

Kirt Jacobs: Welcome to MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs. This is an archived edition when our program was called Leadership Landscape TV.

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Kirt Jacobs: Welcome to Leadership Landscape where we go inside the minds of local community leaders and allow them a chance to offer some keen insights to how they see themselves and most importantly just what makes them tick. I'm Kirt Jacobs host of Leadership Landscape where previous interviews have included former mayors, state politicians, nationally renowned sports writers, heads of major business concerns, community activists, and developers. Today our guest is Francene. For those of you who don't know her you've probably been hiding under a rock. And I'm sure you know her voice but you may not know her face. So I got this beautiful picture of her I want to hold up. Unfortunately it's not full scale but I thought that was a great picture of you.

Francene Cucinello: Thank you.

Kirt Jacobs: Great. Great to have you.

Francene Cucinello: Thank you.

Kirt Jacobs: She was born in New Jersey. I'm going to read a little of her bio. She led a life on the stage before discovering that broadcasting was her true calling. Professional dancer with the regional ballet company at age 14. Francene developed her work ethic early touring with Shakespearean Musical Theatre Company before she was 21. It was during college at West Virginia University when Francene's fate was sealed. She called a radio station to answer a trivia question. The station's program director heard her voice and hired her on the spot to be a disc jockey. After college Francene began writing, producing, and appearing as an on-camera talent in commercials and industrial films.

This included work for MCI, Major League Baseball and various branches of the U.S. government. At the same time she also established herself as an accomplished voiceover artist and recorded an award winning series for the Discovery Channel and audio books for the Library of Congress. A few years later that voice led Francene to Charlotte, North Carolina and to a career as a television news reporter. Francene then continued reporting at the WBAL TV in Baltimore and at a national news bureau in Washington D.C. where she covered Congress and the White House. There's more.

Francene as a former television news reporter who covered Congress in the Clinton White House while a correspondent for a national news bureau in Washington D.C. Following next was investigative work and anchoring at WSMV TV in Nashville. There Francene, listen to this, broke numerous stories of local and national significance and got nominated for several Emmy awards in the process. Several years ago when she was doing television in Nashville Francene produced an exclusive interview with John and Patsy Ramsey. I'm sure you've heard of them after the 2000 publication of *The Death of Innocence* their book about the murder of their daughter Jon Benet Ramsey. However, radio once again beckoned and Francene's next step was KTRS, a talk radio show, excuse me, the talk radio station in St Louis where she was the station's first female solo talk show host. And in 2002 Francene was awarded an International Journalism Fellowship and left the country for study in Berlin, Germany and at a NATO and the European Union. Excuse me. She then, 84 WHAS is ending a morning show she describes as being about news and about life. 84 WHAS is a 50 thousand watt AM radio station that has served Kentucky in a region with news, information, sports, and entertainment since 1922. Currently making her mark on the Commonwealth Francene also finds time to report for the FOX television affiliate in Cincinnati.

I don't know how you do it. And writing editorials for *The Voice Tribune*. If asked Francene will tell you her passions are travel, information and people. Nevertheless we know she also enjoys watching DVD's with her dog Monty.

Francene Cucinello: You couldn't read the short bio?

Kirt Jacobs: I'm sorry. I couldn't do it. I couldn't do it. You've got too much of a good story.

Francene Cucinello: It's all lies.

Kirt Jacobs: Yeah, it's all made up. Nice, well our first..

Francene Cucinello: You want to see Monty? I brought Monty.

Kirt Jacobs: You brought Monty?

Francene Cucinello: I did.

Kirt Jacobs: Alright. Roll Monty out there.

Francene Cucinello: This is Monty.

Kirt Jacobs: Turning it back a little so that make sure the camera can get it. Nlce.

Francene Cucinello: He's actually more popular than I am so this will get ratings.

Kirt Jacobs: This will probably be like we want to see Francine air again we never saw the dog.

Francene Cucinello: No he's a good boy. He's a very good boy.

Kirt Jacobs: That's great.

Francene Cucinello: So Monty's with us in spirit.

