

Women in Business and Technology

Transcript of Episode 039 - Fixing Gender Inequality in the Workplace with Candour Founder Ruchika Tulshyan

Guests: Nancy McSharry Jensen, Ruchika Tulshyan

Summary: Our hosts kick off the show with a conversation about Black History Month. Colleen chats with Nancy McSharry Jensen, the CEO and Co-founder at The Swing Shift—the destination for women in career transition. Sonia interviews Ruchika Tulshyan, the CEO and Founder of Candour, an inclusion strategy organization. Live on Microsoft's campus, they discuss Ruchika's book, *The Diversity Advantage*. The show wraps with a conversation about Pixar's new short film, *Purl*.

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(Music.)

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Welcome to episode 39 of Women in Business & Technology. I'm Colleen O'Brien.

SONIA DARA: And I'm Sonia Dara.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: We're kicking off the show in our Community Connect segment with a conversation that I had with Nancy McSharry Jensen, the CEO and Co-Founder at The Swing Shift. The Swing Shift is the destination for women in career transition, and I talk more with Nancy about their programs to support women who are moving into a new field or returning to the workforce after an extended absence.

SONIA DARA: And then, we'll dive into a conversation that I had with Ruchika Tulshyan, the author of *The Diversity Advantage: Fixing Gender Inequality in the Workplace*. We hosted Ruchika here on campus, and recorded the interview live for an audience of Women at Microsoft Employee Resource Group members, as well as allies. And the event was so well received. I had a great time.

Ruchika is the founder of the company Candour, which partners with organizations to strategize on diversity, equity and inclusion. Ruchika was just named to the Thinkers50 Radar Class of 2019, which is an incredible list of 30 thinkers to watch in the coming year in the world of management ideas. Congratulations to you, Ruchika!

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Yes, congratulations, Ruchika! And finally, we'll wrap things up this show in our Cutting Edge segment with a conversation about the new Pixar Sparkshorts video, "Purl." The story follows an earnest ball of yarn who gets a job at a "bro-tastic start-up," and offers some interesting commentary on workplace diversity and inclusion.

SONIA DARA: Perfect to match with Ruchika. Nice, good job. But before we jump in, we're officially in the midst of February, which is Black History Month. Here at Microsoft, we have an employee resource group called BAM, or Blacks at Microsoft, which is recognizing 30 years of celebration, collaboration, and community engagement. Congratulations, BAM!

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: BAM sent out an e-mail to kick off Black History Month with some great ways to honor the heritage month. One amazing event series that they're promoting is this awesome partnership with Black Girls Code and the Microsoft retail stores. To find the event near you supporting Black Girls Code at your local Microsoft store, search for "Microsoft Stores" and click on the search result "Find a Microsoft retail location." Simple scan the events at your local store to figure out a way to support Black Girls Code.

SONIA DARA: Whether you're honoring the heritage month by visiting your local museum dedicated to African-American history and culture, or spending more of your dollars this month at black-owned businesses, identify what actions you can extend *beyond* Black History Month, and stay committed to throughout the year.

VOICE: Community Connect, get involved and stay connected.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: I am thrilled to welcome to the studio the Founder and CEO of The Swing Shift, Nancy Jensen.

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: Hi, Colleen.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Nancy, welcome to the show.

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: Thank you. I'm stoked to be here.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: (Laughter.) Cool. So can you tell our listeners what is The Swing Shift?

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: The Swing Shift is the destination for women in career transition. Seventy-seven million women work in the United States today, and 60 percent either want to shift roles or careers, and of those, almost half take breaks. And when it's time to go back, they need help. And so, we have built a business that's built all around providing them with products and services to let them shift roles or careers, or get back into the workplace.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: That's fantastic. So, this is not a specific demographic of women. Like, your numbers are huge here. There are a lot of women in transition.

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: It's a huge market opportunity and nobody was addressing it.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: And I know, maybe this is -- I don't know if this is a millennial trend anymore. Maybe changing up your job, your role every couple of years, that feels like the way to build a career to me. And it requires that I'm constantly skilling up.

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: Absolutely, and that is absolutely the trend. There's a piece of research that shows that your average American worker is going to change jobs seven times during the course of their professional career.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Wow.

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: And so, when they do that, they need -- sometimes, many times -- they need resources and assistance to do it. And inside companies, they don't necessarily get that. And certainly in smaller organizations, that guidance isn't there.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Right. And there's a lot of online learning right now, but if I ever even start down that path, I don't know where to start. There's so much out there. It would be nice to have sort of like a built-in curriculum to help me make that transition.

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: It's totally true. And you know, we provide programming. So, we have our flagship program, which is our Career Catalyst, which is a multi-week program. We meet in a cohort model. And we have workshops. We have consulting engagements. We have referrals. We have placement.

The biggest thing that we find with the people we work with is that the sense of community and network is super important as they look to change, because change is scary for most people. And having that support of the people that are going through this process together, and then we provide experts in whatever the areas are so that they get their network within their cohort, they get the experts from the local community, and then from the larger professional community, because your network is what's going to get you to your next stage.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Right. We talk a lot about community on this show, and even just hearing the fact that community and cohorts are such an important and integral part of your program, it's so important to me. I know that when I've tried to make these transitions, unless you happen to be sort of at the same phase in your career as a friend of yours who also happens to be job hunting, it can feel really lonely to make these transitions. (Laughter.)

