

## Women in Tech/Neurodiversity Meet-Up with Anna Wessely—September 12/2023

-Neurodiversity: Points to the fact that every human has a unique nervous system with a unique number of needs

-Men are 4x more likely to be diagnosed with a neurodivergent condition than women and women are consistently diagnosed later in life

### **-ANNA WESSELY INTRODUCTION**

**Our guest today is Anna Wessely, Chief Technology Officer at Digonex, a pricing technology company and TLCC 2023 sponsor. I've known Anna for over 20 years, way back to my Kennedy Center days and her early Tessitura days, where she was the 8th employee hired and spent 18 years in various technology leadership roles, eventually as VP of Hosting Services as Tessitura grew into a global software company.**

**Anna is an adventurous thought leader whom I greatly admire. Not only is she a friend, counselor, and mentor, she is fearless. She has traveled the world for her career but also manages an impressive work/life balance as a single parent to two growing kids and a supportive adult child to aging parents.**

**When Shelly suggested this collaborative meeting between Women in Tech and the Neurodiversity/Mental Wellness groups, I immediately thought of Anna because she has not only built a career in Technology without a Computer Science degree, but has also maintained her good humor, grace, and patience while navigating the cacophony that is the intersection of art, technology, and life.**

- A lot of overlap between being ND and a Woman in the workplace
- Anna had a childhood diagnosis of dysgraphia, and one of the later in life ADHD diagnosis.
- Everyone's magic brain is different.
- Quite a career transformation at Tessitura alone, has a theatre degree.
  - Being neurodivergent helped with career transition, as she was able to identify things she was and wasn't good at.
  - Eliminated being successful at certain things.
  - Able to take in a lot of information and process it quickly.
  - Helps with crisis management.
- Assertive vs Aggressive Rhetorical Style
  - Can be a challenge as a woman in the workplace but she wasn't sheepish about what she wanted.
  - Adds value in HR Management—tell your employees the truth about how they're doing, one of the most ethical things we can do as a leader.
- Task timer—pomodoro clock, essentially- helpful for task paralysis.
- Outlook rules to different folders- check at certain times, but out of inbox.
- Recognize when you need to take notes by typing and notes by handwriting.
  - Whiteboards or window to make notes.
- Know which meetings/coworkers are going to get you dysregulated.
  - Stay off camera to do what you need to do if you need to pace, or your face goes red.

- Eating dysregulation.
  - Healthy options for working at home.
- For Travel
  - Fold dirty laundry and put away as you where them.
  - Task paralysis selecting outfits, mark which ones you're wearing and when.
- As Leaders:
  - Watch Heath Wilder's Neurodiversity in the Workplace Webinar.
  - Name issues when trying to change behavior in the team.
    - "I have ADHD, please stop talking."
  - Coach interview teams and provide resources on how to interview and what you're looking for.
    - Sometimes things we think of as anti-social are neuro divergent.
  - It can be incredibly difficult and exhausting to be on camera. Sometimes things that feel like team building aren't for everyone.

## QUESTIONS

- Assertive vs Aggressive... can be offensive, can come from both men and women. How do you find reassurance that you're still just being you?
  - It's hard. Internalized misogyny is real. Always have a couple of buddies that you can reach out to and as if you're out of line. Talk it through for reassurance. Do you have a male colleague who speaks the same way? If he can say it, you can say it.
- Emails!
  - Take out "I think", "just", "do you minds".... "de-ladyfy" your emails
- How do you handle "productivity" tools like Slack where everything seems like noise?
  - Two slack modes... either on multitasking brain and can take all of it or can take none of it. Manage your notifications and determine if you can handle them.
  - Make sure that the notification settings are curated to your ability.
  - But your status as something so people know you're doing concentrated time.
  - Make channel groupings and twist them closed.
- How can someone navigate neurodivergence when their workday is often reactionary to outside circumstances such as other department's objectives, or customer objectives?
  - Take a minute to prioritize, and it becomes mini tasks throughout the day. Put everything else somewhere where you can find it, but out of your mind. Set slack reminders. Make mini pockets of planned work.
  - From Shelly: Use the colored flags in outlook to categorize emails called "Needs re-read", "Low Strain Project", "High Strain Project".
- What do you say to people who are intolerant of emotional dysregulation?
  - Different when you're working from home vs at the office. Also challenging because people consider it a weakness vs a passion.
  - Be honest and say when you're sad vs mad or are dysregulated.

- End the conversation and reschedule.
- What made you decide to seek your second diagnosis for ADHD and how has that impacted you to know that some of your traits can be attributed to dysgraphia and some to ADHD?
  - Her son was diagnosed with ADHD. Google started popping up articles about women in her age group with ADHD and many symptoms spoke to her that were far away from dysgraphia.
- How do you deal with "challenging" coworkers in an in-person meeting?
  - Schedule in a lot of breaks for meet-ups, schedule breaks after meetings you know will be challenging.
  - From Nancy: A vendor who is a bully, their way or the highway. On Friday, they hijacked and agenda. It escalated to an area that was uncomfortable. If you take yourself off camera and walk away for a moment, it can help. Don't ignore the warnings in your mind.
  - From Nicki: Call out the toxic behavior. It can often stop.
  - From Laura: Let out your stress so it doesn't stay in your body and affect your health. Great book called "Burnout- The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle" by Emily and Amelia Nagoski. Finish the stress cycle after the meeting.
- I appreciate the note about switching career paths, and being able to let things go when you're not good at them. The shame and school-girl fault of failing is alleviated in that perspective.
  - Change management and transformational management skill set can help with the transition.
  - See and take the exit ramps when they make sense.
  - Also another place where you need some buddies.
    - Salary negotiations, resume, and cover letter writing, taking new jobs—make yourself bigger! Take up the space.
- What do you do when your supervisor calls you rude on your evaluation because of your direct communication style?
  - Depends on the relationship with the supervisor.
  - Ask some male friends if it's a sexist comment.
  - Practice what you're going to say.
  - If you have a good relationship with them, call them on it.
  - If you have friends in HR, or someone with experience in HR, bounce things off them.
  - Bosses loom large and others may feel at a disadvantage.
  - What if she's female?
    - From Nancy: Walk away, put your thoughts together, and then go back and have the conversation.
    - From Bobbi: Use the same argument back. (Internalized misogyny)