

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.

Melissa: My current role is vice president of Global Channels and Alliances Marketing here at Netskope. So I'm responsible for all of our indirect routes to market. I've been doing similar roles for probably a decade, but I actually started my career in government and politics. It was really happenstance getting into tech. I was working in government. We had a friend who owned a data center at this time and they needed a writer. It was more of an entry level position at the time. So they took a chance because my boss at the time said "she knows nothing about technology, but she can write." It's really been about, just building my skill sets, but also networking and building relationships. So that's really how I got into tech in the first place and kind of what brought me here to Netskope in my current role.

Gemma: So did you start off in the channel or did you move to the channel later on?

Melissa: I actually started off working for a regional reseller. I was their director of marketing, so I had all of the facets of marketing for a smaller regional reseller based in New York.

We created our own software and then recognized that that software was so powerful just for us, we realised we should build a channel.

So, we built the channel from the ground up. Identifying partners to recruiting partners, to onboarding them, to helping with go to market education. Then I moved to a vendor working within the channel, which, as you know, gives you the opportunity to do all facets of marketing. You're doing a little bit of everything, which is why I love it.

Gemma: Yeah, me too! Okay, So actually, my next question was going to be, what's the best thing about working in the channel?

Melissa: It's the people, as well. You do get to look through a lot of different lenses and have a lot of different vantage points on all aspects of marketing as well as the business. Certainly in a channel marketing or growth marketing role, we're so tightly aligned to the business goals that it really increases the business acumen for all of us as marketers. There's a broad range of initiatives and things that we get to work on and then because working in the channel, you get to work with so many different people, so many different partners, and you get to see their business. You're seeing how their business is running, what's working for them. It really is just such a tremendous opportunity to expand knowledge, expand expertise, experiences and to become an expert at that. As you're seeing the benefit of what all of these different partners are doing and also their go to market propositions. The partner ecosystem is so broad now, including large consultancy firms, GSIs and service providers. So really, it's just a great education in overall business as well. It's good to work with so many different people and partner types.

Gemma: What's your biggest frustration about working in the channel?

Melissa: I think the channel doesn't get enough credit sometimes for our partners, if you think about what partnerships bring to the table. Historically, compared to direct sales teams, I think there was not enough credit for what the partners are giving or what the channel teams are doing. But I've definitely seen a shift in that, especially with the rise of the ecosystem and the different partner types. I would say it's been a case of perception versus reality of the channel and maybe even a little bit of a lack of understanding of all that the partners can really bring to the table. Now there is increasingly more recognition, which is a good thing. And you see this too, with the likes of the cloud service providers and how buyers are procuring technology as the technology landscape is more complex.

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

Melissa: In the immediate near future I'm really excited for our New Year partner kick off. This is a virtual forum where we're bringing our leaders into the partner community. It's a fun initiative where we get to thank our partners, share our strategy and our vision. We do a lot of webinars and things like that, but this one's a little bit more special for just all the elements that we have. So that's something that my team is working on right now for the partner community. But I think overall it's the programs and initiatives that we are building for the partners and their marketing organizations to really seize the opportunity in this SASE market. We're building initiatives and programs around this journey – this evolution to move to a framework or architecture because there's such a tremendous TAM. Gartner are forecasting that more than 60% of enterprise businesses will have an explicit SASE strategy in place by 2025. So we're seeing our partners continue to invest in, and develop service offerings around this as part of their growth strategy.

At Netskope, we want to help the partners with that and help them to accelerate the customer journey and also, quite frankly, seize that opportunity and make money and be successful for their business, but also obviously for delivering enhanced protections for their customers. I think that the market dynamics are extremely exciting and the work that we're doing surrounding that is really cool.

Gemma: What have you done that you're most proud of?

Melissa: It's not a specific initiative or project, but it's people that have worked for me. When I look at the people who've been on my team that have gotten promoted, and there have been many of them; I'm just so proud. You know, somebody just texted me last week and said, 'I'm doing this initiative. I'm going to speak on main stage.' This is what I'm most proud of. Sometimes it's a bit of a grind. There's so much changing in this landscape. And then you take a step back and I look at the success. There's just so many people with roles that they're in right now, I've seen how they've got promoted, how they built their career. That is what I'm most proud of.

