

Women in Business and Technology

Transcript of Episode 015 - Becoming the CEO of your dreams with Serrah Linares

Featuring: Serrah Linares

Summary: Colleen and Sonia debrief on an event called #MeToo in Seattle Tech: What Men Can Do, a gathering where male allies learned more about how to support women at work. Then, Colleen talks all about the intersection of healthcare and tech, as well as the HIMSS18 conference with Serrah Linares, the Global Vice President of Sales and Commercial Operations at KenSci. To wrap it up, our hosts discuss the #MentorHer campaign launched by Sheryl Sandberg's LeanIn.org.

Find audio and more information at Microsoft.com/WIBT

(Opening music.)

VOICEOVER: I think I figured out how to be CEO of my dreams really young. I made a decision of what I wanted, and I worked hard to get it, and then I made a decision of something else I wanted, and I did the same thing, and repeatability got me to where I am today. So dream it and own it.

(HIMSS 18 advertisement.)

VOICEOVER: You're listening to the *Women in Business and Technology* podcast from Microsoft. In each episode, you will hear from women in amazing technology and business roles, as well as male allies who are helping make the industries more inclusive, and bring you tips on how to build a successful career in a supportive community. Welcome to *Women in Business and Technology*. (Music.)

SONIA DARA: Welcome to Episode 15 of *Women in Business and Technology*. I'm Sonia Dara.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: And I'm Colleen O'Brien.

SONIA DARA: We're starting the show in our Community Connect segment with a recap on a local event called #MeToo in Seattle Tech: What Men Can Do.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: And then we'll jump into an interview I had with Serrah Linares, the global vice president of sales and commercial operations at KenSci, a company that created a machine-learning-powered risk prediction platform for healthcare.

SONIA DARA: And, finally, we'll wrap things up in our Cutting Edge segment with a discussion about MentorHer, a campaign launched by Sheryl Sandberg's LeanIn.org to encourage men to commit to mentoring women.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Before we dive in, we again want to encourage you to listen all the way through to the end of the show. In Episode 8, we started closing each show with these small tasks that you can tackle to better invest in your career and promote workplace inclusion. Stay tuned all the way through for those missions.

(Music.)

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Sonia, it's great to have you back in the studio. What were you up to in sunny California?

SONIA DARA: I feel like I'm never in Seattle. (Laughter.)

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: I know.

SONIA DARA: You have to always ask where I've been. Yeah, I was just in LA. I got to attend a conference called Solidworks World. Solidworks is a partner of ours on Surface, so we're showing off some of our hardware, Surface Studio, Surface Book. I ran into Easton LaChappelle, who's actually one of our Microsoft People of Action. He creates a bionic arm, so that was super casual. He's 19 years old. He's a really big deal.

It was really great getting to show off our devices and the CAD software that they have there, so now we're back in a little less sunny Seattle.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Yes. Things in the Pacific Northwest have been a little bit rainy here.

SONIA DARA: Yeah, what did you get up to?

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Well, I recently checked out this workshop called We Are Game Changers.

SONIA DARA: Nice.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Love the name of it. That was run by the Center for Leadership in Athletics at the University of Washington, which of course is my grad school alma mater. It was this half-day training to prepare women to coach youth sports. I don't know if that's something that I'm really ready to commit to just yet, but I wanted to check it out and see what the opportunities were.

SONIA DARA: Yeah, I mean, I know you very well and that you don't have kids, so I'd imagine most people might not think about coaching youth sports until they maybe have kids of their own?

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Yeah.

SONIA DARA: That thought didn't really cross my mind. (Laughter.)

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: You're 100 percent right. Most of the attendees were moms who had just started coaching their kids' teams and were hoping for more guidance or support. But, you know, these workshop instructors explained that there is a shortage of coaches in youth sports, and they presented this other problem, that there's this dangerous trend in the "adultification" of sports. You may have felt this growing up playing youth sports but, you know, pushing kids to become elite at young ages or emphasizing winning over teamwork and, you know, discouraging enjoyment of an otherwise really enjoyable activity.

In the workshop, the research showed that training more women to get into coaching could help solve both of these major problems -- this "adultification" and the shortage of coaches in youth sports more holistically.

SONIA DARA: Yeah, I also know you super well in that you aren't the biggest sports fan. I'm pretty sure I'm the one who drags you to watch all the Seahawks and Falcons games.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Yeah.

SONIA DARA: So why did you decide to go for this particular workshop?

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Well, this may be hard to believe, but I used to be an athlete. (Laughter.)

SONIA DARA: Ah, this is prior to college me knowing you. (Laughter.)

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Yeah. I played field hockey and tennis and soccer and I ran track and when I think back to my elementary school experience, middle school, and even high school, coaches were some of the greatest role models that I had in those settings.

