

Something Extra EP 119 - Mary Jo Gorman

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 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.

I'm thrilled to have Dr. Mary Jo Gorman on the show today. Mary Jo is the CEO of Healthy Bytes, a tech enabled services company in the nutrition market. Mary Jo, I am so excited that we were able to make this work. Thank you so much for making the time today to be on the show.

Dr. Mary Jo Gorman: Well, I'm excited to be here. Thanks for having me, Lisa.

Lisa: We're going to have fun. You're in St. Louis, I'm in St. Louis, you've done a stint in New York, but we did not meet each other in St. Louis. Do you remember where we met?

Dr. Gorman: Yes, we met at Ernst & Young now EY, Strategic Growth Forum in California. It was a great event and it's a great organization. It really celebrates entrepreneurs.

Dr. Gorman: I think more as things have gone on, partly because technology has changed. When I started, we were writing everything on paper, we had those tube systems in the hospitals. You'd send your lab work through the tube system. We had printers at some point at the nursing stations that would print out results. As everything else, technology has just transformed all kinds of businesses, and it certainly transformed healthcare.

Lisa: For sure, and will continue to do so I believe. Then you moved in and this is where I got to know you even more is when you partner for Prosper Capital and the Prosper Women's Accelerator, if you will. Tell us a little bit-- I think that was about 2014?

Dr. Gorman: That's exactly right. One of the things that was interesting, when I left Advanced ICU Care, I raised venture capital money there and had really good experience with my venture partners. I didn't actually have any understanding that women raise very little venture capital. As I learned more about that, and I learned the struggles for women in getting capital to grow their businesses, whether it's venture capital, or bank capital, or that sort of thing, and even more of an issue for women of color, that really intrigued me. A group of us got together and decided we would raise a little fund, we raised \$3 million. We invested that in 29 women led companies specifically there. One of the goals, besides the funding was to be able to expand the network of the women, because how you advance really does depend a lot on your network. We wanted to bring to them through a group of really dedicated women and men in St. Louis, to try to find people who could advise them, help them, find them access to things they might not otherwise have access to.

Lisa: Yes, I want to back up for a minute. You said access to capital for women, they just don't have the access. There is a study that had come out, a report, it said the number of businesses in the United States increased by 51%, the number of women owned firms increased by 74%. They are bringing on \$3 trillion into the economy in revenues. I think at the time of this report, which is just a few years old, they only see about 1% of the capital infusion.

Dr. Gorman: That's right. I don't know the answer for that. There's been a lot of studies about why that happens. One of the things we have been trying to do is call attention to that and help people see that there are lots of great businesses started by women that have a lot of opportunity and should be attracting capital.

Lisa: Yes, and you certainly have been a trailblazer in that area. Let me go back now to Prosper. I think you alluded to this, but one of the things not only did you want to help women have access to the capital, but there are a few other things that you guys did. One is providing programming, access to a network of experts, because that connection, sometimes women have the great idea.

They may have the capital infusion, but if they do not have that network, if they don't even know who to lean into, I've got an issue with marketing, or people, building teams. That is just as valuable.

Dr. Gorman: Absolutely. I think one of the things that I certainly have made this mistake in my career, and I think that others have as well. You try to solve all these problems with just you yourself sitting in your office or sitting at your desk and you're thinking, thinking, thinking, thinking. There are many people who if you just said, "I'm struggling with this problem," whether it's capital raising, people, marketing strategy, "can you give me 30 minutes, and I can explain what the issue is. Could you give me your input?"

At the end of the day, you're the decision maker, you're the leader, but you can get more inputs and I think better inputs that stimulates my thinking in a different way that I believe that I get a better decision. If you don't know who to call or you don't even know where to start that makes it even harder. To your point, really trying to bring people into their environment who are willing to have those conversations, I think is a big value add.

Lisa: I totally agree and I think what you guys put together with Prosper, you were trying to do all of those things. I think that was a little bit of a difference take on it than other possible venture capital firms out there.

I also know that you were setting up master mind groups and all kinds of things. Jennifer Ehlen was very involved in this as well, Mary Jo, as you know.

You and I talked about this a little bit. There was a *Forbes* article I was just reading this morning. The title of it is the Power Of The Pack: Women Who Support Women Are More Successful. I know this resonates with you, it resonates with me as well. This article says, "I always say a woman alone has power, but collectively we have impact. Traditionally we have been taught to be competitive with because of the scarcity of higher level jobs. Really what we have found is that strategy doesn't work so well. The collaboration and women lifting women up is so important. We have found that truly there's so much more power there when we do that."

Dr. Gorman: Well, I think sometimes depending on your work environment, which is really different for everybody, and the corporate is very different than entrepreneurship. The fact is there're already patterns that exist in all of these areas that you need to find your way through for lack of a better word. I think that the idea that the pie is only one size is fundamentally the wrong idea. I mean, capitalism is about growing the pie. By creating something, you employ more people that helps their families, that helps their communities. You're really growing the pie.

