

00:00:00 Michelle Obama: Sometimes young people think that mentoring's just about, just show me the way, just tell me what to do.

Valerie Jarrett: Make my path easier, get stuff out of my way.

Michelle Obama: Make my path easier, yeah, yeah, I want young people out there to know, when they're looking for a mentor, they also have to think about, what are you going to bring to the relationship?

00:00:21 MUSIC

00:00:44 BREAK 00:01:09

00:01:17 Michelle Obama: Hi everyone. I am Michelle Obama and this is The Michelle Obama Podcast. In this episode, we're going to be talking about a relationship that can make all the difference for us in our professional lives, but also outside of it. And that is a relationship with a mentor. Whether it's with a boss, or a colleague who's a little older, or maybe it's an auntie or uncle who you know you can count on.

And so in this conversation, I'll be talking with my former boss... a senior advisor for Barack Obama, President Barack Obama, and me for a very long time, and one of our closest friends in the entire world. Her name is Valerie Jarrett.

Valerie is just incredibly accomplished—she ran a huge portfolio at the White House. She sits on the board of major companies and organizations. She wrote her own memoir, but more than any of her titles or accomplishments, she is simply one of the most honest, most loyal people you'll ever meet.

00:02:33 Michelle Obama: Well, Valerie, welcome to, the Michelle Obama podcast.

Valerie Jarrett: I am so happy to be here with you.

00:02:41 Michelle Obama: we are here today to talk about the role of, mentoring, how the workplace experience impacts who we are, and so much of who I am, is, the result of having you know, not just a strong mother, and a strong nuclear family, but strong friendships, not just in my private life, but in my work life. And when you and I first met, it was at that point in my life, when I was struggling in my career to figure out who I was, what I really wanted to do, the track that I was taking as a lawyer, in a corporate firm, really wasn't what I had expected, it wasn't giving me what I needed, it wasn't bringing joy to my life, it didn't feel meaningful. I hadn't really spent much time in my young life thinking beyond just chasing a career title.

00:03:39 So, for the first time in my life I had to actually get off of this treadmill, of what I was

supposed to do, and start thinking about what I, I wanted to do. What I was inspired to do, and that led me to uh, Valerie Jarrett. who was, [laughs]

Valerie Jarrett: [laughs] And am I glad that it did.

00:04:03 Michelle Obama: Valerie, why don't we talk a bit about that, that first meeting, and you know, where you were in your life, how you wound up working in the city government, that's where we were when we met,

Valerie Jarrett: Well similarly, to you, I had, made up this ten year plan, and I was busy doing everything on my plan, and, woke up one day, and I thought, is this, am I doing something that is fulfilling to me, and, will Laura, my daughter who, by that point, was a couple years old, will she actually be proud of me one day? And the answer was no. And I started doing some soul searching, and, a good friend of ours, Alvin Charity said, why don't you consider public service? You are so miserable at that law firm, And I said well that was not my plan! And he said just try it. You can always go back to the law firm, and so I took this leap of faith. When I met you four years later, I had practiced law for four years, for the city. 00:04:57 and Susan Shure, who was I think the number two person in the law department at the time, sent me your resume, and across the top, it said, you know, extraordinarily bright young woman, has no interest in the big law firm, so right away you had me with Hello! And, I have to tell you Michelle, I can still remember, you walking into my office, and you were so, you know composed, and confident, and what did you do, you told me your story, which is unusual for people to do in an interview.

Michelle Obama: When I met you, a Black woman who was on the same path as me, I was so curious to interview you, [laughs]

Valerie Jarrett: And you did interview me! I felt interviewed, [laughs]

Michelle Obama: Right, and I thought in order to have a real conversation with you, that I couldn't talk about, you know, my education, all that was on my resume, I was like, telling you, this is what I'm going through, you know. I kind of was open enough because I thought, you can't help me, if you don't understand why I'm here, and a job, was just a part of why I was there.

00:06:02 Michelle Obama: You know, I lost my father, and my best friend, from college, within a year of each other. You know my father's death was, fairly sudden. Even though he was deteriorating from MS for a long time. But my girlfriend, Suzanne, who was my age, we were literally, four days, five days different. I was born on January 17th she was born on the 21st, but she was uh, diagnosed with lymphoma, like in the fall, And she was dead by the spring.

