

WOMEN IN TECH PANEL

Transcript from YouTube Video

00:04

We just launched in October in Minneapolis.

00:08

How many people of you, how many people of you...

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How many of you knew about General Assembly

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before coming here?

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Wow, that's so many!

00:17

Great!

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So General Assembly, for those of you who don't know,

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launched in 2011 in New York City.

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It was born out of four guys working in a coworking space

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who really saw a need for skills-based training.

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They were kind of teaching each other

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various skills in web development, software development,

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and it really turned into an education company from there.

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So fast-forward to today, we have over 30 campuses globally,

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and Minneapolis was the last one to launch.

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And so our model is still the same in that we are

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trying to bring career-changing tech training

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to as many people as possible, but here we're doing it

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through free events like this one today.

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And we are also doing short-form classes and workshops,

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so anything from two to six hours

01:02
in things that make sense, like software development,
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user experience design, data analytics...
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And then also some things that are a little bit
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of a departure from traditional General Assembly coursework,
01:14
so things like Instagram for business,
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building your personal brand...
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And all of those things are on our website,
01:22
which I can direct you to.
01:23
It's just ga.co, and then you can
01:25
locate Minneapolis in there.
01:27
And then we also have part-time and full-time programming
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online in things for either upskilling
01:34
or reskilling, so again, like user experience design,
01:37
data analytics, data science...
01:39
And all of that is to say I couldn't be more excited
01:43
to see all of you in this room.
01:45
We have an amazing panel of people,
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and Val was huge in bringing these people together.
01:54
I happen to work at a coworking space
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with you as well, but Katrina for sure,
01:59
and I couldn't be more excited about bringing
02:01
this conversation to you.
02:03
And my name's Maygen, by the way.

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I don't think I said that.

02:06

But hello.

02:07

I'm Maygen.

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And I would actually like these three

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to introduce themselves, because I think

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that's a little bit more powerful than me speaking for them.

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And then we'll get started on some questions,

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and then after the panel discussion,

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I'm going to open it up to you all to ask questions as well.

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So take it away.

02:24

>> Thank you.

02:25

Thanks, Maygen.

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Thanks, Val, for putting this together

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and for bringing us here.

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My name is Caroline Karanja,

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and generally I am interested in using technology

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as a tool, not just for building services and products

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that can help us, like, basically help everyone,

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or that are meant for everyone,

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but then also using tech as a tool to build financial

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and personal freedom as well for different communities

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that often have not always had those opportunities.

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I run Hack the Gap, which is an organization

03:01

focused on getting and keeping more women and non-binary

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people in tech, and we do that by creating

03:07

shared experiences, most notably through our Hackathons.

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Has anyone here by any chance heard of Hack the Gap

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or been to our Hackathons?

03:15

Awesome, great.

03:16

Thank you.

03:17

>> Cool.

03:18

Hello, my name's Katrina Anderson.

03:20

I am the CEO and cofounder of Clinician Nexus,

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which is a software platform that allows health systems

03:26

to proactively carve out their capacity to teach

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nursing students, medical students, physician assistant

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students, and so on, so that those students

03:34

can actually easily access all of those available

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experiences, and also share that with their school partners

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that are just across the street.

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We kind of say it's like LinkedIn meets Airbnb

03:46

for clinical education.

03:49

>> Good morning.

03:50

Thanks to Minneapolis Television for hosting this.

03:54

My name is Lynn Wehrman.

03:55

I'm the founder and president of WeCo Accessibility Services

04:00

and we are a for-profit group of digital technologists

04:05

who all happen to live with disabilities,

04:07

and our mission is to help organizations, large and small,

04:12

make websites, software, mobile applications,

04:15

anything that's digital, accessible to people

04:18

who live with disabilities across disability types.

04:23

Thanks.

04:23

>> Excellent.

04:24

What a panel, right?

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[AUDIENCE APPLAUSE]

04:27

The first Women in Tech Breakfast, and this is who we have.

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So, holy cow!

04:33

What I want to hear about first,

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and we can start with you, Katrina,

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and you guys can kind of pass it along,

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is what inspired you, or what was your path

04:40

into getting into the field that you're in today?

04:44

I know it's a big question.

04:45

>> Yes.

04:46

Well, fun fact, my undergraduate degree

04:49

is in communications, and I had an emphasis

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in video production.

04:54

>> So you're right at home...

04:55

>> Yeah, I was like, this is my place.

04:56

I love this. >> Watch out.

04:58

>> I really, really...

04:59

My dream was that I wanted to start

05:00

a television show.

05:01

I still do.

05:02

It's still, I work on it in my free time for fun.

05:06

>> Come talk to me.

05:07

>> Yeah?

05:08

[LAUGH]

05:08

Yes!

05:10

So that was my kind of original piece.

05:12

I think, actually, when I was in high school

05:16

I wanted to become a dental hygienist

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and one of my video production teachers,

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I just took it for fun, said, You should go get

05:22

your four-year degree.

05:23

I think that you're an incredible editor,

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and I think you should go pursue this.

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And so without that I would have probably been

05:29

cleaning teeth this morning instead of being here.

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But I'm very grateful for that teacher,

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but it landed me into this kind of trajectory

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where I was going into video production,

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and I was kind of trying to define what that looked like

05:43

for myself. And then at the end of my senior year of

05:48

college, my husband was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma,

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and then that kind of just changed everything for me.

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So he was diagnosed about New Years of 2011,

05:58

and then that kind of put us on a path of hanging out

06:01

at the hospital. I ended up getting a job in a clinic.

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I fell in love with how powerful that first person was,

06:08

when you walk into the door of a hospital,

06:10

it kind of makes or breaks your attitude a lot.

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And so I worked as a registrar at Health Partners clinic,

06:16

actually, in Wisconsin.

06:18

And then I ended up finding an internship

06:20

for video production at Health Partners.

06:23

And they were looking to hire someone that would help

06:26

create videos for enterprise-wide education,

06:29

and primarily clinical education.

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So that's how I got into clinical education.

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One of our vice presidents ended up sunsetting

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a lot of our content creation, and thought we really need

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to move into content curation, because we have

06:43

a lot of medical education content clinicians struggle

06:46

to actually consume and find the most appropriate

06:49

information. And it just began this whole other project

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where we were, like, wait a minute,

06:53

we don't even know who's learning in our hospitals.

06:57

We don't know who's teaching in our hospitals.

07:00

We did, not to say that we didn't have that,

07:03

but we didn't have a good technology solution

07:04

for actually accurately tracking that,

07:06

knowing who our teachers were,

07:07

knowing who our students were,

07:09

knowing who we could hire out of those people

07:11

that we taught... And it just kind of got me

07:13

into this interesting project, we had a Skunk Works

07:16

project, and I fell in love with organizational

07:19

communication towards the end of my undergraduate degree.

07:23

And that kind of just began the project.

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So I think at that time, I was very inspired

07:28

without knowing it, to help improve the experiences

07:33

that patients can have through your experience

07:35

with your clinician as they're being educated.

07:38

And so my husband inspires me for this a lot of the time.

07:43

That's the shortest version of that I've ever shared.

07:46

>> Wow, way to go!

07:47

I didn't time it.

07:48

But we can look back at the tape...

07:49

>> [LAUGH] Yes!

07:50

>> And get some real data for you.

07:51

How about you, Lynn?

07:53

>> Well, I often say that my career was

07:56

a professional perfect storm.

07:59

I have a background in communications,

08:02

and I had a long career in sales selling just about

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everything you can think of, including high end

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banking products, but I found myself really wanting

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to get off the sales treadmill,

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and so I landed a job with the Minneapolis TMO

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as an employer outreach specialist at a time

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when they said we're tired of hiring

08:26

transportation planners that want to sit

08:28

at their desk and plan.

08:30

We need somebody that can get out there

08:32

and sell people on multimodal transportation

08:37

that can go out to the office towers,

08:39

get people to have their company signed up for Metro Pass

08:43

and things like that, so I thought, great.

08:45

I can sell, but on one condition--

08:48

you've got to let me write for this job.

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So I wound up writing their new brochures.

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I had a degree in communications, I wanted to get

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that used, I helped them set up a new website.

08:59

And I landed, eventually, at the Minnesota

09:01

Department of Transportation Office of Transit

09:04

as a rural transit assistance program coordinator.

09:07

But like a lot of people who aren't really cut out

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for government, and who are really purpose-driven

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it wasn't really a good fit because it just,

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I didn't mesh with that environment very well.

