



EP 16 AI LEADERS PODCAST

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

ASHA SAXENA: You know, you can't wait for people to make things happen for you. You need to make things happen for yourself.

SAMTA KAPOOR: Hello, everyone. We are very excited to have you on the Accenture's AI Leader podcast today. Today we're doing it in collaboration with Women Leaders in Data and AI. I'm Samta Kapoor. I'm a Managing Director in our San Francisco office. So based out of sunny California. I do data and AI transformations and work with our clients closely as an advisor. My strength lies in data storytelling, as I like to call it.

So with me today, I have Asha Saxena, who is the CEO of Women Leaders in Data and AI. She's also a columnist in the Entrepreneur magazine. She's also a professor at Columbia and sits on boards of nonprofits. So, Asha, welcome to this podcast today.

ASHA SAXENA: Thank you. Thank you for having me, Samta.

SAMTA KAPOOR: Did you want to talk a little bit about WLDA, Asha, introduce WLDA since we are doing it in collaboration for International Women's Day?

ASHA SAXENA: Absolutely. And I think it's a great opportunity for us to talk about not only women empowerment, but how important the presence of women is in the digital age we are building that now together. You know, I talk about we live in the world where everything is run by algorithm and only 12% of women are calling this algorithm. And it's so important that as we design this digital world, we bring the women leader on the table to create this platform. And with that mission, WLDA was created, Women Leaders in Data and AI, as I call it, WLDA.

WLDA was created to bring senior women leaders together to make sure that they are learning through

peer-to-peer networking and becoming strong and secure and there is a retention, so they don't feel alone. And as they do that, they send the elevator down and bring other women leaders and make sure we continue building the women leaders in large corporations.

SAMTA KAPOOR: Thank you, Asha. We also have Ellen Nielsen and Bari Harlam on our panel today for International Women's Day. Welcome, Ellen and Bari. It's so great to have you. I'm going to go ahead and introduce both of you.

Ellen Nielsen is the Chief Data Officer for Chevron. She also is an advisor for Women Leaders in Data and AI, and works very closely with WLDA to enhance their cause and advise them on how things can work for women in the C-suite and also in the boardroom.

Bari, who we have today, is an experienced board director and she's an advisor for public board companies. She serves on the board of Eastern Bankshares, Rite Aid Corporation, Aterian, and she's also a co-founder of Trouble LLC and she relishes in being a troublemaker for good.

Welcome to our panel to Asha, Bari and Ellen Bari. Since we were talking about trouble, I would love for you to say a few words on what that organization does and how you're enhancing the cause of helping women in data as well as in technology?

BARI HARLAM: Absolutely. And thanks for having me. I'm thrilled to be here with all of you. Trouble's purpose is to honor and recognize troublemakers. Those are courageous disruptors who make good things happen in the world. And in doing so, we create a community that recognizes those around them, sends them gifts, and 100% of the profits from those recognitions go to our partner organizations. Those are organizations that are all focused on closing gender equity gaps. And we



launched on the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, so clearly an act that was meant to give all women the right to vote in the U.S. and fell way short of what its goal is and that's very much represents our philosophy. There is a lot of good progress that's happening. We want to celebrate that. And at the same time, we want to call out the next 100 years needs to be much more accelerated in terms of the rate of change if we're going to get anywhere close to parity. So thrilled to be here with you and love the topic, of course, it's near and dear to our hearts.

SAMTA KAPOOR: Thank you, Bari. I know one of the things that you had mentioned on the Trouble website and also when we were having a lot of conversations was that you love to ask people, so I knew I was a troublemaker when, and troublemaker is basically a courageous disruptor who makes good things happen. So, Ellen, I would love to hear from you on when did you know that you are a troublemaker?

ELLEN NIELSEN: First of all, Samta, and the panelists here, I'm so thrilled to be here on this day and for this purpose, and it's always a pleasure to be here with Asha and Samta and Bari. So I'm very excited.

Yeah, I was thinking about the troublemaker when I saw Bari's engagement in this company and I thought, okay, I'm a troublemaker. Maybe I have to ask other people if I'm a troublemaker or not, because it's difficult to judge on yourself if you're making trouble or not. But I would say maybe currently, I'm a little troublemaker because I want to really make an impact on women in data and AI, and that's a very purpose. And when I go way back into the company, I ask difficult questions. I want to see data. I want to see progress we are making. So, of course, I'm kind of a troublemaker. So I will give you a report, I will tell how it goes in the next year.

