

TRANSCRIPT

Learning Unboxed



Episode #280

Aya Beloudah:

Aya Beloudah:

Especially in education, if I don't advocate for myself, I'm not getting advocated for. Especially now that I'm in college, I'm going into my sophomore year, if I don't advocate for the classes I want to take, I'm not getting in.

Annalies Corbin:

Welcome to Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. I'm your host and chief goddess of the PAST Foundation, Annalies Corbin. We know the current model for education is obsolete. It was designed to create fleets of assembly line workers, not the thinkers and problem solvers needed today. We've seen the innovations that are possible within education, and it's our goal to leave the box behind and reimagine what education can look like in your own backyard.

Welcome to Learning Unboxed. This is your host, Annalies Corbin. As always, I'm excited to talk with another great innovator in the transformative education space. And joining us today is Aya Beloudah, college internship student at The Ohio State University. And I asked Aya to join us today because Aya has been on about a 12-month journey with me doing an internship that has allowed her the opportunity to explore her future career.

And so, I'm going to let Aya share with us a little bit about what that aspiration is. And more importantly for this conversation, we really wanna talk about the power of internships and the power of internships to really help students and young professionals find clear direction in their future career opportunities, options, choices, and possibilities.

So, Aya, tell us a little bit, first and foremost, about what is it that you're studying, and why did you choose that thing? And then, we're going to get into the weeds, so to speak, of this internship.

Aya Beloudah:

Of course. First, I am a marketing student at The Ohio State University. I chose this because I was originally a pre-med student. I did all the different, like, programs internships. And I realized that instead of doing the actual medicinal work I would much prefer the administrative work and just making sure that other individuals are capable of funding what they need to do.

So, I kind of went on this crisis of trying to figure out what I wanted to do, and I landed up back at PAST, and I was presented with this opportunity to help market for your book at the time it was unreleased. And I was thinking about it and I was like, "Marketing is just something that I really enjoy." It's not easy necessarily. It's very time consuming and you have to put a lot of creative thought. It's just so engaging for an individual.

And so, when I started taking my courses and I was like, "Yeah, this is definitely what I'm going to do." Like we have meetings pretty regularly. And when I'm in these meetings, just the creative energy that we have going back and forth with these ideas, the research behind it, it's just so engaging for a student. There's no other word but engaging. It's something that you can't step away from.

Annalies Corbin:

Yeah. Let's step back just a little bit because you participated in a couple of different internship opportunities as a high school student. So, I really want to sort of set the stage for the idea around internships early and often in a student's career trajectory.

Not so much the details about what the internships were, but let's talk a little bit about that opportunity to be able to participate in internship programs as a high school student, and how that sort of influenced your decision-making process moving forward, or were there some other collective set of benefits that you want to share with educators who are out there trying to figure out how to get their own students into internships or work-based experiences that are going to be meaningful. Because not all internships are created equal, right? So, help us understand what was meaningful to you and why.

Aya Beloudah:

I think first and foremost, my first internship was a very student-oriented one. So, they understood going in that we are students, we are not already professionals. So, when they started the program, they made sure that every single one of us felt connected and that we had a community before we were taught anything. So, if I had a question, I would go to my peers before I would go to whoever's leading the internship.

And I think that dramatically changed how I perceived the internship because I made friends there and we became colleagues. Going into a program with a friend makes it so much easier. So, if educators want students to be engaged, they have to focus on building a community with their students. Once you build that community, everything else follows in suit. We learned how to write corporate emails, business etiquette, how to present ourselves, how to speak, our body language, how that interacts with guests and customers in every field.

Annalies Corbin:

Well, so those pieces and parts, do you think that there was a meaningful opportunity for you to have gotten that knowledge or experience in another way in your, sort of, high school path or was it meaningful because it was embedded into an authentic experience that was in fact work-based?

Aya Beloudah:

I think the fact that it was authentic and work-based is a really pivotal point for me. If it was for school, I would have seen it as more of an assignment, but I saw this as experience, as something that I can truly take away from because I saw it as a career, not so much a job. A job is something that you just do, kind of like school. It was like a career, something that I could build myself.

Annalies Corbin:

Absolutely. And we're going to get into the details of, sort of, the work that you're doing now, but I want to just dig in just for a moment more about the high school internship experience. So, how did that experience then translate to some of the choices that you either made or the opportunities that presented themselves that you then chose to activate or act on as you started your collegiate experience?

Aya Beloudah:

I got an internship right as I was going into my junior year of high school. And so, I saw a very dramatic change in how I dealt with my junior year and senior year compared to my classmates who weren't a part of the same internship. I felt like I was more collected, more organized, my thought process was more streamlined because that's something that was taught to me. It was something that people led by example, gave me examples, corrected my actions in ways that weren't condescending, rude. They were very complimentary to my behavior. They realized how I could take critique, and they critiqued me in ways that would benefit me.

