

SheHer

Tech GIANTS

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I'm **Gemma Telford**, Founder of She/Her Ltd, and I specialise in human marketing for technology businesses. My work redefines and evolves traditional marketing in the IT sector through a more collaborative, flexible, human-centric approach. Cultivating partnerships that deliver mutual value by starting real conversations and delivering work which excites, inspires and connects people.

I started **Tech Giants** to celebrate some of the great people I've worked with in the channel over the last 20 years and to share their wisdom and knowledge with others. I hope you enjoy reading about them!

Gemma: Tell me about your current role and how you got into it.

Jason: Sure. I'm the Vice President for our Worldwide Partner Ecosystems, and Barracuda has been a channel centric company for 20 years in fact. While Barracuda always been channel centric, this global channel chief role is a new one for the company and represents the investments that we are making in the channel. Recently Chris Ross, who was running international sales, was promoted to become our CRO. Chris has been a huge advocate of the partner channel and distribution for a long time. When I was living and working in Belgium with Ingram Micro, Chris was at CA ArcServe and we remained connected since then. Then over the summer I was in France visiting family and Chris called me on WhatsApp to catch-up and "talk shop" a bit. I had left my previous company but was working as an adjunct professor at a local university for their Executive MBA program. Chris and I continued to talk about opportunities and I was in a formal interview process alongside other candidates by the time Chris came out to headquarters in California. I flew up to interview with him, our CMO and CEO, CFO. I came away really, really impressed with the leadership team and their ability to execute. Company culture is so

important for me to really dig into and research. So I talked to a lot of folks in the company, I talked to partners, I talked to other folks in the channel. And I just kept hearing that about the culture, the culture. And then you see employees posting #CudaRocks, #CudaLife, etc, and I just felt this energy with Barracuda. It felt a lot like when I was at Ingram Micro and there was a strong pride, great people, great culture. There's a humility, but there is a great pride around the company. I've been here now almost five months and all that research has paid off and that's how I came to work in this current role.

Gemma: And did you still do the MBA program?

Jason: I did, yes. I teach one night a week on Thursdays from 7 to 10pm. So it's a three hour class on Thursday night so it's not so disruptive. I could still travel through the week and it's 15 weeks in the Fall semester. It's a class for the executive MBA program on what I call modern operations and supply chain management. I'll teach it again this coming fall semester. My parents were teachers at a community college level, so I always felt that I had that in my genes. I always wanted to pursue that, at the right time in my career. I think that's why I've loved coaching and developing talent, managing. I think that's why I've loved public speaking and presenting. Teaching has been super fulfilling. I get to teach around cybersecurity and NOC and SOC operations and digital transformation. Sometimes we take for granted what we know in this industry. And when you're with a group of MBA students who come from different backgrounds and work in different industries, I tell you that just that they soak it up. The students seem to enjoy it and I hope they are learning a lot!

Gemma: Oh, that's brilliant. Okay, so can you give a bit of background about your career in the channel and how you got into the channel originally?

Jason: Absolutely. I was originally working in the surf and action sports industry right out of college. I had attended UC Davis and I came back down to Southern California, and at that time I had an international business degree. There was a startup surfing company and I came in and did a lot of good hands on work. You know, we built warehouses, we set up international licensing, international distribution, built the brand through retail in the United States. And that was great. It taught me a lot of good hands on business. Then I was called by a recruiter and there was a local value added distributor in my hometown that was in the content management and document imaging space. I was looking for something where I could continue to grow my professional skill set and advance my career, so that was appealing. I'm not an engineer by background. I was never, you know, coding or engineering, however I've been fascinated by technology trends. So, I joined that distributor and jumped right into working with channel partners, integrators, service bureaus. Then after a handful of years or so, it was a natural career move for me to make the switch to Ingram Micro. A global company at that time, they were probably \$20-\$30 billion based right here in Orange County, California. I had become kind of a proverbial big fish in a small pond at the \$50 million distributor and really wanted to see what was it like to work in a Fortune 100 multibillion dollar company. I was married to Marie, who comes from France and I had an international relations degree. Naturally I was looking to move to a global company where I could potentially have an opportunity later to do an international relocation. Ingram was incredible - great company, great people, really good opportunities there. I was part of a small team that built a managed service offering which eventually became Ingram Micro Cloud, and then I was able to be relocated by the company to the Ingram Micro Europe.