SAMTA KAPOOR: Yeah, that would be good to know, Ellen. And you make such a good point on like asking others when you're a troublemaker, the last person I want to ask that is my mom because she thinks like, I've been a troublemaker since I was born. But I think that I've been a troublemaker since I figured out that like you cannot solve for world hunger, should really not be a phrase. Like data and AI should enable us to solve for world hunger. But that was just my take, and I was like, I'm not going to go ask my mom. But, Bari, how about you?

BARI HARLAM: Well, one of the stories that I think about when I'm thinking about troublemakers, goes back, way back in my early elementary school, and I didn't know or think I was a troublemaker at the time. But in those days, all the boys took shop, that was woodworking and metal working. And all the girls took Home Ec, which was cooking and sewing. And so, there were a bunch of people in my class, girls who wanted to take shop. And so, we said, hey, how about letting us take shop? And that was inspired very much by one of my neighbors who took the bus with me every day, and he came home with his prize wooden lamp that he had made. And I wanted to make a lamp, like Ed's lamp. So we went to the teachers. And, of course, the original answer was no. But after persevering and meeting with the principal, they made a new rule that the girls could take shop and the boys could take Home Ec, and that was an early troublemaking moment for me.

SAMTA KAPOOR: That's awesome. And that is so typical. And fortunately, or unfortunately, I feel like there's still these stereotypes that exist. But at least, you know, Bari, you challenged it when you did. And I always think about women who have been here before we have and I'm so thankful for the things that they have done to make this place more equitable. So, love that story.

Asha, what about you?

ASHA SAXENA: You know, when I read that question, the first thing was that, God, I became an entrepreneur at 24, when I had two little kids, I was pregnant with my second child. I had a secure job. I was a programmer. And early on in my career, I just jumped right in. And I don't know, people ask me, how did you do it? You were two little kids, married, had a secure job and you jumped in to become an entrepreneur? And I always said that being young and foolish sometime is a blessing.

And so, yeah, that's what just popped in my head when I thought about it. And a lot of times as women, we think about the family and the responsibility we have on our shoulder. And career is something which a lot of times you feel guilty climbing the ladder. And I think for me to be courageous and being a disruptor at that age, not knowing what I was jumping into and how I was going to have sleepless nights trying to build a company was, I think, was hard without knowing I just jumped right into it.



SAMTA KAPOOR: Awesome. So the other question that I was thinking about a lot as I was putting these together for our podcast, was that what progress have you all seen for gender equality? And for this question, Bari, I would love for you to start us off.

BARI HARLAM: Absolutely. I'm encouraged in many ways where I've seen growth in women's representation. Of course, and in tech and AI, there's growth in many sectors and yet, there is a really long way to go before we're ever going to get close to parity. So on the one hand, I'm encouraged by that. The trends on the other hand, I go back to our original statement, which is we have a long way to go. And I'm also excited about the current perspective around the understanding and genuine appreciation for the merits of diversity. I think there's been a lot of research that's been put out there and some growth in a general way, in a genuine way, that that relates to people accepting and recognizing that better outcomes come with more diverse teams. And that's also something that is encouraging.

And then lastly, another area that I'll call out is sort of reflecting on my lifetime. And I think that oppressive behaviors that used to be considered to be acceptable in many sectors and still are, of course, today in many sectors, in many parts of the world, they're starting to get called out and they're starting to get acted on swiftly and in a way that represents that those offenses aren't just to be expected.

And again, we have a long way to go there, but I think the opening of that window is exciting and it will lead to what is already something that I observe, which is momentum around more widespread courage for women and the motivation to speak out and call out things that are inequitable. And I think that ultimately it leads to more of a sense of confidence and respect for women for themselves, which is, I think, an initial enabler to getting to where we all know will be better for the world.

SAMTA KAPOOR: Yeah, and I like how you put it, Bari. You've come a long way, but there's still a longer way to go, right. And I feel like having had so many of these conversations, not only lately, but even as I was entering my career, it feels like having this podium to even discuss all of this feels like we have come a long way. So I absolutely agree.

Ellen, what are your thoughts?

BARI HARLAM: One of the things that we have, I'm sorry, I just want to jump in for one last point there is, you know, the advertising slogan from my old days was, we've come a long way, baby, and we like to say we've come a long way, maybe. And I think that encapsulates where are.

SAMTA KAPOOR: I love it.

