ALISON DEAN (00:06):

Welcome to “The Breakthrough,” where we talk with technology leaders about their successes, struggles and everything in between. I'm Alison Dean, VP of Operations at TheoremOne. Today we are talking with Megan Prichard, currently the global head of autonomous ridesharing at Ford Motor Company and previously GM for Uber Air. She sent me her favorite quote, from Dr. Seuss:

“Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don't matter. And those who matter don't mind.”

Hello Megan!

MEGAN PRICHARD (00:38):

Hello, Alison. Thank you so much for having me today. Very excited to chat with you.

ALISON DEAN (00:42):

Yay! All right. And so what does that quote mean to you?

MEGAN PRICHARD (00:46):

It's really just about speaking your mind, being yourself, bringing your whole self into any room and saying what you mean. People are going to like it, or they're going to not — it doesn't matter because you just need to show up.

ALISON DEAN (00:57):

I dig it! When you sent it to me, I was like, “That's why I love her so much.” All right. So, has the pandemic affected project prioritization at all?

MEGAN PRICHARD (01:55):

I think with Ford, you see a situation where it is, you know, a hundred year old car company that's evolved much over time. There's a huge push forward to focus on electric and autonomous vehicles, which is smart because that's where the future's going. And so really leaning in hard there to drive value for shareholders is what Ford has been doing. And you've seen I'm sure recent announcements around investments in both spaces.

ALISON DEAN (02:26):

Right. So Ford obviously has a pretty notable history with innovation. What do you think the most crucial aspect of a company's IT strategy is?

MEGAN PRICHARD (02:35):

I personally think it is usability. So designing an entire system that is usable for the people at your company, functionally. What I see, all the time, is a lot of very good IT strategies, very smart IT strategies, but if it's something that rolls out and the employees of a company can't easily use it, they can't easily interface with it. Weird parallel things crop up, people start using other programs that aren't necessarily sanctioned by the company. And you just get a morass of all sorts of different programs, different areas of a company using different programs for different things. And so ultimately making sure everything is very usable at its core, I think, is what's important in an IT strategy.

ALISON DEAN (03:17):

Can you tell us about some of the digital transformation projects that you found especially compelling or especially difficult? I mean, again, you've definitely been at a lot of really cool companies at this point in your career. So I can imagine the things that you've seen and experienced are really unlike that of most people.

MEGAN PRICHARD (03:33):

So, you know, it's interesting: When I saw this question, I did some thinking, you know — what was the biggest, the most interesting digital transformation project I really worked on throughout my career? It was actually at McKinsey, and it was for a healthcare payer and insurance company. And the company was — and this was maybe six, seven years ago now — completely trying to transition to digital, understanding how to do that. And you know, there's lots of issues with the U.S. healthcare system and how it's layered, et cetera. And so trying to untangle that and figure out — where you can really use technology to to just make that easier for customers and also, you know, to drive cost savings on the backend — was a really interesting challenge. It's ironic because that payer, that insurance company is now the insurance company that I have with my current job.

(04:17):

And it's funny because I see some of the things that we talked about there, but then I also, you know, like there's now a really great website that's very intuitive, you know, there's some amazing, you know, preventive care tracking things, et cetera. But still, to submit a claim, you either do it by mail or by fax — which I just discovered today! And I was like, I haven't had a fax machine since I live with my parents. You know, like in the nineties. So, I mean, it was just very funny to see how far it had come, but how many ways it still needed to progress.

ALISON DEAN (04:47):

Right. So working on that project, what do you recall being especially difficult?

MEGAN PRICHARD (04:52):

You know, in big companies, when you really think about a digital transformation, it requires touching big businesses, big books of businesses that are working more or less the way they are now; if historically

they've grown a lot, they've been very strong. And so really getting people to wrap their heads around doing that in a different way, I think is the hardest part of the digital transformation. It's very easy to come in and say, "Hey, I think you should implement this system, use this program or these data analytics tools, and connect it in this way." But at the end of the day, if you have people that say, "Well, no, we've always done it this way, and this is working and we don't want to come in and start doing it and then break this whole bigger system." That's where you really get a lot of inertia.

ALISON DEAN (05:38):

Okay. And so what did you do to push things through if you got that push back?