09:19

And consequently got sidelined for being

09:24

a little bit too good at my job,

09:26

and wound up in a communications capacity

09:32

with commissioner Tom Sorel's flagship initiative

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in the Americans with Disabilities Act transition plan.

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At that time, MnDOT was trying desperately

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to get inventoried all of their infrastructure

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that needed to be upgraded--they were really trying

09:49

to address the needs of users living with disabilities,

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and I was brought in to figure out how to communicate

09:55

that to the public at a time when people knew

09:58

that websites were inaccessible. They didn't really know

10:00
what that meant, they didn't know how to fix it.
10:03
And so I wound up just wading into this project
10:08
that was, you know, trying to fend off lawsuits,
10:11
trying to deal with the stakeholder group
10:13
who lived with disabilities.
10:15
And I sat down with the stakeholder advisory board
10:19
and said, I need to go into your homes.
10:21
I need to figure out how you're using websites
10:25
before I can develop ours to get this message out.
10:29
I wound up learning how inaccessible
10:31
even our meeting agendas were to people.
10:35
And I was very fortunate that I was able to work
10:38
with Janet Peters of the Great Lakes ADA Center,
10:41
who taught me that accessibility wasn't just
10:45
about someone who couldn't see a page,
10:47
it was about someone who maybe had a hand tremor
10:50
and couldn't select a link,
10:52
and people living with cognitive disabilities
10:56
of a wide variety, people with hearing disabilities...
10:59
And having grown up in a family with generations
11:02
of people living with cognitive disabilities,
11:05
mental illness, and epilepsy, it really made me realize
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that I had found where I needed to be.

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And watching this advisory board work with MnDOT
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employees, I saw the power of people living
11:21
with disabilities coming together with people
11:23
who were trying to meet their needs. And we saw
11:26
in digital accessibility--at that time,
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believe it or not, there was really nobody
11:32
who lived with a disability that was heading a company
11:35
or heading an effort.
11:37
It was being done with software checkers.
11:41
And when I started to pitch to different organizations
11:44
the fact that we were going to start to launch
11:47
user experience testers who lived with disabilities,
11:51
that they might be better equipped than the software,
11:53
I literally heard back from the clients
11:56
and the manufacturers that software was better equipped
12:00
to understand the needs of people living with disabilities
12:03
than the people themselves.
12:05
That was normal in those days.
12:07
So we really were formed to create employment
12:13
and to create a paradigm shift on recognizing
12:16
that people who lived with disabilities
12:18
could understand and translate their own needs.
12:23
>> Wow, that's a really great story.

12:24

And for you...

12:28

>> So I have to say, I think my journey

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up until this point has been really organic

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and accidental to some degree as well.

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My degree is from Macalester College

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for American Studies.

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And so if you know anything about Macalester by any chance

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you'll know it's very, very sort of social justice

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driven in terms of how they talk about who they are

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and how they show up, and things like that.

12:56

So, towards my senior year of college

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I was having a really hard time figuring out

13:01

what I wanted to do, and I ended up deciding

13:04

that I was either going to spend my time

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basically, like, catching up on all of the Shonda Rhimes

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shows that I possibly could up until that point,

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while I, like, started applying for jobs.

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Or, one of my friends had started doing web development,

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and I just thought that that was super interesting.

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I was really curious about it.

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And so I opted to do a little bit of both,

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but actually ended up falling in love

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with just building websites and trying to figure out

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how it works. And this is before, you know, things like edX

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and Teamtreehouse, and all those other websites

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where you can go and actually learn the process

13:40

of building websites and web applications,

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and even like what is the difference.

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That's before this was really popular, or even available.

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So, Google at the point was definitely my best friend,

13:52

Stack Overflow, if you know what I'm talking about,

13:54

definitely my best friend.

13:56

And I spent the last three quarters of my senior year

14:02

just teaching myself how to code, and by the time

14:05

I was done, I had started to sort of pick up

14:09

small projects here and there, you know, for free

14:11

to build websites for my friends who were artists,

14:15

or just people who were in the nonprofit space,

14:17

and who were looking for, you know, a webpage here or there,

14:21

or things like that.

14:23

But after college, I ended up working at three companies,

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all within sort of the tech and data teams,

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and I really, really enjoyed it,

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but I often found myself as the only person, right,

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the only woman, the only person of color,

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the only person living with that intersectionality,

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and so I also somehow ended up, you know,

14:45

being asked to sort of help address the diversity challenge.

14:50

Right? Now, luckily I was generally interested in this.

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I definitely would not advise just asking, you know,

14:56

whatever woman is on your team to, like, help you with this,

14:58

or any of that stuff.

15:01

But because I had this degree in American Studies,

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and because of the environment that I was in,

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I was passionate about it, I was passionate about

15:09

thinking about how it looks like within the tech space.

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And so that's where kind of this part of my world

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that's a little bit focused on equity and inclusion

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and belonging really started to show up.

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And I was also in a space where people were curious,

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they did want to hear what my perspective was,

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and what I would do if I was in a position to do something

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about some of these things.

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Now, whether or not they did the things that I recommended

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or others recommended, you know, that was always sort of

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a little bit up in the air, depending on the company

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and the managers. But by the time that I decided

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I wanted to take some time off, I realized that

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I generally enjoyed having conversations with people,

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and helping them draft initiatives or action plans

15:56

around how to make their spaces a place where really

15:59

people did want to feel like they belong.

16:00

And also to make the decisions as to where things

16:02

just weren't a good fit.

16:04

And so that kind of spun out a little bit

16:07

of consulting work that I ended up doing.

16:09

But in the meantime, I started building websites,

16:12

web applications, for a number of different types

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of organizations, from the city of Minneapolis

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to a lot of small startups and small businesses.

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And I really generally enjoyed all that work.

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But within that whole sort of time period,

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I was also kind of dabbling and engaging

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in and out of different meetup groups

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that were just, you know, focused on different things.

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So when I was really interested in Python,

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I would go to a lot of the Python meetups.

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When I was interested in UXUI, I would go to some of those.

16:42

And just without really knowing it, I ended up

16:46

kind of putting myself in this place where I could have

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sort of shared experiences, and a little bit of

16:52

sort of paired programming with different people,

16:54
different amazing mentors around town, that really helped
16:57
me grow my skill set to the point where it is right now.
17:01
And when Hack the Gap first happened,
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I don't remember what year it was, but I was
17:07
really excited about it. I participated
17:09
in the first Hack the Gap,
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and went on to participate in different ways
17:13
in a couple of the other ones after that.
17:15
But when Kristen Womack, who's one of the cofounders
17:18
of Hack the Gap, was looking to focus more
17:21
on Mina families, I had this opportunity to
17:23
take that legacy and continue to kind of to push it forward.
17:28
And so that's how I ended up with this great opportunity
17:32
to continue to run Hack the Gap.
17:34
But in the midst of all of that, I mean, I had
17:38
started to do a lot of work in different types
17:40
of organizations around equity, the way that looks like
17:43
within their organizations doing some work,
17:45
and healthcare doing some work in education,
17:49
and building a platform to help serve
17:51
those different sectors.
17:53
And so I think that, you know, one of my biggest challenges
17:59
within this process has been how to make sure

18:03
that the work that people are doing is truly sustainable,
18:06
and it's not performative, right?
18:08
That people are actually continuing to live forward,
18:12
and continue to drive those actions,
18:13
and continue to get feedback from the employees
18:15
who are in those spaces that they're in.
18:17
And so in the work that I do, I'm very, very cognizant
18:21
of making sure that like that's part of the way
18:24
that we have those conversations,
18:26
but I'm more invested in making sure that people
18:30
who look like me, and people who don't look like me,
18:32
have those opportunities to pursue their own passions
18:35
and their own careers, and to live a life
18:37
where they feel like they are in those spaces
18:40
where they too belong, and that they can be
18:42
and bring their best selves.
18:44
>> Super cool.
18:46
I always love hearing about why people get into
18:49
what they get into.
18:50
And I find in a lot of these stories,
18:52
and maybe you all can relate, there's always
18:54
some element of serendipity,
18:57
certainly in my career as well...

18:58

And I would love to hear you have a conversation

19:02

around things that you wish you knew

19:04

when you were just starting out--

19:05

whether in your role like as a founder or a CEO,

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or even before that. Like, looking back,

19:13

I certainly have advice I wish I could have given

19:15

to myself 10 years ago, but there may be people

19:19

out there who could benefit from your advice

19:21

to yourself right now.

19:22

So I would love to hear you talk about that a little bit.

