

## Gena Killion – Point of Pride Transcript

[00:00:00] **Gena:** There's a massive body of work Simantel's produced that we can be proud of. You can find plenty of case studies about that on our blog. But this is the story about a time that I made the wrong call and the lasting impact it had on who I want to be as a marketer, a leader and a person.

[00:00:24] **Misty:** Hey there, marketing friends. Thanks so much for checking out our Point of Pride series. In celebration of our 40ish anniversary, Simantelites are sharing stories about work they're most proud of that made a difference for Simantel, the client and perhaps most importantly, themselves. I'm excited to share this story with you from Gena Killion, our Director of Organizational Design.

[00:00:44] Gena started her Simantel journey in 2014 as a digital producer, and now plays a critical role in ensuring how we work produces the best outcomes, not only for our clients, but also for our employees. So, it's only fitting that her point of pride is a testament to her personal integrity and the way we do business at Simantel. Have a listen.

[00:01:10] **Gina:** My point of pride moment at Simantel was what I thought would be my defining failure because it taught me how to fail the right way, carefully calculated, communicated and with every ounce of transparency. I'm Gena Killion, Director of Organizational Design, and I've been able to call myself a Simantelite for a little over eight years now.

[00:01:26] The year was 2017 and I was a newly full-fledged digital strategist on one of my first independent accounts. A returning Simantel client engaged us to help him promote a highly consumable product with a focus on gaining share of wallet. I was so excited, and a little terrified. We went straight to work to understand their goals and KPIs, did a deep dive into their audience's motivations and buying opportunity barriers, developed a killer creative concept, built out a media strategy and worked through their digital experience to create a go-to-market strategy that would accomplish what they entrusted us to deliver.

[00:01:58] In pouring through years of prior media performance data for similar products, I observed that there was a trend in lower seasonal performance in summer months and recommended that we increased spend in that timeframe to offset the anticipated volume hit to clicks in page traffic, when compared to the rest of the calendar year.

[00:02:13] After months of work, the campaign launched. We reported out monthly and made optimizations to keep performance trending positively. We were delivering on the projected performance goals for the campaign – everything was working how we predicted. I was a contributing factor in an unstoppable force for good in the world of consumable maintenance products.

[00:02:31] Then summer hit and like we predicted, performance tanked. The audience was out in the field working, too focused on their operations to be reached with our undeniable value differentiation message. My well thought out strategy to offset the lower performing months was not effective enough, and my plan had failed.

[00:02:48] To say that I was devastated is an understatement. I had spent nine months building trust with this client, and now I had to sit across a table from him and say "hello, smart and wonderful human who has given me so much trust and faith to make the right decisions. I have failed you. I'm aware that you have Tim Leeman's number if you want to call him and request that I be shown the door. You are well within your right to do so".

[00:03:07] I agonized for hours over this meeting, so much so, that I barely slept the night before I was to deliver the news. Despite my underlying internal plea for the world to just suddenly cease to

be, the meeting came anyway. I carefully crafted narrative of how I was going to present the results in all of my internal rehearsals of saying, “despite our best efforts, and although we anticipated some decline, the actual performance exceeded our expectations for poor return”.

[00:03:35] I kicked the meeting off with, “I have bad news”. And plainly said something to the tune of, we had two choices based on previous performance trends: spend heavier in the summer months to offset the lower conversion rate to maintain consistent of month over month return, or reduce the spend in those months and invest that money in months with higher return and set the expectation that performance would have big seasonal swings.

[00:03:57] “I recommended the first one and I was wrong. I’m so sorry.” I knew in that moment that the only version of myself I was capable of being was to the point and honest — that I couldn’t be a smooth-talking salesperson, that there was no morally grace thing I could create to sell a bad story. I messed up; I made a bad call and I was going take the fall for it, however brutal.

[00:04:18] The client I looked up to so much, who I had spent months building a relationship with, merely thought about it, nodded and asked me if that was a good lesson for us to learn together and if we would approach it differently next time. I prepared for justified rage, disappointment, anger, frustration or stunned silence.

[00:04:38] Instead, I was met with grace, understanding and excitement over an opportunity for us to learn together. Our client was grateful of all things that we had taken a calculated risk, had explained that risk early on, and set him up to have a conversation with his team about what we learned and how we could apply it in the future.

[00:04:54] My carefully built trust wasn’t shattered — it was cemented. When I shared what had happened with my leaders, they weren’t angry with me for making a mistake either. They were proud of me for owning it and doing what was right by the client and admitting it in course corrected. I was shown many doors, but all of them led to interesting opportunities to learn and grow.

[00:05:13] We went on to win awards for that client, and I have carried forward both immense respect for him and gratitude to have been given an additional opportunity to help him reach his goals. But most of all, I carried forward as example. When our teams come to me with their mistakes, I meet them with understanding and ask them what they learned and how they will apply that knowledge to make better decisions moving forward.

[00:05:32] I’m most proud to be a Simantelite because we may not always make the right call, no one can. But, we can always choose to do what’s right by our clients, our staff and our community. There’s no better place than Simantel to fail, and because of that truth, there’s also no better place to exceed your own expectations for how much you can learn, grow and deliver continuously better work.

[00:05:57] **Misty:** Thank you so much Gena, not only for taking accountability for a tricky situation, but learning from it and paying it forward — extending that same grace to help others learn from their mistakes. That’s just one of the many reasons why you’re such a great leader. I appreciate you so much.

[00:06:12] If you haven’t already, head over to [marketing.sweats.com](https://www.marketing.sweats.com) and check out our very special season six, where you can hear my full interview with Gena, and other Simantelites, as they share their point of pride in celebration of our for 40ish anniversary.