

Women in Business and Technology

Transcript of Episode 012 - Getting started with community builder Megan McNally

Featuring: Dr. Alysondra Duke, Megan McNally

Summary: In Episode 12, Colleen travels to the inaugural Lady Bosses Gala to interview Dr. Alysondra Duke, the founder of Lady Bosses, a community that promotes women's empowerment and unapologetic badassery. Later in the episode, Sonia meets another badass, Megan McNally, a serial entrepreneur who is creating almost faster than we can record. Then in Cutting Edge, we discuss whether AI can improve the human condition or if it might sustain cultural biases.

Find audio and more information at Microsoft.com/WIBT

NARRATION: I think that too often we worry that if we don't do things in the right order or one after another or at the age we've been told we're supposed to do, then that we think we're foreclosing opportunity, and -- and we're not.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: HIMSS18 is the health IT conference where professionals from around the world connect to gain the education, innovation, and collaboration they need to continue to transform health and healthcare through IT.

SONIA DARA: Microsoft will be onsite in Las Vegas at HIMSS18 from March 5th through the 9th to showcase the intelligent services and the trusted platform for solutions that engage patients, empower care teams, optimize clinical and operational effectiveness, and transform health in the face of increasing cost pressures.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: For more information about the conference, visit aka.ms/himss18. That's HIMSS18.

NARRATION: You are listening to the *Women in Business and Technology* podcast from Microsoft. In each episode, you will hear from women in amazing tech and business roles, as well as male allies who are helping make the industries more inclusive.

We are diving into programs that promote greater diversity in the pipeline, and bringing you tips on how to build a successful career in a supportive community.

Welcome to *Women in Business and Technology*.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Welcome to Episode 12 of *Women in Business and Technology*. I'm Colleen O'Brien.

SONIA DARA: And I'm Sonia Dara.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: We're starting the show in our Community Connect segment with a conversation that I had with Alysondra Duke, the founder of Lady Bosses, a community to promote women's empowerment and badassery that originated on the social networking site, Meetup.com.

SONIA DARA: And then, we'll jump into an interview I had with Megan McNally, a lawyer, entrepreneur, community builder, and self-proclaimed rabble-rouser.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Finally, we'll wrap things up in our Cutting Edge segment with a discussion about how AI learns -- and even amplifies -- the biases in our society.

SONIA DARA: So Colleen, in our last episode, you were starting to explore a newfound interest in journaling. Has this become a New Year's Resolution that you're actually sticking to?

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Absolutely! And I'm getting some great prompts and a lot of help from Dona Sarkar's new book, entitled *#DoTheThing*. It's a workbook of sorts that aims to push readers outside of their comfort zones, and help them to finally pursue that secret goal or idea.

SONIA DARA: Sounds like a good read to keep you dreaming big in 2018.

As many of our listeners know, Dona Sarkar was the guest on our inaugural show of this podcast. She's a really inspiring engineering leader here at Microsoft who heads up the Windows Insiders Program. She also mentors countless people, and manages a ton of passion projects like fashion design and of course, writing.

So, Colleen, what else can you tell us about the book?

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: The book is a series of journaling prompts that guide you in writing the story of a hero or A Hero's Journey where you the reader are the hero. And this journey is broken up into four different acts, so you're doing a lot of journaling along each of these lines.

Act 1 is The Ordinary World, or an overview of your current life.

Act 2 is The Call of Adventure, or your self-discovery mission where you figure out what your purpose is.

Act 3 is this Refusal of the Call. This is where you make all of the excuses about what's holding you back from pursuing that secret ambition. So, for example, if you really want

to be a bodybuilder in 2018, a refusal of the call might be, it's too cold out to go to the gym today.

SONIA DARA: Is that a comment on my work? (Laughter.) My workout routine right now?

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: That might be from my personal experience.

And then finally, act 4 is Do the Thing. This is the point in the story where you, the hero, emerge and do what you're supposed to be doing, what secret ambition is.

And this book really guides you through articulating and documenting your strengths, fears, daily priorities, and your accountability tribe.

SONIA DARA: I feel like everyone thinks we're trying to be bodybuilders now. (Laughter.)

So accountability tribe, as in friends, mentors who keep you on track, is that what she means by accountability tribe? And like people who are coaching you?

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Yeah, that's exactly right. And in the case that you don't yet have that person or tribe, Dona has set up a great Facebook group of people pursuing their goals and supporting one another.