MEGAN PRICHARD (05:41):

I mean, that's just a lot of quite frankly, education, and working very closely with teams. Asking your clients and saying, "Hey, you know, here's what we're doing. Here's why we're doing it. We're going to be here to help and, you know, we'll work through this with you."

ALISON DEAN (05:58):

I definitely thought you were going to call Uber Air the digital transformation project.

ALISON DEAN & MEGAN PRICHARD:

Both laugh

MEGAN PRICHARD (06:01):

Well, I mean, the thing is everything is digital to begin with. It's very digital native, you know, it's much more interesting when we're talking about IT and digital strategy to see an incumbent company really try and disrupt itself and also update its systems — versus something like Uber Air...which, from its inception...I mean, like every single piece of eVTOL (Electric Vertical Takeoff and Landing) aircraft are being designed is to be, you know...they're giant sensors, basically. And so they're uploading a huge amount of information to their systems at all times. It's just, it's native to how they're built that that's how that industry is going to be run.

ALISON DEAN (06:37):

Hm. I want to dig into that more. I kind of wish you had that presentation that I saw for right here. *laughs* And you could literally just Vanna White that whole thing. Because, obviously, when I saw that — my mind was blown. Just, wow. When are we going to be in flying cabs?

MEGAN PRICHARD (06:53):

I know. *laughs* I definitely think it will happen very soon, quite frankly. As you know, I worked at a startup for about a year that put an on demand helicopter network, a multimodal helicopter network, across Los Angeles. Starting to see the use cases come together with that was very cool. I mean, I live in Orange

County and I have for many years, and I'm always commuting back and forth up to Los Angeles. And so it's very much something that I think, you know — you see the use cases when it works and you have that magic experience of flying over traffic, getting somewhere in 20 minutes that used to take two and a half hours. It's absolutely mind blowing. I think the technology is coming along really well. I'm very impressed with the technology that Joby has. They've released some great videos that I would highly recommend checking out of their eVTOL aircraft in flight recently, so, very excited about that. And I think you know, stitching that together is going to happen. You know, Joby is now saying 2024, and I believe that.

ALISON DEAN (07:51):

Okay. I think I'd probably still defer to other people trying it out first before me, but I could get on board at some point.

MEGAN PRICHARD:

laughs

ALISON DEAN:

So I think that makes me think about the safety of locations overall. Right? I think we first need to talk about scooters, since you were thrusted into that business unit at Uber. And then we can talk about Uber Air. And then obviously then we can segue into all the autonomous vehicle stuff at Ford happening, but let's start with the scooters.

MEGAN PRICHARD (08:17):

Yeah, absolutely. So scooters you know, obviously a very disruptive technology that showed up on the streets of Los Angeles very quickly, expanded very quickly. And a lot of people were just unclear what was going to happen. I mean, there was a lot of controversy around the Venice Beach bike path, which actually I used to ride my bike on to work many days. And so ultimately yeah, there were lots of issues with people getting in scooter accidents, et cetera. And so Uber was, you know, a somewhat late entrant to the scooter game. But you have to think about how you can use the technology that you have, and also develop it over time to improve safety.

So for instance, we would geo-fence certain areas, such that the scooters were physically stopped; you couldn't ride them in those areas. If a city had asked us not to, or if it was an unsafe area because of, you know, hills or high traffic, whatever. We also put messaging in the app about wearing helmets, about the rules of the road, et cetera. And you can only do so much. Ultimately, humans have to look out for themselves. We can do everything we can to make sure people are safe, and we should do everything we can. But ultimately it's a little bit of common sense too.

ALISON DEAN (09:22):

So that makes me want to just ask the question: What is the craziest scooter story that you heard or maybe witnessed? I can only imagine...

MEGAN PRICHARD (09:31):

Funny, when we would launch cities — I would always be there for the launches and I would go out on our trucks that were, in the middle of the night, collecting all the scooters. So we basically had to go on these like insane scavenger hunt for scooters, because you have a phone that's telling you a scooter is 30 feet from you, and you've parked your car somewhere, and it's like four in the morning and you're trying to retrieve it so you can take it back to charge. You're like looking around bushes and just like being like, “Where is the scooter? Where is the scooter?” And then you'll find it in like an alley, or sometimes you'll see people will want them there for the morning, so they'll put them like behind the gates of their apartment complexes, et cetera. Every time I would do that, it was an absolute just crazy scavenger hunt.