ELLEN NIELSEN: That's a very good comment. Samta, yeah, I think I have some, of course, we grew up all in different times and we had all these experience. My early days, I was unfortunately not as successful as Bari, so I was turned down when I wanted to have something which the boys had. And that was basically my very first diversity moment. Maybe I was four and I can still remember it. So can you imagine? But I would say there are very good pockets where we do a lot of things right in the world. As I'm a European, living in the U.S., I can also compare maybe two cultural sets and how does that intersect? And I would say generally, we still have a way to go.

And I grew up in the IT space, which is typically very, let's say, very few women in this environment, and I didn't feel it that way because I grew up in a certain way, you know, my two brothers around me. It felt normal, and it took me a long time until it may click that I saw it, that we had disadvantages. I was maybe in my 35 years old, 40 years, so you can see it was pretty late when I recognized it. And it's happening in the work space. You know, you go in a meeting room and you see, let's say, two rows of people sitting around the table and you see how they are assembling themselves. And I have very good observations and want to make this as diverse as possible. So when I see that women take a kind of an outer seat and then somebody else take an inner seat. No, we have to mix it up and it's happening still very intuitively. So we have a way to go there, for sure.

And I mean there's also very great examples. Yeah, when you just as I am German, I saw the last election of the government and you can believe it that 8 out of 17 ministers are women. So I think it's a great example of, yes, there is change coming and there is acknowledgment. And it's not because we want to have a parity because the people who have been elected are the right people for the right job.



SAMTA KAPOOR: Yeah, that is something that I want to underline, which is it is not about only the parity or diversity that you want to have, but it's about having capable and right people at the right job. So whenever I talk about diversity, equity and inclusion, I feel like capable needs to be a part of that because that is the key to building diverse teams as well. Asha, what are your thoughts?

ASHA SAXENA: Listen, I have to agree with Bari and Ellen because we need role models and now, we have some role models. We have our first woman vice president, which is great. We have a lot more women in Congress than ever before, which is great. We have a lot more CEO women leaders, which is good, but I still feel that's not good enough. I love, Bari, what you said, maybe.

So, my son, in the pandemic, I was talking to my son and I said, you know, I built companies, teach at Columbia, I'm a CEO coach and I still feel something missing. And he said, Mom, do something that makes you happy. And, you know, I started talking about women in technology. And he said, you should build something and do something about the women in technology. And I got offended. And I said, what do you mean women in technology? You think I'm not a professional? I am capable and I did so - all my life, I worked so hard to prove that, you know, it was not - I didn't get my credential based on gender, and I'm a professional and I got offended that he says, don't pigeonhole me. And he said, Mom, just own it. You are a woman and you are a minority and you are colored and it's okay to be a woman of color and a minority. And I realized that all my life, I was taught to not be seen as a woman. I went into the room, in board meetings thinking, I am equal to a white man and I can stand up and participate as a white man and I forgot. And, you know, I had to forget that I'm a woman in the boardroom because I wanted to be equal.

And so, think about all these women who are climbing the ladder that they have to impose onto this persona to continue succeeding. So I think that there is so much more we can do. I mean simple example like you go to a corporate retreat as a partner and you have to take a male small size jacket because they don't have women clothing. I mean the workforce is not built, right? You go to the offices and the temperature is for the male body temperature is set in the buildings. So if you think about

our work environment is not built for the women leaders yet. And that's why, you know, I'm so glad that - and thank you all for participating and doing something about bringing women leaders to the forefront.

And I'm so proud for the work we are doing at WLDA to bring the senior women leaders and bring the peers together because I think that gender equality cannot come until we feel and we see more role models and we need more senior leaders in the right places with a say.

ELLEN NIELSEN: Asha, I learned something you just now - sorry, I'm going to step here. Because of the temperatures, I never thought about it. Thanks for pointing this out. I bring this actually home now and not only into the office space, but maybe in the home. That's a very good observation.

ASHA SAXENA: And so that's what it is, right? The whole world was built for men. The men were going to the workforce and the women stayed home and took care of the house. And now when we don't need the labor, the physical labor, women can do the mental work. We can come up and run a business and be a CEO. So I think the world needs to continue changing for the better and especially now that we're building the digital world. We live in the world of data and AI, everything from currency, to how we buy and sell and our choices are dependent on an algorithm. We need women leaders right there designing this algorithm, otherwise we're going to build another world for men.

