

TECH INDUSTRY COMMUNITY AND CONNECTIONS

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Kerry Schrader (00:00):

I'm Kerry Schrader,

Ashlee Ammons (00:01):

and I'm her daughter, Ashlee Ammons,

Kerry Schrader (00:04):

and we are the founders of Mixtroz.

Ashlee Ammons (00:09):

Kerry and I were at a major conference not too long ago, and by design this event was quite diverse, but when we sat down and it was self-selected seating, I took a picture of this and literally pitched it to a client later and gained them as a client. I looked to my left and I looked to my right, and on my left, my mom was sitting next to me, and then on my right, every other person in our row was a black female. That happened because, I mean, we're all biased. I'm biased, Kerry's biased, everybody is biased. Right? What you're going to end up with in any situation where people get to self-select is people came in that room, audited, decided where they would be most comfortable very quickly, but we know that when different people coming from different backgrounds and different thinking come together, that's really where the magic happens. To enable that to happen, you need a tool, thus you have Mixtroz.

Kerry Schrader (01:10):

I do believe our mission at Mixtroz is that whole thing about connection and community, but for Ash and I as black female tech folk, it's bigger than that. People would often tell us, you guys are quiet outsiders. You're black, you're female, you're in tech, and your non-technical founders. Then I usually chime in, well, actually I am a Quint outsider because I'm a non-millennial. During our fundraising activity, somebody had pointed out how cute we are, which we are quite attractive, but I do not think it was as a compliment. It was, what's this mother/daughter shtick? Kerry, if you really want mixed shows to take off, you should let the younger vibrant Ashley be the CEO, and you,, I guess, go behind the scenes.

(02:00):

The whole thing around bias and people looking at you and taking a snapshot or making assumptions based on age or anything is crazy. That's what we continue to tackle. One of our early turning points was at the Collision Conference in New Orleans back in 2017. We had been to so many conferences. It was crazy because people would look at us like we didn't belong. I've actually had people ask me to go get them a gin and tonic. Quite frankly, we were sick and tired of it.

Ashlee Ammons (02:34):

We came up with this idea, I feel like 24 to 36 hours before we were scheduled to get on the plane to go to New Orleans. It was a black fitted



V-neck shirt and on the front it had white text on it and it said, Black Female Founder, Fund Me. Then on the back in gold sparkly writing it said, Got seed?

Kerry Schrader (02:59):

I have to tell you, even walking into the conference hall, I did feel some kind of way. I was like, okay, how are people going to take this, and really had to, hey, this is my world. It's the truth. This is my reality. Initially walking through, I mean, there was some mild hostility.

Ashlee Ammons (03:22):

Frankly, it's good to cause a stir. I go back to it's good to cause good trouble, as they say. Right?

Kerry Schrader (03:29):

I was literally getting ready to say that. Congressman Lewis, good trouble.

Ashlee Ammons (03:35):

Yeah. I think it just made it an interesting day because at that conference there might have been 20,000 people there. When you're in a sea like that, it was great to stick out, and not stick out just because you were black. It was because of something you did. You know what I mean? Oh, let's talk about that shirt. Okay, now what do y'all do? That's exactly the point of the exercise. From those \$12 t-shirts, which I would say in the course of Mixtroz's history is the best marketing dollars we've ever spent. We managed to get our first piece of major press, which was awesome. We connected with someone who would become the executive director of an accelerator in Birmingham that ultimately led to us raising over a million dollars, which is amazing.

Kerry Schrader (04:22):

To be able to raise that million dollars specifically in Birmingham, Alabama is a huge deal. Well, I'm wearing a t-shirt right now that it says I Make My Ancestors Proud. I know that they're proud of me because the plantation that my family is from is in Cherokee, Alabama, is called the Barton Hall Plantation. It's on Wikipedia. To think that I'm 120 miles northwest of that here in Birmingham, have raised more than a million dollars, but a million of it came from Birmingham. I have my own home, running a tech company with my daughter. We are successful. We've done it as first time entrepreneurs. I don't know what could be a better outcome for me as a person, legacy for my family, and hope for others here in this region. I hope that generations that come after me will look at me in this t-shirt and feel the same way.

Speaker 3 (05:26):

This story was produced by Accenture's Black Founders Development Program. Get in touch with any of the founders featured in this series to get them the two C's, cash and contracts, that they need to grow.

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