ALISON DEAN (11:20):

I love it. So moving into Uber Air: Same question. Go!

MEGAN PRICHARD (11:26):

laughs I know, for all those times that I was flying around in the eVTOLS. *laughs*

No, I mean — so, for instance, when I was running that helicopter service with Skyrise, things you wouldn't think about. So, ‘dwell time,’ very important here. That's the time from when you get out of a car to when you get into an aircraft. And how do you minimize that time? And how do you make it pleasant for people, if there is waiting time. And so that was a big learning for me, from that particular experience, we learned that it needed to be as short as possible, and if there was going to be any wait we needed to create a very accessible waiting experience, something that was shaded, had seating, was ADA compliant, et cetera...

ALISON DEAN (12:12):

...hire a masseuse...

MEGAN PRICHARD (12:13):

Hire a masseuse! *laughs* Exactly, exactly. So I had to make sure all of that. And then with eVTOL, that's an interesting one because this is an aircraft that — you know, for all intents and purposes of this conversation — doesn't exist yet. Obviously some companies have prototypes, but they aren’t flying around for you and I to take.

We really have to do a lot of thinking, “What do you need to even build for these?” So it's a lot of greenfields ideation. And in those scenarios, I think it's really just important to get the right people in the room. So to get people that have aviation experience, to get people that have, you know, airport operations experience, to get people that have rideshare experience, to get people that have experience

as flight attendants, and bring all those people together and say, “What can we do here to make the best customer experience, or MVP (minimum viable product), that we possibly can?” Because you just don’t know what it's going to be like. You know, you can try it with helicopters, all of the Uber copter products, to get some learnings, but ultimately a lot of it is still guessing, because the aircraft, you know, you don't have it in your hands.

ALISON DEAN (13:19):

Talk more about all the safety measures that were being discussed or that you saw being put into place in any of the prototypes.

MEGAN PRICHARD (13:27):

So safety obviously at the forefront there. We at Uber had hired many safety experts from across both the military and the private airline industry to just understand what are best practices there. And this is everything from, “How do people walk onto an aircraft? How do they approach an aircraft?” to “What are you telling them when they're inside the aircraft? Can they use their phones? Can they not?” to emergency procedures, were something to go wrong. For instance, on any route, you literally have mapped out areas. As a pilot on that route, you know every area — and they are like every quarter mile — where you could potentially put down an aircraft if you needed to. Those types of things are super important, even beyond just eVTOLS themselves.

(14:14):

How they're designed is meant to be much safer than traditional rotorcraft. And so the way they're designed is known as — it's something that's called distributed electric propulsion. So instead of having a single rotor like a helicopter does, you have multiple rotors that are electric, so if one of them fails, you're able to quickly transition to the other rotors. And then that can kind of pick up the slack and you, you could still land. So you see a lot of that type of thing. Also, at least in the Uber network, we were requiring all of our aircraft that would potentially fly with us to have parachutes on them — physical parachutes that pop out of the aircraft and then allow it to land safely.

ALISON DEAN (14:51):

Oh! I was thinking of physical parachutes for all the people in the aircraft. Maybe that too?

MEGAN PRICHARD (14:57):

Yeah, exactly, exactly. And then there's all sorts of things around battery safety as well, and, and safety at a sky port. You know, if there were to be any issue with one of the batteries.

ALISON DEAN (15:06):

Okay. So to transition from that, to now at Ford, with the autonomous vehicles, what is the philosophy around safety in that respect? I mean, I think we're seeing more of this in our lives, tricklings of what the

future will look like. So the question is, “How will the consumer feel assured that they can be safe stepping foot into one of these vehicles?”

MEGAN PRICHARD (15:26):

So you can trust by the time that people are riding in these — and we've taken out the drivers — that a whole list, a giant list of safety and procedural requirements has been met. And so ultimately this is very much a crawl-walk-run industry. You know, the self-driving car industry has been around for 15 years now? Since the DARPA challenge? And it's progressing slowly over time. I mean, I think it was a little bit unrealistic. You know, when this industry first heated up — probably what three, four years ago now — where people would say, “There'll be hundreds of thousands of these on the roads, you know, by 2021…” Well, here we are. There's not hundreds of thousands of these on the roads. And a big reason for that, as you know, at Ford, and as I've seen across all the companies, is safety is really a top concern.

