[MUSIC]

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** I think we need more organizational support, not just at Black Girls Code, but any organization that’s doing this work as a nonprofit. We can’t do it alone. So for me, it’s always about how can we have this magnified effort of different organizations that are all working collectively to elevate girls in the STEM fields, and particularly in computer science?

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Hi, everyone. Welcome to Behind the Tech. I'm your host, Kevin Scott, Chief Technology Officer for Microsoft.

In this podcast, we're going to get behind the tech. We'll talk with some of the people who have made our modern tech world possible and understand what motivated them to create what they did. So, join me to maybe learn a little bit about the history of computing and get a few behind-the-scenes insights into what's happening today. Stick around.

[MUSIC]

**CHRISTINA WARREN:** Hello, and welcome to Behind the Tech. I’m Christina Warren, senior cloud advocate at Microsoft.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** And I’m Kevin Scott.

**CHRISTINA WARREN:** And our guest today is Kimberly Bryant. And Kimberly is an electrical engineer with a 25-year career in the pharmaceutical and biotech industries.

And about 10 years ago, she founded one of my favorite organizations – Black Girls Code. And since then, has received national recognition as a social innovator for her work in technology inclusion.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah, I’m an enormous fan of Kimberly’s –

**CHRISTINA WARREN:** Me too.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** – and of Black Girls Code. You know, it’s one of those things that if you have ever been on the receiving end of an extended hand, like, someone who sees potential in you and takes a risk and believes in you, like, it can be one of the most transformational things that happens in your life.

And I think the great thing that Kimberly is doing is she is extending that hand to, like, as many young women of color as she possibly can to get them into computing. And it’s so needed and it’s so inspirational.

**CHRISTINA WARREN:** I totally agree. I was actually having a conversation with someone earlier about that same thing. And I love that Kimberly is extending that hand, as you say, to so many young girls of color.

So, let’s go ahead and chat with Kimberly.

[MUSIC]

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Our guest today is Kimberly Bryant. Kimberly is founder and CEO of Black Girls Code – a nonprofit organization dedicated to introducing girls of color to the field of technology. She’s also an electrical engineer.

Kimberly has received numerous awards for her work in technology inclusion. She’s been on Business Insider’s list of the 25 most influential African Americans in technology, and she was named one of Fast Company’s most creative people.

In 2013, she was recognized as a White House Champion of Change for tech inclusion, and in 2014 received an American Ingenuity Award in Social Progress from the Smithsonian Institute. Welcome to the show, Kimberly.

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** Thank you for having me, Kevin. Hey, I want to apologize ahead of time. I have a new puppy named Kimiko and she’s busy in the morning. So if you hear a little noise in the background, I apologize.

That is awesome. No problem at all. Is this a COVID puppy?

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** It is. It is. It’s a quarantine puppy. [Laugh]

**KEVIN SCOTT:** That is excellent. Well, I think it’s one of the awesome things that people are doing to get through the pandemic, so no worries at all.

So, I’m just really excited to learn more about your journey. So, can we start with you telling us a little bit about how you got interested in science and technology in the first place?

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** Of course, so, I grew up in Memphis, Tennessee back in – well, late ‘60s/’70s. I don’t want to give away my – too much of my age. But I grew up in the late ‘60s and ‘70s.

And one of the things that I was lucky, I guess, I would classify it as being lucky to be able to experience was this accelerated pathway in math and sciences all through middle school and into high school.

So, during, you know, that period of time when, you know, you’re a high school student and you’re trying to figure out what you want to do with the rest of your life, one of those conversations with my guidance counselors resulted in her really kind of encouraging me to explore an engineering pathway.

Now, I had no knowledge of engineering beforehand, didn’t, you know, know anyone who was an engineer, didn’t know anyone’s mom or dad who was an engineer. It was very new to me. But, you know, because of this accelerated pathway in the sciences and math, it was suggested as a good option for me to explore as a career path. I kind of ended up applying to colleges as an engineering major just from that recommendation from my guidance counselor.

I ended up at Vanderbilt University, right up the road in Nashville, trying to major in the most human-centric form of engineering that they had, which at that time I thought was civil engineering. Before the end of the first semester, I realized that was not the pathway for me. It wasn’t really fun for me to design all these airplane runways and highways. And I was, like, “I’ve got to do something else.”

And so, I found my way into electrical engineering because it had a close connection to technology, and it seemed a bit more interesting to me than designing runways for the rest of my career. And I kind of just stumbled into that as a pathway for me.

And that’s kind of how I ended up in the learning about technology initially. So, I was majoring in electrical engineering, taking that very first computer programming class that this new world was sort of opened up to me. And it became just something that caught my interest at a time when the field was really starting to explode. And that’s how I found my initial way into math and science, in particular into technology.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** So did you have any influential mentors or teachers in college? It sounds like your guidance counselor in high school was extremely influential. But, like, what about one you got into college or, like, into the profession?