19:25

>> Who's first?

19:28

>> I'll start.

19:29

I would say don't be afraid of what you know,

19:33

because sometimes you truly do have an original idea

19:36

that nobody else has had.

19:38

And I think that when I look back at when we started WeCo,

19:44

you know, particularly when we started to gain momentum,

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we started to realize how very different we were

19:50

in the field, and we also learned

19:54

how distrustful people were of the opinions of people

19:59

who lived with disabilities.

20:00

Now, I know I don't look disabled, but I grew up

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with a lifelong disability that carries a lot of taboos.

20:08

I outgrew epilepsy.

20:10

I have generations of people in my family with epilepsy,

20:13

sisters that still deal with it,

20:16

and I grew up with profound depression

20:19

and borderline personality disorder traits.

20:22

So those are things people don't want to talk about.

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And so I think that I was really used to questioning myself,

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because from the time I was very young,

20:31

my validity was always challenged,

20:34

whether...and my sisters...

20:37

I mean, I got very used to my sisters being made fun of

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at school because they had absent seizures at school.

20:46

You know, when people talk about shaming these days,

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I always go, goodness, the way I grew up,

20:53

now that was shaming...

20:55

You know, where people openly made fun of my sisters'

20:57

epileptic seizures, you know...

20:59

I hope schools aren't like that anymore.

21:02

I know my daughter's school experience wasn't like that,

21:04

but I think, you know, if I looked at myself back then,

21:07

I would just say, just because what you're doing

21:11

is really radical and different,

21:13

and doesn't fit the industry now,

21:15

you need to trust your gut, and you need to move forward.

21:18

Which we're clearly doing now,

21:20

but we were pretty hesitant in the early days,

21:23

and I think we would have gotten farther faster

21:26

if I had trusted my instinct. So...

21:32

>> That's good.

21:32

So I was thinking about... Lynn and I have,

21:36

I followed Lynn into the coworking space that we're in now.

21:40

She paved the way.

21:41

We were in a different space that was in downtown

21:43

Minneapolis, probably two or three years ago now,

21:46

and I don't know where you parked, but I had to park

21:49

in Ramp B in downtown in Minneapolis,

21:51

and then you walk about 10 to 15 minutes

21:52

through the skyways to get there.

21:55

And I realized as I was going through that,

21:57

there was a lot of construction, there was this huge project

22:00

to redo the Target center, and we'd walk through it

22:02

every day just to get to the office.

22:04

And as I was thinking about what do I wish I would have

22:07

told myself, I think there was a gift in walking

22:09

through that construction zone, because I realized

22:13

that I wish I would give myself permission to be okay

22:16

being under construction a lot.

22:19

You kind of have to be under construction

22:22

in front of people a lot of the time

22:24

if you want to move forward in your career,

22:26

wherever you are, whatever stage you are,

22:28

if you're transitioning, if you're doing anything...

22:30

And I think there's a real bravery in being vulnerable

22:34

enough to let people walk through your halls,

22:36

or walk through the construction zone while it's happening.

22:39

And I think that there's still value in that,

22:43

and there's still usefulness. And maybe someone

22:45

walks by and says, hey, maybe you should paint it

22:46

this color instead of the color you were going to,

22:48

if you let people in, and it can shape what that looks like.

22:53

So, it's very interesting that I was somehow, like,

22:56

that was under construction, and now my husband and I

22:58

just moved into a newer apartment that you can see

23:01

construction happening, and I'm like, this is everywhere.

23:04

[LAUGHTER]

23:05

It's, like, following me.

23:06

So I think there was, yeah, there's something there

23:08

with that, but that would be my...

23:10

Just, it's okay.

23:11

And I'm very grateful for the people

23:12

that have been really gracious with me

23:15

being under construction, because it's super awkward

23:17

to, like, I was never clearly on a trajectory

23:19

to become a CEO, and I've had to evolve into that

23:23

pretty rapidly--it's like 15 fire hoses

23:25

I'm trying to hold onto.

23:27

And so I'm just grateful.

23:29

Even, I'm still in under construction right now.

23:32

I'm growing all the time.

23:34

So thanks for letting me be under construction.

23:39

>> That's such a great metaphor.

23:40

I like that.

23:42

I definitely would just double down

23:45

on the trusting your gut.

23:46

I mean, I think that whenever I've come across

23:50

a really difficult challenge, like everything my gut told me

23:55

to make a different decision, and I didn't, right?

24:01

So I would definitely just go back and tell myself,

24:04

the second you have a gut feeling, the second time you have

24:07

it, you know, really think about what is going on there.

24:11

The next thing I would say is just that

24:16

I wish I could just tell myself to just be myself.

24:19

I grew up, and when we first moved to the US,

24:23

I went to like a predominantly black school,

24:26

and it was a charter school,

24:28

and it was a STEM-focused school,

24:30

and I just felt like it was such a great environment

24:33

for the person who I became today.

24:36

But we very quickly moved to a suburb that was

24:39

predominantly white, and lacked diversity

24:43

in every single sense of the word.

24:45

In not just the curriculum, not just the people,

24:48

not just the representation in terms of teachers

24:51

and staff, and I think a lot of that put me in a place

24:55

where I didn't really see the value that I brought

25:00

to the table--not just as, you know, a human, but then also

25:04

like all of my experiences, my culture,

25:07

all those different things...

25:08

I worked really hard to sort of strip myself,

25:09

to strip all of that from me.

25:13

And I noticed it too going

25:14

into a professional workplace, right?

25:16

I very distinctly remember, I used to have a nose piercing.

25:20

I took it out because I was like, people aren't going

25:22

to accept what I look like and who I am

25:25
if I bring who I am to the table.
25:27
And I think part of it was that's how I was being socialized
25:30
to go into the workplace.
25:33
But then I also think that there's things that like
25:38
made it so that I wasn't being fully myself in those spaces,
25:43
and I think that it put me in a position
25:46
not necessarily to be my best self there.
25:48
And so I just wish I could go back and tell myself
25:50
to just be me, and let that evolution to continue to be,
25:56
and to really just be cognizant of any sort of assimilation
25:59
that was going on that wasn't really beneficial
26:02
to, like, my personal and professional growth,
26:05
because now it's like I'm pulling back on a lot
26:07
of those things, and trying to revive them.
26:10
And I think that, even through Hack the Gap,
26:12
we see people saying that they would have come in
26:14
and just be who they are, their full selves,
26:17
and that that's how it would have built
26:20
entire products, you know, IOT software
26:24
in the span of 36 hours, is because people aren't doing
26:27
a lot of those things--
26:28
at least that's what they've shared back to us.
26:30
>> Yeah, that's really wonderful to hear.

26:34

So, I think then I would like to talk

26:36

a little bit about advocacy.

26:40

It sounds like, to a certain degree, you all kind of had

26:42

to internally and externally advocate for yourselves,

26:45

which I think is a shared experience probably

26:48

for a lot of people in the room...

26:49

But were there people... I would assume that there must

26:52

have been people throughout that were also advocating

26:55

for you, or celebrating you, or were your champions

26:58

as you were working on these things, and working hard

27:00

at being authentic as you were building,

27:03

building, right...

27:05

building what you are now. And so I would just love to hear

27:09

a little bit about who advocated for you,

27:12

or how they advocated for you, especially when you were

27:15

kind of working in the early stages of your processes.

27:19

>> I could go on and on forever

27:23

about how much people have advocated for me.

27:27

When I started Clinician Nexus, my vice president

27:32

at Health Partners was very encouraging to me,

27:34

and so was my boss at the time.

