

## Women in Business and Technology

Transcript of Episode 017 - Taking the Better Together Pledge with Jonathan Sposato

Featuring: Lauren Wesley Wilson, Jonathan Sposato

Summary: Colleen shares an update on her exploration of sports and leadership after checking out the Seattle Ignited Women Project and an F Bomb Cocktail Club event. Then, Sonia has a conversation with Lauren Wesley Wilson, the Founder and President of ColorComm. Colleen interviews serial entrepreneur, investor, and author Jonathan Sposato about his book, *Better Together: 8 Ways Working with Women Leads to Extraordinary Products and Profits*. Our hosts wrap it up with a conversation about women in cryptocurrency.

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So, number one, I'd said that because I truly, truly believe that your company, and your product, and your customer satisfaction, the culture that you eventually build and grow as your company scales, I believe all of that will be better, much better if you have a female co-founder, and someone at the very highest levels of a company, where you have that gender inclusion. If you start there, that's a great place to be. And there are just going to be a lot of positive benefits. Microsoft Build is our ultimate annual developer event, where the most innovative minds in tech meet to get inspired, create tomorrow, and code the future. The conference will take place from May 7th through the 9th at the Washington State Convention Center in Seattle, Washington. Programming will focus on artificial intelligence, machine learning, mixed reality. Cloud, data. And other emerging concepts. For more information about the event, or to register, head to [Microsoft.com/build](https://Microsoft.com/build). You are 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 small allies, who are helping make the industries more inclusive. I'm bringing you tips on how to build a successful career in a supportive community. Welcome to Women in Business and Technology. Welcome to Episode 17 of. Women in Business and Technology. I'm Sonia Dara. And I'm Colleen O'Brien. We're kicking off this episode with a conversation that I had with Lauren Wesley Wilson, the founder of ColorComm, an organization for women of color in communications. And then, we'll jump into an interview I had with Jonathan Sposato, a serial entrepreneur, investor, and the author of *Better Together: 8 Ways Working with. Women Leads to Extraordinary Products and Profits*. Finally, we'll wrap things up in our cutting edge segment with a discussion about a New York Times article entitled. Women in Cryptocurrencies Push Back Against. Blockchain Bros. But before we jump in, Colleen, I want to check in on your coaching status. Is your team headed for championships? Very funny. So, some of you may remember that back in episode 15 I had gone to a training program, aimed at getting women involved in coaching. And, while I haven't taken the leap, I've officially witnessed a recurring theme of leadership in athletics at a bunch of the events that I've been checking out in the Seattle area recently. Case in point, the FBomb Cocktail Club, which is brought to you by the same people who host the FBomb Breakfast Club. Last month, they featured the owners of the Seattle Storm,

the WNBA team here in the city. Lisa Brummel, the former Executive Vice President of Human Resources here at Microsoft, is one of the co-owners. And it was really cool to see her working with her team of other co-owners to build up greater support for women's athletics here in the Pacific Northwest. You got reacquainted with Lisa. I did. We miss her, she's been gone for a while now. So, have you actually ever seen the Storm in action? I'm really embarrassed to say that I have never been to a Seattle Storm game. No, me neither, I really want. And we live within. Within walking distance, we need to go. Within walking distance of the stadium. I'll buy us tickets. But after hearing from Lisa Brummel, and the other co-owners, I was pretty easily convinced, and I got tickets for the opening game. I guess you're taking me. Yeah, the 2018 season. It's against the Phoenix Mercury, so bring it on, Arizona. And after hearing from that team, it really made sense for me to be voting with my dollars, and buying these tickets was an easy way for me to lift my values, and support women in their pursuits. I see. And you said this was a trend that you've been seeing it among different events. So, what else is bubbling up at this intersection of empowerment through athletics? So, another program that I checked out last month was the Seattle Ignited Women Project, which is a gathering dedicated to redefining what success and strength mean as a woman. The event featured a killer panel with amazing women in sports, including crossfit champion Elizabeth Akinwale, the former US soccer women's national team midfielder Lori Lindsey, and ESPN journalist Dianna Russini. Of course, the event was coordinated by. Health and Fitness coach, Allison Tenney. So, this theme of strength and confidence was really present throughout the evening. On this show, we spend a lot of time talking about the intersection of business and technology, obviously, but the panel was this great reminder for me that women are championing for equality and leadership in industries across the board. So, Colleen, your a full-fledged sports fan now, huh? Well, I'm definitely dipping my toe into the water of sports fandom, but I am pretty steadfastly a supporter of women. Listeners, if you're up for some fandom too, you can check out [WNBA.com/tickets](http://WNBA.com/tickets) to cheer on your local team. Sonia, I'm going to make you go to that website after this. Yes, or I can join you for your tickets as well for the Phoenix game. Yes. And you can stay up to date on the latest FBomb events at [fbombbreakfastclub.com](http://fbombbreakfastclub.com), and you can read more about the Seattle Ignited Women Project at [seattleignitedwomenproject.com](http://seattleignitedwomenproject.com). I played basketball for three years in middle school. I didn't score once. What? I'm excited to see the Storm and see what they can do. I think you're going to get some really great tips, and advice, and visual guidance from the professionals. Community Connect. Get involved and stay connected. Last month I Skyped with Lauren Wesley Wilson, the founder and president of ColorComm, a networking organization focused on advancing the visibility of women of color in communications, marketing, advertising, and digital. Lauren, one of PRWeek's 50 most powerful and PR honorees, walk me through the history of the organization. We've been around for about seven years now. And we really started off as a luncheon, and then we grew to this community, and into this corporation. But back then, we had no intentions to be where we were. We really wanted to gather women to talk about how we could advance women of color in this space, and see more women of color in leadership positions. While ColorComm had humble beginnings, the corporation now offers dynamic programming, and multiple ways to get involved. We have a ColorComm network, we're in seven cities as a professional membership organization. And we have over 1000 paid members, and dues are 360 a year. And we're in DC, New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Dallas. We have a Fellows Program, we have a jobs board. We have a number of different things and work with the various brands on recruiting and retention before people in their companies. So, all in all, we've reached more than 40,000 professionals of color in the communications, marketing, advertising, and digital space. In addition to Evergreen Programs, ColorComm host two annual conferences. Lauren described what those