00:06:40 Michelle Obama: I felt her death profoundly, that was my wakeup call, because I, I wasn't married at the time, I had started dating Barack. He was another kind of, wrench in my plan, because he was somebody that just viewed life differently. He wasn't on a path. He, he didn't do the conventional thing, yet, here he was, having an impact and challenging me, and

making me think in a different way. And I think all of that, was just making me, for the first time in my young life, think, and not just do. And, my thought was that, what do I have to lose, you know? And the fact that you were open to my openness, was, one of the first signs that this is somebody that I want to have in my life.

Valerie Jarrett: Thank you.

00:07:29 Valerie Jarrett: So, you bowled me over, obviously, um, I gave you a job offer on the spot, I didn't have any authority to give you a job offer, but,

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

Valerie Jarrett: I gave it to you anyway, I couldn't imagine why David Messina and the Mayor wouldn't be, um, totally blown away the way I had been, but wisely, you demurred, and said let me get back to you. So before you made the decision to come, you and your then fiancée and I had dinner, I remember that dinner so vividly because, in the nicest but most prodding kind of way,

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

Valerie Jarrett: Barack made me, like, tell me his stor- my life story, I can hear him now, going where are you from? Chicago. Did you grow up here? Yes. Were you born here? Well, No.

Michelle Obama: [laughs] so you were trying to hide that now, right

Valerie Jarrett: I always tried to hide it, I always,

Michelle Obama: And it's so easy, because nobody asks, right! [laughs]

Valerie Jarrett: And it would never occur to anybody, when you say you grow up here, usually they would take you at that, but not your fiancée, he was like diggin' deeper. And, I spent so much of my childhood just trying to be like every other kid. 00:08:31 I just wanted to be, what I would call normal, and I, I didn't feel normal, because I had been born in Iran, and I had lived there 'til I was five and then moved to London, and then to Chicago, and when my parents plopped me down in, school in Chicago, I got teased, and I got bullied, for a whole host of reasons, but mostly cause I was viewed as different

00:08:54 Valerie Jarrett: But what came out of it was that he didn't give me the normal reaction people give me. He, said, well that's interesting and then he started to open up and tell me about his life in Indonesia. So in a sense, we bonded for different reasons, but I did feel like, at that dinner, this is an amazing couple. And I remember that you treated each other, not just with love, which was obvious, but respect. And at the end of that dinner, I not only hoped that you were going to come and join the Mayor's office, but I thought, you know, he is so talented, I bet one day he could be Mayor of Chicago.

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

Valerie Jarrett: [laughs] That was my ceiling! For a Black man!

Michelle Obama: It's like, if he really worked hard! One day, he could be mayor! Yeah, Mmm hmm.

Valerie Jarrett: He could be mayor! And it just shows you how we put our own ceilings on ourselves. I, It never occurred to me to say he could be president! Harold Washington had been mayor, well maybe Barack Obama could be mayor too. So.

00:09:50 Michelle Obama: I accepted the offer. And I, and I trusted, that you were in there for the right reasons, number one because you didn't have to be there, right, [laughs], you were an accomplished attorney, well respected, you could've worked anywhere. But you were choosing to make, to be a voice at a table of power, to be a Black woman, a young Black woman, I just, you know, I still can't believe, I always felt you were so much older than me, because you were you were such a baller, such a boss, but you were a baby. [laughs]

Valerie Jarrett: Looking back now, I was a baby, I was really young.

Michelle Obama: You were, we were, we were all babies, but you! Were a baby! Um, running things. In the Daley administration. You had his ear, he promoted you to become the head of planning and economic development for the City of Chicago 00:10:46 So I trusted that you were doing it for the right reason, and that I could learn, from somebody like you.

Valerie Jarrett: There was one meeting where you asked me to stop by, to, and you were making the government work for people, because so many people got lost in the bureaucracy, it was so disorganized, and you were trying to make sense out of chaos. And I remember walking by the meeting, and hearing your voice outside, and you were saying to all the city agencies that were around that table. We are not gonna leave this meeting until we figure this out, and I remember I turned around, I was like, she doesn't need me in that meeting. She's got this. [laughs]

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

00:11:24 Michelle Obama: You were the first person that showed me, how to use, that voice, and how to, you know, quietly, but deftly, control the conversation, and the agenda. And, it was an important education for me.