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** Well, college was quite interesting for me from the perspective that I came to “Vande” at a time – Vanderbilt at a time when there were very few engineers of color that were in the freshman class, and certainly even less that were in the school of engineering.

But I was, again, I’m lucky, if you will, to run into an upper-class woman on campus during my freshman year walking around one day who became one of my most significant role models and still is a very close friend. She was a couple of years ahead of me, but she was also a double-E major. And I think that she was pivotal for me at that moment because I didn’t have another role model that I could look up to who had done this same field of study, who was on this same trajectory, if you will, in terms of becoming an electrical engineer. And I needed that.

So, in most of those classrooms, you know, I was often most of the time the only young lady in the classroom, but I was absolutely often the only student of color. So, having someone that was an upper-class woman who had done the same things I was trying to get through and surpass some of these hurdles, that gave me that bit of encouragement that I needed because it made it possible, you know, for me, and made it real and made it, like, “Okay, I’m probably going to have a difficult time when I take this electronics class, but this is how I can navigate through. These are some of the tips. And don’t take this professor, you may want to take this one.”

So, that advisement from someone who had shared a similar journey was – it was crucial in terms of me being able to push through.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** So, this must be one of the things that, you know, when you were thinking many years later about founding Black Girls Code that you were trying to do with that organization is, you know, trying to figure out how to connect aspiring young woman of color who, you know, had either the potential or the interest in the field with, you know, with role models or mentors to, you know, help them see that they could have a place in technology. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** Yeah, of course. So, Black Girls Code came about because my daughter was entering middle school and starting to develop this interest or passion for computer science – particularly in the gaming area. She was a really heavy gamer, you know, at a very young age. That was, like, what she wanted to do all day every day.

And so, she had this vision, if you will, at the time – we’d just laugh about – to be a video game tester. But that was just because she wanted to get these games. She wanted to play all the games and she felt those are the easiest way for her to be able to do so.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Do you remember what her favorite games were?

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** Oh, my gosh, what was her favorite game? Now, one thing about Kai is she played games offline and online. She played Dungeons and Dragons offline.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Oh, awesome. Good for her. (Laughter.)

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** It was some kind of platform or game-- because she took her very first workshop and she was trying to create this game.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** But that’s so awesome, it’s one of the reasons why I got so interested in programming and computers in the 19 – early 1980s. I’ve chatted with so many people here on the podcast and just in general where that curiosity about a piece of technology like a game and wanting to understand it better and create your own versions of these things, like, it’s just an interesting motivation that a bunch of people seem to have. So, it’s really, really cool that your daughter had that interest.

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** Yeah. That was her main motivating factor was to really create this game that she played obsessively. And so, when I was able to put her into, you know, workshops, it was, you know, 12, and I found a summer camp that she could go to down at Stanford. And it was really transformational for her. I often say that, but it really was.

So, she, you know, saw that not only could she play these games, but she could really begin to even envision herself creating them, which really created for her a different opportunity for what her future could look like. As I said, you know, initially, she just wanted to be a video game tester, but that summer, you know, her world opened up, if you will, to the possibilities of creating these things.

Now, the thing that was still shocking to me was that those – that particular summer camp didn’t have – it was a sprinkling of girls in the classroom. And I do believe Kai was probably the only student of color. And when I recognized that, it was after the camp was over. And she mentioned something about the interaction in the classroom and the girls not really having a voice.

And they were doing some little game – incentive game or something like if you helped someone and one of our peers, you get a ticket. And at the end of the week, then you can use all these tickets to get a prize or something. And I could envision it. And after she told me, like, the girls were, like, jumping up and helping everyone and getting all these tickets. But their professors, which were male college students – weren’t calling on them.

And so, like, they’re running around, you know, trying to help, but you know, not getting seen in the classroom.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah.

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** For me, that – you know, it resonated with some of the challenges that I had at college, myself. And it really concerned me. And I think – I have mentioned before in other conversations that it wasn’t until she told me that after camp and we were on our way home that I even really cognitively recognized that she was one of the only girls in that classroom, because I was used to that in my professional career. So, I didn’t even see it.

You know, so I had become really programmed that that was the reality in a space like that, because that was what I was personally living on a day-to-day basis. And I did not even think about it, you know, until she mentioned, you know, that concept of not being seen – not the words that she used, but my words, that I didn’t even recognize it because I was used to it from corporate.

And it was really that for me was the driver because I felt like my daughter may not continue on this pathway if she didn’t have a community of support. And I didn’t want that to happen. This was finally something that she was truly passionate about and I wanted her to be able to explore it.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** So, this experience that your daughter had in this camp I think really really resonates. And, you know, it’s a – like, a really powerful motivation to want to help unlock the potential of your child.

So, but, like, it’s a really great thing that you’ve done that you decided that you wanted to go help solve this problem for as many kids as possible. So how did you get there from, like, trying to, you know, want to nurture your daughter’s interests in technology to try to solve this for everyone?