events have looked like in the past, and what she's looking forward to this year. We also produced two conferences. One focuses on executive leaders. Arianna Huffington, Gloria Steinem, Lisa Ling, Whoopi Goldberg have joined us for our annual conference that's in Miami every year. This year, it's going to be in Maui, Hawaii, for our fifth year. We're really thrilled to be there. And then we have our. Next Generation Conference in New York, hosted at Bloomberg headquarters. We're really bringing together the next generation of leaders. Lauren's own experience in the communications industry provided the motivation to start ColorComm. Well, it was actually my experience when I was working at Hill and Knowlton where I didn't see a person of color in leadership, and that's oftentimes a case is when you work in these type of environments where many of us feel like we're the only ones syndrome, where there's only less than a handful of people of color where we work. And even in our industry, it's an industry dominated by women as middle managers. But at the top are leaders and executive leaders as men, and sprinkled in between are a few people of color. So, this prompted through my experience of not seeing people who look like me in leadership. We're certainly there, president at the entry and mid-level, but when it comes to leadership, how do you know you're going to be able to grow in that company, if you don't see people who look like you? For more information about ColorComm, including a Men of Color in Communications Community that launched earlier this year, visit [colorcommnetwork.com](http://colorcommnetwork.com). That's ColorComm, spelled C-O-L-O-R-C-O-M-M. You can also read more from Lauren on the topic of women of color in business at [Forbes.com](http://Forbes.com). And now, let's get on with the interview. I am so thrilled to welcome to the studio former Microsoftee, serial entrepreneur and author of Better Together, Jonathan Sposato. Jonathan, welcome. Hey thanks for having me here, I'm so glad to be here. It's kind of a homecoming of sorts for me. Yes, absolutely. And we're going to dive a bit into that in our conversation. But I'd love to start off by talking about your book. Your book is entitled Better Together, eight ways working with women leads to extraordinary products and profits. And in the book intro, you outline some critical and quite frankly some jarring figures. Very few women are leading Fortune 500 companies, the number is now at 32. And in the technology industry, female founded companies comprise only three percent of startups that are funded by venture capitalists. What do we all have to gain by moving the needle on those numbers? Yeah. Thanks Colleen, that's a great question. I think that there are two things that we can all gain. They kind of fall into two categories, one appeals to the heart and one appeals to the mind or the bottom line, the business mind. So start with the heart first, I truly believe that it is the year 2018 and Gender Equality and Women thriving in the workplace without any fear of sexual discrimination or sexual harassment is still the number one unsolved social issue of our time. There are plenty of other social issues of course, but this one has been going on for a long time as we all know since the suffragettes. And while there has been some great progress being made, we're not at the goal line yet and there's still a lot of work to be done. And so the hard part is really appealing to our overall collective sense of fairness and how women are actually a little bit over 50 percent of the world's population but yet they're always pushing a larger rock up a steeper hill to get the same gains, as you mentioned are only 32 female CEOs in the entire Fortune 500, I think that of itself is a pretty harrowing stat in my mind. Women still earn, in North America, about 79 cents for every man's dollar, that's for white women by the way, so if you're a woman of color, those numbers are even lower. And there are still, as we know the headlines, prolific instances of tolerated sexual harassment at various companies. So I think that the hard part is that it's just not right and it's not fair and we need to do better. Now, the more brain part of it in terms of a bottom line and how it impacts businesses as it turns out, what I was really passionate about is talking more about the fact that women make incredible leaders and they make incredible board members and vice presidents and CEOs as a matter of fact

there's all this research that I cite in the book where for example, you take one company where it's an all male board and another company where you add three women to your board, maybe or ten board members, you add three. Not even accounting for what you might discuss or what issues get hashed out at the board meetings, just a presence of those three women will add to the return on investment on that second company where there are three female board members by 46 percent. Wow. So just adding women is going to add to the bottom line. There's a long term study that followed 80 female CEOs kind of a mixed segment of like private companies, public companies, large and small and different business segments, those 80 female CEOs, it was found that they outperformed their male peers on the S&P 500 by 226 percent return on equity. That's a startling percentage. That is worth noting. Yeah, that is definitely worth noting and so I have this belief that there are leadership qualities or leadership attributes, management attributes that are more commonly associated with the way that women lead that we should really really talk about more and explore and try to unpack what things we can learn from that so that we can actually all be better together and that male and female leaders can adopt a lot of these compound attributes. Thank you for diving into, as you said, matters of the heart. I think that's really worth calling out and I appreciate that you've brought both the qualitative and the quantitative answer to that well. Yeah, you're welcome. Jonathan, you are the chairman of PicMonkey, the chairman and co-founder of GeekWire, the founder of WeCount.org and the former CEO of both FATbits and Picnik, both of which were sold to Google. Your resume suggests that you are incredibly passionate and innovative when it comes to business. Why have you now set your sights on this topic of gender equity in the workplace? Great question. So, in a nutshell I think you do get to a point. If we're all lucky enough, and by the way I've been more lucky than good, let's just put that on the table. But if we have been lucky, we have been a little blessed with some traction and some success. I do think this is not about sort of satisfying one's own needs. That's not what we're all here to do. At some point I think it's very important to activate and to think about, what can I do every day that can make the world better? And in fact actually, I think recently, Bill and Melinda, I think in time for Valentine's Day, did also have a similar message. I think they were answering some tough questions. And I didn't listen to the whole thing but one of the answers that I did hear was this aspect of what can we all do every day and I think it was Melinda that answered that. What are you thinking about and doing moving forward that is going to help people? That's going to make the world a better place? It sounds sort of perhaps a pie in the sky, but I really believe that often times in life, the big changes, the big inspiring things that happen in your life are often times a result of simple and clear insights. They don't have to be complex. You don't have to be overly clever. And so if you make a decision that you want to make the world a better place for me than it was taking what I observed actually as an angel investor or investing in various startup companies, my deal pipeline was very full. People wanted to get on my calendar, pitch me on their startup, have coffee, all wonderful things, I'm very lucky people want to do that. What I was noticing though, was that maybe two guys from Amazon or from Microsoft, they could go out and raise one point two million dollars and it might take them 90 days, 120 days to do that, no problem because they're smart, they've got a great value proposition and a total addressable market is interesting and so they got a great concept. You take two women, maybe equally great, the concept, they are equally smart, maybe in some cases even smarter. It might take them over a year to raise that one point two million, maybe not even ever that they raised that, maybe do a raise that's about half as numerically large. So I saw that over and over again and then I would kind of probe why? And I would hear from these impassioned, smart female entrepreneurs about how they are just trying so hard and already our doors won't open or they get told certain things that sometimes I can't believe, that are sad. And by the

