

## Something Extra EP 116 - Shavon Lindley

**Lisa:** 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 Ali. Ali 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 Ali, 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 this 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 excited to have Shavon Lindley on the show today. Shavon is the CEO and co-founder of Ion Learning. Well, Shavon, I'm so glad we were able to make this work. You're all the way in San Diego, beautiful San Diego and I'm in cold St. Louis right now.

**Shavon:** [laughs]

**Lisa:** Thank goodness for technology, right, where we can do this kind of things.

**Shavon:** It is such a blessing and a beautiful thing.

**Lisa:** Yes, it is. I cannot wait for our listeners to hear your story.













**Lisa:** Welcome back. Shavon, I'm absolutely loving this conversation, and I realized that you and I probably need about 10 hours with one another to even scratch the surface here. You've already shared so many of the lessons that you've learned, but are there other ones that you would like to tell our listeners about?

**Shavon:** From an entrepreneurial, even in someone who's in the corporate space, but a lot of times, as being someone who's owned their own business for a long time, and as you're growing a business, one of the biggest lessons that I had to learn the hard way. This is when I was still in the financial planning career business, and I knew that I wanted to get into helping create inclusive workplace cultures.

I had this opportunity to be a potential contributing writer for Forbes, and that was like I knew that was going to catapult me to be able to go do my full passion, but I still was financially being supporting that passion with the financial planning business. I had one foot over here and one foot over here, and logical financial brain said, "When you make enough money over here, that equals the money you make over here, then that's when you make the shift because that just does make sense on paper."

Well, I'm having this coaching session with this leadership coach, and she said, "I don't know if Forbes is for you. What I do know is that your business and creating inclusive cultures and scaling the learning and development model and creating peer learning spaces, that, that is your soul path. That financial planning is not, and you need to get out of that business." I was like, "Well, how am I going to support myself? Do I do that now? Do you mean six months from now?" This is what she said to me, she said, "When things are right, they happen clear, easy and fast. All you have to do is to take one step, and if that step is easy, you take the next step."

I know like now that sounds like the most simplistic thing in the world, but at the time, I'm like, "Oh, how do I get rid of a financial planning business?"



One of our spiritual mentors is Dr. Richard Blackaby, and I'll never forget him saying one time, "There may be something brand new that's on the horizon for you, a brand new assignment. If you're running 200 miles an hour though, you have to make margin for something new." That's why it's so important, I think, for us to be very centered and principled, so that we can begin to say no to some things.

I hate to say no because I am a pleaser, I love to please people, I want people to be-- I want to help people, but the reality is, you cannot always do that. That brings me to my next question because I do believe that just as we have to have purpose in our businesses or organizations, we also have to have a personal purpose. What is your purpose statement for your life, Shavon?

**Shavon:** My purpose is to inspire inclusion, and when I do that, others are able to fulfill their purpose, and I'm able to live my purpose. When I look at a company, when I serve companies, or if I'm talking to individuals, I know that innovation is at its greatest when we all, the collective in all these different viewpoints and perspectives are able to come and be heard and recognized and valued at the table. If we do not have an inclusive culture, then we will not be able to innovate at our greatest capacity, we will not be able to achieve the missions that we are set out as an organization. My goal is to inspire that inclusion so that we all can fulfill our purpose.

**Lisa:** I love that. Every person seriously, if you don't know what your purpose is, take some time to be introspective and think, what am I created to do? Then like Shavon said, go do it, [chuckles] take that first step. What is it? The journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step. Love that. That brings me up to what you're doing today with ion. You got a very particular philosophy, and I know, I'd read something that you said, where it can't just be a half a day seminar for an organization. To change behavior, it's got to be more than that. Tell me about your philosophy, tell me what you're doing with ion, and why you believe small groups, diverse groups works the best.





You want this group to meet typically over a bounce six sessions, and that structure alone by putting diverse people into small safe groups, no more than four in size will create the space for people to be open to learning, to share their story. Remember, we started earlier with this podcast around how important storytelling is. This environment allows storytelling, for people to open up safely because they don't think they're sabotaging their career doing it in a board meeting, but they'll do it in this small safe group.

**Lisa:** Sure.

**Shavon:** They'll tell their story, and that's where they start to realize how much more in common than we have different, and then that's where they get to practice inclusion in real-time, challenge the biases that they may have had against people from different departments, different ages, different-- Anything different can cause a threat in our brain.

