

Week of Women in STEM Panel Discussion

MELANIE KIEL: I'm just here to introduce Noel Schulz, the first lady. She's also an electrical engineering and computer science professor here, and she'll be-- she's graciously agreed to moderate our panel discussion today.

[APPLAUSE]

NOEL SCHULZ: Good afternoon.

K.D. JOSHI: Good afternoon.

AUDIENCE: Good afternoon.

NOEL SCHULZ: Oh, come on. OK. Good early evening, I guess. Welcome. It's very exciting to see the great turnout that we have here on this first year of this event and the activities. And I'm really honored to have a chance to be on the stage with the panelists and be able to talk a little bit about some of the challenges and opportunities we have as women in STEM.

So what I would like to do is really spend time talking more about them, having them talk, than you hearing me read what's in front of you. So you should have their program, a program, that has-- I'm not going to read their whole bios. I'm just going to read their names and introduce you, and then we're going to start where they're going to give you a short bio about their background.

And then we're going to go into some questions and then, hopefully, have some time for Q&A. So if you have a question, write it down or, like most of the students, type it into your phone. And then you can ask the question when we get to the Q&A time along the way.

So let me start. I'm going to go down the line here. So, first, we have K.D. Joshi, who is a professor and chair of WSU Department of Management, Information Systems, and Entrepreneurship.

[APPLAUSE]

Next, we have Julie Averill. Close?

JULIE AVERILL: Averill, yep.

NOEL SCHULZ: Averill. Averill, executive vice president and chief technology officer of Lululemon.

[APPLAUSE]

Next, we have Tiffany.

TIFFANY LUDKA-GAULKE: Gaulke.

NOEL SCHULZ: Yeah, Tiffany Gaulke. Gaulke, who is an MD and is coming from Spokane in the Providence Medical Group. Tiffany.

[APPLAUSE]

Next, we have Tracy Roberts, who is an electrical engineer for Mission Support Alliance at the Hanford nuclear site.

[APPLAUSE]

And then last we have Leen Kawas, and she is a PhD president of M3 Biotechnology.

[APPLAUSE]

So what I'm going to do is start here and move down and ask them to each just talk for a minute or a little more about their background so they can share a little bit about you beyond what's on this sheet. So you can get a little bit more about their background and what they think is important in their career. And I'm going to sit down and do this from there. So go ahead. Yeah. Go ahead. Start here.

K.D. JOSHI: I was asked not to move the mic. Can you hear me? OK. So I'm K.D. Hello, everyone. Really nice to see all of you, and you can talk to us even after this is done. I'll be on that [? MIC ?] table. I'm going to give you a very quick overview of-- what we were asked to say was something fun about is. I don't know if that's fun or not.

But I have taught here for 20 years. I've been at WSU for 20 years, so I've taught thousands of Carson Cougs how to design and build systems for humans that humans can use. And fun fact about me is I'm a huge sports fan. And if the academic career didn't work out, I was going to try working for the ESPN Network.

[LAUGHTER]

JULIE AVERILL: I did move it. Hi, guys. I'm Julie. This is my first time in Pullman, so happy to be here. Yeah.

I've spent most of my career in the consumer technology space. Undergraduate degree in computer science-- shout out to the compsci team over here-- and MBA from the University of Washington.

And I spent 10 years at Nordstrom doing all sorts of things that face the consumer, so things like mobile apps and websites and stores or store technology, so technology for the salespeople to use to interact with the customer. If you guys know what omnichannel is, bridging the gap between online and the in-store world, doing things like making all the stores turn into warehouses so you can sell inventory. Did that for 10 years, and I went to REI as the CEO there. And I am now the chief technology officer at Lululemon. I've been here a little bit less than a year. So look forward to chatting with you guys more.

I'm Tiffany, and I am a Coug.

[LAUGHTER]

I did my undergraduate here at WSU, majored in neuroscience. As Noel said, I'm a doctor up in Spokane. I went to medical school at UW, but I did not adopt the Huskies, so I am still a Coug. And I do primary care, outpatient clinic medicine up in Spokane. My husband is also a doctor, does primary care as well. And you'll hear a little bit more about why I chose those things in a little bit.

Fun fact about me. I had a hard time coming up with something, but I think in medicine men get to show their personalities by wearing fun ties if they choose to wear fun ties. I decided I didn't want to wear ties, so I wear fun socks, and I make sure that my socks coordinate with my outfit. And even more maybe neurotic or crazy, I like to make sure that my travel coffee cup matches my outfit as well. So that's a little fun thing about me.

TRACY ROBERTS: I'm going to move it too. I'm Tracy Roberts. I got both my bachelors-- can you guys hear me? Can you hear me? All right. I got both my bachelors and my master's in electrical engineering at WSU Tri-Cities. So go Cougs.

I started my career in ultra-low background radiation detection at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, where I did a lot of analog electronics and signal processing. And my fun fact is that I actually invented an instrument that can be used to calibrate certain types of radiation detectors that's being-- it's been submitted for a patent through the lab. So that's pretty neat. It'll take years before it goes through, so we'll find out, but yeah.

Now I work at the Hanford nuclear cleanup site doing low-voltage power engineering. The Hanford site is about 500 square miles. It's like half the size of Rhode Island. 8,000 people go out there to work every day. It's in the middle of the desert of nowhere. And so my company does site infrastructure. We support keeping the lights on and the water running and support the mission of people actually being out there and being able to work.