Here's a quick description of the online Facebook group community: #DoTheThing is a society of people who are here to help you, cheer you on, talk things through with you, not judge you, and generally have your back.

You can find that Facebook Group page at facebook.com/groups/dothethingyo.

And of course, you can find Dona's book on Amazon by searching for *#DoTheThing*.

NARRATION: Community Connect, get involved and stay connected.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: On December 13th, I headed to the SoDo neighborhood of Seattle with Sonia and show producer Lexi Swanson --

SONIA DARA: Shout out to Lexi!

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: -- to attend the Lady Bosses Gala, a party to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the Meetup community of women entrepreneurs, small business owners, side hustlers, and, quote, "anyone wanting to live a more badass life."

The event featured delicious food and beverages, raffles, and an ongoing Bingo game to help attendees meet new people. The Bingo grid contained all of these mini missions to find individuals who, quote, "identify as an artist," "travel for business," or "have opened more than one business."

We sat down with Psychologist, Women's Empowerment Coach, and founder of Lady Bosses, Alysondra Duke, who explained why the event was so special:

ALYSONDRA DUKE: This evening is celebrating our one year of being in community as Lady Bosses. It was a vision of mine at first to just create a community for women where they could come together safely in a way to be able to grow and thrive together.

And we've had an incredible growth. What I thought might be ten people interested has turned into over 1,000 members and followers.

And now this is our one-year mark of a party, and even in this I think I need to work on up-leveling my expectations because I thought that it would be a small number, and here we are like, I mean, huge numbers of turnouts for this amazing event.

So we're just celebrating one year of community, one year of badassery, one year of women being amazing.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: While networking can sometimes be overwhelming, Alysondra has sought out to create an inclusive and warm community under the Lady Bosses moniker.

ALYSONDRA DUKE: Lady Bosses is created to be a sense of home, a sense of like community, so anytime that people come to one of our meetings they are always welcome to even people who run late. Everyone is encouraged to welcome them. They will stop, they will applaud them coming through the door.

So I would say like come. It's not set up to be some sort of awkward networking event that makes everyone feel uncomfortable. And we have small groups that meet together, we're coming together as a big group. I mean, there's so much community happening, people have built all kinds of friendships, new business connections, have gotten all kinds of like clients and different things that they never even anticipated.

So it's like just take a risk and come, because it can't hurt.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: One year in, Alysondra is energized by the community, and has her sights set high for additional growth and new programmatic offerings.

ALYSONDRA DUKE: I want to see Lady Bosses continue to thrive and to grow. I mean, if we continue on the trajectory we have been on, it is just going to be even a more greater force. I want more women involved and engaged in our monthly meetings.

Those will be consistently offered. With that, I want more women to feel like this is their solid community that they are coming to every month where they know that there's a place where there's sort of like a home, like a women's entrepreneurial home, you know, for them to come to.

And I want to be offering more workshops, offering more events throughout the year where large numbers of women can all come together and meet each other, because we all want to feel empowered and live life that feels really good and really authentic, and so that's what I want for women here, and what's I want a whole 'nother year of happening.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: In 2018, the Lady Bosses meetup group will host programming on finances, relationships, branding, health, self-care and more.

For our Seattle-area listeners, you can stay posted on all upcoming events by joining the group on meetup.com. Just toggle your search to "Groups" and type in "Lady Bosses." That's two words.

For listeners outside of Puget Sound, Meetup.com is a great place to find communities like Lady Bosses that are closer to your neck of the woods. Just search for your interests, from tech to business to film, for an upcoming meetup event or a group that meets consistently.

And now, let's get on to the interview.

SONIA DARA: I'm thrilled to welcome to the studio lawyer, strategist, change-maker, and serial founder, Megan McNally.

Megan, welcome to the show.

MEGAN MCNALLY: Hi there. Thank you.

SONIA DARA: So Megan, Colleen O'Brien, my co-host, was telling me a little bit about how she heard from you first, and she learned about you and your work at an event in May 2017 at the Riveter. And we're big fans of the Riveter. We've talked about it on the show a couple times. It's a co-working space headquartered in Seattle, dedicated to women and wellness.

And your event was called *An Evening of Rabble Rousing with Megan McNally*. What makes you a rabble rouser, and have you always been that way?