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: Colleen, you're spot on, and that's exactly the problem that we address. It's professional isolation, right? If you are looking to change roles or careers, I mean, first of all, you're not going to tell your boss, necessarily, right?

(Laughter.) And you may or may not get that guidance inside. And so, perhaps you have been siloed in a job. Everybody's been there. And so, how do you get that? It's lonely, right?

And if you've taken a break, you've been on the playground, or you're at a nursing facility, or traveling right? The professional community and engagement is not necessarily part of your every day. So, we've found that putting that together is essential.

Also, there's a ton of research that bears this out. If you're not going to go through a traditional channel 85 percent of the time, you're going to get your next step job through a personal connection. So, network is super important.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Right. Nancy, what motivated you to start this company? Is there any personal background there, or is it really just looking at all these big stats?

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: (Laughter.) No, the personal is professional in this case. I worked at Microsoft for 12 years, right? And I worked on systems and servers. I was part of the team that launched SharePoint, which is now, as we know, a billion dollar business. I stepped back to take care of my kids.

So, I have a 12 and a half year old, and an eight year old. I meant to take a one year break, and it extended to five. And when it was time for me to go back, I was dumb and happy. (Laughter.) I thought, "Well, I'll just brush off my resume and go start interviewing."

And what happened was I was going on interviews and people were saying, "Yeah, you haven't worked in four and a half years. Thanks for coming in." I mean, these were late-stage startups that were in the same space as SharePoint.

And I thought, "You've got to be kidding me. I know exactly what you're doing in your space. I know how to product manage and market this." And they were basically shining me on. And it hurt my feelings for about 10 minutes, and then I got mad. (Laughter.) And then I thought, "If this is what it's like for me, what is it like for everybody else out there?" And that was the genesis of it.

And then I met Sarah Denwald, who's my business partner. Her situation is different. She just wanted to make sure she stayed in the game, right? Her kids are younger than mine. And together, we started working on the business. That was in 2016.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Anger can be a very activating emotion. (Laughter.)

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: Yes, yes. I try to keep it in check, but it was really more a sense of frustration and, as we said before, of loneliness. I thought, "Wait a minute. I can't be the only person out here."

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Right. What are some of the barriers that prevent women from finding meaningful work after an extended leave, like you took, or in a career transition?

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: Yeah, and it's funny. These are the same barriers whether you're looking to shift roles or careers, or you've taken a break and you want to get back. The first is what does a modern job search look like. It used to be you had a resume, and you made sure it was up to date, and you made a few copies and gave them out.

And in the last 10 years, it has changed radically. There's LinkedIn. There's social media. There's personal branding, right? There's your pitch. How do you talk about your past and your future in a way that's compelling? There's a bunch of research -- I have a background in market research (laughter) -- that shows people will pay attention for six seconds, right? So, how do you get that down? That's the biggest barrier, is what does the modern job search look like and what does it that you need so that you can move forward?

But there's other things that are in play. There's access to networks. We talked about that a little bit earlier. How much is it going to cost? Money is a factor, particularly for women who are taking breaks. They know they've sacrificed income, right?

Or if you're planning to take a break, what's that going to look like? How much is it going to cost to go back? Mid-career, it may not make sense to go get another degree. If you're 45 years old, are you going to lay out \$100,000 to go back? No. There's not much return on that investment, right, financially. You've got to look at the ROI.

Other barriers include how do you make your skills relevant. Like, if you're going from a marketing job in tech to a marketing job in biotech, how do you talk about it in a relevant manner? If you've been doing unpaid work as a volunteer, how do you make that volunteer work relevant in a paid environment? So, there's that skills relevancy. There's more.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Yeah, even as you're saying that, I think about the very vocabulary that we use to describe work and how that changes over time.

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: Absolutely. Yes.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: And sometimes checking the LinkedIn profiles of my friends and colleagues just to see (laughter). Like, are we all still talking about our work in the same way?

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: Oh, it's true. And the reality is when you're looking for jobs, there's a lot of technology and tools that are in place that are super useful. But you also have to understand how they help you and how they hinder you.

For example, applicant tracking systems which lots of companies use. They're a very useful tool for taking in candidates, but they're not friends to somebody who is outside the traditional range. They optimize for relevancy and regency. And so, if you don't have a one-to-one relevant job, if you've had a little break, they're going to automatically scan you out.

So, we work with folks to say, "Well, here's how you make yourself relevant. Here's how you get around the break. Here's what the modern vocabulary is, both on the business side and on the technology side," right?

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: So, I know that you mentioned Career Catalyst. Is there any other program that The Swing Shift is offering?

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: Yeah. We started with the Career Catalyst. It is our flagship program, and it was the first thing we offered. We also listen really carefully to our customers. So, they would come through the Career Catalyst. We have 100 percent thumbs up from our cohorts, but they said, "We'd really like some follow-on workshops." And so, in 2017, we introduced resume reviews.

They said, "We would also like some opportunity to do one-on-one consultations, and we need referrals." You know, I'm a business person. (Laughter.) I'm not a coach. But there's lots of great resources out there. And so, in 2018, we started doing consults and referring people to the appropriate folks in this region that do career counseling, career coaching.