Hi. I'm Leen Kawas. I'm the CEO of M3 Biotechnology. I'm from Jordan, and I did my PharmD in Jordan, worked for three months as a pharmacist, decided I didn't-- I wasn't a pharmacist, so I came to WSU to do my PhD in pharmacology. And, actually, both Joe Harding, my main PI, is here in the audience and worked, also, with Nehal, who's here. I had a baby six weeks ago, so

this is the fun fact. I'm not going to be able to join you for dinner, but you guys, if you have any questions, I'm volunteering both of them to answer it for me. Yeah. I'm looking forward to the discussion today.

Did we get everybody's fun fact? Julie, did we get yours?

[APPLAUSE]

JULIE AVERILL: Fun fact for me. Well, let's see. Baseball is in my genes, but it skipped me. But my grandfather's in the Baseball Hall of Fame, and my dad played eight years in the majors. And now my son plays soccer, which is really sad for my family.

[LAUGHTER]

Yeah. Yeah. So I'll stay up here. Hopefully this doesn't move. Next, we have the next question. We divided up a couple of the questions, so not everyone's going to respond just so we can have time at the end. So the next question is for Tiffany, Leen, and Julie. How did you get started into your STEM career and your current type of work? Was the path straight forward or had kind of a different route? So why don't we start with Tiffany?

TIFFANY LUDKA-GAULKE: OK. So I grew up in Colfax. Everyone here knows where Colfax is. And during high school, I just found that I was really interested in both math and science. And, fortunately, being so close to Pullman, I had some connections and was able to get in and work in some labs in the neuroscience department even, I think, as young as the summer after my freshman year of high school. I was too young to be paid, so it was a volunteer position. But I got to do things that may seem like scut work, but to a high school almost sophomore was super cool, like getting to cryo slice frozen rat brains and things like that.

And I was really interested in the research part. So for a while, I was thinking, gosh, maybe I want to go into research. I kept working in labs each summer through high school. And then toward the end of high school, I started thinking, this is really amazing, and you can make these discoveries that help thousands or more people in whatever, Parkinson's disease or whatever the thing is that you're researching.

But I decided I really needed more immediate gratification. I wanted to interact with people face to face and see the smile on their face as I help them feel better in one way or another. So then came to WSU, did my undergrad in neuroscience. And that was a great jumping board platform into getting into medical school. Sort of briefly considered going into neurology with the undergrad training in neuroscience, but really decided that I wanted to do primary care.

So I went into residency training in a dual program, both internal medicine and pediatrics. And internal medicine are specialists in adults. They only see adults, and pediatricians, obviously, just see kids. So it takes two three-year training programs, residency training programs, and

pushes them together into a four-year program. But at the end, I came out and I was board certified to take care of both adults and kids.

And some people use that to go into certain specialties where there's a lot of overlap, like pediatric pulmonology where kids with CF are growing up to be adults and need to be cared for as adults even though it's kind of been seen in the past as a pediatric illness. Myself, I wanted to use that to go into primary care and felt like I was really well-trained to take care of both adult and the pediatric patients. So my career path was pretty straightforward, though I did think about the lab work for a while, but not too many big hiccups in the road of getting to a doctor.

NOEL SCHULZ: Leen.

LEEN KAWAS: Yes, so for me, my family was heavy on science. And my mom was more in the business side of things. My dad was an engineer and more focused on science. So when I finished my high school, I basically liked chemistry and accounting. And my mom convinced me that pharmacy is the answer, which was right in some ways but not in every way. I didn't like-- I liked the knowledge that I acquired during pharmacy school.

So after I worked for three months, I decided this is not what I wanted to do. I started looking into research, although my research experience was very theoretical at that point. But I was lucky to come here, actually, and work in a lab that was more translational, meaning that the science is not super basic. It's actually very close to become a product and translate into a tool or a therapy that could help people, so that really excited me. And then I ended up starting a company, raising money, and creating a team, which is very exciting.

But, also, this is something that wasn't straightforward for me because after I finished my PhD, I already I was applying for jobs. But then Joe, who's here, he basically told me, why don't you stay and help with the company for a year?

And I honestly didn't understand what entrepreneurship mean for-- it's a very-- if you think about Europe, Jordan is the same. You have to find a very stable job, so I didn't relate with this definition. But I say, why not? I'll try for a year.

And the thing that actually, also, help is I emailed other people. I told them, this is the situation. I really can't accept the job, and they said, we'll wait for a year. If it doesn't-- this is a great opportunity. We'll wait for you for a year. I see them in conferences right now. I didn't take the job, obviously.

So it's actually putting myself out there and being open to opportunities and using the tools that I acquired at every stage in my life to add to-- at this stage, actually. Being a pharmacist helps me right now to understand reimbursement insurance, how should the drug look like to actually be feasible for patients to use.

And all the science background that I gained here also and the ability to look for knowledge and not being afraid of encountering something that I have no idea what it is is actually fantastic because the tools that I acquired during my PhD helps me navigate things in the company. And we started with discovery stage product here. We developed it in the company, and we actually right now in the clinic for Alzheimer's, which is amazing for us.

NOEL SCHULZ: Great. Julie.

JULIE AVERILL: You guys are impressive. My path was nowhere near as straightforward. I think I was really fortunate that when I was in the fifth grade my dad put me in a computer science class, really a training class, at RadioShack.

[LAUGHTER]

It was progressive at the time, and here I was fifth grade girl in with a bunch of adults, all men. And I don't think I even noticed. I just loved the technology, and I just loved the power that I saw in working with a machine and using logic and building. And so that was really where I think that my passion for tech started.

