing, especially the co-op program.

Tommy: Yeah, the co-op program, that really is a foundational piece of the Northeastern experience. Now, I remember we talked a lot about the co-op program in our preliminary phone call a couple of weeks ago. You did yours at General Motors, correct?

Mari: Yes.

Tommy: And can you tell us a little bit about that?

Mari: Sure, it was my first real work experience, and I was very lucky because I worked at an assembly plant that was closing. So, all the interns and co-op students had a lot more responsibility than you would normally have. So, we took on more senior roles than we would have otherwise and that was really fantastic. It was challenging but it was great.

Tommy: Yeah, what kind of responsibilities were they giving you? That sounds really interesting.

Mari: So, at the time I was working as an industrial engineer and we each had a part in the assembly line that we were responsible for.

Tommy: Oh, very cool. Wow. Where was General Motors? Were you out in Detroit doing this?

Mari: No, this was actually in Tarrytown in New York

Tommy: Oh, really? I didn't know that. Oh, ok. That's really cool! How would you say that, I guess, a lot of alumni from Northeastern always talk about the co-op and how it was really sort of the building block into the next step in their career. Would you say it helped you catapult into a career that you wanted to be a part of or would you say it kind of taught you things that like "oh I don't want to do this by the time I graduate?" How did it help you explore just your options?

Mari: It helped me realize what I liked and one of the things I loved is working with people, basically, because when you work in an assembly line plant as an industrial engineer, you are basically optimizing the work of the line workers. You have to learn to be very diplomatic in how you talk to them and how you get them to cooperate with you. So, you have the line workers, then the line supervisors, and you have everyone else working in the plant. So, for me, it was just very interesting to start learning how do you work with people when you have informal authority and how do you get them to do what you want to do, how do you create win-win situations, and basically just work with different groups with very different backgrounds and very different goals.

Tommy: Yeah, wow, that's interesting. I bet those are, for lack of a better word, diplomatic skills that you don't necessarily see in your average, I'm going to say, internship because I went to a school that had internships not co-op. But that's really cool and interesting that they were able to provide you with those opportunities because I don't think those aren't skills you just develop either. Does that make sense?

Mari: Yeah.

Tommy: So, after graduating from Northeastern...was that the only co-op you did? I'm sorry I meant to ask that earlier.

Mari: Yes, I worked for them during my co-ops and then I went to work for them after graduation as well.

Tommy: Oh, great! Were you an industrial engineer for them too?

Mari: I was. Yeah, in the beginning I was in industrial engineering and that was in Detroit, not New York, and then I transitioned to planning from there.

Tommy: Ok, can you tell us a little bit about the planning aspect of it? Just for those listening that might not know.

Mari: Sure. The planning was basically planning for the new vehicle so all the different phases from basically design to assembly implementation of new vehicles. And, again, that just meant dealing with a lot of different teams, making sure everything was on track and the timing. So, I think the skills I started developing and the plans and the diplomatic skills and, you know, people skills in general, that was really important as well in this next phase. So that is something I took with me.

Tommy: Oh, that is really cool. Yeah, after hearing you tell me that, it is pretty clear that the co-op did really kind of plant the seed for just bigger and better things. So, you are no longer with General Motors, right? You are now doing a couple of different things that are really cool. One being an advisor for the International Olympic Committee. Now, you can tell me if I am wrong, but is there a little bit of a gap between General Motors and the International Olympic Committee? And, if so, what were you doing in between?

Mari: In between I was working in Europe for a company called ERTICO that did public private projects with the European Union and with the auto industry. So, that is where I went to from my work at General Motors and then, from there, I transitioned into working with the Olympic Movement.

Tommy: Oh, that is really cool. So, can you tell us a little bit about that and what some of your responsibilities are?

Mari: With the Olympic Movement?

Tommy: Yeah, with the Olympic Movement.

Mari: So, my work with them actually started in 2011. In 2011 I went to work for the Rio 2016 Games and when I was working for the Rio 2016 games, I had a lot of different responsibilities. So, I started off doing strategic projects because when you start as a host city for the Olympics Games, you pretty much have a blank slate and there is a lot of different projects that you have to create and you need a culture project, an education project, and a lot of other different things. So, I did the initial strategy for a lot of those projects, then I transitioned into the lead for the education program, and, at the end of the program, we had eight million kids participating in our programs.

