



EP301_Dupe Akinyede

Lisa Nichols 00:03

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 6000 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 in 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 liked this episode today, please go to Apple Podcast or wherever you listen and leave us a five-star rating.

I am thrilled to have Dupe Akinyede on the show today. Dupe is a seasoned technology executive, wife to Dr. Roland Akinyede and mother of three. Well, Dupe, oh, my goodness, I cannot even tell you how excited I am to sit down with you today and dig in all the goodness and riches and richness that I know is going to come out. We got a lot to talk about. Thank you for making the time to be on the Something Extra Podcast.

Dupe Akinyede 02:06

Thank you, Lisa. And hello to all of your audience and everybody out there. Thank you so much for having me on. I appreciate it.

Lisa Nichols 02:13

We're gonna have fun so, you and I, you know, I was thinking about this. I told you I've got about nine or 10 pages of notes. We're only going to be able to scratch the surface of Dupe today, but I'm going to do my best to get a lot in there. You know, you and I met. I always like to go back and say, so you and I met, because actually, I think I kind of stalked you a little bit, to be honest with you. But two of our friends, two of our mutual acquaintances, Carolyn Holt at Westminster, Christian and Bethany Monahan at Inspire, connected us. And then you and I sat down and had breakfast at The Shack and I felt like I had known you my whole life.

Dupe Akinyede 03:04

Absolutely. It was like I found a lost sister and she had been right here in my backyard all this time. It was such a wonderful session, and I'm so glad that we were able to make that work, because I know our schedules were so busy, we canceled so many times or had to reschedule. Goodness, what a blessing it was to be able to make that work, Lisa.

Lisa Nichols 03:25

Such a blessing and, Dupe, I know that it's just the beginning.

Dupe Akinyede 03:30

Amen to that.

Lisa Nichols 03:32

We've got so much that we can do together and collaborate on so I'm really excited about that, but I can't wait to get into your story and but I would love for you to do is take me back. Take me back to growing up, because you did not grow up in the United States. You've got such a just an interesting, amazing story. So where did you grow up?

Dupe Akinyede 03:55

Well, I was born and spent my formative years on the west coast of Africa, in a country called Nigeria. I was number six out of eight kids in a blended family. So very interesting family. But you know, I am the typical middle child in every way. If you're number six out of eight kids, the entire stereotype of the forgotten child, the invisible child, totally applies to me. And all of the skills and the abilities of the middle child also apply to me, as well. Trying to survive in that environment I have. My father had three, three wives, one of them my friend, the first step mom. My stepmom was German, and so we spoke German and English in our house on the west coast of Africa, in Nigeria, and my mom was second in line, and she was from a different part of Nigeria. And then my third step mom, my second step mom, was from Ethiopia, and so we spoke a local Ethiopian language. And in our house, we were multilingual. Everybody spoke different languages. My father himself was an engineer by training. He was a disciplinarian by practice as a father, but he was excellent in everything. He spoke five languages, French, Russian, English and German, and then two local Nigerian languages. And his language of love to us was excellence and everything, hard work and discipline, and that's really the environment in which I grew up.

Dupe Akinyede 05:32

My hero was my mom. She was my hero. We'll talk a little bit about her later. But as soon as I graduated college, my first college, I moved to the UK, and I spent all of my early career, I met my husband, spent all my early career in Europe. I went back to grad school in Europe, and at a point in time, we decided that we were going to relocate to the United States, which was in the late 90s, and we moved to New York. I moved as a trailing spouse, and the I guess the rest is history. I've been in St Louis since the since 2005 I've made my home here, primary home, but I've traveled all over. But I have three beautiful children. One of them's got the travel bug, so she's graduating now and about to move to Europe and travel the world. And I'm just loving life and just really excited to be here. But very much, not a typical background you would expect from a little girl who was born in Africa, for sure.

Lisa Nichols 06:37

Right. Oh, my goodness. There's so much there. There's so much there. Because I know that you attended, I was looking, I think you attended The Grange School, I think in Lagos. And I think that was founded right? Dupe, by some British expatriates?

Dupe Akinyede 06:55

It was, it was. It's very, very gosh, you did a lot of digging there. I did go to The Grange, and it was a British Expat school. And really funny story I was, it's, I was a minority in my school, but in a majority country, so it is really interesting there. But I grew up with a typical British accent. People would look at me like I was weird. And, you know, you show up, especially when you show up in the shores of the United States, and you're you look like me, and then you have a British accent, which I've, I've lost over the years. But it was very interesting, you know, people just didn't know what to expect. I was always not what people were expecting. Let's put it this way, all the way through my childhood, I was the rebellious child. And I say that like I said, middle child, what can you do? The only way to get attention, I was the negotiating child, and I was the problem solver child. There you go.

Lisa Nichols 07:53

And you're still that today. That's what I was going to talk about.

Dupe Akinyede 07:57

Don't tell my children.

Lisa Nichols 08:01

I mean, you're, that's what you do today. You're a problem solver, and so I love it.

Dupe Akinyede 08:07

I haven't seen a problem that I can walk away from.

Lisa Nichols 08:10

Well, I love that you talked about moving to the UK, because I knew when we talked that where you met your husband, and I think you went on and got a master's in international accounting and finance at the London School, and I think you took some positions there, but then, as you just mentioned, you had the opportunity to move to New York with EY. And wow, wasn't that an experience, Dupe? Because I think, I think, and I don't want to put words in your mouth. I think this is kind of where you kind of began transitioning more into technology. And you know what? So funny, you said your dad was an engineer. I think I read something, or maybe you told me this. You grew up with a family of engineers, and you were determined not to be an engineer.

