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(INTRO MUSIC)

Dina Powell McCormick: We're so delighted today to have Dana Perino with us and her incredible *New York Times* bestselling book *Everything Will Be Okay: Life Lessons for Young Women from a Former Young Woman*. Thank you so much for being here.

Dana Perino: Thank you. It's an honor to be here.

Dina Powell McCormick: So, let me start with what kind of moved you to write this book?

Dana Perino: Well, oh gosh, I feel like this book has been building for a while. And the reason I have the subtitle of *Life Lessons for Young Women from a Former Young Woman*, partly it's why would you buy a book from somebody who's never been through stuff?

Dina Powell McCormick: Good point.

Dana Perino: And also, I felt like I had something to say. I wouldn't want to write a book just to, like, write a book a year. For me, this was really a growth-- it grew out of the first books, chapter five, which was all my mentoring advice in one place. And I had started a thing in 2010 called Minute Mentoring. And this was like speed dating, but mentoring for young women because I had had this opportunity to work at the White House as the Press Secretary. And I think you're probably the same, how many calls do you get a week for mentoring advice? And could you meet for coffee? Do you have time for lunch? Like, you don't have that kind of time. But you have a desire and a passion to help. And an obligation.

And I know that in your programs, like in the 10,000 Small Businesses, like for women, one of the obligations that they have if they participate is they have to mentor others.

Dina Powell McCormick: Exactly.

Dana Perino: Right? So, you're putting that into play. So, I don't have that sort of as a formal part of my life. It's just

something that I do naturally. And I realized that a lot of the concerns and worries that young women were having, even like six years ago during what I would call a quarter life crisis, like in the mid twenties, things get better. But it was following them into their thirties and beyond. And I thought, it doesn't have to be that way.

And when they would come to me, I would realize that not only are they worried about why am I not moving up more quickly? What if I don't even like this industry? Should I go to law school or graduate school? I can't meet anybody. I don't know why it is that the guys get promoted more quickly than the gals. Am I doing something wrong? All of these things.

And I realized they're putting barriers in their own way. So, I feel like I worried my twenties away. Like completely. It's not that I'm saying I didn't have fun. Like I did. But what I remember most is being very anxious. And as I write the book, every career advancement I've had is not something that I planned.

Dina Powell McCormick: That's really true.

Dana Perino: Like none of it.

Dina Powell McCormick: Probably when you were growing up, and your grandfather was a huge influence on you.

Dana Perino: Yes.

Dina Powell McCormick: But I bet when you were riding horses with him, you didn't think you'd end up behind the podium at the White House.

Dana Perino: No, not at all. And my family was not politically connected, although my grandfather was a county commissioner in Weston County, Wyoming. So, I understood public service early on. I had an appreciation for news. Because when I was in third grade my dad started this tradition with me where I had to read *The Rocky Mountain News* and the *Denver Post* every day before he got home from work. And I had to choose two articles to discuss before dinner.

Dina Powell McCormick: I remember you telling me that years ago. And how old were you?

Dana Perino: I was in third grade. So, I was eight. Eight or

nine.

Dina Powell McCormick: Unbelievable.

Dana Perino: And that started this lifelong love of news. And so, I had an idea of, like, what I wanted to do. I was on the speech team. Highly recommend. I thought I was going to be in local news. That doesn't end up happening because I was, like, how do you get ahead here? I had ambition. And I was like, well, how do you get ahead?

And also, when I was a little girl, even all the way through college, there was not a woman who was at the top of their field. Right? If you think of ABC, CBS, NBC News, this was before cable news existed.

Dina Powell McCormick: You're right. You're right.

Dana Perino: And Snapchat wasn't a thing.

Dina Powell McCormick: It was all men. All men were the anchors.

Dana Perino: And they had been there for 20 years. Dan Rather. Peter Jennings. Tom Brokaw.

And so, I wasn't really sure what to-- anyway, I ended up leaving that. And that was hard because at 22, 23, I thought if I don't continue and pursue a job in television news I'll never get to work in television. But I decided it was worth it to go to Washington DC. And, ultimately, after a lot of hard work and chance circumstance, I become the White House Press Secretary.

Dina Powell McCormick: I worked in that administration. There were many, many talented and capable people. And you just shot up like a rocket.

Dana Perino: So, I first worked at the Justice Department right after the 9/11 attacks. And I was working for Mindy Tucker, who I had known on Capitol Hill. So, part of the book too is you see that there's this recurring theme of, I made friends, kept in touch with my friends--

Dina Powell McCormick: Yes, supported your friends.