That's how I think of it. If I can reach out to somebody and connect them to somebody or give them an idea that helps them. To me it doesn't really matter if it's men or women or whatever, but having that resource and being that resource to other people I think it just keeps growing the pie for all of us. I would encourage everybody who thinks that it's too competitive and they either shouldn't ask for help or they're unwilling to get help. Maybe just re-think that because at the end of the day it all comes back around and it really does grow things bigger.

It's hard in any field where it's male dominated which a lot of fields are now. A lot of room still don't have many women in them or many people of color.

We know that that lone voice does not get heard. If you can collaborate with other people in your team or other people on the board you might be on or other entrepreneurs, whatever is in your environment, so that you can amplify whatever you want to say, we know that works and that makes it all better for everybody.

Lisa: I love that tittle, the Power of the Pack.

Dr. Gorman: Yes, exactly.

Lisa: Because you're working alone. We don't want to be the lone wolf out there.

Dr. Gorman: That's right.

Lisa: St. Louis really truly is an amazing startup community.

Dr. Gorman: Agreed.

Lisa: The rest of the world may not really even realize but what do you believe makes out startup scene so special here?

Dr. Gorman: I think one of the things is that we have an open-door policy for people. I can't think of ever turning somebody down if they wanted a 30-minute phone call. I'm sure the same is for you, and I've had the same for me. I reach out to someone and said, "Would you connect with this person just for a short phone call?" I've never had anybody say no. I think that everybody is willing to do that and if there's a way they can help by giving you an idea, connect you to a resource, they're willing to do it. That I think is unique. We say we'll take a meeting, we actually mean it in St. Louis.

Lisa: I could not agree more. We know, the studies also show, St. Louis in terms of money given in generosity. We are one of the most philanthropic.

I don't know what the stat is now, but I know at one time we were the fifth largest in the nation, but we're certainly not the fifth largest metro. To your point, we can give our treasure but we can also give our time and our talents. I think we're philanthropic in that way too. I agree with you.

Dr. Gorman: Yes.

Lisa: Well, Mary Jo, we've got a lot more to talk about, but we need to take a quick break and then we'll be right back with Mary Jo Gorman.

Narrator: Are you a rising IT leader? Could you benefit from a network of like-minded peers? Let me introduce you to the St. Louis Technology Leadership Experience. This one of a kind program gathers cohorts of IT professionals for three workshops. Peers small group problem-solving, one on one mentoring by IT executives, and multiple networking events. You will be prepared for your next steps as an IT leader by gaining core leadership competencies and a strong powerful network of peers. To apply for our next TechLX cohort, visit tpi.co/tlx.

Lisa: Mary Jo, we've got a lot more to talk about but you and I just recently were made aware there's a study that was done by Seek Capital. This is so exciting for me, and I know it is for you too. It's something that we need to celebrate. The study said 45.2% of the startups in the last two years in St. Louis have a woman at the top, and 85% of those made it to the second year.

Dr. Gorman: That's fabulous.

Lisa: That is the highest in the nation. The one that's in second place is Austin, and I think that was at 32%. Not even close to where we are. That is exciting.

Dr. Gorman: Very exciting. Hopefully that's a result of a lot of the efforts that's been made here. Prosper, of course, Jennifer Ehlen has made tons of efforts with Brazen Global. The Arch Grants.

We've got a huge community of people that are trying to identify opportunity and move people along. I'm glad our collective effort to making a difference.

Lisa: It's making a difference and it's important for the economic impact. There's just so much there, the ripple effect of all of that, with employment and all things. That's exciting. What do you believe are some of those traits that make an entrepreneur successful, so that if there are people out there that are thinking or maybe they're in the early stage, what are those things that they need to be focused on to help make their startups successful?

Dr. Gorman: Well, it's interesting you ask that because we actually worked with CMA here in town to identify what are the traits that make an entrepreneur successful. Those could be the things that you would say you're born with. One of them is critical thinking which of course evolves through your grade school and high school and really into your middle 20s. That's important. You've got to have some good critical thinking skills. You also have to have perseverance. As you know, it is a hard way to go if you want to be an entrepreneur. You've got to be able to keep going and keep trying to move forward if you're going to get to success because the whole idea of overnight success doesn't really exist. Having said that, there are lots of areas that you can grow in. You can always grow in your leadership skills. You can always grow in, how do I meet new people that can be part of my network or help me solve problems? There's a lot that I believe commit to growing in as well to build on whatever natural traits you were given and you've developed.

It really is a combination of things to do that, and that's why I think St. Louis is so favorable for women because there are a lot of resources, there are a lot of people as you mentioned earlier who are willing to help, who are willing to try to point you in the right direction. You still got to do the work, but those things make it, maybe based on these numbers, little more of a nurturing environment for entrepreneurship here.