Dupe Akinyede 08:57

Yes, every single one of my four brothers is an engineer. My father believed that there were only three professions in the world. You were either a doctor, a lawyer or an engineer. And I, being the rebellious middle child, had no desire to do anything that he wanted me to do. Even though I was probably more inclined towards being an engineer, quite frankly. And so perhaps, if you had approached it in a different way, I might have studied engineering. I had no idea what I wanted to study. So, it was like, Okay, what are the things that you're good at? Math. And so, I thought, Okay, go study economics. For you know, like a lot of children who go to college, I mean, they have no idea what they want to do with their lives at that age.

Dupe Akinyede 09:39

And I certainly didn't coming out of my first degree and going on to study international accounting and finance, it was just, well, I'm good at math, so maybe I'll be good at finance. And you know, those finance people on Wall Street and in London in central and they all look like they're doing pretty good. So, you know, can't be a bad. Gig, I was a very good student. I think that's part of problem solving. There's nothing that you would put in front of me that I wouldn't be able to work hard at and ace, I think again, that's part of the upbringing from my father. But being an accountant was not for me, ultimately. I found that out very quickly, and I'm so glad that the Lord led me to EY because I had no idea what this consulting thing was, except that I was solving problems, and they seemed to think that I was pretty good at it. And there you go.

Lisa Nichols 10:31

And the rest is history. Well, you and I talked about that Dupe, because that's what I did, you know, I have a degree in accounting, and went into corporate accounting for McDonnell Douglas and God bless accountants. I tell our controller all the time, Christy, I'm so glad that you love this stuff, because after five years, I'm like, this is so for me, it was just, it was a little boring, you know, reporting on historical data. And I'm just like, oh, I don't know that I can see myself doing this 20 years from now. But listen Dupe, and I think you would say the same thing, what an amazing foundation for anything in business, right? Yes, so I'm grateful. And, I don't ever look back on that time and wish I had not have done that, because I think it set me up for even what I'm doing today. So, it is a wonderful foundation. So, you know, young people out there, if you have a pinch on for your accounting, go for it. You know, it'll be a great foundation for you, and you may end up making a career out of it and becoming a controller, CFO, you know, who knows?

Dupe Akinyede 11:42

No, I totally agree with you, and I would not change anything for the world. I encourage you know, young adults, young children, to explore. If you don't know what you want to do, it's okay do whatever your hand finds to do and be good at it, and then find out what you enjoy. Change over time. I've been doing what I've been doing for years, but it's evolved over time. You don't always enjoy that. Go find what you enjoy. Someone who said to me a long time ago, you always need to find the connection of your passion and your industry and try to keep those two together at every point in your life. You gotta be passionate about what you spend your day doing, but it's okay for it to change over time.

Lisa Nichols 12:28

Absolutely. And Dupe, I know you know a ton of leaders too. But how many leaders, how many people do you know that pivoted? Oh, I know a ton. You know, I know a ton. In fact, we had a young woman in our marketing department that I absolutely love, and it was a bitter, bitter moment for us when we lost her. But I was so grateful for her, and I was talking to her yesterday, she pivoted, and she was in marketing and communications, and then decided, about a year a half ago or something, to go back to school and become a doctor.

Dupe Akinyede 13:06

Good for her.

Lisa Nichols 13:07

It's a pivot, and she's loving it, and it's her passion. And you know, so it's okay, it is okay to change so, you know. But really, just like you said, kind of know yourself and know what you enjoy, and know what you're good at, and your strengths, and then hopefully marry all of those things. But you know, Dupe I wanted just you've had an incredible, incredible career in tech, and we're going to dig all into that. But you know, I wanted to read just a few things about people, what people have said about you, and I, I know that you're such a humble person that you may feel uncomfortable with this, but I think it'll help our listeners do a deeper understanding of the kind of leader you are. So, I'm just gonna read a few of these things. This is what somebody said. She's one of the most talented, inspiring leaders with a very high level of personal integrity that I have known and worked for. Her focus is always, and I love this, her focus is always business value side of technology. She continually challenges the team to think business first. I love that.

Lisa Nichols 14:13

Here's another one. Her approach to business partners and her team has always been service and value oriented. Listeners, if you have your journals with you, write these phrases down, because we could do a whole podcast just on these different phrases. Here's another one. She has high energy, an acute ability to learn and absorb information. We talked about you being a good student. Whatever it was that you put in front of you, you could learn it. Maintains her integrity amidst an ever-changing landscape. And I love this. She is a student at heart. Listeners, we never stop being a student. John Maxwell says, when you stop growing and learning, you die. So never stop being a student. Here's another one above all, the one leadership trait that I admire the most is her integrity, all right? So, we could do a deep dive on that. Never compromise. Never go for the short-term win. You know, never compromise your integrity, right? Here's another one. Her understanding and awareness of every facet of her organization allows her to have a sense and she allows her department to have a sense of autonomy and ownership. And that's we know that from Daniel Pink's "Drive", right? That's one of the things that people want. They want autonomy. So, you've done that in your career. You've allowed your teams to do that. She's an incredible role model to all those she interacts with. She has a positive attitude and a positive attitude toward challenge. So, you can go, oh, this is so hard, or you can have a positive attitude and look at it as an opportunity.

Lisa Nichols 16:06

I'm just going to read maybe two more here. It's rare that you come across someone like Dupe, who is both a tough negotiator, is empathic kind and a strategic thinker. So, you've been a negotiator since you were, you were young, so that's definitely a skill that people have noticed. You know, here's the thing, Dupe, we could totally take each of these character traits of you and just do a deep dive, and that would be the podcast. But I just want our leaders to know just kind of what kind of leader you are, and hopefully they'll make note of that and say, you know, I want to be a leader that's bold and positive in the face of challenge. So, we talked about this in the beginning, but you saying that your career is not in technology, but it's in solving problems and creating value, and you love business transformation.