way I'm not maligning any one single individual. I think that we've all sort of men and women inherited a legacy broken system. My call to action is that we need to look very hard at that. So because I started hearing those impassioned stories and noticing that women were struggling still in a year 2017/2018, that's why I wrote this book. I felt like certain things needed to be said and talked about more. It sounds like you were in this unique position both as an angel investor and as a people manager. And did you feel like it was sort of a moral imperative? Like there were so few people in your position that had this purview that maybe you felt like it was your responsibility to speak up. I did, I absolutely felt that it was my responsibility. There are a lot of other people who are doing great work to advance gender equality in business especially in this ecosystem, I know Microsoft and everybody here is doing your part. But I did feel like I was in a fairly unique position to talk about it because most my companies, the ones that you've cited if not all of them, are incredibly gender balanced. We have women in senior management positions if they are not also co-founders, and they have great cultures that are very family forward and female forward that support the development of women and I talk about a lot of that stuff in my book. Yeah. So, and because of that experience, and then also because I wear the angel investor hat, what I do, have this very robust pipeline of companies, new companies that are trying to get started. And then they're telling me very robustly what the issues they're encountering are. I just felt like that I was in a unique position to see a lot of this data. And I think because of my chairmanship of GeekWire that also affords me a little bit more of a platform to talk about this stuff too. So I think all of that stuff came together and which emboldened me with some confidence to write this book. And with this perspective on the industry, in 2015 you became the first male investor to vow only to fund startups with at least one female co-founder. Yes. Can you explain your reasoning behind this position. You've noted a few stats in our first question that, how the investor community has responded? That's right. So number one, I've said that because I truly truly believe that your company and your product and your customer satisfaction, the culture that you'll eventually build and grow as your company scales, I believe all of that will be better, much better if you have a female co-founder and someone at the very highest levels at a company where you have that gender inclusion. If you start there, that's a great place to be and there's going to be a lot of positive benefits. So I said it because of that. Truth be told, when I said it I didn't think it was going to be controversial precisely because I thought well, isn't that pretty easy. I mean, say you're a guy and you're trying to do a startup, and you're trying to put a prototype together. Say that's usually like a common step, or you're trying to put together your deck where you going to pitch investors like me or venture capitalists. I don't think it's that hard to find a female colleague who is maybe very very awesome in this product space or a really great designer or is also technical or is more in a market, whatever it is, I don't think it's that hard to find a female co-founder. So I didn't even think the statement would be controversial. Accidentally radical. I was accidentally radical, exactly, it's a good term. So that's another reason that I have to kind of disclose that I didn't say it on purpose to be controversial. But I felt it very strongly authentically as an investor. And I'm going to go here. There are plenty of startups where as a couple or three guys from Amazon or wherever, I'm going to go here where I think there's more interesting space and perhaps companies that are kind of being overlooked. And as an investor, I hope I'm not being a dumb investor. I think it is a smart strategy. Sometimes you do want to go where there's untilled field, sometimes you want to go where others are not looking and so that was also a part of it. Now, what was the reaction on the investor community. It was very mixed as you might expect from something like that. I think most folks that I encountered, a lot of folks in town who are venture capitalists who I'm friends with other angel investors, have been very very supportive and I'm appreciative of that. As a matter of fact I think many of them are kind of a class act because