MEGAN MCNALLY: Well, I think I probably have always been a rabble rouser. I think what makes me a rabble rouser is I have a big mouth, I am not afraid to challenge the status quo, and I'm an open book. And I think really what people wanted to come hear

that night was me tell my story candidly about how I got to where I am, and how that was not a traditional path at all, and that's okay.

SONIA DARA: So I'm eager to talk more about your recent pursuits, but what I found so interesting about your career is the pivots you've made along the way. So you spent two decades working in the philanthropic sector. What are the most important skills that you honed while working at NPower National, the Refugee Women's Alliance, the Philanthropy Northwest, and the Pacific Science Center? You have quite a few Philanthropies you've gotten involved with. So what were the most important skills that you honed in while you were there?

MEGAN MCNALLY: Yeah, there was a lot of philanthropy in those 20 years, it's true.

I think the most important skill that I honed is relationship building. Much of the work that I did in the sector was about raising money for organizations and for great missions. And I think people often confuse that with sales, that if you just have a good organization or people owe you money, so you just go out there and get it. And it's not, it's about building meaningful relationships with people.

And I think an important lesson is that that's a long game, right? There's not one great conversation that opens up a long term relationship with somebody. It's consistency, it's authenticity, it's showing up over time, delivering on what you've promised to deliver on. And I had an opportunity to do that with a lot of amazing supporters of great organizations.

SONIA DARA: So one of your pivots is you jumped into entrepreneurship in 2006 as the owner and principal consultant of MDS. So what guided you into this entrepreneurial pursuit? Did you have any business owning role models by any chance?

MEGAN MCNALLY: Well, I had some business owning role models earlier in my life. My dad was a gun dealer.

SONIA DARA: Ooh!

MEGAN MCNALLY: I know. That's part of my story that people always think is far more fascinating than it is, but I'm the daughter of a gun dealer.

SONIA DARA: Wait, where'd you grow up? Where was this?

MEGAN MCNALLY: Florida.

SONIA DARA: Florida? Okay.

MEGAN MCNALLY: So yeah, my dad was really an entrepreneur. He was the person who, you know, he loved to do his own thing and to start his own thing. And one of those was he had a dream of owning a gun and ammunition dealership. And so my first job was packing shotgun shells in his gun shop when I was a kid.

SONIA DARA: And how old were you?

MEGAN MCNALLY: I don't know, probably eight.

SONIA DARA: Oh my. At least you're learning safety and kind of respecting the gun.

MEGAN MCNALLY: Yeah. Well, I think what I learned is that running a business is 24/7 proposition, right? Like when you want to own your own business, you give up this notion of work/life balance, like there's going to be some boundary between what you do for work and what the rest of your life is. It becomes a blur, it's all one, you're always working.

But at the time that I started MDS, which is a consulting firm, I actually didn't start out with intention. I didn't say, hey, I think I'll open a consulting practice. I happened to have done some really great work with some great people in the community, and they started coming back to me with projects.

So I had an opportunity where when I was working at one organization where a board member from another organization that I had previously worked for came to me and said, "You know, now I'm on the board of this other organization, and we have this project, and we could really use somebody with your experience and your insights; could you come talk to us?"

And I started getting more invitations like that until I finally looked around and said, I think this is consulting, I think this is what I'm doing now, and so then I started doing that.

And then there were a lot of really difficult lessons at first, like there was a lot of that, but was that really enough for fulltime work, was that enough to really sustain a business, and how do you scale one person with advice, what kind of help do you add, how do you build a team around you? And so there were some really fun and some really painful lessons around that.

SONIA DARA: Any notable lessons, though, that you could maybe share with our listeners, if anyone's experiencing something similar where they've been providing advice but they're not quite sure how to scale?

MEGAN MCNALLY: I think the most important lesson was a person is not scalable. And so to the extent that my business was built on people wanting my advice, my insights

from my experience, there's only one of me, there's only so much of that that you can provide.

You know, I wish I'd had sort of a better strategy or understanding of how instead I could have built a team of other people who also had insight and experience that was similar to mine but different enough that maybe we had a complementary suite of things that we could offer, and so then there would have been a there-there that wasn't just me.

SONIA DARA: So in the midst of building an impressive career in the nonprofit world, you also decided to go to law school at Seattle University at night. And this is while you are still working, which is incredibly impressive. What prompted this return to academia?