And then, the other thing they asked us for was placement. These candidates fall outside the traditional placement guidelines, and they're saying, "Do you have a placement resource that I can work with that is tuned to me and my needs?" And so, we are introducing that in 2019. So, we call it the Close the Loop strategy.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Fantastic. And I know that you're partnering with Amazon, AT&T, Expedia, and NBC Universal.

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: Among others.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Yeah. Those are just a few of your partners and allies. Are these the companies helping you to close the loop, or what do these partners have to gain from working with you?

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: Well, it goes on multiple parameters. You know, in addition to our consumer programs, which is our consults and workshops, and placements, we also have programming for companies. So, they come to use for internal training resources on things like a negotiation, and recruiting to go after this overlooked talent pool. So, we also do corporate engagements. So, it's a little bit of a matchmaking business.

But they look to us really for three things. One is this overlooked pool of talent because they do fall outside the traditional parameters. And yet, the women that we work with, they have 10 years' experience, right? They're proven performers. Maybe they've been out for a little bit, or maybe they've proven it in another area. So, companies are coming to us to say, "Show us how to talk to them."

The second thing, like I said, is internal training. So, we've had a couple of engagements where it's from a diversity and inclusion initiative perspective where the companies are saying, "Would you come in and talk with these communities about how to go in and advocate for themselves when it's compensation time?" So, we've done that.

Some companies do it as a way to show community support, right? They know, and we all know that, particularly in tech, women are still relatively underrepresented. And companies, I think, are making a good push towards, "How do we rectify this?" And so, they work with us because they know that we're working towards that end.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: It sounds like you're working with both sides of the funnel.

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: We absolutely are, yeah. You can't do one without the other.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Great, holistic approach there. (Laughter.) What is some of the feedback that you've heard from job seekers that you're performing? It sounds like after Career Catalyst, everyone was two thumbs up.

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: Like I said, we measure pretty much everything we do. The first feedback was, "Give us more," and this is why we have grown as fast as we have, because they want the workshops and the consults, and the referrals, and the placements.

But as these folks are getting into the jobs that they want, and this is very gratifying as a business owner, they're saying, "What you showed me how to do is letting me advance myself in a way that fits in my life." Don't forget that, for many people, they're shifting jobs or careers, or taking breaks and coming back because their life circumstances have changed.

And we say, "Look, you can't ignore that. You can't ignore the fact that you have a family, and that you've got to accommodate that, and that you have professional skills and ambitions. And how do you pursue that, too? How do you put it all together in a way that works and makes sense for your whole life?"

And so, we have people that are working at places like Uber. We have a gal that we worked with, she actually came through on one of our scholarship programs. She is now working as a site manager at Uber, and she's bringing in other people that look like her.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Yes!

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: And that's how you start. And that's at a very micro level, but that's how these things happen. We have another gal who ran a \$1.3 million volunteer organization as an unpaid administrator. And she went and leverage that into a paid job. And what they say to us is, "I'm not sure I would've done this -- I know I would not have done this on my own," right? And so, that's very gratifying.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Great success stories.

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: Yeah, they're really good. (Laughter.) There's another one that's on our website, a gal who came to our very first cohort just landed what she says is the job of her dreams. I know, it makes me so happy, right? And maybe it's me. I really like everybody who comes through our program. They're so inspiring, and you hear their stories. And I just want them all to move forward in a way that is productive for them.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: It sounds like you're equipping them with the community and the resources to do so.

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: We're working on it.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: (Laughter.) You mentioned this website. Where can our listeners learn more online about The Swing Shift?

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: Go to TheSwingShift.co, not com, dot co. TheSwingShift.co.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: And are there any other social media platforms where they can find you?

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: Oh, we're everywhere. We're on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, not Pinterest because then you would never leave. (Laughter.) I spend way too many hours on Pinterest.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Yeah, we need you to get up and get a job.

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: That's right. (Laughter.)

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Nancy, thank you so much for the work that you're doing.

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: Oh, thanks, Colleen.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: And thank you for being here today.

NANCY MCSHARRY JENSEN: Okay, it's been great.

(Music.)

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: And now, let's get on with the interview.

SONIA DARA: We would love to welcome on stage the Founder and CEO of Candour, an inclusion strategy organization, and the author of *The Diversity Advantage*, please welcome onstage Ruchika Tulshyan.

We'll go ahead and get started talking about your company, Candour. It partners with organizations to strategize on diversity, equity and inclusion -- all topics we love. So, what are the types of projects that you're working on with these companies?

RUCHIKA TULSHYAN: Great question. Candour is an inclusion strategy firm. I set it up some time last year, and it was really borne out of a number of requests I was getting to advise organizations on what they could do about this big, hairy problem of just not having a very diverse workforce that reflected the demographics not only of America, but of the changing world, as well as what they could do to actually keep and include really, really great talent from leaving.

So the company was basically borne out of this number of requests that came to me after I wrote my book. And so, the type of work I've been doing with companies really ranges. So some of it is communications work. And one of my clients, I've been working on a project where they really want to be known more for their social justice work, and for the incredible work that they're doing, and the thought leaders that they have that have really great ideas on complex topical issues, like the Me Too movement, and Black Lives Matter, that sort of thing.

With another organization, I've been looking at -- and my strategy is to always first collect data on where places are at, what's happening within the workplace. And it's so different within different organizations. So, the client I'm thinking of, they do awesome work. And one of the tricky processes that they're having is holding inclusive meetings. So a lot of the meetings are male-dominated, male-run. The men speak. They interrupt

women, and so, really finding strategies to overcome that and be much more inclusive, right?

