

EP270_Jess Evans

[00:00:00] **Lisa Nichols:** Chromosomes, little strands of nucleic acids and proteins, are the fundamental genetic instructions that tell us who we are at birth. Most people are born with 46 chromosomes, but each year in the United States about 6,000 people are born with an extra chromosome, making them a person with Down syndrome.

If you've ever encountered someone with Down syndrome, you know that they are some of the kindest, most joyful people you will ever meet. They truly have something extra. My name is Lisa Nichols, and I have spent the last 24 years as both the CEO of Technology Partners and as the mother to Ally. Ally has something extra in every sense of the word.

I have been blessed to be by her side as she impacts everyone she meets. Through these two important roles as CEO and mother to Ally, I have witnessed countless life lessons that have fundamentally changed the way I look at the world. While you may not have an extra chromosome, every leader has something extra that defines who you are.

Join me as I explore the something extra and leaders from all walks of life and discover how that difference in each of them has made a difference in their companies, their families, their communities, and in themselves.

If you'd like this episode today, please go to Apple podcast or wherever you listen and leave us a five star rating. I'm excited to have Jess Evans on the show today. Jess is a 25 year veteran technology executive.

Well, Jess, welcome to the Something Extra podcast. I'm so glad we can make this happen.

[00:01:48] **Jess Evans:** Yeah, me too, Lisa. This is exciting. I'm so happy to be here and I really can't wait to get into it with you. I'm very, very, very motivated to share some interesting knowledge and just have a really fun conversation. So thank you.

[00:02:02] **Lisa Nichols:** Absolutely. Well, yeah. And so here's the thing. You and I met at the National ORBIES in Boston.

[00:02:09] **Jess Evans:** Yes, we did.

[00:02:11] **Lisa Nichols:** And just had such a great, conversation, a fun conversation. And so I basically did what all good podcast hosts do. And I said, Jess, come on the podcast so I could spend more time with you.

[00:02:24] **Jess Evans:** Which of course I was like, that's a no brainer because you and I had connected so well and just had so much fun. I said, why should we stop now? Let's have more fun.

[00:02:34] **Lisa Nichols:** Absolutely. So I'm just so excited. And, I just want our listeners to get to know who you are, but I, let's start with this. I know that you went to college at Kent State in Ohio, but did you grow up there Jess?

[00:02:47] **Jess Evans:** I did. Northeast Ohio. It's, east of Cleveland and about 30 miles east in a really teeny, teeny, tiny town called Painesville, Ohio. I tell people that and they're like, Painesville? That sounds painful. And I'm like, thanks, Captain Obvious, it's not, however, it definitely is a place where you have to have a little bit of grit. It's in the northeast Ohio snowbelt area, which means right before Buffalo gets, you know, demolished, we get it right before. So, it's, it's feet of snow, not inches. That's how they measure. So it's, it definitely takes a lot of fortitude to live in, a known place that we sometimes are colder than Antarctica in Northeast Ohio. How crazy is that? I know.

[00:03:41] **Lisa Nichols:** Is that right?

[00:03:43] **Jess Evans:** Yeah, yeah. My children would, when they cancel school, it wasn't always for the amount of snow. It was because it was negative 20 and they can't stand at the bus stop.

[00:03:55] **Lisa Nichols:** Oh, my goodness.

[00:03:57] **Jess Evans:** So I grew up in Northeast Ohio. And, while it is a little brutal, I will say, it definitely builds character. So Lisa, I have plenty of character. So I've decided I no longer need to live in Northeast Ohio, although it is always have a special place in my heart.

[00:04:16] **Lisa Nichols:** Oh I hear ya. I don't know that I can do that. You know, Jess, I remember I worked for a fortune 500 company that was

headquartered in Minneapolis. And I remember having to go to headquarters sometimes in the wintertime. And I was like, these are walls of snow. And I'm like, I, I just, I'm sorry, I could not do that. But that's, I mean, just growing up though that way and, a little bit smaller of a town, I think that there's something really interesting about that too, Jess, and, know so many people, the values, the, you know, just, that grounding, I think, that you get.

[00:04:53] **Jess Evans:** Yes, you're, you're spot on that whole area and a small town is, is, very different. You know, you'll see it in movies, you'll see it in writing and books, but there is an element of the values like you just alluded to Lisa where when you grow up in a or, or you're a part of a community that they all have to overcome the same challenges where, whether it's weather, whether it's the NFL team that might not be doing super stellar, although this year the Browns are doing much better. So, yay.

You know, it's whatever the story is. It resonates with everybody. So it creates a sense of community, a sense of belonging, a sense of we're all in this together. And so that absolutely shaped me as an individual and, and as a youngster coming up and people would always ask, you know, what do you want to be when you grow up? Huh. I don't know. As a small child, I really struggled with that answer because there wasn't one particular field that spoke to me at that time and I didn't realize what I wanted to do till I got to college. So But that sense of community gave me that freedom that space to really just be me. Exactly.

And so, you know, tying it all together with how I grew up, I definitely believed that's, helped elevate me through life because I had that freedom in space, which was very, and still very important to me. So.

[00:06:28] **Lisa Nichols:** Yes, I agree. Yeah. I was going to ask you about that. What do you like to do? Or are you thinking about, because you're, we'll talk about that but you've just had an illustrious career in tech and I was going to ask you, did you, did you kind of get a sense for that early?

[00:06:44] **Jess Evans:** This is a great story, Lisa. You're going to love this.