You know, at this stage in our life here at Microsoft, we're inviting career mavens into the studio, but when I was 17, my field hockey coach, Barbara Locke, was the person who was teaching me these values and goal setting and what it meant to work hard -- shout out to Coach Locke, thank you so much for making me the person I am today.

SONIA DARA: In Massachusetts.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Yes. So if you're searching for a way to be a role model for girls or young women, don't discount how much impact you can have building confidence and teaching resilience on the field or on the court. (Music.)

VOICEOVER: Community Connect, get involved and stay connected.

SONIA DARA: On January 24th, Microsoft producer and friend of the podcast Sam Mata headed to the Northwest Film Forum in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood for an event titled #MeToo in Seattle Tech: What Men Can Do.

The event was organized by the Tech Workers Coalition, a group guided by a vision for an inclusive and equitable tech industry in association with the activist organization Women of Color Speak Out. Over 100 people attended the event, and men comprised about 2/3 of the audience.

The event organizers revealed the results of a survey that they had circulated at local tech companies in which people shared their experiences of gender-based discrimination and harassment. The survey found that of the 204 women and non-binary respondents, 81 percent of them said that they had experienced gender-based discrimination or harassment at work.

Tech worker and event panelist Caty Caldwell explained that the gathering sought to provide a space specifically for men to wrestle with their complicity in this problem.

CATY CALDWELL: There are a number of women in tech events, and men just don't really have the space or the opening to actually wrestle with a lot of these issues. And a lot of HR tends to focus more on diversity and inclusion, but they tend to focus on, like, the marginalized folks. It's important for folks who aren't necessarily marginalized to think about ways in which they can be part of the solution and they can start brainstorming and realize that it goes back to that "ally versus solidarity" comment that I made earlier. It's like, "Hey, this isn't just your fight, this is our fight."

And so it's really to get folks that aren't typically a part of the conversation to really be part of the conversation and to wrestle with the solution.

SONIA DARA: The primary purpose of the event was to provide tactics that attendees could start exercising in the workplace to combat sexism. Software engineer and event panelist Austin Valeske explained some of the recommendations that bubbled up in the aforementioned survey.

AUSTIN VALESKE: It came up on the panel before I answered the question was, like, there's both individual things you can do and then also a need for systemic change. And so individual -- individual things aren't going to cause -- like, lead to that systemic change, but they will help in the near term.

Some of the examples that we saw women asking for were, like, when I get talked over in a meeting, call it out and, like, give me the floor again. Or when someone takes my idea, credit me and give me the floor again. There were a lot of just, like, make sure, like, help make space for women.

Other things are, like, when you see something happen, go and -- and the woman wants to report it to HR, back her up. HR often listens to men, but not to women. And so if you provide that voice for her, super her -- support what she's telling HR, then they might actually listen and might actually solve the problem.

SONIA DARA: Yin Yu was part of the event planning team and explained the responsibilities of allies -- especially those in leadership positions -- to understand the vocabulary of power dynamics and to proactively acknowledge and address embedded hierarchy.

YIN YU: Well, I think first is actually learning to name what sexism is, what taking up space is, what patriarchy is, what -- just being in practice of naming those dynamics, because you know, I didn't know how to name ageism until a youth modeled it for me and was able to take over a space and name that very respectfully and powerfully and then I observed and learned how to do that the next time.

And so I think in the spaces and the examples that were shared tonight is about how do we recognize, "Oh, wait, I'm taking up too much space, can we invite other folks that haven't spoken?" Especially using, like, a term in social justice called "progressive stack," where, you know, those most marginalized speak first, have that to be a principle. Whether it's in a meeting or any space that we're in, have that to be, like, a basic principle that, you know, we're going to progressive stack the space.

SONIA DARA: For more information about the Tech Workers Coalition and their work with existing movements towards social justice, workers' rights, and economic inclusion, visit TechWorkersCoalition.org. And for more information about Women of Color Speak out and their work as intersectional movement activists, visit WOCspeakout.com.

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

(Music.)

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: I'm excited to welcome to the studio the global vice president of sales and circumstantial operations at KenSci, Serrah Linares. Serrah, welcome.

SERRAH LINARES: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: KenSci is the company that builds a machine-learning-powered risk prediction platform for healthcare. Can you tell us a little bit more about that product and what your role is in working on it and working for that company?

SERRAH LINARES: Absolutely. So many of us are familiar with machine learning and this kind of technology in using things like Google Maps on our phone and how much we trust that. Healthcare is lacking that. So KenSci has built a platform that allows them to do things that Google, Microsoft, and others have done in their businesses, but for healthcare, with a motivation to help patients actually live a longer life. And by doing that, the healthcare providers and payers need to be able to be proactive and not reactive. And these insights that we can produce from all the data they have been collecting allows them to do that.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Can you give me a tactical example of what that data might look like or how someone might be using it?