Gemma: And that's when we met!

Jason: Yeah, that's right. That's when I was living and working in Belgium because Ingram Micro Europe was headquartered at there that time, and I was responsible for what they call their Advanced Solutions business. Things like networking, security, and data center and the beginnings of cloud. I was at Ingram for a total of 9 years and so then at that point was in distribution for probably 14 years and I think it was also then a natural career move for me to go from a distributor into the vendor environment. I started to put some of my feelers out and again, the power of network came good. Folks that I knew who had been at Polycom had moved over to Palo Alto Networks to run global distribution and global channels. I heard back quickly from one of my mentors, Ron Myers, who said, "Jason, your timing is perfect. Tom Kelley and I have joined Palo Alto Networks. We are looking for somebody to run EMEA distribution." That was a real logical step for me coming from distribution, a good foray into the vendor environment. I held various roles at Palo Alto Networks again, both in Europe, and then they relocated us back to the States. So now it's 20 to 25 years in channel related roles. I love working with partners. I mean, partners are out there every day in front of customers. And I truly believe in that role of the local trusted advisor in helping customers of all sizes with all of their technology planning and their technology problems. As distributors and vendors, we have an opportunity, in fact we have a duty, to help our partners to help their customers.

Gemma: Okay. So, what's the best thing about life in the channel?

Jason: You know, I'm a big fan of just listening to and learning from partners. I literally have talked to thousands and thousands of partners around the world. In many cases, you talk to a partner in Southeast Asia, you talk to a partner in sub-Saharan Africa, you talk to partner in Europe, talk to a partner in Latin America. They have very similar business models, very similar needs, similar challenges.

They've got similar success stories or stories about building their company. So I like listening and understanding their challenges, understanding how we can help them. And that's the way that you really keep your finger on the pulse and can then adapt strategy and programs and tools to help those partners to grow their mutual business.

Gemma: And what's your biggest frustration about working in the channel? Have you got any?

Jason: Well, I don't like to use the word frustration, but sometimes you see missed opportunities and currently missed opportunities are, unfortunately, more of a result of a lack of talent. This lack of cybersecurity and DevOps talent is impacting end users and is also impacting channel partners. They are struggling to hire enough certified competent talent or retaining that talent to grow their business. The opportunity is there. I mean, we all know the statistics as far as digital transformation projects and public cloud consumption and cybersecurity, ransomware attacks. I see a lot of partners who would love to scale the business. They'd love to expand vertically, horizontally geographically. But it's so hard to find and retain specialized talent these days.

Gemma: That's been a problem for a while, hasn't it?

Jason: Yeah. The other piece of that translates oftentimes to vendors and distributors with missed opportunities at the partner level, for them to execute with a lot of the programs, campaigns or tools or even track leads that you're providing the partners. And I think distributors and vendors do a heck of a job building playbooks, marketing campaigns, demand gen, leads, etc for partners. And that last mile piece is having the partners then execute either through process or just people. That sometimes is a missed opportunity.

Gemma: What are you working on right now that excites you?