[00:06:47] **Lisa Nichols:** I want to hear it.

[00:06:50] **Jess Evans:** I thought I was going to be a professional volleyball player. Oh yeah.

[00:06:55] **Lisa Nichols:** Wow.

[00:06:56] **Jess Evans:** Oh yeah. My, I was, I was committed. Full disclosure. I am not that good. However, however, in my mind, I was. And I believed it fully. Now, most of my friends who I had at the time, volleyball players, would absolutely tell you she was not correct. But I wasn't, I mean, I wasn't, I wasn't abysmal, but I was, I was good. Just not good enough to be a professional, right? I was very competitive.

I, meaning competitive in skills. And so what has been wonderful about that is, I told my mother, I'm quitting college. That's it. I am a volleyball partner. We're going to go play beach. Now, I remind you, I grew up in northeast Ohio. Uh huh.

[00:07:45] **Lisa Nichols:** Had you even been to the beach by then?

[00:07:47] **Jess Evans:** Well, now, now, I love that question. I grew up on the shores, the majestic shores of Lake Erie. Which, they say there's sand there, but it's more like dirt with rocks.

[00:07:59] **Lisa Nichols:** Okay.

[00:08:00] **Jess Evans:** And, that was my beach that I grew up on. And, so that also yields a lot of grit, because when you dive into sand and you hit a rock, it's, it's jarring at best.

[00:08:12] **Lisa Nichols:** I would imagine.

[00:08:14] **Jess Evans:** Yeah, so I told my mom, that's it, I'm going to play volleyball, you know, I love this. And let me also mention, I am five foot five. Not six, not seven, not eight, five, five on a good day with tennis shoes, five, six and a half. So, my actual hopes for professional volleyball were probably not going to happen, but it didn't matter to me. I was committed and I was going to do it.

And I unenrolled from college, which of course my mother said absolutely not, at least take one class. And this was the tipping point. My friend and I were playing on the volleyball, we were in New Jersey playing on the beach. Came back for school, took the one class and then in the fall, we play indoor in Ohio because it's too cold.

So I'm playing indoor and I took one business class. Now, prior to that, I had been a science major, biology. I was going to be a marine biologist, or so I thought, because I liked dolphins. That was literally the limitation of my

marine, I liked dolphins. It was not very well founded. So I get to business class.

And we start talking finances and we start talking about investing and we start talking about, business operations and a little spark happened. And I was like, huh business stuff. This is, this is interesting. I, I think I could do this. And so when my volleyball career did not take off, I made sure that I re-enrolled and finished college.

And when I got to Kent State, I said, uh. I'm going to be a finance major. And then they said, you have to take like 12 accounting classes. And I was like, Oh, just kidding. No, thanks. what is out there? Now this is in the early, early nineties. So the internet, well, I mean, it was just becoming a thing.

[00:10:11] **Lisa Nichols:** Emerging.

[00:10:12] **Jess Evans:** Yeah. Just be coming to thing. And I, I understood technology. I utilized it, but I took my first intro to computer class. And, in that class, Dr. Steinberg, who was an amazing professor, I think a lot of us who pick our professions, many of us get inspired by a professor and he definitely did that.

And, because of his class, he had said there's an opportunity if anybody's interested to be a Yahoo beta tester. Now, I don't know if your podcasters are similar in age to me, but Yahoo was the new cool whiz bang thing at the time. And I was like, of course it was before it was really public. Right. So, you know, this is, you know, we're re I was really more focusing on bulletin boards and all this, like the older technology. So this web thing was kind of cool. We got to use the algorithms and learn this and learn the programming behind it. And that's all it took. I was hooked.

[00:11:16] **Lisa Nichols:** You loved it.

[00:11:16] **Jess Evans:** I have been in IT since Nineteen Ninety something.

[00:11:21] **Lisa Nichols:** Well, you know, there's just, I, I love everything that you just said, and for our listeners out there that may be a little bit younger in their careers, just know that just moving forward and sometimes you don't know. I mean, I'm amazed when I meet people that say, Oh, I knew when I was 11 years old. This is what I wanted to do. But just know that that is probably more the anomaly. And I think the thing that you said, Jess, that I think is really important to emphasize is you took a few classes that you didn't even know you

were a science major before you had not even taken a business class, but until you are exposed to those things, you don't know.

And aren't you grateful that you did that. So I'll tell you a funny story. So Greg, my husband and I co-founder of Technology Partners, we went to college together. He's a couple of years older than I, and I was going to be in Medicine. I was going to do something in Medicine. I that's what I had prepared for either Music or Medicine like you, I wanted to be Olivia Newton John. I didn't want to be a volleyball player. I grew up singing, but probably not good enough to be professional.

But, but I, so I thought, you know, I want to do something in Medicine and he's a couple of years older. So I got to college and he said, no, go into Accounting. And when we graduate, we'll start our own accounting firm. So I said, I don't even know if I would like this. I've never even had a business class, but I did. And I'm like, Oh, I'm good at Math. I think I can do this. Well, he was an Accounting major too. And then when we got into Advanced Theory and Cost Accounting and Tax and all this, he went on and finished it.

But he's like, I don't like this anymore. I'm going into computers. And so anyway, just funny, funny story. But until you try those classes out, you don't know. So I would just say, just, some sage advice for younger people, just try a lot of different things. You just don't know what's going to click with you, you know.