Kirt Jacobs: There went the whole interview. We are done. What what drives you to do all this. You could just do WHAS but you are doing Cincinnati. You're doing The Voice.

Francene Cucinello: I've never been able to have one job at a time. I think it's a combination of fear and boredom. I am easily bored. But

I was poor and trying to make it in broadcasting for so long that you said yes to every job that came available. And you didn't know how long you were going to have it. So you had to make the rent. And I think I'm just in that that groove. And now when people say hey blah blah blah and it's also good for me. Because by reporting in Cincinnati I bring a lot back to the station here and my talk show here. And also it's good I get a little geographic and psychological break.

Kirt Jacobs: It's not so provincial. To get out

Francene Cucinello: Oh it's not provincial. It's just it's just a new city to play in once in a while.

Kirt Jacobs: Sure. Sure. Whom do you credit most influential in your life?

Francene Cucinello: You know I don't...

Kirt Jacobs: It doesn't have to be one person.

Francene Cucinello: No there really is one person but for a couple of reasons. It's my father. Who died about seven years ago.

Kirt Jacobs: I'm sorry.

Francene Cucinello: Well thank you. Don't smoke. Cancer three times. My work ethic comes from my father. He was a fabulous businessman Wall Street. Yeah big time and he also had some qualities that I was developing. Workaholic and the success equals money and nothing else. And I am now diametrically different from that because of an event or series of events in my life. So dad still a huge influence on a daily basis.

Kirt Jacobs: Wow. Interesting impact he had on you. What was the most defining moment of your life? It could be more than one. It can be personal or professional. And feel free to elaborate. I want to hear..

Francene Cucinello: Well let's go back to what changed in my life.

Kirt Jacobs: OK.

Francene Cucinello: And you're probably going to talk to a lot of wonderful amazing business people. And then there's me...

Kirt Jacobs: No. No. That's not it. We cover the gamut here.

Francene Cucinello:... with this personal story.

Kirt Jacobs: You wouldn't be here. I mean the bio speaks for itself.

Francene Cucinello: Thank you. '99 my dad died. In 2001 9/11. Then an ex-boyfriend of mine Danny Pearl who was a reporter with The Wall Street Journal was kidnapped and murdered in Karachi, Pakistan.

Kirt Jacobs: I never knew that. I never knew that.

Francene Cucinello: We dated when I was in Washington the first time. Danny was an incredible person. And the three events because dad at one point worked in the World Trade Center in the South Tower when I was a little girl we used to go to Windows on the World. The three events just made me really sad and I got really depressed and I kept thinking there's got to be more to life than this. And I was in St Louis and I hated St Louis. And I didn't really like the people I was working with. And I just all I really wanted to do. I didn't realize I was really depressed. And all I wanted to do was travel and see my mother. And a girlfriend of mine said you need a huge break. And people said you can't take a break and leave your career. You will never get back into broadcasting at the same level. I mean this is like death because they forget about you if you're out of you know the sightlines. And I said no this is what I need to do. So I applied for the fellowship, the journalism fellowship. And it was hard. It was like being in college because we had, I had to to interview with Berlin. I had an interview with Washington. I had to go through the whole application and then they said we need you to write five papers and the it was sort of like discuss the

Central European Nationals Bank.

Kirt Jacobs: You don't strike me as one who likes to write essays.

Francene Cucinello: I love too. I love to write..

Kirt Jacobs: Do you?

Francene Cucinello: ...that's the whole column thing.

Kirt Jacobs: Ok. Well, that's true.

Francene Cucinello: I like writing. You know but it was it was discuss the ramifications of the division and reunification of Germany with regard to the political social and economic impacts. This was like really hard stuff. And my my friends kept saying do you really want to do this?

Kirt Jacobs: Right

Francene Cucinello: And I did. I just and I left the thank God really thank God I won. My mother was completely supportive. And I left and after the fellowship was over I stayed in Europe and I traveled for several months by myself. One suitcase. And I came back into the country got a couple got a part-time job was commuting. I was in Charlotte commuting a Raleigh. Living with my mom again. In my you know mid-30s thinking Boy am I a success. And and then I auditioned and got the gig here. Which was the best job I've had to date. So that was a really defining moment for me because I trusted myself and the universe and God rewarded me for being brave.