And it's been an incredible journey. I've been so lucky. I've gotten to meet really great people who have great intentions to make a difference.

SONIA DARA: So in addition to your work with Candour, you -- like you mention -- authored *The Diversity Advantage* and also have written on the topic of diversity in leadership for several outlets, including *Harvard Business Review* and *Forbes*. So how did you become so invested in this topic?

RUCHIKA TULSHYAN: So great question, and it's a long answer, so bear with me. I actually am a recovering journalist. So, I started my career as a business journalist and I loved writing about the markets, about companies. My favorite part of the work I did was interviewing leaders.

And one thing I started realizing, no matter which country I was operating in -- so, I worked in Mumbai, I've worked in London, in Singapore, in New York, in Atlanta -- and one of the things I started realizing again and again is every time I went to interview a leader, nine out of 10 times, the leader was male, right? And nine out of 10 times, it was actually a white male, even in other parts of the world.

And so, I had a feeling like something needs to change, but I was so busy putting my head down, working hard, being a reporter. And then, I actually moved to Seattle and started working in technology and using some of my journalism skills for technology, essentially.

And in that experience -- and again it's not to do with that one organization, it's not at all to do with that one experience -- but I observed a large scale, technology wide, industry wide issue of where I saw widespread sexism. I saw widespread discrimination, especially against women of color and people of color. And now, this is all well-documented. This is something that we're really talking about.

But when I was there it really wasn't, right? And every time I would try and bring this up, a lot of the advice I would get was part of the lean-in narrative. "It's you who needs to lean-in more. It's you who needs to negotiate better. You need to be more confident." And I was like, "I'm leaning in hard enough. I'm about to fall over, and things aren't getting better for me. In fact, they're getting worse."

And so, I just had -- you know, as a journalist, born a journalist -- a deep desire as a journalist to investigate what was going on, because I said, "It can't be up to me only, right? There has to be something else that's going on." I talked to other women quietly in the breakroom, and then we'd go back to our desks. And we just had to put on these layers of armor and just be normal again.

And so, I quit my job when my manager and I were talking about a promotion. With three quarters of my stock options on the table, I walked away to become a starving author, essentially. And my book was really designed to help organizations, A, understand the business case for why diversity and inclusion makes sense; and secondly, be very actionable, have very tangible, actionable strategies to help drive those conversations around what actually works when it comes to recruiting more women, retaining more women, and advancing more women.

And I just sent it out into the world. I spoke with some awesome organizations doing some great work all around the world. And I didn't foresee that this would become such a big topic of conversation that we're having right now. My plan was to write the book, do the investigation, and go back into technology, right, because I loved the idea of building the future, of innovation, what's coming next. That has always excited me, even as a journalist.

And so, now to be at this intersection of building a much more inclusive world with these awesome organizations doing great work, it's like a dream come true.

SONIA DARA: So last year, you authored an article in *Harvard Business Review* entitled - I love this -- "Women of color get asked to do more office housework, and here's how they can say no." What types of office housework is getting assigned to women of color, and how prevalent is this issue? What is office housework?

RUCHIKA TULSHYAN: How many of you have been asked to do office housework?

SONIA DARA: I think I have. (Laughter.)

RUCHIKA TULSHYAN: How many of you don't know what office housework is? Great. So, office housework is the work you do to keep the organization running smoothly, and it does not lead to promotion. It doesn't lead to any sort of recognition. And some of it seems extremely benign, right? Some of it is like ordering lunch for the meeting, or taking the notes, or closing the door, even if you're halfway across the room and all the men are on the other side next to the door. It's, "Hey, Ruchika, can you close the door?"

And in the beginning, it doesn't feel like it's a big deal. It's like, of course, we all want to work together. This work needs to be done. But it happens again and again, and again, and disproportionately, bears our research, women get asked to do much more office housework than men, and women of color disproportionately among women get asked to do this office housework.

And here's why this is a problem. The reason why it's a problem is because when women get asked to do office housework, it reinforces the existing power structures, right? So, it reinforces this notion that, "Hey, Ruchika's a great team player. She always

takes the notes. She always orders lunch. But you know what? She's not really leadership material."

And over the years, it continues to add up, right, because there is no good answer apart from widespread discrimination. There's no good answer for why women are graduating college at record numbers. We're getting more advanced degrees. We're getting better educated. We're getting better. We're getting much more experience than ever before, and yet the number of Fortune 500 CEOs has actually started declining. The number of female CEOs in the Fortune 500 has barely moved, and in some cases, has declined. And you know, women of color certainly very much lack representation.

So, there is no good reason for why that exists. So, that's a more long-winded answer.

And office housework is one of those things that it's so slight, it's so under the surface that it's actually hard to even put into words. And I'd realize that, no matter where I've worked, when I reflect now, I would get asked to do office housework. And again, in the moment, point in time, there are small requests like, "Order lunch, take the meetings notes, shut the door," and then there are the large ones, especially in academia.

So, one of my hats that I wear is in academia. These are huge, huge time stop requests. You know, "Mentor people, sit on committees that do not lead to tenure, that do not lead to promotion."

