



Season 2, Episode 6, “Rising from the Ashes,” April 5, 2022

Angel Likens: Just a regular, beautiful day at the club, had a great family dinner, went to bed, and I sleep with my phone right next to me just because I’m the first phone call if the alarm system goes off. At 11:30, my phone goes off and it’s Erker Security, who does all of our security; she says, “Angel, the fire alarm’s going off at the club.” And I said, “Fire alarm? That can’t be right.” I get dressed. Pull out of the driveway. And I could see just a ball of fire.

Kurt Greenbaum: From Olin Business School at Washington University in St. Louis. I’m Kurt Greenbaum and this is *On Principle*. Returning listeners know that *On Principle* invites leaders to share stories about the pivotal moments they confront in their businesses. Today’s story starts with a smoldering cigar, and it carries us through a host of intersecting and competing decision-making moments. We’ll run the gamut from literal firefighting to long-range planning, from honoring the past in a 60-year-old family business to tossing aside tradition and innovating for the future. When interests and priorities are all competing for your attention, how do you avoid the rough, stay out of the sand traps and stick to the fairway? Today’s guest, who was just coming into her own as a leader of the company, will tee up our story.

Angel Likens: My name’s Angel Walters Likens and I’m the general manager and president of Bogey Hills Golf and Country Club.

Kurt Greenbaum: Can you just give us a little bit of background on Bogey Hills? What’s a little bit of the history of the club?

Angel Likens: My grandparents founded the club back in 1962, and my grandfather, Doc Walters, actually used to caddie at what then was the St. Charles Golf Course back in the ’40s, and he ended up going to optometry school in Chicago, came back and had a practice on Main Street, and the family also had Walters Jewelry on Main Street, where my grandfather and my grandfather’s brother worked. Just over time, my grandfather decided to buy the property, and at that time it was a nine-hole facility, really run down. And he and my grandfa... and my grandmother worked hard to make it into a nine-hole public golf course at that time, and then over the course of the years made it into an 18-hole private facility. And then the club, as it is today.

Kurt Greenbaum: And how long did he run the club?

Angel Likens: My grandfather died in 2001, so pretty much actively, I would say, into the mid ’90s. And then just with his age, he wasn’t at the club as much, but he was still involved in the day-to-day. He lived right on the golf course, so he was always looking at the fifth green and the fifth hole and always had contact with either

my father or the green superintendent or club manager at the time. So he was pretty actively involved all the way to the end.

Kurt Greenbaum: How did Bogey Hills get its name?

Angel Likens: So my grandfather played golf all the time, and my grandmother was not an avid golfer at all. She dabbled a little bit but never really played that much. And so he came home one day and they were trying to figure out what they were going to name the club. And she asked him, "You know, what kind of score do you get at the club all the time when you play golf?" And he's like, "Well, I always had a lot of bogeys, but I want to have pars." and she's like, "Bogey Hills it is." So she's the one who kind of started the name.

Kurt Greenbaum: As you might imagine, in a business like this, the management of Bogey Hills eventually passed on to Angel's father around the mid 1990s, when the company expanded into related lines of business. All the while, this country club in St. Charles County on the western side of the Greater St. Louis region was growing to become a community institution, a place where high school students gathered for their prom, where brides and grooms celebrated their weddings, and where friends met for dinner, a dance or a round of golf. You must have been a very young girl when your grandfather was still running the club. Was it kind of preordained that one day Angel Walters was going to run Bogey Hills Country Club? Or was that ever in the ... in the cards for you as you were growing up?

Angel Likens: As I was growing up, I didn't really know that much about the club business. I just knew that we went there for dinner, and I'd played junior golf, and I was on the swim team and had a lot of friends that were there. And we spent a lot of our time there, obviously, because both my parents worked there, and my grandparents, and we lived literally 600 yards away from the front door. So that was just kind of my life. I loved the game of golf. I played in high school, played one year of college golf, but really thought I wanted to be an attorney. My family just supported me as to what I wanted to do. Do I think they had a hope that I would take over, my brother would take over? Sure. I think that that's any kind of family business you hope that the grandchildren and your children decide to come, come into it, but it certainly wasn't forced by any means or groomed at that point.