Dupe Akinyede 17:05

Yes, absolutely. I don't believe in technology for technology's sake. I'm not a, I mean, I love technology because it has the ability to be applied in so many different ways to create value in so many different applications. And you know this, it's I get to live in a world where the explosion and the innovation that technology has provided to us. I mean, that's amazing. I love the fact that I'm living in this time. But what I say to folks, it's about the application. It's about what you do with it, how you use it. You can use it for good. You can use it for bad. And how you think about using it to create value in whatever application that you're in.

Dupe Akinyede 17:51

In my life, outside of creating value in a corporate environment or in a personal other environment, I actually like to not be around technology. My favorite place is on a beach with a piece of paper, a book, and with no nobody around me. I always say I am the modified introvert, and that is my place. That is, I call it my home with my family around me most of the time, and that is my own piece. So, for me, technology is, you know, how do we make our world better? How do we make people's lives better? And that is a question that I ask every day, no matter where you're at, continuous improvement, what can we do to make it better? And I get excited about that. And I love to have, you know, surround myself with people, or to instill in people the ability to get excited. I mean, that is so exciting. You're making an impact, using technology as an enabler. And that's important.

Lisa Nichols 18:49

You know, we, we talk about that in Technology Partners, that technology, you know, we are harnessing the power of technology to improve the world. So, I mean, truly, again, we don't have the time to go into it, but Dupe, hey. I mean, technology is making a difference in healthcare. It's making a difference in just so many areas, right? And the customer experience and, and people's lives. So, I love that so much. But I do know you love transformation, and you've done a lot of transformation in your in your career, but you know how let's talk about this. So, transformation, though, Dupe, and not transformation for transformation's sake, but transformation that's going to improve things. It can be really, really hard. So, let me ask you this, what strategies have you used in these various organizations to win the hearts and the minds? Because sometimes, and you just said it to me, inspiring other people to want to make those changes. What are those strategies? Because it's hard, and sometimes I think people are change weary, sometimes, and it's the adoption of that transformation and change that's the hardest piece, right?

Dupe Akinyede 20:05

No. You know, I'm actually, it's interesting writing a book about this and about my experiences and what I've learned over the long tenure of transformation. And ultimately, it comes back to, it's all about people, you know, when you're going through whatever kind of transformation, it's all about people. And you have to start off with understanding that, but then start off with the question, why are we doing this transformation? You got to know the why, and then you've

got to be able to communicate to the right people. First of all, the why, and there's different types of people depending. I've been in really large organizations, and I've done transformation in smaller organizations. You have to know the landscape, which includes the people, the currency, and you've got to understand, you know, their current thinking. You've got to be able to empathize with all of the different groups and classifications of people as you think about transformation.

Dupe Akinyede 21:06

I really do think about, you know, people say transformation is hard, but I really, I think my thinking is really about, there's a process. There's a process to taking people from point A to point B successfully, and it starts off with the why are we doing this? Who cares about it, and why do they care? And then how do you communicate the why and why you should care to people? That doesn't mean everybody's going to get on board, but once you communicate the why and why you should care, then you begin to get the adopters and the believers you're looking to inspire people the what's in it for you, what's in it for the business. How does this make you better there? I don't think I've met anyone who is averse to making themselves better or improving the world around them, or making a better place for their company, their children, whatever it is. But you have to be able to sell, and sometimes in the process you may identify that you know, maybe this transformation isn't appropriate for the place and time. So, you also have to be able to listen to the people around you that you're seeking to transform.

Dupe Akinyede 22:10

But once you center on a, a reason or a goal, a transformation goal, then you need to understand the organizational hierarchy and figure out who are going to be the sponsors, who are the folks that are going to be the sponsors, the typically leaders in the organization, who have the greatest to win or to lose by the success of the transformation. And you need to make sure they're squarely on board. Because the process, you know, I think an example of someone, I'd heard someone say, the process of transforming from a caterpillar to a butterfly. I can't imagine how painful that must be when you see that happening. It's not necessarily easy, but oh, we have to tell people that it's so worth it in the end, and then as we go through that process, we have to support people. We have to hold their hands, we have to not be judgmental. We have to give them everything they need to make it through that transformation. And different groups of people will need different things. So, then it becomes about understanding, a deep understanding of the people, the process, the technology around it, what's working bringing shorter cycles of change within the overall transformation, so that you can get small wins really fast. I've seen a lot of times that, you know, transformational project, you got a big, you know, five-year thing that's going to fail. I always say that right out of the bat, because people cannot wait five years for the reward of a win. That's just the way we are.

Dupe Akinyede 23:44

And I, you know, having children, I think, was the best teacher for me of how to handle transformation. You need to give them small wins every so often to continue to keep them inspired and motivated for the next win. That's how I approach technology, transformation, celebrate the people call that, you know, agile, right? I always say, come up with the fancy names of agile, but it's just to me, common sense, because you're dealing with people who are relational. You want to give them something to be proud of. You want to give them a, see, we're going in the right direction, but we want to also see we made a mistake. We need to recalibrate and learn from that and move forward. Do it in smaller chunks, where it's minimal impact to the organization if you fail, but it's great impact to the individual team members. If you succeed, you give them something to be proud of, and you have to support them. You have to support them when they fail. Make it okay to fail. I always say that one of the worst things that as a leader, you can do is make your teams or your organization scared of failure. How do we learn? We learn from failure. You need to put the guard rails around them and let them know. That it's okay to fail, we will support you. Just don't fail at the same thing twice. So, I tell my children, don't make the same mistake twice. You make it once, we will learn from that and move on.