[00:13:37] **Jess Evans:** You really don't. And I find that, and I have young adults, they're in college right now and I'm encouraging them the same, please take something you would never take. My oldest, who is a theoretical physics major or no, I'm sorry, quantum physics, theoretical quantum physics major, he's adamant about physics only. And I said, Eli, you have to take other things. And they made him take art. And of course, he is protesting, like, beyond belief. Right. He's trying to find what kind of art credit he can take.

So he takes art history, because he loves history. Now the beautiful component is that this is something that he would never take. And he definitely did not appreciate the class as deeply as maybe an artist. But the wonderful nugget, as you're alluding to, Lisa, is that after the class, I think the most rewarding thing is when he was sitting at my parents house and he was looking at their art, he said, oh, that's a, and I have no knowledge. So he's going to say, yeah, whatever. The brushstrokes are a thing. And then this is a thing and it ties to this period in this history. And I was like, Eli, that's awesome. And just like a physicist, extremely robotic. He just like, yep, that's what I learned. Isn't it great.

[00:14:58] **Lisa Nichols:** So funny.

[00:14:59] **Jess Evans:** But he has a new, deeper appreciation and it actually opened him up to reading different types of literature that he wasn't going to read before. Now that sounds all nerdy and stuff. And we are a little bit of a nerdy family, but, to your point. It's different for everyone. And, please let your husband know that cost accounting was absolutely the bane of my existence and helped me get into computers as well.

[00:15:25] **Lisa Nichols:** Oh my goodness. That's such a great story. Yeah. I love that. Well, okay, So you do hold a bachelor's of business administration in computer information systems from Kent, but here's what I'd love to talk about now. You went on, at some juncture, just to get your PhD.

[00:15:42] **Jess Evans:** Yeah. So this is crazy, Lisa.

[00:15:45] **Lisa Nichols:** So tell me that story. What was the impetus for you to say, I'm going to go on and get my PhD?

[00:15:53] **Jess Evans:** Hmm. Yeah, no, I never thought that. So I, so you're like, wait, but wait, you have one. Yes. But I never thought that. Now this is really important for young and any age listener. Here I was and, you know, everybody has trials and tribulations of their life. I got married, I would say quasi young to today's standards. Back then it wasn't.

Always knew that I was going to have children. And I know this sounds like a long roundabout way, but we'll get there. I promise. At a young age, mom, I'm gonna have two kids, I'm gonna have a boy first and then I'm gonna have a girl and she tapped me on my head. Oh, sweet pea. That's not how it works.

And, I was eight years old and I said, yes, it does. It works that way for me. Okay. So she just passed me on my head. By the way, I have two children. I have a boy and then a girl. And then I, when I was married, it was not the ideal marriage. It's just, you know, my ex husband is not a terrible person. He is a, he is a nice man. It just wasn't right for the both of us.

So I am now a single mother, a hundred percent full custody. My ex moved, to Florida and I'm in Ohio. And so I've completely by myself with two young children. At that time, Eli was four and Ella was one. And I was working at banking at the time in 2008.

We're going to pause for 2008 working in banking. Oh, I might want to mention at the number one subprime lender bank in the country. Yeah, that didn't end well. Right. So, right. So in December of 2008, when the federal government seized the bank, that's a real thing you can look it up, we all lost our jobs. So I started in higher education in February of 2009, six weeks after I lost my position at the bank. And when I got into higher education, there is a motivating factor to get advanced degrees.

The boss that I had, who is the most amazing man that I've ever had the pleasure to work for, Lev Gonick, shameless plug because he's, that amazing. He pulled me aside and, and he said, you know, you have real talent and I think you could do well in this industry and you've always been in tech and that's needed, but I really think you could get your PhD. You, you could do it.

Lev, are you crazy? I am a single mom with two babies and I work full time for you. How in the world am I going to pull a PhD off? It'll take me 7,000 years. He said, think about it. And that's all he said. Well then, about a couple months later, I had a professor who is teaching in a PhD program at Weatherhead who was working with our leadership team pull me aside and said and this is a beautiful thing he said, you are an eagle among chickens.

I'll never ever forget that. Tony Lingham, plug, shameless plug for Tony Lingham, who is another amazing man who saw promise in me. And he said, I want you to apply to our PhD program. And I said, did you talk to Lev? He said, no, I applied and I got in. And Lev created the space in my job so I could attend.

Now, it was designed on a cohort base where you only had to be in class like four times a semester and then, I mean, it was a very structured program and if I, if it wasn't that structure, I wouldn't be able to do it. But here I am, still holding a full time job, having two small baby children.

[00:20:01] **Lisa Nichols:** Single mom.

[00:20:01] **Jess Evans:** Single. The only one taking care of them. No income and at the time no child support. We can get into that later. That's a, yeah, slight thing. Anyways, providing for my children. And myself and working ridiculously. I am alive today. So it is possible.

[00:20:21] **Lisa Nichols:** You got through it.

[00:20:22] **Jess Evans:** I got through it. And what I will say, everyone, well, how did you do it? I love this question. And the answer is you just do, you just

do. It is commitment, it is tenacity, it is perseverance, and it might be a little bit of wine, just saying it didn't hurt.

So you just do, but I will tell you that all of these, these challenges or opportunities, that, that get put in front of you and you're not quite sure why, you know, sometimes there's a, a greater power at hand and if you just commit to getting through it, you can. Big man will help you get there.

[00:21:10] **Lisa Nichols:** Absolutely. Oh, well, yeah. And you're not alone in it, but, but Jess, there's so much about that that I love. I love, and it was two men. Yeah. That spoke into you.

[00:21:22] **Jess Evans:** Yes.