MEGAN MCNALLY: First, let me go back to your comment, which thank you to say that it's impressive, but it's really not. (Laughter.)

SONIA DARA: It is.

MEGAN MCNALLY: When I did decide to go to law school, for me it wasn't an option to quit working and become a fulltime student at 40 years old. I had no interest in stepping out of my career stream. I had no interest in trying to build a social life on campus. I was there for a purpose. And so continuing to work as a professional during the day while pursuing my degree was to me the only option that really made sense.

So I will also say that I am not a person who does well with extra time.

SONIA DARA: What do I do with this?

MEGAN MCNALLY: Like I would waste it.

SONIA DARA: What is this amorphous thing?

MEGAN MCNALLY: I would waste it. And so working fulltime while going to law school meant that -- and I was working a fulltime executive job. So I was working 50, 60 hours a week.

SONIA DARA: Wow.

MEGAN MCNALLY: Then I would go to campus, I would sit in class for several hours, and then I would go home or go to the library and read case law until the middle of the night.

And I didn't have any time to waste, because there were no margins. And so I just

plowed through and did it. I never had the luxury of saying, gee, should I do my homework now or put it off until tomorrow. That wasn't an option.

But what inspired me to go to law school, it was not the first time that I intended to go to law school. I had twice before come really close, and then something amazing happened that took my time and was a higher priority than school.

So I always knew at some point that I would probably go back to school to start, and then finish my law degree. But this time around what it was is in my consulting practice I had the privilege of working on some really cool social sector projects that were testing the boundaries of what a charitable organization is and what's a business, and how do those ideas come together, and what are these hybrid organizations, and is there an opportunity to have a bigger impact or make a bigger difference if we step outside some of the known models.

One of those projects that I was working on, we were fortunate enough to have donors working with us who said, "I don't need a charitable write-off for this gift. So tell me how you need the capital. What kind of capital do you need? What would really make a difference?"

And it was amazing to be able to work with people like that who wanted to put their wealth to work making a difference. And it was frustrating to then have to hand them off to a law firm to figure that out.

And so I was spending a lot of time with friends who are tax lawyers and business lawyers trying to figure out what those options were, and how to do that, and along the way decided that those were skills that I wanted to add to my own toolset.

SONIA DARA: You mentioned two opportunities that came along the way that kind of kept you on your career path as opposed to going to law school. What were those opportunities? They sound pretty big deals.

MEGAN MCNALLY: Yeah. The first time I intended to go to law school, it was just that I was not ready to be a grownup.

SONIA DARA: Are we ever ready to be grownups? I don't know.

MEGAN MCNALLY: There's a spectrum of people who are sort of like ready and not ready, and there's not ready and there's really not ready. And I fell into the really, really not ready category.

And so when I left undergrad, I actually walked away, I hitchhiked from Mexico to Alaska, and I decided that I had more important things to do than go to school. And that

was about experiencing life and really I think figuring out who I wanted to be, and that was not in a classroom. So that was the first time.

And then the second time it was that I got hired to work for NPower, which at the time was a nonprofit that had just been founded with some founding money from Microsoft. Microsoft was one of the four founding funders. The organization was built in 1999 to help the charitable sector deal with this coming wave of changes in information technology.

And I was the tenth employee that was hired there.

SONIA DARA: That's awesome.

MEGAN MCNALLY: And it ended up being this amazing experience. We leveraged Microsoft's \$25 million investment to grow to nine communities around the country, and I think really made a difference for nonprofit organizations across all sectors and across the country.

And my boss, Joan Fanning, who was the founder of NPower, just saw something in me and believed in me, and gave me opportunity. And the five years that I spent with that organization was far better than law school at that time. It was an opportunity to grow daily, to learn, to get to take on new levels of responsibility and kind of figure out what did I really have to offer an organization. So that kept me away from law school the second time.

SONIA DARA: Yeah, I don't blame you. That sounds amazing. That's an awesome opportunity.

MEGAN MCNALLY: And I'm a believer that law school is always going to be there. I think that too often we worry that if we don't do things in the right order or one after another or at the age we've been told we're supposed to do, then that we think we're foreclosing opportunity, and we're not. I knew it would be there at another time, and I knew that when the time was right, the time would be right.

SONIA DARA: So you ended up going to law school at the age of 40.

MEGAN MCNALLY: Mm-hmm.