And so, it disproportionately women and women of color. And I think what we really need to start talking about when we talk about equity and really solving some of the issues that are deeply held is this idea of office housework because it sounds so innocuous. It sounds like, oh, it's no big deal. But again, if it's impacting women, if it's impacting our ability to get ahead, it's definitely something we need to talk about.

SONIA DARA: So what are strategies you'd recommend to combat this trend?

RUCHIKA TULSHYAN: So, one of the ways to disrupt this behavior is really to, in that moment, actually say something like, "I think it's going to take away from the time that I need to do X." Literally something like, "I was hired to do marketing, and being a mentor at this time will take away time from this work that I've been asked to do." Those are for more larger, overarching requests, the ones that really take up a lot of time.

Another strategy is to basically keep track of how often you get asked to do this kind of work, right, and bring it up. Use that data to your advantage. "I've taken meeting notes for the last 10 meetings. It would be really, really great to come up with a program, some sort of rotating program, right, where other people can take notes."

Often, it's actually just bringing it up. I think that's one of the things, and especially when I speak with my male clients, and especially when I speak to even male friends, it's this deep surprise, like, "Really? I didn't know that this is an issue. What's office housework?" And so many have no idea. And so many, when we actually talk about it, it's like, "Oh my gosh," a lightbulb goes off. "Yes, it's true. What you're saying is true." So, that's another strategy.

And then, the last one, the one that I like a lot is kind of say no for that and then offer a more communal give that could actually impact your career. So maybe ordering lunch won't, but maybe actually sitting on a committee that may not be a promotable, very glamorous task. Be like, "Okay, I'll do that instead, but I'm not going to this," right? So offer a no, and then a communal give.

SONIA DARA: So, you've also written on the topic of gender wage gap which impacts women of color more acutely. While resolving the gap is not solely the responsibility of women, negotiation is a productive strategy. And I bet we'd all be excited to listen to this. So, what are some techniques you'd recommend for women and also women of color to effectively negotiate a raise?

RUCHIKA TULSHYAN: I think negotiation in general in life is a really, really important skill to have. I think knowing that you're going to encounter bias, especially if you're a woman -- especially if you're a woman of color -- I think you need to walk into any negotiation room and negotiating table and know that that's the case, that that's going to be a reality.

My point here is the lack of transparency around this, around data -- around salary data -- is really one of the biggest issues that we're dealing with. I think being able to be armed with the right data is extremely important. And that data doesn't necessarily mean asking your girlfriends. It means finding out what are the men making in sort of a comparable role, right?

And then, there are some websites where you can -- one I recommend in my book is Payscale where you can find out, at least to some degree of certainty or some degree of help, what sort of ballpark you should be aiming for. But I think one of the big mistakes that I've made in my career in the past is walking into a negotiation room just not knowing, and then picking a high number out of thin air that's not going to help you at all.

SONIA DARA: So partially because of the gender wage gap, 43 percent of American women with children leave their jobs, 43 percent. That's a lot. That's so many women. So, we've spoken about negotiation as a way of taking matters into your own hands, but what can organizations, then, now do to retain more women in the workplace and maybe some of these mothers returning from maternity leave?

RUCHIKA TULSHYAN: Yeah, and you know, I wrote my book before I had a child. And then I had a child, and literally, I was like, "Wow, I would have written a whole different book," because this issue of caregiving, and we know women disproportionately are caregivers, and that doesn't matter whether you decide to have children or not. Certainly if you do have children, it's very, very much an issue. But it's also aging parents, friends who are like family, siblings, etcetera.

And we're up against this reality where it's just absolutely incompatible today to be able to work and really be on the path towards leadership, and also have children or be a caregiver, right, in any situation, certainly as a woman and much harsher for women of color.

And it's such an issue. It's such a pressing issue, and it's one that we just are not addressing fast enough, like not even close. The fact that in the Seattle area -- I mean, I know we're here in Redmond -- but in the Seattle area, it costs more for one year of full-time daycare for an infant than it does a downtown rent in a downtown apartment. I think that is really concerning, and it's something we don't talk about. It's something we just, we're like, "Yeah, rents are a huge issue." Yes, they are. So is childcare. It's a crisis, if you ask me.

So, it's not just maternity leave. It's actually understanding, across the board, we need to have better systems to be caregivers and to be allowed to be caregivers.

So, women face this incredible issue. Mothers face this incredible issue essentially called the maternal wall by scholars. And the maternal wall is women with children are perceived as less competent. When there were identical resumes to hire someone sent to a group of a hiring committee, men and women chose men that had some sort of identifiable information that identified them as fathers, like PTA versus women who had some sort of identifiable information that they were mothers, like PTA.

And so, men and women chose overwhelmingly to hire men for that position. And if they decided to hire women, they actually offered them a lower salary. So, we are really up against this very strongly held mindset which is absolutely incorrect, and we're not going to be able to move the needle without addressing some of the societal issues.

From an organizational standpoint, I mean, I think maternity leave is extremely important, and a caregiving leave is extremely important. And I know Microsoft has a really comprehensive maternity leave.

Some of the work that I do -- I know we're going to talk about the Women's Commission -- some of the work that I do has put me face-to-face with women who've had to go back to work literally the day after they gave birth. The stats are bleak. I mean one in four mothers in America go back to work 10 days after giving birth. If any of you do

have children, 10 days after birth certainly of your first child, I know I was in complete disarray.