Lisa: I agree. So important. I want to pivot into what you are doing today because I think you are in a really exciting space today. You are now the CEO of Healthy Bytes.

You and I have talked a little bit about this, nutrition and these things are so important to our overall being. I love what you're doing, and coming from a doctor, you're coming from that perspective, the clinician side too. Tell about that, what you guys are doing, so our listeners can find out more.

Dr. Gorman: I'm really excited to be at Healthy Bytes and if I think about my career starting mostly in the intensive care unit where we saw people who sometimes through the many choices they had made ended up needing the care in the ICU. By the time you are that sick and you're there, what we can do for you is a little limited when I say the medical team. To be on this part of the continuum for people to think about, "How do I take better care of myself so I never have to be in an ICU hopefully?" A lot of that starts with how we eat and what we eat.

Our registered dietitians are a terrific team who have had college education, special training, special licensing and they can engage with people around, where do they need to make changes to get themselves to a healthier life. How you eat and what you eat matters how much energy you have, how much focus you have. Has some effects on mood, those sort of things. I'm just excited that we can be in a situation where we can try to help connect people of that resource.

Lisa: I love your model. It's really the B2B, the business to business to the C. Explain that a little bit and how you guys are going about getting Healthy Bytes out there.

Dr. Gorman: We are calling on the benefits manager or the HR department at an employer. Almost every benefit plan has a benefit for the employee to engage with a registered dietitian. It's covered by their insurance plan, but most people don't even know that they have that benefit or how to use it. By partnering with the employer and collaborating around communicating this to the employee, that's really how we drive success for the business. When that employee decides to have a visit with my registered dietitian, then our revenue stream comes from sending in that claim into the insurance company.

We help the employer by helping them bring something that their employee will appreciate. Doesn't cost the employer more money than they're already spending, because we know employers have a lot of things that they have to manage. It helps the employee because this is usually covered by their benefit plan and helps them realize some things that can hopefully help their life and help them be better employees.

Lisa: Is technology helping people get healthier? There's some schools of thought out there on that too, but how do you see technology playing a role in this?

Dr. Gorman: Well, there's a lot of technology as you well know everywhere, right? All the way from the Fitbit to the apps to whatever it is. Some of those things are useful because some of it is developing new habits. If you can develop a new habit and you can at least try to think of these goals, in some cases we hear everybody talk about their 10,000 steps. If it's reminding you to drink more water or make some food choice that's better for you or help you do meal planning so you don't take that quick stop at the fast food.

There are ways that technology can support the behavior changes people are trying to make but it's clearly not a panacea. There's no real miracles happening around that. I encourage people to experiment. You have this goal, figure out what those things are. Whether it's technology or other cues that help you develop those new patterns, because you have a lot of choices now to try to make those things happen for yourself.

Lisa: I love what you said, it's really habits. Replacing a bad habit with a good habit and if you can do that along the way, then the outcome is just going to be better.

Dr. Gorman: That's right.

Lisa: I'd love for you to think about maybe a something extra that you have seen in a team member or a coach, it could be a parent, in the past. What do you think that something extra was in them that made them just an incredible person?

I think is really important to better results and I think it gives people that kind of understanding like, "Yes, we would miss you if you didn't show up today. You are doing something for us here." I just really hope that people will think a little more broadly and deeply about everybody's contribution because it all really matters.

Lisa: You're exactly right. Mary Jo, is there something that you want to tell our audience, to let them know about, and how they can get involved?

Dr. Gorman: I would love to put in another pitch here for Healthy Bytes. We are here in St Louis now, the company was moved here from New York. Anybody who's in the benefits part of your company as an employer or in the HR department, I'd love you to reach out. We'd be happy to tell you what we can offer and connect to your employees. If you are just looking for a registered dietitian and you want to have those conversations, somebody to help you on your nutrition journey, you can go to our website which is healthybytesinc.com. You can make an appointment from there or you can have a conversation with us.

Lisa: Very good. I was just thinking as you and I were talking that old adage, an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. What we put in our bodies is so important, right? If we will take the time to get that right and to be as healthy as we can, hopefully in the future, we're not going to have as many health issues. That's not always the case because obviously with genetics...

Dr. Gorman: I do think that that's a disservice for people to point finger at other people with health problems and say, "Oh, if they ate better--" Because that is not true in many, many cases, but we do have a lot of areas that we can make ourselves better, stay around for our kids and our grand-kids and just show up in a different way.

Lisa: Yes, so let's focus on what we can control.

Dr. Gorman: That's right.

Lisa: All right, very good. Well, Mary Jo, this has been so much fun. Thank you so much for making the time to be on the show today, I know that it's really going to help our listeners.

Dr. Gorman: Thank you so much, Lisa. I really appreciate the opportunity to be here.

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