Dupe Akinyede 25:11

So, I love transformation. It's like seeing I love seeing people grow through it. I love seeing the results and like, we did that together. I love seeing the value that it creates. I think that's another area of transformation. You have to be able to measure the value. You have to be able to measure the value every single time. And you have to pay attention to measuring the value. You have to remember where you started from by baselining and measure the value that you're creating at every single point. Remember, we are in a capitalist society. We are in an organization that potentially has shareholders or owners that are looking for a return on investment. So, any transformation should yield measurable value, and you need to pay attention to that. And I encourage everyone to pay attention to that everyone in the team. It doesn't matter whether you're at the top of the team or at the bottom of the team. You're part of the team, and you're on the team for a reason, because there's some value that we expect you to be able to contribute, and you need to measure that at the beginning baseline and at the end when we achieve that, so that we can continually let ourselves know that we're going in the right direction. I love transformation. People are so proud of themselves, you know, when

they, they achieve the outcomes and the goals that they set for themselves. And a lot of times, it doesn't necessarily look exactly like how we envisioned it at the beginning, and that's growth. We made it better. So, I don't know, you can probably hear my voice. That excites me. It's like.

Lisa Nichols 26:47

I'm passionate, I am passionate. I'm serious. We could stop the podcast right now. Dupe, and there's so much richness in what you just said, and goodness and what you just said, that it was just beautiful. And I love how you think about it. You know, even with your children and in life, I mean, so, goodness gracious. That was so good, so good, you know, let's talk about this. You know, you said you've been in big organizations and small but you know, after EY, you transitioned to Emerson, which is an iconic brand in St Louis and beyond. And I think you spent about 16 years there. Dupe, I counted you had eight different roles when you were there.

Dupe Akinyede 27:35

Had a lot of different roles at Emerson, and 16 years in total, I was a boomerang kid in the middle of that, because I went off, and that's another conversation after I had my third child, and I was like, okay, you know, I thought I needed, you know, I went into some mama issues. Let's put it that way, of feeling like I wasn't good enough, either as a mother or at Emerson. But then I came back, because I just love the global nature of the company, the challenges and the opportunity that it provided, and it was an organization that I was able to thrive in. Interestingly enough, even as large as it was.

Lisa Nichols 28:17

You did really, really well at Emerson. I like what you just said that you were a boomerang kid and you kind of had some mama issues. I didn't really plan on talking about that Dupe, but I think a lot of women have mama issues. In fact, I just talked to a young woman yesterday, and she's like, how do you balance, you know, you've got this family and you've got and I'm like, well, first of all, let me just tell you, it's hard. It is hard. Let me also just tell you if you're feeling that angst inside of you, it's normal. I said, I think most women, if they really admitted it, sometimes it's you do have those things where you feel like, oh, I'm not being enough here. Or, you know, you feel the guilt of when you're at work, of not being with your children or being the room mom, but, you know, it's normal. But Dupe, I mean, let's talk about that. I mean, how, how did you, how did you do both and do it well? And, you know, sometimes, you know, in the reality is, I've always said sometimes there's seasons where I did need to focus on my, a child a little bit more, or, you know, there's something at the at the business that you need to focus it's, it's, I don't like this term work-life balance, because I don't think it's ever perfectly balanced. But, you know, there's a lot of prayer in there, too.

Dupe Akinyede 29:48

You know, I was just gonna say, by the grace of God, is the only answer that I realistically have. I can't even pretend that I was perfect at it, it, it's, it's a challenge. And I went through different seasons of my life with different age groups in the, you know, when my children were young, you know, I was in. You know, the early stages of my career at Emerson. And it's at that stage, it's about mastering and, and you know mastering your trade, and you know being known at Emerson for excellence and delivery, or whatever it is that you choose to, to be your brand, and you have to work hard. And for me, you know, for those who may be familiar with Emerson, and I love Emerson, but it was primarily a male dominated environment, especially back in the early 2000s and beyond, and especially in tech, there were not a lot of females in the IT organization, especially black females that looked like me, who were married with younger children. And most of my male counterparts had stay at home wives. So that it you have to be able to compete and deliver value, and it was tough, you know.

Dupe Akinyede 29:51

But for the grace of God, and I have a wonderful husband. You know, that is it be one thing that I would say to people, you need to have a supportive spouse. I would not know how either single parents or folks who do not have supportive spouses would have been able to handle that. And my spouse is a physician, so he has a pretty demanding job too. I tell people, I've, you know, I've done the, you know, give Tylenol to my kids when they had a fever to bring their fever down so I could still dump them in daycare, so I could go to work thing because I needed, I've, you know, had the arguments with who's staying home? How many days can you stay home? It was, it's been tough. So, I don't necessarily have an answer for folks, other than it has informed my leadership style, because I don't think the environment that I came up in is one that should be tolerated in corporate America today. And I make it, you know, part of my mission to make sure that we create environments that are productive with high performing teams, but allow women, especially, to thrive because the things that as women we have to deal with are very different from our men. I know I'm generalizing, but they are. We are, if you are married and you have children, generally the primary carer for your children. I know there's some men who are great carers for their children as well, but generally we are, and we should be, and we are also very, very productive in the workplace as well. You know, I love my men, but my

women, they can walk and chew gum and do all kinds of things. I've got three kids. I can hold conversations with all three of them at the same time.

Lisa Nichols 32:58

And uniquely gifted, right? In the workplace?

Dupe Akinyede 33:03

You know. So, I, you know, I think all of us, as we've, you know, matured and gone, should be looking at, how do we make the workplace a better environment for women to thrive. Because I shouldn't have had to, you know, give child Tylenol to put them in daycare and make all the other kids, but I felt like I didn't have a choice. That is an example. I as an example, also worked all through my last two babies. I was working right on the day I had those babies, even all the way into the hospital and delivery area. And I shouldn't have had to, but I did, because I felt like and maybe one could argue that maybe I put that on myself, I don't know, but I felt like it was necessary in order to prove myself in the environment that I was in, to continue to deliver value, to show that there was no difference between myself and my male counterparts. So, it's interesting. I've spoken to a lot of women who go through the same kind of psychological thinking. But we need to create a it doesn't have to be that way. And I think, I think times are changing as well.

