Christine Bongard: Igniting Transformation, Reinventing Mid-Career & Building Confidence That Lasts

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And the first thing that happened when I finished, when you have that thank you slide up, was a gentleman set, turned and looked to Neil, my partner, and said, so da da da da da da da da, you know, if we do this, we do that, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

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And there I was at the front of the room, like all by myself going, well, why, I just delivered this, why is he asking Neil?

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And I just remember, everything in me sank.

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So for those listening, for those allies listening, like this is what it does to people.

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Like it literally crushed me that for whatever reason, I didn't seem valued that he could ask me the question.

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And Neil, who was absolutely amazing, said, I didn't do the proposal.

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Christine is working this project, so you should ask her.

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And that's an ally.

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that's an ally.

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This is Transcending Tech, a podcast about the people behind the platforms and the stories that transcend technology.

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This episode of Transcending Tech is brought to you by the WIT Network.

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I've been a member for two years now, and I can say as my first-hand experience that it is an incredibly powerful community of women igniting excellence.

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They provide training, mentoring, and most of all, a warm and welcoming community.

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And you can join us on site in San Diego.

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We're going to be there celebrating International Women's Day, March 10th to 12th.

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You know, it's really for anyone.

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any women who are looking to grow their career to take that next step, maybe even into a senior executive role, we'd love to see you on site.

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You can find details and register at thewitnetwork.com.

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I'm your host, Ashley Vogstad.

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Today on the show, we're going to have Christine Bongard from the WIT Network.

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She spent nearly 30 years of her career often being the only woman in the room.

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And while this is a challenge, really, Christine took it as a challenge

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to the status quo.

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From her deep roots in the Microsoft partner ecosystem, Christine is a global community leader with force.

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She has dedicated her career to helping women.

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As the co-founder of the WIT Network, they have over 14,000 members in more than 80 countries around the planet.

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Today we're going to talk to Christine about what it truly means to transcend boundaries.

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Christine, welcome to the show.

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Thank you, Ashley.

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I'm so excited to be here.

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I wanted to start with the idea of competition.

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So the World Economic Forum just wrapped up in Davos, and they released this report, the 2026 Global Risks Report.

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And what it declares is that we're currently in an age of competition, notably not an age of cooperation.

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And the leaders there were describing this fragmented and high-pressure global world that businesses are operating in

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really being shaped by global politics, acceleration in AI, and increasing distrust.

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More than 50% of the leaders there believe that we have a turbulent business outlook coming for us.

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And what I wanted to talk to you about is that in these turbulent moments, it's often that power

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concentrates, and it narrows opportunities for certain groups of people.

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And so I'm curious, from your point of view, in an age of competition, how do we ensure that women and underrepresented voices stay front and center on the scene?

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Well, this has been a challenge for hundreds of years, so we're used to it, right?

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As a group, we are definitely used to it.

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I think, you know,

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I talk a lot about how to lead during difficult times and how to inspire women to really take charge and take hold of their career.

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I think the key word here is to not hesitate and wait for opportunities to come to us.

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A lot of times women tend to

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think I'll get recognized, I'll get pulled up, I'll get opportunities out of fairness because I've earned it, because I deserve it, because I've been here long enough, because I have the skills, because I have the experience.

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And in reality, it just doesn't work that way.

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And so my advice is we have to step up and we have to step into these opportunities.

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We have to set our sights, we've got to do the research, we have to find, you know, within our company or outside of our company,

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What is that next step and how am I preparing myself to go for it?

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And it's speaking up.

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it could be something simple as talking to your manager or HR team to say, hey, look, I'm ready for that next level opportunity.

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I'm all in.

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I'm loyal.

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I've done great work.

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My performance reviews were great.

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Can you look at maybe some opportunities for projects that I could stretch projects, where I could demonstrate I'm ready for that next level?

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It's really about having conversations with your leadership to try to crack open some doors and push ourselves into those spots that we want, not sit back and wait and hesitate and listen, everything that you described about where we are today

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is concerning.

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So, but that doesn't mean that we are destined to be left out of it, right?

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We have to kick that door down ourselves.

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We've got to push those cracks and make ourselves known and stand up for ourselves.

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advocate for ourselves.

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Advocate.

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Yeah, I like how you said don't hesitate.

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That really spoke to me.

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And one of the reasons I think you've been so successful with things like the WIT Network is that you're very tangible in terms of your saying, go into the room, you know, have these talking points prepared, like know the story that you want to share with leadership, have a voice at the table.

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And I think that is incredibly important and a really good reminder.

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I just want to say, though, that

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I think we have to have a little bit of empathy for where women and other marginalized groups are at because it is scary.

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There is an amount of fear right now that we're all that many people are living under, which is, am I going to be part of the next set of layoffs?

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You know, am I going to lose my job?

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And so there is sometimes our immediate knee-jerk reaction is just to put our heads down and just do what we're told and not make any waves.

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You know, you don't want to do anything to stand out.

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And I understand that, but I think there is a balance about it.

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And there certainly is a way to be professional and advocate for yourself without causing a stir and making a scene and being seen unprofessional.

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So I think that's what people have to keep in mind and figure out.

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And what role or responsibility do leaders and also community organizations like the Wit Network have to play in this?

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Well, I think from a leadership standpoint, you know, this isn't a time to hide behind your office door.

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This isn't a time to go dark.

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Your team needs you.

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And the best leaders show up in the hardest of times.

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And, you know, just give that look, even if sometimes it's as much as a look.

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I know what you're going through, asking, How are you today?

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That doesn't take away from all the productivity that everybody's going to do and deliver, but it's showing that human side of you and letting your team know that you're in it with them.

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They're not alone, and so I would say, as far as leadership is concerned, that's one of the best things that you can do to keep your team intact.

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and keep them going.

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The WIT Network is here as an outside resource, really, to be a place of support where women and their allies can come, have open conversations, not feel judged, really open up how they're feeling and let other people connect with them because they're feeling the same thing.

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And that's one of the really beautiful things I find about the WIT Network is that when I'm on events and we're in our programs, I see folks right in the chat.

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this just changed my day because it let me know that I'm not alone.

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I'm not the only one that's going through this or feeling these things.

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And sometimes that's all that's really needed.

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It's not that difficult, you know.

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And that's part of the reason for the podcast as well is, you know, in my intro I say the people behind the platforms and the stories that transcend technology, because I want to give people the opportunity to hear about the great accomplishments, but also the challenging times that we go through.

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as an entrepreneur, it's not all rosy.

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And when I hear you say this leadership responsibility of having conversations, I often challenge myself to do the tough thing, which for me is, how many crucial conversations can I have?

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And where am I backing away from crucial conversations where I really need to be leaning in?

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I do see that as a fundamental part of the leadership role.

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I wanted to ask, so in this age of competition, you're an entrepreneur, you're a founder.

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Yes.

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And where do you see yourself being competitive with the WIT Network?

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Like where are you leaning in to compete this year?

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Oh boy.

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Well, you know, when we first started out, I think we had maybe two other organizations that did similar to what we did.

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And now there are hundreds, which is wonderful.

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People always ask me, you know, oh, what do you think about that?

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Or how does that make you feel?

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And I say, look,

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When we have tackled all of the inequity and we're living in a gender-balanced world on every level and every metric, then I'll worry about competition.

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Because that's my mission, is to see that those things are changed and that everybody is viewed as equal within their organization, right?

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So that's what I care about most.

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And so right now what I try to do with some of our competitors is find ways that we can partner together.

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Because, I can't be everything to all people.

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My organization can't solve every problem.

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We can do X, Y, and Z really, really well.

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But there may be other competitors that do, you know, D, E, and F.

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So I try to look for that.

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You know, how can we work together?

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Obviously there's things

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you want to care about with your data and sharing data, obviously, there's things that you have to protect.

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I understand that.

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But there are ways that you can partner together and tackle more, hit more of an audience to help them.

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And that's what I look for.

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I really love this because you and I, we work in the world of partnerships.

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We work in technology ecosystems.

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And sometimes I think it's not top of mind for people of how do you collaborate?

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I mean, how can we be in a partnership space?

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and not lead by example in partnering.

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And definitely I see this at the WIT Network.

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I see you out at all different types of community events, and I see even the sponsors and the attendees at the WIT Network.

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I mean, many of them are members of other organizations, and you really do champion that.

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Yeah, I try not to bring division into it, or, you know, our goal too is to lift as many women up as we can, especially women who are consultants and entrepreneurs,

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women that are doing things solo is how can we help raise their voice and put them up on stage and give them an opportunity.

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And, it's my hope that in the world of karma, it all comes around.

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and serves everybody equally in the end, which I have found for the most part, it has over my career with the WIT Network.

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You mentioned gender equality.

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And one of the famous stats around from PitchBook, they've reconfirmed it actually for 2026, is that solo female-founded businesses get less, in the US, get less than 1% of venture capital funding.

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But the really interesting part is these female-led businesses

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are getting higher and higher exits as they continue to demonstrate their capability and capital efficiency.

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And so we have this gap.

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And I'm wondering if you see that gap closing or what the trends are that you're looking at?

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Unfortunately, no.

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You know, one of the main yardsticks of this is the McKinsey Lean In Women of the Workplace report.

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And that

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They interview like 9,500 people in the industry, asking them things like about salary, about promotions, about training opportunities, do they have mentors, do they get sponsored, different things like that.

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all of the statistics have either declined or are much less than our male counterparts.

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And that really makes me sad because I do think there are a lot of great people out there and allies who are trying to make change and don't look at that as a barrier.

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But it still gets reported to us from the members in the network that their male counterparts get access to more training

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and sponsors, they get tapped for promotions without it being a fair process.