So, I think the fact that organizations like Microsoft -- and Microsoft really took the lead much earlier than many peers -- is amazing, and that's part of the equation. I think the other part of the equation is having managers understand that you can't make assumptions on a woman's capability or her ambitions, or what she wants to do based on the fact that she's a mother, right, because men don't have that same issue.

One thing that I think I'm very passionate about is more women getting international assignments and doing that early in their careers. And PWC research shows that men and women like equally want to go international for their work. If they were asked, they would equally take it. And yet, men get offered those international assignments at much faster rate and a much higher rate than women.

And so, it's really rethinking some of those existing paradigms. Obviously, offering support where needed, right, especially if you're a manager and you had a female employee who has children -- young children, especially. Obviously, it's understanding, "Hey, where are you at? What do you see in your career trajectory ahead?" But it's, then, not making assumptions based on that.

And then, the last stat I want to share is the wage gap between married mothers and married fathers is one of the biggest wage gaps. And in certain places, including King County in the Seattle area, is actually wider wage gap that exists -- married fathers and married mothers doing the same job. And then, again, if you control for everything else -- experience, age, all of that -- it is still the widest wage gap.

And so, what we're up against, again, is these really strong, entrenched societal ideas. And I really want to see more managers think outside the box on that.

SONIA DARA: Yeah, and especially you mentioned the international assignments, for instance. But what about assignments upon returning and the quality or the maybe promotional level of assignments? Like, sometimes you might see, "We'll go easy on you the first couple of months," or something like that, and you don't want to be patronizing. What's a good bit of advice, maybe, to hiring managers if they have someone who's coming back from parental leave as paternal or maternal?

RUCHIKA TULSHYAN: Just ask. Literally ask, "Where are you at? What do you think? What are your career ambitions?" Don't project them on someone. Don't project them on anyone. And again, those unconscious biases creep in across the board, right, if someone is a woman of color, if someone is a person with disabilities, if someone is from outside the U.S., right, if they're an immigrant. There are all these beliefs and there are all these long-held biases that creep in that we sometimes don't even know.

And again, it's that idea of, "I'm trying to go easy on you. I'm trying to be benevolent." But maybe that's not what this person wants, right?

But a big part of having an honest dialogue about that is being able to create an inclusive culture within your team. And if you don't have an inclusive culture -- if a new mother or a new father doesn't feel empowered to tell you what they need, like what are their career ambitions -- then, I think you have a really big problem that really needs to be nipped at the bud, like really discussed team wide. Like, "Here's what I want to do. I want to create a really open culture."

One of the other things that especially men can do -- especially men in leadership can do -- is take their paternity leave, if relevant. Obviously actually take it, actually go take your leave and be offline. Like, model that behavior. So part of it is that. You know, modeling behavior is like when you lead. Don't always leave the office at, like 9:30 or 10, or midnight, or what have you. It's modeling the behaviors. Like, "Okay I'm going to leave at 5:30." It's being more visible and visibly involved in caretaking.

I think rebalancing that, again, in the home would shift the workplace in such great and strong ways. I mean, we're already seeing that in a lot of Scandinavian countries.

SONIA DARA: So, we're going to shift a little bit to talk more about you. (Laughter.) So writing is perhaps an obvious trend in your career, having received your Master's Degree in Journalism from Columbia University. Congrats. You're also the Founding Editor of *The Establishment*. You've published work in *Forbes* and *HBR*, like we mentioned, and you're a frequent Op-Ed writer for the *Seattle Times*.

How can we get more women to speak up in these media? And what advice would you have for women who want to build a brand, as an expert?

RUCHIKA TULSHYAN: Yes, this is my favorite question. I am so passionate about more women speaking up as experts, as leaders, as Op-Ed writers. It has changed my life. It's an obvious -- so now I rarely report original stories. Like, I'll rarely go out and write a long-form story. The last I did was last year I wrote one for the *Seattle Times Magazine* on the experience of women of color at work. And I interviewed four amazing women from different intersectional backgrounds about their experience of working in their workplace as a woman of color.

But Op-Eds, and being able to contribute when important debates are going on in the fields that you're in, it's one of the most life-changing experiences ever. It really is. And I say this not because -- I don't say this because you need to have the hubris of, "I'm amazing." But you're actually working in these fields. If you actually are working in VR and AI, and all these amazing things that are happening -- machine learning, etcetera -- why should you not be the person? If you're the expert behind your desk at your job, why are you not the expert out in the world, right?

And so, and again, I found in my experience that men never second guess this, or very rarely second guess this. But for people of color, for women, we've been told for so long, "It's better to be seen than heard," and so much of that has been internalized.

So, I think there are many ways to think about this. First is to really talk to yourself to get over that, because so much of the first hurdle is in your mind. You're like, "I'm not the expert. I'm not the right person for this. I'm not that." So literally sit down and be like, "Nope. I'm the expert. I am the expert. I am an expert in this field." Like, really, really think about that.

SONIA DARA: I'm picturing you in a mirror pumping yourself up before you present anything.

RUCHIKA TULSHYAN: Yeah, sure.

SONIA DARA: I would do this before a presentation to my manager, or something. "I'm the expert on this. She has to believe me." (Laughter.)