But then when I graduated high school, I had no idea what I wanted to do. I had no role models in terms of what would a career in computer science look like, let alone any women that I could look to, to be a role model. And so I started studying business. My heart wasn't in it

Actually, I worked since I was 16 doing consulting. It was very early days, but businesses didn't know how to use desktop computing. And so I learned things like WordPerfect, which was the early competitor to Word, and Lotus 1-2-3, which is a competitor to Excel. And I'd go in, and I'd teach businesses how to use technology. And then I'd write little programs and things like Access databases, and that's what I was doing. That's where my passion was, but didn't translate to me to a degree.

And so I didn't end up graduating with my undergrad degree until I was almost 25 because I was working full time, and it just took a circuitous path. But eventually I decided to study computer science, and I did that in the evening while I worked full time and then continued to work full time, got my master's degree from the UW also in the evening.

I feel like I just made a decision early on that I was always going to be in a situation where I was learning something and felt like I was in a place that match my values and that I was happy maybe 80% of the time. And when one of those things no longer happened, I was going to find the next thing that was that opportunity. And so I have ended up in this consumer-facing retail space. But if you would have asked me, are you going to be the CTO of a apparel company, I would have thought that was the craziest thing. So it's been pretty circuitous, and I would say opportunistic for me.

NOEL SCHULZ: Well, I think it's great to hear stories because a lot of times we think about that people want A, B, C, that it was a very straight path. And for many of us, there are different paths along the way. So thank you for sharing, all of you. For the next question is for K.D. and Tracy. How do I know when I'm good enough to sit at the table? Well, you're all sitting at the table today. But in your workplace, how do you know when you can sit at the table with your colleagues?

K.D. JOSHI: OK.

NOEL SCHULZ: K.D.

K.D. JOSHI: Well, this is my favorite question, and I just made it my own question. And if I don't answer it, try again. But I was taught to believe in myself and to work really hard to get the credit. So I never questioned that if I was good enough to sit on the table or at the table. However, I soon realized that-- and, shockingly, I don't even think it was surprising-- that people who were at the table or folks who had the power to make the decision on who gets to sit at the table did not believe in me. Many of them didn't believe in me.

So what I learned is it was not good enough to be as good as the people who are already at that table. I had to be better. Reflecting back, I had a lot of help. There were some people, my mentors, who believed in me much more than probably even I did, even though I never-- my self-esteem was never at stake, but I don't think I thought through certain pathways like Julie mentioned.

And if it was not for those mentors, I wouldn't be sitting at this table. So find good mentors. Seek out good mentors. It will not happen automatically unless you proactively seek them out.

NOEL SCHULZ: Tracy, how about you?

TRACY ROBERTS: Also, I love this question. So what I would say-- have you heard of the imposter syndrome? It's where-- Yeah. OK. Yeah. So there are books about it. It's where you're very qualified and you're doing all the right things, but you still don't feel like you should be there at the table.

So I would say look at the hard facts. Get out a piece of paper, an Excel spreadsheet, or Lotus 1-2-3, if you're still into that--

[LAUGHTER]

--and pick out maybe a couple of your peers that you would view as successful or as worthy of sitting at the table. And then write down, OK, here's them. Here's me. Let's look at GPA. OK. What's my GPA? What's their GPA?

Let's look at scholarships. What do I have? What do they have? Internships, professional societies that you belong to, events that you go to, and then you'll have hard facts, evidence right in front of you. And you can look at it and say, OK, well, I'm on par with this person who I think is successful on paper. I'm looking at that and thinking, OK, well my gut tells me that they're OK to sit at the table. My gut tells me that I'm not ready to sit at the table. And you can go, well, gut, you're wrong.

[LAUGHTER]

So, yeah. Having that written down on paper or whatever, visual, seeing it, saying, proof. OK here's proof that, yeah, I am good enough to sit at the table. And then go convince yourself of it.

NOEL SCHULZ: Great. And I just want to mention I really appreciate the men that are in the audience because it's important for women in STEM, for us to have men that are partners and helping. Particularly as we talk about imposter syndrome where someone doubts, a woman doubts her abilities, having colleagues around to help support her and say, no, you are good enough, let's sit at the table together, or helping through those situations. We need allies in men, so I appreciate all those that are here tonight because it really is about-- women in STEM is not about women only. It's about how do we create a culture that's important for women to be successful.

OK. The next question is going to be for everybody, but I'm going to start with K.D. and ask why did you decide to take a path into academics. Did you start out thinking that, or did you just find your way?

K.D. JOSHI: So my dad was a professor, and I was born and raised in academia and lived all my life in university campuses. I actually tried very hard to move away from my predestined academic career and found out that I didn't like it at all. So I went back to school, got my PhD and became a faculty member.

It is one of the best jobs in this entire world for two reasons. One, you get to create new knowledge and do research. And, second, you get to transfer and disseminate that knowledge through teaching these young minds. So I did what, I guess, I was supposed to do, but I love what I'm doing.

K.D. JOSHI: So great. Thank you. Let's talk a little bit about the rest of the panel's career paths. You've talked a little bit about this in some of the other earlier questions but maybe a little bit more. How did you pick your career related? And we'll start with Tiffany first.

TIFFANY LUDKA-GAULKE: I think I sort of answered the question already, but the one thing I didn't really go into is primary care, why I picked primary care over specialty care. And that may be a bit of a key point when these are-- you aren't premed students trying to decide what you

want to do. You're trying to decide what grand career at this point in your life. But you really just have to find what-- I don't know. What tickles your fancy, I guess, is what's in my head.