So, when I go into high school and senior year applying to colleges, writing my essays, even doing my assignments, the way I write is different. It's more mature and professional and well-spoken compared to some of my classmates that were still writing at that high school level, which is understandable. But when you have the opportunity to grow, it feels different. Like it feels nicer when I'm writing an essay, and I see the words that I'm writing are eloquent, they flow well.

And I know that came from being experienced in internships, constantly communicating with peers and educators and mentors. It's just a skill that I think will transcend even other internships and careers, jobs, everything.

Annalies Corbin:

So, it was an accelerant.

Aya Beloudah:

Absolutely.

Annalies Corbin:

Yeah, I really love that. Okay. So, then, let's fast forward and let's talk a little bit about the collegiate internship, the internship that you're working on right now. So, I'm going to give a little bit of context for our listeners, many of whom know that I have a new book out. It's called [Hacking School: Five Strategies to Link Learning to Life](#). And because I knew that Aya wanted to really, sort of, dig in and study marketing, but more importantly, because of the work that I've had the opportunity to do with Aya prior to that, I also knew, full disclosure, that Aya has a pretty entrepreneurial mindset. She is pretty creative in the way she thinks about and she approaches things and is unafraid to try things, especially things she's never tried before. And those are qualities that not all students have; however, they are qualities that all students can build.

And so, I wanted to talk about her early internships experiences because I strongly believe that those experiences did, in fact, provide her with that mindset to say that it's okay to try, and it's okay to learn, and it's okay to explore and to experience in a variety of different ways. So, when it came time to say I need to put together a team around the book launch, the social media, the developing of the courses. For those of you, this is my seventh book but this book is very different because we published it in a very very different way.

And so, what it meant was that we wanted to take back some control over lots of elements that traditionally fall to an academic press partner, wanted to make this book more accessible, didn't want to get it caught up in the pricing criteria that academic presses tend to have to lead with for the purposes of getting books into academic libraries. Wasn't interested in that at all. Wasn't the purpose of Hacking School. Hacking school was intended to be accessible to a wide array of users.

Therefore, we needed a different plan, right? But we needed a plan that said, "We're gonna be extremely entrepreneurial." So, enter Aya, as well as a couple of other interns that have been involved in the project. So, Aya, let's start with, what were all the things you didn't know but you knew you were going to need to know?

Aya Beloudah:

So, there's a lot of things that I didn't know. One, I had never done market-based research or marketing-based research. So, looking into other people's videos, the algorithms, I had never even considered looking into them. It just seemed strange to me. So, doing that for the first time was incredibly... I don't want to say difficult but it was almost off-putting. Thankfully, I had my peers to help me. We kind of like tag-teamed it.

Another thing was just coming up with ideas that we could realistically do 'cause, obviously, I'm thinking big picture, like "We can do this and this," but realistically either it's too expensive, it's out of our budget, we don't have the time, it doesn't fit in our schedules. You have to do a lot of micromanaging. I'm a very big-picture person. So, when I have to narrow in on details, I tend to struggle with that.

I suppose another thing would be building an author site. I hadn't done that before. We're still technically nitpicking some details, but it's pretty much done now. And if you told me that I would build an author site about a year ago, I don't know what I would have said. I would have tried, but I don't think that I would realistically complete it.

Annalies Corbin:

Well, I think you would have. Knowing you, you would have completed it. But I think that that's a really good point. So, you had to create a website, right? You had to create, design and develop a marketing plan, a social media plan. You're working on a social media takeover. And add to that then all the different elements and components that are really around sales, which is a whole another piece of this equation. So, when you think about all of these pieces and parts then, how is this experience gonna translate for you?

Aya Beloudah:

Well, one, it's directly related with the field I'm interested in. I'm wildly interested in all things marketing, digital marketing, in-person marketing, every sort of thing. And so, just being able to experience all different parts of it, I think, will make me a lot more adaptable in the future. So, whenever I get a project that I had never even heard of, I would be able to start somewhere, I'll be able to make a gameplan, and eventually figure it out just because of, right now, I'm building that adaptability, I'm building the skill sets, the mindset. I'm just coming up with ideas left, right, and center, it's helping me become more of a marketer overall.