And so fall of 2000 or really summer of 2000, after I graduated college, I ended up going to San Diego, going to law school there for the summer just to decide, do I like law school? Do I not? And I ended up not enjoying it as much as I thought. So I ended up coming back home, worked for a document imaging firm for about a year and a half, and then just found myself starting to ask my dad a lot more questions about how's this property doing or what's the daily rounds here? How are you handling the cart revenue and the greens-fee revenue? And I just started getting more interested and then that's when I decided I think it's time that maybe I start seeing if this is what I want to do. And so I started working at the daily-fee properties, which is the public properties. So fall of 2002, a position opened at Bogey

Hills Country Club for the membership director position. So I applied and I got the job. And so I started as membership director in fall of 2002 at Bogey Hills.

I love to know new things, and so I kept asking more questions as I started progressing in that position and asking the food and beverage questions and the food cost and the liquor cost, and why we did inventories. And I always was educated by my father on the golf course. So I knew fairly a good amount on the agronomy side at that time, and I just kept asking and asking and asking. And so with that, I kept being promoted into different positions based on my willingness and readiness to learn and also put in the long hours in time that it requires to run a facility like that.

Kurt Greenbaum: You described running a golf club as really running a variety of different businesses. Can you ... can you talk about that?

Angel Likens: I think everyone just thinks, Oh, I, you know, a golf course is just, you play golf and you eat dinner. But really inside of a golf course is, you have a retail shop that the pro shop manages, and so they have to buy clothes and sell clothes, so that's a retail section. You have the agronomy section on the golf course, which is buying and purchasing chemicals and fertilizers and lots of really big equipment that requires to maintain a golf course to a certain level. You have food and beverage, so you have food costs, you have servers, so it's like running a restaurant within a club. Then you also have the membership aspect and then you have your corporate and event planning side. So it's really a lot of different buckets that are within majority of clubs. And clubs can really get ginormous. I mean, there's clubs that are very, very big. You know, we're on the smaller end of clubs, but you get like a Congressional and they have a huge amount of employees.

Kurt Greenbaum: By this point in our story, Angel has gone all-in with the club, and yes, it's pretty much a foregone conclusion that she'll be the third-generation president of Bogey Hills. But right now, she's the general manager. Her father is still the president, and it's just a few weeks after Christmas in 2016. New Year's has come and gone, and we're coming to the close of an unseasonably warm day in the winter of 2017.

Angel Likens: It was a beautiful day in February, I mean, it was like mid-60s. It was unusually warm for February at that time, and we had a lot of golfers. We had all the doors open because it was beautiful out. I remember leaving and just checking on the bar, making sure that they were OK for the day. So I went home, had a great family dinner, went to bed. At 11:30, my phone goes off, and it's Erker Security, who does all of our security. She says, "Angel, the fire alarm's going off at the club." And I said, "The fire alarm? That can't be right." So I get out of bed. My husband asks if everything is OK. I said, it's probably nothing. Another false alarm because I had had a false burglar alarm the night before. So I get dressed, pull out of the driveway, and I look to the left and I could see just a ball of fire.

KMOV TV Reporter: We were on 70 traveling to this scene that we could see plumes of smoke nearly two miles out. That just goes to show you how massive these flames were.

Angel Likens: I could see the club on fire, so obviously I get in sort of panic mode. Get out on the street and they already start blocking the street, so they didn't do any sirens or anything because it was so late at night. So I pull up, I get out of my car and I said, I've got the keys to the front door and the firefighter tells me, "Angel, we've got the keys," and he's got a big ole ax. They were already inside. I always had the fire department to the club because I always wanted them to know number one the inside of the club and the best way of entry, which was always through our side door, never the front, because the side door could get you pretty much anywhere in the club quickly. I had found out that the firefighters were in there less than 15 minutes before they had to get out.

Kurt Greenbaum: What's ... what is going through your head? Can you remember what you were thinking at the time?