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They're still not paid the same.

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What is the latest decision?

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It's 82 cents on the dollar.

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82 cents.

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Yeah, and I think it's gonna take 130 more years for that to change.

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So those things are concerning, that they seem simple to me.

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They seem simple, but we have

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systemic issues in corporate America, unfortunately.

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I think it's probably more so in America than in other parts of the world, that it's going to take probably 50 to 100 years to break a lot of that down.

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I do want to say, though, there is hope, because if you look back at the whole women's suffrage movement, this is a big thing for me, and it's something I hold on to when I'm feeling down about it.

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The women who fought for that, it was hundreds of years from start to finish.

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And the people in the beginning that were fighting and campaigning and protesting and getting arrested and lots of terrible things in the beginning, they did so for the sole purpose that they knew that it would

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be a long process for women in the future to have it be different.

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And that took hundreds of years.

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And so we're kind of in that, we're in that next phase of that.

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And how far are we in the journey?

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Not that long.

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Not that long.

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And I like where you've gone with history.

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I think sometimes, you know, taking a look back in time, it can be,

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it can really build your understanding of maybe this is just a wave of something, or how have we overcome a more difficult challenge?

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I mean, I've just been attending classes at the University of Oxford, and one of the things that I learned in my orientation week is that women weren't accepted to the colleges, which are essentially the university, until the 1970s.

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And even then, they couldn't graduate with any sort of a certification.

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They were just allowed to attend the classes.

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I mean,

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That really was not that long ago.

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And in the '70s, women couldn't get a credit card on their own.

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So you're absolutely right.

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And I think about it like this.

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I have a lot of men in my network, friends, that will reach out to me and say, help me understand.

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I really don't know what this is about.

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And of course, how would some of them know, right?

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What are the injustices that are happening?

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What are the grievances that women have at work?

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And it's about educating them.

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So now we're all having open conversations with our colleagues, with our managers, with our husbands, our partners, with our sons,

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This didn't happen 50 years ago.

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No one was talking about this, but now we're all talking about it.

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And that's what I mean by it takes generations for this kind of stuff to change.

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We can't expect people who have been leading a company for 50 years to get that.

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That's not something that's in their frame of mind.

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And I say that generally speaking, because obviously there are some leaders that do do that.

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But

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It's just going to take more time and we can't stop.

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So back to this 1%, I'm wondering on the aspirational, inspiring side, what advice do you have for women?

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I'm guessing we're going to have a lot of women tuning in from the WIT Network and many who are, many even I talk to on a regular basis who are thinking about starting their own careers.

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Sometimes, you know, they're young and just out of university and they want to start their own business or increasingly they're very established in their careers.

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but they're maybe experienced one of the big layoffs in tech, and they're thinking that this is finally the moment for them to build that new company on their own.

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So what advice would you have to help them get started?

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Well, as far as the financing is concerned, it really is about networking, right?

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Because you have to start to get in front of that audience.

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I would research there are female-owned investment firms.

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that that's their goal.

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They're out there.

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And that would be who I would go to first.

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And then there are conferences for, you know, there's conferences where they're matching up founders and investors where you get to go and do pitches.

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And I think getting started with practice, go to them and start practicing your pitch or go there and just start networking and talking to folks.

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about what does it take to get it over that finish line?

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What does it take to get their attention?

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And really understanding that world because it is very unique and it does have its challenges.

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But my advice would be research and seek out female owned or firms that specifically say they cater to that audience.

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They are out there, they're far and few between, but start there.

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It's interesting, even knowing you, and I know how passionate you are about networking.

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I didn't actually expect that answer.

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And when I think about my own business, I just had this flash of insight that...

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So my company is self-funded, so this isn't from a financial perspective, but I remember one of the things, and you knowing me will probably be surprised to hear this, but I couldn't sell to save my life.

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And the first, the way that my business actually got traction is because I had some people who believed in me and believed in what I was doing, and they sold my services.

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They went out and got me my first clients when I didn't have the courage to have those conversations.

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So that network, I mean,

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I definitely wouldn't be where I am today without the power of network.

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I could talk about networking and the importance of it.

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seems like such a blase topic or something we've heard for years and years and years, but it's really, really important for all aspects of your professional life to get out there in every way, shape, and form and network yourself.

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Because so much of my life, career, professional life, I guess

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personal life as well, but mostly professional.

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I can pinpoint specific people and networking that I have done that has changed the course of my career.

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Share a moment.

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I'd love to hear.

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Okay, well, I guess I'll start with Microsoft had an annual partner conference.

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It used to be called WPC, and that's when this occurred.

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Now, then it changed to Inspire.

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But

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I went to that conference every year, and I just loved meeting people.

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I mean, I have always been somebody who loves meeting people.

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I connect with people.

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I enjoy it.

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And so being at a conference, you know, wasn't as intimidating for me as it may be for other folks.

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I understand that.

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But I used every opportunity I could to meet people while I was there.

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And

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I had just this great opportunity meeting somebody that worked for Microsoft.

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He was a director level.

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And I was just talking about feedback about the conference.

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And he said, well, you should be on the planning board for the conference.

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Oh, wow.

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You have some really great ideas about how to bring partners together.

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Let me make a recommendation for you.

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And he did.

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He wrote in a recommendation.

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And the next thing I knew, I had an invitation to be on the Microsoft Partner Advisory Council for

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the conference.

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Wow.

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Yeah.

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And it was wonderful.

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I went to Redmond 3 * a year.

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I met with partners from all over the world and I was in my 20s.

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So this was an incredible experience for me from a mentorship standpoint to learn how to work with people from a global audience and also to put myself out there in terms of

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not to be intimidated, I was there to help provide input.

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So I had to learn how to not shy away, but to step out and be like, well, I think this.

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And that's intimidating when you're in a room full of 60 global leaders, including 10 Microsoft leaders.

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So it was a process for me, but that whole, that's what started everything for me and led me really to where I am today through the WIT network because

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We did, we wound up doing a luncheon for women in technology at this event, and Microsoft asked me to sort of help with that.

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And then that led to women saying, we want more than a luncheon once a year.

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We need support all through the year back in our geos and our community.

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How can you help us?

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And I thought, okay.

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So a bunch of my colleagues, we sat down and we were like, let's build it.

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And that's kind of how the Wit Network was born.

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Oh, that's so fantastic.

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I didn't know all the details in there.

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So DEI, we need to talk about DEI.

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And diversity and inclusion can get bogged down in optics, in policy, increasingly in politics.

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But the reason I wanted to bring it up with you is

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you have a very fresh and different perspective on it.

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And feel free to correct any of this.

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I'm paraphrasing something I heard you say that was women make up more than 51% of buyers.

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So you've kind of shifted the conversation to think about who is that target customer, that buyer.

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And that when we build products or AI platforms without women's input, it isn't just a values mismatch.

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It really isn't like it's really a failure of design.

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and a business decision making.

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So I'm curious, like why do you think so many organizations continue to fail to have this diverse perspective?

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I don't know.

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I ask myself this every day.

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Like it seems so simple.

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It seems like a really simple thing to be inclusive.

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and make sure that you're thinking about all voices.

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It isn't even just women.

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You know, there's other groups, marginalized groups to think through as buyers.

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And I don't know.

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It's just, it's, I think maybe folks are just stuck in the rushing to get things done and therefore they're not taking the time to be thoughtful.

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And

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I think this whole topic comes down to one word too, which is intentionality.

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If people took 5 minutes out of each project, out of each day, out of each initiative, out of each strategic goal to think about intentionality, I think things would change.

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But we're so rushed and everybody's just trying to quickly get to the finish line that they're willing to let.

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Yeah, it's the fastest path or the path of least resistance.

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And that's not necessarily anybody's fault.

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Like I think about the pressures of the job market.

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You know, in an age of AI, people are expected to do more and more and to produce more outcomes.

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And, you know, perhaps some of this is just coming through in that it takes work to elicit diverse voices and to be inclusive.

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And

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people aren't making the space for that.

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Yeah, I mean, if something's already halfway down the chute and they say, wait a minute, we haven't thought about how this is going to impact this, and this, these groups.

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Stop.

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Now, who's going to do all of that work?

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How are we going to find those voices?

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Are we going to have to redesign?

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It just becomes overwhelming.

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And I think that's where it gets lost.

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But what we have to try to do

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is start from the encourage folks at the beginning of these processes to take these things into consideration.

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And for those decision-making groups to be more diverse from a starting point.

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There was an amazing marketing campaign that was, I think it won this major award in creative last year.

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And it's called *****.

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And the concept, and it's all over Manhattan, it's everywhere.

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And have you seen the campaign?

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Do you know what I'm talking about?

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So it's this concept that

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Men named Richard, shortened to **** have more board seats than a whole variety of marginalized groups have even in companies.

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So there's more ***** than XYZ.

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I think one of the big ads is there's more ***** on corporate boards in America than there are Hispanic women in leadership roles or something like that we can fact check for the show.

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But that kind of speaks to me when I hear you saying that.

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So I wrote to him.

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I wrote to the CEO.

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That's from a cosmetic company.

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Yes.

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Elf.

00:27:01

And I wrote to him.

00:27:03

We wrote to the CEO.

00:27:04

No.

00:27:05

Yeah.

00:27:05

Well, we did two things.

00:27:06

One, we wrote to the CEO and we asked if he would be an advisory board member because we loved his gusto.

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And I believe he's an Indian man.

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And we were like, we love this flag, you know, for diversity.

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So can you please help us?

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But we didn't hear back from him.

00:27:25

Oh, wow.

00:27:26

Maybe this will help get the word out.