Dana Perino: Helped my friends. They helped me. And so, after 9/11 I returned-- I was at the Justice Department. And then I

was at the White House Council on Environmental Quality. And I always tell people, "take the job that nobody else wants." I'm not saying nobody would have wanted to work at the Council on Environmental Quality. But during those years, the hot topics were terrorism--

Dina Powell McCormick: Foreign policy. National security.

Dana Perino: All the foreign policies. And also, tax cuts. All that stuff. So, what I did is I said, I'll handle those issues for you, Ari Fleischer and Scott McClellan so you don't ever have to worry about them. And that's how I ended up, ultimately then, as the Deputy Press Secretary. But it partly is because you take the jobs that you think aren't that attractive and do them very well. And that's how you get up.

Dina Powell McCormick: And then you served as Deputy Press Secretary, which from CEQ to that was a leap.

Dana Perino: Yes, definitely.

Dina Powell McCormick: And also, a much more high profile role. There are so many things I could ask. But I've got to get to one story in the book where you'd been working around the clock. You'd done the job very well. And you and Peter, your wonderful husband, decided that, you know, it was time for a change. And that you were going to go in and talk to Ed Gillespie, who was the Communications Director at the time. And just tell him that, you know, it's been great, and you love the president.

Dana Perino: But when you are working at the White House it's really hard to leave.

Dina Powell McCormick: Uh-huh, it is. It's a huge honor.

Dana Perino: And there's a limited amount of time that any administration is going to be there.

Dina Powell McCormick: Of course.

Dana Perino: So yes. The call had gone out from Josh Walton, the Chief of Staff, that--

Dina Powell McCormick: If you were going to leave, right? Or something?

Dana Perino: That we have 18 months left. If you feel like you might not be able to sprint to the finish, then you might consider moving on now so that we can have people with fresh legs to see it through. And I was like, sprint to the finish? I'm crawling.

Dina Powell McCormick: Right now, I'm crawling.

Dana Perino: I look around, I'm like, I can't do it. And also, you know, I met my husband on an airplane. He's so supportive. I had not been able to spend time with him for eight years. You know? When you're working in those jobs and those hours, it's limited time. But it's intense. And the spouse or the family--

Dina Powell McCormick: Huge sacrifice.

MALE VOICE:

They get the short end of the stick. So yes, we decided, like, you know, maybe this is the time. So, I was going into the office to tell Ed Gillespie. And then I was going to tell the president. I was so nervous. And I saw Ed. And I said, "Can I see you after the meeting?" And he said, "Oh yes, I need to see you too." I'm like, okay, great.

So, we finished the communications meeting that morning. And he says, "Thank you everybody. Dana, can you stay?" Sure. So, I wait till everybody files out. I sit down in the chair across from his desk and I went to just blurt it out so that I wouldn't lose my nerve. And he says, "Do you mind if I go first?" "Oh no, that's fine." And he said, "All right. The president would like to make you the Press Secretary on Friday." And I said, "Wonderful. Okay." And I never told him. Until I wrote my first book Ed never knew that I was--

Dina Powell McCormick: That story was in that book. But you had never told it before?

Dana Perino: Yeah. So, like, think about my plan. I had this plan. I was ready to go. I was not really certain about it. Imagine if I had gone first.

Dina Powell McCormick: Exactly. So, what is the lesson there that I think--

Dana Perino: Well, always let the other person go first.

Dina Powell McCormick: That's a very important lesson.

Dana Perino: And also, be ready to turn on a time.

Dina Powell McCormick: Well, that's the thing. And to have the confidence. Because a lot of people, myself included, might have said, "Oh my gosh. I can't believe you thought of me. I wasn't even thinking that way." And candidly, I think women do that a little bit more than men. You know? With all due respect I think men say, "What took you so long to ask? I've been sitting right here." But I worry sometimes that women tend to say, "Oh, I'm so grateful. And you thought of me."

Dana Perino: But women tend to think they need more experience.

Dina Powell McCormick: Exactly.

Dana Perino: So, Dee Dee Meyers who was the first woman to hold the job as Press Secretary, I once was at an event with her where she described being at a seminar where they were talking about things you need to have in your wheelhouse in order to run for office. Five things. One, two, three, four, five. She said the guys in the room would be like, "I've got one of those. I'm going to go for it." And that the women would be like, "Okay, I have three of those already. And if I apply myself and work really hard for the next four years trying to get the fourth one-- and then by the time I--." And they are thinking that they need a lot more.