[00:21:22] **Lisa Nichols:** We'll get into speaking into women. Yeah. Women helping other women rise as they rise. But I love that they saw something in you to kind of push you that way. And then just the grit and the determination that you had to get through it and leaning into your faith. So, that's all just really awesome. Well, tell me. For your dissertation and your research, what were some of the key findings? What did you learn through that? Cause I'm sure you learned a lot, Jess.

[00:21:54] **Jess Evans:** It was the most amazing program I have ever had the opportunity to be a part of, and I don't say that lightly because Lisa, I'm a very plain speaking person. I don't sugarcoat things. Part of that is the Northeast Ohio like, hey, this is what it is. But I will say it was the most rewarding experience.

So what I found, the beauty of this program is that in any PhD program, you're in a particular vertical. So my vertical is, designing sustainable systems. And a lot of people raise an eyebrow and go. So you're saving the planet? Well, there are some classes on sustainability, and everybody should try to save the planet, but no. It's truly around looking at all the management verticals offered in, management school, and applying design principles, applying sustainability principles to the management system, right? So designing sustainable systems. And then while you're in your PhD, you choose which system you want to do. And then, you know, in order to get a PhD, you have to, contribute a new body of knowledge that has not been, and then you have to defend it in dissertation.

Don't, don't ask me about that. It was painful, but I'm okay. Yeah. However, what I learned is that I focused on leadership and IT leadership specifically and in a PhD you have to get really refined. So it was not CIO. I did not evaluate the

effectiveness of a CIO. but I wanted to know because I knew be, you know, being a CIO. I want to know what makes the people that work for me the immediate layer underneath me, what makes them most effective?

Because in leadership, what I've learned over my X, X, fill in the blank long career is that you need different skills at different levels. That's not new and nuanced, but it's true. And so as I recognized that I said, well, we don't actually know what makes that layer most effective? There are millions of books on what makes a CIO effective. There's millions of books on individual contributor, first line manager, even director level. However, when you have that like leader of leaders level, what makes those leaders more effective? And it is, and I have the answer. Yay!

[00:24:28] **Lisa Nichols:** New body of work.

[00:24:29] **Jess Evans:** New body of work. So, I have the secret sauce if you would like me to disclose it.

[00:24:36] **Lisa Nichols:** I totally want you to disclose it. I'm sitting on the edge of my seat.

[00:24:40] **Jess Evans:** Okay. Okay. The secret sauce is a blend of emotional and social intelligence skills. But specifically some specific skills. It's, it's not like if you look at the emotional and social intelligence index, from Richard Boyatzis and who worked with Daniel Goleman, the grandfather of emotional intelligence.

[00:25:01] **Lisa Nichols:** Of emotional intelligence.

[00:25:02] **Jess Evans:** Richard had discovered, that there were about 20 to 22, depending on which version you're reading different attributes for emotional and social intelligence. So, as a technologist, though, we know that sometimes technology people may struggle with this element. We'll just be very kind and say it that way.

[00:25:24] **Lisa Nichols:** Yes, a lot of people struggle with this element.

[00:25:26] **Jess Evans:** Well, they do, they do, but, but yet in business, all 22 elements, what I found, I'm like, well, they may not be specific for a technologist. So I found what the top seven were, take those and it became a technical credibility. So because you have this emotional and social intelligence, if you do these things, it brings technical credibility. But, where's that technical

piece? You have credibility, but you don't have the technology. So the missing component are the knowledge attributes required in order to be successful, in order to enact.

So you must blend the emotional and social intelligence, the seven factors, and you must blend four critical knowledge factors. And those four factors are knowledge breadth. You must have a breadth of specific technology knowledge if you want to be effective as a senior leader in IT. Meaning you must have experience in multiple verticals.

Now, here's this, why is that crazy? Well, here's why it's crazy, because when you work in IT, you only work in one vertical for a lot of it. You have a person that comes up for security and they only work in security. You have someone who comes up on the project side.

[00:26:42] **Lisa Nichols:** Infrastructure.

[00:26:43] **Jess Evans:** Exactly, that, is a kiss of death, must have more experience in a different area, which means that puts their career at jeopardy because the whole way they've been working has been, I'm going to be a developer and I'm going to write code and then when I'm done, I'll be the director of code. And then, then now I want to be a CIO. Do you? Cause you only know code. So breadth is critical. Next one, depth. Jess, you just said I needed breadth. Yeah, but you have to have depth in one, one vertical.

[00:27:18] **Lisa Nichols:** Gotcha.

[00:27:18] **Jess Evans:** So like my depth is application development. Well, it was now it's networking and infrastructure and data centers. I pivoted, but my initial depth was application development. And then I realized, let me get into project management. This is where your critical skill of getting breath can happen.

If you lean into project management, you can work infrastructure and learn it. You can work deskside and learn it. You can work web and learn it. Great opportunity. Okay. So those are two critical factors, but depth and breadth were already in the literature. That's not a new contribution. Okay.

Here's the third one that is not new. It's called currency. In technology. It is the most critical that you are current on your tech. If you don't know what's happening today, you are not going to be effective. And by the way, I would even advocate that it's more than currency. You need to look forward because if

you don't know what's coming tomorrow, how are you going to retrofit it to your existing legacy applications.

[00:28:15] **Lisa Nichols:** We need to be planning today for what's happening tomorrow. Looking around the bend.