Angel Likens: I don't really think I was thinking too much of anything, to be honest. Just utter disbelief. You're not really thinking much, because you're in shock.

Kurt Greenbaum: You knew immediately that you were going to rebuild. Was ... was there truly never any consideration of going in a different direction?

Angel Likens: I think everybody would say, I'm going to rebuild. I just, for me, it wasn't ... I didn't question that or ... I didn't think ... I knew we were going to rebuild because that's what we do. It's what the family does. We get up and we're going to be bigger and better. We don't just say, "Oh, what's going to benefit us? Should this be something else? Should this be a neighborhood?" I didn't really think about that. Now, the next day, I had a board ... an emergency board meeting, obviously at my house, and there were discussions. But I can tell you the discussions did not last long. If we were going to rebuild or not.

Kurt Greenbaum: Why do you suppose that is?

Angel Likens: Because I think the club is a part of a lot of people's lives. That's their place to go to get away from work. That's where a lot of their friends are. That's a lot of their community. The club not being there is just ... it just wasn't an option, in my mind.

Kurt Greenbaum: Now, at that time, your father was still president. You were general manager. But your father gave you the reins to sort of take care of this.

Angel Likens: So the next day, ATF came in, they had 55 people on site for five days. Pretty impressive as to what they ... what they could do. I took the lead on that. We didn't have any of the trailers up yet, so my house was the makeshift office.

I had a team that had to rebook all of the weddings within 24 hours, which they did. Need to call the IT person right away to make sure that everything from the cloud was saved in our operating system and start working on getting computers to my house and getting the staff to the house after they had their moment of what had happened. And then immediately I started having them from memory, writing down everything that was in their department. I also took the lead on the insurance, and I just got in go-mode and thought to myself, I can do this, I want to do this. And I basically put myself as the lead role in the entire rebuild. I think he could see the drive and the tenacity in me. He saw that this is truly the time to let the third generation take over.

Peter Boumgarden: It's a balance between continuity with the past and opportunities to change moving forward. If one errs on the side of continuity, if the club is the exact same as it was X amount of years ago, at some point the world changes around it and it would feel misaligned, out of step with the current state. But at the same point, you can imagine organizations that change too dramatically and in doing so, lose some element of alignment with who they were. Maybe change for change's sake, which can be problematic as well.

Kurt Greenbaum: That's Peter Boumgarden. He's WashU Olin's Koch Family Professor of Practice in Family Enterprise and a scholar in organizational behavior. He's also the first Olin faculty member to make a return appearance with *On Principle*, so we're glad to have him. Peter has consulted frequently with restaurants and other small business owners around the St. Louis area, and his research has appeared in the *Harvard Business Review* and a variety of peer-reviewed academic journals. Is there research around what's going on inside the head of a leader during those kinds of times? Are there just some lessons that you've picked up from ... through your experience? I'm just curious, like, is there something special about what's happening inside somebody's brain?

Peter Boumgarden: Moving to this proactive posture versus a reactive posture is difficult. Your attention gets sucked into whatever is scarce, whether it's scarcity of time or scarcity of resources, it can lead to some pretty suboptimal thinking. We zero in on the challenge in front of us, and it becomes hard to pick our head up and look around. Moving forward can't be merely about not thinking of crisis and thinking about the new. You have to balance both approaches. It's easier to focus in on the crisis and harder to invest in the broader future.

Well, some of the big takeaways for me really centered around this need to respond to crisis and how you think about doing so and seeing it perhaps even an opportunity to reinvent versus just invent the same piece. So that to me, is one critical piece. Another challenge or thing that comes up in situations like Angel's as well as others, is the unique nature of innovating for a family organization where the old approach is represented by perhaps someone in your family, a father, a mother, and the new approach might be represented by you or a sibling. And so anytime the new is pushing against the old, whether that person is with us or whether or not they're

more of a memory, a legacy that you're trying to maintain, I think can become especially acute, maybe even more so than if you're in a non-family organization where you're the new CEO. But the old CEO isn't by any means related to the work that you're doing, so on and so forth.