Lisa Nichols 34:15

I agree. I totally agree. I love, I love what you just said. And you know, the thought just occurred to me, Dupe, as you were talking, we need to obviously give other people grace. We've been there. We know what it's like. Let's remember what it's like, right? And give people grace that is in our that are the people around us in our organization. But we also need to give ourselves grace, when we're in that and you feel like that, oh, I'm not being enough here, or I'm not doing what I need to do, we need to give ourselves Grace we're doing the best that we can. But to your point, I do believe, especially women leaders that know what it's like. We need to make that, you know, something in our own organizations or the people that we lead that that, that they don't have to make those choices, right? If your child is sick, you family, first family.

Dupe Akinyede 35:12

I say that and I model that. And so, it's also important as female leaders that we model what we say. And so, for me, I'm like my faith, my family, and then delivering value for everyone else around me. That is the order of priority I have for life. And I model that. I make every effort to model that. And then you can, because that's the best that that is the best teacher. Because you can say one thing to your team or your organizations that you lead, but if they don't see you acting how you say, then that you know, they're, they're going to think that this is some kind of trick going on here, so to advance they need to, you know. And again, who better than your children to call you out on that, you know, do as I say and not as I do, really?

Lisa Nichols 36:07

Oh mine, definitely do. Mine definitely do. You know, just a moment of vulnerability here, you know, we talk about our kids, you know, being present, being present, where your feet are. And probably a couple weeks ago, my middle daughter said, Mom, do you realize how much you're on your phone recently when we're talking and I'm like, Thank you. Thank you for, for calling it out in me, you know, I'm putting my phone away, you know. So, they, you know. Let's hold each other accountable at work and in our families, right? So, Dupe, we've got so much more to talk about, but we do need to take a quick break, and then listeners will be right back on the Something Extra Podcast with my sweet friend Dupe.

AD 36:52

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Lisa Nichols 37:22

Welcome back everyone to the Something Extra Podcast with my friend Dupe. We have just been having so much fun. We've got a little bit more here to talk about. There's just, if you haven't noticed, she's a deep woman. She's a seasoned tech exec, she is a seasoned mom. I mean, she's just got so much wisdom. And so, we're going to try to, to get a little bit more of that in here. And I know the listeners, you guys are just going to love it. So, make sure you got your notebook out and taking notes. But Dupe, in 2022 you became the CIO for Resideo, and which was a spin-off of Honeywell. Talk a little bit about your first 100 days. What were you actually brought in to do?

Dupe Akinyede 38:05

So, I was brought in to look at how to transform the IT organization, to create an IT organization that was fit for purpose, for the new company, Resideo, as you indicated, was the spin-off of commercial and residential product organization from Honeywell, the big old Honeywell. And it was a \$4 billion spin off of primarily the Honeywell thermostat manufacturing and some security business around that, and a distribution business called ADI Global. It was a beta pro distribution business of low AV, security products, cameras, video phones, things like that. And they had spent a lot of the time just getting off of their TSA, hopefully your audiences just getting off of the Honeywell systems was a priority to get off that with speed, and now they were at a point where they're like, well, who are we for going forward? And we need to come up with an IT operating model that's fit for the much smaller company that we are, and is fit for our vision and strategy for going forward, which is very different from when we were part of Honeywell, and the big, you know, corporate structure of IT. As well as all the other functions that Honeywell had, would no longer be fit for purpose, for this smaller company that was seeking to be more nimble, more innovative and creating new products, was seeking to become more of a digital company.

Dupe Akinyede 39:40

And so, I was brought in to really look at the entire IT operating model. Look at all of the businesses, all of the people. There were about 1300 people in total, which included both the workforce, employees, as well as third-party, third-party contractors. They have a lot of third-party contractors, which is typical when you've had a spin-off of that size, off of a big company that had mainly centralized services. So that was really fun. I really enjoyed that because you have to come in and understand the landscape. You need to understand the team that you have. What capabilities do they have? What are their skill sets? What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses? You need to understand the technology. Then you need to understand where the company wanted to go, what the strategy was, the business strategy was, and to figure out what technology do we need? Where are technology gaps, and what do we need in order to be able to meet that vision, to enable that vision? So, for example, we didn't have cloud operations capability. We didn't necessarily have AI and data analytics, advanced data analytics capabilities. And those were things that if we were going to be able to compete digitally and enable the new vision, we needed to be able to build up.

Dupe Akinyede 41:00

And you know, my role was really to look at it and to come up with an operating model, a fit gap analysis for the capabilities that we needed to deploy immediately in order to be able to be competitive. Things we needed to stop doing. So, there were some projects that we had in front I'm like, we need to stop doing this, because we have scarce resources that we need to invest in from a technology perspective, and we need to figure out which investments are going to give us the biggest bang for our buck, the biggest return investment. The underlying infrastructure stability, building out a cyber security organization. Those are the baseline things that were really needed for any company, and we needed to make sure that we had our utility, that's what I call it, the utility infrastructure in place that would allow us to scale. I always say infrastructure, resiliency, stability, reliability and security is what enables you to not put yourself at a competitive disadvantage. But that's just foundational. That's if you don't want to be as compared, you got to get your arms around that you got to optimize it as much as you can and make sure it's secure.

