### Lana Fried (00:20):

My name's Lana and I'm the host of Get Hungry. I was born and grew up on Boonwurrung country and also have a very personal connection to my own Jewish culture and heritage. On behalf of the team producing this podcast, we pay our respects to the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, the traditional owners of the land the Australian Swinburne campuses are located on, and where this podcast was recorded. We also pay respect to elders past, present, and emerging for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and aspirations of Aboriginal Australia. We must remember that under the concrete and the asphalt, this land is, was and always will be traditional Aboriginal land. The rich storytelling history of the world's oldest living culture is what we proudly pay homage to when we share stories on this podcast.

## (<u>00:50</u>):

This is Get Hungry, a show where we give you a taste of what career success looks like by talking to some of the most successful people in different industries and learn how they got to where they are today. I'm your host Lana Fried, and I'm a psych student at Swinburne University of Technology. And like a lot of you, I often wonder what it is that makes a person successful. In this show, I'm going to talk to people from different industries who've asked themselves the same questions as you and I. Where am I going and how do I get there? We'll grab a bite of food or even a coffee from somewhere near Swinburne. Then we'll find a spot on campus to have a chat. We'll talk about everything. We'll explore the successes that they've had, and just as important, the mistakes and missteps that they've learned from. So let's get into it.

## (01:40):

Today, I'm catching up with Rachel Terkelsen. She's Creative Director at a branding agency called Principals, and she is so impressive. Rachel studied design at Swinburne and now works in the advertising and branding world. In today's chat, you'll hear how sometimes your career can take some surprising turns. Rachel will talk about how building a network of connections early on helped her succeed. She'll share the moment she was made redundant and how it actually helped her. And Rachel will tell you the story of how her career got started with a very unique approach to a job application. We're meeting for sushi at a place called Sushi Uokin, which is just on Glenferrie Road across from Swinburne. So let's go.

### (02:36):

So I am here outside Sushi Uokin. It's a really beautiful modern and quiet and calm cafe. Yeah, it's just a beautiful place to actually relax in between classes and refresh with something nice and fresh. So let's head inside and have a look at what we have on offer today. Hi, is it Rachel?

```
Rachel Terkelsen (03:02):
Yes. Lana?

Lana Fried (03:03):
Yes it is. Lovely to meet you.

Rachel Terkelsen (03:05):
Good to meet you.

Lana Fried (03:06):
```

Thank you so much for joining us today. Why don't we have a look at what's on offer and then we can pick your brain about the design world?

Rachel Terkelsen (03:13):

Let's do it.

Lana Fried (03:16):

So, Rachel, this is a place that I've really wanted to check out for some time, so I'm excited to show you around. But before we do, I would love to know what's your go-to sushi order?

Rachel Terkelsen (03:25):

My go-to sushi order is usually very simple though they're some amazing looking things. I would normally just go for the very simple sashimi, salmon sashimi.

Lana Fried (03:36):

I think I'm going to stick with something I've had before. I think I might grab the Wagyu beef roll. That looks incredible.

Rachel Terkelsen (03:44):

Oh, yum.

Lana Fried (03:44):

Could we please grab one of the Wagyu beef roll and also the salmon sashimi set? Thank you. Thank you so much.

Rachel Terkelsen (03:57):

Thank you so much. Thank you.

Lana Fried (<u>04:00</u>):

I think I've actually eaten Uber Eats from here before.

Rachel Terkelsen (04:03):

From here before?

Lana Fried (04:04):

Have you? Looking at the bag with the stamp on it, this looks like it's been in my kitchen before.

Rachel Terkelsen (04:09):

Oh, that's funny.

Lana Fried (04:15):

All right, well we have our sushi in hand. I really can't wait to show you where we're headed next. So let's go.

### Rachel Terkelsen (04:20):

I'm starving. Let's go.

### Lana Fried (04:21):

Me too. So, with our sushi safely secured, we headed back to campus. Now Rachel is from the design world, so I wanted to take her somewhere special for our conversation. So we headed to AMDC208, which is this beautiful meeting room at Swinburne. It's inside a wooden dome. It's very cool. So to start our chat, I asked Rachel what she thought of the room from a design perspective.