But I went into primary care because I really wanted to get to know my patients, and I wanted to be able to see the same patients over and over. Maybe it's once a year if they're healthy and if I'm doing a good job helping them stay healthy. Maybe it's more often if they're older or frail or they've got a lot of things going on. But to me, I really enjoy that interaction with and getting to know my patients and sometimes their families. And in primary care, I get to see the grandma, the mom, the baby, sometimes to the fourth generation. And so I guess my answer is you've got to really find what aspect really-- what really sparks your interest, and go that direction.

NOEL SCHULZ: OK. Julie.

JULIE AVERILL: What I hear in this question is, how do you know what you're going to do for a career when you grow up in life? Right? And I think that's a pretty loaded question. I have a almost 16-year-old daughter. And she's at a point that you guys were a number of years ago. Right? Where do I go to school? What am I going to study?

And I have just tremendous empathy for being in that position because it's such a huge decision. And you feel like the rest of your life is dependent on that right answer. And I think what I would say is life is a journey, and college is a journey just like the journey that you were at in high school and before that. And you make choices, and the choices get bigger. But you're never at a point where it's just right or wrong, and you're at a dead end. The skills that have gotten you to a place where you're at where you make good decisions based on the information you have is what will carry you into your career.

And so for me as-- I shared with you it was hard for me to decide what I wanted to do with my undergraduate degree. But I just took this road of finding where the opportunities met my passion, and that's guided me to a specific place. But it wasn't a map that I laid out when I was 22 years old. What's in front of me? What opportunities do I have that I can take most advantage of? And where are my passions, and where are my interests?

I got into my job at Nordstrom very opportunistically. I had a friend that I had worked with before that called me and said, hey, there's this job here. I think you'd be great at it. And I had been out of work for a year because I had my daughter. And I was actually-- I taught at Seattle University as well, so I'd just gotten a job at Seattle University teaching. And I thought, well, I'm not interested in this Nordstrom thing. But I decided to do it because he said, I just think you'd be great. And I thought I'd get some extra cash, and I ended up being there for 10 years. That's just the path that I took, and I stayed because I loved it.

NOEL SCHULZ: Leen, you want to talk a little bit about your career path? And you talked a little bit about it. So do you want to add anything?

LEEN KAWAS: Yeah, actually just a couple of points. First, if you are doing something that you don't enjoy, make sure that you don't spend 10 years. Three months is a good period to leave and change what you're doing. What you studied in school shouldn't-- it's not the only thing that will determine your career path.

And the third point, network because you don't know what's out there unless you talk to people. Not the internet. Actual people. Go out and talk to people because through people opportunities will present itself.

And the fourth point, which K.D. already highlighted, mentors that care about your success. It's very important to surround yourself with people who care about you and your career and for you to spend time to listen because we have two ears and one mouth. So listen twice as much as you talk with your mentors. And you don't have to follow exactly what they're saying, but at least have people who have experience around you that could help you navigate your career.

NOEL SCHULZ: Great. Tracy, do you want to add anything?

TRACY ROBERTS: Yeah. I actually did what I Leen just said not to do, and it's really good advice. Don't stay career for 10 years if it's not right for you. My first career, I was an event coordinator for about 10 years. It was fun and exciting, and I got to-- you get to meet rock stars and whatever. But it just wasn't using my brain to the extent that I wanted to.

So I decided later in life, OK, I'm going to go back to school. And at that point, I owned a house in Richland, so WSU Tri-Cities it was. They offered three engineering programs, and so I chose the mathiest one, because I like math, which is selectable engineering.

My first career in electrical engineering was in analog electronics and very specific path. Really awesome stuff. Got to do some really, really cool things.

But I thought about my long-term plan, and one of my goals is to go live other places, maybe different countries or at least not in the desert for the rest of my life in southeastern Washington, which I love right now. My boss is watching. No. [LAUGHTER]

Yeah, and so I thought, OK, well, what's something that I can do that would allow me that mobility to be able to go and do whatever I want? And so the low-voltage power engineering is everywhere. I mean, it's everything that's in this room. If you go anywhere that has any sort of infrastructure, you can find it there. So that's how I chose that, that path.

NOEL SCHULZ: OK. Great. So great advice. Lots of different paths. And I think that's one of the important things, as you go on your way, is you need to get lots of different data points and see-- then you can draw your own line through that data set and figure out what your path is. OK. The next question is for Tracy, Julie, and Leen. How do you balance or integrate professional and personal aspects of your life? So, Tracey.

TRACY ROBERTS: This question is a tough one because it makes me want to ask the question, if this were not an exclusively woman panel, would the question actually be in the list of questions? I don't think it would. I really don't think it would. I think it indicates that we're maybe holding ourselves to unrealistic standards and holding ourselves and maybe other women and not men to these standards. And we need to cut it out. You can't be everything, so just don't. I mean, you'll drive yourself nuts if you try to be everything.

That said, my work-life balance strategy is when I'm at work, I'm at work. And when I'm at home, I'm at home. And wherever I'm at, that gets my full attention. And if they start crossing over on each other, then I know something's wrong with one of them. And I need to look at it and figure out what the problem is and solve it. And the solution is never to just try and manage and try and be better, do more or anything. It's a very engineering mindset thing to do, but you got to go in and find the problem and fix it. And then life is good. Life is balanced.

NOEL SCHULZ: Julie.