RUCHIKA TULSHYAN: And you are, right? And you are. And part of being a great expert, part of being an expert, when I have observed people who really are great experts -- it's that they know how to listen. They listen well. They contribute the information they know with some level of humility, not like, "This is God's word," but more like, "Here's what I've found. Here's what the research shows, and I'm open to other ideas and suggestions, too."

And so, there's this reframing of the word. I mean, even the word "genius." I once wrote a column about how we don't associate the word "genius" with women, right? And that has led to widespread consequences, such as the Nobel Prize rarely going to women, certainly in the STEM fields.

And so, I'm thinking about coming back to this topic of actual Op-Eds and positioning yourself as an expert. So, one of the number one ways, and I tell my students this, is through social media and really building a good, strong brand on social media, and certainly on LinkedIn. And I have really seen this work.

And that means it could start off in the beginning with sharing articles on the topics that you're interested in with a comment. Like, "I've actually seen this thing play out, you know, this new thing that's happening in the field of Artificial intelligence," or, "Here's my comment on this thing." And so, you start off sort of slow. You start off sharing information that's actually really, really relevant, and your comments on what that is.

And then, graduating to maybe testing your audience on LinkedIn through -- and I'm a big believer in LinkedIn -- publishing articles, right, publishing short articles, like, "Here's

what happened, here's what I went through," or, "Here's what I've observed about what's going on," and make sure that it's relevant. It's newsy, it's important, right?

And then, from there, I really encourage women and people of color to submit Op-Eds, right? And I think the Op-Ed project found that in mainstream media, less than 10 percent of Op-Eds were written by women. And can you imagine the number that were written by women of color in that 10 percent? So, submit the Op-Eds and really just put yourself out there. And that's the first step.

Submit your name to speaking conferences that are coming up. I know the Grace Hopper is a big one. Submit your name for conferences. Talk to your manager. "What would be a good conference for me to go to? What would be a good event for me to go to?" Maybe start off as a volunteer, start off as someone who is kind of getting the lay of the land, and then submit your name.

SONIA DARA: So, you served on the Seattle Women's Commission ever since July of 2016 where you've now become Co-Chair for the Seattle Women's Commission. Can you share more about your work with that organization, and maybe an initiative you're super proud about?

RUCHIKA TULSHYAN: Yeah. I love the Seattle Women's Commission. So, I'm an immigrant. I'm still not American. I was born and brought up in Singapore, and one of the big sort of drawbacks when I was working in tech is I didn't have time to be civically engaged, or I thought I didn't. I didn't make time. I didn't prioritize time to be civically engaged.

So when I heard about the Seattle Women's Commission, I was really, really excited. It's an advisory board to Seattle's City Council and Mayor on women's issues. And so, I've been serving now for more than two years. It's been one of those experiences where you really get to see and understand world views that are very different from yours.

So as I mentioned, I mean, I worked in journalism, which has decent benefits, and then I worked in tech, which has great benefits. Talking about maternity leave, I heard from women and the vast majority of our population of lower wage workers are women of color. And getting to hear from women of color, like, really what are some of the issues on the ground has been so humbling. It's really changed my life and the work that I've wanted to take on since.

But the Seattle Women's Commission, I'd say one of the most topical and cool initiatives is last year, the Seattle Women's Commission co-authored a report called Losing Home, and it's basically on the state of evictions in the Seattle area. And what we found was astonishing, and data backed that largely women of color were being disproportionately impacted by evictions, often with children, often for amounts as little as literally a couple of dollars, or less than \$100, right?

And so, the report came out, made quite a few waves, all of that. And then, just very topically, very much aligned, is today, Microsoft announced a \$500 million donation to look into this problem and really help solve some of the issues of the housing crisis. And \$5 million of those dollars are going to a fund called the Seattle Mariners Fund that directly came out of, or was created because of this report that the Seattle Women's Commission put together, and co-authored and researched.

And so, when you actually see your work making impact in the community that you're a part of, there's no other feeling.

SONIA DARA: So, you're also -- woman of many hats -- a Distinguished Professional in Residence at Seattle University where you lecture in the Communications Department. You've also worked as an adjunct instructor at the University of Washington. In what ways is the topic of diversity present in your classroom?

RUCHIKA TULSHYAN: In every single way. And you know, the way it starts is really through the readings. What you read, certainly as a student, certainly influences and shapes your world view, going forward.

And what's really awesome is how many of my students come into the classroom today and, for those of you who are younger millennials -- I'm on the other end of the spectrum -- or have family members or friends, or have any other direct contact -- is how socially justice minded this generation is. It really is. It inspires me to come into my classroom of 19, 20 year olds, 21 year olds who have these concepts of diversity, inclusion, equity, social justice, top of mind.

And so, it really is, in my mind, my honor to be able to select texts to be able to showcase guest lecturers, showcase great deep thought around work like intersectionality, around social justice, and be able to showcase that and show that that, too, is what an expert looks like because, growing up, I never saw that. For me, the idea of an expert was always a white man in his 50s or 60s, or what have you.

And I think it's been really amazing to see that. It's really been amazing to see the impact it's had on, certainly, women of color, students who will often tell me that I'm the first woman of color professor they've ever had. So, part of it is that.