Kurt Greenbaum: This idea that a golf club isn't really just one business, it's sort of a collection of very different businesses. It's ... it's a food and beverage business, it's an event business, it's a retail business, it's an agronomy business. All of this stuff is going together, and you're dealing with people with different skills and different levels of education and different backgrounds. And so I'm ... I'm just wondering how that colored your understanding of all of this.

Peter Boumgarden: Yeah, it's ... it's a great example, and in fact, in some ways it's unique to a ... to a golf course and to a golf club. But other ways, there's a lot of businesses that are like this. So imagine you are Herman Miller, a design furniture company, and you have a high-end retail operation with DWR, you have a manufacturing hub that has a very different employee set that's there. You have business-to-business versus business-to-consumer sales channels in that space. You have designers, you have manufacturers, but you're right, there is something about unbundling those pieces of the business that might require you to invest, innovate, approach them all differently.

So you can imagine a club that says we're going to come back in the exact same way, and you can imagine another that says we're gonna come back in ... in a similar way, but we're going to rethink our approach to food. We're going to rethink our approach to events. Maybe we're overly dependent on membership fees. And so we need to make sure that this is more open versus more closed as a setting. So I think the ability to strategically unbundle those different components and to think of them differently, distinctly, where do we need to innovate and why? And then also to realize that you can't only think of them as unbundled. You have to re-bundle them back together.

And so if you change something and it doesn't fit with the other core components of the strategy of the organization, it could feel misaligned either inside the organization or perhaps even misaligned from those that are experienced in the organization from the outside or maybe even your employee base. So yeah, it's ... it's ... it's a great framing: the ability to unbundle different parts of your business to think about where there are spaces for change and adjustment out of crisis or just in general, and then to put the pieces all back together again and see how it fits.

Kurt Greenbaum: I don't think anybody would have wished to have a fire that would level, you know, a 40,000-square-foot clubhouse. But as long as it did, now what? Now, what are we going to do? And let's think big in some sense.

Peter Boumgarden: Most of our innovation, most of our change is incremental. So thinking back to teaching, if I were to teach every single semester, the same course,

most of the time, what I would do if I wasn't forced into something different is to change one piece here, to change one piece there. But if I were to be forced into something completely new, if my computer were to shut down and all my slides were to be gone, then I'm forced into kind of rethinking my approach in a more robust way. And you're naturally going to retain pieces of what worked because they're in your memory, right? The best parts of your organization, the best parts of your class, the best parts of anything are still embedded in that memory that allow you to re- ... re-imagine them in a new form.

And yet, at the same point, there's a lot of things there that are clunky, that no longer work with how the world is changing, that by having this reset point allows you to again redesign in a ... in a novel way. How do you maintain a certain kind of immersion in the way that things are? A commitment to the tradition? While at the same point not becoming so committed that you become stale? At least in my view, there's a certain kind of balance between those two that good leaders do well when it comes to opportunities to rethink and to reimagine.

Kurt Greenbaum: Now, remember what I mentioned at the top of this episode, that bit about balancing the firefighting with the long-range planning? And the idea of preserving traditions while innovating for the future? When Peter and I talked about that, he used a phrase I wanted to learn more about this idea of externally held continuity versus internally held continuity.

Peter Boumgarden: That means that someone taps you on the shoulder and says, I don't like the direction you're going. And so, I think one error, maybe an error that I would find myself falling into as a leader, is feeling the need to people please. And therefore, not change. So I'd love to do something different, innovative. But to be honest with you, I know that people are going to be upset with it. So therefore, we should stay the same way. Sometimes leadership is being comfortable letting people down and knowing when it's strategic and important to do so. And so if people are unwilling to do so, then that can be problematic. In fact, that's probably the error that some family businesses side on. It's not too much radical change. It's failing to change the model or the approach over time, either because your customers want you to be consistent or more often internally, it becomes difficult to push against your mother or your father who represented the old way of being. So that's ... that's one approach.