## Rachel Terkelsen (04:48):

To me, it feels like we're in a conservatory looking up to the sky. So it's amazing. It feels very celestial.

## Lana Fried (04:55):

I can't take my eyes off of the clouds on the roof. It's a really beautiful and calm setting for a meeting as well.

## Rachel Terkelsen (05:01):

There's something slightly Vegas about it. They kind of faux interior inside, blue sky inside.

## Lana Fried (<u>05:07</u>):

Absolutely. Yeah. So now take me back to the start of your journey. We know that you went to Swinburne as well. I'd love to ask you what happened after you graduated. You, I believe, were applying for jobs and getting rejected quite a bit, and then one day you decided to do something a little bit unconventional to help you stand out. Do you mind talking me through that point in your life that led up to that big moment?

## Rachel Terkelsen (05:33):

So job rejections are really tough, particularly when you're job seeking as a graduate, they're really tough. And I don't think it takes a high number of rejections before you start feeling quite dejected. And I don't know if it was just desperation or what it was, but I'd been to a job interview in the morning and I came home that afternoon and wrote a letter to the business just probably from memory thanking them for the interview and expressing how keen I was to start this role and emphasising what skills I could bring to the table.

#### (06:04):

And I sent it off to a Swinburne lecturer who had been lecturing us on written communication and she made a few alterations and sent it back to me. And I then had it couriered over to the business that same afternoon. It might sound more exceptional than it actually was because this was the mid-90s and we literally did not have emails, so the options were faxing it or putting it in the post, and they're no more appealing now than they were back then. So I guess probably the true alternative would have been to do nothing. So probably by that measure, it probably did stand out.

### Lana Fried (06:36):

I think what you said about running it by your lecturer as well, that's something a lot of us as students would forget that we have the option to do. We have access to all these people who, depending on

what degree you're going through part of your future industry, it's a good reminder that we can be leaning on them and asking them for advice and support with things like what you did, with things like jobs and networking as well. So that's fantastic for even just me as a student in a different degree to think about.

Rachel Terkelsen (07:03):

Yeah, absolutely. I'm sure there's a huge knowledge base there that students can draw on.

Lana Fried (<u>07:07</u>):

Absolutely. Can I ask what fueled your decision to send that letter in the first place?

Rachel Terkelsen (07:14):

Well, yes, possibly desperation, but maybe a combination of that and my mother always taught me to send a written thank you after somebody had you over. I think it was literally just that I'd gotten to the point where I just thought I just can't take another ejection. And I was particularly keen for this place of employment. So I think it was just trying to stand out, I suppose.

Lana Fried (07:34):

So what happened after you sent that letter? Did you end up getting the job?

Rachel Terkelsen (07:37):

I did get the job. I don't know that this is particularly helpful for anyone, but I do think there was a certain element of just being in the right place at the right time. They had just once a new business and they were looking to kick it off immediately, so they were looking to hire immediately. And interestingly, I had been for an interview at that same workplace a few months before and they had hired someone else over me and I can't actually recall now how it was that I ended up there again. But I do think there's always an element of being in the right place at the right time.

Lana Fried (<u>08:06</u>):

Yeah, it's fantastic. Now that you're someone who does the hiring, how much do you think it matters for new graduates to find a way to stand out from the crowd?

Rachel Terkelsen (08:14):

I think it is important, but possibly in a way that is different to the way that students might think it is. And I'm sure all businesses are different and all businesses have different priorities, which is great or we would all be competing for the same graduates. But I've seen quite a few applications over a number of years come across my desk that have amazing conceptual leave-behinds with them, which clearly do draw your attention. And obviously, the student has spent a lot of time, and in some cases, you can see quite a lot of money. To be honest, I would say from my perspective, the most important thing, almost to the exception, or the exclusion rather, of anything else, is the work in your folio and making sure that the work itself or the projects themselves are all contemporary and fresh, and importantly, that they all feel quite different to each other.