JULIE AVERILL: Yeah, I'm glad you said that we put a lot of pressure on ourselves even in this question because I think it's important that we realize that you have to make choices. You can't do everything in the world. I found myself in a situation once where I tried when I told you I got the job at Nordstrom and the job at Seattle U at the same time.

So I had two jobs and a one-year-old. And then a couple of years later, I had another one, so I found myself two jobs and two kids. And at some point I was like, what am I doing? Life isn't a race, and it's not something where you try to cram everything into because you end up not doing it super well. I have a big community around me. My family's all in the area, and I'm super blessed that way.

Another thing I would add is that I think when you choose your career and you choose your company, choose one that aligns with what's important to you and allows you to be your true authentic self. And then you find ways to integrate your personal and your professional life. And that's not something I've always done. I spent probably my 20s trying to figure out how to play a part. And then at some point, I realized that I'm better both at work and at home when I bring all of me into that and bring a level of authenticity.

And it makes for-- I think it makes for better days, and it also just makes you more happy in the world. So try and figure out how to be something you're not is something that, once I worked hard to overcome that, I think that is a pivotal turning point in my life.

NOEL SCHULZ: Leen, want to add anything?

LEEN KAWAS: Yeah, it's interesting because I'm working on a startup. So it's a small company, and it's different. And if you're going to start your own company, it is your life, and it's your family and even-- I had a baby six weeks ago. I went back to work after four weeks, and I even never disconnected from the company. But I don't think this is-- there's no right or wrong way

of doing things. If you are happy, whether you're spending 12 hour at the office and you're working and you feel like you're giving back, I think it's fine.

I'm a woman. I'm a woman of color, foreigner, I come from the Middle East, so there's a lot of reasons that people could look at me and feel that I'm different. But I've never felt true discrimination until I got pregnant because people directly thought that a woman would not be as dedicated to her job if she had a baby, which is something that was very foreign to me because yes, I want to have a family. But I want to be the role model for my daughter to think like, if I want to continue working and I feel really good and I'm happy, then I'll be happy at home.

One of the things that my husband say, if work is going well, our relationship is perfect. So I think that whatever works for you, it's your own balance. I could feel guilty. Oh my God, I'm here, and my daughter is six weeks. I'm not guilty. I'm providing her with a role model that you have to focus on your career. And you could have a family, and you just have to make the sacrifices in each at work and at your family that makes sense to you, not to other people or what the society think that you should be doing. OK.

NOEL SCHULZ: Great. Great advice. And I added integrate instead of balance because if it is balance, it's like for a microsecond. And then it's out of balance, at least in my personal experience for professional and personal.

OK. The next one is for everybody. And can you discuss one disappointment, obstacle, or failure you had and how you got through it? And this question is one I kind of brought up, because one of the challenges I see is all our resumes talk about all our successes, and they don't talk about the challenges we have. So a lot of times we look at leaders and say, wow, they went from A to B to C. And as we've heard today, that's not really what happened. So I think it's particularly important, as we all run into our first obstacle or see those obstacles along the way.

So I'll start with Leen and come this way. If you could just talk a little bit about a disappointment or challenge that you dealt with. And you've mentioned one already with your pregnancy.

LEEN KAWAS: Yeah. I would say it's the freshest and the highlight, I would say. I did a lot of-- one time I was in a golf course. I was going to meet an investor, and I was waiting. I was wearing a dark-- it was in Scottsdale in Arizona. Very hot day, 90 degrees. And I was wearing a dark suit with one of the guys that work with me.

And then my investor was late, so he said, just meet with my friend in the lobby. Mike, I think his name. Me and my coworker are standing there, and he comes. And then I shake his hand. Leen Kawas. And he's like, oh, you're Leen. I thought that you're Gina, the cart girl. And I was wearing a suit. I was like, wow. But I didn't faze me. I was like, oh, good for her. She's really good looking. And we laughed.

[LAUGHTER]

But that was a shock for me. People just assume what I am based on, you know. I actually had a lot of similar experiences, but it was very easy to change the mindset. This guy eventually invested in the company, and we are really good friends right now. But if I took it personally, probably I would have lost a good relationship and investment in the company. So I experience these things, but it was very easy for me to change their impressions. But I'm still working on what people think about me being a mom and running a company. And I'll send you data when I collect more.

NOEL SCHULZ: Great. Tracy.

TRACY ROBERTS: One of-- so I thought about this. So my graduate class at WSU Tri-Cities of electrical engineering was 14 people. Kind of a small school, and I was the only woman in our graduating class. And we'd gone on some field trips and go to events, and they always want to take pictures of the group. And I noticed after one-- we went to the Columbia Generating Station, the nuclear power plant that's right there on the Columbia River north of Richland.

And, afterwards, we're all-- we've been walking all through a reactor. We've been in the cooling towers. We've been wearing hard hats and everything. We go outside, and I'll line up and take a picture. And great, cool. I look at the picture afterwards, and I notice that everyone in the picture except for me was standing facing forward, facing the camera and just like that. And I was standing-- I was doing the thing that we all do in pictures. You know what I'm talking about? The off to the side.

And I'm looking at it going, oh, my gosh, I'm making myself smaller. What am I doing? And I go back and look at all of these pictures, and I'm like, oh, my gosh. Every picture I look at, there's all of-- the people around me are confident, and they're doing their-- they're getting big, and doing the getting small.

So that was something that I had to change my mindset when pictures were being taken or when giving a presentation or something like that, standing and taking up space and saying, OK, I'm not here to make sure my arm doesn't look fat or something.