Kirt Jacobs: How long was that internship?

Francene Cucinello: The internship itself was a couple of months but then I stayed several more months. For a total of almost six months.

Kirt Jacobs: You took advantage..

Francene Cucinello: Oh yeah

Kirt Jacobs: That's great. Now. on the flipside of that somewhat is there one, what is your biggest professional regret? If there is one. Can be more than one. Can be professional/personal. You may have touched upon it already.

Francene Cucinello: My biggest professional.. sorry

Kirt Jacobs: Regret

Francene Cucinello: Regret

Kirt Jacobs: And that word strike some of our guests a little caustic

Francene Cucinello: Oh. I could say I don't believe in regrets but that's so trite.

Kirt Jacobs: We get that response.

Francene Cucinello: Yeah. Well I don't. I believe they're only good if you turn them into a positive.

Kirt Jacobs: OK.

Francene Cucinello: My biggest regret and I'm probably shouldn't tell you is I have sacrificed so much of my personal life for my career since I was a kid. I couldn't figure out how to do both of of them. You know professional and personal. So I still don't know how to date. I still don't.

Kirt Jacobs: Unfortunately that is not the topic of our show but I'd love to go into that

Francene Cucinello: Well we could do you are the host of the show.

Kirt Jacobs: We'll not, let's flip that around. What is your biggest professional triumph? I think I might know the answer but I'm going to leave that up to you

Francene Cucinello: This show. There's about 25 women doing solo talk shows in the country. That aren't doing chick chat. That aren't a news anchor or a sidekick. That aren't doing you know psychological Dr Lauraish shows. So it's hard. And this was and this is one of the top ten radio stations for talk radio in the country. so this was a biggie.

Kirt Jacobs: So out of those 25 would it be fair to say your market or what you cover is in the top five or in terms of...

Francene Cucinello: I would like to say top two but I don't know.

Kirt Jacobs: Don't know off hand. I was just curious on the thing that out there. What do you find exciting? I mean you are engaging. There's a magnetism about you know I mean that with the utmost respect. Draws people in I think. But what have you found exciting? You're writing the column. You know you go to Cincinnati.

Francene Cucinello: Yeah I like to work. Work is fun for me

Kirt Jacobs: Your show. Your show is challenging. I think you challenge people. I think it's a fair observation.

Francene Cucinello: Thank you. Thank you. That that actually is the best compliment I can get. To make people think. Challenge people. And that's fifteen hours of live content a week. So there's a huge amount of stuff and it runs the gamut as you know.

Kirt Jacobs: Right

Francene Cucinello: Now I I have an exciting life. I try to hang around with really interesting people and do interesting things and travel and. You know I just try to have fun. It might just be blatant Catholic repression I don't know but..

Kirt Jacobs: Again, that's another show.

Francene Cucinello: See I am ensuring follow ups. Sequels

Kirt Jacobs: This is about leadership and there's a fine... I have to keep it within the realm.

Francene Cucinello: Sorry

Kirt Jacobs: Nice. We're just digressing.... What what is your if your...

Francene Cucinello: Want to see Monty again?

Kirt Jacobs: No, no we'll segway to that. What is your favorite word? Francene...

Francene Cucinello: My favorite word?

Kirt Jacobs: If you first pick one out of the great lexicon of the English language.

Francene Cucinello: Lexicon is a good one. You know I actually knew you were going to ask me that question. So I started thinking about it

Kirt Jacobs: It can be more than one. I always give people more than one option.

Francene Cucinello: Well I like serendipity.

Kirt Jacobs: Nice.

Francene Cucinello: I like enigma and I like conundrum. Conundrum is probably my favorite.

Kirt Jacobs: Want to elaborate on them? Conundrum, just the way it rolls off our tongue.