Dupe Akinyede 42:09

But then from that foundation, you got to be looking at how you're going to compete in the market. And it's all of the other technology enablement's, the ERP, the systems of operation, that allow you to optimize and make your processes shorter, your supply chain, your manufacturing. How do you make those as efficient as possible? With that ERP layer, or systems layer, with automation, with robotic process automation, digital. How do we bring all of those tools which they didn't have to optimize the middle tier, the operations layer, because that's how you get more competitive by optimization. And then the next layer up becomes the customer, the digital layer. How do you make sure you have a delightful experience for your customers? You make the sticky, and I always add in there a delightful experience for your workforce as well. The digital layer today is not just about customers. Customers are a primary goal, but you want to make sure that your workforce are not fighting with technology, that technology is making them productive. You know, they're not spending the whole day trying to figure out what their benefits are in, you know, in a different country, because it's right there. And so that is digitization to make sure that your workforce, your customers, but ultimately your supply chain as well. You want to make yourself easy to do business with.

Dupe Akinyede 43:31

And so, this is why I always say I think about technology in terms of the value that its creation. And this is how I approach transformation, especially at Resideo, looking at all of those layers, the people, the processes, we had, the technology, and with always that question, is this advancing to us towards the new strategy for this company, or is it you're holding us back? And I would say we were very successful. We deployed some really cool technology that was so exciting. We deployed AI technology. We deployed new data capabilities. We matured a cyber security organization. I hired a CISO, hired a Chief Data Officer, built a cloud operations environment. So, some really cool

things that you know at least, I think kids would consider that cool, that enable the modernization and the digitization. I always say, networks and infrastructure have become so much more sexy these days. In the old days, you know, it was like the old individual in the back room. In our end point, I always say, you know, Covid and the aftermath of Covid, everybody went home.

Dupe Akinyede 44:42

So, think about endpoint management and endpoint workforce productivity. I mean, that just totally changed, and there was a great team at Resideo that was able to pivot to suddenly, everybody went home. And so now we're serving and supporting people in their homes. How do we get laptops? You just, just think about that change where, you know, you come into the office your IT, person walks up and gives you a laptop, whatever is part of your onboarding. Now, we were all over the world. How do you make sure that day one, a new hire has everything they need to do to be able to do their jobs? That was a great pivot. It was great. It was fun times. I really enjoy that, you know, just a great company in transition,

Lisa Nichols 45:23

Gosh, I'm just listening to you, Dupe. If any young person is sitting out there going, oh, technology is so boring. They need to listen to this episode, because it is anything but, right? I mean, just what you just went through and all the different things that you need to be thinking about in terms of your foundational layers of infrastructure and securing your data. And I mean, there's a lot to it. It's exciting. It's exciting stuff. So let me ask you this, gosh, we've got so much, but I know that we're not going to get to all of this. But what, what kind of leader can we specifically talk about, CIOs, CTO, CISOs, what do you think, what kind of leader do you think the future is going to require? Dupe, and how can technologists now prepare? We may have some listeners that are, you know, middle management, and they're aspiring to be in that C suite. What traits, what do you think it's going to require in the future?

Dupe Akinyede 46:31

Well, I think the future is all about technology. I think any company, no matter what product or service you create, or what markets you serve. If you're not thinking about how you're going to use technology to differentiate yourself, you are not going to be able to win in the future. I mean, technology has changed the way we live. It has changed the way we consume. It's changed our lives. You know, and I always come back to my life, my children. I personalize a lot of things. I look at the way my children go to school, how they consume education, from my oldest child who had paper books and textbooks to my youngest child who's done everything on an iPad digitally. And the companies that provide books and provide educational service. How are they going to have to adapt in order to meet that? They have to have technology savvy leaders, or leaders who align themselves with technology individuals who are able to translate the technology, the right technologies, into the value creation and the digital experience that our consumers are demanding out there.

Dupe Akinyede 47:47

So, for technology leaders, whether your title is a CIO, there's all kinds of different roles. CIO, CTO, you know, Chief Digital Information Officer, all of the above. I always say to people, it's, it's the you need to become business people. I actually don't like the term or, you know, there's a lot of times there's this, oh, I've got a CIO so they're a technical person in the back room that only deals with computers. And I'm like, no, you need to become a business person. Because the purpose of technology is, how does it create value? How does it create value? How are you going to apply this technology to create value for whatever product or service that you are offering to whatever market or market consumers? How are you going to innovate and continually push the experience of that product and that service? If you have to, if you want to win, you have to continually be innovating, and that innovation is going to be based on technology. It's just that I don't see any other way. And so, you, you go out there as a leader, make sure that you're always aware of changes in technology, evolutions and the different technologies out there, and you have to always be thinking about your company and value creation.

Dupe Akinyede 49:09

You know, one of the things that I've had from a very young age, and I think it's, you know, probably comes from my father, and his discipline is in everything that you're doing. How are you creating value for your company, for those folks who are aspiring to be to leadership, I don't know that I ever consciously thought about aspiring to leadership. I always just thought about, how am I making sure that I'm always creating value and I'm creating the best possible value that I can in whatever I'm doing at that point in time, whether I'm doing it myself, or I'm doing it through others. You've got to be creating value as you begin to transition from, there three I extend it as they're kind of three phases. I think of my career, and I think if people want to think about how to approach leadership, this is what I would offer to them. You know, there's the mastering trade. You can't be a leader. If you're you've not been able to master whatever your trade is. Master something about your trade. There's a phase of your career, early career, typically, where you're

mastering something. You may be mastering an area of technology. I was mastering problem solving, mastering how to understand and work with different types of people. I was mastering my EQ because I had zero EQ.

Lisa Nichols 50:26

I find it hard to believe.