(09:01):

And that's probably rarer than it should be. Oftentimes a folio will feel quite uniform throughout and obviously you want to see not an individual style. You want to be able to see that a student can design for different briefs. I know we all know this thing about showing that you are interested in a particular business, but it probably bears talking about the importance of actually researching the particular business that you're applying for and tailoring your communication, your written cover letter in advance or your communication when you're in an interview context specifically for that business because it's really super obvious when someone's just, and I get it, it is super time-consuming, but it's really evident when someone's just sent out that sort of blanket blast of a cover letter and it just really says that you're not specifically interested in this business or this position.

## Lana Fried (<u>09:50</u>):

Yeah, absolutely. I think as a student, it's really easy to get super excited and want the first job that you see, but I imagine that it did make a huge difference for you knowing the type of culture and the type of atmosphere of the job that you were going for and knowing that that was something that you wanted to work for as opposed to just applying to something because it was open and there.

## Rachel Terkelsen (10:09):

Yeah, that's right. I think that keenness/desperation did shine through.

### Lana Fried (<u>10:13</u>):

Do you have any tips for students who might want to build their folio outside of uni as well? Any ways that they can build up a bit of extra work?

# Rachel Terkelsen (10:23):

Yeah, and I think I've seen folios where students do that. They might actually be doing a little bit of freelance work on the side, particularly by their final years of uni, and they'll include those projects. Sometimes I've seen students that have actually just created self-initiated projects. If you're feeling that whatever projects you have completed at uni or for whatever reason, perhaps you didn't get to the outcome that you might've wanted to or you don't feel that there's sufficient breadth, I think it's perfectly fine to put in, particularly as a graduate, put in some self-initiated projects to show, I guess, extra breadth in your folio or other skills.

### Lana Fried (11:00):

So one thing that I know was important for you in your journey was your network of connections. I wanted to ask you about a time that your network came in handy for you. Do you mind telling me about the story of when you were made redundant and started freelancing?

## Rachel Terkelsen (11:14):

So I've been made redundant a couple of times now. So far my career, touch wood, there will be no others, but probably the first thing to say about being made redundant is it's fairly much part of a corporate contemporary career, I should say. So if you can get comfortable with that notion, then I think it just buys you a little bit of resilience. So the first time I was made redundant was a Friday morning. No warning. And by the Friday afternoon, I was on the phone and Monday morning, I had work. And I managed to stretch out that work for the better part of six years. And it was a case of people saying,

"Come and work here," or saying, "I've freelanced there, why don't you give them a call?" So that network was really, really important.

## (11:58):

The network's super important, I think, at any stage of your career and it's something that's really worth investing your time in. And that sounds a little bit drier than it really is because oftentimes, a network are literally just your friends in the same industry, the people that you went through your course with at uni or the people that you met in your first job, in my case, designers, but also the account managers. So the account managers that I worked with in my first job, you fast-forward 20 years into a career and they're the head of brand in an organisation, so they're the ones that are calling you up as your client.

## (12:30):

So network is super important, I think. And probably, I should say I was very lucky in that first job in that at its peak, it had, I think around 60 employees and a lot of really young employees as well. So it was a really fertile ground for making friends, which we talk about as professional connections. So to that end, I would really encourage graduates to consider those larger organisations as well. They often don't appear as edgy to a graduate, but there's other things they might offer, which is longevity of career and oftentimes far better people and culture policies as well.

## Lana Fried (<u>13:07</u>):

Very good to know. So when you look back on that time being made redundant and freelancing, how did you feel about that whole experience?

## Rachel Terkelsen (13:16):

The actual process is never a great feeling, but as I said, the sooner you can get comfortable with that, the better off I think. And honestly, it's very rare to hear about anybody who actually doesn't end up happier after redundancy and a change. It's impossible to tell a designer to keep their folio up to date because it's always an enormous undertaking and we're always starting it from scratch again anyway, and redesigning the whole thing with the new contemporary platform or whatever it is. But one thing I would say, it's super important to keep your resume up to date. So it's virtually impossible to remember the details of an award or an initiative that you were involved in years down the track. But it's super easy to just add that in as a line item on a Word doc or whatever you're doing, your resume.