SAMTA KAPOOR: Absolutely. And I think on that note, like about women empowerment and what we have seen thus far and having those role models, Asha, like to the point that you were making, like it's important to see that. I think the one thing that I'm noticing is that, of course, this would tell you that I'm a mom of a five-year-old, but I have watched and count way more than I should. I would want to admit that I've watched that movie, but it's just changing it at the grassroots level, like it's just being able to see even different kind of people come together in like something as small as a five-year-old watching a Disney movie. So definitely feel like that, like seeing people like you makes a lot of difference and not only for leaders, but also at the like at kids, right? Like as kids, you know, you don't want them to experience things any differently. But on that



note, I would love to hear from you all on a woman empowerment movement that has inspired you?

ASHA SAXENA: You know, we had an award ceremony at WLDA in December. And first of all, I have to say that it was so great. I'm so honored that we actually could recognize Women Leaders in Data and AI who were actually making a contribution. And I want to call out, I know some of you are very humble and you don't talk about it as much, but you were one of the award winner of the award Woman Leader of the Year award of not just the contribution in technology, but also your contribution in the community. So it's not just about what you do in your day-to-day life, but also what can you do more of? So I want to congratulate you, Samta, and recognize all the work you're doing, because one thing is that women do all the work. And when it comes to the time of recognition, they step back and they let somebody else take the recognition. So I think the WILDA Awards were so critical to recognizing women leaders, and Ellen was right there as a board member to support awards. So thank you, Ellen, for all the work you do directly and/or indirectly to support women leaders and thank you. And thank you, Bari, for what you're doing and your contribution.

But for the moment, I think what inspired - inspiring or empowering moment is watching all of you do what you do. You know, and then people say that there are so many other organization like Women in Data, Women in Tech, Women in AI, Women in Data Science. I always say we need more and more. I actually love the fact that there is so many organizations who are doing this work and there's never going to be enough. And that's why in 2023, we are looking to launch AI collaboration where we're going to bring all these organizations together in the main platform in D.C., to be able to showcase all the effort we are doing.

And it's not that just the journey of women, it's the journey of men too. I meet a lot of male leaders who want to be a male allies and come and sit right next to us and make sure we bring the change. So I think the empowering moment for me is to see each one of you contribute.

SAMTA KAPOOR: Absolutely. Ellen, what are your thoughts on women empowerment?

ELLEN NIELSEN: Yeah, I have to say while Asha was talking, I was thinking about a recent promotion that we had within the company, and we have now a women leader leading at the Chevron Technology Center. And just this combination is super inspiring to see somebody going through a career, making a lot of impacts through the company and then reach really the top chair in the executive board contributing. But then even in this kind of difficult field of a technology center, which is really wide ranging in the industry of oil and gas. So, I'm super inspired.

I see her already in a different - yeah, I would say leadership style and she makes an impact. And, yeah, I was so happy that I actually even sent our CEO a message and congratulated, of course, the advisory board, but also the executive board to make those decisions. It was super inspiring for me. And also, she speaks up. She speaks up as a woman. She's supporting women. She was supporting us also with WLDA, with the Women Leader in Data and AI. She's a great role model. I'm totally inspired by her.

SAMTA KAPOOR: That is so awesome and I feel like you make a very key point, Ellen. It is about women supporting women. So the one thing the other day that I was reading is that it's just another women's crown, but don't even let her know that it was crooked. So completely bought into that. And I feel like it is very powerful. Like, that's how we would be able to build a very strong pipeline of leaders. And also, peers, like I like to call it.

Bari, I would love to get your thoughts on women empowerment?

BARI HARLAM: Well, I love the moments that you are all calling out and the reality that some of the examples like Ellen at for the queue that you get at such a young age and that you're calling out, Samta, around Disney movies and Asha, that the continuing conversation around WLDA and supporting women at high levels and also supporting the pipeline, which I I've heard from all of you. So that the messages are loud and clear. I think the see it, you can be it mentality is really prominent for all of us. Some of it's very vivid and some of it is subtle, and all of that matters in terms of the expectations that we have for ourselves and what we think we're entitled to and shooting for that is limited if our expectations are low.



