

Alison Dean (00:10):

TheoremOne is the leading innovation and engineering firm for the Fortune 1000. We design, build and deliver enterprise-scale technology solutions and are very excited to present The Breakthrough Podcast, an ongoing series where we interview technology leaders to share their experiences and perspectives on what's next in tech.

Alison Dean (00:39):

Welcome to The Breakthrough. I'm Alison Dean, VP of operations at TheoremOne. And today we are talking with Sarah Richardson, currently the SVP, CIO at Tivity Health, as well as the founder of Concierge Leadership. She sent me her favorite quote, "What would you attempt if you knew you could not fail?" So hello, Sarah.

Sarah Richardson (01:00):

Hello, Alison. Thank you for having me on the show today.

Alison Dean (01:03): Of course, I would like to know what that quote means to you.

Sarah Richardson (01:06):

That quote was given to me by one of my mentors when I was at HCA when I was embarking upon my very first CIO role. And he said, "Hey, I have something for you." And it's this box. I'm like, oh no, it's another pen because people always feel like you need a pen as a present. And it's this pewter plaque that said that. And, that first time you're terrified to get that executive job, and you're like, I have to get this right. It didn't scare me to get promoted in the past, but this was my first executive role. And he said, you got this. And I was like, okay, this little pewter plaque to me was this huge safety net of the fact that people don't promote you to watch you fail. They don't put you in scenarios where you can't be successful because that's never the intent, and it certainly wasn't the case in this scenario.

Sarah Richardson (01:48):

So very fortunate to be able to be given the opportunity to go forth, but be given the confidence to do it too. And so I've carried that with me ever since, and that's why I share it pretty broadly with others because you know what, go for it. You're not alone, and really, the worst thing you could do is fail. And even then, you'll still land on your feet.

Alison Dean (02:05):

I dig it. All right. So I want to take things back to your college years since you graduated with a focus on hospitality management. And I do see a duty of care theme here happening. But I want to know how that leads into your IT career.

Sarah Richardson (02:18):

I love the question about college because I went to UNLB. And UNLB is still, to me, the top place to go for a hospitality degree in this country. And it's because of proximity to where everything happens. And I love to travel. I love hospitality. I love the hotel business, all the things about it. So it made sense to go there for school. And I'll tell you at 18, I was like, I'm going to go open hotels around the world. That was my thing. I was going to go work for Hilton or whomever.

Sarah Richardson (02:44):

And then in the mid-'90s, yes, that's how long ago I graduated from college, all the major developments happening in Las Vegas, a mega-resort was opening every single year, if not more often. And so there was this side of me that's like, why would you leave town to go where everything is happening?

Sarah Richardson (03:02):

And I was already there and already had a network established, except at that age, you don't know what a network is when you're 21. So what I love about the program at the William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration is at least back then, you were required to have 1000 hours of work experience and a 250-hour internship. So you were working while you're going to school. And most of us worked full-time and went to school full-time, it was pretty interesting. I didn't have friends who didn't have a job in college because it was part of the curriculum.

Sarah Richardson (03:25):

So I graduate, and I'm working in room reservations in PBX, and I worked swing shift after school, basically. I learned how to program the systems, Alison. After hours, the techs go home, and things break. And so I learned how to do all the interfaces and all the programming and just all the random things that can make the world keep running the front desk, room, reservations, ticketing, VIP services, all those things they had to keep going.

Sarah Richardson (03:47):

So I learned how to do the bug fixes really at night and the break-fix type of things. It led to graduation. I was already working for those leaders who said, we want you to stay with us. And here I thought I was going to go be a casino host or something fancy. And they said, actually stay here with us because this isn't something that people normally choose as their longer-term career, but you're really good at it, and

you're capable with people. And it was years before I didn't work in the basement of any place that I worked, by the way.

Sarah Richardson (04:13):

So IT happened to me versus me happening to IT. And I just stayed with it because the progression was pretty significant, and there were zero women doing what I was doing at the time. That's actually an advantage because the human side of what we need to do every day is huge. And I think women just have a natural advantage of having empathy and leadership skills that allow people to come together more naturally.

Alison Dean (04:37):

What a great story. I had no idea. So you recently joined Tivity Health. In my opinion, it's a collection of wellness brands. I read that there were plans for a digital engagement platform, as well as a CRM. What else is on the roadmap and where are you starting first?

Sarah Richardson (04:54):

So what I love about Tivity is that when you dig the layer down, and you see, yes, it's a bunch of wellness and fitness. But the brand of silver sneakers is three decades old. And people that use it and know it are emotionally attached to it. That kind of brand loyalty and the lifetime value of a product like that is significant.