Valerie Jarrett: Well and I had gone, in a sense, from a mentor as well, when I first started working for the city, there was a woman whose title was assistant to the Mayor for finance and development. She's the kind of person who would make space for you, so if she took me to a meeting with senior staff, she'd say Valerie why don't you do the presentation, and I would be terrified, but what an opportunity, that was that she afforded me. So she let me shine, and didn't feel like she had to be the one to always shine. And the, the thing that she really taught me that came in handy both in the Mayor's office and in planning, is she would always say remember who we work for. We work for the citizens of Chicago. That's our ultimate boss. We are here to serve. This is public service.

00:12:22 Michelle Obama: Watching you be one of the younger, often only women, oftentimes, the only Black person, at a table full of, CEOs, and bank heads, and community leaders, was probably the most powerful thing I could see.

00:12:49 Valerie Jarrett: Look Mayor Daley had a lot of strengths, he had a lot of weaknesses, but in terms of loyalty, one of the many reasons why I was loyal to both he and his wife Maggie, I remember, once I had brunch with them on a Sunday, and um, Maggie said what are you doing after brunch? I said I'm going back to work, and she goes why do you work on Sunday? I said, I'm the Commissioner of Planning and Development, I work everyday. And she goes, He doesn't work on Sundays, talking about her husband, why do you? She said Sunday you should be with your family. I thought about it I'm like you know what you are right, I should be with my family, and but when Susan and I were newly in our positions, we didn't really know Mayor Daley that well after he'd promoted both of us. And we were sitting in his office, and Susan and I started looking at our watches. And he caught us. And he said, so, what's going on here. And Susan and I looked at each other, and I often wonder, if Susan hadn't been in the room to kind of, um, give me some encouragement.

Michelle Obama: Safety in numbers,

00:13:47 Valerie Jarrett: Right, right, Would I have said to him, sir the Halloween parade starts in twenty minutes and we're 25 minutes away. And he didn't miss a beat, he said what are you doing here, and why didn't you speak up? And Susan and I go flying down Lakeshore drive in Chicago, and going a little above the speed limit, and we get to her son and my daughter's school, they were both in second grade together. And when the doors opened and the little darlings come out, and you've been to that holiday parade, Michelle, you know how darling they are,

Michelle Obama: Mm hmm yeah, [laughs]

Valerie Jarrett: They come out and what are they doing, they're looking around the crowd for us. And we were there. And it, the lesson wasn't just, OK, this, Mayor of Chicago is understanding we are both single moms and if we don't show up there will be nobody there. But it was also like, if we don't advocate for ourself, then he would never know, he can't read our minds, he doesn't know what's going on in our personal life.

Michelle Obama: Well, it also speaks to the important of having the diversity of leadership, what I experienced was having a boss that was a woman. Women bring a different perspective to the workplace. That is important and relevant. 00:14:51 Sometimes we get upset with men because they don't understand, well, no they don't understand. They're usually not the person who's taking care of the kid, you know, they have someone else do that. And I say this to our male leaders, it's like, you know, we we don't want women to be like men. You know, that's not what we're fighting for. We're not just fighting for women to put on suits, and to don the habits and perspectives of men to be accepted as leaders. No we need, that feminine energy, that perspective, that approach. A lot of male employers, you know they don't even know to make those accommodations. When you were the head of planning and economic development, along with some of the other senior women in the Daley administration, you got, I knew you were mothers [laughs] You weren't hiding it. When Laura called, you know, when

Laura called, and Laura was what, 8, 10, I, how old was? she was little. No she was younger than that,

00:15:46 Valerie Jarrett: You know what, she was, when you were in planning, she was like 5, 5 or 6,

Michelle Obama: Yeah, she was 5. But, if Laura called, [laughs] everything stopped. And I would sit, be sitting in meetings with you, and you'd be, hammering down, some intense thing, and uh Kathy would beep you in, it's Laura on the line, and wouldn't matter what you were saying, you would swivel around in your chair, just to slightly turn away, and you'd say Hi baby, how are you? And you wouldn't rush her, you know, you would answer her little five year old questions. And then you would say, Mommy will be home, then you'd turn back around without skipping a beat and be right back in it, and I thought, baller! Baller.

Valerie Jarrett: [laughs]

Michelle Obama: You know, I was like, she just flipped, she was like, the head of economic development one second and Laura's mommy the next.

00:16:41 Michelle Obama: And I saw you and Susan Shure, and some of the other women leaving meetings to go to the Halloween party, and rushing to get to the school play, and, that made us all more productive, and feel like not just our work had values, but our lives had value.