27:37

She gave me a book that said trust your crazy ideas,

27:40

and it was just a notebook for me to think

27:43
through things, because there was no historical evidence
27:47
to suggest that I should have done what I was doing
27:51
to leave this great environment, and then go out
27:55
at 26 on my own and start this company.
28:00
And in hindsight, I don't know what I was thinking,
28:03
but I think that I just had so many people
28:08
that believed in me, and then I was like, wow,
28:10
if you believe in me, I guess, yeah, maybe you see
28:12
something that I don't see.
28:13
I think sometimes when someone pulls that out of you
28:16
that allows you to actually take that next step forward.
28:19
So that was amazing.
28:21
And I could thank my father-in-law, actually...
28:24
About a month and a half after my husband
28:27
was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma,
28:29
his mother unexpectedly passed away,
28:31
so we got like a one-two punch.
28:34
And then you've got my father-in-law, he's newly retired,
28:37
and I'm finishing college, and Peter's in the hospital room.
28:41
We just sat and talked and talked when Peter
28:43
was getting his chemo.
28:44
He was just passed out, and we were just
28:46
duh-duh-duh-duh, like, never thought I would get as close

28:48
with my father-in-law as I did, and he became
28:51
just my support champion through thinking through,
28:56
you know, how to start this company, how to finance it,
29:00
just, you know, how to think strategically
29:02
about the value of time.
29:04
All these different things...
29:06
And so it was this really interesting kind of blessing
29:09
and gift out of a really hard time that he was able
29:11
to have that time and pour into me a lot of hours.
29:15
I've never met someone who can listen as long as he did,
29:18
because I can talk for a very long time,
29:21
and so I'm very grateful for him.
29:23
I'm very, very privileged to have a husband
29:25
who's super supportive.
29:27
He was just like, yeah, go do your thing.
29:29
I think he's kind of happy, because he plays video games,
29:31
so then when I'm working a lot he's like, oh great...
29:33
[LAUGH]
29:34
I can go play my game.
29:37
And he's very healthy now, by the way.
29:38
I'm sorry, I should always mention that.
29:41
But there was kind of little things like that,
29:44
and then we had a lot of advisers that,

29:47

I was like, I don't even know how they believed in me,

29:48

because I was very awkward and very nervous

29:50

in my first advisory board meeting, I think I cried

29:53

the whole time.

29:54

[LAUGHTER]

29:56

And then one guy had to call, and he was, like...

30:00

We were trying to hire our first employee,

30:02

who's now our COO, and one of our advisers said to Andrew,

30:06

Just so you know, a lot of the support you're going to give

30:08

isn't just doing the work, it's emotional support

30:11

for Katrina, if you take the job.

30:13

And he was like, okay, great.

30:14

And so we have joked that Andrew's been just my support

30:18

system to work through things.

30:21

I could go on... Early stage employees that take a risk

30:25

are amazing people.

30:28

I have the privilege of being able to share

30:30

all the good stuff that we do, but they're the ones

30:32

that have breathed life into me when I'm crying,

30:35

believe in me--that's absolutely incredible.

30:38

And we just closed our million and a half seed round

30:41

in December, and our investors are now kind of

30:46

this next step of believing in us. And the way

30:49

they approached investing in us is my style of...

30:52

They're very much our support system.

30:54

They believe in us, they're taking that vote of confidence.

30:57

So I try to also strategically place myself

30:59

around people that are giving me constructive criticism,

31:03

but also saying you have it in you, go for it,

31:06

you've got it.

31:06

And I think that's... You don't want to create, you know,

31:09

a tribe of people that tell you you're wonderful

31:11

all the time, because then you're just,

31:12

that's not really helpful.

31:14

I know I'm not wonderful.

31:15

I have a lot of issues and limitations,

31:18

but, yeah, people that also believe in the best part of you

31:22

and your true heart in what you're doing,

31:24

that you care deeply about it.

31:26

Anyway, like I said, I could go on.

31:27

I've been so supported, left and right.

31:31

And it's... I'm looking forward to a time

31:33

I can be helpful.

31:35

It's again kind of that, you have to be really vulnerable

31:37

and let people shape the awkward edges of you.

31:40

It's good times.

31:43

Yeah, I don't know what your experiences were, but...

31:45

>> I mean, I...

31:47

There's so many people just,

31:49

same here, that I could sort of go on about.

31:51

>> Yeah.

31:52

>> But I think the most helpful thing has been

31:55

having friends and mentors who can be

31:58

really, really straightforward and honest with me.

32:01

And it is just, it is so helpful to have people who

32:04

can say to you, you know, that shade does not look great.

32:10

Let's think about this.

32:12

And really give you sort of that space to carve that out.

32:15

But then also people who do sort of help you realize

32:18

all the things that you're doing.

32:20

The one thing that someone told me once

32:24

that I would encourage everyone here to do

32:26

whenever you're having any doubt as to who you are,

32:28

or all the things that you've done,

32:31

literally, put together your resume,

32:33

like actually put it together, list everything out,

32:36

and put it away for like a week.

32:38

Go back and reread it, and just see all of the things

32:42

that you've been able to do, all the things

32:45
that you've been involved in, and that's just,
32:47
I think, sort of having that affirmation
32:49
that's coming from yourself,
32:51
that's something that I've found to be really powerful
32:53
and really helpful.
32:55
And someone else told me the other day
32:57
that, like, they hired a copywriter to basically write
33:02
their resume and like all of their community involvement,
33:06
all those things, so then that way it was
33:08
from someone else's perspective. And then when they got
33:10
a look at it, they were, like, oh, this is really great...
33:13
Like here's... To really just have that perspective,
33:16
it's so different, because oftentimes I think we miss
33:18
all the things that we're involved in,
33:20
all the people that we are serving and helping,
33:23
all the projects that we are helping uplift,
33:25
and so I think that's been sort of the biggest way
33:28
that I've found to not just like advocate for myself,
33:32
but to just take note of all the things
33:34
that I'm doing.
33:37
>> Well, I think all of us have people that advocate for us
33:40
that we don't necessarily take in.
33:44
And recently, I mean, I can just reflect the same thing.

33:49

There were, you know...

33:50

I think about the people that supported me

33:53

emotionally when this started, and I think most of all

33:56

my friend Ken Rodgers, who a lot of people know who he is

34:01

because he's a strong disability advocate

34:04

in the Twin Cities, but how many times he would go

34:08

to a coffeehouse with me when I was really frightened

34:10

of getting this thing going, and help me talk it through.

34:13

But then I also think about some of our strongest advocates,

34:17

our volunteer advisory board, who we have marked

34:21

the ninth year of these people meeting with me

34:24

on the first Saturday of every month,

34:27

and they've never been paid a penny.

34:29

And then I think about people like our director

34:31

of accessibility services, Sue Ann Rodriguez,

34:34

who signed on to this thing when we didn't even know

34:37

where it was going, and she made it her own.

34:40

But the most important thing I think that you can do

34:44

is open your eyes and realize that you have people

34:47

advocating for you in ways that you probably

34:49

don't recognize. And I try to take time to do that

34:53

at least once a week, to be aware of it,

34:58

and to allow people to take the mission

35:03

and make it their own.

35:04

Everybody comes up to me and says, oh, WeCo's your baby.

35:08

WeCo has never been my baby.

35:10

It's never felt like it's belonged to me.

35:12

It felt like something I was selected to build,

35:15

and it's something that I think is going to live

35:17

beyond me and everybody that's associated with it right now.

35:22

So I think that that's part of what advocacy is,

35:25

is just allowing people to support you,

35:30

and trusting that, and, you know, kind of acknowledging it,

35:34

at least in your own brain, so you can benefit from it.

35:38

>> Cool.

35:41

I love hearing you guys all talk about kind of

35:45

the innumerable people who have supported you throughout,

35:47

and I certainly don't want this to go in any sort of

35:50

negative direction, but do any of you feel like

35:54

there were pivotal moments when you had to tune out people

35:57

who were not advocating for you?

36:00

Or, you know, you had mentioned the belief that software

36:04

might be better equipped than people

36:05

living with disabilities to set things up

36:08

for people living with disabilities...

36:10

And so to me that's kind of like a negative noise

36:14
that you had to move past and kind of advocate
36:17
for what you were working on.
36:18
So do you have a lot of those moments in your stories
36:23
where you were kind of inundated with this,
36:27
yeah, that's not going to work.
36:29
Because it seems like you all had wonderful advocates.
36:31
I would just be interested to hear...
36:33
I would assume there had to be other noise happening.
36:36
Or maybe there continues to be.
36:38
>> I feel like sometimes in Minnesota, though,
36:40
it's, you know, sort of like to your face,
36:42
oh, that's really cool...
36:44
And then just, you know, no...
36:49
But it's like, it doesn't really follow...
36:52
I mean, to me advocating is not just sort of stating
36:57
the thing, but it's also thinking about how,
37:00
like, what are the next steps for that.
37:02
So for example, if we share with someone,
37:05
if you share with someone this is what I do,
37:07
I do design work, and they hear someone else
37:09
who needs someone to do design work,
37:12
but like to me, part of advocating is sharing
37:14
that information along, right?

37:16

But I think sometimes in Minnesota, I mean,

37:19

what I've encountered is people who just sort of stating,

37:23

oh, what you're doing is really interesting.