[LAUGHTER]

I'm here to present and be powerful and do my engineering. And, yeah, that was pretty-- the pictures changed after that, and it felt good. It really increased my confidence as well, standing that way.

There's a really great Ted Talk on how the way that you stand and your postures affects how you feel. Not how other people-- I mean, probably how other people see you as well. But not only that, but actually how you feel too and your confidence levels and your energy when

you're going into business or anything. That's really great. I would suggest looking it up, Ted Talk. Can't remember her name right off the bat. But yeah, so pictures.

NOEL SCHULZ: Great. Tiffany.

TIFFANY LUDKA-GAULKE: When I was in high school and applying for colleges, I was valedictorian of my high school class, so I was high achiever. Was thinking, gosh, I want to go to an Ivy League school. So as I was looking into programs, thinking at that point already that I wanted to go into medicine, I found a program at Brown University that was a six-year program where you would do your undergraduate and your medical school all in six years. And I thought that sounded awesome. So I was like, that's the program for me. That's what I'm going to do. I applied, and I didn't get in.

So instead of being devastated-- now, WSU wasn't my second choice. But instead of being just devastated that I didn't get into this program that I thought was the right program for me, I said, you know what, I'm just going to make my own hard program. I'm going to challenge myself instead of this other program that I didn't get into.

So I came to WSU. I picked what I saw as a hard major, neuroscience. I was active in clubs and programs on campus and really made sure to prove to my future application reviewers at medical school that just because I didn't get into that Ivy League program doesn't mean that I can't challenge myself and prove that I was a good candidate for medical school. Make the most of every situation, I guess, is my take home of-- sometimes you're disappointed, but you can make the most of what other opportunities you have been presented.

NOEL SCHULZ: Julie?

JULIE AVERILL: So I've got a long list of things that I could pull from for this example of failures. But I guess for context, I told you my family comes from baseball lineage, which means I grew up in a very competitive environment. Brothers, just-- you know, there's no such thing as failure, right? You're driven, very, very competitive.

And so by the time I was turning 30, I was vice president of an international ad agency. And I was running the Seattle office, and I was very much-- a lot of my identity was intertwined with my career. And we were acquired about the same time that I got pregnant. And I found myself having to do things like come out to Boston, and reapply for my job.

And I met in a really-- all the leaders of this company met in a cigar bar in Boston. And besides the woman in charge of HR, I was the only woman. I felt very out of place, being pregnant, and being a woman, and being in a cigar bar, that I think I just didn't show up. I think I felt like my voice couldn't be heard at that table. They didn't want to hear me, whatever stories I wanted to make up.

But I wasn't present. And I found myself laid off at six months pregnant. Laid off, angry, wasn't sure how much of it was my fault, how much of it was not my fault. But you know, it didn't feel fair. And it certainly wasn't where I chose to be at that point in my life. And at six months pregnant, probably not the most ideal time to look for another job.

So I found myself a stay-at-home mom, like something that I never ever saw in my life that I would be. But it turned out to be the best thing I ever did, because I was 18 months staying at home. I really went to the point where I thought I was never going to work again. I really liked it. But I also learned a lot about myself.

And it's a period that I couldn't ever create for myself if I was still in the rat race. And I think it gave me incredible perspective on me, and what's important in my life, and what I really care about. I still look back at that time, and can't really recreate how I would have showed up differently. But I would like to think that I would, but I certainly don't regret the outcome of it.

NOEL SCHULZ: K.D., do you want to finish?

K.D. JOSHI: Thank you. So my-- I have a list. So I had to pull one out of it, and this is mine. My first semester at the University of Michigan engineering school was probably the most challenging. So we're a bunch-- the cohort is comprised of students who have always been at the highest level, top of their class. The very top of their class. And now, some of us-- not all of us could be at the top of the class.

So the fierce competition and a very expensive school. It's a public school. But the tuition is really high. Collectively put tremendous pressure on me. And I always loved learning, but I stopped loving it. I just didn't like it. And it became a burden, you know? Going to class and learning became a burden.

And I'm like, that has to change. It's not sustainable. Step back, had to change my mindset. I'm like, I'm not going to worry about my grades, although grades are important. I wanted to go for a higher education. Grades are important. But I had to change some things. I'm like, I'm not going to worry about the grades. I'm going to look at the course, their course objectives. What does the faculty want me to learn? And I'm going to make it fun for me.

So if it's a project that is assigned, I will make it something that I like doing and try very hard to just focus on learning. And the second thing I did seemed self-evident, but wasn't to me. It was practice, practice, practice. So it was a project, or a presentation, or solving problems-- I solved a lot of problems-- I just practiced a lot.

And what that did was it actually got closer to what my faculty wanted me to learn. Not necessarily solving that problem and getting a good grade, but the end is changing the cognitive muscle to think in a logical way, to think analytically. And that kind of change-- I started having fun. And luckily, grades followed as well. And if they didn't, probably I wouldn't have been

admitted to a PhD program. So grades are important, but if you stop learning and if it becomes a burden, change something.

NOEL SCHULZ: Great. So I want to open it up to questions, a few questions. Leen has a flight to catch, so we want to make sure she can get out of here. And the rest of us will be here for dinner if you have additional questions. But are there any questions from the audience? Right here. If you could tell us your name and your major?