Annalies Corbin:

Yeah, absolutely. So, let's talk a little bit then about the way that you are interfacing with the other... because you're not the only intern on this project, right? So, let's talk about that a little bit, because I do also think that there's a lot of prep work that has to go into ensuring that people know how to function as part of a team. So, let's talk about that a little bit because you've been on numerous teams and not all the teams have been high-functioning teams, right? It's oftentimes that happens especially with our type A personalities, right? They, sometimes, tend to say, "I'll just do it all," right? And yet, that's not a good experience, not for any of the individuals involved. So, talk to us a little bit about how you navigate being on a team, working collaboratively. And

if you were to advise someone who's helping others learn how to work collaboratively, what would you share?

Aya Beloudah:

Two things come to mind. First thing is communicate, communicate, communicate. Whether that'd be orally, written, email, literally just anything to get all your team into one place. Meetings, like literally any form of communication is vital for a team. I've been on a group of interns teams several times. And every single, time we designate one individual to be the active communicator, which means they are sending the group emails, taking the meeting notes, sending those meeting notes out.

Sometimes, we have to interact with clients. They are the ones interacting with clients, and then they are communicating the client's needs, wants, desires to the rest of the team. One person needs to communicate. At least, one person. If you're lucky, everybody will be an active communicator and constantly keep everybody in the loop.

The second thing is going back to the original internship is building that sense of community. If your peers do not trust you, no work will get done. They will not delegate tasks to you if they don't think that you can effectively get them done. So, when you build that sense of community, (1), that aids in communication obviously; and (2), it makes everybody less tense. Everybody will work more fluidly with each other, meetings won't be filled with tension and dreaded.

You just have to have a sense of community. It has to be a healthy workspace, which thankfully every internship I've been in has been incredibly healthy, very fluid, and everybody's willing to do their share of work, but that's not the case for every internship. Like you said, internships are not all made equal. And in those scenarios, you just have to actively advocate for yourself. If you feel like you are doing too much work, you need to speak with your advisor, mentor, supervisor. Communication is what will keep you afloat.

Annalies Corbin

Yeah. How do educators... I'm trying to step back from this question, right? I've got so many ways to approach this, but bottom line, what I'm really trying to get at is one of the things that I hear all the time from educators who are really making the shift into more of a project or problem-based sort of teaching and learning environment, right? And that's definitely what we advocate for at the PAST Foundation, as you are well aware. But it's hard, right?

If that's not what you're used to doing and that's not what your students are used to doing on a regular basis, it can be very complicated because those environments lend themselves to collaborative work, right? Collaborative projects, collaborative problem solving, group dynamics. And yet, one of the things that I hear repeatedly from

educators is it's very difficult to get students to work sometimes collaboratively. And more importantly, how do I evaluate or assess in that environment if I believe that my traditional Type A is doing all the work and my other students are not maybe carrying the same load.

So, how do you, as a student who has successfully experienced the good and the bad of these scenarios, how would you advise an educator that was struggling with that balance?

Aya Beloudah:

Something I will always say is you cannot trust group reflections because, especially in high school and middle school, everybody's friends, they will not be the bad guy.

Annalies Corbin:

So wait, wait, wait, say more about that. Say more about that. What do you mean by that?

Aya Beloudah:

People will always defend their friends, even if it's not in their best self-interest. I was recently in a group college project, and essentially the entire semester, I did the entire project. I tried to communicate with my peers several times, and they just would not communicate back. So, I reached out to the professor and they told me, like the professor told me that they had reached out and said the same about me.

I realized that in college, it's very different from high school. Educators need to understand this and kind of reconfigure their classrooms to represent this. In college, everybody's watching their own back. In middle school and high school, it's a colony. Even if type A is doing all the work unwillingly, they won't snitch on the type B friend because, then, they're the bad guy.

Annalies Corbin:

So, how do you reconfigure that space for that not to happen? So, what does that look like? For you as a participant, what would that look like?

Aya Beloudah:

It's really difficult to navigate that specific scenario just because everybody tells everybody everything in middle and high school. It's not really 100 percent, but the best thing I would say would be to observe. You can see the quality of work. If it's one person, it's likely going to be less quality than if, say, it's a four-person project. If one person is doing everything, they're spreading their efforts across the entirety of the project. Just being observant with your students will significantly help because middle schoolers and high schoolers are not subtle. They are not subtle at all.

Annalies Corbin:

That's true. What about assigning roles? So that was one of the things that when this comes up, I speak about frequently. I said, "Look, your students have to learn to get out of their comfort zone, and they have to learn to take on different tasks." And recognizing that those assigned roles or those tasks, they're cumulative in the sense that they build on each other, right?

And so, you're going to have to build in the opportunity for that team to learn how to function within those assigned roles and tasks, and that to give students the opportunity to shift roles from project to project because the other thing that happens is students will tend to pick up and try to do the same thing over and over again because, "Hey, I already learned how to do this. That's gonna be the easier lift." But, ultimately, that doesn't give us a well-rounded or prepared individual. So, what do you think about that?