maybe they were sort of doing that stuff anyway and supporting the development of female led companies. But in a less official or overt way. Right. And so the fact that they were doing that perhaps even before me is totally deserves kudos. But then when there was a more broader, kind of Internet reaction which was surprising, but a lot of negative reaction that this was the dumbest thing ever. That technology is one of those spaces where it's a true meritocracy. So the fact that you don't see a lot of women raising large amounts or succeeding at their startups are only, so few female CEOs in Fortune in and of itself testament to the fact that perhaps they're just not as qualified some. People and I think this is a more subtle way of perhaps expressing a latent sexism there, is that it's always a pipeline problem. I think that there may still be a pipeline problem in a very most core technical positions, but I think for larger companies where you have multiple functional areas, I think that that's no longer really an excuse that you can have anymore particularly if you look at some of the data. Again I think it's in my book about male-female college graduation rates in STEM fields, actually there are just as many women graduating from STEM fields as men now, which is fantastic. Yes. So there was a lot of backlash from some people which I thought was good ultimately because you then know where they stand. And you do know that exists still, and that we shouldn't fool ourselves into thinking that some people don't actually still think that way. Interesting. Yeah. Jonathan, I first heard your story back in December at the Riveter, which is a co-working space founded here in Seattle focused on women and wellness. And you are now the Distinguished entrepreneur in residence there, what does that title mean and how are you using it to advance this concept of gender equity? Yeah. So I was one of the more significant investors in Riveter because I really believed in Amy Nelson and her concept and having this coworking space that's very forward female friendly, don't exclude men which is great, but it's a space that is not like a bunch of ping pong tables and noisy and arcade games and things like that. It's there for people to work and focus and it's very genteel and kind of a beautiful relaxing atmosphere. I'm highly highly supportive of that. That's actually the environment that I like to work in when I walk into a co-working space. And so that my title as Distinguished entrepreneur is really myself leaning into that. I began talking with Amy about in addition to just being an investor, what else can I do to help you? What did a non monetary ways that I can help you? And so we came up with this distinguished entrepreneur thing to denote that I actually show up at the Riveter and I sit there and I sort of have office hours. And anybody who wants to chat with me or get advice on funding or capitalization issues, structure issues, team building or product design, any of that I talk with them and try to help them along. It's so great to hear that it wasn't just a financial transaction. You have to demonstrate your investment especially in this time of need to lean in and survey monkey just put out this survey that shows that senior men are more nervous than ever to interact with junior women in a job. Yeah. And the call to action there from Sheryl Sandberg and lean in, it's for more senior men to be mentoring women. Yeah. And it's so great to see that you're putting that into action. Yeah, thank you. So I absolutely agree that sentiment that what Sheryl said about the fact, I don't be afraid to talk to women in fact engage more. And in my book I actually have this concept of reverse mentoring. That I think it's also important that a senior man in the organization engage with maybe some of the up and comers the women in their organization, that they also flip it around. Maybe 50 percent at a time or maybe all the time where it's a reverse mentoring relationship. Perhaps somebody else can come up with a better term for that. But what I mean by that is that it's really important to listen. It's really important to actually pay attention to the needs and sort of the career aspirations and the goals of the junior women in the organization. And listened to them about can a culture change? How can we change certain policies or just maybe even tweak them so that the environment and culture is more supportive of women in the workplace and women advancing in the

leadership positions. And so this concept of also reverse mentoring I think is important too. I thought that was a great anecdote in your book because it not only made you privy to you know some of the cultural accommodations you could make for more junior women in your organization. But you know there's business insight there too. How do we better tap into a millennial audience? What type of content can we be generating to better attract new audience members? And actually Bill Gates, old habits die hard, I remember there was a seminal memo that he wrote when, I can't remember the exact year sometime during the 90s the world remembers him in 97 writing the Internet memo. But I remembered a prior to that he wrote a memo that was equally impactful to me as a young employee when I was in my 20s which was around the time I think he was maybe coming up to being 40, maybe he was like maybe in his late 30s and he wrote a memo to the whole company talking about how what usually happens to companies is that as we've been very successful and we've taken risks and we've done these great things, but what always happens is that as companies mature they grow in size, we also age up and we get older and more conservative and we stop growing and learning new skills. He said that, and I think that that's a testament to how pressure he was back then. And I really believe that it's important that no matter where you are in the organization, you can be a CEO or senior vice president, you could have been at the company 30 years, you could be in your 50s, you're middle age like me. And it's not too late to learn and yet continue to get so much out of my interactions with people who are younger than I, who have fresh ideas and all you got to do is listen. What a great sentiment. And speaking of these old habits, this conversation here on. Microsoft's campus is a bit of a homecoming for you as you mentioned, you previously worked in. Microsoft's consumer division and you're a manager on the Xbox team. And since that time gender in the workplace has become a much hotter topic, and something that larger corporations are bearing a lot more scrutiny for. Jonathan can you comment at all on your experience in corporate America here at Microsoft versus the startup world and how you saw those gender politics playing out in those arenas? Definitely, I think there's kind of an interesting arc there that I also allude to in my book which is that I was blown away when I came to Microsoft in 92. And I don't know exactly how many employees there were but it was small like you knew everyone. Right and you play soccer out in the field at Luncheon. And I was blown away by how progressive the company was. There were a lot of things that felt to me at that time were only things that Microsoft was doing, inclusive to sort of even our policies like, I think you can have a same sex domestic partnership that your spouse, that same sex domestic partner could be also eligible for health insurance things like that. I think I don't think many companies were doing that at that time. So Microsoft gets kudos for being really rather innovative there. No surprise that for example in the consumer division, My mentors were Patty Stonesifer, she was to senior vice president of the division, and division had probably like six or seven hundred people there. Reporting to her was Charlotte Guyman who was the general manager of the lifestyle's business unit. And then my direct manager was also a woman named Lisa Mackie who was a product unit manager at the time. And I just sort of learned so much from them. And it also seemed like it was pretty 50/50. It was different in research, different systems. But I did feel like that it was something very novel and new and good when I saw that happening. Now here's where the art changes, then at some point, the women started leaving or what would happen is it's kind of more subtle right, like maybe they would have family, they would have kids and they would take leave but then not come back or they would come back for just a little bit and then not stay. And so, that was very puzzling to me and a little bit worrying. And then as the years progressed, it seemed like instead of things getting better that things were more gender balanced or were more women in senior leadership. Things were actually getting a little bit worse. And again there's