## (13:56):

So it's really helpful to have a resume that you can send out really quickly. And the freelancing was great. I had some really valuable experiences that actually even now at this stage, all these years later and at this stage in my career, I still draw on, there's still really valuable experiences. I had the opportunity to work client side. I worked in an ad agency for a while. So there're definitely opportunities that I would not have been exposed to otherwise. And the working client side, I would recommend all designers actually do a stint working client side. It just gives you some incredible insights and the granularity of problem solving that you're doing when you're working client side actually provides really valuable learnings later on when you're working on similar clients. And I do think that freelancing is often a lifestyle choice. It suited me. I had young kids at the time and that flexibility really suited me. And then as they grew older, we had school fees, we needed to renovate the house. So it became far more appealing at a certain point to have a regular paycheck.

### Lana Fried (<u>14:57</u>):

And then you came back from freelancing into working for someone else and that network came in handy again, didn't it?

### Rachel Terkelsen (15:04):

It did then, and it has again more recently. So the role I'm in at the moment, I was approached by a colleague that I'd worked with back in that very first job. And apart from that first job that I got straight out of uni, I don't reckon there's any job that I've gotten that hasn't been word of mouth. And I've certainly applied for them and even with years of experience, I've not even gotten interviews, which I think speaks volumes about the power of network.

### Lana Fried (<u>15:31</u>):

Absolutely. That's definitely a great thing for us to know going into the professional world after studying. Do you have any tips for students looking to build a strong network?

## Rachel Terkelsen (<u>15:41</u>):

Honestly, it's really just your friends who are in the industry. That's what your network is. Undoubtedly, there's layers to that. Some of the relationships that you form are genuine close friendships. One of my closest friends is someone that I met in that very first job. And then beyond that, you have a broader circle of friends, I guess. And those friendships in the industry, it's really important to spend the time cultivating those as you would any friendship, as you would any relationship. And then beyond that, again, there's the colleagues and it's not feasible or practical or in some cases even desirable to stay in touch with everybody, but it is important to keep some line of communication open with that network. And the easiest way to do that is on LinkedIn.

### Lana Fried (<u>16:22</u>):

So it seems you had a pretty clear idea from very early on that you wanted to work in design. After all this time, what keeps you coming back to design?

### Rachel Terkelsen (16:30):

I still really love the buzz of a clever idea. So whether that's a really clever kind of smile in the mind brand mark idea or a brand personality that really resonates with the target audience or really dynamic brand identity. It's great creative. It's what we got into it for in the first place, I suppose.

#### Lana Fried (16:48):

And you're clearly very passionate about what you do, so I'm sure that also really helps.

### Rachel Terkelsen (16:52):

It is. It's fun to work on every day.

#### Lana Fried (16:54):

So, Rachel, you're a creative director at Principals. Can you start walking me through a regular day in your life as a creative director?

Rachel Terkelsen (17:04):

I feel like there's not a typical day, but I will say every day I get up really early. I'm a really early riser and I start every day by planning out the day. And it probably takes about half an hour and it's the most useful half hour I spend all day. I can have sometimes up to 30 things on my to-do list, which I'm never going to get through, but at least I know if I planned out the day, I'm ticking off the most urgent things, the things that the wheels are going to fall off if I don't get done. So by the time I get into work, I'm ready to tick off a meeting or email through some feedback to someone before we have our 9:45 daily creative WIP or Work In Progress meeting.

### (17:44):

And that really just anchors our day. It just gives everybody a chance to work out, "Has everyone got enough work, not too much work, have they got all the briefs they need?" And then we feel we're starting the day slightly in control. We know it's going to shift a thousand times during the day, but at least we start the day off right. And then meetings just fall into the diary. So it could be anything from catching up with the creative team on projects that they're working on, doing one-on-one professional development sessions with the team, could be working with account managers on scoping and costing new business proposals.

### (18:19):

And then I try and set aside about 45 minutes at the end of the day to get through emails that I never really get to during the day. And the train ride home, I do creative inspiration every day. So it's usually just looking at Instagram and filing things according to topics so I can access them really easily, it might be reading an article. It's pretty frenetic, but I feel it took me a long time to put some of those, I guess, guardrails into my day to give it a bit of structure. And that's, I think, alleviated some of those nightmares I was having about a car spiralling out of control.

## Lana Fried (18:53):

I wanted to ask a couple of questions just touching on a few of the things I heard you say, and you said on the train back home, what was it you do, creative inspiration?