(16:10):

People are not pushing the tech to do more than it can, and they want to make sure that there's a lot of redundancy in the technology; that in the beginning, there are ‘safety drivers’ who are really watching what's going on; that if there are any takeovers, you know, driver takeovers — that those situations are being reviewed; that those scenarios are then being tested and, you know, run back again into the algorithms. Really making sure that as we progress those standards are met...it’s just paramount to this industry.

ALISON DEAN (16:40):

Also makes me think about Ford in general, with safety innovation through the years. I think of other car companies like Tesla, or perhaps other companies that are pushing out a lot of electric vehicles...I'm curious your viewpoint on the societal implications of autonomous vehicles. What does that look like for mankind for the next hundred years?

MEGAN PRICHARD (16:58):

So a hundred years from now is pretty far out. *laughs*

I'll bring it into maybe the next, like even 20 years, which is I think the timeframe in which we'll really start seeing this technology take off. Right now, when you think about mobility or when you think of Ford, you think, “Okay, I'm purchasing my new Bronco from Ford, and it's however much it is, it's $30,000.” The reality is that $30,000 that you're spending on the car is only a piece of what it takes you to travel, you know, the one mile for you to go from your home to the grocery store. The actual real cost is the insurance, plus the gas you put in your car, you know, or the electricity used to charge it.

(17:40):

It's the maintenance on your car. It's — if you haven't taken Uber — the driver physically driving you. So there's a lot more there than just simply the cost of a vehicle. Ultimately that 'cost of vehicle mile traveled' is really what's going to become interesting going forward. Right now in a rideshare, you know, it looks like a standard UberX or Lyft Classic looks at about $2.20 to $2.60 cents, depending on the market, cost per vehicle mile traveled. And so ultimately in your average car, in the United States, you're looking at between $0.60 to $1 in cost of vehicle mile traveled. So the assumption here is that, with self-driving cars, ultimately you can bring down that cost. Where rideshare currently is, you know, in, in the $2s — and you can bring it down to sub $1, or even into $0.60 cents or so — where people actually will be saving money from taking these autonomous vehicles instead of buying personal vehicles.

(18:36):

And so that's the dream. When that happens, ultimately you've got a great situation because there's fewer overall vehicles on the road, because it's a shared resource now instead of an individual resource. We see that happening in the next basically 10, 15, 20 years or so — when you'll start seeing those costs per vehicle mile come down. That's really when this gets interesting. Then this opens up a multi-trillion dollar market in the U.S. alone for individual miles traveled. And so, you know, what does that mean to bring it back to your question? What does that mean for us as a society? Ultimately, providing affordable transportation options for people is opening up; it's opening up opportunity, it's allowing people to have more access to job opportunities, to spend more time with their families, et cetera.

(19:27):

You're giving people better ways to travel. You're giving them access to opportunity, but as this is coming up, you know, what are some of the ethical considerations? Let's talk about equity. Right now there's lots of just restrictions around how and when eVs can can be used. So there's certain, you know, geo-fenced off areas in cities that have been mapped, or that are permitted, where you can use this technology based on the miles per hour it can go and its current capabilities. one of the things I'm really focusing on is making sure that, you know, when we start to do this across different areas, obviously dense, urban cores are the best for this for many reasons, but, you know, we're not just focusing on wealthy neighborhoods, we're looking at actually making sure those initial services areas are able to serve a broader scope and just a broader reach of the population.

(20:17):

And so making sure that we're really doing that. Making sure as well that they're helping to connect to public transit in the meantime as well, I think is super important. And then there's, you know, ADA accessibility issues. And this is a really interesting topic, because this is one that rideshare, quite frankly, didn't really solve. Rideshare didn't solve this. Right now on Lyft or Uber the requirement is you have to have a vehicle that you could put a folding wheelchair in. And then Lyft and Uber also provide, in some cities, full zero entry, so basically you could physically roll a wheelchair into it, vehicles on-demand as well.

But again, it's a very small portion of the fleet. Now we've got this very cool opportunity where we're designing vehicles from the ground up.