Jason: Right now it is helping our partners to protect their customers, people, data and applications. I mean, we are at an extremely challenging time right now with cybersecurity threats. The latest feedback that we're hearing is all this difficulty that end customers and partners have around cyber insurance requirements. And so not only is it a need to protect the business, but sometimes just to get a policy. Even if this stuff happens, the partner has some protection for themselves or financially for the business. But what we hear is the availability of cyber insurance is going down. The pricing is going way up by and the amount of forms that the customers or the MSPs need to fill out in order to get a policy written is a real burden. We all see the statistics around the number of attacks and all the bad stuff happening. And our channel is right there ready to help. The vendors are there with great technology ready to help. And now you have this extra hurdle with this difficulty of getting policies to protect their business through cyber insurance. So, you know, I'm a bit of a channel geek. So that's exciting for me. The more partners I talk to and more customers I talk to, that is absolutely an immediate term challenge that we need to help them solve.

Gemma: What are you most proud of in your career? Or actually not just in your career?

Jason: I love building teams. I love seeing teams come together. Finding opportunities for talent in the organizations to grow. I think this industry is incredible at the personal development, career development opportunities. I love opening LinkedIn and seeing, every day, literally every day because we work in this industry, your feed has post after post with: "I'm excited to share..", "I've started this new opportunity.." or "I'm hiring", right? That's every single day in this industry. And again, we shouldn't take that for granted. This doesn't happen in every other

industry around the world. It's just such a dynamic industry that, allows you to pull teams together, to help develop talent, to help these great successes as teams and individually. And there is just this infinite amount of opportunities in our industry in particular. And so that's been the most exciting and the most fulfilling for me.

Gemma: And what was your biggest mistake?

Jason: There was a time in my career where I had made a decision to join a company when I did not do adequate research on the leadership team and their ability to execute and on company culture. And I've always had long tenure at companies and I think in the channel you really want to have long tenure because relationships are so important with partnering with distributors, with alliances. But I did make one decision where I just did not do enough research on that company's leadership team and on the ability to execute. And so I would consider that the biggest mistake in my career.

Gemma: What's one piece of advice that you found useful that you would pass on?

Jason: It wasn't given to me personally, but anybody who knows me knows that I've used this same line for probably a decade. It's the famous Stephen Covey line from the Seven Habits: "The main thing is to keep the main thing, the main thing." It's about focused execution. Every day we can go in different directions. We talked about how dynamic this industry is. There are a million different opportunities and ways that you can change and innovate and create. But yeah, at the end of the day, we're here to have success. Go execute against that plan. It's a simple piece of advice but so incredibly relevant.

Gemma: And what's a little-known fact about you that people might not know?

Jason: I have really three things in my life. I have family, I have work, and I have

sport. You know, I am pretty simple like that. I have four children, married for nearly 21 years. Family is number one in my life. I'm focused on my career. And I'm a believer in healthy body, healthy mind. So, I let off a lot of steam and have a lot of fun through many different sports. I don't have many hobbies. I'm not playing instruments. I'm not wrenching on a car in my garage or making woodworking or flying drones or coding in my basement. So I'm either with family, I'm working and traveling or I'm surfing, golf, tri-training.

Gemma: What's next for you?

Jason: I've been at Barracuda for just coming on five months. I hope I'm here for many, many years. So far, I love the company—first impressions have been incredible. I love the people that I work with. I love this mission that we have in our industry around cybersecurity and helping to protect people. I'm enthusiastic about what I do in the company, around our partnerships. I also want to continue to teach. I'm not near retirement yet, so I'm not even thinking about that right now.

Gemma: Last question. Give me either a favorite book or film or song or piece of music?

Jason: Jason: I think one of the best business books that I ever read and I've used multiple times is Patrick Lencioni on The Five Dysfunctions of a Team. I highly recommend that. And Bob Burg's book entitled The Go Giver, which is the short fable I think everybody should read. Yeah, I should definitely read that one. What other books? Russian was one of my majors at university. I read a lot of Russian poetry and Russian literature. I recommend Dead Souls by Gogol. It's a very clever story, well written, a truly great read.

If you'd like to suggest a Tech Giant, find out more about the work She/Her Ltd does, or have a question or feedback then please get it touch!

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