Sarah Richardson (05:13):

And so we have a lot of digital engagement today. We actually have our members use our platforms, they use our apps, they take live classes, they do all of these different things in digital environments, as well as now going back into the gyms and doing things in person. So we have CRM and we are elevating it to the next level of omnichannel using Redpoint. And we have Snowflake for our data analytics, putting that in place, using stream to connect those two elements really elegantly so that our data is clean and it's well managed across the organization.

Sarah Richardson (05:42):

But one of the biggest things we want to do over this year moving forward to what you mentioned is create this digital engagement space. So today, if you go to our website, use our app, you go there, choose the things you want to do. And it's very useful. It's very helpful. When we think about that true member portal experience, you want to jump in, and based on your activity and your behavior and the things you do with us, it starts to create that customization. That is just what Alison wants when she walks in the door. So we are adding functionality and engagement and utilization opportunities.

Sarah Richardson (06:11):

So then, not only are you a silver sneakers member because you like fitness, but we also realize that not everybody wants to do fitness. They might want to do recipes, they may want to hang out in community groups, they may want to read articles on wellness, they may want to connect with others in terms of hobbies and activities and all the different things that allow us to say, oh, you want a one-on-one personal trainer or a coach? We can connect you to those services too.

Sarah Richardson (06:34):

So we're starting to expand the offerings inside our platforms, not to just be about fitness, but to be about overall engagement. And we're starting with our senior populations because we know that access and loneliness and community are some of the biggest factors in helping people live longer, healthier, productive lives.

Alison Dean (06:50):

I dig it. Okay. You previously worked for several healthcare companies, obviously that industry has significant regulations. Does that experience affect how you think about wellness and how you should prioritize the projects that are currently slated?

Sarah Richardson (07:07):

Yeah. It's interesting, for anyone who's worked in healthcare for a long period of time, we are beholden to regulatory compliance measures all of the time. They're there for a reason and we know that, especially when we serve more vulnerable populations like our seniors. There's an extra responsibility that comes with looking after those populations. But you think about in general, how we prioritize certain types of outreach, there's a lot of conversation about social determinants of health, historically called those multiple comorbidities or the things that create those scenarios.

Sarah Richardson (07:36):

So if you don't have access to good healthcare, if you don't have access to healthy food or you don't have access to transportation, those are social determinants that then create additional acuity levels of some of these comorbidities. So what are the things that we can do to get in front of all of those? We already know that it's safer for people to stay at home. For seniors it's a safer environment, it's more familiar, higher quality in terms of being exposed to different scenarios. People feel more comfortable there.

Sarah Richardson (08:01):

So if you can start to do things like bring the experience into the home, bring in certain levels of care into the home, be able to deliver things to people's houses because they don't have a way to get there, help them get to their appointments in a safer environment, home health monitoring, there's a whole slew of things that can happen there. But before all of that happens, you have to be able to say, what are the

things that are making people sick? What are the things that are creating the biggest risk for others out there?

Sarah Richardson (08:28):

So think about this, obesity is our number one issue in the United States. 66% of Americans are overweight or obese. It was an important factor in being a risk for COVID. And we didn't talk about a lot of those things. We talked about all these other factors. And so for us, think about the importance of fitness in your life, fitness, and wellness, eating healthy, getting enough water, getting enough sleep, having healthy food, all those different factors help to keep you healthier.

Sarah Richardson (08:25):

And then you start pairing up with the right environment. So the right connections that make you want to do those things, then yes, it allows us to say, we can put all of these things at the fingertips of our members and they have choices and options for how they want to live their lives.

Alison Dean (09:06):

Yeah. And I think you do have a little bit more flex just because you're not necessarily in the healthcare space, right?

Sarah Richardson (09:13):

Yeah.

Alison Dean (09:14):

Room to explore and be more creative with how you solve things.

Sarah Richardson (09:19):

Yeah. I'm not dealing with patients coming in to see their physicians and helping to get them out of the hospital faster. The reduction in the average length of stay isn't important to me because now I feel like I'm more on the actual front end of it. My job is to keep you out of the hospital in the first place. And that's not because we can coordinate to offer our services where people come to your homes, this is about fitness and wellness and nutrition and alternative medicine. And all the things that again, allow you to stay healthier in the first place, succeeding in front of that curve.

Alison Dean (09:47):

What do you think is the most crucial aspect of a company's IT strategy, since obviously you've been doing this since college?

Sarah Richardson (09:55):

Here's what's so funny about that question. I teach strategy for CHIME, for the College of Healthcare Information Management Executives, both from a CIO boot camp perspective, but also to some of the recent college grads who take some of our programs. And here's what I say, strategy to me is about knowing what not to do truly. Well, sure, there are tons of great ideas out there but if you think about the essence of it, it's really knowing what not to do. And there's a distinction between strategy and operational effectiveness. And I think strategy is about making the right choices and trade-offs, and it's about deliberately choosing to be different.