SONIA DARA: That's awesome.

MEGAN MCNALLY: There are smarter birthday presents you can give yourself for your 40th birthday than law school.

SONIA DARA: I'll say. (Laughter.) Right.

So yeah, you've definitely been putting your law degree to work since graduation, to say the least.

In addition to serving as the Director of Advancement and the Chief Development Officer for the Washington State Bar Association and Foundation, you founded your own firm, Doyenne Legal. Can you describe what your firm specializes in and what you set out to achieve with Doyenne Legal?

MEGAN MCNALLY: So we're a full service business law firm. And when I set out to create the firm, I had this idea that I wanted to be the place that any entrepreneur could walk through the door, share their idea, and be taken seriously.

So we really pride ourselves on being welcoming, on being inclusive, on being lawyers who provide legal advice that's grounded in the real world, and an understanding of how businesses and organizations really work.

We strive to be what we describe as utterly human, which means we don't bombard our clients with legalese, we don't give them answers or information that isn't helpful, we aren't aiming to bill the most time that we possibly can with each client, we actually aim to be a thoughtful partner to people as they build, scale, and run their businesses.

And when I launched the law firm, I actually had a vision of building more than a law firm. My vision was that I would build three interrelated organizations, Doyenne Legal, Doyenne Strategy, and Doyenne Capital. Because when you decide to build an organization, whether it's a nonprofit, it's a small business or it's a venture scale startup, you need legal advice but that's not enough.

SONIA DARA: Right.

MEGAN MCNALLY: You also need business strategy and support. And so I thought we could provide that through Doyenne Strategy.

And even with those things, you can't get very far if you don't have access to capital. So I wanted to build a capital fund that would also ensure that there were resources there for people who really did have a viable idea to going forward.

And the law firm has only been in business a year now, so bringing those other two arms of the sort of overall organization just hasn't happened yet.

SONIA DARA: I know that Sara Blakely, the founder of Spanx, was part of your inspiration to start Doyenne Legal. You heard an interview with her and were frustrated to hear about her struggle to get ideas patented. We've discussed patenting on the show before, specifically the stats from the Institute for Women's Policy Research,

which demonstrate that more than 81 percent of patents include no women inventors, and that women aren't expected to reach parity in patenting until 2092. How can we move the needle on that number more quickly?

MEGAN MCNALLY: I don't know that we can move it quickly. I don't want to create false hope that we can move it quickly, but really moving the needle requires consistent effort over time.

And for that particular needle you've got a number of issues that are important. We have to continue to press to make STEM fields places where women want to pursue learning as well as a profession, right? And then we have to do the same thing with the legal profession, which is not a very welcoming place for women still. Even though at law school more than 50 percent of law students are women, we see women leave the profession five to ten years into legal practice. The opportunities for advancement aren't there. So a lot of the same challenges that you hear about in the technology sector also play out in the legal sector.

So if you want to see more women patent attorneys, and if you want to see more women who are actually creating patentable ideas, then we've got to create professional spaces that actually make room for women to come in, drive forward their own ideas, and succeed.

SONIA DARA: In August of 2017, while serving as the principal attorney of your law firm, you also founded RheaMedia where you're serving as the CEO. The primary product of that company is Diana, the first streaming network dedicated to women sports. Are women sports another area of passion for you? And how far along in the company journey are you guys right now?

MEGAN MCNALLY: Yeah, absolutely. Well, I love sports, and I love people who love sports. I love to watch sports, I love to play sports. And I am tired of being a sports fan who can't find the sports that I love. There are 35 million fans of women sports who are either completely ignored or wholly misunderstood by the existing sports landscape.

So when I set out to build RheaMedia, it's because we recognize that there's an opportunity right now, there's a moment in time where people are turning away from cable TV towards streaming media, that gives us an opportunity to aggregate and bring sports together into a place that's much more accessible and actually creates a sports media experience that fans of women sports want to watch.

It's been amazing. I would encourage everybody at some point in your life to step into a space in which you have no real knowledge or expertise. Naiveté is powerful, it is liberating to just step in there and say, so I have no background in sports, I have no background in media, but I am the customer I'm solving this for. And then to drive into a question without any preconceived notions about what the answers are or what's

possible but to really just dive into it with curiosity has been just an amazing journey over the past few months.