I mean, I guess the second approach is innovating just for the need to be different. You know, probably the best example of that in modern culture right now is "Succession," the television show on HBO, where you have the next generation leader who's trying to reinvent or change the whole model of what they are as a media company, Kendall versus Logan Roy. And you see this may be partly shaped by where the world is going. Right? We need to innovate because the world is changing. But maybe also partly shaped by "I need to be different than the past leader. I need to be different than my father. I need to be different than someone else." So ironically, it's a certain kind of emotional balance that's required on the part

of leaders. Emotional balance to realize it's OK at times to let people down as you change and evolve. While at the same points, the emotional balance to not merely have to be different, to need to be distinct, to do something completely radical, which can be its own kind of emotional pitfall or challenge.

Angel Likens: So I would say for the first 30 to 60 days was probably more a crisis. How are we going to get these temporary buildings back up? What can we do? ATF was out. They had determined that it was just an accidental fire. Once ATF got out, we were able to have access to the building. And so we got in and said, "Is there anything that we can salvage?" We couldn't salvage really much of anything. So we had to get the building torn down and then start the process of picking who's going to rebuild the club. Once that decision was made, then it started getting into, what's the club going to look like for the future? I've read a lot of industry books within Club Managers Association and what's the future of golf going and what are these new clubhouses and what's important, what's not important and really things were going in the family resort type feel. One-stop-shop clubs where you have a fitness, you have swimming, simulator rooms, kids' rooms, casual dining, outdoor dining, fire pits. Those types of things has ... was in all of those magazines and industry things that I had been reading and here came the time for me to be able to do it. And then deciding, do we just want to be a golf country club? Do we want to do all of these weddings? Do we want to do all the corporate events? And we had decided, yes, because that's a part of the community that we have. There's a lot of community leaders that like having the events at our club and ... and doing those types of things. So at that time, we had decided we're going to build the club two-fold. That we're going to have a banquet-event side and we're going to have our members-only side. And then it just started morphing into the building that it is today.

Kurt Greenbaum: What you're describing as I'm understanding it is, there was this idea that we need to keep the things that make Bogey Hills important to the community. But at the same time, this is a chance we can't pass up, to kind of reinvent Bogey Hills in some ways. Is that right?

Angel Likens: Correct.

Kurt Greenbaum: What are some other examples of ... of how you kind of walk that line?

Angel Likens: The team and I would get together and talk about what was dysfunctional in the old building. What do we love about the old building? What do the members love about the old building? And can we ... can we make this or that work? The biggest thing at the old club was the bar. The members loved the bar, and we just went back and forth in the design. We couldn't make that work. It was great from a member's perspective, but from a functionality perspective with staff and service, it was not very functional. And ultimately, we chose the bar that we did choose. At first, it wasn't received very well. But over time, people learned that change is sometimes good. The old building had its own kind of men's designated

grill area with their own bar and everything like that. We did not do that in the new building, because we couldn't accommodate the women as well. At first, the male members didn't really like it as much, but now that they're used to the whole scenario. A lot of members had memories in the old clubhouse; we had a dance floor with a big fireplace and a lot of family photos were taken there. We had a huge staircase in the front entryway. A lot of family photos were taken there and just members coming and saying, "I had my prom there" or "I had my wedding reception there in the old clubhouse" and just reliving the memories of that old clubhouse. It's just the impact that the club has had over so many lives over the last 60 years is what made it even more special to rebuild the club as it is today.

Kurt Greenbaum: OK, so let's talk about Bogey Hills Country Club as it is today. But first, a quick wrap-up. Days after the fire, Angel reopened the golf course using a temporary building as the clubhouse. A few days later, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives found the cause. Someone hadn't put out a cigarette or a cigar. They dropped it too close to the outside of the building. It smoldered for hours before it sent the building up in flames. By August of 2017, Angel and her team broke ground on a new 40,000-square-foot clubhouse. It opened seven months later.