### Rachel Terkelsen (19:02):

Yeah. I find it just a really useful thing for designers to just stay across things that are happening globally in terms of design trends. And it just gives me a chance to be able to point to reference. If designers are getting stuck, I can say, "Maybe have you looked at that or maybe try this." Just keeping references current really.

#### Lana Fried (19:21):

It's really clever. I've never really thought about that. It's like a pre-mood board to touch on in different projects.

### Rachel Terkelsen (19:26):

It is. And a lot of designers do it with Pinterest as well, and I never have, and I kind of regret not having started that quite early, actually. Some of the designers I work with have really rich, deep mood boards on Pinterest and no matter what you're looking for, they can pull up half a dozen references really quickly to just inspire some thinking.

#### Lana Fried (19:44):

So we already asked you what a day in the life looks like for you as a creative director, but what about the people who may be getting their first job out of uni? What would a typical day in the life look like for an entry-level designer?

## Rachel Terkelsen (19:57):

At Principals, a graduate might expect to start their day having a chat with their colleagues over a coffee with our beautiful new coffee machine in the kitchen. And then they would ideally have some work to go on with from the previous day. They would make sure their timesheets are up-to-date if they hadn't done that the day before. And then we have our 9:45 creative WIP where we all come together as a creative team. From there, we would make sure that there was a briefing in place for them, and that would usually happen with an account manager and the creative.

## (20:23):

And then they would be working supporting the senior designers or the design director, either helping to roll out longer-term implementation on existing clients or maybe working on concepts for new clients. And that might be anything from developing illustrations, searching for reference for concepts. It might be putting together applications to show how an identity comes to life. And then if it's a Wednesday, there's always drinks in the office at the end of the day. So there's lots of opportunities to connect and cross-pollinate with other capabilities within the business.

## Lana Fried (20:57):

You're making me want to become a designer with all of these fun things going on.

## Rachel Terkelsen (21:01):

We do have a work experience student at the moment and she said that everybody's so nice, everybody seems really happy to be here, which I thought was quite good feedback.

### Lana Fried (21:10):

And then if there's anyone who is just starting their career and they want to be a creative director someday, how would they get there?

### Rachel Terkelsen (21:16):

Okay, so always take your career seriously, even from the start, even as a graduate. Each decision you are making is putting a building block in place for your career. If you can, find a mentor that can help to guide you. We talked before about creative references, always keep your thinking current, always keep your creative references current. Be curious about design and about culture. Go to conferences, read articles, do courses. Importantly, understand your client's business. Recognise the value that design drives for the business. Think about doing a brand management course so you can speak your client's language.

### (21:52):

We talked about working both sides before, so working client side as well gives you that really important insight. And I think at creative director level, you're speaking a lot to the head of marketing, so it's really important to be able to speak about design in a way that really resonates with them and that they can understand and can drive value for the business. Get interested in new business development as part of that role. And something that's often not talked about is working on soft skills. So creative director, you

are directing people, you're managing people, and there's a real dearth of empathetic leadership in management. So that's a really important one.

## Lana Fried (22:29):

So just speaking of design in general, when I think of design, I often just think of the artist doing the designs. What are some of the other roles in the design industry that people might not know much about?

### Rachel Terkelsen (22:41):

Yeah, that's an interesting one and I think it definitely does depend on the specialisation. So Principals is a branding consultancy. So we have designers who would typically be graphic designers. We have illustrators supporting them, so they might be graphic designers who really specialise in illustration. We have art workers that prepare the work to actually be produced, be that digitally or traditionally in print. We have a motion graphics team that supports the work and really helps to bring it to life. And then we have a brand voice capability within the business, so copywriters. And we work really closely with them as well. We have an experience and innovation capability called AlphaLab, so that's UX designers. And then feeding into all of that. We have insights team and strategists, and then we have account managers that I think traditionally used to be called design managers supporting all of that. So there's a big ecosystem that you can consider if you're interested in design.

## Lana Fried (23:37):

You mentioned UX designers. I haven't heard that before. What does that mean?

## Rachel Terkelsen (23:40):

So UX refers to user experience where UI refers to user interface. So UX might refer to how a user interacts with a website, for instance, and user interface refers to what it looks like.