So I mean the moment for me that comes up when I was thinking about the question, goes back to the olden days again. When I was in high school, it was shortly after the passing of Title IX, which I think was a very big moment. And the reason I'm bringing up is that for personally, for me, it was at my public high school the first time that there was a women's basketball team. And so, I was on that team and despite my five feet half inch that the pipeline was limited. So I was able to play point guard and we made it to - we won the Illinois State Championship, which should have never been because it was a suburban high school. The team should have never been. There were lots of stories and in fact, I want to call out one of my good friends who was on the team. Her name is Melissa Isaacson, and she's published a book that's called State. That was all about that team and the underdogs and the stories about all of the people involved, but that set an expectation for us.

So an example that goes back eve, Asha, to your point about the size of clothes or the clothes that are available and the temperature in the offices. You know, we didn't have uniforms like the boy's uniforms, and we were just excited to have a team and we could practice at six a.m., but that was the only time we were able to get the basketball court, because the boys had the basketball court. So our expectations were enhanced over the years as things have continued.

And at the time, we were joyful that we could even get a ball and go out on the court and play. And that was progress. But it also in a very significant moment that's led to a lot of other moments and firsts. But at the same time, our expectations were met in a way that they shouldn't have been. So that, for me, is a moment that I've reflected on a number of times throughout my life in ways that helped me inspire people around me to celebrate the success. But to also recognize that that isn't good enough and we can hold both of those emotions at one moment. And the tension, I think, is very healthy.

SAMTA KAPOOR: That is, yeah, that is so good to know, Bari. I'm like now, I know how you came up with the name trouble. You've been quite a troublemaker all throughout, huh? So it's actually with that, I'm curious, what would your -, of course, there have been so many moments, right, in all of our lives where we have kind of seen things around and felt like things should be done differently or there should be some kind of change that's

coming in, like how do we make sure that we're setting it up for our younger generation that's going to come up? Having seen and said all of this, what is the most important piece of advice that you've ever been given?

BARI HARLAM: Absolutely. I'd be happy to share some advice that I've been given that was really valuable. And when I think about it, one of the very powerful moments for me was the first annual review I had in the corporate world, which was later in my life because my first chapter was in the academic world. I was a marketing professor for about 13 years, and then I eventually left and joined the corporate world. So I was older when I was having my first review and my boss was walking through the things that went well and the opportunity areas that we had for the business and then shared some development advice for me, which was that I should be more of a which - it rhymes with which and starts with the B. And so, I paused and was a little bit taken aback. And she also paused and said, I've never given this advice that directly, but you're someone that I'm pretty sure isn't going to take this too far and I'll be there to catch you in case you do. But my advice for you is that you could add a lot more value if you were challenging in the moments that mattered. And, of course, I think that I had been conditioned, like many of us, to be a pleaser and to avoid some of the tough moments. And her point was pick your spots, think about the tough moments where it's going to add value for the organization, which is what you get jazzed about doing every day and push back. People will respect you. And they'll also appreciate that the comments that you're providing are in the spirit of better wins and better outcomes for the company. And that was a really important turning moment for me.

SAMTA KAPOOR: That, yeah, that's an amazing piece of advice, Bari. And it's sometimes it's so good to get it from your mentors and, of course, you know your friends along the way because they know you the best. So they kind of have your best interests in their hearts as they give you that.

Asha, what about you? What was the best piece of advice you got?

ASHA SAXENA: You know, it's the time of self-doubt. I had my mentor, my first boss, said, believe in yourself. You know, have the courage to believe and move forward. And I think so many times you question yourself and you say, you know, you can have all the

preparation and have everything right and you still say, can I really do it? And I remember having that conversation and I said to my boss at that time, I said, I don't know if I can do it. And he said, I believe in you. I know you can do it. And I think just that statement, when he said those words to me, it made me feel better and I knew that if he believed in me, I could do it.

I think so the question is in the times of doubt, can you believe in yourself to move ahead? And if not, find somebody who believes in you and shake you up and say, you can do it? Just go do it. And so, I always say either find a mentor who is a strong mentor or make sure you have the confidence to keep moving ahead, no matter how hard you know the life is.

SAMTA KAPOOR: Yeah, that made me think of something, Asha, one of my mentors here at Accenture. He and I were just chatting very recently, and one of the things that he said, which actually struck me was that believe in the person when the person doesn't believe in themselves, but you know that they can get the job done. And he said, that's what matters. Like that's what would make the difference that we're looking to make. But I absolutely agree with you that having that mindset and that advice as you embark on your journey helps a lot.

Ellen, curious to know your thoughts on it?

ELLEN NIELSEN: Yeah, first of all, I loved the point Asha made, you know the self-doubt. I think it's always in our head sometimes, and we have to learn through the career that you can trust yourself, you're good, you're 120% and you can you can make that.