no single individual that should have the blame it's that we've all inherited some sort of legacy system and there are certain policies or practices in place that the framework itself is what is doing this. But you still have hope that still by the late 90s early 2000s you're still thinking like, okay, the world will get better. Assuredly, I mean, this is how the world works everything gets better. And then in a startup world, I felt that if things took another sort of step down, that you could see some of the things starting that I have alluded to in past women were getting harder for them to get funding if they were even founding companies at all. And so I, feel like that there is still a lot of work to do. The current, focus and attention on this stuff is ultimately incredibly good. If I could wave a magic wand I might have more of the mix of the conversation be less about what is assuredly very important, issues of sexual harassment or sexual discrimination, and maybe focus a little bit more on the solutions and talking about how we can overall solve some of the economic disparity to wage disparity, income disparity between men and women in technology or in business in general. And some of the policies that we have placed in corporate America that do affect women to the adverse. Working here at Microsoft, I feel a lot of protection like HR is doing their job and I'm now starting to focus more on how can I use the platform that I have here to make sure that we are directing more attention to women outside of structures and corporations where there is more accountability. Yeah that's right. I know you probably were about to move on your next question. That's actually why in a book I did have, both because I'm not an awesome writer, and I couldn't organize it or fit it as well as I wanted to. But I think also because I think that sometimes these issues that women confront are very very subtle, they can be small things and it could be like death by a thousand cuts. So I had to construct a way in a book to kind of capture sometimes these little thousand cut things. And so I have these little snippets that are in-between the chapters that I call straight talk. Yeah. And so, they are sometimes just like this thing is not enough or like an entire chapter or entire topic, but they are very real and they are exemplary of the things that women face in the workplace all the time, over and over again, every day. And one of them is just an example, a couple of colleagues have mentioned that, what happens all the time to women is that they're in a meeting, and there are a lot of men in the room and maybe they're the only female or maybe with numbers like one other. The woman has an idea, and it's a great idea and the conversation kind of moves past. And then ten minutes later, a man has a in a nice guy or a bad guy, I'm not blaming him, but he has the same idea. And then everybody rallies him, it's like oh Bob's idea is awesome, that's great yeah let's do that. And those kinds of things can be incredibly frustrating. I mean we sort of laugh a little bit about it but these things do happen every day, and those are the kinds of things that I would encourage us to take stock of the very human day to day interaction things. I really appreciated the Straight Talk moments in the book because as a woman working in tech I see those things every day. I'm constantly looking for a way to sort of capture the moment and explain it to us. The men in my life who have made themselves available to listen and want to help and they want to consider themselves allies and understand the moments in which they can be helpful. That's right. Just this morning, I take the 5:45 bus from Capitol Hill to Redmond and when I approached my bus stop, there were 18 people waiting for the bus. All of them were men, and in these moments when you're all getting on the bus to go to the same place, it's just a reminder of your otherness. And I don't like should I take a picture of this right now so that I can show someone, here is a moment in my day which may seem inconsequential but makes me feel othered. You know Colleen, I'm really glad that you brought that up and if I may just kind of segue a little bit. You mentioned my work with wecount.org which is a nonprofit that I started to help individuals experiencing homelessness. And there is this concept in that area of work which is that, they call it environmental violence against someone, which is not actual physical violence but it's this concept



where a lot of little things make someone feel their otherness and feel sort of maybe left out or, less than. That's the worst part of it, right? And so, I think that those are important things that we again take stock of and notice and just really appreciate any other person. Let's work hard to not exacerbate that feeling of otherness or less than in someone else. You mentioned Lisa Mackie as one of your leaders that Microsoft. She's the CEO of Pocket Doc and authored the foreword of your book Better Together. She writes Jonathan's experiences starting with the circumstances of his birth, make him very uniquely qualified to address any issues surrounding bias and inequity. Can you tell us a little bit more about your background and your upbringing that provided the foundation for this? Yeah I'm happy to. So I was born to an unwed mother in 1967 in Brooklyn. I was actually born in London but then shortly after moved to Brooklyn. So that's where we were, and she could not make ends meet. And I witnessed firsthand how hard it was for her to struggle to make it both being a woman of color and also being a woman to struggle to make it in a man's world. And so, she sent me to live with my grandparents in a foreign country in Hong Kong, I'd never been there, I didn't speak the language, I did not speak Chinese at the time. And so, then I was basically raised by my grandparents. And so the reason why I appreciated your prior example of your commute and feeling other, right or wrong, I've always felt the sense of otherness wherever I was during my early years. Whether I was actually in Brooklyn, I think I was the only Chinese kid there, and then at the time. And then when I was in Hong Kong I was the only non Chinese speaking kid that was born in England, and then when I moved back to the United States to. Edmonds Washington I felt that even more acutely. And so, I do think Lisa is right that activated me to always try to think in most circumstances when you're interacting with someone, what the other side's perception might be like and what it might feel like to be in the minority, what it might feel like to even sometimes to have bad things happen to you. I had a tough childhood, people pick fights with me and I had to learn to stand my ground, and I think those experiences galvanized me, but at the same time, it's activated me to pay attention to how sometimes there can be like a mob mentality and those in a majority don't realize some of the privileges that they are afforded that are just not even spoken. I mean they just aren't there. Even though you come from this background and this foundation where you understand what it means to be othered. I really appreciated that you went on this journey with a partner who is writing the book with you or researching with you. You reference your working relationship in a chapter called, "With Grace Kahng", which of course refers to the Emmy and Peabody Award winning journalist. Can you tell us a bit more about how you worked with Grace to bring this book to life? Absolutely. So, actually it's really kind of an example of better together and for other people I collaborate with on this journey as well, one of them is Christina Watt who is also very smart about these things and is someone that whose interaction I really benefit from the overall effort benefits from. So she gets credit. The reason why she has that acknowledgment in a book is because she was the one that actually really goaded me to write this book. She walked into one of my companies to. PicMonkey and we were expanding and hiring more and more people, and she visited me at these new offices. It was a lovely visit but she kind of looked around she was, okay hold up, this is not like any other tech company I've ever walked into. What she was noticing was actually, I think at the time numerically we were greater than 50 percent women across the ranks. And there were women in engineering it's not like we had a role in marketing or something like that. There were women in engineering, there were women in UI design UX design, all that functional areas. And she was very pleasantly surprised by that, she says Johnson you have to write a book about how you did this. And so I thought that her sort of instincts were very very sharp there, and so that's how we jumped into this. She wrote one chapter of the book that I felt was best done coming from a female perspective and I think she wrote it very beautifully and