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And then we reached out to the marketing agency and we actually, they did reply and they are interested in meeting with us because we just loved it so much.

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And we thought, hey, what can we do together?

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And can you help us out in some way, shape, or form?

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So we're going to meet with them.

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But yeah, yes, That's so cool.

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What I loved about that campaign as well, since we work in technology, is that's a data-driven insight.

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You know, somebody looked at these statistics, looked at the data, layered on a creative concept around the number of Richards sitting on boards and made this brave choice to actually build an advertising campaign around that.

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And I just think that sometimes we're talking about AI and is AI creative or not creative?

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There's very strong arguments on both sides.

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But where I land is

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It doesn't affect our ability to contribute and to be creative.

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And I think that campaign really illustrates to me this sort of marriage of looking at data and analytics and then layering on some human thinking and coming up with a really funny and creative concept.

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Just absolutely brilliant.

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Loved it.

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And you know, you mentioned data, which, so here's the funny point when you ask me, like, what do I think about where this is all at and am I surprised?

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Most of these leaders, male-driven.

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Men love data, like to make decisions based on the data.

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The data shows that companies with more diverse leadership teams drive more revenue, greater profits, higher stock prices, better customer retention, better employee satisfaction, better innovation.

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So what's the problem?

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I wish I had an answer for you there, Christine.

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I don't know.

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You know what?

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As you go through your podcast, it would be great for you to ask that.

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That should be a question that you ask those male leaders.

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Because I would love to know why that holds them back from embracing it.

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And the fact that many have done away with it, you know, have eliminated all their programs now,

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It's just even more surprising to me.

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Yeah, mind-boggling.

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You're someone who really is authentic, and you do in your everyday life support other women leaders.

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And when we were doing our briefing call, you had mentioned participating in She Summits.

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And we didn't get a chance to dive into it at the time.

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But I'm curious.

00:30:09

So this is a group of women who went out into the mountains of Colorado.

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Yes.

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I had actually wanted to participate, but I couldn't make it.

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I'm a big hiker, mountaineering, outdoors fan.

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Tell me about the experience.

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Well, it was really amazing from start to finish, I have to say.

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Erin Figer, she is one of the founders of She Summits.

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And

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She generously and enthusiastically recruits about 10 to 15 women per hike.

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They do 3 at a clip.

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They'll do a beginner, an intermediate, and an advanced hike all within the same like 2, 3 weeks time period.

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It's usually around Labor Day.

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And she just talked about it.

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And you know what really struck me was that it's

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It drives a journey of transformation physically and also mentally to do something like that.

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The mountain is 14,000 feet high.

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I live at sea level.

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So that is a big deal for me.

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That's the first part of it.

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And then the second part is the hike.

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It's like 3 1/2 miles up and 3 1/2 miles down.

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So it's, you know, you have to be, you have to train for it.

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Otherwise you'll have a lot of problems.

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And some parts of it are really, really steep.

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There's heights issues.

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You're walking on large rocks called scree at many points, which are moving.

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You're walking on rocks that are moving.

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So that's difficult.

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There were so many things about it.

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But I fell in love with the idea of challenging myself and going through a transformation as a part of that process.

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And I did.

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I built out a training plan.

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I said yes.

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wow, I didn't know that.

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That's when she talked about it.

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And I said yes, and then I said, I'm going to take this seriously.

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So I hired a trainer for three months, and we geared my training specifically to getting up that hill.

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And I had to do cardio to train for the lung capacity with the height, with the altitude.

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And then I recruited some friends to go.

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So then I had my little team.

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And we went and it was fantastic.

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I mean, it's absolutely breathtakingly beautiful there.

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Colorado is just one of the most gorgeous states.

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And we went early.

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We did some training.

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We had a lot of fun.

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It was bonding.

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We all stayed in one big Airbnb.

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So there was a lot of getting to know new people, spending some great time with old friends.

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And Erin does a great job of curating all of that, whole experience.

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And we did a training hike.

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And then on the Monday on Labor Day, off we went to the mountain.

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We started at 4 A.m.

00:33:00

Wow.

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Pitch black, we had headlights on.

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And yeah, it was really, really hard.

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I was going to ask you, what was the most challenging part, the physical struggle.

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Actually, no.

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I was in good shape for the hike.

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It was the breathing.

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Yeah, I have asthma, so it was a little bit double difficult for me in that regard.

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So that part was scary because you're supposed to, you're supposed to, I think you're supposed to elevate like every 1000 feet, you know, 24 hours.

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And we were, the house that we were staying at was at 10,000 feet.

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and then we drove to the starting point on the mountain, that was at 12,000 feet.

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So, in a two-hour car ride, we went 2,000 feet up, and then we did the hike another 2,000 feet, in two hours.

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So it was, that part of it was hard for me.

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But I loved it.

00:34:01

And the next day I wasn't even sore.

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I couldn't believe it, in terms of the hiking.

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So I did well with that part and I was really proud of myself.

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That's amazing.

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Yeah, thank you.

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And don't ask me if I'm going to do it again.

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The answer is no.

00:34:17

There's few things that I love more than a good mountain summit, but I've never been much of a...

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a technical climber or mountaineer or anything like that.

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And last summer, a girlfriend of mine just said out of the blue that for her 40th birthday, she wants to summit Aconcagua, which is a 7,000 meter peak.

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I don't know what that is in feet, but it's just short of Everest.

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Everest is 8,000 meters.

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So it's the tallest peak on the South American continent.

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It's not a very challenging hike in terms of the train.

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Like you don't, I don't believe need ropes

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Anything, but anyways, she mentioned that she...

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she wants to tackle this challenge.

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And me being incredibly type A and organized, I don't think she was taking it that seriously until I signed us up for several days of mountain skills training last summer.

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And we did a test climb, which was just to assess if this is something we're even going to seriously pursue or not.

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And I'm feeling confronted at this very moment because

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I now feel like I'm making a public proclamation.

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You're doing it now, girl.

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I'm going to do this thing.

00:35:24

But we summited Mount Baker.

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And that was so beautiful.

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It's one of the most glaciated mountains in the United States.

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And so we climbed up on the glacier.

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And it was so, it was very hard, but it was so breathtakingly beautiful.

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That's well, that's lovely.

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That's great.

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Yeah, I think it's important to challenge yourself because when you do get to that top and you look down, it's a feeling you can't create in any other way.

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And it's just really pride that you did it.

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Enjoy.

00:36:00

Yeah, absolutely.

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And then to be there with other people as well and sharing that community experience.

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And as entrepreneurs, Ashley, we can really correlate those, that whole experience of training and preparation and bringing teammates along and scaling, to starting a business.

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So let's talk about starting a business because you co-founded Quality Technology

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solutions.

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25 years, you ran that business.

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27.

00:36:32

27 years.

00:36:33

Great.

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And what was so incredibly impressive to me, living and breathing the Microsoft ecosystem, is that you're an award-winning Microsoft partner.

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I mean, there's over 400,000 Microsoft partners on the planet to get to that tier of accomplishment.

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So I wanted to ask you the question because

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on this topic of helping women see opportunities and take the leap into maybe starting their own thing, bring us to the moment that was, that represented the pinnacle of success for you.

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Like what in that entire 27 year history really stands out in your mind of like, wow, we did this?

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The surviving 27 years?

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Let's see.

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I guess we, you know, we did build a really great relationship with Microsoft.

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Neil Rosenberg, he was the president.

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He was the main founder.

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And he asked me, I was 24 years old, and he asked me to come along on that journey with him.

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And the whole experience, the good, the bad, and the good, the bad, the ugly, more good.

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But the whole journey was something I'm so grateful for because it taught me so much about people

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and business.

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I had to learn, and technology, too.

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The whole concept of new cycles of technology are constantly coming out and you have to reinvent every single time.

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And now it's faster.

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Back then, I remember it was like three to four years, you would get a new version of Novell Netware or Windows and things of that nature.

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And now it's

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They're coming out daily on your phone.

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So it's a whole different thing now, but it did teach me about that cycle and how you have to completely reinvent your business, your solutions, how are you going to serve, how are you going to sell it, how are you going to package it, all of that, how are you going to market it, changes every single time.

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And for those who don't do that, that's how you get left behind, right?

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So those things were really valuable business lessons, learning how to manage people.

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I was young.

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I had teams.

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I had to learn how to manage them to success and not just be a therapist where they would come in and put their feet up and tell me their whole stories.

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That was, I could write a book on that.

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Takes skill.

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Yes.

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Working with customers.

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I mean, I'm so proud to say, and Neil did such a great job at leading in this way and mentoring.

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about taking care of the customer and building a relationship with the customer.

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That's where I learned that, the importance of it.

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Was there a particular customer relationship or deal that got brought across the line that you just remember thinking, whoa?

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The story that stands out for me the most personally was I had gotten a lead for a financial firm on Wall Street and they were moving into a new space

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So they needed everything built out from scratch.

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And this was before wireless.

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So it was a physical construction project plus all the IT.

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And anyway, I knew what I was doing.

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But when it came time for me to deliver the proposal, I had to stand in front of 14 Wall Street board members, stand in the front and deliver this proposal.

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What an experience.

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Yes.

00:40:04

So of course I practiced and just like you, I know how diligent you are.

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I practiced, I practiced, I practiced.

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And I went in there and I killed the presentation.

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And the first thing that happened when I finished, when you have that thank you slide up, was a gentleman set turned and looked to Neil, my partner, and said, so da da da da da da da da, you know, if we do this, we do that, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

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And there I was at the front of the room, all by myself going, well, I just delivered this.

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Why is he asking Neil?

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And I just remember everything in me sank.

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So for those listening, for those allies listening, like this is what it does to people.