SERRAH LINARES: Absolutely. I'll use a local hospital here in Seattle as an example where we can use data to help them predict who's going to walk into their emergency department and what kind of things are going to happen in terms of the conditions or the emergencies they're facing, how many of them are truly serious, and how many may just be a convenience where their child has a cold or something that they just need to be seen urgently for.

That will help to reduce the time they spend in the ED waiting, and many of us have had those experiences waiting in emergency rooms, and so that they can be seen faster through having better staffing or be routed to a better course of care.

And that's just one small example in comparison to a larger example where some patients end up dying in the hospital with diseases and conditions they didn't even know they had. And they don't have that opportunity to chat with their family to know ahead of time that they have these things. And so data can help the hospital identify these people ahead of time, and to be able to say, "Listen, maybe five years earlier, you may start to develop heart failure, you may start to see signs of diabetes. And if we offer this service to you or this program or assisted you in this way, would you be open to having those conversations with us?"

So it enables some of those conversations to happen about people's health, you know, in an end-of-life stage as an example.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: You're talking about this technology that will, ultimately, help an end user, an individual, but your audience focus is primarily on healthcare institutions, that's who is using this type of technology?

SERRAH LINARES: Absolutely. And I'll classify it as the following: Our mission is to help people. And to do that, we need to work through the providers and the payers who provide healthcare to all of us, and give them the insights they need.

So imagine that -- back to the analogy of the maps. Imagine if our providers and payers had a Google Map for their patients that they know where they're at, where they need to go.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Right.

SERRAH LINARES: And that they could guide them better, and that that's transparent to us. That's what KenSci's trying to enable.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: And prior to joining KenSci last year, you held previous roles at HealthTap, Wolters Kluwer Health, and Spok -- all companies that are at this intersection of technology and healthcare. What drew you to this particular part of the healthcare industry?

SERRAH LINARES: Well, in my earlier career, I was working across many enterprise verticals. And in doing so, I had the opportunity to work in healthcare. And a few years into my career, I developed a passion for it. Thinking ahead for the rest of my career, and on the journey of healthcare, what kind of disruptions were in for the industry? And it looked really exciting and promising to be able to focus on.

And as I began to specialize more, that became more and more real. And as you see in my career, then a part of many disruptive technologies that have been brought to the healthcare industry to make that industry better.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Absolutely. And did you always know that you wanted to be at this intersection? Can you share a little bit more about your upbringing and your education?

SERRAH LINARES: I think the first indication was an interest in science fiction and technology at a young age.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Interesting.

SERRAH LINARES: Yeah. And I remember reading a book that was published in 1959, and it was illustrative and had what the future home would look like. And this was in the '80s when I read the book. And many of the things in that book had come to fruition.

The realization I had was the movies I was watching and the television shows of that time were possibly going to come true. That was fascinating to me.

And I had an opportunity early in my career to work at Citi, and in the financial industry, there's technology they're consuming and using. And the role I played was to roll out a financial management platform for the organization where I had the opportunity to see how you implement technology, how it affects the workplace, how to optimize, how to get a return on investment from a technology product.

I actually had no intentions of staying in the field. I was at the Art Institute of Chicago at the time thinking that I might, you know, have a completely different future that had nothing to do with technology and it was that experience that made me realize and recognize that that was the path forward and it actually changed my education path, too.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: The chief marketing officer of Microsoft sometimes, you know, when he's giving this guidance about career planning and figuring out what your next step is, he really encourages people that he's mentoring to look for the one thing in their current role that they can use to swing to their next role. And it seems like that technology rollout was something that brought you into the next role.

SERRAH LINARES: It absolutely was.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: It seems like you don't have extensive formal engineering in your background. How do you establish trust with your coworkers in this field? How do you communicate the value that you're specifically bringing to the work without the technical terminology or the formal education there?

SERRAH LINARES: It started early in my career at Spok. And the first example I wanted to share with you is the environment I walked into at that time in the early 2000s. It was communication, it was engineering, it was 100 percent male dominated, they were all engineers.

So I had to establish, first of all, respect.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Right.

SERRAH LINARES: And so I worked -- they worked eight hours, I worked 16. If they said, "Jump this high," I jumped higher. And when they had situations where they couldn't keep up with the workload, I figured out how I could jump in, understand, and be a partner. And that created, first of all, respect. And then building trust came in me taking the time to understand in the case of Spok, we were delivering technology that if not working functionally, if ever down, in healthcare, could mean a patient's life.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Wow.