And actually, Tony Snow was the Press Secretary I replaced. On his last day he came to see me and said, "How are you doing?" I said, "Well, not very good." Because he was so good at the podium and he was so beloved. And he was 6'5" and I'm 5 feet tall. And I was like, how am I supposed to fill his shoes?

Dina Powell McCormick: Totally.

Dana Perino: And he made he stand up. And he shook me a little bit. And he said, "You are better at this than you think you are." Two weeks later I had to do a briefing on a Friday. I was in a rush. Meeting, meeting, meeting. I had to go do the briefing. I don't have any notes. But I was like, oh well. I mean, I don't want them to think that I'm nervous. So, I'm not going to be late.

So, I walked in there and I had the best briefing I've ever done. And I realized, oh, that's what Tony meant. I could just

be myself. I didn't have to be him.

Dina Powell McCormick: That's so true. And be confident. And be confident.

Dana Perino: Yes.

Dina Powell McCormick: You know, another thing that you talk about in the book that I can personally say is an issue I wrestle with, which is sort of the kicking yourself after the fact.

Dana Perino: Yes.

Dina Powell McCormick: Now, you know, the story that my team has heard a few times is, you know, like you go into the client pitch. You're so prepared. You're so proud. 95 percent goes well. And all you think about is the five percent, right, that you should have done differently. And I really believe that really holds back women, in particular. I really do.

And so, you had to deal with that on kind of a national stage to include--

Dana Perino: Yeah. I mean, there were nights when I would lie awake and think, "Oh, that would have been a great line. I should have said this. I should have said that." And I actually can do it so much better now for others. I'm like everybody's press secretary. Like, "Oh, they should have said this. Should have said that." Even for Jen Psaki. And she and I are very friendly. I would never do this because now I'm a journalist so I can't send her, like, "Oh, hey, here's some advice." I would not do that. It'd be unethical. But I think, ooh, she could have said that. Oh, she could have said that. And like, wow, I actually did know what I was talking about.

Dina Powell McCormick: But you were beating yourself up a little bit.

Dana Perino: Yeah. And actually, it's kind of a biological thing. I don't know why it is. But we all do it. It's actually funny. You can remember anything negative that's ever said about you, like on social media. But you can't remember that somebody said, "Oh my gosh, that was a great presentation." It's like you let those ones go. It's kind of a biological thing.

So, one of the things I talk about in the book is how can you

take those feelings of anxiety and the worries and convert them into energy that is productive for you to use? Like where you can say, "I'm going to try that next time"?

Dina Powell McCormick: And move forward.

Dana Perino: Because also, the people don't remember. I tell this story about getting kicked out of the Oval Office--

Dina Powell McCormick: Well, that's where I was going to go. Wait, wait, wait. The set up here is very important. So, it's your fast day.

Dana Perino: Well, it's my third day in the West Wing.

Dina Powell McCormick: Yes, okay. And you go to the Oval Office.

Dana Perino: First day in the Oval Office. I have never been in the Oval Office-- well, I went there for one time to shake a hand. Now, I don't think the president even knew my name on this third day. He would probably say, "Of course I know your name." And I got asked by Dan Bartlett, the Communications Director, to sit in on an interview the president was going to do with a columnist.

All I had to do was show up for the pre brief. Dan would do the brief. And all I had to do was sit there, take notes, and cut off the interview at 30 minutes. Like, I can do that.

But you know, your first time in the Oval Office is just--

Dina Powell McCormick: Overwhelming.

Dana Perino: So hard. You're so nervous. And it's majestic and you want to look at everything, but you also want to be focused. You're like, am I drooling? And so, we get there. And Dan starts to do the pre brief. And the president says, "What? I'm not doing an interview with that guy." It's like, "Yes, remember, you said you would talk to him." He said, "I said I'd talk to him. I didn't say I'd do an interview with him." So, there's a miscommunication.

Dina Powell McCormick: That you had nothing to do with.

Dana Perino: I'm just an innocent bystander. Completely. And I'm watching this go back and forth. And of course, the

president wins the argument.

Dina Powell McCormick: It works out that way.

Dana Perino: And he says, "I'm not doing an interview with him. And therefore, she doesn't need to be here." And then he looked right at me and went like this, like see yourself out. So, I nearly crawled back to my office. It was 32 steps. I had a little pocket door. I closed it behind me. And I called my husband. And I was very tearful, and I told him what he happened. And he said, "Well, just think. For the rest of your life, you can say 'I've been kicked out of better places than this.'" "

Dina Powell McCormick: Well, I am not surprised at all at how well this book has done. I think your humility and grace is such a great example for so many of us. So, thank you so much for being with us today.

Dana Perino: Thanks for the opportunity. Yeah.

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