Valerie Jarrett: Right. We have to find the courage to be willing to say, this is what I need. And, um, and in so doing, we empower ourselves, and then you need to make sure that you're working for people, who allow you to be who you are.

Michelle Obama: Yeah,

Valerie Jarrett: And they can't be that, for you, unless they know who you are.

00:17:17 Michelle Obama: Well, and it, and you also learn that, there're millions of women, and people out there, who work in jobs, where, they don't have the luxury, they don't have the opportunity, they don't have the voice, they don't have the leverage, which is why I always say, it's incumbent upon the people like us, who do. We have to be that voice.

00:17:43 Anna Holmes: More on the Michelle Obama Podcast after the break.

00:17:55 BREAK 00:18:25

00:18:28 Valerie Jarrett: It's kind of a self-fulfilling prophecy, once you start setting your demands,

Michelle Obama: Mmm Hmm, yeah.

Valerie Jarrett: It is easier for people to just respect them, and I, I think a shock wave came when, before Kathy was my assistant, I had an assistant who one day, did not put Laura through when she called, and when I came out of a clay, closed door meeting,

Michelle Obama: See I laugh at that, like Oooh, that's why I never knew that woman, I don't even know who you're talking about,

Valerie Jarrett: You never met her. Because she handed me one of those little, uh, pink slips which says, you know, Laura, and I looked down and I said Laura who? And she said, Laura Jarrett,

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

Valerie Jarrett: And I said well she couldn't have called cause you would've come in and got me, and she said well you were in a meeting with the door closed, and I said, but you know the rule is, if Laura calls, and she said, Laura said it wasn't important. I said, a five year old doesn't make that decision. I do. I'm the mother and I get to, I can tell within ten seconds. I can say Laura, I will call you back, you know, you're just dialin' me cause you want to hear my voice, or, is there something, that she needs? 00:19:29 But if she wants to hear my voice, she gets to do that. And so yeah she didn't last, for a host of reasons.

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

Valerie Jarrett: But that was the one I remember most, and, so I think, and then, it became the rule, and every, it was like, urban lore, not even lore, cause it was the truth, well, that assistant, didn't last very long, so. And I think because I was in a position of power and authority, it made it, a lot easier to do. In fact I realized, when you said it, that I was, being a role model. Which I didn't really think about at the time, that you were watching me. I was more like, I'm doing this for Laura, not realizing, oh, people who are younger, are seeing this behavior, and that maybe that will help them.

00:20:09 Michelle Obama: And not everybody does that. We are, uh, living breathing role models, not just in what we say, but what we do, and if we're not making space, and we're not showing balance in our own lives, no matter what we say, young people are watching what we do.

Valerie Jarrett: Yeah,

Michelle Obama: They are watching and saying, I look up to this woman, and if she's working until, you know, twelve at night, seven days a week, and not mentioning her kids, then I guess that's what I have to be, to be a good professional, to be a good employee. And we think that we have to present ourselves perfectly to young people, right, if you're too far up, if you, if you, if you're perceived by young people as being perfect, and untouchable, they give up. I never want young people to think that failure, isn't a part of everybody's journey. Yes, I failed my bar, the first time, what does it do, for me if I, if some kid thinks I've never had a failure, that that's the only way you can be First Lady, is if you're perfect? No one is.

00:21:21 Michelle Obama: My ability to see other women who balanced it all, and were able to set boundaries for themselves gave me the tools, and at least the vision, of how I could be a



working mother. That was, that was huge for me, um, you know being able to say to my team, at whatever level my job was, it's like, let's block out all the things that are my life, first. Let me put, let me put me on my calendar first, let me put my kids' activities, and parent teacher conferences, let me put my workouts, let me put the things that are important to me on my schedule. Like, an appointment. Block out that time. Did I have to tell them that it was booked with a Halloween parade, did I tell them that it was booked, with a workout for me? No. You just say, I'm booked. And guess what people do. They go, OK, well let's find another date. 00:22:17 Let's find another time. We, we do that for, in our work lives all the time, we block that time off, but it is possible, to give yourself a reason to say no, if you put yourself on your schedule first. And,

Valerie Jarrett: And it grew out of the, the opposite right, where everybody was fillin' up your schedule without any consideration of what your needs were, and if you let them do that, you won't have any time left. They'll fill up every minute of your day, if you let 'em.