AUDIENCE: Hi. I'm Marissa. I'm a zoology premed major with honors. I have a question for Tiffany. So when you were an undergrad, was there ever a time where you felt that medicine wasn't for you because of the stress of being a premed, and keeping up with the requirements of what medical schools wanted?

TIFFANY LUDKA-GAULKE: No. Yes, it's a lot of work. Yes, it's stressful. But if you keep focusing on your end goal, it really makes the stress worth it. You've got to apply yourself. You can't goof off through undergrad, because it just doesn't work. You need to-- and same with medical school, you've got to apply yourself.

But no, there was no point at which I felt I was overwhelmed and that I didn't want to go. I mean, I had backup. So if I didn't get into medical school, what else would I do? But I never really thought that that wasn't the direction I wanted to go.

NOEL SCHULZ: Other questions?

AUDIENCE: Howdy. My name is Cameron Church, and I am in the business college in MIS in finance. So this is a question, just in general for everybody. And I'm really sorry, I hate to be the guy that talks more about guys. But I think one of my experiences is that I've always worried about-- like, I think I experience seeing men trying to be, like, dominant, which is pretty, you know, being very masculine in the workplace.

And so I wanted to know, from the experience of women-- and you've kind of talked about these experiences as well, but what are some ways that men in any workplace can support women to foster more success in a way that's supportive, but not like, again, not like being the masculine, like, oh, I'm a guy, I'll help you. But in the way of, again, just like supporting women to be successful, to be, like, equal?

LEEN KAWAS: I would just say, don't acknowledge gender. Like if you have a colleague, it doesn't matter if it's a female or male. Just, you know. And for me, I've never, like, when we hire people, I never see gender.

So I think that's the most helpful thing, is we are all, I think, the same level of skills. And I don't know. That's my point. Like, don't give gender too much in the workplace. And I do have to run because my ride is here. Is it OK, Noel?

NOEL SCHULZ: Yes. You want to catch your plane. Thank you, Leen. Thank you. So do we have time for a couple more questions? Yes? OK. So-- oh, let's finish this question. So anybody else want to add?

JULIE AVERILL: I'll add a little bit to that. I mean, I appreciate the question. Because I think it's very obvious we have a very real problem with women in STEM education and STEM careers. And it's not a women-only problem. It's a problem for all of us.

And I had the fortune of hearing Michelle Obama speak a couple of months ago, when she was in Vancouver, Canada. And she had a similar question, and her answer resonated with me, which is-- well first, she said, you know, men, you got us into this problem. You need to get us out of it.

But then she said, you know, whatever it is that you can do, that's what you should do. So whatever position you're in, if you're the CEO of a company, you can help a large batch of people. If you're not, you still have influence, and you have network. So whether it's your peers, or it's your kids, or it's your sisters, do everything you can do. And I think that's-- you know, find your way to do that, and that's what you can do.

K.D. JOSHI: Can I answer?

NOEL SCHULZ: Yeah. We've got one more.

AUDIENCE: Hi.

NOEL SCHULZ: No. One more. Let her answer, and then we'll get yours.

K.D. JOSHI: Notice. And if you notice, do something. So it's hard. It's hard to notice. If there are stereotypes and biases, step back and see if you can do something about it. And have the courage to do it.

NOEL SCHULZ: OK. We're ready.

AUDIENCE: Hi. My name is Christine Sizemore, and I'm studying management information systems. Thank you all for coming. My question was regarding mentorship. I sometimes struggle with knowing if it's appropriate to ask a question to a mentor, or identifying a mentor, or just looking for people that you admire. Could you talk about your experiences with that, and how you go about those processes when you are looking for advice?

TRACY ROBERTS: I would say always ask questions. The worst thing that can happen is they just won't answer them. I mean, really. And I was always, you know-- and actually, I found that people love it when you ask them questions. People love to talk about themselves, and love to talk about what they do. We're all up here. We're loving this. So yeah, asking questions is 100% they'll do it. They'll love it.

AUDIENCE: Thank you.

NOEL SCHULZ: Anybody else want to add?

JULIE AVERILL: I would say I don't think you always have to formalize a mentor relationship. And mentors can change over time. I think about mentors in my life, and I don't think I ever said, would you be my mentor?

But there are people who have emerged as people who care for me, and people that I respect and are willing to give me honest opinions. And those are people who have become really important in my life. So you know, as you see people around you that you respect, yeah, ask questions and just develop those relationships.

K.D. JOSHI: I think I have asked people to be my mentors. And sometimes, they just have been my mentors. And I'm trying to think the latter, how that happened. I will have to think more about that. But asking helps, in the sense that you tell them why.

So the mentors are for different things. If it's for a career that you're in and you have questions, and you just need a soundboard to say, OK, what should I be doing now? You were here before. Then tell them, this is why I want you to be my mentor.

And meet with them. And say, OK, I want to have coffee. I want to talk to you. So talk. It doesn't have to be a question and answer thing, but it just helps to build those relationships over time.

AUDIENCE: Thank you.

NOEL SCHULZ: I think there's a question in the back.

AUDIENCE: Yes. My name is Erica Serrano, and a PhD-- finishing my PhD in molecular plant sciences. And my question is about the confidence gap, because I feel-- I don't know. I have always feel this confidence gap, because I have, like, really super high standards. So I always want, like, everything to be perfect.

But I realize, comparing, like, with the standards of other people, that I was doing really, really well, but not in my standards. And I realized that at least with my advisor, if I tell him, like, in honest truth, OK, this is the way that I see myself doing with my highest standards. But if I just measure by what everybody else is measuring, I'm really good.