SERRAH LINARES: That's a totally different level of engineering complexity and intensity than other industries.

So I wanted to make sure if I'm on the ground representing an opportunity for a customer to use a technology that will help them save lives or function better as an organization, I wanted to make sure that we could deliver.

So I partnered very closely with them to understand and make sure that they were informed on the risks and the opportunities that I was bringing to bear and how this technology would be used, things like persona and journey mapping, to help them understand that and to be clear on the risks and even do walk-throughs in some of our customers. And, likewise, they would let me shadow them.

And they had a case, I'll give an example of a project where we were short staff to deliver, I jumped in and was project manager. There was a time we needed specs on a code and we didn't have people to write some of the personas and the journeys, I jumped in and did it. And so just working side by side, I was able to learn. And that was early in my career.

Now where I am at KenSci, I have lots of experience. The engineering team invites me to their conversations. They can't wait for my perspective --

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: What a win.

SERRAH LINARES: -- and likewise, they come out and join me in the field. So it's really been an approach that's worked for me.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: I've had a very similar experience working in these non-technical roles, but supporting very technical teams. Anything that I could do to really break down the silos that we were previously working in, or assumed to be working in, those were the ways that I best connected and came to be thought of as a strategic partner in bringing our products to market and not just someone to pitch ideas over the fence to. That's really great advice, thanks for sharing that experience.

So in preparing for this interview, I spent quite a bit of time on the KenSci website where they represent both the leadership team that's driving the company mission that you reference, and the board of directors. You, Serrah, are the only woman on that leadership team at the company at present.

In December of 2017, the Center for Disease Control reported that women comprise nearly 80 percent of the roles in healthcare. Of course those numbers are significantly smaller in the tech field, and you're sitting at that intersection. But why are so few women making it to leadership positions?

SERRAH LINARES: That's a great question, and I want to first say with respect to KenSci's current state of affairs, we are very anxious to continue having more women join us, so we do look forward to that.

And in my findings over my career, there's many great role models that I've had a chance to meet who are women in this field and going to conferences, which we'll chat about I'm sure more later, is a way for you to connect with those leaders and understand their stories, their journeys.

As it relates to the challenges and those who are not in those roles, what are the reasons why they have been challenged to even think of themselves in that role or get roles like that? And I hear a lot from people the sacrifice is an intimidation. So to be in roles of leadership often requires sacrifice beyond normal. Whether that's more hours or travel, intensity and stresses. And a lot of people I meet don't feel that they can give that commitment to the role.

And I'll give you some examples. I've had some women I've worked with who they felt the expectations, if they've ever had management roles, was to work on weekends, to work evenings, to work, you know, 60 to 80 hours a week. And a lot of women are also battling with what roles they have in their home -- being a mother and being a wife. And they may not even have the support they need from their home or even in their culture to go do these things.

So I have heard some of those barriers, but by and large, I think there's a huge number of women in emerging leadership roles that are about to get these seats. And so I think you're going to see a bit shift in the next five years of more women not only at KenSci, but across the board in leadership roles at the board level and the CEO and CXO level.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: What I hear you saying is there's this perception of what being in leadership means, that's not necessarily matching up with the reality. But even thinking about what those long hours might look like or what your day-to-day might look like is enough to discourage people from participating. Do you find that your day-to-day matches up with that perception, the intensity, the long hours? Or is the workplace, specifically at KenSci, evolving more to include more people in the conversation?

SERRAH LINARES: I think that there's an intensity to that responsibility no matter what, and no matter what gender you are. And you need to be aware of what you're signing up for. And I think the best are great at life balance and making things work.

So rather than working all day long and all night long, having an opportunity to take a break in between and run a personal errand or make that, you know, soccer game for your child exist, and I think people don't realize the flexibility is there, that this intensity is self-driven and that you really just want to succeed, and that's why you're working

that hard. But you could fit it into your own schedule, you could build your life, you know, around that.

And so that's something I think is the perception that's missing, that they don't realize you can build your life around your leadership role.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Right, like it sounds like women are talking themselves out of something before understanding where those flexibilities might lie in the workday, for example.

SERRAH LINARES: Yeah. And these are just some of the conversations I've had. I think there are barriers in some organizations where there's a need to create these opportunities where women are welcome at that table. At KenSci, that's not the case. At KenSci, it's very much open and it's just a matter of as we grow, making sure that women know we're a beacon for them to come to and that they can come be successful here.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: What a great message. You know, we previously had a conversation with Microsoft Corporate Vice President Julia White about this specific topic. And I wonder if you ever feel pressured as a woman in this field to have a public presence, to demonstrate to that next generation that might otherwise be talking themselves out of it that what you've accomplished is possible for them as well?