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Like it literally crushed me that for whatever reason, I didn't seem valued that he could ask me the question.

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And

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Neil, who was absolutely amazing, said, I didn't do the proposal.

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Christine is working this project, so you should ask her.

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And that's an ally.

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You know, that's an ally.

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He could have answered it.

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He could have, because he probably would have done better than me.

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I doubt that.

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But he did what he needed to do.

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He shifted it.

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And at that moment, the entire room turned back to me, and I answered the question.

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And that night, my contact, the one VP, called me at home, because this was before cell phones,

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And he said, you got the job.

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Wow.

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And you kicked **** in there.

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you did an amazing job and we are thrilled to work with you.

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And it was unanimous from the board.

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So it all worked out, but that, I still remember standing there.

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I know what I was wearing, because it was so pivotal for me that how he made me feel by that action and then, you know, how Neil stood up for me.

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And that importance of the first follower, there's that meme, I think it was at the gorge, it's a music festival or something, and this one guy goes out there and he's just dancing like an insane person.

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And if it was just him, he would be this insane dancing guy.

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But instead, the first follower comes and joins him.

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And it triggers this whole subsection of this outdoor concert into its own little mini concert of just people having the best time.

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But it's

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really that, so, and as a leader myself, so often I find these moments of leadership are actually when you are leading from behind and you're giving opportunity to other people and you're shining the light on someone who isn't you.

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And, you know, at the end of the day, you also got the deal, a Wall Street finance deal across the line is, I mean, that's very cool.

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Yeah, it was really, it was really important to me.

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And I wish I could,

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I didn't keep in touch with them.

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I wish I could tell them this story now, because I never talked to them about it, but it would be fun to reminisce with them about it, I'm sure they would get a kick out of it, but.

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I wanted to ask too, after 27 years in this business, what did it look like and how did it feel to go on to the next thing?

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It was very sad.

00:43:29

Okay.

00:43:29

Yeah, it was sad.

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Yeah, I used to think about it like this, and it's kind of like this with the WIT Network now.

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It kind of became my identity.

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You know, when you're a founder, you do something for 27 years.

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It is your identity.

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And I have poured everything I had into that.

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And sometimes at night I would be like, where is the line?

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You know, it's a little different when you're an employee.

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you have a little bit more of a line.

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But when it's your business, where is that line?

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You give anything to make it successful.

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So yeah.

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Identity is such an important topic, and I see it coming up a lot at the moment with layoffs even, or at Transcends in my business, we say remote first, not remote only.

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So by our bones, we're a remote first organization, which means we can provide flexible work.

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And what that interprets as is that we have a lot of women in the business and a lot of moms, for example, who ebb and flow into their careers and out of their careers.

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And I find

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that, that's a conversation that comes up is that core identity pivot when you're working and when you're not working or if you're going through a major life change.

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My aunt is currently retiring.

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That's a that's another one where you have this identity question.

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How have you how have you kind of secured yourself in that identity?

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As much as exciting as it was to be wanted and pursued by other businesses.

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I mean, acquisition, most people would say is the definition of success for an entrepreneur.

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Like this is the pinnacle.

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Yes, that's right.

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And that's why I brought that story up.

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But there was a part of me that knew that part of my identity was going to go away.

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And I had to make peace with that, which took a long time.

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I cried A lot.

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I did.

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I cried a lot.

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Because I'm such a human, I connect so deeply.

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I had customers for 27 years.

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They would tell me, I get pinged by seven of your competitors a day.

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And they stayed with us because they trust us.

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That's a lot.

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It's hard to let that go.

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It was hard to let my team disengage with team members that were family for 20, I had folks there 27 years.

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So that stuff was really hard.

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And then when we got acquired and we were merging in, and I'm sharing this story because something happened to me and I thought it was just me.

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But now, since then, I have talked to so many people.

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And in fact, a friend called me last night with the same scenario.

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and she was asking me to kind of coach her through it.

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When you get acquired, it's very common, like essentially I got let go as soon as my contract ended.

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And even when I was there, they had their own ideas about things that were under my purview, you know, things that I had responsibility for in the business.

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And what happens

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this is just part of the process.

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But when you're in it, you know, and when you're an owner, you're a leader, and you're the one making the decisions, and then you get acquired, and now you're being told what to do, that's another process that you have to go through, where in your head, you're saying to yourself, Why didn't they ask for my input on that?

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I used to make that decision myself.

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And it's,

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a challenge.

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my friend was saying to me last night, like, they rolled it out all wrong.

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if they would have come to me, I would have told them, no, like, this is how we need to do it.

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I know the space.

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It's my business.

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And I said, honey, this is what happens, right?

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This is normal.

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And I thought, oh, geez, when it was happening to me, was I the only one?

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Or why was that happening?

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Why wouldn't they want my input on that?

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Like, I couldn't understand.

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Like, well, we got the business to hear.

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You acquired us.

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I certainly have some value in this process.

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But for some reason, this is another crazy thing that happens out there.

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People just, they have their own ideas and they...

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They don't really care.

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I don't know what the stats are, but it would be interesting to know the percentage of people who walk out on their earn out.

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So when a company is typically acquired for the senior leadership, often the founding team, it'll be negotiated in the contract that you need to stay on in the acquiring business for X amount of time, often a period of say two years.

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But I've talked to several people who took a huge financial cut, because of course they always put this

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clause in the contracts, a clawback on your package if you don't do your full-time tenure.

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And I don't, I have a feeling it's not uncommon for people to make that financial sacrifice to not participate in what you just described.

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Yeah, because it really was toxic.

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And it is toxic where this example I gave of a friend of mine going through it, is toxic.

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And you do get to a point where you say to yourself, it's not worth it.

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Not worth it.

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So I mean, this brings up risk.

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And one of the things I find inspiring about you is you've taken really good risks in your career.

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I'm sure some risks that haven't paid off as well.

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But let's talk about a good risk.

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Like what's a risk that you've taken in your career that really paid off for you?

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Well, I think starting, you know, the first one, the foundation one was, you know, joining my friend that started the QTS.

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That was a risk.

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I was at a corporate job.

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I was doing really, really well there and had a secure promotion path and job security.

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Blue Shield, Blue Cross, Blue Cross Blue Shield.

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Blue Cross Blue Shield.

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Yes.

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And then to go to a startup.

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But you know, I weighed it all out.

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I talked to my family, my parents.

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I was living at home at the time.

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And

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They were behind me 100%, what should I do?

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This is probably the best time in my life to take this risk, so they encouraged me.

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And so that's number one, and I love that.

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And I think the second pivot on that is starting the WIT Network.

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coincidentally, when they let me go at the end of that contract, we had been bubbling up, to found the WIT Network.

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So

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It kind of led me to where I needed to be because it was that month that we incorporated.

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Oh, wow.

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Yeah.

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You know, I find so often that these experiences can be very painful, but it creates space for something new to come in.

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Sure did.

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It's just all laid out that way.

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I didn't plan it.

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It just, that's how it laid out.

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And, you know, that's kind of when you know it's right.

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I want to talk about risk.

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So Microsoft has this Work Trends Index report.

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The last one was 2025.

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They haven't released for this year yet.

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But the 2025 report is all about becoming a frontier firm.

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And it's about agentic businesses where there's human agent teams.

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And how they talk about risk in that report is to say that the

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barrier to entry on risk has lowered because you can do this rapid experimentation in a time of AI.

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And I'm wondering for you, like how do you think about risk over the course of your career?

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And in this AI era, are you more open to taking risks in your business?

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Do you see AI being an advantage there?

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Well, I'm forcing myself to.

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I think, I guess to answer the first part of your question,

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I wouldn't say I'm super, risky or taking, super on that end, but I'm probably more moderate.

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And I do weigh, I think I spend a lot of time kind of weighing the pros and cons.

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And then as long as it feels good to me, I do a lot of gut checking because I do believe in my instincts.

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And if it feels really good, you know, then I'm likely to take it and jump.

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And I mean, you're successful in your career.

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So I think that that's really good advice.

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going back to Harvard Business Review just published their first major trends report for 2026 in partnership with Gartner, and I found the data absolutely shocking.

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So it said that while many CEOs are bullish on AI, data suggests, get this, one in 50

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AI investments deliver transformational value.

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Wow.

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And it's only one in five that deliver any value whatsoever.

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One in 50 transformational value, one in five any value whatsoever.

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And so where the market seems to be going is measured risk, which is actually what I think I'm hearing you say there.

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Well, somebody, I, so interesting that you say this.

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So I, as a leader, you know, as a business owner, I, we're all challenged with how can we take this technology

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and use it for good for our business, and most importantly, serve our customers better, right?

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That's what everybody wants to do.

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So I am looking at different things with that.

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But I talked to somebody just yesterday, and we were talking about this topic, and she said, well, you know, I really, I looked into building an agent, you know, for our business, and it's going to cost $50,000 for one

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agents, she said, I can't make that investment right now.

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That's well beyond.

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And I said to her, listen, this is because it's all new.

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And of course it's going to be top of the line pricing at this point.

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You do have to think about what is that going to drive for your business.

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Is it going to drive sales?

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Is it going to increase

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customers?

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And if not, the answer is it's just helping you serve better or then, you have to weigh that, what that ROI is going to be on that investment.

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Doesn't sound like in her case, it was going to drive that business.

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So I'm like, I think you need to wait it out and let that, because there's going to be 1000 other people that build those types of solutions in about 3 months and you'll probably get it down to 20,000, you know.

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So, but you know, I think this whole thing,

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It's going to be really interesting to see where we are in a year against these companies saying that they're laying off all these people because AI is taking jobs.