the book is all the better because she's involved. I appreciated so many parts of the book. I'm going to jump into one part in particular. This quote from software engineer Kate Heddleston who you referenced in your book. And this is going to take me a minute to get through but I think it's all very valuable. Women in tech are the canary in the coal mine. Normally when the canary in the coal mines starts dying, you know the environment is toxic and you should get out. Instead, the tech industry is looking at the Canary wondering why it can't breathe saying, we in Canary we men. When one canary dies, they get a new one because getting more canaries is how you fix the lack of canaries. Right. Except the problem is that there isn't enough oxygen in the coal mine, not that there are too few canaries. I think that this is such an awfully beautiful metaphor for the predominant focus on recruiting more women into attack instead of looking at the full funnel including retention mechanisms that might make it truly more comfortable for women to stay. Better Together outlines eight solutions that people can commit to in the quest for gender equity in the workplace, and among those improvements to the recruiting process. But I'd actually love to dive into one of the retentions solutions that you call out. What does it mean to create a family forward culture and how tactically does that get executed? Yeah great question. So a whole chapter on that. It's like a grab bag of many many things, I think there are like seven or eight that I talk about in that chapter. So, some of those things are policy things, really, it's that kind of Steve Jobs notion of like once you realize that all of these policies and laws are really just the ideas of people and you can change them, then you're a Baltimore and Howard. And so then the second part of some of these solutions is really physical things, design things in a space and how you can equip your employees to do their jobs better. There's really good stuff there too. So let me talk about the policy things. One very very simple one, again it's not about being super clever and tricky, it's really sometimes the most simple and elegant solutions. Not having meetings start before 9 a.m. I know that that can be a tough one for a lot of companies but here's why. At least back when I was writing a book and when I was a CEO of PicMonkey, I found out that the Seattle school district or at least parts of the Seattle school district for kids in grade school, actually school didn't start until 8:30. And the statistics on child rearing is that even in the year 2018 where you have very very enlightened husbands, enlightened fathers, the vast majority of child rearing and stability of drop off, pick up, getting breakfast, getting the kid bathe, dressed, all of that stuff, falls, still much more on the mother. So then if you believe that's that. What happens if you have a scenario where the school district doesn't start until 8:30. If you have meetings start early, like you have an 8AM meeting or an 8:30AM meeting, what happens that woman can't spend time with her child and it kind of throws a lot of other compensating factors into motion that ultimately makes that employee less fulfilled, less happy and less productive. So that's one of the things that I advocate, is let's not put women at a disadvantage. Let's not have that person walk into a meeting at 8:30 sort of just dropping in cold from having spent a lot of time getting the kid ready or drop out of the blue. Other things when you have an opportunity to schedule like a kind of a semi non-work event like a morale event or like an office party. Actually do those things in office and include families. Make it 4:00 o'clock. Don't make it seven o'clock and it's at a bar or even happy hours at a bar and then people sort of have to debit their time away from families to be a part of it. Otherwise I feel like that they're not caught up or out of the loop. So if you make those things in office and families are included, again you get more fulfilled employees, happier employees. So those are just two examples of policy things. Another one which I love is also making sure that I know at Microsoft, you guys already do that, but at large in corporate America, the vast majority of companies don't have this yet, which is giving the men equal parental leave as the women. And the reason why that's important is because it lessens that feeling of being less than or other when women typically re-enter the workforce. So when women