Sarah Richardson (10:29):

When we go into some of our planning sessions or innovation sessions, part of my responsibility is to shut down bad ideas, but not in a way that's because I know better than you, it's like, hey, by the way, this is what this means if you choose this instead, and I've got great partners in that too, our Chief Experience Innovation Officer, our strategy officer, we all get together. And the strategy officer is always super excited because he's like, I love when somebody else says no besides me. So I would always say the most important thing about strategy, know what you should not be doing.

Alison Dean (10:56):

I like that. So obviously TheoremOne is a consultancy. And so it's always of interest to me how other companies make the decision to bring on external consultants or not? How have you approached that throughout your career?

Sarah Richardson (11:10):

We are really good at certain things in our company. And what I love about us is we know what we're good at, and we know what we're not good at. And so the things we're good at, we go for, we do it, we build it, if it doesn't exist, we have someone else build it. We'll take it back in, we manage it. And then there are the things where we're like, hey, guess what? We're re-platforming part of our whole health living. We know that we are going to go after mainstream products that replace three things that we built when once upon a time they didn't exist. And we don't have a vendor management office. We don't have a team that sits there and says, I'm going to lead that RFP. I can't wait to gather requirements from the business, the tech, the information security, and the analytics team. There's not the person. There's not that group in house right now.

Sarah Richardson (11:50):

So we need to gather all the requirements and then we need to put out the RFP and then we need to score the RFP. And by the way, we then need to know the whole orientation of this project. We could do it, but we know we wouldn't do it awesome.

Alison Dean (12:02):

Right.

Sarah Richardson (12:03):

So we are using a third party that we've worked with for years and I'm newer to the company, but we have some amazing relationships established. Guess what, we're going to let someone else do that for us. We're totally involved, but we are not going to do that. And so that's what I love about who we are, is we're like, yeah, this makes sense or no, that doesn't make sense. And we do that even with some of our teams, if we know we need to refactor something, how long is this going to take us? Eight months? Let's go hire a couple of people who are like a tiger team and just do it.

Sarah Richardson (12:30):

Sometimes we decide to teach us how to fish along the way, other times we're like, go ahead and stock the pond and Ben teaches how to fish. So it's always a very deliberate decision when we do it. We're not afraid of knowing what we know and knowing what we don't know, because that allows us to be way more flexible on some of the bigger things that we don't want to give away.

Alison Dean (12:48):

Right. It makes sense. Your answer is similar to that of most people, it generally depends. Okay. So how you sell the vision that technology transformation will improve people's lives across the business units and potentially drive revenue, although that's probably not the real driver, but...

Sarah Richardson (13:06):

It's funny how people don't like to talk about the revenue aspect of what we do. But my top mentor of all time, Joe Scarlet, he really brought the tractor supply company mainstream, and then also public, which was the most successful I think IPO at the time. He wrote a book when he was at tractor supply, was like, work hard, have fun, make money. Those are the three things you need to worry about. Just do it. If you're not in business to make money, then why are you in business? Because that becomes a bi-product of the things that we do. Everything else tied to it, of course, but if there's no fun, there's no business. So I would say it's okay to talk about the fact that yes, what we do produces revenue and a lot of other great benefits. But what I love about talking about the vision of digital or my favorite digital transformation.

Sarah Richardson (13:45):

So our whole team agrees that this is not about digital transformation. We've been using digital since the advent of digitized products of computer science degrees, way back in the day. By the way, it was not my first degree. But we talk about it in terms of digital evolution. And here's why, digital evolution is the intentional choice of a business to rapidly accelerate the organizational rate of digital adoption and change.

And when you think about that simultaneous creation, renovation, the marshaling of all of our digital products, alongside creation and flexibility of new products, maturation of platforms, new go-to market strategies, that's really what it's about for us.

Sarah Richardson (14:23):

So the vision is shared. Digital evolution is not an IT initiative. We are that partner, that enabler throughout that journey with the organization. But by no means are we transforming something, it's already there.

Alison Dean (14:37):

Okay. I like it.

Sarah Richardson (14:40):

My two cents. That's my version of the world. So again, my Chief Innovation Experience Officer, Stacy Santo, and I were like, we're evolving, we're not transforming. We are just taking it to a new playing field.

Alison Dean (14:50):

I like it. I like evolve and I like transform. And I guess for me, depending on the project, I might comment differently. A transform was the right word or evolve was the right word.

Sarah Richardson (15:05):

I mean, if I was bringing you your fitness at home and the screen popped up out of nowhere and you were touching all these things, to me, that'd be pretty transformative.

Alison Dean (15:11):

There you go.

Sarah Richardson (15:12):

But right now you're logging into your smart TV or your device and you're clicking the app or the thing and you're registering, or it's still at 2.0. So to me, it's more about the evolution of where we're headed, but when we get to the 3.0 and beyond, and the VR components, then I think I'm transforming what I'm doing every day.