So where we are is we're pretty close to having a live demo that then we're going to get to play with and get to spend some time really working on the fan experience. And hopefully we will be launching to the public early next year.

SONIA DARA: That's awesome. What's the inspiration behind the name, Diana?

MEGAN MCNALLY: That is such a great question. The truth of the matter is the name was a placeholder the week that we were working on the business plan, *Wonder Woman* came out, and we said this is an easy one, and really thought it would just be an placeholder name, that we needed something to call it because "over the top streaming network dedicated to women's sports" was too long to keep saying in every conversation. So we needed --

SONIA DARA: OTP network, yeah.

MEGAN MCNALLY: Exactly. So we needed a placeholder. We chose Diana. And that name started to invite really interesting conversations for us, and I think people started envisioning or visualizing that this project is a project that was about a woman.

And I got some great advice from somebody who said, well, remember Diana is a goddess; go with the goddess.

SONIA DARA: This has probably become clear to our listeners by this point, but you are an incredibly productive individual, to say the least. Are there any secrets to your productivity? Is it bullet proof coffee, specific apps, philosophies? Like what's your secret? Like you barely sleep, like one hour, like micro naps?

MEGAN MCNALLY: I'm a boring, sober vegan who doesn't drink coffee, so there's not a product that I can swear by.

I would say first of all, it's not very smart to try to launch a whole bunch of things in short amount of time. You run the risk of not doing any of them well if your priorities are really divided.

I wouldn't say that this is a great model to try to emulate, like start something, and then a few months later start something else. And if that's going well, start another thing, right? But that's kind of what happened.

And for me I think sometime in the past year and a half, sometime last year, I decided that life is short, and I was ready to pursue my own ideas. And I have confidence in

myself that I'm a smart person who's good at figuring things out. And I don't have all the answers, but I have enough to get moving, and so I started to get moving.

And what I found is that when you do that, you get traction. And when you get traction, it's kind of addictive, you want to keep going, right? So I want to keep going until I can't or until somebody stops me.

SONIA DARA: What I really admire about your career is that you're making space for so many other women to find success. While launching Doyenne Legal, you also started building a network of women called The F-Bomb Breakfast Club. I love the description of this group. It's an F-ing fabulous community of female founders who cuss, cavort, and collaborate. I love it. This community is only a year old but has over a thousand members. And your monthly first Friday breakfasts are always the talk of the entrepreneurial town here in Seattle. Can you tell our listeners a little bit more about the F-Bomb Breakfast Club, and did you realize that what you were building would become such a phenomenon?

MEGAN MCNALLY: I had no idea. It's been a fluke.

I wrote a blog post a little over a year ago during Seattle Startup Week. It was the same week that I opened doors at the law firm. And during Startup Week I talked to so many women who had experiences that were similar to mine, experiences of being in the boardroom and you share an idea or you make a point, and it seems that it's not heard, but then your male counterpart says the same thing and it's heard in a different way. Or you've been minimized, underestimated, marginalized in decisions.

And particularly in the space of wanting to build a business law firm, I kept having the experience where people would say things, when I would tell people I've finally decided to go into practice, I'm going to open my own practice, and they would say, "Oh, family law?" Like their assumption was if you're a women opening a law firm, it must be family law. And I would just look at them and say, you know, what it is about me that makes you think --

SONIA DARA: Yeah, why do you think that?

MEGAN MCNALLY: -- that I would -- right.

So I wrote this blog post and said, you know, if any other women were having these experiences, experiences similar to mine, and you want to get together once a month, and just talk through some of the strategies of how you build a company or you build a business in a space, and particularly in male dominated spaces, I said, I'll provide the space, I'll provide the coffee and donuts, you just have to get up early to come meet with me, because I'm in a hustle, you know, once the business day is under way.

And so our first meeting in January, I had no idea if anybody would show up. I hoped it wasn't just going to be me alone in the dark eating donuts. And about 20 women came.

SONIA DARA: Wow.

MEGAN MCNALLY: And it took off from there. And we're now at almost 1,500 actually members of the community online.

SONIA DARA: That's great.

MEGAN MCNALLY: And about anywhere between 100 and 150 that come in person once a month.

So I did not sort of like MDS, like my consulting practice, I did not sit down and write a business plan for this. I thought there was a need, I offered a solution, and people showed up, and it grew from there.