**Lisa:** Ion can lead you through all of this. You even use artificial intelligence to even match the people, so the company doesn't even have to do that piece. I see a lot of other benefits and perks that come out of this. I bet you, when companies engage with something like this, employee engagement probably goes out the roof.

**Shavon:** 100%. Literally, someone emailed us just three days ago saying, "I've never wanted to work harder for a company in my life because I'm finally given a support system in the workplace, I feel like my ideas are being heard and valued." This is what people have been craving and needing. That deep human connection is so important, and so this framework can work. If you're just starting out, you don't need a technology to help you create the algorithms for massive amounts of groups.

We serve companies that are normally 3,000 plus employees or more, but no matter what size, we do it. When we only had four employees, we started this, because there's four of us or three of us, and we learn together in these groups and alternate between learning and small, diverse peer groups, and we've got a research study that backs this up.

I would say if you're wanting to dig into the nitty-gritty on the research behind it, we've got a really cool research study that we spent nine months on and some extraordinary results to share why this method is so powerful, and then the ion platform just helps optimize and scale it for any content.

We also have content ourselves that we support organizations with. Let's say someone comes and says, "Hey, do you have anything off the shelf?" We have a curriculum that we've designed that's already locked and loaded, that companies are focusing on, and it's all based on leadership development that has an inclusion focus, all of our courses have that because that's what we are most passionate about, but then we also help companies design their own, take courses that they have currently in place and help them adapt it to the ion framework and use our platform as well so that they can administer and scale that too.

**Shavon:** I love every piece of what we've talked about. Shavon, this is something extra, so I have to ask you, and I think I know what you're going to say, [laughs] but what is this something extra that every leader needs?

**Lisa:** I believe leaders need to disrupt exclusionary behavior, they need to speak up when they see something or they experienced or witnessed something where others are being excluded, and to leverage that position that they hold, the privilege and privilege sometimes can cause people to feel funny, privilege just means an advantage. You have an advantage because you have a certain position in an organization.

To leverage our advantages and the power that we have to disrupt exclusionary behavior, to change processes and systems, to give a voice to someone else when they maybe don't necessarily have the same amount of position or authority as you do, so leveraging that. Not being afraid to speak out about social issues and using our platforms that we have for good in this world with businesses can serve all of those purposes.

You will be more successful as a business, the more impact you can make on humanity. I think that's really what people are waking up to right now, and organizations that they have a huge role in ending systemic inequities in this planet. That's where we want to serve these individuals because we believe that that's our highest leverage point.

This is the area so really we want leaders to be equipped with the skill to do that. That's actually what my TEDx talk is all about. If you want to want to hear me talk about how to disrupt exclusionary behavior, you can just Google Shavon Lindley TedX talk, and it'll pop up for you, but we can dig through some of those four steps now or they can figure it out later.

**Lisa:** We'll have to do a part two.

But tell me, is there something that's coming up where our listeners could get involved in, or that you'd want to tell them about?

**Shavon:** To be honest, it's really about furthering education. Start with education as an organization, you do not have to have a five-year strategic plan to get going. You can just acknowledge that maybe we have not been paying attention to this, that honesty and genuineness is going to go a long way, because if you all of a sudden start saying, you're a big advocate of D&I and everyone's like, "No, you have not said anything until now," that will feel out of integrity and you're actually going to lose people.

But when you own it and say, "We have not been doing this," or wherever you are on this continuum, to just step out. If you need educational resources, we are here to help support organizations in that way. We've got some public events that we're doing for the first time. Even for, let's say smaller companies that don't want to bring us in their own company one-on-one, but they just want to send five people or 20 people to a curriculum, we've got some public events and experiences that we're doing for the first time. I would just go to [ionlearning.com](https://ionlearning.com). Follow us on LinkedIn, that's where we share almost all of our information. Just find ion and we can help give you the info that you need.

**Lisa:** Shavon, thank you so much. This has just been such a fun interview for me and I love learning from you and like I said, you're a remarkable woman. Keep shining your light and keep doing what you're doing because you're making the world a better place.

**Shavon:** Thank you so much for this opportunity. It's been so fun.

**Speaker 2:** Thank you for listening to today's show. Something Extra with Lisa Nichols is a Technology Partners production. Copyright Technology Partners link 2019. For show notes or to reach Lisa, visit [tpi.co/podcast](http://tpi.co/podcast). Don't forget to leave a review on Apple Podcast, Google Play, or wherever you listen.

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