I think the other part of it that is really important is, at that age, no matter what age you're at right now, these conversations are top of mind within many, many organizations. So being able to be culturally competent in driving these discussions -- what does diversity mean, what does inclusion mean, what are some ways that we can really strategize about overcoming some of these huge issues that we're dealing with -- I think that's a very important message that we need to sort of spread to colleges and universities, and academic institutions across the board.

One of my favorite texts, and I can't recommend it enough -- and I also say this because she's a good friend -- is Ijeoma Oluo's *So You Wanna Talk About Race*. And Seattle University actually has adopted that as our common text, so everyone in the University next year actually gets a copy, all the incoming freshmen.

SONIA DARA: That's awesome.

RUCHIKA TULSHYAN: And so, absolutely, I think being able to have open discussions around things like the Me Too movement, a huge issue on campuses -- not obviously Seattle University campus, but campuses -- and just being able to be really, really open and talk about these issues. I think it's super important.

SONIA DARA: A gendered lens on society informs a lot of the content on The Establishment. It's a woman funded and run media company that believes the conversation is better when everyone has a voice. So, what motivated you to get involved as a founding contributing editor?

RUCHIKA TULSHYAN: So many things, and that is, again, seeing mainstream media. I mean, for me, it has been amazing to see the change in journalism from when I went to journalism school 10 years ago where it was like, "Oh, you can't use anonymous sources in a lot of our publications," therefore it's very hard to report on things like sexual assault. It's very hard to report on what has now become the Me Too movement.

And we never talked about race in the media. We never talked about being a woman in a newsroom. What does that mean? What does it mean to be a war correspondent, or a war photographer, etcetera, if you're a woman?

And I think what spurred me on with the establishment is the ability for people within the communities -- within the most marginalized communities -- in our society today here in America and around the world to be able to talk about issues, and to be able to publish stories in their own voice, tell their own stories.

And that has meant that we have written stories about taboo of menstruation in India. It has meant that we have published a story about free speech in Turkey. It has meant covering Black Lives Matter and having actual activists, actually members of the African-American community write those stories. That is something that the journalism I grew up with just wasn't the case.

SONIA DARA: Where can listeners find you online?

RUCHIKA TULSHYAN: My website is RTulshyan.com. And I'm on Twitter. I'm extremely active on Twitter. So if you want to follow me, if you want to have a conversation, that's a great place. And LinkedIn is also a great way to connect.

SONIA DARA: And they should look out for your articles that you'll write on LinkedIn as well.

RUCHIKA TULSHYAN: Yes.

SONIA DARA: Thank you so much for joining us. (Applause.)

VOICE: Cutting edge, our take on stories in the business and technology world.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: In this Cutting Edge segment, we're taking a look at the Pixar Sparkshort video entitled "Purl," which was published on February 4th on YouTube by Disney Pixar. The short, which was directed by Kristen Lester and produced by Gillian Libbert-Duncan, "features an earnest ball of yarn named Purl who gets a job in a fast-paced, high energy, bro-tastic start-up."

SONIA DARA: The office setting for the short animated film is comically homogeneous. All of the people who work at this company are white men in suits. "Yarny" hijinks ensue when a pink ball of yarn is hired to join the team. Purl sticks out like a sore thumb in this environment of misogynistic watercooler jokes and antagonistic business strategies. There's even a moment where they avoid asking her to a lunch that everyone else in the office was going to.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: At first discouraged, Purl decides to roll with the punches, and changes everything about her yarny self. She knits a black suit to look more like everyone else in the office, and starts telling crude watercooler jokes, too. Because of these efforts, she becomes a part of the in group, and the office tends to accept her.

SONIA DARA: This is all well and good until a new ball of yarn, Lacy, joins the company. When Purl witnesses the team shunning Lacy's differences, she remembers her roots, and starts acting more like her old self to ensure that Lacy feels comfortable at the company.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: The film ends with Purl bringing new hires up in the elevator at B.R.O. Capital to an office that has more yarn ball representation. The office is vibrant, and employees are intermingling between the identity groups, and even making plans to socialize after work.

SONIA DARA: "Purl" highlights many workplace challenges: An absence of great onboarding from HR at many companies; the lack of diversity that still exists in many industries; and the toxic behaviors that homogeneous workplaces can create. If your team is just starting to engage in conversations about diversity and inclusion, "Purl" is a great tool to break the ice.

(Music.)

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Well listeners, thanks for checking back in with us this time. And a special thank you to Nancy Jensen for joining me in the studio to share more about The Swing Shift.

SONIA DARA: And thank you to Ruchika Tulshyan for joining us here on campus for a great conversation. I'm already thinking about opportunities to stretch more into brand building and with Op-Eds and speaking engagements. She had some great advice in there.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Absolutely. Listeners, please remember to rate, review, and share our show on Apple podcasts, or wherever fine podcasts can be found.

SONIA DARA: If you have any questions or feedback, as usual, you can e-mail us at wibt@microsoft.com or tweet us [@MicrosoftWomen](https://twitter.com/MicrosoftWomen).

Listeners, your mission for this episode, if you choose to accept it, is to apply to speak at the Grace Hopper Celebration, the world's largest gathering of women technologists. Proposals are due by March 5th.

GHC is also accepting applications for track committee members, so if you're interested in being a part of the conference planning committee or reviewing speaker proposals, applications for those roles are open through the end of February. For more information, head to ghc.anitab.org.

And maybe these opportunities aren't for you, but be sure to flag them along to someone you think would be great for these roles.

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