SERRAH LINARES: I do. In fact, you may not believe it, but I'm an introvert. And that's not a good combination for being in sales, so I've had to get out of my comfort zone throughout my whole career.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Absolutely. Wow, that's really impressive.

SERRAH LINARES: But with that, I've also had to make time to be in the spotlight as much as I can to demonstrate that for women. So I think it's very important and there's opportunities like we're in now, but all over the place where you can help women see that.

I think of a partner of mine, Dr. Josh Luke, who runs a bunch of conferences in the healthcare space. And he specifically looks for women who can join the panel and get their first-time exposure to speaking even --

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Yes.

SERRAH LINARES: -- to becoming a leader. And he specifically searches women in healthcare that can come join these conferences, and will promote panelists -- facilitators to panel members to become speakers. And he and I partnered to find

women that might be candidates for that. And so I'm constantly sending him referrals for his conferences.

But I look for people like that, that are making it available for us to have a spotlight and to have a chance to be diversified when you go to these events and you see who's on the panel, to start seeing someone and taking charge and leading as well.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: That is such a great example of male allyship and advocacy and such a wonderful partnership that you've built up with him, you know, to feel confident of sending over the profiles of women who are really qualified and would be great speakers, but otherwise maybe undiscoverable by him on the day-to-day. So that's a really great example of admirable male advocacy.

I also wanted to make a comment on your mention of your introversion, of identifying as an introvert. I also really identify as an introvert and have to do a lot of preparation for these types of conversations in order to feel respectful and prepared and ready for them. And throughout my personal development and professional development, I've constantly sought out these ways to be on stage more, to be presenting more, knowing that my natural tendency is to want to sit at my desk and do a lot of deep thinking and communicate primarily via e-mail.

So just from a place of compassion there and really identifying with the way that you perceive the world, I really respect that you take the time to have such a public presence. I know that can be really challenging and I appreciate that you do that.

SERRAH LINARES: Well, thank you. I'm happy to do it, and it helps me get out of my comfort zone, which is a good practice to have always.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Yes. Serrah, my mom is a registered nurse, so I always had healthcare representation in my life. And this is going to sound really silly, but I started considering healthcare yet again when I started watching Shonda Rhimes' show, *Grey's Anatomy*. You know, on this show, I saw so many women who were leading teams in that space, and it was like a really thrilling environment to watch that type of leadership.

On this show, we oftentimes quote Marian Wright Edelman's famous expression, "You can't be what you can't see." What can we do to get more women leaders, like yourself, who are making waves in the industry, into the spotlight -- whether it's on the next Shonda Rhimes show or otherwise -- so that we might change these trends?

SERRAH LINARES: Well, I think, first of all, a lot of women, and especially people like me that are super busy not only working, but I'm raising a family and trying to be a wife at the same time, and you don't slow down to be aware of these opportunities and to take advantage of them. So the more we can do to make sure people are aware of the

opportunity, like what Microsoft has done to communicate that there's a *Women in Tech* blog, that you have podcasts -- I didn't know about that prior to our conversation.

And I think many women would rise to the occasion to be available for things like this across many forums, and it's just a matter of how we market to them. Maybe we can use machine learning to find them. (Laughter.)

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Ooh! I like that idea.

SERRAH LINARES: What about that? But I also think that there's -- thinking about inspiring women, back to television, it's amazing how far along we've come in television with seeing women role models in many shapes and forms. And I think that that is planting a really important seed in all women and all girls around the world when they watch these things to know what that persona looks like.

It was inspirational to me. I think back to Heather Locklear in *Melrose Place* and her suit and her power days, and honestly, when I went to Art Institute of Chicago, I thought, "I'm going to be a powerhouse advertiser and have all these skills and use my creativity." And that was inspired by a character.

And so what shows you watch, what characters that you see on television and in the movies, I think are inspirations and you end up connecting with that later in life if you're watching as a child, when you meet mentors that intersect with that and help you become the person that you want to be with the persona that you've dreamed of.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: It's so great that you hear that. You know, Sonia and I previously had a conversation about the latest NASA class, and they talked to each of the women in the latest NASA class about who their role models were.

And one of these astronauts mentioned Miss Frizzle, who was the teacher --

SERRAH LINARES: Oh, my gosh!

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: -- on *The Magic School Bus*.

SERRAH LINARES: I totally remember that one.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: And it struck me as so funny that we're constantly looking for this inspiration and these role models in our life, and for a long time, for women, those were so difficult to find that someone literally needed to grasp onto a cartoon character in order to keep feeling that inspiration.