[00:28:20] **Jess Evans:** Beautiful. Well said. We call that knowledge currentcy. Here is my brand new attribute that didn't exist anywhere on the planet and still doesn't. Cha ching! I love when people are citing me. Alright. Call it knowledge complexity. Like, what, Jess, what is that? Well, we had this wonderful class in PhD to learn about chaos systems and, and how feedback loops help with growth and change and, you know, you look at the butterfly effect, everybody knows that Jurassic Park movie and they talk about it, right?

Alright, so, knowledge complexity, rooted in chaos theory. Doesn't that feel true for technology? Feels like chaos theory feel because that it's so constant change and rapid. Well, knowledge complexity is an individual's ability to connect the interdependencies of the solutions for which they are trying to solve.

So. When you are a senior IT leader, if you do not have knowledge complexity, meaning if you do not understand the interdependencies and the relationships of implementing new network technology and what that does to an application or a web page, not what it does to the network, then you cannot be effective.

[00:29:32] **Lisa Nichols:** Very good. Wow. And there had been nothing on that. Nothing written on that. Wow. I do believe that though. I do believe that you do have interdependencies of all the different systems. And wow.

[00:29:49] **Jess Evans:** Right. Most of the mistakes are happening because leaders are making decisions based on either depth, or currentcy, but not breadth. You have to use that breadth. So you can see how all four of these knowledge attributes are critical. Now, the cool part. Now, okay, so this is for any, any of you, structural equation modeling nerds out there. All four of those attributes converge to form one higher order construct, which I created called IT leadership knowledge. And it is IT leadership knowledge that is the critical factor and it, emotional and social intelligence is necessary, but it's not sufficient. The sufficient is technical knowledge. Ta da!

[00:30:33] **Lisa Nichols:** That's beautiful. I love it. So what, tell me the seven emotional factors. I know there is 22 or something in total, what are the seven?

[00:30:45] **Jess Evans:** I'm not going to disclose them because I have a paper under review and I've already said enough. And that one is easy to spot. So I need to hear back from the journal because my, my colleagues that work with me who are extending my research. So I had initial research and then I have a colleague who is extending it. She has submitted to, some journal, academic journals and we've not heard back yet where it's at. So I cannot disclose it.

[00:31:14] **Lisa Nichols:** I love it. I love it. Well, in the future. When that has been reviewed, we'll talk about it again. Wow. I mean, Jess, this, this is just, honestly, it's just mind blowing to me. I cannot tell you though, how many amazing technology leaders I've had on the Something Extra Podcast that have said, you know, they were, you know, in this particular vertical within it. And then there was something that came up over here and data or something that came up over here in cyber. And they're like, Hey, let me be the one to go do that. And so I do think that breath is really important. But having the depth and then the knowledge complexity, that one just blows my mind, but it's so true. So we'll listen. Hey, we have got so much more to talk about, but we do need to take a quick break and we'll be right back on the Something Extra Podcast with Jess Evans.

[00:32:11] **AD:** In business, the tendency is to seek out partners who are bigger, faster, stronger. When it comes to IT, you should be looking for smarter, faster, better. That's just what you'll find with the talented technologists at Technology Partners. Our experts develop custom solutions to tackle your most complex challenges. All to simplify your processes in the smartest, most efficient way possible. The time to be swift and nimble starts now. Go to technologypartners.net/solutions and see what's possible.

[00:32:41] **Lisa Nichols:** Welcome back everyone to the Something Extra Podcast with Jess Evans. So Jess, my mind is blown. I love all of the things that you just described, this new body of work. That you put together for your dissertation. But once you you've discovered these things, so you have been a multi time serial CIO at different organizations, and we can get into that a little bit. But as the CIO, how do you build a culture in the technology space that really is going to help embody and help promote those things with, with your people?

[00:33:17] **Jess Evans:** Oh, I'm so glad you asked because that's the perfect segue to what we were talking about before, which, which when you think about making the most effective leadership team, as I was alluding to, right? So, as a CIO and just full truth, I've just been a CIO at Vanderbilt. I was a deputy CIO at ASU. I want to give right credit, speak truthful to me because I'm very,

very honest. So the most important element is that cultural development is your critical job as a CIO in order to build the most effective team. And then it trickles down from there.

So when you are a CIO and you're looking at your leadership team, and you now know the effective skills and attributes and you feel like you're rocking and rolling, but there's still something amiss. That is very, very true because you could have the best team, and it could be the most effective people, and all of it will epic fail without the right culture.

Now, we talk about culture a lot in the literature, and about, and the world, and, and everything. We also focus on D.E.I.B., diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. That is your sufficient character. So I talked about necessary and sufficient earlier. It is necessary for diversity, equity, inclusion. But none of that will ever come to fruition without a sense of belonging.

[00:34:45] **Lisa Nichols:** Without the B.

[00:34:46] **Jess Evans:** Correct. And the B, the belonging. That's what cultural work is, creating an environment of belonging. IT Professionals are a special breed. So are engineers, so are physicists, so are doctors, so are lawyers and on and on and on, every career has an identity and creating the technology identity of your group, your culture of how they interact with each other is critical.

And if you do not commit to working on this culture, creating a sense of belonging, where every individual can be their authentic self. It doesn't matter how effective your leaders are, and that's the job of the CIO.

[00:35:34] **Lisa Nichols:** Yeah.