Michelle Obama: That's right, that's right, um,

Valerie Jarrett: I remember you on the campaign trail where you said, OK, I'll do what you want me to do, but I have to be back, by dinner time.

Michelle Obama: Yeah, I carried that into the, into the White House, when I realized that, over the course of the presidential campaign, when I still had a job, because I was still working for a good half a year before I was, walked away and did campaigning full time, that I gave the campaign, three days a week. 00:23:12 And I said, you know what, these are the times, I, you know I gotta get up, I want to get my kids to school, I gotta get my hair done, and I gotta get home in time for dinner. And you have this chunk of time in between there, to get me on a plane, and I will go anywhere, I will work as long as you need me to work, but when that bell rings, [laughs] you- I need to be at home, at this time, and don't call me. [laughs] And I got so much done, in those three days, that people thought I was working on the campaign full time. The same thing was true as First Lady. I was up three days a week.

00:23:49 Michelle Obama: We called it being up, and for a woman that was meant I had hair and makeup done, and I didn't want to waste, a day of hair and makeup cause when, I'm First Lady, if I'm not up, and I am not in hair and makeup. I am looking like me, right. So when I had hair and makeup, it's like let's let's do every speech,

00:24:07 [CLIP: Michelle Obama: Thank you everyone...Graduates as you all know ... thank you all, thanks so much, you all, rest yourselves. ]

Michelle Obama: Let's do TV,

00:24:13 [CLIP: Grover: Wait a minute! Are you First Lady Mrs. Michelle Obama?



Michelle Obama: I am, Grover, hi, how are you?]

Michelle Obama: Let's do all of this stuff,

CLIP: [Michelle Obama: HI! And welcome to the White House! [cheers]]

Michelle Obama: And, then I had the rest of the week for my children. And, for my husband. And, for dinner time. And, for me time. Uh, and I was highly productive, in that time. I got so much done, we launched four initiatives. We spoke at graduations. We did PSA's, we did events. You know, we had, the house was full of activity in the White House, but it was scheduled around, the parameters I set for my family.

00:24:59 Valerie Jarrett: Those of us, who are bosses, have to give the team permission too, because that's culture, you've created a culture now, where people know they can bring their full self to work. You have to reinforce it over and over and over again, because people are also bringing their baggage from their prior experiences, to the table. Which means to some degree, you've got to let them let go of that baggage, and realize oh no, this is a new place, now, we're not playing by those rules that you played, where you couldn't talk about who you are. Cause, you have to do that here. That's what I expect of you, and so, leading by example, and you did that, but also empowering other people to say well, it's OK for me to do that, too.

00:25:47 Michelle Obama: Sometimes young people think that mentoring's just about, just show me the way, just tell me what to do.

Valerie Jarrett: Make my path easier, get stuff out of my way.

Michelle Obama: Make my path easier, yeah, yeah, I want young people out there to know, when they're looking for a mentor, they also have to think about, well, what are you going to bring to the relationship? I was talking to Malia about this, the other day, because we, you know, we were talking about having impact, and how young people, and I know our generation talks about it, a lot of times, a lot of young people want it really fast, like I want to make change, I want to be a speechwriter, [laughs] right,

Valerie Jarrett: Right.

Michelle Obama: You know, seeing that in the campaign, I want to come in, I think I want to run communications, it's like well first of all, you're 23, you just got out of college. I tried to make the point to Malia that the young people that are, that have been in my life a long time, and who are my mentees, I reminded her that they started out, several of them, in the campaign, doing some of the grunt-iest jobs. 00:26:50 You know, uh, volunteering to pick up speakers. At the airport. Um, Doing advance work, which is some of the hardest stuff, that means you have to go out and set up the site before, that means you gotta get coloring books

for the candidates kids, you gotta, bring food in, it's grunt work. But the people who are with me now, and who now have responsibilities over my schedule, or they've helped run a big book tour, or they are running, our higher ground productions and working with Netflix, almost all those people started out, doing some grunt work. [laughs] And, you watch, how young people do the work that they don't want to do. The thankless work. That's not so fun, and to do it well, those are the people that I look to and go, huh. That person's ready to be pushed. That person wants to do more, I'm I'm ready to invest in them.