Francene Cucinello: Conundrum really sounds like what it is. You're just mired in..

Kirt Jacobs: You're in a cluster.

Francene Cucinello: Yeah exactly when and if you look this might be silly but if you look at the word with the ends and there are hills. So you have to climb over them because you've got problems.

Kirt Jacobs: Yeah.

Francene Cucinello: Kind of yeah.

Kirt Jacobs: Nice. I like those words. I don't think we have had those on here before. Can you define leadership in one word or two?

Francene Cucinello: I think it's inspiration.

Kirt Jacobs: Can you elaborate on that a little bit.

Francene Cucinello: I think a true true leader... Because a lot of people who have leadership roles who are not truly leaders. Exactly. A true leader has the ability to influence and therefore inspires people to do their best. And that's workers and also everyone that touches his or her life.

Kirt Jacobs: Does your show inspire you? I mean do you get up every morning I mean you know I don't know how honest you want to be here but do you get up every morning

Francene Cucinello: I watch alot.. like a rug.

Kirt Jacobs: I don't have a topic or do you

Francene Cucinello: Sometimes

Kirt Jacobs: ...already you get up and go I can pull a topic.

Francene Cucinello: It depends on the day. I have no idea what's on tomorrow's show.

Kirt Jacobs: An inspiration is what I would think would get me through those days where you're like going...

Francene Cucinello: No I mean inspiration to do your best. To be your best. To work your potential. and I don't know what's on tomorrow's show if you have tomorrow's news that would be very handy

Kirt Jacobs: You'd like it tonight.

Francene Cucinello: Yeah.

Kirt Jacobs: Nice.

Francene Cucinello: I just... you know sometimes I don't Sometimes I don't know what I'm doing at 8:30..

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Francene Cucinello: That's when it gets.. and the show starts at 9 so that's when it gets a little dicey.

Kirt Jacobs: Nice

Francene Cucinello: but... it just depends..

Kirt Jacobs: That is very insightful.

Francene Cucinello: You know you know it just depends.

Kirt Jacobs: I don't find it not engaging

Francene Cucinello: Well thank you.

Kirt Jacobs: When I tune in pretty much

Francene Cucinello: The best thing somebody told me about talk radio is I don't it's easy when there's big things happening.

Kirt Jacobs: Sure

Francene Cucinello: You know this November/October is going to be a cinch. With the 3000 political contests.

Kirt Jacobs: You can just pick a race and run with it.

Francene Cucinello: Exactly. I make my money when there's nothing going on and still keep the show interesting.

Kirt Jacobs: I've heard you do that. If you could change one thing in life or in general in your own life what would that be?

Francene Cucinello: Oh my mother's going to be mad that I said this on camera but I am not the ambassador to Great Britain. And I'll explain that. Don't laugh because this is serious. I have these problems.

Kirt Jacobs: It is time to cut to Monty again.

Francene Cucinello: There is a man. Talk about a leader. There's a man named Phil Later. He was the president of Winthrop college before it became Winthrop University. It's in South Carolina. Then if you remember when President Clinton was in the White House he would go to these Renaissance weekends around the Hilton Head area with a bunch of real VIP's. And it was like a think tank and they would talk about how to make the world better. Phil Later started the Renaissance weekends. Then he became the head of the small business, the small Small Business Administration under Clinton and then he became the ambassador to Great Britain. Now look at this guy. College president. Started a world renowned think tank. You know Small Business Administration, ambassador and I'm doing a little show in Louisville. Which is nice it's wonderful but when I doubt myself. I doubt that I haven't reached far enough, big enough and I think about Phil Later and I think oh my god. Ambassador to Great Britain.

Kirt Jacobs: Good answer. I got you. Good answer. It's a different one. Could you..

Francene Cucinello: And it bothers me. It does. I'm serious

Kirt Jacobs: I'm sensing it does.

Francene Cucinello: It really does because it's hard to know that you've done your life right. You've done enough you haven't wasted your time and that's probably why I have so many jobs and I try to make sure that I get involved whenever people need me because I don't want to miss an opportunity.