(20:57):

You've seen all sorts of interesting vehicles from Zoox or Cruise. You know, you can definitely expect to see some of those from Ford in the future. But one of the things we're really thinking about is how can we make those vehicles fully accessible for people and not just from an ADA compliance perspective. How are we thinking about making them more accessible for women? That was a big issue on rideshare platforms for a long time. You know, how are we thinking about, you know, potentially children with families? Like you just had a baby; I'm sure you have to bring your car seat, you know, to put your child in an Uber. What does that look like? So we're thinking through all of those now, and I think it's a super exciting time because it's basically greenfields. You're designing new battery electric vehicles and purpose-building them for these new applications, which is very exciting.

ALISON DEAN (21:44):

Okay, so let's talk more about that. What does the day-to-day look like when you're designing a vehicle and it's all on you?

MEGAN PRICHARD (21:51):

Well, it's not all on me. Obviously.

ALISON DEAN (21:52):

All on you, Megan. *laughs* All on you.

MEGAN PRICHARD (21:54):

We have an amazing vehicle team at Ford, obviously, our design team, and it's called XD, spends a lot of time with this as does our vehicle team. And, you know, they'll do the actual physical designing, but as the business leader it's my job to basically say, “What are the requirements of this vehicle? What does it need to have?” And so that actually looks like a lot of market research, a lot of interviews, understanding different use cases and how different people are gonna use the vehicle.

ALISON DEAN (22:21):

Okay. So have there been any new discoveries for you, things that surprised you so far in the time you've spent leading this business unit?

MEGAN PRICHARD (22:29):

I think for me, the biggest takeaway has been that this technology is much, much, much closer than everybody thinks. You know, it's obviously been around for some time, and I've been in many over the years. I was recently down in Miami and I got to test drive — well, I guess not test drive, but test ride for

Tesla — some of our Ford Argo vehicles. And I was absolutely blown away with the technology. Very, very impressive. It's come a long way. And my mindset shifted from where I was with Uber Air, which was like, “All right, these vehicles will be around for some preliminary testing and limited routes. And if in three-ish years from now, this is a business that's really going to be taking off very quickly. How do we start getting everything in place to make sure we can make this the best customer experience possible?

ALISON DEAN (23:16):

I'm curious what adoption looks like overall. I understand the implications in big cities, Los Angeles is a great example, right? Where traffic is horrendous and people spend hours getting from point A to point B. So solving problems for some of these big cities with mass transit issues will be very significant, but it comes down to how you will make that happen. I wonder about your thoughts on the way forward, how we'll approach selling this new way of life to people.

MEGAN PRICHARD (23:41):

So I think ultimately, yeah, you're right. Adoption. This is going to be tough, as I said, like transitioning to any new mode is tough. Even when Uber first came out, I mean, we had hundreds of marketing people out in bars, passing out flyers, giving discount codes to get people to try the service. It seemed crazy then that you were going to get in some stranger's car and just let them drive you home at 2:30 in the morning. But, you know, here we are billions of rides later. And so I think getting over that hump of adoption and changing behaviors is definitely going to be a real consideration here. And I think the first step is really making sure that we're creating a product that is meeting people's expectations of what an on-demand, ride-hailed type of product would be.

(24:25)

That's meeting ETA, that's meeting some more price points, et cetera, and that's going to be a big step to get there, you know, as a first pass. And then after that, it's about differentiating. What are the things that are unique to AVs that would make you excited about getting in one? So of a lot of the things that we hear, privacy is a big one. So being able to take a business call. I don't know if you've ever had the experience of being in an Uber, where you're filtering yourself. You're like, “Oh, we're about to do this big deal with L,” or something like that. So privacy is definitely a big one. Another big one is being able to really use that vehicle a little bit more as your own.

(25:07):

Think about right now. It's difficult to run errands in an Uber, because normally when you're running errands, you're going multiple places. You may have bags that you're carrying with you, and it's much easier to put all that in the trunk of your car. So, thinking about how we can use AVs (autonomous vehicles) to solve that use case. And then also just overall, cleanliness and experience, you know, it's horrible when you get in an Uber and it smells bad. Nobody likes that. It's terrible. So what can we do with these cars? Is it flushing the air completely after every writer? Is it a custom scent? Is it cleaning crews that are going

around and meeting the vehicles if they don't hit their standards? What can we do to really differentiate across that respect too?