37:24

But then, whenever they hear that need somewhere else,

37:29

like... And I'm the kind of person where I like,

37:31

I think that we should...especially in this space

37:34

that I'm in, I'm huge in terms of collaborating,

37:37

I'm huge in terms of partnering.

37:40

Like, it's just there's too much stuff, right?

37:41

There's too much stuff we have to be constantly

37:44

in connection with one another.

37:46

But folks who don't really take that next step

37:48

to say, you know, have you heard of Women in Tech?

37:51

Like, you should bring them in.

37:52

Or, have you thought about doing a focus group

37:55

and actually putting together resources

37:57

to figure out how to make some of those changes

37:59

that your employees are asking for,

38:01

your staff is asking for?

38:03

And so I think that's one way that sort of that noise pops

38:06

up is just by a disengagement.

38:10

But I think, you know, there's just running a business

38:14

and owning a business, there's always going to be people

38:18
who either plainly, or not so plainly, state
38:21
that something isn't necessarily going to work.
38:23
I think, for me, that's more of like, even just outside
38:28
of professionally, like a life question. Right?
38:30
It's, there's so much that is pushing up against, you know,
38:37
who I am as like a human, that even just me running a
38:41
business, is like--it's just one of the many things that I'm
38:46
constantly getting pushed back on.
38:48
You know what I mean?
38:49
>> Yeah. >> Yeah.
38:50
>> And so, it's just like at some point, I personally
38:52
had to figure out what is this mesh wall that I'll have,
38:55
what are those things that I'll let permeate,
38:58
and what won't I?
39:01
And so, you know, when I got to this point, it's just,
39:04
it was like one more layer, one more part of my identity
39:07
that was out there for people to speak negatively about,
39:11
or to, you know, yeah, to push back on.
39:16
It's just been sort of part of who I am
39:20
to figure out how to navigate that.
39:23
>> Yeah, definitely.
39:24
>> I think, like a lot of people who live with disabilities,
39:26
what we finally did was created our own bubble.

39:31

And we, lot of people, interns that work with us say it,

39:36

it's... We created our own sense of reality,

39:41

and it's always kind of shocking to me

39:44

when I get out of the bubble, and I see that people are

39:48

still so surprised that a group of digital technologists,

39:52

some of whom live with very severe disabilities,

39:55

can make a business work.

39:57

But, you know, some of the pushback we got was...

39:59

I mean, I still look at it, and I go people really

40:03

used to say things out loud to us, like we don't need

40:06

to make our intranet accessible

40:09

because we don't hire people who live with disabilities...

40:12

And which I'd say, okay, say that out loud one more time.

40:16

Well, I mean, we have to understand, and I'm a little bit

40:20

older than a lot of people in this audience, but I remember

40:23

the days when it was normal to assume

40:29

that a company would not have the capacity to accommodate

40:32

people who live with disabilities.

40:34

There's a lot of that that's still out there.

40:36

So it's, you know, it's like the story of the bumblebee,

40:41

the bumblebee is actually too heavy to fly,

40:45

but it doesn't know it, so it just goes on

40:47

and does it anyway.

40:48

And I think that there's a degree of that

40:50

that we all have to do that's been really well modeled

40:54

for us that live with disabilities by people

40:57

who've advocated, live with disabilities themselves,

41:01

and have advocated for disability rights,

41:03

but we've just kind of built off of that.

41:06

We have our WeCo bubble, and we just,

41:10

you know, we're a bumblebee, and we just...

41:12

I remember having a business expert

41:15

from a local university come in to try to help us,

41:19

looked at who our clients were,

41:21

looked at our business model,

41:23

and the only thing that he could say to me

41:26

is that this should not work.

41:30

[LAUGH]

41:31

And then we found the right business adviser

41:35

in a gentleman named Matt Willard from Augustana University

41:39

in South Dakota, who got it, you know...

41:42

And so you just, you just build your bubble,

41:45

and you just keep flying until you find what you need. So...

41:50

>> I love this question because it reminded me

41:52

of my anatomy class in high school,

41:56

where we had to all build a cell and model it

41:59
off of something that we understand,
42:01
and I modeled mine off of a church,
42:03
because I went to church all the time.
42:05
But before I presented it, we all had to get up, you know,
42:07
and like show our model.
42:09
I was like, I know, like it's kind of
42:10
nerdy and stuff, it's like a church, and like, you know, and
42:12
like it just like helped me, you guys don't have to resonate
42:15
with it...
42:16
And my teacher, Mr. Albredo, just stopped class,
42:19
and he was like, sit down.
42:20
And then it was a 20-minute monologue on how we can't
42:23
discount ourselves before others do.
42:27
And I still haven't learned that lesson thoroughly,
42:30
and I think that that's probably where this was a helpful
42:33
question, because I think I discount myself, still,
42:37
before anyone else can so that I don't have to be
42:39
hurt by people discounting me.
42:41
So I'm first to say, I know I look like I'm 15,
42:43
it's totally fine.
42:45
You know, we're like...
42:47
[LAUGHTER]
42:47
You know, I always make sure I'm like, I'm very aware

42:49
of my limitations, so that others don't have to do that.
42:51
And that might be... It's a defense mechanism,
42:54
but there's also an element to that which I think,
42:57
I am internalizing that myself so that I am my most..
43:02
I'm just not helping myself really in that, sort of.
43:05
I'm my biggest enemy in that.
43:07
So I think that... You know, if I..
43:09
Tomorrow's our first board meeting,
43:11
I have to do a lot of self-talk to be like,
43:13
you deserve to talk to all these absolutely incredible
43:18
people that you respect and that are older than you.
43:21
And that's okay, Katrina, that that's what's going on..
43:25
And I think I'm actually getting an executive coach
43:28
to help me with this because I think I'm, again, my biggest
43:30
enemy in this. And a lot of this is, what are the stories
43:34
that you tell yourself every day, and if I say
43:35
I'm really young, I don't deserve to be here,
43:37
then I'll act like that... And then people will perceive
43:40
me that way, and then what flows from that
43:43
is probably that I act a certain way.
43:45
So I think that there's a..
43:48
That's one piece to it, where you teach people
43:50
how to treat you, and if you treat yourself really well,

43:53

then that allows people to learn that how I should

43:55

treat you is also with respect.

43:58

I don't think it has to be disrespectful.

44:00

You know, it can be just a common truth, that this is just

44:05

how I like to be treated, and that, you know, it can just be

44:09

a little bit more simple I think in that way.

44:10

I always try to mitigate problems and risk all the time,

44:13

so that's one of my, like, angles around that, but....

44:17

>> Definitely.

44:19

I can relate to that, as I'm sure a lot of people can.

44:24

To pivot just a little bit, I want to talk

44:26

about the Twin Cities tech scene specifically,

44:28

so--and you all occupy kind of different spaces

44:32

in that ecosystem.

44:34

I am very new to it, and so I'm so grateful to people

44:38

like you for being so welcoming.

44:41

I'd love to hear some of your thoughts

44:42

on how, if it's not already collaborative enough,

44:46

how you feel like the Twin Cities tech ecosystem

44:49

can become even more collaborative.

44:52

Certainly, I'm going to start with you actually,

44:54

but certainly from a diversity and inclusion standpoint,

44:57

and I think from a women in technology standpoint,

44:59

I think there are some spaces, from what I can see

45:03

as a new person, where it may be lacking in collaboration.

45:06

So I would just love to hear some of your insights on that.

45:12

>> So I think that the tech scene is the best example

45:15

for the Minnesota bubble.

45:17

So, has anyone here ever been

45:19

to any of the Minnestar events?

45:21

Okay, so I once invited a couple of people

45:24

to the Minnestar, I think it was Minnedemo, and

45:27

I think it was like 1000 people were there, right,

45:30

there's like a whole humbuzz around it.

45:33

And the folks I invited never knew it existed,

45:38

they had never heard of it.

45:39

They were like, wait, there's so many people here.

45:42

It was just the biggest shock to them.

45:44

It's somehow the best-kept secret in the Twin Cities

45:48

that, like, we build these massive communities and these

45:53

hives, where folks, honestly, I think really do a great job

45:56

of collaborating and connecting, but it can be

45:59

really, really challenging to just go in there

46:02

and get yourself plugged in.

46:03

It's taken me years to kind of really be a part

46:06

of the tech scene here.

46:09

And I hear that from other people who are new as well,

46:11

and I think we're really working on that,

46:12

and really, you know, making this a lot more porous,

46:15

and bringing in as many people as possible on this journey.

46:19

I think that when it comes to making it more inclusive,

46:24

the things that I hear often are around representation.