The second would be that I lead our Awesome Women of Netskope – AWON, which is our employee resource group here at Netskope, and just the community that we've built and cultivated. I'm extremely proud of that. It's an amazing community. We've just celebrated International Women's Day to celebrate and recognize women, but then also use it as an opportunity to be honest with ourselves on how we're actually taking action to make real change and bring about real topics to the forefront of attention. But the work that that we've done within that organization and the supportive community that it is, and the fact that I get to be a part of that and help shape or mold it.

Gemma: What would say was your biggest mistake?

Melissa: I think two things, probably. Early in my career, not recognizing soon enough the power and necessity of patience and empathy. So when you're coming in, guns blazing, you know, taking over the world. I would say time helps you to develop that experience that you need, but also just being self-aware. So that's something that I work on every day, especially the patience part, which nobody will be surprised by.

But absolutely that and then I think the other thing, which also comes with lessons learned, is the mentality of fail fast. Sometimes you try things and they're not working. It's okay to build fast, move on and try something else.

I think those are the two things. When you put them together, there is a good relationship there, which is just about how we operate within business to be not only successful but also have a great community around you. And that's everybody, whether that's your partners, whether that's your colleagues, whether that's people above you, below you. And I've also seen that shift in the industry as a whole. We've come a long way from the days where everything was top down. For me, those skills honestly would be the important things.

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

Melissa: It's about your career journey. It's understanding that your career is not exactly vertical. It can take all sorts of different turns and challenges. And it doesn't always look like "I'm starting here, I'm going to have my boss's job" and so on. That is what I share with people. There's opportunities at every turn. It might seem like a lateral move sometimes, but you're getting different experience, you're working a different muscle, you're being part of a different organization.

That old model of always going up the career ladder is just not relevant anymore because you may get different successes in your career and the path that you've taken to get there is nothing like what you would envision if you were thinking of the corporate ladder.

Take chances, go to different teams and different opportunities. There's opportunity at every turn. And I think as we open up our eyes to that and understand that, now you can be even more successful when you've experienced different teams, different management styles, different experiences. From a marketing perspective, I've had people move to different campaigns roles. People have been in channel marketing that have taken on sales. I mean, I the examples are endless. So yes, it's that your career journey is really more of a squiggly line now and that's actually really good.

Gemma: Is there is there a little known fact about you that people might be surprised to learn or that not many people that you that you are okay to share?

Melissa: I usually lead with the fact that I started in government politics, which is just such a different industry. So that's definitely something but the other thing which sometimes comes as a surprise is that we do a lot of camping and hiking, and also that we have a very tight family. My entire extended family lives within about an hour radius. It is a large extended family, so the holidays are definitely busy. There was one year for Thanksgiving we were close to 30. But that extended family is just, you know, so, so important to me. And it's wonderful that everybody is so close.

Gemma: Can you pick a favorite book, film, piece of music.

Melissa: I like so many books. But *The Corner Office*, by Adam Bryant, a New York Times editor, is one of my favorite books, and it's actually a compilation of the articles that he had written for The New York Times. It's lessons in leadership. There's tons of leadership books out there. But at the core of this book, it is really around people and the recognition and what these leaders have learned over time. And it's a book I often reference. There's just these amazing nuggets of information. It's not like a self-help book. You're reading somebody else's journey, what they've learned from it. When I first read the book, I was hesitant because I already read all of the articles.

He basically looked across all of the interviews that he did and pulled them together in an umbrella and all the chapters. In the book, people are honest and open about their journey and about how they exist, how they recognize people, what they've learned.

So, it's a great book. And one of my all time favorite quotes came out of that from the former CEO of Yum Brands and it's about action versus activity. A lot of times you're really active. You're doing a lot of activity. You're running reports, you're sending emails and you think you're checking the boxes. What I've learned over the years is what is the action that's going to move the needle. Because we get caught up in the activity and not the action. So that is definitely one that that I keep close at hand.

And then *The Devil in the White City* is actually based on the true story of when the World Fair came to Chicago. It was actually right after the Paris World's Fair. That's where they built the Eiffel Tower. And it is just a phenomenal, phenomenal book. And it is a true story. There's all sorts of twists and turns in the book. So those are usually my two favorite books to go to.

Gemma: Last question - what's next for you?

Melissa: I think that depends on the opportunities that come about, because, you know, if I'm true to myself, you never know what kind of opportunities present themselves. So, wherever the squiggly line goes next.

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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