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Like, I don't know.

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I'm skeptical that in the next two to three years, it's going to be this completely changed workforce that people are talking about or envisioning.

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So one of the greatest things about the WIT Network, and my team's directly benefiting from this, is the training and skills development.

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We had some of our team just go through your AI training program with Impresa AI, which was fantastic.

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So...

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People debate this all the time, and I've been reading a lot of books on the topic of what are the skills that humans should be investing in, training in, order to be relevant in an age of AI.

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And I don't necessarily think there's consensus in the market.

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I'm curious what your point of view is.

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What do you think is important for people to be developing right now in terms of skills?

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EQ.

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You know, I have a whole presentation on this.

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I delivered it at Microsoft Ignite.

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You know, there still will need to be the human aspect of relationships, whether it's with teams, collaborating with teams, leading people that are there, and customer relationships.

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I'm not saying that 100 years from now, robots will be doing business with robots.

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That's probably coming, but in the next 50 years, there's still gonna be people involved

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in those transactions, right?

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And so how do you, like, what did I just say about that story?

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The customer said, we trust you.

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We stay with you because we trust you.

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That's built on rapport, that's built on connection, and that's not gonna happen with technology, right?

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You can't replace that with technology.

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And even with people, like I mentioned about asking people how they're doing and being that support system for each other and helping people through those times, I think...

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I think that's one of the things that's super, going to be super important.

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The other thing I would say is communication, communication skills on the human side, right?

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We can use the AI to run the data and run the reports and build this and build that, but then how do you talk about it?

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How do you get the team to use that information then and make it something else?

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So communication skills

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I think our also continue to be one of the top things that folks need to focus on.

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I think about Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People, which is an...

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old school book and not necessarily the most uplifting for women specifically, but the concepts in the book are incredibly powerful.

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And I think this idea of influencing people in a positive way to do things, to accomplish, to achieve, to move in the same direction is, it is a senior level skill.

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And I think the more that we can help people to learn that skill is really going to serve them well in their careers.

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Yeah, yesterday I got tagged on a post

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post on LinkedIn by Julie Simpson.

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She's one of the co-founders of the Wint Network.

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Love Julie.

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I know, she's the best.

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And she was in a meeting with clients and they're talking about tech, absorbing the tech.

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How do they roll out the tech?

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How do they market the tech?

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How do they sell the tech?

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How do they deliver the tech?

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And the whole, you know, at one point, everybody was just stone-faced, overwhelmed.

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She could just tell, they looked

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just flabbergasted at like, my gosh, how are we going to take all of this on?

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And so she must have asked a probing question, like, okay, what's happening in the room, right now?

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Like, how are we feeling?

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What's, what are these faces for?

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Everybody looks, you know, shell-shocked about this.

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And the one gentleman said, we're just, we're probably all feeling the same.

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Like, how are we going to absorb doing all of this work with this small team?

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on top of everything else that we have to do.

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Like we get it.

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This is the vision that we've bought into, but we just have no idea.

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Like we're stuck.

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We can't move right now.

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And she shut down the presentation and she said, let's talk about this.

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You're not alone.

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This is something that's happening everywhere.

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And let's just talk.

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And

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Everybody started opening up and sharing how they were feeling and the frustrations that they have and the pressure they're under.

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And they just all started letting that steam valve open up, and letting that pressure out.

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And let me tell you something.

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Do you think she's ever going to lose those folks as a client or as people in her network that would probably do anything that she asked them to do?

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No, because she opened up EQ.

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She made herself vulnerable.

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She didn't know how they were going to respond to that.

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They could have just shut her down and been like, we're not talking to you about this, right?

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But she showed her human side and that strengthened her relationship with the customer, which is what we all want.

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But this is what I'm talking about.

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And how do you teach that?

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You know, how do you teach that to folks?

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She's more senior, she's been around the block, she knows.

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How do we teach that to early career folks, the importance of that, when everybody is like this?

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Yes, on the phone.

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No one looks up, everybody's doing 10 things at once, no one is in the moment, living present, being conscious, being intentional, I'm gonna use that word again.

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It is refreshing to see an uptick in in-person events and getting people together face to face in a room.

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It's one of the reasons we're doing, we're sitting here together today.

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It's much easier to be virtual, but it's not the same thing.

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I go back to that philosophy of being remote first, but not remote only, and the not remote only part is about intentionality.

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It means de facto, our day-to-day operation is remote, and that provides a lot of wonderful things, such as flexibility.

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But we can't exclusively be remote because we're all human beings and we are faster.

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More importantly, we enjoy our work life much better when we have an empathetic connection that comes from face to face with people.

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And I think we have to find more opportunities to be intentional in our work to create those experiences with people.

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But I certainly don't have, Julie's amazing and she is a force to reckon with and she has an incredible executive presence.

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I think

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A lot of people could learn from her, but training those skills, I think like your co-founder did for you in the room when he put the spotlight back onto you, that gave you an opportunity to really own the room and to create that influence.

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So maybe that's one way as leaders that we can support.

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Yeah, and builds confidence.

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That's another thing.

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You know, one of the things I think a lot of women do struggle with is that confidence to, do I have enough?

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do I know enough?

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Can I explain enough?

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Do I have enough experience for this?

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We question because we always want to be perfect.

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We want to be, you know, top, top before we go through.

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And that's something that we can learn from our male counterparts because they don't.

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It's fake it till you make it in a lot of cases.

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And it works.

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It's okay.

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So, you know, that's something that I think those experiences do help you to build confidence.

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And, you know, on this topic,

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if you're looking for an actionable tip, one of my favorite TEDx videos is on this concept of fake it till you make it.

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And it's all the research behind the fact that standing, you know, if you're not on video and you can't see me, but I have my arms expressed up, confident stance over my head, you know, these silly, they call them power poses.

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Yes.

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Actually show in research that if you do these power poses before going into an important meeting, you are going to be more confident in that meeting.

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So there's lots of little tricks that are going to help you on that.

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Well, you're supposed to smile.

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too before you get on phone calls with customers or partners or it's that you're sending yourself like this positive reinforcement for what you're about to go

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go into.

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So I do do that.

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You do do that.

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I do.

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I want to talk about reinvention, because you and I were discussing busting this myth, and we have this in common in our journeys, where there seems to be this belief that if you don't have your path to success very clearly defined from a young age, that you simply aren't going to get there.

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And it can create this lack of confidence and this doubt if you don't know at the drop of a hat.

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Yes.

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What is your purpose?

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Yeah, that was me.

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What is your experience?

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That was me.

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I was an overachiever coming through schooling, university.

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I had to take, everybody else was taking 12 and 15 credits and I was doing 18 and 21 and I had three jobs and I was the president of the sorority and all these things.

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And so,

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for me, I got into the workforce and then started to hear people say, this is my passion and this is what I was meant to do.

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And I always knew I wanted to do this and do that.

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And I'm thinking, wait a minute, I never had that.

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I never really had this direct connection to what I was going to be when I grew up.

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It just sort of unfolded for me.

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As I mentioned, I had a corporate job and then, landed this, had this great relationship with somebody who wanted me to go along on that ride with him.

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And then that led to everything else, you know, that happened.

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So it was not so much that I planned it, but that's how the fate, you know, the fates took me.

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But I remember that, constantly hearing people say, this is what I was supposed to do.

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And I felt bad for myself.

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Like, why did I have that?

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I just never had that.

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And so it was.

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It's something that I just tucked away, this feeling that I had.

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I was just like, well, you're doing good.

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Like, you're doing good work, and you're happy with what you're doing, and you've done a lot, so don't be down about it.

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And then I'll never forget, it was the, we launched the WIT Network in 2018.

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We had our very first webinar for the community in September.

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Gabriella Schuster did our keynote for it, and we announced everything to the world.

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And when we hung up, it was so great, so positive.

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And so many people wrote notes to me.

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And I remember distinctly sitting there saying, aha, this is my purpose.

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I was meant to lead this initiative.

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Like I just, every bell went off for me that I have found it.

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So you can't give up because it came to me, you know, later in my career.

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It wasn't something I knew when I was going into school.

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But I found it and I found joy through it.

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So I'm so grateful.

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My sister always said, since I can remember, I mean, we might have been three and five years old, we're two years apart, that she wanted to be a nurse and she wanted to be a mom.

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And she graduated from high school, she went to nursing school and became a nurse, and then very quickly met her husband, and they have four wonderful children who are my nieces and nephews.

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And

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My career has not followed a straight path.

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I used to have a restaurant.

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I don't even know if I know that.

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No, I didn't know that.

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A raw vegan community space, really, where we did lots of talks and built community.

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And it was called Zend Conscious Lounge.

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And now I work in technology, which for me makes sense.

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My dad led technology transformation for public transportation in British Columbia, and they were a huge Microsoft partner.

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So funny enough, here I am at Transcends.

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But even when I started the business Transcends, I didn't know what it was going to be.

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I incorporated the name, and the name felt right.

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And I knew that I wanted to do something as a marketer.

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I was really passionate about doing something niche, something where we were very well-defined.

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and discovered this area of Microsoft partnerships and channel partner marketing.

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And that's really where we've specialized.

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But it took a long, you know, I didn't start Transcends until I was 35 years old.

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And I think for you, the WIT network came to you later in life.

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Like, tell us about what that time in life looked like for you.

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Yeah, well, it was at the time of the crossroads for me with my work

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the Microsoft partner work.

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I had started to do some consulting for some other partners at the same time as we were launching the WIN Network.

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Yeah, and it was later in my work, my career.

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I do remember another thing that was happening for me at that time that was a lesson learned, which was the importance of self-care.