46:28

So I think that we need to do a much better job

46:30

of showing the wide...

46:35

wide types of opportunity

46:38

that we have in terms of tech.

46:40

We need to do a better job of showcasing

46:41

all the different startups that are here

46:43

and the different types of work that they do.

46:47

And not just always focusing on sort of the big, you know,

46:49

Fortune 500 companies, that we're fortunate enough

46:52

to have here.

46:55

But I also think that there's a space

46:58

where we can like think about how to employ tech

47:02

outside of the tech community. Right?

47:03

So for example, there are some massive construction

47:09

and development opportunities that are popping up

47:11

right now in Twin Cities, and I think that for us

47:14

who are interested especially in this intersection

47:16
of equity and inclusion and technology,
47:19
we can employ a lot of that in some of these
47:22
other spaces to help people think about how to make
47:25
those spaces more accessible, how to make them more
47:30
friendly to families, and to all sorts of different people.
47:34
Right? And so I think that there's always we can sort of
47:36
seep out outside of our tech communities,
47:38
and go into these other spaces,
47:40
and just being a little bit more involved
47:43
in what's happening there, but then also hopefully pull
47:45
in some of those other sectors
47:46
that are a lot more segmented in Twin Cities.
47:49
So I would love to see, I think, a little bit more of that
47:51
cross-sector collaboration, because I think it would
47:54
make a really, really big difference,
47:55
especially in some of the larger projects
47:58
that are happening in the Twin Cities.
48:01
I think that another part of it is that
48:03
just building a little bit more community
48:05
amongst the different companies,
48:08
so, you know, business resource groups, or ERGs,
48:12
and some of these larger companies end up being
48:14
a really great force for building community

48:16
for people who don't identify specifically
48:20
as cis white male, right?
48:22
And the cool thing about that is you get to basically
48:25
be in a room with people who identify with you
48:27
in some way or another, you get to share stories
48:30
and get to know each other, and really build
48:31
that strong network, which you end up needing
48:34
for emotional support, for people to advocate for you,
48:36
for all those different things.
48:37
And I think that what I would love to see
48:41
is for us to use our meetup groups
48:44
and our different communities to actually build
48:47
a lot of those cross-company networks,
48:51
and really sort of help grow that sense of belonging,
48:54
even though, you know, you might be one of,
48:59
you might have a really small company and be one
49:01
of maybe 20 employees within an organization,
49:04
just building that community across other companies
49:07
that are similar, I think we'd end up
49:08
with some really, really interesting, yeah,
49:12
really interesting communities.
49:14
>> Cool.
49:17
>> I think that there are probably two areas

49:20
that could use some growth and collaboration
49:24
in the Twin Cities.
49:25
I think that there isn't a great deal of representation
49:29
of people living with disabilities in tech.
49:32
Part of that, I would say, is our own fault.
49:36
And having been in the position of being included
49:42
at a lot more tables lately, I would say that
49:46
there are a lot of people who want to include people
49:49
living with disabilities, but they don't know where
49:51
to find them, and we can mysteriously be quite invisible,
49:58
so that it's really up to us, sometimes,
50:01
to make ourselves known, and to ask for a place
50:04
at the table.
50:05
It's really rare that we ever get turned down
50:08
when we ask anymore.
50:09
So the other area that I think that there really needs
50:14
to be some growth there is women in technology
50:18
over the age of 40 and 50.
50:22
I'm 56, and nearly every client environment I walk into,
50:30
everybody is probably 20 years younger than me.
50:34
And for some reason, when women age, we suddenly get
50:40
perceived of as having no tech sense.
50:43
I don't understand where that comes from,

50:45
because I remember, I'm actually old enough
50:49
to have been a young admin at a computer company
50:54
that went through, a computer part company,
50:57
that went through the transition from typewriters
51:00
to computers, and my job--my daughter loves this story--
51:04
my job was to route all the emails to everybody's desks,
51:08
because back in those days,
51:10
they came through a central server.
51:13
So I lived through that transition. And sometimes I think
51:16
about the knowledge and experience that I have
51:20
being a woman in technology in my 50s,
51:23
that I bring this perspective, and how that's been lost
51:26
because so many of my peers are phased out
51:29
of their positions, because they're not even asked
51:33
if they need additional training...
51:36
It's something that I think that escapes a lot of people.
51:41
You know, why do not value people who are older,
51:45
who've had more experience?
51:46
So those two areas I think are areas that need growth.
51:53
>> Ooh, there's so many things to chat about with this.
51:56
The first thing that's coming to my mind
51:58
is I'm on the leadership council for a social venture
52:01
called Million Dollar Women.

52:03
It's based out of New York City,
52:05
and was started by a woman named Julia Pimsleur,
52:08
who started a company called Little Pim,
52:11
learned that there was this big gap in any woman
52:15
who starts any business of any type
52:18
kind of going from \$200,000 to a million dollars
52:22
in revenue for your business,
52:24
and there's amazing statistics that it's less than
52:29
three percent of any female-owned business
52:32
that gets started that actually gets to a million,
52:35
and then it's less than one percent for the diverse women
52:39
who can't then get funded, or you know...
52:42
And a lot of his has to do with
52:44
like I mentioned before the mindset that goes behind
52:46
how you do whatever you're doing.
52:49
And so it's an interesting question to me that...
52:52
I'm actually thinking about this right now,
52:54
where I had to connect with someone in New York
52:57
to get the kind of support that I needed at that stage.
53:00
So whether that's a gap or not in the Twin Cities,
53:04
I think she's seen that's a gap nationwide
53:06
that we don't have that support--accessible coaching
53:09
that's affordable for someone who can't spend

53:11
\$30,000, \$40,000 in her first two or three years
53:15
of owning a business. So then, you just don't have
53:18
that support. So I think I'm actually processing myself,
53:24
how do I stay engaged with that?
53:26
Is it something that we branch out...
53:28
They're starting to move into Houston
53:30
and looking for additional locations that they would
53:32
bring that content. But then that creates this other problem
53:35
where it's like wait a minute, there's already
53:36
this activity going on, how do you link that up
53:38
with Lunar Startups, and you've got a lot
53:40
of other things going on.
53:43
Sometimes I think it would just be great
53:44
to have a big city hall meeting,
53:45
like, let's all go to the Minneapolis Convention Center
53:47
and have a chat, and everybody take turns presenting,
53:50
like what is Beta doing, what does Healthcare.mn do?
53:53
Now we've got UnitedHealth Group, and Techstars...
53:56
You know, there's all these things going on.
54:00
It could be really fun to just have this huge chat
54:02
about, you know, is this really working?
54:04
What's really beneficial,
54:05
What do we need? Do we need to be unified?

54:07

Do we not need to be unified?

54:09

It's changed a lot since I started.

54:11

Treehouse Health was this staple for healthcare startups,

54:15

and now I don't, it's not really anything

54:18

that exists to my knowledge present day,

54:21

or isn't something that a lot of founders

54:23

find valuable to them like they did then.

54:27

I think it's just evolved.

54:28

So I think there's also just like,

54:30

there's probably opportunity to be a part of writing

54:32

about the future of what our community looks like,

54:34

and deciding what to kind of pick and choose from,

54:37

but I would say I'm grateful General Assembly's here

54:39

because I think that skills-based teaching

54:42

is really critical.

54:43

I think there's a need for that.

54:46

I am personally, we're looking to hire,

54:51

hopefully, someone maybe as a part-time role

54:53

or full-time role eventually, possibly contract-based,

54:57

for front end development.

55:00

And I think we're kind of looking at our team

55:03

and saying, wow, we've got a lot of dudes

55:04

just coding back here... Like, why don't we have some ladies

55:07

in here that can do that?

55:09

And I think part of that's, you know, sourcing.

55:11

How do we find each other, kind of to your point,

55:13

where it's like you can of have to insert yourself,

55:15

and how do we source accurately

55:19

and kind of find each other more clearly?

55:22

So any ladies that are looking for front end, let's talk.

55:26

>> Solid play. >> Yeah. [LAUGH]

55:28

>> I did want to add to that a little bit.

55:31

I was talking to someone the other day

55:32

and they said Minnesota is the Land of 10,000 Nonprofits.

55:35

I think that we... >> [LAUGH]

55:37

>> ...sometimes have this-- >> That's awesome.

55:38

>> Yeah, we like have this need to, you know,

55:42

we see something and there's too many wires there.

