

Transcript

Different, Not Less (Part 2)

Narrator: When she was young, Temple Grandin was considered weird and teased and bullied in high school.

The only place she had friends was when she found activities where there was a shared interest such as electronics, model rockets, or horses. She credits an important mentor who encouraged her interest in science, for when she had a new goal of becoming a scientist, she had a reason for studying.

Temple Grandin: That enabled me to get through elementary school without being bullied, elementary school years were good.

Narrator: Temple Grandin studied psychology in college and went on to get a master's degree and a Ph.D. in animal science, leading to a distinguished career in consulting for the livestock industry.

And today, half the cattle in the United States are handled in facilities she has designed.

How did she do it?

With the realization that her autism diagnosis made her different, not less.

[MUSIC]

Narrator: When Temple Grandin finished her master's degree, she began working in the livestock industry. And it gave her the motivation to develop some of her most impactful innovations, making herself a known expert in the field.

Temple Grandin: And one of the things that motivated me when I was in my twenties was I wanted to prove I wasn't stupid.

Narrator: Grandin made some observations about the preparation of livestock for market: that certain practices were causing stress, injury, or even death. These observations led to one of her proudest achievements.

Temple Grandin: Well, one thing I was so proud when I did those dip vat experiments, and I invented that new entrance design where the cattle which would prevent drowning in dip vats. And I remember when we got that to work, I was really happy.

Narrator: Grandin watched cattle slipping down slick and steep slopes as they entered these chemical dip vats, resulting in drowning deaths of cattle as well as chemical spills.

But her design gave them a gradual slope with grooves that eased them into the water. She also designed splash guards to help protect their human handlers from chemical spills.

Temple Grandin: Now there's another piece of equipment called the center track restrainer system. And it's in every large beef plant in North America. It's a piece of equipment I worked on developing. I was out in the early nineties out there supervising installation of it.

Another thing I did is implemented the animal welfare scoring system for meat plants. And then I taught McDonald's and Wendy's and other buyers how to use it. And when we did that, I saw more change than I'd ever seen.

Narrator: Dr. Grandin admits that her journey to this point in her career was made possible by early influences.

Temple Grandin: I just can't emphasize enough the importance of good teachers when I was young, my mother, my speech teacher, my elementary school teacher and then later on in high school, it was my science teacher, because I was not studying. I could care less about school. And Mr. Carlock, my science teacher got me interested in studying when education became a pathway to a goal of becoming a scientist.

Narrator: Mr. Carlock played a role even more important than a teacher to Temple Grandin. He was her mentor.

Temple Grandin: Mentors are extremely important. Well, I had watched a movie from Bell Labs they showed in the science class about optical illusions, and I got fascinated with an illusion called the Ames Distorted Room, where one person looks much bigger than the other. It's a trapezoidal room and they weren't going to just show me how to make it, they wanted me to figure it out for myself and he gave me interesting projects to do. And then with that, that got me interested in science and got me interested in studying. But I can't emphasize enough the importance of mentors.

Narrator: Dr. Grandin recognizes that once mentored, it's a responsibility to then mentor others.

Temple Grandin: I have had about, put about 20 graduate students through either a PhD or master's program. And a lot of my students are out in the industry. Three of them have become professors, which I'm really happy about. Others are running animal welfare programs out in the industry, but I also get a lot of emails and letters from. So I feel now I have a responsibility of being a good role model. People ask me how I feel about all this attention. I said it's a responsibility.

Narrator: She may feel this responsibility even more deeply, as she also dealt with obstacles in her career that were unrelated to her autism.

Temple Grandin: And then when I got out in the cattle industry, being a woman in the early seventies, that was a big barrier. It was. It was like having a disability.

And the engineering staff didn't like this girl nerd. Ninety percent of my trouble all through the seventies and even in the eighties and some in the nineties.

Narrator: Again, it all came back to having a good mentor.

Temple Grandin: But there were some really good people that helped me. And one of them was Jim Uhl, a contractor. He was a former Marine Corps captain ... was starting a small construction company and he had seen some of my drawings and he seeked me out. He was another really important mentor.

And mentors get attracted when they see ability and he'd seen my drawings and for 10 years we did jobs together. In fact, the dip vat jobs that are shown in the *Temple Grandin* HBO movie, Jim Uhl's company built them. I designed them.

Narrator: Design was critical in another of Temple Grandin's early interests: the space program. Thinking back to her story in the last episode, where she talked about different thinkers, here again, we find people who were different, not less, contributing to the success of the space program.

Temple Grandin: Let's go back to the moonshot. Who's finally getting credit now, that needed credit, probably didn't know very much math? The ladies that sewed the space suit for walking on the moon worked for Playtex corporation. And a bra designer helped design it. Don't think there was much algebra there. Mission critical.

Narrator: Dr. Temple Grandin is a pioneer and innovator in the livestock industry, but it's her keen observation of behavior that stands out in every industry that involves people.

For in making the case for listening to and including different thinkers, she has made it clear that together, we can accomplish extraordinary things with ordinary actions.