Tommy: Wow.

Mari: So, it ended up being a very successful social legacy for the Games and, from there, I also worked with engagement. So, how do you get people on board? How do you get the population excited about the games? I also worked with the torch relay and special projects at the end as well. Tying up loose ends let's say.

Tommy: So, I'd imagine you are kind of entering a little bit more of a busier season now the summer games are coming up? I saw that the torch relay just started, was that maybe a week or two ago?

Mari: Yeah, I think it was eighth of May that it started. So that was for the Rio Olympics, and, after that, I was invited to work as a consultant for the International Olympic Committee to help the future host cities. Because like I said, usually you have a blank slate and it's typically something that hasn't been done in the country before, so you don't have any processes in place, no one really knows what these projects look like so they use the expertise of people who have done it before just to help the new host cities understand what needs to be done and use as a sounding board as they create their programs.

Tommy: Oh, that's really interesting. So, you know, I'm sorry this is a little off topic, but I am curious now just in regard to the 2020 games where they were supposed to happen, obviously they couldn't in 2020, and then they have it the following summer, right, in 2021. Did that take a lot of pivoting?

Mari: Yes, a lot of pivoting, a lot of flexibility as well to move everything which is something unprecedented. But it worked pretty well.

Tommy: Yeah, I mean, that was awesome. I remember watching that and that was really cool just seeing Tokyo in that light, you know, I have always heard great things about it. It shot right up to the top of my list for cities I want to visit. But another thing we talked about and I know you mentioned earlier that you love working with people and your time at General Motors really emphasized how much you love working with people and I see that currently you are a Messaging and Storytelling Strategist for clients across multiple professions, is that correct?

Mari: Yes.

Tommy: So, where did you get that idea to help others craft their own personal stories and own personal narratives?

Mari: So, a lot of that came from my time working for the Rio 2016 Olympics because what happened was, when I took over the education project, it was a project that had no visibility, very little support, and very little money as well. And so, I used a lot of the training that I had in storytelling and persuasion to get a lot of players on board to help us build out the program and support us in different ways. So, while I was doing that, I was always thinking, "Ok what are the stories we need to create to get people really interested and really on board and for people to say, 'Wow, I need to be a part of this because this is something so exciting.'" And, it just made me realize the importance of storytelling and

persuasion in general and I realized a lot of people don't have any training in this, so my mission now is just to help people amplify their voices and really give them visibility and help them get support for their ideas or projects or whatever it is they want to set forth in the world.

Tommy: Yeah, that's really cool and I think that is something that, you know, everybody can really benefit from. So—how do I want to word this?—saying that you took those skills that you learned and developed from storytelling for the Olympics and applying it to individuals, what is the transition there? Because obviously, the Olympics, you are trying to communicate with millions of people but how can you take those tools and use them for an individual?

Mari: It's really about helping people understand what it is they are trying to say because a lot of times people are not certain about what it is that they want to say. And so, what I do is I always have different phases. The first thing I ask people is, "What is your intention? What exactly do you want to happen when you say something to an audience, to one person?" Right? Because a lot of the time we don't have it very clear in my mind what it is we are trying to achieve. So, that's the first thing.

Then, the second thing is you really, really have to understand your audience and, I know, in general, people think they know what their audience is but a lot of times we forget and sometimes you talk as if you are talking to a wall. But you always have to remember that there is somewhere there and what are those people thinking, what are the barriers for them to accept whatever your idea or project is and you really have to get into their heads and try to understand how they think and how you can help them because, for me, communication is always about how you can help the other person, right? What is it that you bring of value to them? And then, of course you know, using stories because that really helps people visualize what it is you are trying to tell them, right? If you use a story with a character, then people can really understand what is your idea and what you are trying to convey.