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** That’s a great question. I – so, initially, after that first summer camp experience that she had, you know, I left with this driver – motivator, I guess, to have more girls like her in this class – you know, more friends, community, whatever that may look like. And as I was speaking to some folks that were within my professional community, I was like, “Hey, I think I’m going to send some more girls.” Like, I literally was going to pay the summer camp registration, although it’s quite expensive, but I was going to pay the summer camp registration just, you know, for three or four other girls so that when Kai would be there next summer, you know, there would be other girls within her community. They could have a friend circle, if you will.

It was just that, you know, direct. That was what I was going to do. And as I was speaking with some of my peers and colleagues, they’re like, “That would be okay, you know, maybe just – why don’t you create a camp yourself? Why don’t you create one – something like this?”

Now, I did not have any plans to create a camp, but that was, like, when the seed was sort of planted. I was, like, that’s interesting. That could be interesting. I never thought about that. Never even thought that I could.

And it was, you know, that little seed that was planted and, you know, really starting to have other conversations with folks around what they were doing similarly to those types of camps, STEM, or I’d talk to teachers that were teaching technology in school that I really, you know, decided to create something myself so that not just, you know, that small group of girls, like, that would have been great. It would have been great for Kai to have other girls in that classroom. But I think what resonated with me that made the vision a little bit bigger was not only that encouragement from my peers, but also just a realization because I was working at a biotech company in the Bay Area. We did a lot of outreach work outside of South San Francisco in a neighborhood called Bayview Hunters Point. We did a lot of volunteer work there.

It was a community that was under-resourced, and I was familiar with this particular community. And I thought about the girls in that community who would not be part of that forum, you know, would not have an opportunity, you know, perhaps due to their parents’ income to attend a camp like that at Stanford.

And I wanted to equalize the playing field, if you will, a bit in that regard. I wanted to expand it so that not just, you know, parents – or students that come from a high-income household like, you know, what my daughter was blessed to be born into would have the same experiences and opportunities as she would.

Because I, you know, recognized that even though I had these challenges as a woman, a black woman in the STEM field and tech, I still have privilege because I had an opportunity to, you know, share these experiences with my daughter. But there were certainly other moms like me who were not engineers, not working at, you know, a large biotech firm that may not be able to do that. And I wanted that not to be the case. I wanted for girls who were like me who came from a low-income family or middle-income family to have the same type of exposure and opportunities that I was able to give my daughter. And that’s what motivated me to actually create something. Didn’t necessarily know it would become as large as Black Girls Code, but I wanted to create something that would allow all girls, you know, to have these same experiences.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** So you started Black Girls Code in 2011. So you’re celebrating, or are about to celebrate your 10 year anniversary. Tell us a little bit about how the organization has evolved over those 10 years.

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** We’ve evolved quite a bit. And I always – I think I have always considered our pathway to be more like a startup as opposed to a nonprofit. Maybe now, you know, maybe a more traditional nonprofit, but certainly more like a startup in the beginning because of the pivots and turns and detours that we took along the way.

I think the very earliest detours were, you know, something that’s become very fundamental. In the beginning, you know, we knew that the turning point for girls in STEM was middle school. So, we initially, you know, had as a part of our design in the program that we would focus on girls, you know, 10 to 12 or 10 to 13 or so.

We found ourselves expanding that range because in that initial class, some of the moms that we outreached to in the community had daughters that were younger. So, the girls had younger siblings. And they were, like, “Well, what about for my seven-year-old, six-year-old? Do you have anything for her?”

We were, like, “Well, what can it hurt?” Bring her along, you know, she can’t hurt anything. It’s just pilot. And what we found was those girls were like a sponge – like literally. They would soak all the information up. They would run around the classroom, they’d run to their computers and they would stay there all the time. They really were as interested in learning these tools as their older sibling – in some cases, even more so.

And so, we found out from that experience that we really probably should widen the funnel, get the girls as young as possible, you know, six or seven into learning these skills and then develop them into those middle-school students. So, that was early.

We changed the program model the following year when we started the full year. We changed it from a six-week program to a program that has as its foundation these one-day immersion workshops. And we also moved into a chapter-based model because we wanted to take BGC out of the Bay Area and see if we could get some traction or if there was the same interest. And we were sort of overwhelmed by how much interest there was in other places.

And we recognized that if we took it out of this local market and leveraged volunteers in various cities, we could expand our reach and really exponentially reach more students than what we could do in a six-week, Bay-Area-only program. So, the chapter-based model formed at that time.

And then over the years, I think we’ve continually added more and more subjects to the things that we teach. So, we were teaching just basic app development in the beginning, website development. Over the years, we’ve added everything from artificial intelligence to virtual reality, blockchain, crypto – you name it. If it touches technology and we can really expose our girls to it in a way that engages them, we do. So, we’ve added all of those different learning areas to our platforms.