Alison Dean (15:27):

All right. So then what has been the most impactful digital evolution project that you've worked on?

Sarah Richardson (15:35):

You're going to laugh because when I saw you sent me this question, I'm like, I opened four hotels in the '90s and an airline, the airline went bankrupt in like a year. It's there, but it didn't really go anywhere except a couple of cities.

Sarah Richardson (15:48):

Opening a brand new facility, huge, thousands of rooms, thousands of employees, getting ready for that is still to this day the most either transformation or evolutionary or just brass tax work I have ever done. And I'm grateful that I did it when I didn't know that it was a big deal. It was in my early 20s through my early thirties where that's all I knew. "Hey, we're going to go open up a 3,500 room hotel." Okay. And you just knew what you had to do back in the '90s. Someone just called you and said, "Alison, hey, we're going to cross the street to open this hotel." All right. And you may or may not know half the people on that team and the things that are going on, especially when you get an early enough in a new project like that, it's still rebar and cement.

Sarah Richardson (16:30):

There's not just slot machines and blinky lights and all these amazing entertainers in the building. You're crawling through ducts with a hard hat, connecting wire sometimes because back then you're the smallest person that'll fit through the opening. To me, that was because it all had to happen exactly on time and exactly right. And there was something crazy every day that would pop up. So you just figure out how to handle it. So I'd say opening a large-scale mega-resort property in Las Vegas is by far the most challenging project I have ever worked on.

Alison Dean (16:59):

And what did you take away from that experience that translated into future projects that you worked on?

Sarah Richardson (17:07):

It's a saying from Colin Powell, once I heard him say it, I'm like, oh yeah, I've been thinking about that for years. And it's one of his 13 rules of leadership. It can be done.

Alison Dean (17:17):

I like it.

Sarah Richardson (17:18):

There's always a way to figure it out. That doesn't always mean you should, there are caveats to that. But at the end of the day, it can be done.

Alison Dean (17:24):

Yeah. I think now based on all the different implementations that I've now done and what that spectrum has looked like, now in my mind, I would totally buy into that. It's not so much fear I have anymore. It's more of a curiosity, how is that really going to work and how is that going to work most efficiently so that I'm not doing things two times or three times, et cetera? So I can't say that I was listening to Colin Powell say that and going, yes, I'm right there with you. So are there any other projects that come to mind that really left an impression on you?

Sarah Richardson (18:02):

Yes. And I'll share. Gosh, was this maybe after 2010? Once you hit your mid to late 40s, you start to forget when things actually happen in your life. What comes to mind most prevalently for me was working in union-based facilities. And it's not because the union's impossible to work with, it's really not. If you know how to have relationships with people, guess what, that's one year stakeholder groups that you better have a great relationship with. And I was fortunate to be able to build one. But getting an entire group of clinicians to want to do something new and different that they don't believe is going to provide better care, there's no evidence at that point to show that electronic medical records were going to be better for the patient. It took us years to get that, to get these dialogues really figured out.

Sarah Richardson (18:51):

And I'll tell you today, it's still an issue. If you are running a major hospital or healthcare system and you are doing an upgrade or a change or anything that is significantly different within your medical records space, you always have to prove why it will be better or different. And if it's not, then you have to say, well, regulatory compliance, safety perspective. These are the things that it's going to endeavor to allow us to be able to produce. And then being very creative with how to adapt those technologies to meet your clinicians where they are.

Sarah Richardson (19:18):

So we all get the components that are required. I think when you really have to intrinsically meet every single individual and understand where they come from, that takes a lot of time and energy to be able to do that well. And so the requirements around using technology to take care of patients from a documentation perspective are always a space where we can be doing things better and differently and partnering to figure out how the patient stays at the center of that activity.

Alison Dean (19:42):

And one day transforming that?

Sarah Richardson (19:44):

one day, transforming, yes. That goes back to the space of you wake up, your body gets scanned by your home scanner, and then it can self-document based on its known history of you as a patient and all that, is

inter-operably in one place, in one fantastic Cloud and an avatar type of scenario that we, the patient manage ourselves.

Sarah Richardson (20:03):

Imagine if you knew everything about yourself, and then you had the ability to share that out collectively and said, oh, this person needs this. We will get there, I actually truly believe that in my lifetime, I will have an avatar version of myself that tells me how healthy I am and what to focus on. And that alone will allow us to live a sorbent amount of years greater than we do today. And if you've ever read Yuval Noah Harari in Sapiens, in his book, and he talks about some of these things, what happens when we live to be 125, because you 3D print a new heart or a kidney, or the things that break. Our bones can probably last much longer, we've got some spaces, but it's our organs that give out. So what happens when you and I can be 125 years old?

Alison Dean (20:42):

I didn't think that this was going to go there, but it doesn't surprise me that it did, but I was not prepared for that. And now my mind is going in a thousand places and I'm like, whoa, that's a trip to think about. But you're right. I think that that's absolutely not unlikely in our lifetimes.