Aya Beloudah:

The first thing that came to mind was, especially with group projects, you have to give them the illusion of choice. It's a funny thing to say but it's like you don't want to assign groups because, then, you're the bad teacher that never lets them hang out with their friends, but you also have to make it controlled enough to where they're not pairing with the same people every time because, then, you're not really building their ability to communicate and effectively work with other people.

So, maybe almost like popcorn reading. Like a "One, two, three, four," and then get in groups, or like you pick a popsicle stick with the roll and you have to do your roll. You have to make it almost seem like it's random, but it's not necessarily as random as they expect. That, in my experience, makes me feel like, "Oh, next time, I can get a really fun group," or I almost feel like I have a choice. Like I picked my roll instead of it being handed to me.

And that makes sure, like, you could also set up rules. Like you can't have a role twice. There's ways to work around it, but just making sure they're not like a hundred percent in charge, especially in like earlier stages of education, not giving them a full control over what they're doing, but giving them a sense that they do have a semblance of control.

Annalies Corbin:

We really want to foster agency. So, that's kind of a yin and yang we've got going on here, Aya.

Aya Beloudah:

But I feel like towards high school, like junior and senior year, when they're building that sense of maturity, that's when you can start to give them more choice. Like you

lessen the rules, you give them... like, "You can pick one partner, and then I'll pair the other partners." You could do something like that because in college you really have to advocate for yourself.

Annalies Corbin:

I was gonna say it's all on you, right? The professor says, "Hey, this is due. You need to be a group of four. Go. See you in six weeks," right?

Aya Beloudah:

In college, I feel like it kind of comes easier just because you just pair with whoever you're sitting with. And if you're not sitting with somebody at the end, you just send an email out. That's what I did. But in high school, it's like you don't want to be the friend left out. So I remember there was this class I took where they would say, "Literally get in a pair," and I would think I'm working with my best friend, and then they would pair me with some other group. So, we had a group of four, but I got to pick one person. So, it feels like I have a sense of control. Like I know going into this that not everything is predetermined.

So, something similar to that would help your students still be able to communicate because there's two other people in the group that I wouldn't have chose to work with, but I have to. And then, one person that I'm fully comfortable with, which ensures that, at least, half the work gets done. And if I don't communicate, you could clearly see where the error is. And as an educator, you can make whatever decision to correct it.

Annalies Corbin:

Alright, fair enough. So, let's bring this conversation home, Aya, because we're talking about student internships. And so, as you reflect back on the journey through internship, what are the two things that you really, really want your younger Aya to know or to keep in mind so that the Aya talking to me today is able to take full advantage of what we've got going on?

Aya Beloudah:

One main thing I would tell myself is not everything's a personal attack. Like, just because they don't like my work does not mean that they don't like me. I can still enjoy working with somebody and not enjoy the actual physical work that they're presenting me. So, if I was able to internalize that, I feel like I would have gotten along with a lot more people because I feel like... as I started my internships when I was around 16, like everything to me at that point felt like it was an attack, which looking back is ridiculous. Just because they didn't like the way I worded something doesn't mean they think I'm lacking in intellect but it seemed that way to me.

If I could go back, I would be able to apply those critiques, and I would have matured and grown as a professional so much faster, and I would have been able to reach the point I'm at much sooner. And I feel like that's a lifelong skill, being able to take critique.

The second thing, that's kind of a hard one. I would say, again, going back to communication because it's like a foundational skill. Like everything that you do is based on how you communicated with whatever party you're communicating with. Especially in education, if I don't advocate for myself, I'm not getting advocated for. Especially now that I'm in college, I'm going into my sophomore year, if I don't advocate for the classes I want to take, I'm not getting in. If I don't join the programs I want to join, I'm not going into any programs. They are not reaching out to me. I have to advocate for myself to get myself where I want to be.

Annalies Corbin:

Absolutely.

Aya Beloudah:

Yeah.

Annalies Corbin:

You have a lot of agency, Aya.

Aya Beloudah:

I try.

Annalies Corbin:

You do indeed. And we are grateful to have you as part of the journey. So Aya, thank you very much for taking time out of the day to have this conversation with us about internships, the power of internships, and just the journey through that process. So, thank you very much.

Aya Beloudah:

No problem. Anything to give back to the PAST Foundation.

Annalies Corbin:

Thank you.

Aya Beloudah:

Have a great day.

Annalies Corbin:

Thank you for joining us for Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. I want to thank my guests and encourage you all to

be part of the conversation. Meet me on social media, @AnnaliesCorbin, and join me next time as we stand up, step back, and lean in to reimagine education.