And I think over the last year, the most significant change that we made was going virtual. That was a necessity in 2020 – actually, about – actually, it probably was this week. We were in the office wondering what was going on in the world in terms – what was going to happen in terms of COVID and the order came down from the San Francisco – maybe California – that shelter-in-place was going to start.

And we literally ran around the office, you know, putting things in storage in rapid fire. It was chaos, you know, to get everyone out of the office.

Now, we also had to do the same thing in our New York office, because we had a team there. But we weren’t planning to go virtual. We weren’t planning to go virtual as a team. We certainly weren’t planning to go virtual as an organization. But after we took the teams offline and everyone was at home, we started to shut down these in-person workshops that we had planned throughout the year.

And so, we recognized that if we were going to be able to continue to do anything with our students, we were going to have to try to figure out how to do it virtually.

And that’s what we did. We really revamped the programs that we would normally teach in workshops as well as partnered with other corporate partners to create opportunities for virtual learning around technology.

Interestingly enough, one of the partners that we started out with was Microsoft. So, we did workshops with Microsoft all over. We did some of them with the Microsoft Store community and did these virtual workshops all over the place. So, like, we would sometimes market those events to our chapter.

Maybe over 50 or so workshops, if not more, with the team at Microsoft, who were able to create these virtual lesson plans and really partner with us to be able to get them to our community.

And then we began to do the same with our own curricula. So, it was a transformational moment for the organization in that we could still, even though we were sheltered in place, get this learning and tools to students who were stuck at home with their parents. Parents were asking for this, girls were asking for this, and we were able to, you know, exponentially increase our reach over the course of the year. So, year before, we reached 5,000 students. This year, we reached, in 2020, over 10,000.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Wow.

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** Primarily, because we transformed to that virtual setting. So, this has been a constant thing of changing ourselves, if you will, as needed.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** And so how much of that transformation do you think will persist once the pandemic restrictions start to recede over the coming months?

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** Well, we made a decision, especially after we looked at those numbers, but we also made a decision just based on where we wanted the organization to go in terms of our reach, you know, that we would not, you know, stop doing virtual plan. We actually created a whole team and hired and added to our staff to create a virtual programming team.

One of the things that we found via the virtual platform that we created in 2020 was that we didn’t necessarily need to depend on this chapter-based, local-based model to grow the organization. And the clearest path to growth and reaching a million students by 2040, which is a goal for us, is really to leverage the virtual platform as much as we possibly can.

We were also able to bring in students from all over the world. So, in some of those virtual sessions that we did, we would have students from different cities in the U.S., but as well as, you know, in Africa, the Bahamas, throughout the U.K., Canada, etc. Just the ability to increase our reach demographically was especially possible because of the virtual learning platform.

So, that’s something that’s now a part of our organizational programmatic strategy. You’ll always do virtual. We hope to go back in person, yes, at some point this year, but we’ll never not do virtual planning or virtual learning. It will be part of our organizational strategy from here on out.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah, I’m really encouraged to hear that. You know, you grew up in Memphis and I grew up in rural central Virginia. And, you know, I think there are all sorts of kids in these rural communities or in places that are not urban innovation centers that have this critical mass of tech expertise who have both interest and potential in technology who just would never be able to travel to places that have programs like yours for in-person. So like this virtual stuff I think could be really transformative.

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** Absolutely. I think for us, you know, we considered doing some virtual programming before, you know, years before, but it wasn’t a priority. It was just like, “Eh, you know, maybe that might be something we could do to reach students in places that we don’t yet have a chapter.” But being forced, you know, to really adopt the platform to teach virtually, it really – for us, I think it opened our eyes to the necessity just for that reason that you mentioned. Like, there’s a tiny Asian country company in the Pacific area.It’s tiny, like you have to magnify the map to even see where this place is.

And during one of our virtual sessions, we had a student there. So, we were tracking the locations, and someone from this very small island in the South Pacific was in the feed. And for us, you know, we all marveled at – I think we showed the numbers and the charts to one of our board members. And they’re like, “Oh, yeah, this is such and such a place,” but we’d never heard of it.

So being able to reach them virtually and have them become part of the community would be transformational for them. And I think that’s – that’s part of our goal is to extend our reach as much as we can to those who need it.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** So, I’m curious. Going back to the girls who choose to participate in Black Girls Code, have you discerned any interesting patterns in what drives these young women to sign up? Like, how much of it like your daughter, where they’ve got a burgeoning interest in something like gaming? Like, how much of it is because they’re hearing from, you know, the media or something else that coding careers are interesting things. Like, what motivates these young women to even come into Black Girls Code.

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** The motivator for the girls has changed a bit over the last 10 years. I would say in the beginning, there was not this common terminology in the public mindset around coding and computer science. You know, there was not – it was not part of our common lexicon, if you will, back in 2011.

Yes, it was for those of us that are techies or geeks or in STEM, but the general public, absolutely not. You say, you know, I’m teaching computer programming, they did not know what that was. That did not, you know, that was not something that we were talking about commonly.