Sarah Richardson (20:56):

Yeah.

Alison Dean (20:57):

Wow. That's interesting. We're going to continue on the healthcare convo. So Tony Dottino, who's the head of the Dottino Consulting Group. He was recently on the podcast and he has this question for you. "How do you prioritize your projects?" He says, "I've worked in healthcare for 15 years. And all I have heard is IT is not giving us what we need."

Sarah Richardson (21:21):

So it depends. And here's why, the bigger your organization, the harder it is to make decisions about what to do, because everybody has a bunch of good ideas. Let's just say Alison, that every department or every team has narrowed down their group of requests. They said no to 10, they picked three. What happens when you have 20 stakeholder groups that have a top three? So it's not actually up to IT to decide what the priorities should be. That is not the role of technology. They do not decide what is most important for the organization. We are responsible for saying what technologies enable it or what would that look like or what could it take to get there? It can be done.

Sarah Richardson (21:58):

Here's what that means. I teach you part of the conversation, but we should not own overall governance for the organization because I can't tell you that a certain type of therapy for a patient or a research project is more important than another. What I can tell you is how clean I can keep that data and how readily accessible that data can be to you and how quickly we can change that data into different modeling scenarios and present it to you in ways that allow you to make very thoughtful statistical evidence-based decisions. That's my job. So once we decide what we're going to do, then I can get that to you.

Sarah Richardson (22:29):

Now, sometimes it's harder to get there for myriad reasons. Maybe you don't have a fancy data lake or a data warehouse or a data location that allows you to aggregate the data elegantly and produce it in a way that's readable at your fingertips. But if that's what you want in an organization, then let your team get there. And too often, we make trade-offs. I've lived in scenarios where IT was at the bottom of the funding pool because we thought of technology as a commodity. And now I would say to every organization, are you not a technology company that has other things, because what do you do that doesn't involve technology every day? And that's not because IT wants to be in first place, it's because you have to invest in the things that drive your business.

Alison Dean (23:07):

Yeah. I totally agree. If it's not already shifting dramatically in most organizations, I think it's only a matter of time because senior leadership now really understands how imperative it is to have IT a part of all conversations, just because everything is so technology-dependent in some way, shape or form technology is now a part of all of our conversations. And if it's not a question what the business is doing. So you posted a LinkedIn article titled, why being psychologically astute is important. And I want you to speak about how this has affected your leadership style through the years.

Sarah Richardson (23:42):

Yes. I love to write blogs. Mostly about how we operate within our environment. I love technology. Clearly I've been doing technology my whole life, but I don't get excited writing about technology. I feel like there's a whole bunch of people who do all of that and I read their research and I talked to our consultants and our vendor partners. And there's lots of people are talking about API-based data infrastructure, which is where we're headed and codebase and low code environments. That's all very cool because we're doing it. But when I think about what it takes to make all those things be successful, everything we do comes back to one common factor, that is people.

Sarah Richardson (24:16):

Remember the same mentor who gave me the pewter, what would you do if you couldn't fail? I said, what is the hardest part of your job? You've been around all these years, you're amazing at what you do, what's the hardest thing? He goes, people. I was waiting for something way more interesting to come out of his mouth. And he's like, nope, it's the people. He's like, you have to do with people, you get anything done

you want to do. And that started me on this journey of really deciding to understand how people tick, the human side of change and why change is so hard for people, why we make decisions that we make and what it means to have empathy, what it means to listen.

Sarah Richardson (24:52):

Oh my gosh. If you just listen and you hear what isn't being said, and you change even your cadence, you'll notice how I purposely changed my voice. You just learn so much, ask open-ended questions, be curious, ask follow-ups, don't assume you know anything. Be nice, be kind, there's so much there that allows us to understand the environment better.

Sarah Richardson (25:16):

I'm fortunate in that the team that I have come to work with at Tivity has 68 full-time colleagues in IT and about 30 contractors. And I made a commitment to meet one-on-one with every single full-time colleagues for 30 minutes. one-on-one within the first 100 days. I'm pretty happy to report that after six and a half weeks, I am over the 50th percentile. And what's awesome is guess what, I am learning everything there is to know about the orgs, I'm asking five questions. Tell me what you do in your own words. What do you love? What drives you crazy? What can we do better? And what do you need me to know? Thematically there's five things, and it's not five things we can't fix or can't do something about. So then you present the data back and say, thank you for taking the time, here's what I heard. And then my other favorite question. So what do we want to do about it? And guess what, 68 really smart people plus 30 contractors, they know.

Alison Dean (26:07):

Well, they all have ideas, I'm sure.