So how do you handle that? How do you handle that confidence gap? And also, because I also think, like, besides our confidence gap, usually with women we-- always people, or at least with me, I don't know, like, always you need to prove yourself. Always you-- like you said, you need to be even better than the other people at the table. So how do you handle that?

NOEL SCHULZ: Do you want to go?

TRACY ROBERTS: Well, yeah. There was-- like, so I'm the same way. I'm, you know, the imposter syndrome, right? But I'm really competitive with myself. So even once the writing it down on paper and going, OK, yeah, technically I am, you know, I am-- I don't know, at least on the same level, if not beating other people around me, because we are such high achievers, then you can also-- you know, you have that evidence.

But as far as a confidence gap, I think just the achievements that you achieve convince yourself that you're-- it's OK to be kind of hard on yourself sometimes, right? To say, OK, I don't feel like I'm doing well enough, but I'm looking at the paper and it's telling me I'm doing well enough. So you know what? Suck it up. Get out there. Do your job. I'm doing good. Just believe it and go do it.

And it's hard sometimes, but the more you go out there and just do it and keep doing it, you'll get used to it. And the people around you will get used to it, too. You were saying it feels like we have to work harder. But my experience has been-- I work in a really male-dominated place, because it's mostly engineers, and craft, and a lot of construction.

So we've got tons of electricians, and pipefitters, and everything out there. And for the most part, they are awesome. I rarely ever have any issues with anyone looking at me and going, oh, you've got to work harder to get my respect. I do run into the built-in bias sometimes, where the first time I meet someone, they'll kind of, like, don't know what to do, because they're like, oh. What do I do with this?

And you know, sometimes they'll maybe say something weird. But they realize it, and then the next time I see them, they know how-- they're prepared for me to be there, I guess. And yeah. So just, you know, the whole showing up. Show up, be competent, they'll get used to you, and you'll get used to it. And eventually you will bridge that gap.

NOEL SCHULZ: Anybody else?

JULIE AVERILL: I would just say there's 100% certainty that no one will do you better than you. So, you know, what you're comparing yourself to is your own expectations, and we all just need to know that we're good enough. And what makes us different is also what makes us special.

So that's a good thing. Diversity is good for business, right? If we all think the same way and have the same backgrounds, then we're looking at the problem from only one angle. So I would just feel real confidence in that, feel confidence in the differences and those things that make you you.

NOEL SCHULZ: I'm going to interrupt here for just a second. The servers are going to be starting to serve dinner. If you have dietary restrictions and we've given you a card, would you make sure that you've circled what your dietary restriction is, and hand it to your server when they come? OK. We have one more question.

K.D. JOSHI: Can I answer that one, because I think that--

NOEL SCHULZ: Yeah. Go ahead.

K.D. JOSHI: OK. So first of all, never ever stop believing in yourself. Don't hear other messages of you. Believe in yourself. Second, surround yourself with people who appreciate you. They will reinforce how good you are. And have fun. Be so good that no one can ignore you. That's a fun challenge.

NOEL SCHULZ: OK. Last question. Identify yourself.

AUDIENCE: I'm Claire. I'm a zoology major with a math minor. I wanted to ask how all of you guys managed to have your careers and go through school-- Julie, you said you didn't graduate until you were 25-- and still keep your youth, I guess, or experience it while you were still young. You know, if you guys-- most of you have been in school for a long time. So how were you able to be in school, get jobs, and still live your 20s? Yes?

JULIE AVERILL: I never went away to college. So I moved out of my parents' house when I was 19. I was working during the day and started out going to community college, and then went to evening classes. So I feel like I missed a step, which is probably the reason why I'm so enamored with colleges now, especially as my kids start to look forward to that.

But you know, it sacrifices. And for me, I'm glad that I went the path I did, because I had a pretty strong resume when a lot of my peers were just graduating college. You know, I had eight years of experience that I could put on a resume. So that was my path.

NOEL SCHULZ: Anybody else?

TIFFANY LUDKA-GAULKE: No, no. I kind of echo that I kind of put my life on hold, at least during medical school. It's intense, and I'm fortunate that I didn't have a husband and kids, though some of my classmates in medical school did, and they managed to balance things. I still found you can't just have your nose in a book the time.

You still have to find your elements of joy, whether that's hanging out with your classmates or spending time with your family, whether that's a spouse or parents, or siblings, or whatever. So you've got to carve out time for that. But sometimes, you've got to apply yourself. And if it's that four years that you know you're going to have to push through, then just do it, but knowing that there's a reward at the other end.

NOEL SCHULZ: Anybody else?

TRACY ROBERTS: I will also echo that I had absolutely no life while I was in school. But you know, you work so hard for those four, or six, or eight years, and then the rest of your life is so much easier for it, and so much better for it.

And as a bonus, if you actually like what you're going for, then the hard work is kind of fun sometimes. So one interesting thing after we graduated, I don't know if you experienced this, but I had to actually work at figuring out what to do with my time, because I hadn't done anything in so long. So I had to go out and seek hobbies and things to do so that I didn't just sit at home all the time being boring.

K.D. JOSHI: For me, lots of sleep helps. And yeah, I'm really old. So I mean, thank you, whoever asked that question. If you find your passion and find paid work in that space, then it's not work.

So I don't think I'm working. I just feel like I'm having fun. So that helps. It doesn't mean there were not challenges. Trust me, there were a lot. But if you love what you do, I think it helps.

NOEL SCHULZ: All right. Let's thank our panelists.