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If I look back at the first 30 years of my career, I did not balance that well at all.

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And I really regret that for myself.

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I feel sad about that, that I didn't prioritize myself in that journey.

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And so when that ended, that was one of the first things that became very clear to me was the importance of prioritizing yourself.

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So what does that mean?

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Again, intentionality.

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I come first.

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I do my workouts every single morning before I do anything else.

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That took me 30 years into my career to figure that out.

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I would always say, I'll do it after work.

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And then work was ending at 5, ending at 6, ending at 7, ending at 8.

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No one feels like doing a workout at that point.

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I certainly don't.

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So I didn't set myself up for success in that regard, you know?

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But now I understand the importance.

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If I'm sitting at my desk too long, I get up.

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Oh, no, I've been sitting here for too long.

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I need to get up.

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I go for a walk.

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If I have a struggle with something, I say, I need fresh air.

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I'm sitting in this office too long.

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I get up.

01:09:24

I go outside.

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I walk around the block.

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I know these things now.

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I make sure I have my water.

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I'm drinking a lot of water.

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I plan my meals so that I don't sit at my desk from 7 in the morning until 3 in the afternoon and then go, oh, I have to eat something.

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These were all mistakes I made.

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You know, now I just try to really be intentional, plan my week, put myself

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first.

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And what?

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I feel so much better about my day when I've done these things.

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I really do.

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It's made such a difference for me.

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And I know a lot of people struggle with this.

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And it's so hard.

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And I don't have a family, so I know folks and moms that are trying to get kids out the door, they'll say, that doesn't work for me.

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You know, I get it.

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Everybody has to find their way to make it work.

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But it's so important.

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How do you deal with that?

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Well, it's some of the really small things that you mentioned there that maybe I used to dismiss as being too small to be important.

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Having a sip of water.

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That's it.

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That really does regulate your system.

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And now, especially before I go out on stage, for example, I'm always careful to take a deep breath.

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I think one of the things that can be challenging for women is expanding your waistline.

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We can just really hold in our breath.

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And so I find now, I'll challenge myself, you can do it any time, is just to push out my stomach so that I can feel my waistband of my pants.

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And it just brings me into my body a little bit more.

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Having a sip

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of water, same thing.

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It's very grounding.

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It can just take you down that couple notches out of your fight and flight and into a space that's more calm where you have access to your creativity and can be more present to listen, come up with solutions.

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It's very hard to do that when you're freaking out inside.

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Which does happen.

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All the time, all the time.

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So with starting the WIT network later in your career, the reason

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I think this is so pertinent to share on the show is that we have greater health spans.

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So recent research from Wharton and NBER, I think it stands for National Bureau of Economic Research, they had a paper that came out showing that improving health span doesn't just improve quality of life, it's increasing the length of time that people are participating in the labor force.

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And

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having possibility for yourself going into later stages of your career that you can reinvent, that you can have a second, third, 4th, 5th, hopefully, go around.

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And I wonder, we had talked about on the distant horizon is maybe this idea of retirement for you, but do you even want to now that you're doing something that you love so much?

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No, I don't.

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Yeah, I know.

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It has changed for me.

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But back when I was in the corporate world, it was, can I retire?

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My goal was to retire at 62.

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Like I just wanted out because I knew I would do something afterward, and I thought it would be something more with a nonprofit.

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It all just happened sooner than I thought to make that transition.

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And now, yeah, my plan is more, hey, well, maybe I'll cut back some hours as I age, but I certainly see myself working the next 10 years just because the work is so important.

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And maybe my role will shift.

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I mean, I do try to pave the way and try to empower other people and bring other people up.

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So maybe I won't be the face of the WIT network.

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Maybe I'll let other people rise up and take that.

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Maybe I won't be the day-to-day operations person.

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I'll bring other people in and my role may shift, but I still see myself being a part of it.

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Yeah, that's fantastic.

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There's this guy who really left an impression on me, Chip Conley.

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I had the opportunity of being in person with him at an event put on by Summit.

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Summit.co is the organization, a really intimate retreat in Beaver.

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I think it's called Beaver, Colorado, just outside of Aspen.

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And he's this really cool guy.

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At the height of his career, he was the top boutique hotelier in California.

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And he was known as this rock'n'roll guy.

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And he had lots of celebrities coming into his properties.

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David Bowie famously stated a bunch of his places.

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And Airbnb approached him, I think it was in about 2013, to become a strategic advisor to their business.

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And this is when Airbnb was still a startup.

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And they didn't have, they were tech guys, they didn't have the experience of hospitality and what it means to actually run a hospitality concept.

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So they brought in Chip.

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The reason I bring this up is that he was 52 when he started this journey with Airbnb.

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And what he's doing now actually is called the Modern Elder Institute.

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And this is all about helping people to find purpose in their later years in life, whether that looks like traditional careers or just doing something that you're really passionate about.

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And you know, we're all sitting in the room with Chip and the question that he challenged us with

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that I really hold closely still is what is something that you can start today that you could see yourself doing in 10, 20, and 30 years from now?

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What is something that I understand that you started swimming?

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late in life.

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And if I've got this right, you were doing 5 out of 6 competitive swim strokes.

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Tell us about this journey, because that's something that you can do, I mean, indefinitely with any good fortune.

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Yeah, no, it was a, it has been an incredible experience for me.

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It's in February here, it's three years.

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So I had the unfortunate experience of needing a hip replacement.

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I had arthritis in my hip.

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And so that was really painful.

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And as part of that journey, but I couldn't walk, I couldn't run, you know, I couldn't do those things.

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So I needed to find a form of exercise that would be safe, you know, that I could do.

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And so my doctor recommended swimming.

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I happen to be in an area where there's a

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nice, lovely community pool.

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And I dragged my sister along for the ride.

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I said, hey, you know, why don't we do some swimming?

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And our brother-in-law is a lifeguard and he does coaching, swimming coach.

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So I said, we have a swim coach right in our family.

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So we recruited him and it was wonderful.

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I mean, the very beginning, I knew how to swim, but I couldn't do the rotary breathing with my face in the water.

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So I wanted to learn that and she was kind of tentative in the water and I wanted to help her get past that.

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So we started out with the basics.

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We learned water safety.

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We learned how to float.

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We learned breathing, you know, the importance and how to breathe underwater.

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And he took us on a really great journey of nice slow process.

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And yeah, now I'm up to five strokes.

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We just conquered the brush stroke.

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So now I'm doing that one and I really love it.

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I'll tell you a few reasons why.

01:16:37

One is I learned it was a great experience to learn something new, and I'm still learning as I'm in the water.

01:16:44

He's starting to prepare us for the butterfly.

01:16:47

So I'm always learning.

01:16:49

I get to spend great time with my sister, who I absolutely adore.

01:16:52

So that's a quality time during the week that I get to be with her.

01:16:59

And to see her excel and to see her grow as well, I'm so proud of that.

01:17:04

I'm proud of myself when I can do one more lap than I did the time before and we do measure ourselves.

01:17:11

And here's my little guilty pleasure.

01:17:18

When I'm in the water and I'm concentrating on my breathing

01:17:23

and I'm focusing on the technical aspects of a stroke, because I have to constantly tell myself that.

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Turn your head, you know, look up at the sky, put your hand in the water this way, pull, keep your feet together, keep your knees together, point your toe.

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I'm constantly cycling through the technicality of how my body needs to perform.

01:17:46

You can't think about anything else, and even when I'm doing the backstroke,

01:17:52

There's something about being underwater, being in the water, submerged in the water.

01:17:58

My mind literally goes someplace else.

01:18:00

It's almost a meditation for me.

01:18:03

And I crash into the, when I get down to the other end, I wind up hitting because I'm lost in thought.

01:18:09

And I don't even know, I get up and I go, I don't even know what I was thinking about.

01:18:12

I'm just completely lost in this state of peace.

01:18:18

And that is what keeps me going.

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I love it.

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It's just so great.

01:18:23

That's beautiful.

01:18:24

And hopefully an inspiration for people to find something that they can take on that can serve them through the decades.

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Yeah, I think what we're hearing here is 2 things.

01:18:32

Like you're never too old to find that passion.

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You're never too old to try new things.

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You should be always challenging yourself in little ways.

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I didn't start out doing all of that.

01:18:42

We started out just going underwater and learning how to float, which is so basic, right?

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So you don't have to be an expert, don't

01:18:50

pressure yourself to be at this point.

01:18:52

You just start, just take the first step.

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And you never know what you'll uncover.

01:18:56

And by the way, I also tried golfing.

01:18:57

I challenged myself to try golfing.

01:19:00

And guess what?

01:19:01

I did 4 lessons and I gave my friends clubs back.

01:19:06

I was like, I am all done with that.

01:19:08

is not for me, but I tried it.

01:19:10

That's what's important.

01:19:12

Next up is going to be

01:19:14

pickleball.

01:19:15

I haven't, because I had, when pickleball hit the streets, I was, had my hip, I was in pain and I had surgery.

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So I missed that window of time where everybody started it.

01:19:26

So now I'm like, well, I'm late to the game, but I guess I should try it.

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So that'll be next for me.

01:19:33

I want to talk about the WIT Network, which is really the reason that we're here.

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So give us the high level.

01:19:39

What is the WIT Network?

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What are you focused on?

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And then we have an exciting announcement I'll prompt you for in a second.

01:19:46

We do, we do, yes.

01:19:48

The WIT Network was meant to be a safe haven, this place

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for women and allies to come, to learn together, to grow, to challenge each other, to support each other, to give a helping hand, to give a hug, to cheer people on, to help them grow their network, to help them find a mentor, all of that stuff.

01:20:08

And that is still what it is today.