Yes, so I would say the most important advice I got was from an executive. He was leading Latin America in one of my past companies. And I always felt like, oh, man, I'm so lucky I get the opportunities and I could travel. I could jump into different jobs. I'm a change agent. I could learn so much. I'm really lucky. So I was sitting in dinner next to him and I told him that I'm so lucky and being in this kind of I wasn't a regional CIO role at that time. And he said, Ellen, you are not lucky. That has nothing to do with luck. And he stopped the conversation. We switched to something else and I came back home and he sent me a book and the book was called that you basically condition yourself to a success. It's a fable. And I was reading this book in an hour and I thought, oh my God, he was so right.

t's speaking about tonight's and they are looking for a special plan, and it has to be conditioned in a certain way and one gives up very quickly. This is impossible. This is impossible, very negative. And the other one is kind of, oh, I will find it. I will search for it. I will ask other people and I will create a condition to make this happen. And that was very powerful for me, a very powerful advice because that has also some things to do with self-doubt. Yeah, you create the condition to succeed and you create the condition in your head what you want to do. And that's maybe you want career advice. I would also give a woman, so don't take yourself too low. Don't be too critical on yourself. You can do that. You can do even more than you think by far.

SAMTA KAPOOR: Ellen, you said golden words right there. Like, I feel like that self-doubt is so real, so real that sometimes it's unbelievable. And I'm always thinking like is it just women who have that or is it just across the board? But you know, you can accomplish the best of things. And at least with me, sometimes I'm like, oh, like is that really it? Like what is it? So, absolutely, and I love your advice.

So, Asha, my next question is for you. And it is how can we encourage more women to pursue technology and senior leadership roles in their career? And where can we adjust the pathways for our own team members?

ASHA SAXENA: So I will say three things. The first is education. We live in the world of technology, which is not just the hardware or semiconductors. It's now more how do you visualize the data? How do you share or build applications? And there's no code technology. So the technologies advance so much that there is so many aspects of technology women can participate.

Number two, give women challenging work. So a lot of times women will get a simple word because they have family or they have other commitments. So take a woman leader and make sure you're given the challenging work to the women leader because professionals, high performers want to do challenging work and grow and continuously grow. So I would say the second thing is make sure that you take the women leader who are strong and make sure you're giving them challenging work.



And lastly, recognition. Very important. They do a good job. Make sure, give them the space to speak and recognize them and push them ahead. And make sure you are the catalyst in their growth. Take that power and make sure you encourage and push a woman ahead. So those would be the three takeaways.

SAMTA KAPOOR: Those are really awesome. Thanks for sharing. Asha, Bari, my next question is to you, which women's cause needs to be challenged and changed first and why?

BARI HARLAM: So I'm going to build on Asha's point around power and money is power. And so, pay gaps is the issue that I would put front and center. And it's also a persistent problem or gap that's existed and hasn't changed very much. So as many of you know, women earn roughly 80% of what a man earns in the same job. And that translates to March 24th being the date that a woman will earn the same that her male counterpart earned by the prior end of the calendar year. For black women, that date is August 3rd, nine months into the year or eight months into the year before she's paid what her male counterpart would be paid. For Native American women, that's September 8th. And for Latina women, that's October 21st. It takes until October 21st. So pay gaps are the problem that I would put at the top of the pyramid. It's a reflection of how we value women. It leads to perceptions of power, and it's something that we need to solve.

SAMTA KAPOOR: And it's interesting you say that, Bari, because I always felt and kind of the pay gap was that a real thing? But what I did not realize was that it was 80%, like that is shocking. But, yes, it is a problem and that needs to change. I completely agree.

Ellen, my third question is for you and which is that what kind of challenges and hurdles have you personally had to overcome in your career? And what can we do for the future generations to make sure that they don't have to face the same type of challenges?

ELLEN NIELSEN: Yeah, I would say I have faced several challenges, of course, in an industry I was in or in a role I was in, which was highly male dominated or men dominated. I was actually one time leading a team of 100 people, and there were only five women and I was one of the women, but I was the leader. So you can see I took some challenges there, but I learned a lot. And so, it's not so simple, and I think pay gap is definitely one

topic which I sometimes see. It's also how we enter into roles or negotiate when we change into a job, and we have to educate ourselves better.