Dupe Akinyede 50:30

Oh, no. I just thought, you know, you go to work to get paid. You do your job. You do the best job that you can. You get paid. Everybody, go home. We're here to do a job. And that's it. And it took some time to begin to understand, and I grew, grew through that, that you're working with people. And so, the key is, what is your end goal? You understand that, but the path there is never a straight line. How do you motivate the right group of people and enable them with the right resources to get to that goal. That's a process for me that I was mastering for a long time. And then you move into a role, or into a position where you now become a mentor. If you want to become a leader, you have to be able to be a mentor and a coach to other people. You have to be able to work on your influence. And then a lot of us have done these DISC profiles. I can tell you earlier on, my DISC profile has changed over time. My early days, you know, I was a very low I.

Lisa Nichols 51:28

You were in high D, I bet.

Dupe Akinyede 51:30

A high D, yes, you got that. I was a high D and a very low I and I realized over time that I need to flip that, or at least bring your I up. And your, I, is really about empathy, understanding people working with them, being able to mentor them, to get them from to be the best versions of themselves, and then to put them in the right seat on the bus so that that best versions of themselves can work together to create value. So, and then, you know, I'm really at the phase of my life now where it's about making an impact. How do I make a broad impact? How do I put a ladder down for those who are coming behind me? My leadership style, and so that's why I keep saying, I think I'm a coach. I love that, the whole idea of this coaching style, I love to find great talent, to encourage them to be the best versions of themselves, to set high expectations and high and challenge them to achieve. And I'm usually there like telling them, you can do it. And if they come for advice and counsel, you have the guard rails, but you don't go be successful and you reward and you praise and you listen. But I'm like, there's so much that people have individually in them, and when you bring them together. You know, another analogy is like the conductor. You know, I love finding people that are a whole lot smarter, a whole lot more talented and skilled than myself. I learned so much from them. But if you just put them together, just so, just right, you make great music.

Lisa Nichols 53:07

A symphony, a symphony. I love it, I love it!

Dupe Akinyede 52:41

So that's, that's what I try to I always, you know, people have different talents. You know, a lot of them are like, oh, this person, you know, I've been in situations where, you know, a particular talent was thought to be not as productive or, you know, by maybe a prior leader. And I always take the time to understand what's going on with them. It takes time, you know, at Resideo, when I first joined, I think I spent the first six months or eight months, just going to almost every single location, meeting almost every one of the workforce that was both in my group, but as well as meeting the internal customers, meeting other groups, because you need to understand people. You need to know understand where they're coming from. You need to understand their hurts, their pains, their you know what they look for, what makes them who they are, as well as what they aspire to, in order to be able to work together with them to help create value.

Dupe Akinyede 54:10

If that is a step that you, I think that any leader has to spend time, if that isn't natural to you, I'm an introvert. I tell people like that, I'm an introvert, I really am, but in order to be a leader, you have to work through that and figure out how to get to know people, relationships. Building trust. It takes time to build trust, and if you find someone who just trusts you right out of the gate, then you better be careful that is not judgment, that you need to earn the trust of people around you, and you need to invest time in them, in building that. Again, I come back to, you know, family and kids, and you know, certainly my when, if you value people, you spend time with them.

Lisa Nichols 54:58

So true. Oh my goodness. Girl, there's so much goodness there. I woof. I'm just like, sitting here, like shaking my head because I'm agreeing with everything you said. I want to get a little bit deep with you on something else, and then

we're going to talk about something extra. I have a maybe a couple little lightning round, but I know we're kind of running out of time here. You know, before you know, we talked overall, the overall message when you and I first started talking about what you wanted to, to leave with our listeners, and, you know, hopefully our listeners, this has come through Dupe. But you said, it's really about winning in a world where no one expected you to you were this little girl in Africa that you know grew up in this, this home. I mean, really, I mean truly, you're winning, but not just like by being a CIO or being in the C suite. I mean, it's not about that kind of winning. It's like, really, I look at you, Dupe, and I'm like, you know you, you are doing seriously what you feel called and led to do, and that is to build into other people, whether it is your team, you know, at your workplace, or whether it's your home,

Dupe Akinyede 56:12

And whether it's my community, you know, there's something I said earlier that my mother, you know, God rest her soul. Was my hero. And you know what she left me with, that I carry with me is not just an introduction to my faith, my faith, my faith work. I'm a Christian. I cannot even pretend that I'm not. It comes out in everything that I do, whether it's subliminally or overtly. But she always taught us that whatever you put your hands on, and that's whether it's people always make sure you leave it in a better place than when you got it. And it's something that I've heard and I've been taught whatever you do and how it doesn't matter how you meet someone, try to leave them better off when you leave them than when you met them. When you feel when you meet someone, it may not be your work. When you're an employee, you treat your employer like it's your business. You want to make sure that your employer you are faithful to deliver value for them to the best of your ability. And you know, whether it's your own company this, or whatever you do.

Dupe Akinyede 57:28

And so, it's, it's something that has followed me all of my life. And you know, I haven't always, you know, sometimes I've fallen off the wagon. It comes back to me and that, you know, this is so your, your job titles. And I heard this recently, again, it's so impactful. You know, all of you the job titles, what you do in the workplace, they are all rented. They're all borrowed. Your character and your integrity you live with forever. So those, to me, are things that are not, there, that's my line. Those are your character, your integrity, and my North Star for that is my faith, my Christian faith, and the by what the Bible teaches me about how I'm to live my life, and that's what holds us what I'm accountable to, at least try to hold myself accountable to that every day, and it convicts me when I fall off the wagon as I do, and brings me back and you learn how to apologize and make restitution when you know you've done something that. It's a standard by which I'm always judging myself in everything that I do, and I think it comes out in the way that you treat people, in the way that I lead my teams. I think people, at least, I hope people see you know that authenticity, that I hold myself to, not because and because it's a greater it's a greater power. There is something greater than us in this world. I love that, that we hold ourselves accountable to. And when you do that, I think you do the right thing.