00:27:49 Valerie Jarrett: Right. Attitude matters. Attitude! And effort, and energy, and you know being a cheerful spirit even on a bad day. The folks that I hired in the White House to be a part of my team, were many of the junior staff that I saw along the campaign trail all over our country back in 2007 and 2008. That impressed me with their job that they were doing, little did they know, I was looking at them, as somebody to potentially have, a much more senior position. The job of the mentor of course is to help, people grow. And, not give them so much responsibility that they fail, but to be able to gauge, what works and what isn't gonna work. And to, and when it's not working, to say to them, this isn't working, but I think this will.

00:28:35 Valerie Jarrett: And you know you and I had a similar experience in high school in that our college counselors um, were discouraging. I remember going to my counselor and I told him you know since my first year of high school, I'd always wanted to go to Stanford, and he said there's no way, you're gonna get in Stanford, and out of maybe, obstinance, I applied anyway, but plus it's just like I had been so determined, to do this. But my mother, the cautionary one, said well apply to a bunch of other schools too, and I never told her what he said to me, and so I did, and ended up getting into all the schools I had applied to, but I remember going to college thinking, well maybe it was a mistake, maybe that guy was right, maybe I don't really deserve to be here. And it wasn't until I started getting my grades that I was like, well, wait a minute, I'm actually doing alright, but he did damage to me, I think, with that setting of a low expectation of me.

Michelle Obama: I think it has a lot to do with the uh, limitations of race and class um, that sadly, guide too many people.

00:29:35 Valerie Jarrett: Exactly.

Michelle Obama: I mean, I, you know, a lot of these counselors, you know, they're dealing with hundreds of students,

Valerie Jarrett: [phone vibrates] Oh, Hold on hold on, Laura, [laughs]

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

Valerie Jarrett: I have to still be true to it! I know she's probably been texting me. Hi sweetheart, doing my podcast with Michelle but of course you know I had to take your call,

Michelle Obama: Hey Laura!

Valerie Jarrett: 'Cause otherwise I'd be off message! [laughs] She says hello, alright I'll c- Ok, bye bye, [laughs] Was that perfect or what.

Michelle Obama: She good? I know,

Valerie Jarrett: I saw the lil' pumpkin pop up I was like uh oh!

Michelle Obama: I know! She's still the pumpkin poppin' up.

Valerie Jarrett: She's still the pumpkin, she's probably been texting me, for hours, and she worries like a little old lady so if I don't answer her right away, then she assumes that I've tripped and I'm on the floor bleeding or something, but anyways,

Michelle Obama: That's right, it's like I'm not dead, I'm just doin' a podcast,

Valerie Jarrett: I'm alive!

00:30:30 Valerie Jarrett: I interrupted you.

Michelle Obama: No, no. It's a good thing. Um, but, but yeah, it's some of it is, uh, people's limited view, their own biases, their prejudice, their racism, and there are a lot of people who don't, they've been talk that, a little Black kid, or a brown kid, or working class kid, is only supposed to achieve so much. That's that's their limited view of the world. But the thing, that that that all adults have to think about, is what happens when you say that to the kid who has nowhere else to go with that negative energy? They sit with it, and it slowly erodes the sense of who they are. When the realities as we both discovered, are just the opposite, there's no magic in these schools! I talk about affirmative action all the time, the minute you sit in these hallowed halls and you sit on these boards, and you sit in these C-suites, you see a lot of excellence, but you also see a lot of mediocrity. 00:31:27 You see a lot of reverse affirmative action, of kids who are there because their parents paid for their placements at those schools, we've seen it in the college admissions scandal, which is nothing new to us. We know that there are people who, are alumni donors, or, or or football boosters, or you name it, there're plenty of ways that kids uh, are placed in positions and told, you deserve it, when they haven't earned it at all. And You've got, you know, thousands, millions, of talented, young, minority, poor, working class kids, kids who live in small rural towns, who nobody gives the chance. That's what, also what being a good mentor is, it's like if you're gonna take on a position of being a teacher, or counselor, you you know, you have a responsibility to clear your head, of your prejudices, and your bigotry, you know, all of that, because you can damage a kid for a long time to come.