[00:35:35] **Jess Evans:** That's the job of the CIO. Bring in a sense of belonging and culture. Bring in a sense of trust and respect. Professionalism. Bring that in. That's what culture work is. Those aren't the emotional and social qualities. Those are cultural attributes required for human beings to flourish. And so if you are not creating a cultural environment for flourishing, where psychological safety is the number one thing valued in your organization, then you are definitely not creating a culture of belonging. And it is critical that this element be at the forefront of every CIO. So servant leadership.

[00:36:23] **Lisa Nichols:** Jess, I'm just thinking as you're talking, I mean, you as the leader, as a CIO, you have to model those things, first of all, right? Because as the leader goes, so goes the organization, but tell me, you know, tell our

listeners, tactically, though, how have you done that? I mean, what, what, what are the tactics that you use to create the B part?

[00:36:48] **Jess Evans:** I try to pay them off with gifts. No, I'm just kidding. So no, I did buy them some shirts and sweatshirts because the whole thing was, did they feel loved? And I, and I use this word carefully in business. A sense of belonging means that people feel valued for who they are and that they can be the person they are without fear. And that's where psychological safety comes in.

So I worked first with my direct report team and we did a little offsite and I had a facilitated session and I said to them, I said, we do not have a vision statement for this group. We don't. We need a vision statement because this is the North Star. Who are we? What is our identity? If you don't say who we are and what we do, then how do they know what to attach to, right?

So, my vision statement, my, sorry, our vision statement, because it's not mine individually, but we put it together. Our vision statement, and hopefully this, resonates, let me get, uh. I'm going to read it verbatim so that I don't mess it up. We are a human centric organization that advances our university by delivering innovative solutions and frictionless experiences through collaboration.

Now a couple things as you deconstruct that. We start with a human centric organization. The culture I'm trying to grow for my team is one that values human beings first, above technology. So we put humans first. Now, it is our job to deliver innovative solutions. That is what we're trying to do.

[00:38:37] **Lisa Nichols:** That's what technology does, right?

[00:38:39] **Jess Evans:** Exactly, right? But the key is frictionless experiences. So when you have customer friction, when you have an individual who can do their job, but it's so burdensome, then maybe you're not delivering the right innovative solution. So we must look at how our customers are using those innovations. And if it creates more burden, then that's not going to be good for the organization either. And then the only way you can create frictionless experiences is through collaboration.

[00:39:10] **Lisa Nichols:** That's beautiful. So that's that. Start with the, the CIO needs a vision for the, and, and obviously you want to make sure that it's not anything that's contrary to what the overall organization has to fit within there.

[00:39:27] **Jess Evans:** You got it. That's the next sentence is exactly right. It needs to make sure it advances the mission of the university, which is why we have that in there.

[00:39:35] **Lisa Nichols:** Yes, that's so good. So that's, so you, so gifts.

[00:39:42] **Jess Evans:** Yeah. Gifts, definitely gifts, butter them up, show them the love, give them a North star and then develop some guiding principles. We developed eight because these guiding principles were the eight things that were missing from our culture. I can go into them, but more importantly, the point being, you need some guiding principles for which will drive behavioral characteristics that you're looking for in your culture.

So guiding principle could be collaboration. A guiding principle could be mutual respect. A guiding principle could be, be professional. Those were some of ours. We had optimized bias to action. Oh, fantastic. Because IT people are never analysis paralysis. Oh, wait. Yes, we are. So bias to action, right? So, but those principles? They have to be right for your organization.

So you have to work with the team to find out what is the culture missing and what do we want to highlight behaviorally, because we all know what we need to do from a technological standpoint, we get innovation, we get the technology. We're solid on that. So if we're not having a sense of belonging or psychological safety in our culture, what are the principles we need to empower and then hold each other accountable for them?

So I, I got to share this because you're listeners are going to love this. How do you get them to adopt these behaviors? Great question, Lisa. So glad you asked. I'm just going to read your mind for a minute. I created a game. Now. IT professionals, not all of them, but many of them like to play games. I love to play games.

Some of us like to be competitive. Some of us don't, and that's okay. But we also worked at a university. So I'm like, how can I creatively come up with an idea that ties? Well, college football was happening. And in college football, my favorite team, excuse all the universities I've worked at, Ohio State, O H I O, Go Buckeyes.

The Ohio State University, my apologies, they put stickers on their helmet when football players do something really great when they stand out, whether they stand out as a leader on the football field or, or in the locker room, either way. And then you can see in the beginning of the season, how they get more stickers

and now there's a little bit of peer pressure. Oh, so and so has more stickers than me on my helmet, right?

[00:42:08] **Lisa Nichols:** Right.

[00:42:09] **Jess Evans:** Okay, what if our eight guiding principles, everybody loves stickers, they put them on their water bottles, they've been putting them on their laptops, what if we create the guiding principles as stickers? And then, you are never allowed to put one on your laptop, it must be given to you.

So, the rule is, my employees, and it doesn't matter what level you are, it's not just management, in fact I encourage it to be everybody, if you see someone demonstrating a guiding principle like, Oh, today you did bias to action, here's a sticker. And all of a sudden laptops started filling up with stickers and water bottles. So now you're sitting in meetings and you open your laptop up and you see one laptop with like 12 stickers and one laptop with none.

Now, here's a couple critical factors for you. You have to tie these guiding principles into performance evaluation. So every year, how did you do on these guiding principles? All right. And you have to have a conversation. And what's beautiful is when a manager sits down with their employee and they open their laptop and they've got zero stickers and say, okay, so where do you want to focus first or on the flip side? We've got an employee who has 12 stickers, all bias to action. Now, that is great. You're missing collaboration, and respect, and professionalism.