I think the smartest thing I did was in the very first meeting was look around the room at who are the other women in this room who can help this become something. I didn't want it to just be just my idea. It's not the Megan show. And so I tapped really smart people like Keita Williams who came to that first meeting, and started asking her, what do you think, how would you like to see this grow, how would you like to see it evolve, and what role do you want to play, and doing the same thing with other women in the room, and I think we grew it together as a community over the course of the year.

And it's still amazing to me what a phenomenon it has become. I have experiences where I'll walk into the grocery store and people will come up and said, "Oh my god, you're the F-Bomb lady." I think like --

SONIA DARA: You should make a shirt and just wear it around.

MEGAN MCNALLY: -- number one -- we have shirts, we do have shirts --

SONIA DARA: You do?

MEGAN MCNALLY: -- that say, "Get Up and Swear."

I mean, of course there's some ego in it, right, when people come up and say, "Oh, you're that lady," but more importantly it's just amazing to think how many women we might have touched as a community, and how many women we've inspired.

Our community is open to women anywhere on their entrepreneurial journey, so whether they are still employed but trying to gather the resources and the courage to quit their job to launch their business, or they've already exited multiple companies, are

on a third or fourth startup, whatever, everything in between. And so we want to be an inclusive space for all of those women.

And the magic is what happens in between the meetings where two women meet each other and show up for each other and actually help each other in some meaningful way get to that next business goal, get the connection that they need, solve some particular business challenge that they have in scaling their company. It's incredible to watch what the women in the community are doing for each other.

SONIA DARA: In addition to your entrepreneurial and community minded efforts, philanthropy has remained a consistent part of your life. You served as the board president for the Puget Sound chapter of Girls on the Run, you're a volunteer attorney for Wayfind, and you served on the boards of the University of Washington Advisory Board, the Association of Fundraising Professionals, and the Initiative for Diversity Governing Council. How do you determine the causes you want to dedicate your time to?

MEGAN MCNALLY: Yeah, a couple of things. One is that how I choose what effort I'm going to give my volunteer time to is, number one, I care am I really going to make an impact. Is this a board that if I join it, they actually have a need that I can fill, right, that my skills or my experience or my connections are going to make a difference, and that has to be true.

The second thing is it has to be a cause that I really care about. I'm not interested in serving on boards just to sort of accumulate board service experience. It really has to be something that I'm personally passionate about, because when you're talking about your volunteer time on top of your professional time and all the other things that you're doing, you're really talking about the tradeoffs of family time. So if I'm not going to spend that time at home, it better be something I really care an awful lot about. And so that has to be important, and that's been the case with each of these.

And then finally, I have to have capacity. Having been the person that's staffed boards, and knowing the difference between a board member who really shows up and is really helping advance an organization from the board member who just kind of phones it in and you always have to beg for their time, I really care about being able to be that board member who truly shows up and is really making a difference. And if I don't have the time and capacity to do that, I think that I'm getting better at saying no and being really choosy about the opportunities that I agree to.

SONIA DARA: You were recently interviewed on the Success Bully Podcast with Keita Williams where you spoke about your daughter as your North Star, a reminder to live as the role model you want her to have. But you mentioned that every North Star needs a keel. What exactly do you mean by that?

MEGAN MCNALLY: Let me say first of all that I probably mixed some metaphors there, so I don't know that that was the best way to phrase that, but here's what I mean.

To me a North Star is your vision, it's what guides you. It tells you what direction you're headed, and it's aspirational.

But if you really want to get there, you've got to keep your ship upright. And to me that's what I mean by every North Star has to have an even keel. Because you need something that keeps you functioning and headed that direction, or you won't ever get there.

And I know who that is in my life. It's important that I know both who's that North Star, but also who's the even keel that's keeping this all together, because it's not me.

SONIA DARA: So do you have any other advice for women considering entrepreneurial pursuits?

MEGAN MCNALLY: I think the first one is to just start. As women in particular we tend to think that we have to have all the answers before we trust that we're the right person to do this. And there won't ever be all of the answers, so just start.

And then once you start, be prepared for really hard work and surround yourself by people who can help you.

With RheaMedia we decided to form the company a few months ago and get started. I made a very intentional decision that instead of keeping the idea too much under wraps and keeping it behind an NDA, I decided that I was going to talk with absolutely everybody who would talk with me about it. And in doing so I was able to figure out who else is out there who cares about it, who else is working on something similar. I wanted to know if there was somebody else that was working on the same idea and was ahead of us, I wanted to find them because I wanted to support them. And I needed to learn a lot in a short amount of time.