That has changed over the years, however, but in the beginning, I was mostly seeing students that were finding our programs either from teachers and possibly parents. So, that’s sort of how we grew in the beginning.

Now, you know, the landscape has changed quite a bit over 10 years. So, there’s Code.org, there’s Girls Who Code, there’s Technovation Challenge – there’s so many organizations that are focused on teaching coding skills to kids. And kids are learning these skills in schools – not in all schools, but in many of them.

So, now we’re getting more students that are coming into Black Girls Code because they learn Scratch in school and they want to learn more, or they did Code.org Hour of Code and they want to learn how to build apps now.

So, the seeds have been planted, you know, sometimes before they get to a Black Girls Code program. And there’s an interest in technology or they want to build an app or, you know, they want to create some type of apparatus. So, girls are actually interested now in learning more and are finding their way to us somewhat on their own and through their circle of friends who’ve done a Black Girls Code program a lot more than it was in the beginning, which has been a great transformation to see, that now it’s more common, if you will, for them to know a little bit about coding or at least that language and a little bit about computer science, but have this hunger to learn and do more.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** And do you all think about how you help support the interests that these young women have in technology and computing over time? And I mean, I ask that because-- you know this from your own career, but you know, majoring in electrical engineering and then becoming a professional engineer majoring in computer science or mathematics or pick your things, like, it’s hard enough on its own, like, getting all the way through, you know, the point where, you know, you’ve got this skillset that you can then go use to earn a living and to, like, find fulfillment in your life.

It’s even harder if you’re a woman in these fields, just because of all of the obstacles and, you know, sort of things that you know discourage you or you know just stand in the way. And then it’s harder yet if you’re, you know, like if you’re a black woman. And so, like, how – like, can we in general help nurture this interest that these brilliant young women have over time?

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** Well, one of the things that, for me, that has been a consistent part of my journey as leading the organization over the last 10 years is that I had my daughter in my home.

And so, as she went through these various stages, just as you described, you know, as she got to high school and as she was taking AP computer science and the challenges there, then she went to college. She majored in computer science, she’s still in college. She’s about to go into her senior year. Still a major in computer science, but she’s taking different detours here and there along the way, you know, she’s interned – at Microsoft by the way.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yay!

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** She’s going back for a second year this summer.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** That’s awesome.

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** So, because of that, I have really been able to bring things to the organization, like, hey, we really need to give them, you know, support. Once they get to high school, they’re going to need to go into AP computer science or they may be.

Or we need to start doing more to prepare them for internships and open up these opportunities for them to have exposure to internships in the summer. So, we created an alumni program back at the end of 2019 that we have fully actualized this year that really includes support beyond just what we would do in a K-12 BGC setting.

So, we created a formal mentorship program, we created a formal internship program that connects our girls to internship opportunities with a variety of companies. We have an alumni summit that we have done – this will be the third year, but second year virtually that really brings in mentors to support the girls, give them really exposure to career advice, etc., to prepare them for the next step of their journey. And then we hope by 2022 we’ll actually have some college chapters in place.

So, what we’re looking to do is create a bit of a circle, if you will, that girls will come into BGC, but they can grow and they can go into these other career areas or major in CS, but still be a part of this very rich community in ways that we continue to provide them support.

So, for us, it’s really, you know, building out this leg of the organization is a key for us in this next year or two is to really make sure we have the career support, internship support, mentorship support, etc., so that these girls that we’ve really created a pipeline of can actually begin to have these fruitful, and hopefully a longevity of their careers in the field.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah, so it – you all are doing such great work. Like, I wonder, you know, if you could get the world to do anything that would, you know, get more women and more women of color into computing, like, what would that thing be? And, like, how can we all help support that?

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** I think we need more organizational support, not just at Black Girls Code, but any organization that’s doing this work as a nonprofit. We can’t do it alone. So for me, it’s always about how can we have this magnified effort of different organizations that are all working collectively to elevate girls in the STEM fields, and particularly in computer science?

And so, that means, like, getting companies to volunteer to help support this. So, that means bringing in staff-- our classes are run by volunteers that work in the industry. So, getting folks to volunteer at organizations like Black Girls Code, getting individuals to both give as well as encourage their organizations and companies to give to support organizations like Black Girls Code. Absolutely, positively, creating both mentorship and internship opportunities. Those opportunities are transformational because it’s difficult to understand what – and computer science does, if you haven’t done it, like, very – I see this from my daughter. Like, when she’s in school, like, that’s totally different than when she’s in, you know, her internship and she’s on a team of engineers that are working on a product line. Totally different experience and totally different way for her to develop this mindset of what a computer scientist really is and what that does.

And then I think really making sure that once these girls are career ready, they’re graduating, that they can get a foot in the door, they can get an opportunity to work with a company like Microsoft and others and have a fruitful career there.