Tommy: Yeah, absolutely. I think those are really great tips to for anybody out there listening I know our audience specifically does skew on the younger side in terms of the Northeastern students who are like, "Hey, what can a Northeastern degree do for me?" So, I guess even in that context, do you have any small little tips that any student or young professional can do on a day-to-day basis, a small practice or something, to kind of help develop and refine those skills.

Mari: Yeah, I think one is the word you used: practice. You have to practice every day. A lot of times something very simple you can do is just record yourself and just look at the

recording and try to make adjustments based on that, right? And just practice, practice, practice. If you have an important presentation or an important interview, it's important to practice not only with your phone recording yourself but in front of other people as well because that will make you more comfortable. And it will also get you out of your head because sometimes in our head things sound really well but when you say it out loud it comes out very differently. So just get it out before the actual presentation or interview or whatever it is you are going to do. And also know that your personal stories are important. We each have very unique stories and we tend to normalize our experiences and think, "Oh, that's nothing important because I went through it, it's just my life." But your stories a lot of the times can help inspire other people. So, always remember that and use your own personal stories whenever you feel comfortable doing so as well.

Tommy: I think those are some really great tips and I honestly do think that's gonna resonate with a lot of people. Those tips...I know that in my original question I kind of asked about students and young professionals, but those almost seem like they touch on the human condition, and they can resonate with people of all ages and walks of life. So, thank you so much for sharing those because I really do think those are going to be helpful to our listeners. And since this is the "Northeastern Next Podcast", I always like to end the podcast with this question and saying, "What is next?" So, what is next for you?

Mari: Something else I have been working on for a little while now is self-compassion and doing workshops on that because I feel, also if we look at it from a communication perspective, if we can't connect to ourselves, how can we connect to others? I feel like it is very important for us to be kinder and gentler to ourselves so we can be kinder and gentler to others as well because a lot of times when you see people are angry or they are fearful in some shape or form it's because they don't feel loved. At the very basic level, all human beings wished to be loved. So, if we can generate that for ourselves then our relationships with others improve as well. It's also been scientifically proven, it's not just me saying it. I think the more we can learn to be kinder and gentler to ourselves, the better it is for the environments we are in and for our professional success as well. So, this is something I have been working on, that to me is what is next just to kind of plant the seed of self-compassion in people and to understand we can be kinder and gentler to ourselves because a lot of times we don't know how to do that or we were taught to be kinder and gentler to other people but not to ourselves. We've never really been taught to do that. I'm just throwing it out there for everyone to know that you can be kinder and gentler to yourself and try to practice that every day.

Tommy: I mean, that is a great message to convey to everybody. One by one you're making the world a better place with that. Now, I know I said that the previous question was the

last question but, you know, I just kind of in a similar vein want to ask if you have any tips off the top of your head that somebody could just do just day-to-day, you know, take it one step at a time. Really develop self-compassion.

Mari: One thing you can do is...I can do a quick exercise which is...

Tommy: Ok.

Mari: You can think about how you talk to your close friends when that friend is in need or going through something difficult. Just think about what it is you would say to them, what's your tone of voice, what are the words that you use, if there's any gestures—if you hug that person—so just think about that for a little bit. And then think about what happens when you are going through something difficult and how you talk to yourself. What is the tone of voice you use, what are the words that you use, what do you do? And, typically, you'll find that there are extreme opposites, right? We typically are very gentle and kind to our friends and very harsh on ourselves and very judgmental. So, if we just learn to talk to ourselves as we talk to our friends then by just making that shift you start being kinder and gentler to yourself. And also ask yourself the question, "If you treated your friends like you treat yourself, would you have any friends?"

Tommy: That's a great question. And I think that's one that's really going to stick with a lot of people. Wow, that just rattled my cage a little bit. I like that though. Well, thank you so much for coming on the podcast, Mari, I really appreciate it, this was a lot of fun.

Mari: Thank you so much for having me, it was lovely to be reconnected with the school.

Music: Enters

Tommy: Yeah, absolutely! Thank you.

Mari: Thank you!

Tommy: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of "Northeastern Next." Are you or do you know a Northeastern alum with a great story to tell? If so, email us at alumni@northeastern.edu to be featured on a future episode of the pod. I hope you enjoyed the episode, and I will see you the week after next.