00:32:37 Michelle Obama: During our White House time, one of the, the programs that, I was most proud of, was our mentoring program. That we had in the White House. Um, You know, we didn't make that, public, because that was something that um, that we wanted to do because we felt we had an obligation, uh, living in the most famous powerful address in the land, what were we doing as the First Lady, and as senior advisors to the President, women in this administration. What were we doing, to, actively lift up, young people, not working for us, or interning with us, but, you know, young women in high school, who were trying to find their way, and we started uh, the White House mentoring program. And, Barack had a companion program for young men, but you were, played a, a big role, you were one of the, you know, more powerful and more important, mentors,

00:33:40 Valerie Jarrett: I'll tell you a story, I'm not even sure I've ever shared this with you, but, the, first group of mentees, that we um, brought in, were all, down, on the first floor. Ground level of the residence waiting to be invited up to, to meet you. And, I walked from the West Wing, on my way, to the reception luncheon that we had for them, and, uh, so I had to walk through the crowd. And they were, they were so emotional about meeting you that many of them were in tears. Typical teenage girls, had no control over their emotions, and because you weren't there, they felt free to just sob, and scream, and, and they were a hot mess before they went upstairs,

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

00:34:20 Valerie Jarrett: But they composed themselves, to go upstairs, and what I remember so vividly about you, and you have talked about this a lot, is that from the moment they met you, you were so present in their life. And you, you've talked about the fact that you don't know, whether their families were present, what what kind of circumstances they were living in. All you knew is that for that time that you connected with them, you wanted them to know, that you valued them. And you could just feel them relax, because they're like Oh she's a mom. She's just like, normal. And so I think the program, it was about the intimacy of that connection. And, that was the piece of it that I enjoyed, hearing their stories, and you know teenage girls, they'll talk, you just have to like, wind them up, but,

00:35:15 Michelle Obama: And, and and the thing the program did, you know, the reason why I think I like formal mentorship programs, especially with young people, it takes time for them to warm up. And, to reveal themselves, it doesn't happen, over the course of a meeting, I don't care how open you are. Our mentorship program was a heightened version of that. These young kids were being brought into the White House, and they were meeting with the First Lady at the time, and that was really heady. But that's true for any, you know, relationship with young people, it takes them a second, to ease into themselves, to start opening up. Because, they don't know if they can trust you, just because you're the First Lady, just because of they don't, it's like, part of 'em is like I don't know these people, I don't know if they're serious, I don't know if they'll be here, I don't, so the, so the consistency of formalized mentorship program, it reinforces to young people that you're serious about your investment in them.

00:36:15 And my point was, to them, always, was, if you can walk into the White House, and look the First Lady in the eye, with confidence, and share your thoughts and ideas, and share some popcorn, and laugh, if you know, if you can feel your growth getting comfortable in the most powerful house in the land, there's nothing you can't do! There's no place you can't go, cause you've been to the mountaintop. And you've looked power in the eye, and, and you were a part of this. Mentoring can be that powerful. And, formal consistent mentoring can change the trajectory of a child's life. We have seen it again and again and again, even if they don't end up in a certain place, it changes the fabric of who, how they see themselves. In the world. 00:37:07 And, my thing is like, if we could do it in the White House, under some challenging times, I know that every corporation, every bank, every office, every, you know, everybody out there, can think of a way to do something formalized like that, for the young people in their communities.

00:37:29 Valerie Jarrett: And I will say one other thing outside of the formal mentorship program that you two did, is that when you touched people, it was never the drive by. So for example when you, and Barack when to Indian country. And you met those teenagers, who had suffered so much, the suicide rate in the high school, I know was off the charts. And what did you do, you invited them, back to the White House, not once, but again. And we were in Chicago, and and Barack met with a group of, uh, students over at Hyde Park high school, who were in this becoming a man program, before there even was a My Brother's Keeper, and then he invited them to the White House around father's day, and I'll never forget, one of them gave him a card, and it said, uh, it was a Father's day card. They actually, they all signed the card, they all signed this father's day card, and one of the kids said to him, you know, I've never signed a father's day card to anybody. And Barack said, neither have I. 00:38:25 Well, the powerfulness of that moment, those young boys will never forget when he said that to them.

00:38:47 Michelle Obama: To people who, you know, uh, are trying to find the mentor, within them. Uh, what advice would you give?