Lisa Nichols 59:10

I love what you just said. And it is, when you say North Star, when it is your true north, you think of a compass. And sometimes we get a little lost. We can get off the path, right? We can make our path a little crooked, sometimes, I do it a lot, but having that North Star, I mean, it brings you back, you know, to that straight path and how we are to live our life with our Creator and with one another, right? And it really, it transcends all of that. I believe you know, one of the things that you told me and for our listeners, and I don't know the exact stats, but you know, you are a woman in technology Dupe, at the top, less than 25% of. Women make it to the top spot in the technology world, and you're a black woman in technology which 3% or less make it to the top as a black woman. I mean, it's really, I mean it's, it's just remarkable. But you know, you're, you're trailblazing, right for the women that are coming behind you, but one of the things that you told me is I'm resting and being seen as different. Have you always rested?

Dupe Akinyede 1:00:29

No. No. So, it's interesting. Well, you remember, I grew up in a primarily African, black, African country. So, I was for a good portion of my life, I didn't know that I was different. I was different when I went to school, because, you know, I was like one of the few black children. So, I got used to working in those two worlds. And I think it allows you to create. You know, what it allows you to do is to spend time understanding your environment and understanding the people around you. And I always say it's very important that you're able to do that no matter where you go. Like I said, I've lived and I've worked and I've delivered technology in so on pretty much every single continent in the world except Antarctica. It's on my bucket list, but I don't know what technology they need there, but we'll figure it out. But it's you it has, from the time of being young, spending time to understand your environment, to understand the people, why are they the way that they are? What makes them tick? How do you How can you be successful even though you are different? How do you stay true to your, your difference? Without giving up. You know what is core to you.

Lisa Nichols 1:01:59

Who you are. Yes, exactly.

Dupe Akinyede 1:02:01

And you know, it's become, I think, second nature to me, but it's important to know who you are at your core. And for me, that has definitely been my faith. There are certain, you know, we go into environments, and in order to be able to deliver or to be successful in that environment, it's also about making people feel more comfortable with you. A lot of times in a younger career, you're spending a lot of time making people feel more comfortable with you, but only up to the line of who my, my core is, right? And it hasn't always been, been easy, it, but I am, I am different. Like you said, it's but, you know, I love the fact that it is, you know, times are changing in you know, my time coming up in career, I spent a lot of time trying to minimize my difference. You do. You actually do, because it's about making people more comfortable with you so that you can be successful. Because I'm very outcome focused. I believe times have really changed now, and the world at large is just becoming a global village. Again, with the evolution in technology, and we're now really appreciating the differences that we all bring to the table and the diversity, but we're also recognizing that with the core, we're all more the same than we actually are doing.

Lisa Nichols 1:03:32

Amen to that.

Dupe Akinyede 1:03:37

It's so funny.

Lisa Nichols 1:03:38

Okay, so you just set me up. You just gave me the perfect segue. This is called something extra, you know, and, and if you recall the, the inspiration behind something extra was our daughter Ally with Down syndrome. Yes, she's different. You know, one in 600 people children will be born with Down syndrome. She's different, but you know what the differences is what makes her beautiful and makes her who she is, and I want to celebrate those differences. So, you just set me up. Yes, we're different. Why would we want to be a carbon copy of everybody else, Dupe?

Dupe Akinyede 1:04:14

And if I may, if you will allow me, and if your audience will allow me, I'm sorry. I got to go back to my faith. But the Bible tells us that we are uniquely and fearfully made, and science actually corroborates that. That every single one of us, you look what do they say that on the palm of our hands or certain that we're so different that every individual can be uniquely identified. That is, to me, is amazing and but.

Lisa Nichols 1:04:43

Every fingerprint.

Dupe Akinyede 1:04:45

Every fingerprint.

Lisa Nichols 1:04:47

And there's almost 8 billion people in the world, and every fingerprint is different.

Dupe Akinyede 1:04:53

That blows my mind. But then I tell them that, and you know what? There's a reason for that difference, because every one of you is unique, and you have something of value that somebody else does not have, and what we need to do is to tap into it and to find it.

Lisa Nichols 1:05:08

Amen. Amen. Well, what do you believe, Dupe, I think I might know. But what do you believe is this, something extra that every leader needs? To recognize that maybe, to recognize and celebrate differences?

Dupe Akinyede 1:05:25

I think, celebrate differences, but, you know, I'm at a time where I am like every leader needs to have compassion. This is something that I'm seeing is missing or in a lot of leaders out there because of, you know, the type of people that typically become leaders. We talked about this, they're high D, right? High D folks typically are, what the kind of folks that make it up through leadership? I think that we need to have a significant focus on compassion. I have found that compassion goes a long way to inspiring and motivating people to do extraordinary things in the workplace. If you want to get a group of folks to go, you know, over the line, to go with you, into the hatch and into war with you, there's nothing more like empathy and compassion.

Lisa Nichols 1:06:24

It's beautiful. I love it.

Dupe Akinyede 1:06:28

So, those are the two words, empathy and compassion. People will go an extra mile for you if they know that you have their back. And you understand what they feel.

Lisa Nichols 1:06:39

Dupe, this has been so amazing, so good. I feel like my bucket has been filled up, and I know you're gonna fill up our listener's buckets. So, I just appreciate you so much. Thank you so much for making the time to be on the show today.

Dupe Akinyede 1:06:57

Thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate it. It was a wonderful and just fun conversation, and I am looking forward to having conversations outside of this podcast or this call with you. So, thank you so much. I appreciate.

Lisa Nichols 1:07:12

I am too.

Announcer 1:07:14

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