So be very proud what you do, get educated on what the salary ranges are and do a good job in negotiating. I think there are many good opportunities and don't be shy to do this. But I have to say, I have seen many different things not fitting a mold. You know, sometimes you don't fit a mold in a certain company. So when I look out for a company, that's one of the most criteria I am looking after. How is the board assembled in terms of diversity and how does the company present themselves in this space? What do they say? Do they walk the talk? But first of all, you can see and find out what they say. And typically, when they say something, they have to walk the talk. So you can be in a better space. Unfortunately, there are companies out there, I look at the board and I think, hmm, that's maybe not it. And that's maybe the learning for women, look out for the right company, be not shy to negotiate your and, yeah, make it end there. That's maybe what I would say.

SAMTA KAPOOR: I agree, and I remember when I was getting my MBA at Kellogg, we had a negotiations class and I felt like that was one class where it wasn't coming naturally to me when it was about me being in the negotiation about myself. But like when I was negotiating for other people or negotiating for someone else, that was just sweepstakes, but this was really hard. So completely agree with what everyone has said here. I love the wonderful conversations we've been having. However, all good things have to come to an end, so I would like to get parting thoughts from all three of you and focused mainly on what is the most important message you want to send to young women who are thinking about their careers? And for this one, Ellen, I'm going to start off with you, go to Bari and then Asha.

ELLEN NIELSEN: Yeah, I enjoyed this conversation a lot. So maybe my parting advice is based on my own experience. You need a great support system. And what I mean with that, it's you have a support system at home with your spouse, your partner. You have it in your family with, let's say, starting from parents and siblings or whatsoever, and then you have it at work. And I observe there are people around you which are not lifting you. They are keeping you down. So look out.



for those who lift you, who make you taking risks and step into challenges which are maybe not the normal path. And if you see somebody is giving you a challenge or lifting you, these are the right people.

I just had recently a conversation with one of my best friends, and as she basically changed her role to a lower role because it was fitting more into her private situation. And I thought, okay, she can do so much more. It's a personal decision, of course, but it's depending on the support system around you. So be for the look out.

BARI HARLAM: I love those words, Ellen, and this time together is a perfect example of it, right? The energy that we get from being with people that want to have a winning team and get to the best outcomes. There's nothing more fun than that. So thank you for all the fun time together.

The advice that I'm going to share is related and it was given to me and it is, take the ball, don't wait for somebody to pass it to you. And I think it speaks to some of the points that, Asha, Ellen, you've already brought up around having confidence and people believing in you. And first and foremost, believing in yourself and when you want something, tell people that because I think there's often a tendency to think you put your head down, you do a good job, people are going to notice that you're doing good work and they're going to give you opportunities. And, of course, you know, sometimes that works. But if you let people know what you want, it'll work even better. And so, make sure that you make that known and take the ball.

ASHA SAXENA: And I'm going to say that, of course, Ellen, when you start talking about support, I couldn't have done anything in my life if I didn't have the support system around me. You know, when I'm teaching and be at the college, people will ask me, how did you have it all? And I say, you can't have it all if you don't have the support system. So I cannot agree with you more about that and then take the ball and run with it because you need to make things happen.

And I would go back to what I was taught. Believe in yourself because if you believe in yourself, people believe in you. So if you show up with confidence, then the room will know that you can make it happen. So it's so important to believe in yourself. But above all, I would say, always, always stay curious and be a lifelong learner. If you're curious, that learning never ends. You

know, you go to school, you learn. You come to work, you learn. You become a senior leader, you continue learning. You could be a C-suite and you still continue learning. So never stop the hunger you have within you to learn. So I'll say, I'll leave you with that. That make sure you are an amazing learner all your life.

SAMTA KAPOOR: Thank you. Thank you, ladies. I cannot tell you how inspired I am just by this podcast and the conversations we have had today. So I sincerely thank you all for your time, and I thank our listeners for tuning in and listening. Don't forget to subscribe to our AI Leaders podcast.

As I wrap this up, I do want to iterate, and I know there were many, many key messages that you are probably taking away. But the ones that stuck with me are as follows. One, is build your village. Don't give up. Build your village. The other thing that I want to highlight is the fact that there is a pay gap. We all know it's a challenge. Please negotiate. Negotiate based on the value that you bring to bear. Don't let this go. Take it as your opportunity to shine and do it. And the third thing that I want to highlight is believe in yourself, belief that you can do it and you can do it.

So thank you all for your time today. I appreciate it a lot.

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