Sarah Richardson (26:09):

So let's figure it out. And this is where we get to prioritize our own work. What's number one, because we're not going to fix all five. Maybe two we're going to go after the balance of this year. Okay. We want to mature our Agile, Scrum methodology and get to that 2.0 version, let's do it. Oh, we want to create greater communication channels and decision-making capabilities, great, let's do that too. So people aren't asking to fly a rocket ship to the moon and come back unharmed, they're saying I want to mature our processes and I want to know more about what's going on around here.

Alison Dean (26:38):

Low hanging fruit, right.

Sarah Richardson (26:39):

And you learn all of that by being psychologically astute. Ask. So therefore I don't think it's groundbreaking, but boy, think about how many people miss out on that opportunity because it takes time to do it.

Alison Dean (26:51):

Yeah. Something that I started doing recently was having strategic conversations across all the departments in the organization with the senior leaders. Just because, especially in my seat at the house, it's fundamental that I know the things that are stressing them out or the things that are top of mind for them and to see where I can help lend support. Sometimes it's just a therapy session, but all these things are very helpful, I think, to make people feel heard and supported. And I think when you're driving any successful business, it's crucial.

Sarah Richardson (27:26):

Yeah. I'm dealing with the business owners too. So it's not like I'm just focusing on IT, I got IT, then I've got five separate questions for my business owners. I meet with every single business owner that has a stake in the game too. And so are they 12, 14 hour days right now? Yeah. But here's the thing, when you love what you do, you don't really notice how much time it takes to get it done. You just do it because it's the right thing to do.

Alison Dean (27:45):

Amen. Okay. What do you want your direct reports to remember you for? I think we should almost split this because there are the direct reports that you work with day to day, but also for Concierge Leadership, there are different relationships that you want people to remember you for too. So maybe I would put that as two questions for you.

Sarah Richardson (28:04):

Okay. So it's probably fair to also let people know Concierge Leadership is a private coaching firm that I own and lead. And then I have my day job of being a CIO.

Alison Dean (28:14):

Because she's not busy enough. Yeah.

Sarah Richardson (28:16):

Because I'm busy enough, and they are compatible because guess what, you're coaching your team all day long anyway. So why not monetize it back to guess what, make money, monetize it. So here's what's interesting. I have relationships to this day with at least somebody from every company I've ever worked for that was a direct report of mine. And one that's still lasting and matters, true friendships. And here's where I'll say transform because I think what we do sometimes, we transform people into not thinking that

they were able to do something, we transform them into a space that allows them to believe they have superpowers and get them done. And that's one of the things I do with Concierge Leadership.

Sarah Richardson (28:52):

If I asked you, what's your superpower? What are you good at? I've done that my whole career with people because I was taught that by bosses that I've had in my life. I was very fortunate to have probably one of the most amazing bosses of all time as my first real corporate boss. So I learned from the best initially. I tell you all that because people need to know that it's about them and not you. They need to know you care and that you put them first always. And that's what I would want anybody to know in terms of a team that we're on together. I don't believe in hierarchy, I'm not a big direct report person other than the fact that we need to have those structures for various reasons.

Sarah Richardson (29:29):

And even now I've only been with my team almost two months. They all know, we all know, we care about each other as people first. When you do that, the work gets done. So it's pretty fascinating and it's easier to make decisions. To me, my best friends are people I used to be on the same team with. And I get to see one of them next week in person, we're all vaccinated and headed off to an event. So if you're on the same team as me, then I want you to know, I care more about you than anything else as a person. And then if I'm coaching you, I want you to walk away believing you can do things that you were never able to do or didn't believe you were capable of doing before and actually making them happen.

Alison Dean (30:03):

Is there anything for people out there that are embarking on a new role as a leader, what you think would be most powerful for them to hear from you to set them off on the right track?

Sarah Richardson (30:17):

Go for it. With wild abandon, go for it and be ridiculously curious and know that you're capable of doing something. And I say that because especially women, we believe we have to have all of the answers all the time. We have to believe that we're 100% prepared for a job opportunity. And I cannot tell you how many times I coach clients who say, wow, there's this really cool opportunity that I want to go after, but I don't know how to do the third bullet point from the bottom. I'm like, nobody does. I look at it I'm like, I don't know how to do that either. And who cares? And men will be like, whoa, that looks like a pretty cool job. They even haven't read the job description or they may be 40% capable of doing it and they just go for it because you're going to figure it out when you get there, the company hiring you is not going to hire someone who is not able to get through the interview process, especially at this level, it's four months of interviews. You have the decision to go there.

Sarah Richardson (31:07):

And so when I coach people about going after a new role, Alison, or thinking about an opportunity, I said, they need you as much as you need them. So you don't go in with ego saying, I'm the perfect person for the job. You go in saying, here's what I bring to the table. And then if you're the right person, they pick you. And if you're not, so what, you don't and that's okay, because it's always an experience. And we've all been in jobs that we took and we thought we were going to love, it turned out to be horrible. We also took jobs that we weren't so sure we were going to be great, which turned out to be those experiences of our lives.