And the new version of Bogey Hills? It's got a golf simulator room for hitting balls indoors. It's got bride and groom suites. It's got a lower-level dining room called the Bogey Bistro. It's got larger banquet facilities. And four years after the blaze, Angel said, Bogey Hills has grown from a \$3 million property to a \$7 million property. You know, a few months after Angel and I spoke for this episode, I saw a story in the *Detroit Free Press*. Five years to the day after the Bogey Hills fire, a blaze leveled Oakland Hills Country Club in a Detroit suburb. I emailed Angel to say it made me think of her story. She was going to wait a few days before reaching out to the general manager. From experience, she said in her reply, he is overwhelmed with all this. When Angel was in that position, was she thinking about resetting norms for how Bogey Hills would function? Or was it just about putting her head down and getting the work done?

Angel Likens: No, I constantly think about all of that. Knowing where society was kind of going in the future, and there's old traditions of clubs that I think everybody thinks it's a male-driven industry, which it still is. But the days of where the dad is the one who joined the club and the mom was just kind of there and the kids weren't there. That whole dynamic was changing, and I could see women's golf was starting to take off. Moms were starting to play more. The kids were starting to play more. So it was making it more of a family-friendly facility and putting in family bathrooms. So there's changing rooms for both the dads to be able to do diaper changes and having areas for women to be able to breastfeed that are designated. But we do have a suite one and a suite two that the bride and groom can utilize for when they get dressed. And just having different areas that are just, I don't want to say gender neutral, but are just more friendly to society as a whole.

Kurt Greenbaum: Were you finding yourself in a position where, I mean, did you ever have to talk about the old way being broken in a way that was ... that you had to be careful about how you talked about that?

Angel Likens: I think that there were times where people thought I was not appreciating the past. That's not what was happening. If anybody appreciated the past, it was myself. But I knew that I had to move the club in a forward direction or else we were going to fail. The past was always in the back of my mind, but it couldn't be the driver of what the future was going to hold.

Kurt Greenbaum: Whose voice got to be heard, and who ultimately ended up making the decisions?

Angel Likens: I listened to them all because I think everyone's opinion is valid. So it's really bouncing a lot of ideas and thoughts with everyone and then outside industry people as well—other club managers, other mentors—and then ultimately saying, I think this is the right decision for the club and I got to be, you know, I was confident making those decisions.

Kurt Greenbaum: So how would you characterize the change in the business before the fire and now? And I know we've ... we've had to cope with the pandemic in the interim there. But look, is there a way you can kind of put in perspective what kind of a change to the business this crisis wrought?

Angel Likens: So before the fire, we were just kind of a well-oiled machine. There wasn't a ton of stuff that we could do to make it more functional. We were doing OK. And then the fire happened and then we did the rebuild, and then we just doubled everything. We doubled the weddings, we doubled a la carte. We doubled the membership. I mean, everything just took off.

Kurt Greenbaum: What did you learn from all of this?

Angel Likens: I've learned to be confident in the decisions that I make. If I'm not, then to go back to the drawing board and troubleshoot and figure out why I have those doubts. Knowing the operation inside and out and knowing what's best for the club and the staff and the operation as a whole. You don't give up just because there's an obstacle that comes around. Even though it might be hard, you still have to face that obstacle and figure out how to get out and how to make it better.

Kurt Greenbaum: And that's our episode of *On Principle*. I really want to thank Angel Likens for walking us through this difficult time and for sharing some of the insights she gained in the experience. Thanks also to Peter Boumgarden for putting all this into a broader context. I also want to credit St. Louis' KMOV Channel 4 for that brief audio clip from their early reporting on the Bogey Hills fire. We'll link to that KMOV video from our website at *On Principle* podcast dot com. And if you visit, you'll find today's show notes and links to some related stories about the rebuilding

process and the Bogey Hills website. You'll also be able to hear past episodes of *On Principle*, but I recommend that you search for *On Principle* in your favorite podcasting app so you can subscribe and get updated when new episodes drop. If you have any comments, questions or episode ideas, send an email to Olin podcast at W-U-S-T-L dot E-D-U. That's olinpodcast@wustl.edu.

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