[00:43:23] **Lisa Nichols:** Or personal responsibility, or whatever.

[00:43:25] **Jess Evans:** Right. We need to work on a different area. But what's beautifully happening is there's a sense of community. There's a slight spirit of competition. We know we're going to be held accountable by these guiding principles. And if we're demonstrating them, we get a sticker and it's a, it's not because the sticker it's the acknowledgement. Now the beautiful thing is because not everybody likes acknowledgement or being called on stage. So then we mitigate that because it's done in private. And yes, the sticker speaks for itself, but nobody has to say anything or draw the unwanted attention.

So when you're in IT professionals and you have a blend of introverted and extroverted people, this process helps facilitate and yes, I am the brainchild behind this whole thing. And, and my team loves it. They have demonstrated me. They said, look, I got stickers. And I, when I walk around the, the, the floor

and I've got people showing me their stickers, I'm so proud of them and they're proud of themselves.

[00:44:21] **Lisa Nichols:** They are proud of themselves, right.

[00:44:23] **Jess Evans:** And they have a sense of belonging.

[00:44:26] **Lisa Nichols:** Yeah, that is brilliant. That is brilliant, Jess. You need to write something on that. You do.

[00:44:33] **Jess Evans:** Oh, that's okay. Your whole podcast, people, they can take it and they can just, you know, asterisk, credit Jess Evans. It's fine. I don't, I don't need, I don't need the accolades.

[00:44:42] **Lisa Nichols:** It's the idea though.

[00:44:44] **Jess Evans:** Exactly, I just want people to belong, yeah.

[00:44:49] **Lisa Nichols:** Well, there's so much I love about that. I mean, it's positive peer pressure for one thing. Positive peer pressure. Also constant reminders. I don't know what the stat is now, but you know, at one time you needed to be told something eight year, eight times for you to really get it. But every day you're seeing that right. And as a reminder, you're, Oh, bias to action or what mutual respect or whatever the, the thing is. Yeah, that is, that is brilliant. I just love it. Well, Jess, oh my goodness. I can tell right now we need to do Something Extra part two with Jess Evans. Cause I've got so much here to talk about.

But, you know, you are, because of, you know, who you are. I mean, you're considered a researcher scholar. You've won multiple awards. I know that you were, most influential women in tech. I know that you had your, your face on a magazine.

[00:45:45] **Jess Evans:** I know that's crazy, right?

[00:45:50] **Lisa Nichols:** I never thought I would have my face on a magazine. Top 100 women in technology, I think is what that was. But this did not happen overnight. It's truly been. A journey and I am sure there, there may be younger women in tech. There's not. And we, you and I have talked about this kind of in a sidebar conversation.

I don't know. It's less than 30 percent now of women in tech make it to a leadership type position now, women make up 50 percent of the workforce, but there's a smaller percentage of women that are actually in technology and you, you'd even said, Lisa, it's worse since COVID or since the pandemic and women are falling out. I mean, I would love, you know, we can't spend a lot of time on it, but I'd love just to hear your thoughts because we've got, how do we right the ship here?

[00:46:42] **Jess Evans:** No, I love this question. When I started in technology in the... early, it was 90 percent men, 10 percent women. Just not even in leadership, I'm talking in the entire profession in IT because when it started in the 90s, when it truly, I mean, sorry, everybody's like it started in the 60s.

Sure, we can argue semantics, but from a business perspective, true actual IT departments, not like the mainframe department and then the teleco department. I mean, actual IT departments, 90:10. Now what was beautiful as I was coming up through my career, they started to recognize that and it started to pivot. It only reached It only reached 70:30 in 2019 and then 2020 happened.

[00:47:34] **Lisa Nichols:** Then 2020 happened.

[00:47:35] **Jess Evans:** And we are back to 80:20. We've lost and some would say it's even more extreme than that. I'm saying 80:20, like female to male ratio for the entire it, but leadership, we're back to 90:10, 90:10.

[00:47:55] **Lisa Nichols:** I did not realize that 90:10.

[00:47:59] **Jess Evans:** And it breaks my heart when I talk about this. And so what I can say is to all the women out there, I had a, I had a horrible experience as a female leader at a large three letter acronym company that doesn't sell computers anymore. Okay. And, when I worked at this large organization, I was an up and coming leader and they were putting me on what they call their fast track.

And I had, I asked for two female senior leader mentors, right? Mentorship is important. We can talk about that another day. Both of them discouraged me to have children. Both of them told me that you are not allowed to have children and work at this place. Both of them told me that if I did not have a stay at home husband or an au pair to take care of my children, I would never make it because I had to be committed.

And when I got pregnant with my first and I was working 16 hours a day because I was running a global operation and I had to meet with a EMEA at the ungodly hour and then AP later in the evening and North America and Latin America and South America all day, 16 hours a day, nine months pregnant. I understood what they meant.

And it broke my heart because they weren't more supportive. Now, they were in an organization led by a man who did not value that. So I left and had my children and worked. It was hard.

[00:49:18] **Lisa Nichols:** It's hard.

[00:49:19] **Jess Evans:** It's so hard.

[00:49:20] **Lisa Nichols:** Let's don't sugarcoat it, Jess. It is hard to be a mom and, you know, a working mom. It's just hard.

[00:49:29] **Jess Evans:** It is. And no one understands. And those women We're not supportive of me and that's the key here. We have got to stop undercutting each other's success. We have got to be each other's champions. We have got to be each other's cheerleaders. I have benefited from two men who saw the good and more than that.