Kirt Jacobs: It's a very positive outlook. Wish everyone had that. I tend to that myself. Saying no is difficult for you then?

Francene Cucinello: No. I have learned how to say no but unfortunately there's a lot of things that need us to say yes too.

Kirt Jacobs: Could you describe in detail a particular incident if you're in the area when your professional or personal life where we utilize your style or philosophy on leadership? You may have kind of touched upon it.

Francene Cucinello: Yeah I ah almost..

Kirt Jacobs: Your show I will, I'm going to energetic here, your show kind of gets into some terrain that .. you know you're laying yourself bare there for some controversy at times I think that's an understatement. You know. And so but that's a style of leadership because not getting into your predecessor you're still here. You know. So that's a style of leadership. Question's yours.

Francene Cucinello: Oh my goodness. That's nothing like what I was going to talk about.

Kirt Jacobs: Well, no that's fine.

Francene Cucinello: It's umm

Kirt Jacobs: But leadership comes in many forms.

Francene Cucinello: I I hope I'm making somewhat of a difference. It's a tremendously difficult balancing act for me personally because my top bosses like my boss's boss his boss and I are fundamentally different on what I can do on the air. I believe that I can change the world. And he says no you can't. Well yeah. It is entertainment.

Kirt Jacobs: Right.

Francene Cucinello: And it's news. I mean it is. It's a radio show. It's not that I'm not curing cancer here. You go "Click" it's off but oh baseball you know

Kirt Jacobs: Right

Francene Cucinello: UL Basketball

Kirt Jacobs: Right.

Francene Cucinello: But. It's I can get information out there. I can tell people about things they don't know. I can make people think. I love talking to people.

Kirt Jacobs: Right.

Francene Cucinello: They teach me things. I teach them things. They say. And it's it's inspiring to me. It's also deeply frustrating but I have been able to do good by bringing some issues to the table otherwise wouldn't have gotten the coverage it needed. To me if I make one person laugh or if I help somebody or if I just alert someone to something there they hadn't thought about. That's changing the world because you change one person and that has an influence beyond that one person. My big boss doesn't think so. I think he's wrong. But you know what a true leader follows his or her heart. I mean deep heart not surface but like soul.

Kirt Jacobs: OK.

Francene Cucinello: Regardless. And I think that's what makes the show successful.

Kirt Jacobs: I think this is a great segway into the next question that I want to throw out to you. You think there's a difference in today's leaders and from past generations? I mean and I like to ask this question because the pace of our society has changed so dramatically in the last definitely last 10 years, five years. I mean the world was very different 20 years ago. Mainly because of technology but do you see a dramatic difference in our leaders I may be giving you a tremendous straight line here. I'm not sure but run with it.

Francene Cucinello: No. I am afraid there will always be generational leaders. Always

Kirt Jacobs: Right

Francene Cucinello: But I am afraid there will be far fewer leaders in the next few generations behind us because of the entitlement and the attitude of instant gratification. Because leaders often have to stick to whatever they believe in for a long time and have tremendous perseverance and spirit and fight. And sometimes leaders go defeated their entire lives and they are only looked at as genius after death.

Kirt Jacobs: Good point.

Francene Cucinello: I don't know that we're raising up the caliber.

Kirt Jacobs: Very good observation.

Francene Cucinello: Thank you. of of children that are going to have that kind of metal. There's a girl who, she has a little scooter and she delivers her newspapers and this is and she lives with her grandmother in this is in some kind of retirement community in Florida and there's you know covenants of the association. And they said no scooters. So she's going to give up her paper route. And I said why can't she get a bicycle. I mean. Well that's all we used to do. Or walk around. Kids today, not all of them but a lot of them give up way too easy. And because they've been given so many things. I mean I. I was so poor for so long. I had to teach dance class two nights a week to

make sure I had rent coming in. I mean it was crazy and that's good for you. That builds character.

Kirt Jacobs: Yeah. Sounds cliché but it does.