SERRAH LINARES: Absolutely. I love that.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Although you're the only woman on the KenSci leadership team, you recently shared in an interview on the *Microsoft Enterprise Blog* that women comprise 50 percent of your team. What an awesome stat. And that KenSci is making specific investments in making the workplace more gender inclusive. Can you share what some of those investments are?

SERRAH LINARES: Well, first of all, thinking back to our leadership roles and the need to have more women on the team, when we have important roles in our company to fill where the applicant diversity isn't there, we are willing to spend money on outside recruiting help to make sure that we've brought in as many viable diverse candidates as possible.

So not to say we are explicitly looking to hire a woman for a role, but to say we want to make sure we have a good diversity of candidates to choose from and that women are in that mix. So that's an investment we choose to make. We don't need to go that extra mile, we have plenty of candidates, but we choose to. And that would be one example at that level.

Further, I think about the investments in our work environment and the women that are in the organization. And so the Women of KenSci group do meet, and there's investments we make and initiatives that we decide we want to work on. And, furthermore, for those who may be in a life stage where they need access to things like a nursing room, we made sure even though we are tight for space, that we maintain a room available for mothers who are nursing. I don't have anyone in that capacity now, but I wasn't going to give up that room, because you never know when that will change, or what new employee may walk in the door where that makes a difference in their decision.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Yes, absolutely. That allocation of space could be, you know, what wins a candidate over to see that you are making those types of investments. It's great to hear.

You mentioned the Women of KenSci. I will admit that I've been following you on Twitter and saw your recent photo post from a lunch for the Women of KenSci. What do you think is the value of having shared identity groups at work, and can you share some of the programming that that group engages in?

SERRAH LINARES: Absolutely. So with the Women of KenSci, that's one of many groups at KenSci. We even have a Games of Thrones group, as an example.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Oh, wow.

SERRAH LINARES: Oh, yeah. So the idea is really to bring people together outside of their normal functions, people who may not actually engage together normally, and

have an opportunity to cross over those boundaries and just get together. So it brings a lot of value, irrespective of the subgroup name.

For the Women of KenSci, we've taken on ambassadorship of what that means in our culture. And we want to make sure that we have a closed-loop feedback to our leadership team and to the organization on making sure that we're enabling women to be successful and that we aren't accidentally inheriting biases that sometimes happen and you don't even realize it as you're growing a company.

And so in our group, we talk about things like our culture, and we do call-outs of things that we think need to be talked about at the leadership level of things that we may need to do differently, and then we sponsor all kinds of projects inside the company so the Women of KenSci can be contributing back to the organization.

An example also would be going to conferences and going to events. We'll nominate each other to go do different women in technology, or just in general conferences where women are being represented so that KenSci not only has a representation there, but that our teams have an opportunity, irrespective of their role, to get out and start engaging with other women leaders in the community.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: What a healthy conversation it sounds like you're having. You know, if I look back at some of the narrative around women in business and this notion of the glass ceiling, you oftentimes hear that women who made it through initially were not trying to help the women who came after them. And in total contrast to that, it sounds like you've created such a culture of people who are cheering each other on, who are supporting one another, providing opportunities for one another. It's not a competitive, you know, "My slice of the pie needs to be bigger than yours." It's this notion that we're all going to make the pie bigger, and let's all enjoy it together.

SERRAH LINARES: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: So, switching topics here. HIMSS is the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society, which is a global cause-based, not-for-profit organization focused on better health through information technology.

They host an annual conference, which will take place this year in Las Vegas from March 5th through the 9th, and that's called HIMSS 18. We've been talking a little bit about that on our show.

I know that you will be there. What are you most looking forward to at the event this year?

SERRAH LINARES: Well, I will consider myself a veteran of the HIMSS event -- more than a decade of attending.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Wow.

SERRAH LINARES: And in that time, colleagues have become friends, and those lines are blurred a bit and there's so many I don't have an opportunity to see throughout the year. And it becomes quite a reunion when we all get together.

But that reunion is not just about saying hello, it's about supporting each other and helping each other to achieve their dreams, whatever that might be.

And so there could be networking that occurs, introductions that happen, encouragement, storytelling, and groups -- you know, people that we bring to the group and new groups that we engage with. So I look forward to seeing a lot of those folks doing that networking.

In particular this year at the show, I'm very excited about the AI topic. So artificial intelligence, you know, is a buzzword, of course. It reminds me of buzzwords of past like "population health" when that first came out. And I'm interested in all the stories about AI and what's real, what are the barriers, what are the successes? And there are more than 20 speakers from payers from healthcare organizations who are standing up on stage talking about how they're applying this technology and making a difference in patients' lives, making a difference in the lives of nurses and physicians who may be experiencing burnout with the workloads that they're carrying and all the technology that they're responsible for using as well.