typically re-enter the workforce after being gone three months five months, they feel like they are vastly out of the loop, and companies sometimes don't really take the extra step to adequately bring them up to speed. And I think that if more men and particularly male managers took the same amount of time off and they were mandated to, it's not just to go golfing and change a couple of diapers on occasion, it's really to partake 50 percent in a child rearing, that's the other component that has to happen at home, then when they come back, it's more of an equal situation, I think there's much more sympathy for what happens to women. So that's another one, okay, I've gone along on that, my apologies. The physical things are, I have photos that kind of speak a thousand words in the book, but we've designed our office spaces to include play areas, sort of living room spaces, or playroom spaces where there are low tables for kids, where there are kid's books, where there are kid's activities, where there are Legos. And it isn't uncommon for some of our employees if there's like a gap like something happened at the school in the morning is canceled and so there's no backup childcare, it's not uncommon for employees to bring their kids to school age children and just kind of park them at work and are not far from them and they can watch them. And in fact sometimes people will sort of pull them together like there maybe three kids in the office at the same time. And one of the somebody who's a program manager or a task manager who is also a parent is also looking after the three kids and sometimes that can just take the edge off, so that that employee didn't necessarily have to take the day off. And more importantly, that employee didn't have to feel guilty that often she had to make some sort of sacrifice that she had to choose work or kid that we can enable both. All great examples and very tactical opportunities for implementation. And I think, this commonality that they see both in the policy and the physical space is making it more comfortable to bring your whole self to work. Yes that's a great way to put it. Bring your whole self to work. Yeah, I think we get very familiar with the work personalities that we encounter in the workplace day to day and getting to know people more holistically the values that they have, the people that they're surrounding themselves with can only make our working relationships richer. Yeah, that's right. Jonathan, I was really struck by your call out of two broken systems that you hacked to be more inclusive in the book. First off, when it comes to recruiting, you give a larger referral bonus for non male non-white candidates who are hired. And I understand that that incentivizes your employees to make diversity a priority when they're considering their networks for referral. But ultimately that points to an HR recruiting system that is not currently sourcing the diversity of candidates that you're looking for. And then when it comes to promotion you recommend advocating for women who exhibit classically female attributes like high integrity and respect to all levels of constituents in a system that rewards classically male attributions traditionally. Like aggression and results orientation, both of these illusions are hacked two broken systems are these workarounds the only way to eventually fix the system, will flood the system with women and then we can make it better, or should we be working both on these hacks and in parallel to remedy the systems themselves? Yeah that is a fantastic question and I've been doing a lot of thinking about that. I do think that both of those solutions really do move the needle but they're not all inclusive of course. I did underscore them a lot or talk about them a lot in the book precisely because they've been shown to bear great results. That if you do really give a large like sort of extraordinary look noticeably large bonuses, like double or even triple what you would normally get for an employee referral. People notice and work on it and then more importantly you send a message that you mean business that you really mean it because you're willing to put your money where your mouth is right it's not like a token thing. So that's been shown to move the needle on a lot of companies these days. I would say as much as I kind of bashed that startup ecosystem a little bit earlier for having a greater gender problem, I would actually say that one of the things that I love about the startup

ecosystem is the rapid pace at which change can in fact happen. And we're seeing this being executed right now today into Seattle tech ecosystem startup ecosystem and a lot of companies are reporting that they're getting great results. In terms of the second hack, I thought that it was also really important to officially codify in the company values in terms of what we value the most in like the canonical best employee that those values are very very clearly inclusive of both male and female leadership attributes because they are both important. I really sort of believe in this sort of compound leader that exhibits both of those traits. Right. You mentioned that there is great progress happening in the Seattle community, and I took great pride in reading about the pioneering that we're doing here in the Pacific Northwest. Yeah. You stated that, I think the Seattle tech ecosystem will eventually lead the way on gender equality and be a role model for other tech Hubs to follow. What do you think is unique about our city? Yeah, so there is this magic that's happening right now right under our noses that we may not even realize which is that we have the most amazing confluence of first of all we're on the west coast. So we tend to be younger, we tend to be a more liberal, more progressive in our thinking so, that's already kind of a part of our culture that's also present in a bay area also. But what we also have here in the Northwest, is a certain sort of gentility, a certain look. Maybe the bad part of it is that sometimes people say. Seattleites are kind of passive-aggressive or something like that, and that's probably true. That's kind of true. Yeah, right. But the good part of it is that, we're not all like at each other's throats, we're not all combative and hyper hardcore competitive with each other. We're not quite frankly as just culturally. I think these things are all kind of different facets of the same core. We're not as showy we're not about displaying overt status things or tokens of wealth and I think that we've had a lot of really great captains of industry and business leaders in the region that have kind of set that tone for the rest of us. And so we have all of the attributes where there's a little bit of humility, that's what I'm saying, and then there's also a third thing is that there's a really great orientation towards philanthropy and doing good and this kind of concept of that I think. President Obama said and like maybe 2012, the concept that you can do good and do well at the same time. And so I feel like that's very unique to our region. And with all due respect to our friends down in the Bay area, a couple of those elements that I just described don't exist there or don't exist as strongly. I think people are a little bit later to activate to civically virtuous things or philanthropy. I think there's a little more just a harder edge a competitiveness. Not just amongst companies but also amongst people. There's a little more people move around a lot more from company to company there's more competition for talent and they'll go to the higher paying job and leave their past job that they've only been out for a couple of years there's a lot more of that going on that I think causes a little bit more noise and chaos where these really good things can't take hold as well as they can here in the Seattle region in a northwest region. The fourth thing that I'll say about that why I truly believe that we can lead the way is because we have incredible leaders here in this region. We in fact have a lot of really great business leaders that are doing great things and doing what they can at their companies. Some are a little less vocal than I. I'm getting a little bit of a spotlight now because of the book. But there's a nice critical mass and a groundswell happening that is really great to see here. I've witnessed so many of those qualities about Seattle that you referenced here. The interest in building, sustainable businesses, sustainable communities, I haven't felt that in such a way that I feel living here in the Pacific Northwest. And this notion of philanthropy, of course the Bill and Melinda Gates. Foundation is one of the pioneers here, and we have this great culture of philanthropy here at the company. Growing up, I didn't really know that I had the power to be a philanthropist and coming to work at this company we have a great giving campaign. That's right. Matching benefits, are our donations matched. And yeah there's a lot more coaching on what it means