55:46

Okay, I need to start an organization focused on just that,

55:49

and without really sort of taking a look at what else

55:52

is happening. And so I think that we sometimes start

55:57

these different organizations that are focused

56:01

on really specific challenges, and I think that

56:03

that's great, but I think to your point, it would be

56:06

really great if we also looked around and see

56:08

how else can we collaborate as well, and amplify each other

56:12
in what we're doing, rather than always
56:14
starting another thing.
56:15
>> Yes, that's funny.
56:18
>> Yeah, 10,000 nonprofits...
56:19
[GROUP LAUGHTER]
56:20
>> So many nonprofits here for everything.
56:21
>> Yeah, I believe it.
56:23
>> I love the idea of a megachat,
56:24
like it's such an oxymoron, right?
56:27
Having all of these groups and people come together
56:30
for a chat...
56:31
But I love the idea, and I think we should do it.
56:33
I think we should just execute it.
56:35
Why not?
56:36
>> Yeah.
56:37
>> So, I know I said we were going to have more questions,
56:39
but we are at Q&A time, which I think is
56:41
everyone's favorite time.
56:44
I would love to hear from you
56:47
if you have questions for all or one
56:49
of these wonderful people. The only stipulation
56:52
is you need to say it loud enough for me to hear
56:54
so I can say it into the microphone,

56:56

because this is being livestreamed,

56:58

and so we don't want weird silence and then having these...

57:02

Did you just learn it was being livestreamed?

57:03

>> No, I'm just kidding.. [LAUGHTER]

57:06

>> Gotcha!

57:08

>> Candid camera.

57:09

>> But we don't want weird silence

57:11

and then a contextless response happening,

57:14

so I would say just, there you go.

57:17

Great job, Greg.

57:19

>> I always have to be the one talking.

57:21

>> Yeah.

57:22

[LAUGHTER] Sure.

57:23

>> I found it interesting, the volunteer board,

57:26

you said of advisers--one of you said that,

57:28

I think, over there. How did you come about that?

57:33

Finding those volunteers to be part of your board

57:36

to be act like mentors for yourself, for your company?

57:40

>> So how did you find an active volunteer board

57:43

to participate in your company?

57:45

Is that a fair abbreviated version of the question?

57:49

>> Well, if my career was a professional perfect storm,

57:51

WeCo certainly has been, too.

57:54

It was very serendipitous that, when I was working

57:58

on MnDOT's ADA transition plan,

58:01

I was working with an advisory board that had been assembled

58:05

of stakeholders from the community, who lived

58:07

with disabilities, some connected with advocacy groups,

58:11

and we became friends.

58:13

And some of those people, including Janet Peters

58:18

from the Great Lakes ADA Center, who was serving

58:21

on that board in a paid capacity,

58:24

become WeCo's first advisory board,

58:27

and most of those people are still with us.

58:31

They knew people who knew people,

58:33

and we have a, just a tight little group

58:36

of six people that I meet with once a month

58:39

that help keep us on track.

58:41

We have another one of our advisory board members,

58:46

by the name of Sarita Kimble,

58:48

heard me on an Easter Seals podcast

58:51

and got my number and called me,

58:53

and joined the board that way.

58:56

I think that if you just let it be known

58:59

what you're working on, the right people somehow find you.

59:04

I don't know how else to say that.

59:06

I mean, I met them in a professional capacity,

59:10

and then we kind of became a magnet after a while.

59:18

>> Yeah, you go on.

59:19

>> This is actually for you, Lynn, again.

59:23

So I'm one of the people that runs

59:24

one of the 10,000 nonprofits...

59:26

[LAUGHTER]

59:27

Thank you for saying that.

59:29

I also run a couple of other groups,

59:30

and we have had at times people with hearing disabilities

59:37

want to attend, and, of course we're, yeah, absolutely,

59:41

we want to facilitate that.

59:44

What advice would you have for groups that do want

59:48

to offer that kind of accessibility in covering the costs

59:53

of, say, having an ASL interpreter come

59:57

and perform an event?

60:01

>> So, I'm just going to restate for the microphone.

60:04

So what advice do you have for nonprofits

60:07

who are seeking to make their events more accessible,

60:10

perhaps for people with a hearing disability?

60:13

>> Or just any groups.

60:14

>> Or really any person living with a disability

60:16

that might need hired help, I guess,

60:20

so for instance, an ASL interpreter for an event...

60:23

How would you recommend a nonprofit go about

60:28

being able to provide that?

60:29

>> I guess it's like \$150 an hour,

60:32

and when you're volunteer-run, it can be difficult.

60:35

>> And thank you for asking the question,

60:38

because, actually, WeCo has gotten really good at this

60:43

because we're entirely bootstrap.

60:44

There are no startup dollars out there for entrepreneurs

60:48

who live with disabilities.

60:49

And we went through my retirement fund,

60:53

and it's been entirely bootstrap. But it's possible

60:58

for any group to do this, because there are so many ways

61:02

you can do it.

61:04

We know a group that does trainings with the library system,

61:11

because the library system can provide the ASL interpreters.

61:15

That's one way it could be done, and that takes

61:18

a little bit more coordination.

61:21

I spoke at the New York City public school system

61:25

accessibility conference in September,

61:28

and they had an ASL interpreter, but they also had

61:32

automatic captioning on a level I had never seen before.

61:37

I was quite impressed with it.

61:39

We've also had individuals who are ASL interpreters

61:43

that have volunteered to work with us.

61:46

And the other thing that I always say

61:48

when people ask me this is, is check out the cost.

61:51

Most of the time you imagine that it's

61:54

this astronomical cost.

61:57

There are also, I believe, there are some groups

62:00

that offer this stuff at a reduced rate for nonprofits.

62:04

I know WeCo, we offer our services

62:06

at a reduced rate for nonprofits.

62:09

In the early days, we did things like, you know...

62:14

We captioned some of our own things in the beginning,

62:18

because some of the people that worked with us

62:20

believed in our mission and were willing to be okay

62:23

with our less-than-perfect captioning.

62:26

Now we do everything we do online with our testers,

62:30

and with the public is live-captioned through a group

62:34

called Caption Access, which was started by a man

62:37

who is deaf, Bill Graham, who used to be a World Book

62:40

Encyclopedia editor, and I play him on Words With Friends

62:43

and he creams me.

62:44

[LAUGHTER]

62:46

But I just, I think you have to be understanding

62:51
that there is more than one right way to do this,
62:54
and you can get inventive, and you can pool resources
62:58
with other organizations that may be able to afford it.
63:02
But we really believe that you can accommodate
63:07
and access of disability regardless of size,
63:10
if you're willing to talk with the person who needs it,
63:13
if you can, if that's possible. Find out what they need,
63:17
and, you know, there's more than one way to skin a cat.
63:21
It doesn't have to be this expensive way.
63:24
Does that help?
63:26
Okay.
63:27
>> I'll add a little bit to that too.
63:30
So if Minnesota's the Land of 10,000 Nonprofits,
63:31
it's also the Land of 1000 Philanthropy Groups,
63:34
and so I think that there is opportunities
63:38
to have conversations with different foundations
63:40
about them providing a stipend just for that.
63:45
And then I also would encourage you
63:48
to just put out on Twitter that you're looking
63:51
for an organization to cover the cost.
63:54
I have seen that work really, really well,
63:56
especially within the tech community.
63:58
Just let us know what you need, and like I know,

64:01

I'll speak for myself, I'm more than happy to share out

64:03

within our network to make sure that you're able

64:06

to create the event that is accessible

64:09

to as many people as possible.

64:12

>> Yeah, I think also, I know you weren't really asking me,

64:14

and I know the event you're talking about.

64:17

But I think, too, for people...

64:22

So like childcare at events is very in right now,

64:27

which is ridiculous, but even every time I hear it,

64:30

it's like, oh, wow, that's so wonderful

64:32

that they're providing... I was listening to a podcast

64:34

that was about people in Brooklyn,

64:38

that are located in Brooklyn, and they're talking

64:39

about a local event, and they were like don't worry

64:41

about childcare, we have you covered.

64:43

And so I think part of it is simply visibility

64:47

of actually having it, and letting people know

64:49

that you need to have it.

64:50

And so like at the Unhackathon that happened

64:54

when you all provided childcare, kind of an innovative

64:57

thing, but if people don't know that you need to provide it,

65:00

they don't know how to provide it.

65:01

And so I think using as many folks who are willing

65:04

to share out why you want to do this,

65:08

I think within all of these communities coming together,

65:11

you might be able to find those resources.