## Lana Fried (23:53):

Interesting. And then do you have any tips for anyone out there who might be thinking about studying design but isn't sure it's the path for them?

### Rachel Terkelsen (24:01):

Yeah, so if you are a high school student and you're probably studying either art or viscom, I would recommend going to the open days, talking to the students, talking to the lecturers, wander around the faculty, get a sense of what it would be like to do the course. And then if you are keen, take advantage of the school sanctioned work experience. So I feel that is something that hasn't gained traction again since COVID, but it's a super useful way to actually get inside a studio. And even if you just do it for a week and find out you hate it, then you've saved yourself studying a course before you find that out. And then the other thing to keep an eye on is conferences. There's often student discounts. I've always found that to be really, really inspiring.

### Lana Fried (24:44):

It's funny you mentioned work experience. I actually did work experience as a graphic designer in year 10 and it personally wasn't the area that I wanted to get into, but it was incredible to have that handson experience and to really experience the week of being a designer.

Rachel Terkelsen (24:59):

And did you decide at the end of that week that it was not something, or was something just kind of percolated once you had that experience?

Lana Fried (25:05):

Definitely the latter. I absolutely loved it while I was there. It was such a phenomenal experience. And even if it's not specific work skills that I might be taking into a future of psychology, it's things I still use in so many of my projects. So it was a phenomenal experience for me.

Rachel Terkelsen (25:19):

You're making your projects beautiful.

Lana Fried (25:20):

Thank you. Rachel, it's time for our quick fire round. I've got five food-related questions that I'm going to ask you in rapid succession. The rules are you'll have 10 seconds to answer each question and you have to answer with the first thing that comes to your mind. All right, let's go.

Rachel Terkelsen (25:39):

Okay, let's do it. I'm ready.

Lana Fried (25:41):

If design was a food, what would it be?

Rachel Terkelsen (25:44):

It's got to be sushi. We just had sushi. It's functional as in it's good for your health and it's beautiful.

Lana Fried (<u>25:49</u>):

Love that. What is your favourite condiment?

Rachel Terkelsen (25:52):

A homemade tomato relish. It goes with everything. And shout out to Britt and James, who just brought some of their homemade tomato relish over.

Lana Fried (26:02):

Love Britt and James. What's the most exotic or unique dish you've ever tried, and did you like it?

Rachel Terkelsen (26:09):

So I make my own cashew camembert, which means I literally grow mould on the food that I'm going to eat. So it requires a certain level of bravery to eat it, but it is sublime and even better with the tomato relish.

Lana Fried (26:22):

Interesting. What is the secret sauce to your success?

### Rachel Terkelsen (26:27):

I will have to fall back on hard work, but I will add in there kindness. I think that empathetic leadership is so important now.

Lana Fried (<u>26:36</u>):

What about a literal secret sauce?

Rachel Terkelsen (26:39):

As in, are we talking edible?

Lana Fried (<u>26:41</u>):

Yeah.

Rachel Terkelsen (26:42):

Oh, gosh. I will have to admit to a late night scotch.

Lana Fried (26:47):

Oh, love that answer. And then finally, the most trivial of all, does pineapple belong on pizza?

Rachel Terkelsen (26:54):

Always and only with ham.

Lana Fried (26:57):

I'm waiting for someone to say no. Well, Rachel, thank you so much for coming in today. I really love chatting with you.

Rachel Terkelsen (27:03):

It's been great talking to you. Fantastic to meet you, Lana.

Lana Fried (27:05):

You too. Thanks for listening to Get Hungry, a podcast from Swinburne University of Technology where you get a taste of what career success looks like. If you like what you heard and you're keen to study at Swinburne where you can get your own real industry experience, then head to the website swinburne.edu.au. To make sure you don't miss an episode of Get Hungry, be sure to subscribe to or follow the show in your podcast app. And while you're there, leave us a five star review. It really helps others to find the show. This show was recorded in and around the Swinburne campus in Hawthorne, on Wurundjeri land, featuring some of the great cafes and most interesting buildings. The show was produced with strategy and production support by Wavelength Creative. I'm your host, Lana Fried. And thanks for listening to Get Hungry.