Sarah Richardson (31:34):

As you grow, you realize what questions to ask, what experiences to go after. If you're willing to ask questions that might give you an answer you don't want in the interview process because that gives you the criteria to say, I don't believe this is the right place for me to go. No matter how shiny that object may be, really know why you're going after something and what it's going to bring to you. I always tell people, what is your list of criteria? And score it. And so one of my girlfriends recently took a new role with a new company because her other company did, let's be honest, a reduction in force.

Sarah Richardson (32:06):

And then, executive level, boom, a whole bunch of them just laid off. And number one criteria, she didn't want to have to move because kids are in high school. So guess what, she found a new role, a great company, and doesn't have to move. And so that took other companies off the table where she actually had an offer in hand and was like, I can't, I don't want to move. Let me see if anything else pops up and it did. And so not everybody has that type of flexibility. But when you do, stay true to yourself, stay honest because compromising ourselves is really honestly the worst thing you can do.

Alison Dean (32:37):

Yes to that. I want to talk about projects that you're especially interested in as you move forward in your career, since you've done many, many things at this point, is there anything that is on the brain right now for you? What does that look like?

Sarah Richardson (32:52):

Yeah. So I'm actually referencing material because I'm a research nerd. People say, what do you do? What do you do for fun? I'm like, well, strangely I actually research different topics that I think are of interest in different scenarios. I also scuba dive and hike and golf and all that stuff, but I'm always very curious where money is flowing into high tech and healthcare. I'm a big fan of cybersecurity, even though I'm not a practitioner. I got to do it for a period of time in the mid-2000s, enough to actually be like, wow, I'm pretty sure I'm not the person you want keeping everything safe. Not because I'm not capable, but because that constant, no matter how safe you are, you're never safe enough. Which is why I think women are so good at security because we always have that top of mind.

Sarah Richardson (33:34):

Women are naturally inclined to look for the safe way to do something and in security, that's actually a really good thing, especially cybersecurity. So when young girls come to me and say, "If I was to go into IT, what would you have me do?" And I said, go into cybersecurity. It will always be the biggest thing out there that we have going on.

Sarah Richardson (33:51):

Now, if I tried it again in my 20s, I'd probably be like, yes, I can do this. But at the time I was already mid-30s and found out I was too old to join the FBI. So I was like, well, never mind. That was a true story. I was like, I'm too old to join the FBI. Cybersecurity has received \$41 billion of funding in the past decade, three billion of it in 2020, and digital health, another 53 billion, and data intelligence, 80 billion.

Sarah Richardson (34:15):

So I'm pretty excited about data intelligence, especially, and the analytical tools and methods companies are using to deploy better understanding and information to improve both services and investments. And this is not even fancy buzzwords about AI and NLP and whatnot. This is about being able to use the smallest amount of data sets possible and then pulling in both social behaviors and opinions to create recommendations or scenarios or customizations based on who people really are. There is so much information out there about us that all these algorithms and some of these bigger companies know more about us than we do. And I'm okay with it.

Sarah Richardson (34:53):

If you heard a recent podcast with Draxter Ford and Bill Russell on This Week in Health IT, Drax is like, you let Amazon take care of vaccinations may have been done in a week. We live in a house every day, you're right, I should have dropped off a package and stuck me with my shot. So I'm really curious about both industry applications and data analytics, everything from truly the pharmaceutical research components that we can do to help people with certain conditions, as well as just you being able to have access to the things you need to have access to more efficiently.

Sarah Richardson (35:22):

So I love data intelligence, the data sciences. I love keeping it safe. I think that's a really, really big deal. And then in healthcare in general, you start bringing that digital component of security and also intellect. It's an unstoppable space to be thinking about. So I pay attention. I joined Roundtable, do some VC, different things with people, and then figured out where it makes sense to plug it into my world too because I have to keep it safe. How do we use our data to make better decisions? So those three together to me are the perfect triangle of where things are headed and where I still want to spend a lot of my effort and energy.

Alison Dean (35:52):

Okay. And you just talked about the intersection between healthcare privacy. Does any of that concern you or is it a point of where everything intersects, that concerns you at all?

Sarah Richardson (36:05):

Do you use any free social apps?

Alison Dean (36:07):

Well, yeah. I mean, hello, social dilemma.

Sarah Richardson (36:09):

Then you're fine, your information's already out there. Here's the thing, the more data that's out there about ourselves and the things about us, then the more solutions we have available at our fingertips. There is no such thing as privacy anymore. And I don't mean that we don't create privacy for HIPAA and compliance and PHI and PII and all those walled-off environments, I get that. But in the general sense of who we are as humans every single day, there is no such thing as privacy. There's a level of what we choose to share. But at the end of the day, if you carry a cell phone, you are being tracked, all the time.