01:20:11

I'm really proud of it.

01:20:12

There have been so many people that have been a part of this or building this organization.

01:20:17

It is not just me.

01:20:18

I have a whole team of people.

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There are 60 community leaders around the world that volunteer and put on community events, mixers, charity events, wine tastings, art projects, book signings, you know, all different ideas.

01:20:39

They are independently run.

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I'm so proud of all of them.

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We have an incredible list of corporate partners that believe in us, partner with us.

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They provide our programming to their employees.

01:20:53

I'm so grateful to all of them.

01:20:55

There are so many, and I don't want to start naming because then I unfortunately leave folks out, but they are on our website.

01:21:02

And I'm so grateful to all of them.

01:21:04

And then there's partnerships.

01:21:05

There's all these incredible partnerships that help us to deliver services, allow us to provide more

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To, for instance, we partner with New Horizons Educate 360 they provide some of the technical courses that we can't they come with certifications, and we did Copilot, we've done Azure, things like that.

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We partner with IBM they have granted us...

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full access, levels one, two, and three, which are not open to the public, to all of their training.

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They have over 1,000 courses in there, mostly technical, but they also have personal development ones.

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And they're fully certified, accredited, and they come in 20 languages.

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They're delivered in 20 languages.

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So

01:21:57

They donated that to us, which is fantastic.

01:22:00

So through partnerships with the WIT Network or memberships with the WIT Network, our members get access to all of that training.

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So those are just two really great examples.

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Another one real quick is Athena International.

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They have a 10-week leadership course that is transformational.

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We have put just about 1,000 of our members through.

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1,000 members.

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Yes, a 10-week leadership development experience.

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And when I tell you, Ashley, women will write me emails or LinkedIn messages when they've completed the course, or even sometimes it's three months later, with very emotional stories about how that course has changed their lives.

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whether it motivated them to take the next step in their career.

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Remember I mentioned earlier, we hesitate, we got to push.

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This course gave them that oomph to push past and go for it and ask for a promotion or ask for the raise or get a new project or go ask for training and get new skills.

01:23:03

And we've helped a lot of people in that regard through that partnership.

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And that's something that is really, really grateful.

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The best part of my day is when a member says that something that they participated with us changed their lives.

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That to me is nirvana.

01:23:22

We've served our purpose.

01:23:23

We just did our annual survey.

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We had a record number of responses, which I cannot believe.

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I'm so happy about that.

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And do you know that 70 to 75% of the members that reported said that through their membership with the WIT Network, their career progression has escalated.

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They either got a promotion, they got a raise, they got a new job within their organization, or they got acknowledged by their leadership team for work that they did.

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And I can't wait to shout that from the rooftops because that's the proof right there that being a part of this organization can be transformational.

01:24:04

But it's what you put into it, right?

01:24:06

And on the topic of transformation, Christine, we've had the joy of getting to collaborate on a project.

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And I'm really excited for you to announce, what would you like to share?

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What's new and coming soon at the WIT Network?

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Well, all businesses,

01:24:23

really need to go through transformational times.

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You do have to stop and pause, look at what is that brand, what is that image that you're putting out there?

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Is it relevant?

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What has changed in the times that you need to catch up with or pivot to be more applicable to your audience?

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And so we did challenge ourselves with that.

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I think we were the WIT Network, Women in Technology,

01:24:49

And I had so many conversations with women and even leaders of organizations that would say, well, we don't belong there because we're not in tech, right?

01:24:59

So if a woman was in sales or in marketing or in HR and finance, saying, hey, we'd love for you to be a part of the WIT network, it was an immediate barrier to get them over the line

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No matter how many times I would say, we're all women in tech.

01:25:16

We all use computers to do our jobs.

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Our companies all use technology to serve their customers.

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But they didn't see themselves in it.

01:25:23

But they didn't see it.

01:25:24

And I can't get out there and convince each person personally for that.

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And the same with organizations.

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I mean, I would approach healthcare.

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I would approach banks.

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I would approach manufacturing and say, hey, come be a part of this.

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And it was sort of like, well, we're not a tech company.

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And I'm like, no.

01:25:42

So I sort of, I got a little tired of that.

01:25:46

And then with the whole, this whole anti-DEI movement, and that's not really why I did it, but the pivot to be inclusive, I believe in.

01:25:57

And I found, well, we're a little hypocritical if we're saying everyone needs to strive to be more inclusive, then so should we.

01:26:06

And so the barrier to women has also been removed.

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So we are, we ignite transformation.

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That's what the new acronym for WIT stands for.

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And it welcomes.

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So powerful.

01:26:19

Yeah, I mean, it welcomes primarily women, and our allies who want to come along and be a part of the journey.

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And so I'm really excited about it because I feel like it's fresh.

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I feel like it's modern.

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I feel like it aligns with where the world is at now.

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And we're not abandoning our mission.

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We still have the same mission that we do, but we're showing the world that we're more inclusive and we're welcoming to all.

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So you were women in tech.

01:26:45

You now are we ignite transformation.

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I love it.

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What did that creative journey look like for you?

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I know.

01:26:54

Well, you should know.

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Now, listen, we met a year or two ago.

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I forget exactly when we met, but not that long ago.

01:27:03

And I was just really inspired by the work that you've done and learning the stories of how you help customers and how you're using technology, how you wrap technology through the marketing.

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You really pull all of that through.

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And great success helping partners drive their relationships with Microsoft as a result of that.

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It is all about what you

01:27:26

put out there.

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And so just hearing your stories, it attracted me.

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I said, this is somebody that gets what I, know she gets what I want to do with this.

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I need to reform this.

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And the way that you've had success helping Microsoft partners do that, I thought, well, we're kind of tech.

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So yes, I think this aligns.

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I just, I got the right feeling about it.

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And that's why I reached out to you, because I wanted you to be a part of it.

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And also, you were new to us.

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I felt it was important to get a new voice, to get fresh voices that were not hearing about the WIT Network for eight years, that maybe a little jaded because they know the story, right?

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You really didn't.

01:28:13

I had to take you on that journey and expose who we were and where we were going, but you were a fresh and your team, they were all fresh ears and eyes.

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And I love that.

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was intentional.

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And so, I think you all helped me and our team, go through the process of analyzing what was the story that we wanted to tell, and how are we going to bring that to life now?

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It was a great process.

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So there's a brand new brand, new look and feel, there's new iteration on the colors, the symbolism.

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What was the process for you of letting go of some of the old and introducing?

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It was, it was hard.

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I'm still a little sad to see the globe go.

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In fact, my team is like, should we get, should we get stickers with the globe on it, like just to honor the past?

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And I'm like, no, we're moving forward.

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And that was hard for me to say because I wanted to say, yes, please, I want the globe everywhere.

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But the globe was very meaningful for me when we had that logo first designed.

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It was very important to me that we showed the globe.

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I wanted every woman in every country to know that they were welcome to be a part of it.

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And so letting that go now was, that was a little hard because I was tied to that.

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And you have members in more than 80 countries today.

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So you've been successful on this part of the mission?

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Yes.

01:29:40

What does the fire, there's a fire representation in the new logo.

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What does that mean?

01:29:45

Because I feel we have to call out with a megaphone.

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This goes back to the very first question you asked me.

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We have to ignite women to get past this hesitation that we're in right now.

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And our goal is through finding a mentor, upskilling, education, and growing your network, providing an access to more people in a network.

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Those are the things, those are the foundations of igniting your next step.

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And I want people to know that we are a transformative agent in their career if they choose to be a part of it.

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We will help them get to that next step in some way, shape, or form.

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I can guarantee that.

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So the igniting was really, it's fiery, it's feisty, and it's who we are.

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So I think it

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It just connected perfectly.

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Igniting transformation.

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Yeah.

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And igniting excellence, that's the theme of our annual conference, which at the time of this airing will be behind us.

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But, you know, that's something that's very important to us as well.

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That's an annual gathering.

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It was in person the first few years that we were in business and then the pandemic hit.

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So we had to go virtual like everybody else.

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And that was sad because there really is something super special about physically, you mentioned it about getting earlier, about getting back together with people in person.

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There's something about being in a room when you're all sitting there listening and learning from a speaker, and then you're all like getting amped up and inspired.

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You're like, yes, you know, and you're all there together.

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It's a moment.

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I saw it happen last year.

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I mean, people just loved it.

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And then we have all this networking built in.

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So then there's ways for you to meet new people.

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And it's transformative for sure.

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I can't wait to be on stage with you and to celebrate International Women's Day.

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Like you say, once this podcast airs, it'll have just happened.

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So to close us out, and on the theme of fire, I want to ask you just a couple rapid fire questions.

01:32:02

Okay.

01:32:05

A tagline for this season of your life.

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When you think about where you're at today and what's on the horizon, what would be a tagline that represents this moment for you?

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I'm gonna say it's a season of intentionality.

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I love that.

01:32:23

About myself, about my work, you know, my self-care, my work, you know, things that are important to me.

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What's one value that you hold on to no matter the costs?

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Authenticity.

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You're very authentic.

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Yeah, I won't give that up anymore.

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I did for a long time.

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And last question, if your younger self could sit here with you, what advice would you give her?

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Put yourself first.

01:32:53

Don't feel guilty about that.

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I think I...

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I didn't do it for a long time because I felt it was more important to serve other people than myself.

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And I just misunderstood that message.

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You can do both.

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So I get that now.

01:33:07

I probably would tell her that.

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I would tell her about authenticity and the importance of being unique.

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And that is how people will connect with you.

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You are very unique and your authenticity is what I genuinely believe drew us together.