Valerie Jarrett: That relationships are everything. That that's what makes us human, is our ability to develop deep and meaningful relationships in our life. I can tell you, that some of the most rewarding relationships that I have in my life, including the one obviously with you Michelle, came from what started out, as, um, an acquaintance, uh, we clicked, we worked together, and over the course of nearly three decades, it grew deep. But those roots don't happen just because you think they should, they take hard work. And and you've got to give each other, you've got to be able to look at the relationship from the perspective of the other person, too. It's not just all about you. It's gotta be, what is that, and sometimes, when we're particularly junior, and you're looking up to people, you think well, what could I possibly do for them? 00:39:47 Michelle you brought so much joy to my life, when you came and joined the Mayor's office, and then we were together in planning. Unbelievable joy, and, and unbelievable relief to know that if I gave you something, I knew that it was gonna be done at the absolute best. And so, for the mentees, realize that you bring joy to the mentor, it's not just them being helpful to you.

Michelle Obama: You know a lot of times people think mentors are famous people, people with titles, and, you know, achievements, people that they see out in the world. But, we are all, role models. And I, you know, I just, the one thing I don't like is the people who have a platform who say, I'm not a role model. And it's like, well, you, you have a choice, then don't be out there, because if you are being seen in any way shape or form, there is somebody looking up to you, and I want young people to realize that mentorship starts early. 00:40:41 And it starts right in your own backyard. For every, young person who's listening to this conversation, I don't care if you're twelve or ten, there's somebody younger, who is watching you, they are watching how you carry yourself, how you laugh, how you make fun of things, what you wear, there is always somebody, right behind you, looking, at how to be. And in that way, we have to carry ourselves with the knowledge that we're, we're always setting the tone for people behind us. We are always um, in somebody's line of sight. So Valerie I want to thank you, um, for,

Valerie Jarrett: Oh, this was such a treat,

Michelle Obama: We've got a lot more work to do, um, I know that, times feel hard right now, and there are a lot of people who feel discouraged, but there's also a lot of hope and potential, and we're seeing it in the young people who have been in our lives. 00:41:37 They are stepping up in ways, that, are important and promising. And it's up to us, to be there to help them guide the way, so thank you for being that for me, and so many people.

Valerie Jarrett: Right back at you. Right back at you my friend, my dear, dear, dear friend!

00:41:59 Michelle Obama: So I want to thank Valerie not just for joining me today but for everything she's been for me in my life, and for so many people who've worked for her, and with her, over the years.

As you can tell, she's someone that understands to her core that when you make it in this world, you have got to reach back and lift up other folks who will one day step into your shoes. And that doesn't just mean if you're in the White House or the C-Suite or any other lofty position. It also means taking on the responsibility any time you've got someone out there who's looking up to you.

00:42:39 Maybe you started your job a couple months before the newest hire. Maybe there's someone in the grade behind you who's looking for some support. Maybe there's a kid growing up down the street who just likes the way you carry yourself. No matter who it is, or where it is, or what it is, you have an opportunity—and a responsibility—to make those kinds of connections.

And if you find yourself looking for someone to learn from and lean on, my advice is to take that first step of introducing yourself to the folks around you. Ask them for coffee. Or set up a meeting to ask them whatever questions you have on your mind.

Do whatever you need, but just make sure you do it—because once you start a conversation, there is no telling where it might end up.

So thanks again for listening. Talk to you again soon.

00:43:41 Anna Holmes: The Michelle Obama Podcast is a Spotify Original, presented and produced by Higher Ground Audio in collaboration with Dustlight Productions.

From Higher Ground Audio, Dan Fierman, Anna Holmes and Mukta Mohan are Executive Producers. Janae Marable is our Editorial Assistant. Adam Sachs is our Consulting Producer.

From Dustlight Productions, Misha Euceph is the Executive Producer. Arwen Nicks and Jonathan Shifflett are the producers. Additional Production support from Mary Knauft. Jonathan Shifflett is also our engineer. Menaka Wilhelm is the archival producer and transcriber. Rachael Garcia is the Dustlight Editorial Assistant.

Daniel Ek, Dawn Ostroff and Courtney Holt are Executive Producers for Spotify.

Special thanks to: MacKenzie Smith, Joe Paulsen, Kristina Schake, Melissa Winter, Chynna Clayton, Alex May, Caroline Adler Morales, and Merone Hailemeskel.

And thanks to: Clean Cuts Studio, Search Party Music, Tyler Lechtenberg, Dylan Rupert, Carolyn Lipka, Young Creative Agency, and D'ara Nazaryan.

Our theme music is by Stevie Wonder. Original music by Andy Clausen and Tele Fresco.

The song you heard at the beginning of this show is "The Night Song" by Ravyn Lenae.

Thanks for listening to The Michelle Obama Podcast.

00:45:12 BREAK 00:45:32