So just get going, surround yourself by people, and talk to people, and you'll be amazed at how far you can actually go.

SONIA DARA: Where can our listeners find you online?

MEGAN MCNALLY: You can find me at a couple places. You can find out more about our women's sports network at Diana.media. You can find our law firm at Doyenne-Legal.com.

SONIA DARA: And for our listeners, that's D-o-y-e-n-n-e.

MEGAN MCNALLY: And you can learn more about the F-Bomb Breakfast Club at FBombBreakfastClub.com.

SONIA DARA: Thank you so much, Megan, for joining us.

MEGAN MCNALLY: Thank you. This was fun.

NARRATION: Cutting Edge, our take on stories in the business and technology world.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: In this episode of Cutting Edge, we're going to discuss an article written by Kevin Maney that was published in *Newsweek* on December 11, entitled "*How AI Learns to be Sexist and Racist*." The subheading cuts right to the chase in positioning humans and not machines as the problematic factor here. The subheading reads, "If AI learns from human interaction, is it doomed to pick up our biases and excesses?"

SONIA DARA: Mark Yatskar of the Allen Institute for Artificial Intelligence is quoted as saying that "AI could work to not only reinforce existing social biases, but actually make them worse."

And the article cites an example of this in action: A group of University of Virginia computer science students trained an AI image-recognition software to tie certain scenes to gender. After scanning billions of images, the trained AI decided that shopping and washing are things women do, while coaching and shooting are things that men do.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Yeah, really amplifying the biases and excesses there.

Yeah, and another example of this comes from Boston University research team that trained AI on text from news articles. They then asked the software to complete this sentence, quote, "Man is to computer programmer as woman is to X," sort of like a fill in the blank. And the AI replied, "Homemaker."

SONIA DARA: So yeah, you may be thinking, "Okay, these are discrete examples, how will this really impact me in the workplace?"

And so Maney documents that both Bridgewater Associates and Tokyo tech company Ricoh are already recording and digitizing meetings, and that data that can actually be fed into AI.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: The bright side here is that computer scientists know this is a problem, and could potential tune AI to detect and counter bias. Maney reasons that, quote, "Once AI can spot the worst in us, software might help us be better humans."

SONIA DARA: But there's an underlying moral question here that Eric Horvitz, a Technical Fellow with Microsoft Research, calls out: "When should we change reality to make our systems perform in an aspirational way?"

In the absence of a unified societal response or a legal standard to answer that question, it's critical that we start making more progress toward workplace equity before AI learns from casual workplace sexism or systemic bad behavior.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Well, Sonia, that makes a dozen episodes, but this is definitely one of my favorites. I think it was really great to celebrate such a successful year with Alysondra Duke at the Lady Bosses Gala, you know, to be back in the studio chatting with you about AI and tech trends, and to really put pen-to-paper on some of my 2018 ambitions with Dona Sarkar's new book, *#DoTheThing*.

SONIA DARA: Yes, all goodness. And let's not forget a stellar conversation with Megan McNally. Her amazing levels of productivity have me feeling even more ambitious about this year, like really trying to be to her level.

If you want to help keep that inspiration momentum going, we could really use your help to make our show more discoverable. Please remember to rate, review, and subscribe to the show.

And if you know of someone who might love the *Women in Business & Technology* podcast, please let that person know! We'd really appreciate your recommendation.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: As always, you can find us on Apple Podcasts, Google Play, Spotify, YouTube or wherever you listen to podcasts. You can also find us on SoundCloud, where we recently launched.

And if you have any feedback or questions, please email us at WIBT@microsoft.com, or Tweet us [@MicrosoftWomen](https://twitter.com/MicrosoftWomen).

SONIA DARA: And finally, your mission for episode 12, if you choose to accept it, is to volunteer at a nonprofit that supports women. Catch-a-fire is a website that matches skilled professional volunteers with nonprofits by aggregating an evolving list of dozens of projects. To get started, head to [Catchafire.org](https://catchafire.org), click on "Find a project" and under causes, select "Women's Issues," and there you'll see all of the projects supporting women-centric nonprofits. Whether you're a great at marketing, grant-writing, board governance, software training, or whatever, there's a great way for you to support the broader global community of women.

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