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Yeah, but when I was coming up in my career and I would see a woman on stage in a suit, like a skirt and heels and her tight jacket and walk in the stage being very, I thought that's what I was supposed to be.

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I think a lot of people did.

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You were just like, this is what you're trying to emulate, this persona.

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And I think it's important to understand that that's kind of fake.

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When I sat down and I thought about all the people I ever saw on stage, the ones I couldn't take my eyes off of were the people who were

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just being them.

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they were hands in the air.

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They maybe were wearing something that was not a perfect little suit.

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And they were emphatic about their storytelling, right?

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And you just can't take your eyes off of people like that.

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So at first I thought, is that wrong?

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But then I said, no, I really enjoy that.

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So then I started to let my guard down a little bit.

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you have to know the audience and know your space, but where it is as much as possible, I try to be true to myself and who I am and how I show up.

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And you know what?

01:34:41

It's not perfect, but that's okay because this is who I am and it's great just as I am.

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So that's okay.

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And I have to tell myself that a lot, but

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Do you think men sit in the mirror and go, how should I act?

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What should I say?

01:34:56

What should I do?

01:34:57

How do I want to show up?

01:34:58

They don't do that.

01:35:00

They just show up.

01:35:02

They just show up.

01:35:03

Do you struggle with that?

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Of course, definitely.

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I mean, it was interesting to me that you said a woman walking on stage.

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I feel like

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I rarely even saw that.

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So for me, I had never reported to a woman in my career.

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To this day, I've never reported to a woman.

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My mentors were generally speaking, not women.

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I actively sought them out later in my career.

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So it was very difficult to see myself in that role.

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It was a complete disconnect.

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And I remember getting in trouble consistently in one of my jobs where I was still a top performer, but my management didn't like my management style, which is that I was friends with the people that I worked with and they wanted me to be a lot tougher.

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And I think while there was some merit in some of their feedback, overall it took a long time to realize I just need my own style.

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I've got to be myself and what works for them just simply did not work for me.

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Yeah, But you found that now, and I know you've spent a lot of time working on that and that's great.

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And now that's half the battle.

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Like when you're planning, when we're speakers, half of the battle is how am I going to even show up?

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That's the first part.

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Then it's the content.

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Well, now you don't have to worry about that first part anymore.

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You have that.

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You have your travel suit.

01:36:26

You're all set, right?

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And that is

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preparation and being intentional.

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So now that's done and then you just get to focus on, the messaging.

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But before we leave, I'd love to leave your viewers with three pieces of career advice, if you don't mind.

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I just think this is important to try to drill home for folks.

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Because a lot of people ask me, you know, what should I do?

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I'm in this stuck spot and I really want to get to here, you know.

01:36:56

I think three things that need to be part of your whole, your whole, every day, really, your goals and what you're thinking about for yourself is where do you want to go?

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Start, what does that future look like for you?

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As you mentioned, maybe it's I want to get this next role in my company.

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Maybe it's I want to change industries.

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Maybe it's I'm going to start to scale down.

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I'm in that stage of my life.

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Whatever it is, doesn't matter.

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And what do you need to get there?

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Start to build that plan.

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It takes time.

01:37:26

Research.

01:37:27

Do you want to get funded?

01:37:28

That's a long journey.

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You know, things of that nature.

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So start to build that plan.

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What are the things, what are the skills that you need to get to that spot?

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You may have them now, you may not.

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Do an inventory.

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And then how are you going to acquire those skills?

01:37:41

What do you need?

01:37:42

How are you going to get that education?

01:37:45

And

01:37:46

How long is it going to take you to get that education?

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That's something people don't think about.

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Well, I want to get here.

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Okay, well, are you prepared and equipped to do that now?

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Or is that a 10-year journey?

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Or is that a five-year journey?

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What does that look like?

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That's the basis of it.

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On top of that, there's two really, really key pieces.

01:38:03

One is finding a mentor.

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This is a big topic because people, how do I find a mentor and what do I do and how do I...

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There's tons of books, there's tons of research out there on how to find a mentor, but it is important to build that into your plan and know that A, you don't need just one mentor, and B,

01:38:27

Some mentor relationships last a very short time.

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They come in places where you need them, right?

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Just for one problem you're going through, for instance.

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You need to open your mind about how you think about a mentor.

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But my advice is wherever that plan is you're hoping to get, find somebody that's over there.

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That is your mentor pool, you know?

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And reach out and ask.

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Because people want to help other people.

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Don't be intimidated.

01:38:54

If you're coming to somebody and you're saying, I've observed that you're really successful at this, and I'm starting out, and I would love it if you would be a mentor to me, that's a stroke of their ego.

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That's a compliment to them, right?

01:39:08

They're most likely, I haven't heard any story where somebody asked and they said no.

01:39:12

So that's one thing to keep in mind.

01:39:15

How can mentors help take you on that journey?

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The second thing, and this is my number one most important skill in business, is networking.

01:39:24

You can't call on a network for help if you haven't built it, or if you built it and you haven't nurtured it.

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And I remember people, when I started out, I was a very good networker, and people said to me, why are you doing all that?

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They almost shunned me a little bit, like, wow, you put a lot of effort into doing all that stuff.

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Like, that's crazy.

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And I'm like, it's just natural for me.

01:39:49

I love people.

01:39:49

I love getting to know people.

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And I also like helping people.

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So when I am networking, how can I help you?

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Like, what are you looking for?

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You're trying to get into a client.

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Do you need a partner?

01:39:58

Are you looking for teammates?

01:40:00

What is it that you're looking for?

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And how maybe can I help you?

01:40:03

And that brought me so much joy on top of the regular part of my job.

01:40:07

But guess what?

01:40:09

Those relationships I still stand on.

01:40:13

Any big pivot in my life happened through support of people in my network.

01:40:18

When we started the WIT Network, do you think that we cold cold folks?

01:40:22

No, we didn't.

01:40:23

We went through our networks.

01:40:25

Come along on this journey with us.

01:40:27

And guess what?

01:40:28

They all did.

01:40:30

And when you're looking for a job, when you're looking to start your own business, when you're looking to buy a home, whatever these pivotal parts of your life are, it's your network that's going to be there to escort you through that.

01:40:45

And I've had so many people say, well, I don't really have a network.

01:40:50

Where do I start?

01:40:51

Well, get moving, right?

01:40:53

Yes, start to get to events, go to events.

01:40:57

professional events, community events, like things even in your own town.

01:41:01

Volunteering is a great way.

01:41:03

Volunteering through your church, through your school.

01:41:07

At school, they have so many different groups you can join and get to be a part of.

01:41:12

And then also there's tons of industry events that are everywhere.

01:41:16

And challenge yourself that you're going to go into those events and you're going to come out with two.

01:41:21

Just start small.

01:41:22

I'm going to come out with two contacts.

01:41:24

And don't go to the event

01:41:26

and just expect people are going to help you.

01:41:29

You have to go in with a plan, get your elevator pitch ready.

01:41:33

I always say this to folks.

01:41:34

When someone says, Oh, hi, I'm Ashley.

01:41:39

I work here.

01:41:40

What do you do?

01:41:41

Oh, I'm in sales.

01:41:43

Do you know how many times that's when people say, Oh, I do finance?

01:41:49

The person goes, Oh, okay, see ya, and they move on.

01:41:52

If you change that story to say, oh, I'm actually, I do sales for a Microsoft partner and I recruit customers who are in the finance industry and I help build solutions that help them solve.

01:42:04

And the best thing that can help me is if you have any introductions to folks who work at finance companies.

01:42:12

Now, what do they have?

01:42:13

They have a lot to go on.

01:42:14

Oh, what Microsoft partner?

01:42:16

What is the technology that you do?

01:42:18

okay, finance, let me think about who I know.

01:42:20

Boom.

01:42:21

It just changes the outcome.

01:42:23

And so many times I see people just give one-word answers and then it falls flat.

01:42:28

So I know this was a long story, but I just really feel it's important to drive home to folks building that networking into your career development and into your business plan for whatever it is that you're doing.

01:42:41

And then let's not forget all the follow-ups with your network through LinkedIn.

01:42:46

When you see those people that you met, their posts and stuff, put comments on there, engage with folks.

01:42:53

I know it's like another thing that you have to do, but it really is important and it makes a difference and it can really come back to help you later down the line.

01:43:02

You're making an investment in something for the future.

01:43:05

Think about it like that.

01:43:07

Absolutely.

01:43:07

And Christine, I'm incredibly grateful that you're a member of my network and I would count you as a mentor.

01:43:14

It's been an incredible experience being able to collaborate with you on a more hands-on basis.

01:43:20

And just thank you so much for seeing opportunity and trust in coming on the show today.

01:43:26

It's been amazing having you as a guest.

01:43:27

I've loved every minute of it.

01:43:29

I really enjoy our conversations, whether they're online or not.

01:43:34

We always have a good time together.

01:43:35

We're tech buddies now.

01:43:37

Thanks for having me on.

01:43:38

I appreciate it a lot.

01:43:40

And I appreciate your partnership.

01:43:42

When people say to me, I really believe in what the WIT network is doing and I want to help promote it, that is so important to us because that's, it's gold.

01:43:52

You know, first of all, that you feel that way about the work that we're doing.

01:43:56

And then secondly, that you're willing to put the time and the investment into helping share out about the good work that the team, the whole team is doing.

01:44:04

So really, really appreciate that from my heart.

01:44:07

Thank you, Christine.

01:44:10

I'm Ashley Bogstad, and this has been another episode of Transcending Tech, where we dig into the people behind the platforms and the stories that transcend technology.

01:44:21

If you want to support our community, we greatly appreciate it.

01:44:24

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01:44:28

Thanks so much.