Sarah Richardson (36:41):

That's okay, if I get kidnapped, maybe someone will find me more easily or I don't know, but I mean, I'm almost 47 years old, by the way, my data is out there. So no, I want the drone to bring my prescription to the door if I'm sick, because I really don't want to go outside if I have bronchitis or strep throat or whatever ails us in different scenarios. So it's already there and they use it for good. Let the cybersecurity experts keep the bad guys out as much as possible. But if you want to know something about me, you can pretty much Google it and it's all there.

Alison Dean (37:13):

Okay. So you just talked about drones delivering scripted medication. Is there anything that we haven't talked about in the world of innovation that is captivating you right now?

Sarah Richardson (37:24):

This is not about innovation, this is about social responsibility and technology will allow us to get there, especially when we don't allow the reimbursement models to be the hurdle. And so I'm a big fan of seniors as you well know, it's one of the reasons I joined my company because of that social responsibility to seniors. People want to age in place. And if we are truly creating environments where people can live

longer, healthier, happier lives, and they want to do it independently, then what is our responsibility to make sure those people can stay home?

Sarah Richardson (37:56):

And here's what gets crazy though, if you do get ill, what are your options? There's no such thing as insurance-backed, private care at home. There's a component, but I think it's like 100 days that Medicare will even cover your skilled nursing facility. And I'm an easy example, my mother last year because she died of cancer.

Sarah Richardson (38:15):

When she was going through chemotherapy, she had to get to and from her appointments, which were 30 miles away. When she got home, guess what, super sick for a few days. So, people who have been through it understand all the outcomes from chemo. All the medications, keeping them on track, making sure she's eating, making sure she's getting hydration. The list goes on and on and everybody's experience is different. And so what stinks about a terminal cancer diagnosis is that there's an end date.

Sarah Richardson (38:42):

I think about some of my friends who have elder care responsibilities that are long-term illnesses. If you can't afford private care or you don't have the ability to do a reverse mortgage and hope it doesn't run out, or you don't have a long-term insurance policy, or you don't have the other members to take care of you, you end up in a skilled nursing facility that's often state-run. And those caregivers have the best intentions, but sometimes the ratios are 22:1.

Sarah Richardson (39:05):

So fortunate enough that we had private care and family care and able to take care of her through the end of life. But you know what, wow, that was a monumental undertaking. And I'm like, I don't have kids, there better be a robot in 2060 that can do those things for me, not because I'm dying of a terminal illness, but because I'm just old and I need help with things. And so let's use technology to truly create spaces where people can live independently and age in place. And you may even be younger and have a chronic illness where you need help, but let's create methodologies for people to have independent living and not be beholden to medical facilities to receive that ongoing care all the time.

Alison Dean (39:50):

We shall see what happens. I can certainly speak to many instances in my own life where that would have been interesting to have as part of it. Good food for thought. Can you speak about a breakthrough that you had recently?

Sarah Richardson (40:03):

Yes. And this is a big deal to me because I'm super independent. I can do everything all the time, all by myself. No, you can't. I think it was actually a ladies panel that I was moderating for a group not too long ago. And it was about that point where you get to in your career where you may actually need to buy back your time. And it's okay to outsource someone doing your errands and someone doing your laundry and someone cleaning your house and someone doing your personal tasks.

Sarah Richardson (40:31):

And we do it in one form or another, but it was really this aha moment where I'm like, well, I already have a housekeeper, it's okay to hire a personal assistant 10 hours a week. It's okay to hire a social media manager. It's okay to have someone do my laundry. I can buy back my time so that I can do things like make sure I'm not missing my visits to the gym, I actually have a personal trainer too. So I pay someone to train me.

Sarah Richardson (40:54):

And you get to space like, I work hard enough, I'm successful enough that if I want time just to sit with my husband and have a glass of wine, or I want to go for a beach walk with him tonight. But I don't feel guilty about all the other things that are piled up that I haven't gotten to throughout the day. So the epiphany or the breakthrough is like, it's okay to buy back some of your own time if you can and you should. And there's no judgment on what you decide to buy back time to do.

Sarah Richardson (41:19):

one of my girlfriends hired a housekeeper so that she can walk her own dogs because she likes being with her dogs. They make her happy. But she's like, why am I hiring someone to walk my dogs so I can clean my house. She was like, I'm going to hire someone to clean the house so I can walk the dogs. And I'm having these conversations with a lot of my female friends and we're like, yeah, there's no judgment in how you spend that time. Just give it to yourself as a gift.

Alison Dean (41:43):

How I'm pondering this as well right now. Yes, indeed. All right. Well, I thank you so much for all the insights. Sarah, you definitely have planted many seeds for me. I appreciate all your candor.

Sarah Richardson (41:56):

Thank you, Allison.

Alison Dean (41:57):

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