So, pushing on all those various levels, either via individuals that are giving of their time and resources or really holding our companies accountable for providing these opportunities to get more women in the field.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah, it’s such a good and necessary push and, like, we should all be very, very grateful we have your leadership and your organization’s leadership out there, helping us all make progress on this.

So I would love to get your advice to two different audiences. So, like, one is, like, if you’re a young woman – or just a young computer scientist in general trying to, you know, break into the field, you know, like, what advice would you give to them and then, a separate question is: What advice would you give to parents when they have a kid like you who, you know, is interested and capable in, you know, mathematics and science? Like, what advice do you give to presents about how they can help their kid, you know, pursue that?

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** I would say for students or young computer scientists, find the thing that you love and find a way to utilize technology to help you do that thing.

I continue to, you know, always bring up things about my daughter because, like, that’s who I see, like, on this pathway. And for her even, she loves art. She always loves – has loved art. She was once – wanted to be an artist, like, before she wanted to be a technologist.

And in this last year or so, she’s found a way to put art with technology and she’s doing a lot of digital art. And she’s still a computer scientist and sees herself that way, but she’s really now able to match these two really, really strong passions of hers. And I think that’s what it’s all about. It’s not like just doing something because there’s a good job at the end – like, I’m a parent, and I don’t promote that (Laughter.) because that only gets you so far. And this can be a difficult field. But if you can find a way to mesh, you know, the things that really get you excited and find a way, there’s – there – I can think of very few things that technology doesn’t touch it.

Find a way to meld those two things together and I think that’s what leads to really finding so much joy and fulfillment in your career path.

And then I would say something similar to parents is, find the things that your kids love and give them opportunities to do that. For me, it was my daughter loved gaming and she also loved – she was a creative. Now, I did not want her to do games, like, I did not even want to teach game development when we first started BGC. I was sick and tired of those games and I did not want to teach it.

I found out, however, very early on within BGC that teaching game development and game design is such a – sound really geeky now, but it’s such a beautiful pathway in tech because it’s creative, so there’s art there, there are the people behind the scenes that do the sound. There, of course, are developers who do the algorithms, but it’s such a diverse as well as really – I think it’s the perfect way to teach computer science because of the different modalities in terms of bringing all these different skill sets and techniques into creating a final product.

And it’s a place that, you know, certainly, we need more and more diverse creatives being a part of that industry. But I didn’t want to do that because I was, like, oh, gaming, she’s going to play games all the time. But it was what she loved. And I think for me, the learning as a parent through all this is, like, it – find the thing that your child loves and open up every opportunity possible for them to be able to do that thing, you know, whatever it is. You know, and if it’s technology, there’s a lot of resources out there now that we can get, you know, right offline. Find those opportunities and introduce them to it as much and as early as you possibly can.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah, I think that is such good advice. I mean, it’s really interesting. The first program that I ever wrote for myself, like, the thing that motivated me to, like, just go learn more about coding so I can make this thing that I wanted entirely for myself was a Dungeons and Dragons game, actually.

And once I had made that thing for myself, like, I learned a bunch and, like, I – the most important thing I learned is that I could make things and, you know, I was super interested for a long time and how do you build games and, like, how do – you know, how do you build awesome computer graphics systems?

And, like, I’ve never been a game designer or, like, a computer graphics person but, like, just having those is the motivation that drew me in, that taught me that I could figure out how to program, then let me sort of do exactly what you just said, which is find the thing that I was really passionate about making that I could make with these skills that I had picked up.

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** No, as soon as you said that, my brain light bulb went off. And I remembered the game she used to play all the time, it was World of Warcraft.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Oh, nice.

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** She played World – she was so obsessed with this game. She wanted to create World of Warcraft. And you also made me just remember in talking about feeding into passions and I mentioned, like, she’s a digital artist now, but these characters that she’s drawing, they look a lot like those characters in World of Warcraft. And it didn’t – until you just said that until I put two and two together, because I’ve been looking at this digital art, like, where are these characters coming from? But it looks like those characters in that fantasy world that she was so obsessed with as a gamer.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah.

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** And so, it gets back right to what you said is just like being able to support where our kids and our younger selves, you know, have this passion. It’ll eventually come full circle, you know, like, as parents, we may not know where that is, but it will. And if we just support them, you know, along that journey, I think that’s where we can make sure they have, you know, find a way –

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah. We’ve – there’s been a bunch of research done about the differences between intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. So, you know, extrinsic motivation is like a thing that comes from outside of you. So, it’s, you know, like a paycheck or, you know, like, other people piling on adulation or, you know, criticism.

And, like, intrinsic motivation is, like, what comes from within you. And it is just super clear thought that intrinsic motivation is, like, the more powerful of the two. And, like, I think you said something a minute ago, like, being a professional of any sort is hard, like, you’re going to have days where the thing that you’re trying to do is a struggle. And if you have that intrinsic motivation, like, you sort of understand why you’re doing the thing that you’re doing, like, you will get through whatever the struggle is.