Francene Cucinello: Exactly. I mean I didn't walk uphill both ways to school

Kirt Jacobs: for three miles in snow.

Francene Cucinello: ...without shoes without feet. But you know. So yeah I do and it's interesting because I was talking with the 1986 Cardinal basketball team recently.

Kirt Jacobs: I remember that show.

Francene Cucinello: and we were talking. Thank you. thank you and I were talking about coaches.

Kirt Jacobs: I was listening that day.

Francene Cucinello: ...and kids and they say the student athlete is totally different now. Because they don't have the respect and they don't have the fight.

Kirt Jacobs: I want to throw a little surprise question in here but I think for you to work good. If you were granted two weeks right now, and this is a woman who multitask with multi-jobs, two weeks right today. Boss says you got two weeks no turn in your BlackBerry whatever it is you know no cell phone, no e-mail, nothing and do whatever you want no commitments come back in two weeks. How would you spend those two weeks?

Francene Cucinello: Oh see you. I'm in Europe.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Francene Cucinello: Yeah easy.

Kirt Jacobs: What would you do?

Francene Cucinello: I would go places... First of all I love to travel with my friends and my mom but I love to travel by myself because I feel especially when far away. Actually I might change my going to Africa because you need two weeks to go to Africa.

Kirt Jacobs: Have you been before?

Francene Cucinello: Not to Africa. Because it is far and I want to see the animals. I like going places where I'm so far away that I can be authentically me. There's no preconceived notions. There's no expectations. If it's another language it's good because. Even though I speak a little of a lot of languages my world is quieter. No constant television. No constant internet or radio and it's lovely. And then you just fend for yourself and I feel like I'm truly myself so that if I need to meet people or if a situation comes up when I need something. It's just provided by me there's a wonderful synergy that God gives me when I travel. My needs are taken care of I'm very very taking care.

Kirt Jacobs: I think suspect though if the animals could talk you would be interviewing them out there in the field.

Francene Cucinello: I'd be fine, with yeah. I love animals. Thank you.

Kirt Jacobs: All right now this is a question of course you know you can it is a little dark for our younger guests as you are but when the when the great day comes. How do you want to be remembered? You know so you walk out here today. God forbid something happens

Francene Cucinello: Metro bus. TARC bus.

Kirt Jacobs: Monty comes save the day.

Francene Cucinello: There you go. Well I like this this quote that says. Courage is not the absence of fear. It is the ability to act even

though there is fear. And I'll tell you I've been... There been many times during my career that I have been terrified of what I was doing I hit the White House after two and a half years in news I didn't know what I was doing. That's terrifying but what was I say no.

Kirt Jacobs: Yeah. Opportunity of a lifetime.

Francene Cucinello: Exactly. When every, most people start in television in the market you know 168, 182. That kind of thing. I started in market 28. Was I prepared? No. I flew to Washington found somebody who'd worked for ABC News paid him to work with me for eight hours and teach me how to be a reporter. And I had some of the other skills so I could put it all together. I was probably deplorable and they were desperate Thank God. I didn't really know how to be a talk show host and I grabbed a couple of veteran hosts and I would take them to lunch and ask them questions and as they ate. And I would take notes and then I would try it on a weekend show. I've always said yes even though I was afraid and I'm afraid a lot because I keep taking these chances. I'd like to inspire people with that quote because I don't think you can wait until you're comfortable. Or you're not afraid. Or you'll wait forever. and you have to act even though there is fear.

Kirt Jacobs: It's a great note to end on. That's what makes the show so special because of that nugget.

Francene Cucinello: Because of you.

Kirt Jacobs: You affect somebody then the show has been worth it.

Francene Cucinello: Thank you.

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Kirt Jacobs: Thank you for listening to MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs. This episode was archival audio from when we were known as Leadership Landscape TV. If you have any feedback, general comments, or a recommendation for a suitable guest feel free to

email me at kirt@moxietalk.com or catch us on Facebook under MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs, or on Twitter under [@kirtjacobs](https://twitter.com/kirtjacobs) or our extensive website at www.moxietalk.com