I've had, I've had many colleagues see the good in me to be fair. But I don't have a lot of women that I can say that about because we're too competitive with each other because there's so many opportunities for us. We're, I wish we could just value each other and celebrate each other instead of cut each other down.

And that is a critical thing. Oftentimes people want to blame men for it. And there are times when that may be appropriate, not the go to anymore. It's just not. What's lacking is that the extra female support. There's female support for certain areas, none in technology, because it's so competitive. They're scared that if they give too much support,

[00:50:40] **Lisa Nichols:** That there'll be less for them. It's a scarcity mentality versus the abundance mentality. But you are so correct. Jess, we have got to get past that. And as you rise, you pull others along with you and that is going to be the game changer. So, so good. Wow.

Well I've got a lot more things to talk about here, but I'm going to ask you just a couple and then we'll talk about something extra. Jess, for you, how do you

define success? Because People have all kinds of definitions, of success, but for you, Jess Evans, how do you find, define success for yourself?

[00:51:23] **Jess Evans:** It's simple. When I have a team that is in alignment, grateful, motivated, inspired, pushing the needle, saving money.

[00:51:41] **Lisa Nichols:** Making money.

[00:51:43] **Jess Evans:** Making money, making money, making lives better, improving interactions through technology, and you get a thank you note, that's success. And in a world where instant gratification has become a norm, which that sentence in and of itself grates against my core I'm sorry, it just does. Instant gratification has been a critical killer for our entire planet right now.

[00:52:21] **Lisa Nichols:** Agreed.

[00:52:22] **Jess Evans:** So success means. Watching something grow over time and it take roots and it stay. That it, it can flourish in what has become a cancel culture. If you can survive the cancel culture now, that's success. And too many people are judgmental too quickly. And they want to just write things off because we are a swipe left kind of culture now.

Oh, I don't like this. Swipe. I don't like that. Swipe. Did we forget that there are human beings on the other element of that? And if that is the behavior that you take in your organization where you're like, Oh, I don't like that about that person. Swipe. That's not success.

[00:53:09] **Lisa Nichols:** No.

[00:53:10] **Jess Evans:** That's evil.

[00:53:13] **Lisa Nichols:** Agreed.

[00:53:14] **Jess Evans:** That's evil.

[00:53:15] **Lisa Nichols:** Agreed.

[00:53:15] **Jess Evans:** Success is creating an environment.

[00:53:19] **Lisa Nichols:** Where everyone can thrive and flourish and belong

[00:53:23] **Jess Evans:** Belong and be their authentic self.

[00:53:25] **Lisa Nichols:** Yes.

[00:53:26] **Jess Evans:** As long as they're not hurting anybody physically or mentally, that goes hand in hand, there are still etiquette required. But this culture, this world, and, and, you know, it's the irony that it's technology that has gotten to this culture is not lost on me. So Lisa, when you're ready to have a responsible innovation conversation, we can have one of those as well.

[00:53:52] **Lisa Nichols:** Yeah, that's great. Well, let's do it. Oh my goodness. We, I think we are going to have to do a part two because I, there's just so much I would love to talk to you about it. You're a big reader, you know, if you've got, go follow Jess, go follow her on LinkedIn, she's an amazing, amazing woman. You'll learn so much. We didn't even really get into life mottos or any of that kind of thing, but I do have to ask you, Jess, this is called something extra. What do you believe, and it's probably some things that we've talked about. What do you believe is something extra that every leader needs?

[00:54:28] **Jess Evans:** Caring.

[00:54:31] **Lisa Nichols:** Yup.

[00:54:32] **Jess Evans:** And I have a story for that.

[00:54:34] **Lisa Nichols:** Love it.

[00:54:35] **Jess Evans:** I was told when I first became an executive. By a male that was a peer. He said, Jess, you know what your problem is? I love when people start with that sentence, by the way. Jess, do you know what your problem is? You care too much. I looked at him and said, you're darn right I do.

I care about every human being in my organization. I care about all the initiatives we're working on. I care about doing a good job and I care about having others do an equally, if not better job. And I hope that everybody does their job better than me because if they are, then I am doing my job. I care a lot and the fact that you don't is what makes us different.

And that's something extra is because I care. Now there is a detriment to that. I take it personally. I got to get over that and I got my own insecurities with that. But. Caring is an element that separates not just good leaders, I'm not going to quote anybody, but great leaders, but there are female leaders who care so

passionately and that is held against us. And that is unfair. Caring is the something extra.

[00:55:54] **Lisa Nichols:** Love it. Well, Jess, thank you so much. This has been so much fun for me. It'll be the most fun thing I do all day long.

[00:56:06] **Jess Evans:** Me too.

[00:56:06] **Lisa Nichols:** I just, I can't, I can't wait to just hopefully get to see you face to face again soon.

[00:56:13] **Jess Evans:** Absolutely.

[00:56:14] **Lisa Nichols:** You're in Nashville. So if anybody's in Nashville and wants to have coffee with Jess, I know that she would love to do that.

[00:56:21] **Jess Evans:** I would. I would welcome that wholeheartedly, Lisa. I would. Thank you.

[00:56:26] **Lisa Nichols:** Well, thank you so much.

[00:56:28] **Announcer:** Thank you for listening to today's show Something Extra with Lisa Nichols is a Technology Partners production copyright Technology Partners Inc 2019 for show notes or to reach Lisa visit tpi.Co/podcast Don't forget to leave a review on Apple podcasts Google Play or wherever you listen.

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