And if you lack that intrinsic motivation, then it’s just very hard, so –

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** Absolutely.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** You know, in a sense, like, figuring out what it is you do to, like, find that intrinsic motivation, like, I think what you just said is, like, just fantastically good parenting advice in general is so powerful because if a kid can figure that out, then, like, they’ve – they’re off to the races.

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** Yeah, absolutely. I totally agree.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** So, how are you thinking about the future? Like, you’ve got 10 years of Black Girls Code under your belt and, you know, hopefully, you’ve got, you know, many decades ahead of you. But, like, what – where do you think things are going over the next 10 years?

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** I think over the next 10 years for BGC, we’ll certainly be building out a foundation based on what we’ve learned that we do really well. So, we just finished a strategic plan at the end of this quarter, and you know, part of what we’re looking to do over the next three to five years is just build a solid foundation.

So, it’s – for us as an organization, we’re transforming a bit into a more mature, if you will, company – getting a bit out of that startup mindset that we really built on over the last decade.

But building that foundation, I think for us, some of the things that we have done very well in terms of building out these chapters, we want to continue to do. So, certainly, scaling the organization to other cities both in the U.S. and abroad, building out this virtual platform and making sure that the tools that we’ve been able to develop, we can utilize them virtually. But also, seeing ways or finding ways that we can get those tools to teachers in the classroom that may want to utilize our lesson plans, etc. So, really, expanding on our virtual offerings both in house and externally.

But also, I think for us is making sure that as you’ve mentioned earlier that these girls that are in college and going into their careers really have a solid support system. So, I see the organization continuing to transform in that way in their college partnerships and building these college chapters.

But for me, I think it always comes back full circle to supporting these entrepreneurial initiatives that the girls may go into. So, I do hope that in the future, this probably is maybe eight to 10 years out that we can create these center of excellences or labs, if you will, innovation labs and hubs, and we have one in our office in New York, but building it out in other areas like California, where girls can come in and actually see a product come through its full lifecycle and that we can support these girls in creating some of these companies thought we’ve introduced them to and exposed them to over the prior decades.

That is really my hope and dream, whether I’m sitting in this seat or not, is to be able to see and invest in a company that’s started by a girl that was a part of Black Girls Code.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** That’s awesome. I would love the opportunity to make those sorts of investments, myself. So, we’re almost out of time here. I – before we go, like, I just want to ask, like, what’s – what’s things you do for fun? You have this big, meaningful job that you’re doing, which I’m guessing consumes a lot of your time. But, like, do you have any interests outside of that that – that you’re really passionate about?

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** Interestingly enough, the thing that I – one of the things that I do for fun that I’m starting to get back into now is the most low-fi, low-tech thing possible is gardening. Like, I’m really obsessed. (Laughter.)

**KEVIN SCOTT:** That’s awesome.

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** Gardening. I love, love, love to, like, go – I can spend – (inaudible) I can really spend hours outside in the dirt. I love it. Once, when I lived on the east coast and I lived in New Jersey, of all places, I really wanted to, you know, become like a master gardener.

I love gardening. And I just – there’s just something about it, I mean, I think it’s probably why I’m in nonprofit now, but just – you have to be patient, you have to plant seeds and you put the seed in there and you got to water it. I mean, I love – I love – I’m obsessed with it.

And it brings me a lot of peace, I don’t know, but like, it’s very peaceful to me. It’s hard and it’s, you know, shoveling and digging, but I love that part of being back and connected to nature and, you know, nurturing something and then patiently waiting and seeing if it’s going to sprout or grow. I – it’s really something that I’m passionate about.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** That’s – it’s really awesome. I mean, I do think gardening is an interesting – is an interesting metaphor, like you said, you can nurture, but you’re not in control. And it’s so interesting and special when you get something out of it.

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** I mean, it’s – it really is. And I didn’t really think about it that much in terms of BGC, but yeah, it is similar – similar to it, running a nonprofit. But I do that just to unwind and, you know, after being so connected to my tech and talking on tech and teaching about tech all day, just being able to go out and connect with nature in that way is really special for me.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** What’s your favorite thing to grow?

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** Vegetables. I love – this is the southerner in me. Like, I’m obsessed with growing all these collard and mustard greens.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Oh yes indeed.

(Crosstalk.) (Laughter.)

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** I was, like, this is how you know I’m really from the south, I have probably – that is the thing I love to grow, but any type of vegetable, I love to grow that.

And it – and before that on the flower side, I really was obsessed with roses, but I know that’s from my grandmother, who was a rose gardener. But I’m a vegetable gardener, that’s my –

**KEVIN SCOTT:** It’s interesting. Yeah, I mean, maybe this will resonate. As a southerner, like, I get kale shoved in front of me all the time. And, like, I rarely like it when people – people are, like, “Oh, oh, you know, like, you don’t like kale?” And I’m, like, no, no, no, I love kale, I just don’t like raw kale. Like in the south, you, like, you put your greens into a pot with a – like a piece of smoked and salted pork.