So I look forward to hearing more about what are those successes and challenges and networking more with people that are focused on turning AI into something that's real and creating ROI not just for the hospital or the payer, but for us as patients. Is it going to help us get better access to care? Is it going to help us reduce our healthcare cost? Is it going to help me know what things I need to know about my health and the health of my family and loved ones so that we can all thrive?

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: It sounds like there are quite a few reasons -- networking and learning about the latest technology applications among them -- for attending a conference like this. How do you think about conferences more broadly as a career investment? In other words, how should our listeners think about getting the most value out of the financial investments that come with going to conferences, which are oftentimes very expensive.

SERRAH LINARES: They can be. For me, the ROI being in sales is a little easier equation. You know, we're looking to network, and through networking, we find new opportunities, and that can translate into sales. Not everyone goes for that reason. Other reasons to go are education and networking, and so the ROI on that is your investment in your career.

And I'll give some examples. There are several folks I've worked with in the past who were in a realm of healthcare technology, and they weren't sure if they could pivot to some of these newer disruptive technologies if they had to go back to school or how they would go about making the transition.

And HIMSS, and other conferences, provides so many educational forums that I think rapidly gets you up to speed on what you really need to know to first make a decision if that's the right transition for you, but second, to have confidence to apply anyway. You don't need to go back to school to go learn a new technology. If you've got the basic foundation, you can go learn more.

So whether it's technology or it's techniques like I recently went to an event where we got into design thinking, and it had nothing to do with healthcare, but design thinking is important in all aspects of what we do, and just to take time to connect with others on the topic and think about how do these techniques apply to what I'm doing and how can they help my customers really was beneficial.

So for me, it was about education for myself, but for others, I would recommend making sure you think about it as an investment in your career to keep you relevant and to help you make decisions on pivots, especially if you're in a technology field, there will be many pivots over the next, you know, many decades that we'll have to be sharp on. And so conferences give you a way to do that.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: That's such a great call-out because I think if you're thinking about education more holistically or I guess even more broadly, any commitment to education is going to be an investment and conferences can give you little bite-sized chunks of all of the investments that you might make. So it seems like a good place to put those dollars that will give you a really broad view on where the industry is going and what you might want to invest even more heavily in.

SERRAH LINARES: Absolutely. And I'll just add, in our case, we have, at HIMSS, a presence from our engineering and product team, and they will be empowered to go attend many of these sessions and network. And it is a significant investment, so we're consciously treating the investment like an educational opportunity.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Excellent, good point of view to have, and a good, I think, talk track to help pitch your manager on why that conference is a good investment for you to attend.

We've spoken on this show a little bit about the intersection of gender and industry conferences. Most recently, Sonia and I discussed some of the news coverage of the Consumer Electronic Show, which unfortunately hasn't hosted a woman keynote speaker since 2016, in the past two years.

We also had Frances Donegan-Ryan in the studio early on in our show tenure to discuss the community that she manages, which is called Janes of Digital. That community was created in response to seeing so few, if any, women on panels at advertising conferences. And, you know, quite frankly, also in this effort to create a safe space alternative to big conference parties and nightlife.

Can you speak to this intersection of gender in conferences in the healthcare and technology space? Are there any similar themes worth calling out?

SERRAH LINARES: Absolutely. We had a conversation about this at our recent lunch with the Women of KenSci, and it was called out by someone on a team that they were quite offended last year at HIMSS with some, say, "sexy nurse" kind of models that were in the booth. And I thought, "Gosh, is that necessary? Why do we need that happening?" So it was interesting to hear someone else share some of the frustrations.

I'll say, by and large, though, in healthcare conferences, I find so much diversity in women buyers these days, that the booths are not appealing just to a man. And in most cases, the use of models has gone down. I even have some friends in the industry that have said the percentage of model bookings is much lower for healthcare conferences than other types.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Wow. Interesting.

SERRAH LINARES: Isn't that great? I'll have to go back and get that stat.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Yeah. The phrase in technology is "booth babes," and it's interesting to see that that even translates across.

SERRAH LINARES: Exactly. So what I find is key, first of all, being in a position of making a decision of what booth experience I want. You know, I appeal to all kinds of buyers, all kinds of people coming through, you know, and at KenSci and equally at Microsoft in the booth, you won't see that. And I'm seeing that trend across a lot of organizations making that commitment, first and foremost. So that's positive news.

But I will say, I get worried a little bit about the evening events and things like the parties and the social hours are a chance where people can let their hair down a little bit. And I think women need to be aware of their safety in those environments, and to make sure that they're in settings that they feel comfortable in and they don't feel pressured to go to events and do things that don't lead to business and networking.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Serrah, what advice do you have for someone who is listening to your story and is inspired to pursue a job like yours, or maybe even wants to have your job one day?