65:14

And then the wonderful thing is that people who go

65:17

to that event, or maybe people who are going to that event,

65:20

because they know that it's accessible for them,

65:22

and they wouldn't have otherwise been there.

65:23

And that kind of spreads.

65:25

And so I think it's a very worthy thing to get as many

65:30

people and voices on as possible, because I think

65:33

that would be really powerful for that event.

65:35

>> And I think people don't ask,

65:36

because I cannot tell you how many times we have offered,

65:40

or they don't take advantage of it, we have offered

65:43

to look at people's PowerPoint presentations

65:45

and make them accessible, because we do accessible documents

65:48

too, how many organization committees we've been on

65:52

for events--and they never, ever send them to us

65:55

to make them accessible.

65:57

So there's a lot of unused free resources out there

66:02

that I think just kind of don't get used.

66:05

Ask.

66:08

>> Yeah, go ahead.

66:09

Yup.

66:10

>> Money.

66:11

We know that for women, funding is what, four to seven

66:14

percent of capital funding, and less of that

66:16

for women of color, so how do you fund what you do?

66:20

>> So yeah, the question is I think for all of you,

66:22

How do you fund what you do?

66:27

>> We're bootstrapped.

66:29

We, in the early days of WeCo, we all worked for free.

66:34

And that was the only way to get it done.

66:36

And then we used, you know, high interest lines of credit

66:44

that are available out there, and yet while those have

66:47

costed us money, we wouldn't have our company without them.

66:51

But that's, it's I think one of the most disappointing

66:54

things that happened to me in the last year

66:56

was finding the Social Enterprise Alliance

66:58

going to their conference in Chicago

67:02

and realizing that all of the funding sources there,

67:06

none of them fund entrepreneurs who live with disabilities.

67:09

We didn't have the right mission.

67:11

And all of them said to me, well, the government

67:14

will do that for you.

67:17

And I said, oh yeah?

67:18

[LAUGH]

67:19

Okay.

67:20

But I think there's so many of us that are out there

67:23

that are just using our sheer force of will

67:26

to get this stuff started.

67:28

We find people who believe in it.

67:31

You know, there were days when I came close

67:36

to going to Food Shelf because I didn't have enough to eat

67:39

in my own cupboard to get this going,

67:42

but I knew it was the right thing to do.

67:44

So I hope other people have happier stories than that.

67:48

But that was the reality for us.

67:52

>> I'd say the answer always lies in what the trajectory

67:55

of the business is.

67:57

There's that delineation of, is this a small business,

68:00

is this a lifestyle business, or is this a startup?

68:04

And those are three very distinctly different things,

68:06

so if it's a small business, you'd more than likely

68:10

just pursue a loan, and we have good support locally

68:14

for specifically women loans from, I think it's DEED

68:18

that has this loan process.

68:21

So if you're starting a coffee shop locally,

68:23

or you're starting the next Spyhouse Coffee,

68:26
whatever it may be, that's a really good route to go,
68:29
because your revenue threshold hits a cap on the market
68:32
locally. And then if it's lifestyle, generally that's
68:35
going to have to be bootstrapped, because, again,
68:37
you're not going to create a return that's even of interest
68:40
to a VC. And then the startup is when you're thinking
68:44
about those high margins, high returns,
68:46
a bigger exit. And they say those, the four outcomes
68:49
for a startup would be failing, it would be to be
68:52
acquired, to merge, or IPO.
68:55
And so it's, to me, it's partly right-sizing,
68:58
like what is the potential here, what is that,
69:00
and then it can be a more fair conversation
69:03
about how you fund it.
69:04
And so in our case, we're venture-backed.
69:07
Now, our lead investor in the run was Hyde Park Venture
69:10
Partners out of Chicago, and I would say that,
69:16
you know, the hard part for us wasn't necessarily...
69:18
I think there's a lot of attention on getting women funded,
69:21
so I don't think that that was a struggle for us,
69:24
thank goodness. I think more of the struggle
69:25
was articulating our vision and actually painting
69:28
the picture that this isn't, again, one of those first

69:31

two categories, and that you see a worthwhile kind of return

69:34

coming in that regard.

69:36

So that's been our experience.

69:38

It was hard, though.

69:39

The summer was really hard, because we moved up

69:40

to California for an accelerator program

69:42

on Minnesota salaries--that was great fun.

69:48

But yeah, the first three years were really, really hard.

69:51

I don't mean to discount them.

69:53

That was the most difficult.

69:54

I'm kind of... We're funded so we can actually pay our bills

69:57

a little bit as individuals, and we're all like [SIGH]...

70:01

okay.

70:02

I think there's an element of, we missed the reality

70:05

that that's the space you can actually think creatively

70:07

and solve problems. And it just takes a significant amount

70:11

of grit to get to the point where you can do that.

70:13

And I think there's that plateau that most people drop out

70:17

because it gets really hard, but if you hang on,

70:20

then you can get there.

70:23

>> Yeah, I mean you said the number's around...

70:27

or did she say the numbers?

70:28

>> Yeah.

70:29

Three percent, yeah.

70:30

>> And I think for me, just knowing that, I automatically

70:35

knew out of the gate that I needed to figure out

70:36

a better way to fund my businesses.

70:38

So everything that I've done has been self-funded,

70:41

bootstrapped. Hack the Gap, we have been able to make

70:46

revenue through like the events and sponsorships,

70:49

and that's been really great,

70:52

and we are expanding what we do

70:53

as an organization as well this year,

70:55

and so we'll have more opportunities to engage

70:58

with different people in different types of ways,

71:00

and sort of diversify our revenue stream as well.

71:04

I think... So I think there's a couple things.

71:07

So DEED is doing their matching up to \$35,000

71:13

of capital that you spend, and so if you are running

71:17

a software company, I definitely highly encourage

71:19

taking a look at that and those opportunities.

71:22

I definitely would encourage folks to have conversations

71:25

with the different foundations.

71:27

A lot of them are starting to go into the investment

71:30

field as well. In addition to just giving out grants,

71:34

they're also looking to give out actual investment dollars,

71:37

and so if you want to know more about that

71:39

I'm more than happy to kind of share a little bit more,

71:42

and specifically which foundations.

71:44

I would also encourage folks to go to the city halls,

71:51

like go to a lot of the government spaces

71:55

and get to know what the RFP process looks like,

71:58

sign up for their market programs.

72:01

It can be,

72:03

being in like the government space, it's really nice,

72:06

because once you are able to connect with someone

72:09

and sort of share your products and your services,

72:12

it's a lot more straightforward to figure out

72:14

how exactly some of those larger IFP process really work.

72:18

But that, I definitely wouldn't jump into an RFP process,

72:21

to be honest, the chances of that, just for myself,

72:24

I'll speak for myself, are very slim.

72:27

But it is a lot easier to get engaged with someone

72:29

and see if you can pick up a smaller project

72:31

and start to build a relationship that way.

72:34

I definitely would encourage folks to do consulting

72:38

in addition to their software, any software development work

72:41

that they're doing, like if you're building a startup,

72:43

and there's a software, that's been one thing

72:45

that's worked really well for me.

72:49

Yeah.

72:50

I can try to think of other ways, but

72:51

I just like personally, I've have had to be super creative

72:54

about capital and just automatically knowing

72:59

where my odds were, and using that as a way of figuring out

73:01

where to spend most of my time.

73:04

>> Cool.

73:05

We are at time.

73:06

And I am very strict with myself about staying on time.

73:09

[LAUGHTER]

73:10

And so thank you all for being here.

73:13

I have loved all of this, too...

73:14

[AUDIENCE APPLAUSE]

73:16

>> Thank you. >> Thank you.

73:17

>> I'll clap.

73:20

And thank you all for being here, too.

73:23

The last thing that I will say is

73:25

feel free to come talk to me.

73:26

I will be here if you have any questions

73:29

about upcoming events, or anything like that,

73:32

just let me know.

73:33

That's what I'm here for.

73:34

Or if you would like to run an event,

73:36

partner on event, that's pretty much

73:38

one of my full-time jobs, I guess,

73:40

and so if there's something that you have a dream

73:43

of running, and you just don't have the bandwidth

73:45

or capacity to do it, I would love to talk.

73:48

And I'm not sure if any of you are sticking around

73:50

after, too, but, yeah...

73:53

And eat donuts and stuff.

73:56

But yeah, I'm really glad that you all came.

73:58

This was a really wonderful first, I hope,

74:00

Women in Tech breakfast,

74:01

so thank you so much for being here.

74:04

And thank you, guys.

74:05

[APPLAUSE]

English