(Crosstalk.)

**KEVIN SCOTT:** And, like, you boil the life out of it. (Laughter.)

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** I’m laughing. I’m laughing because I literally have watched – looking at several bunches of collard greens as well as a piece of pork in my refrigerator to cook right now. (Laughter.) We are very – two southerners, Kevin, I love it. (Laughter.)

**KEVIN SCOTT:** It is – collard greens braised with pork is my absolute favorite thing.

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** Mine, too. I – we’re birds of a feather here. (Laughter.)

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Well thank you so much for taking the time to chat with us today. This has been a really great conversation. It’s so inspiring what you do and I’m so grateful that you’re out there doing it. Like, you are really making a difference. And I appreciate it and I think we all should.

**KIMBERLY BRYANT:** Thank you so much. Thank you, I appreciate that. It’s a labor of love. And I’m really glad to have so many folks support the work. Thank you.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Awesome.

[MUSIC]

**CHRISTINA WARREN:** Well, that was Kevin’s conversation with Kimberly Bryant. And, wow, Kevin, there was so much good stuff there. I want to go back a little bit because games came up a lot as sort of a gateway, I think for both teaching programming and also for sort of the inspiration of – you know, for Black Girls Code. And also, a little bit of an inspiration for how you got into programming as well. What do you think that it is about games that makes it such a perfect way to sort of onboard young minds into, you know, technology?

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah, so, I think games are super interesting because they are easy to love. Like, they’re a thing that you can touch, like, you can be a fan of a game, you know, like they are unlike many things in technology, they’re not abstract.

And I’m seeing it even with my own son, who is a big fan of Roblox. I have tried for a long time to get him interested in coding at all, and his desire to make things in Roblox was ultimately the thing that convinced him that coding was something interesting to do.

And so, I think whether it’s games or anything else that, like, finding a thing that you want to make with code, with technology, is really powerful motivator.

And, like, the other thing, too, though, I’ll say about games is, like, the really interesting thing to me and, like, this is what really resonated you know resonated with me about the example that Kimberly gave of her daughter is games are sort of multi-disciplinary.

So, you can, you know, you can sort of jump into you know learning about or trying to create games because you love art or because you love game design, like, how you know a character is interacting with other characters, you like it because you love physics, like, you want to build simulations of worlds, like, there are just so many parts of a game and so many ways to, like, your interest.

**CHRISTINA WARREN:** Yeah, no, I totally agree. That really struck me, too, when she was talking about that because she’s right, I mean, it really is sort of the perfect onboarding mechanism especially as games exist today because there’s not just one role, there are all these roles. And it can really be a good way I think to kind of get people to think about you know especially kids, right, to think about things they might be interested in.

I also wanted to kind of get your take, like, what struck me from hearing your conversation with Kimberly was how important it is to have mentors and representatives and people who either look like you or remind you of yourself as a way to kind of encourage, you know, young people or students to take on a career.

I was really struck by the fact that you know both when she was in college and then as she was building out Black Girls Code, like, how important it is that we see people who look like us in the fields that we work in.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah, look, I think one of the – one of the things that she said that was super powerful was, you know, this example from her daughter’s camp where these girls were off doing you know really amazing things, you know, trying to get these tickets and you know were helping each other.

And, like, and weren’t being seen. And I think being seen is a very important and fundamental human thing, like, you – you need to be seen and, like, in the things that you choose to put your heart and soul and energy into.

And you know, conversely, you need to be able to see yourself in a career in the future and I think it’s so important both of those things, like, to – you know, be able to imagine yourself in a future and to, like, you know, feel like you have a connection to whether it’s in the classroom or in your job or you know in the communities that are surrounding your job.

So, like, I just think it’s super important what Kimberly is doing. Just overcoming, like, all of the inherent difficulty and getting a set of skills that you can then use to go off and create and make, you know, is tough. And, like, you need – you need to be able to really envision yourself in that future so that you’re not – overcome by, you know, things like imposter syndrome or, like, all of these doubts or –

**CHRISTINA WARREN:** Right.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** You know, things that can come, you know, come up as you’re struggling against something.

**CHRISTINA WARREN:** No, you’re completely correct, I think. And I – like you said, I’m so glad that Kimberly is doing what she’s doing because it’s so important and it is giving that visibility, but also, letting those girls see themselves somewhere else and doing something that they might really want to do. I love that so much.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah, it’s really great.

**CHRISTINA WARREN:** All right, well, that’s it for our show today. We are so grateful to Kimberly for joining us. Please share this episode with educators, colleagues, and friends to help spread the word about Black Girls Code and the important work that that group is doing.

Remember that you can send us a message anytime at BehindTheTech@microsoft.com. Thanks for listening.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** See you next time.