to be a philanthropist. That's sort of systemic here in the Pacific Northwest. Exactly right. I mean I can remember or I know not just what I remembered when I was an employee here but I actually even know from outside all of the great things that this company is doing right now, What Brad Smith is doing I know he's one of those other leads by example in terms of how much he leans into things like the United Way your or Washington state opportunity scholars. And I think people take notice of that and assuredly a lot of this stuff I'm somewhat speaking in platitudes and it's anecdotal but when I've been at other companies visiting the Bay Area or times that I've worked down there, you don't quite have that critical mass or at least people who are doing great work are a little less visible on the philanthropy side. Jonathan, in the introduction of Better Together, you call out your audience specifically. The goal of this book is to provide managers, CEOs, board members and business owners with a blueprint to attract, recruit, hire and build a sustainable, gender balanced workforce at all levels. And you wrap the book with the Better Together pledge which commits people to, one, remove bias against women in recruiting. Two, fully support women's development within the organization. Three, listen louder and support women's communication. Four, create a family forward work culture. Five, not tolerate sexual harassment regardless of the perpetrator's performance. Six, adopt the Equal Rights Amendment language for the organization. Seven, encourage women to support women and eight, sets the right example for the next generation. How would you recommend getting this book with all of these great and tactical things you can do into the hands of more people in power so that they might take this pledge? Yes thank you for that. I really appreciate you reading that because sometimes when you hear it coming from another person and it's sounds different and sometimes better so that's great. I would say the best thing to do is enabling more opportunities like this, so if there's anybody out there listening to this podcast and if you have a platform for me to speak with you and to engage with you and your audience in hopefully a delightful and fun way in an informative way, just like I have been doing comedy, I would love to do more of that, just to get the word out and coming back to you Colleen, I am just deeply appreciative of this opportunity and speaking with you, I've actually learned that just as much talking with you just kind of listening to what's implicit in some of your questions in terms of what's important to you as I hope I've been useful. And so, I think opportunities like this I definitely seek to get the word out more, and the book is in fact available at all the major book outlets, Barnes and Noble, and Amazon, and things like that. So I am told there is a quick and enjoyable 200 pages. Yes. You can tell me if it is. It 100 percent is, and I'll share a hack. I have tried to build relationships with my managers where there is a constant feedback loop, and I just dropped this book onto the desk of my manager the other day when I wrapped it up. So pay it forward, I think as junior women in technology, we tend to speak amongst each other but I think it's really important to give feedback to the leaders in the direction that you want them to be leading you, and dropping a book on your manager's desk and explaining why that book was impactful for you, I think is a great step that we can all take. Wonderful. That actually makes for great stuff. Thank you for that. Yes, Jonathan where can our listeners find you on the Internet, aside from the places where they can find your book? Right. So I have a website [www.jposato.com](http://www.jposato.com). That's the letter J and S-P-O-S-A-T-O dot com. And of course I'm on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter. Yes, all over the places. That's right. Thank you so much for making the time today, for making this your mission. I really appreciate the work that you do and that you made the time to come talk with us here. You're most welcome Colleen, and it has been a total pleasure. I had a lot of fun. I hope you did too. I did. Of course. Cutting edge our take on stories in the business and technology worlds. In this cutting edge segment, we're going to take a look at an article written by Nelly Bowles that was published in the February 25th issue of The New York Times entitled, Women and Cryptocurrencies Push Back. Against Blockchain Bros.

Bowles explains that while virtual currencies and blockchain were intended to be democratizing forces, a gender imbalance is already creeping into the cryptocurrency world. According to the article, some studies estimate that women account for only four to six per cent of blockchain investors. Bowles emphasizes why this is important. Quote "the early days of" an industry are often when the fortunes are made." The article cites a few different instances of overt sexism in the cryptocurrency community. But I was most surprised by the coverage of the North American Bitcoin Conference in Miami which happened this past January. The program originally slated 86 men and one woman to speak. After complaints, investor and organizer Mo Levin shifted the programming to feature 84 men and three women. Oh yeah. Levin explained it just coincidentally happened that there were more men than woman speakers. It's not intentional not to include them. It's just, we don't have time to include them. Levin also decided to host the conferences after party at a strip club. This is not fake news. This is not fake news. Some early female investors are speaking out in the midst of the trend, including venture capitalists Alexia Bonatsos , who tweeted, quote, women consider crypto, otherwise men are going to get all the wealth, again. Brit + Co founder Brit Morin even held a blockchain gathering and a live stream for women and over 16,000 tuned in. Yeah, she originally decided to have this event and needed to move it to a larger room, 500 people attended in person but there was way more interest so I thought it was cool that she did. Also in addition to these individual calls to action, both also points to the creation of the blockchain diversity advocacy group called, the collective future which will create a diversity pledge for crypto companies committed to stemming the tide of current representation trends. My favorite part of this article is the input from Ariana Simpson, an early cryptocurrency investor. She reminds women that it doesn't take expertise or a Ph.D. to thrive in that ecosystem. Simpson states and this is the best part. Women always question if they're qualified, but look at these clowns around. Thanks for tuning into another episode of women in business and technology. I'm so glad we were able to host Lauren Wesley Wilson to tell us more about the color comm network and the conference coming up. And thanks to that amazing and also somewhat depressingly hilarious new york times article. I am definitely now more aggressively getting up to speed on cryptocurrency and how to get into the game. Good for you. And of course we were honored to host Jonathan Sposato in the studio. I highly recommend picking up a copy of his book for yourself and maybe a few for the people in your leadership chain. Again the title of that book is Better Together, eight ways working with women leads to extraordinary products and profits. As always please remember to write review and subscribe to the show. All of those actions helped more people find us. You can find us on Apple podcasts, Google Play, Spotify, YouTube, or wherever you listen to podcasts. And our website is wibt.com. And if you have any feedback or questions, please email us @wibt@microsoft.com or tweet us @microsoftwomen. Your mission for this episode if you choose to accept it is to subscribe to the broadsheet. The broadsheet as an email newsletter from. Fortune that is distributed Monday through Friday. Kristin Bellstrom and Valentina Zarya write, quote, the dish on the world's most powerful women. It's obviously one of my favorite email newsletters and helps me determine the themes and content that we prioritize on this show. The broadsheet is free. You just have to head to. Fortune.com/GetBroadsheet. Check the box for the broadsheet, enter your email address and country and click, sign up now. Happy reading.