SERRAH LINARES: Well, I'll give it up. I look forward to somebody coming in and taking my job, would love that, and especially if it's a woman. So how would you do that? First of all, I was talking with the group about my story of how I even got started -- back to the Women of KenSci lunch. And I was asked to talk about how I got my start. And one of the things that dawned on me is I think I've figured out how to be CEO of my dreams really young.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Ooh! I love that.

SERRAH LINARES: I took ownership of it. And I made a decision of what I wanted, and I worked hard to get it, and then I made a decision of something else I wanted, and I did the same thing, and repeatability got me to where I am today. So own it, dream it and own it.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: That's great advice. Serrah, where can our listeners find you on the Internet if they want more of this inspiration, more of the latest cutting-edge news on that intersection of health and technology? Where can everyone find you?

SERRAH LINARES: I post a lot on Twitter. You mentioned earlier that you saw me there, so you'll find me there, and daily updates and retweets and all kinds of news that I'll share.

Also open on LinkedIn, so send me an invite there, happy to connect. And, finally, if you're interested in some of my travels and the places I've been that also are inspiring to me anyway, you can find me on Instagram.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Excellent. What's your Instagram handle?

SERRAH LINARES: SerrahL. S-E-R-R-A-H-L.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Thank you so much for being with us here in the studio today. I really appreciate that you have taken the time.

SERRAH LINARES: Thank you so much. I appreciate being here. (Music.)

VOICEOVER: Cutting Edge, our take on stories in the business and technology world. (Music.)

SONIA DARA: On February 6th, Sheryl Sandberg's nonprofit organization, LeanIn.org, launched a campaign called #MentorHer. In a Facebook post, she addressed that in the wake of the #MeToo movement, men might think that the way to address workplace sexual harassment is to avoid one-on-one time with female colleagues, including interactions that help us work together effectively, like meetings or coffee breaks.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: This may sound silly, but Sheryl Sandberg backs this fear up with data. A recent survey by Lean In and Survey Monkey revealed that almost half of male managers in the United States are now uncomfortable participating in basic activities with women. Senior men are 3.5 times more likely to hesitate to have a work dinner alone with a junior woman than a junior man, and five times more likely to hesitate to travel for work alone with a woman.

SONIA DARA: Yeah, this probably goes without saying, but fewer interactions with colleagues, especially those in leadership positions, will likely decrease the number of opportunities that women have at work. Sandberg said it perfectly, "The last thing women need right now is even more isolation."

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Sandberg calls on men who want to be on the right side of history to do something about it -- specifically, to mentor women. The #MentorHer campaign urges men to use their power in the workplace to support women. People with mentors are more likely to get promoted, yet women are less likely than men to be mentored, and women of color get the least support of all.

SONIA DARA: By committing to mentor women, men are ultimately investing in getting more women into leadership. And when more women are in leadership, organizations offer more generous policies and produce better business results.

You can see all of the studies that demonstrate those findings, read more about the campaign, and find resources to help you be a great mentor at [LeanIn.org](https://leanin.org). (Music.)

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: And that's a wrap on Episode 15. Thanks again to Sam for getting us some great coverage on location at the #MeToo in Seattle Tech event, and of course to the University of Washington Center for Leadership in Athletics for hosting an amazing coaching workshop.

SONIA DARA: And I've already subscribed to the *Amazing If: Squiggly Careers* podcast to keep getting helpful and inspirational advice from Helen Tupper, you interviewed. Season two just launched, so listeners be sure to check that out.

And I've also started sharing the MentorHer campaign resources around with my colleagues. I'm lucky enough to have a few men who are already providing mentorship in my career, but I really do want to make that more of a norm.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Listeners, as always, please remember to rate, review, and subscribe to the show. All of those actions help more people find us. And maybe you've been chatting with a few of the men in your workplace or social circles who want to help in the wake of the #MeToo movement. This is a great episode to share over to them.

As always, you can find us on Apple Podcasts, Google Play, Spotify, YouTube, SoundCloud, or wherever you listen to podcasts.

Our website is wibt.com, and if you have any feedback or questions, please e-mail us at WIBT@microsoft.com, or tweet us @MicrosoftWomen.

SONIA DARA: Your mission for this episode, if you choose to accept it, is to do some salary research. Maybe you've just been promoted or you're not ready to ask for a raise, but awareness on this topic is key. There's a lot of information behind paywalls online, but Glassdoor.com and Salary.com both provide salary benchmarks without requiring the submission of personal information. So, listeners, get informed and know your worth!

(Music.)

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