ALISON DEAN (26:15):

You know, I tell my brother, “Don't ride motorcycles in LA. Not because you're not an excellent driver, but I just don't trust other drivers.” I think about this in the same way — where perhaps I do trust the AVs, but I don't trust everyone else around the AVs. What is the thought process around all the other millions of cars on the road interacting with all these AVs?

MEGAN PRICHARD (26:39):

I definitely hear that. I mean, ultimately that's the same risk as when you get in your own personal car, and quite frankly the type of sensors that are available on these cars and the computing power is just so much better equipped to handle the situations that come up quickly, like when you're texting while driving 80 mph on Route 405 and merging lanes. I think the technology is going to be a big part of really making people feel safe. And it's funny, actually, a lot of writers, some say, like, what you say. They're like, “How am I going to trust this?” But many people are saying things more along the lines of, “I trust this so much more than I trust myself to drive.”

ALISON DEAN (27:22):

So now I'm gonna just talk about the Jetsons.*laughs*

MEGAN PRICHARD:

Mm hmm. *laughs*

ALISON DEAN:

Do you think that in our life we'll be seeing flying cars?

MEGAN PRICHARD (27:28):

Absolutely. I think in this decade you'll be seeing mass use of flying cars.

ALISON DEAN (27:33):

Really? This decade?

MEGAN PRICHARD:

Yeah, absolutely.

ALISON DEAN:

No way!

MEGAN PRICHARD (27:37):

Yeah! In this decade, as I mentioned to Deener, Joby is planning to...they've announced they're going to be testing routes publicly in 2024. And I wholeheartedly believe that that's going to be there. I mean, when I was at Uber, we were putting everything in place for that to be a reality — even, in fact, a bit earlier — but things were delayed because of COVID. So, absolutely yes. That will be a thing. But again, flying cars is a little bit of a misnomer here. This is not the situation where, like, you, Alison, have your flying car, and it's in your garage, and then you like, fly it to my house and you park it on my front lawn. This is not that situation. This is more like a shared transportation experience. It's more like a bus or a shuttle where it's, you know, going from point-to-point in the beginning. Those are fixed routes. You're sharing with other people to make the cost affordable.

So it's a very different situation than like, "Hey, we have flying cars that take us everywhere."

ALISON DEAN (28:32):

When is that going to happen?

MEGAN PRICHARD (28:34):

That's a good question. I mean, honestly, this goes back to the tension in all of these future transportation and mobility designs — between human-centric design and community-centric design. And so ultimately in, you know, the Apple world that we all live in, things are very much based around human-centric design. "How do I make the best possible product for you, Alison? For you, Megan?" Like, "How can I make this the most convenient, the most awesome for you as you use it?" Which is very different than community-centric design, which is "How can I create a product that serves the needs of our community better? That helps us as a group to continue to excel, and is good for everyone?" And so I think a lot of these new mobility solutions really are focusing on that more community-centric design. You know, thinking about how you can create these shared assets that multiple people are using to really, as you mentioned, achieve those outcomes, like decreasing congestion, decreasing cost of transportation, et cetera. You may never see, like, mass personal flying cars; if I were to have my way, you know, the whole future of transportation goes away from that individual ownership both in the sky and on the ground. And it goes towards something that's shared, that's electric, that's really actually helping us to get outcomes that we want as a community.

ALISON DEAN (29:57):

Also, I think ultimately greener solutions, right? So less vehicles on the road overall, because we need to be thinking more thoughtfully about our approaches around mobility. But, I mean, it really kind of horrifies me to think about everyone in LA with a flying car. I mean, I can literally just see the accidents happening, like mass loss in the sky. *laughs*

MEGAN PRICHARD (30:17):

laughs No, interestingly enough, I think even if you were to be running a ton of vehicles, by the time that would happen they'd all be basically connected to one another and talking. And so the routing and the actual, you know, physical movement of them would be very orchestrated. I don't think there would be that same experience you have, you know, like merging onto the freeway. *laughs*

ALISON DEAN (30:35):

We've talked a lot about many types of innovations. Are there any future innovations that we have not talked about that you're excited about?

MEGAN PRICHARD (30:43):

I am super excited for space travel, as that's becoming a thing. You know, SpaceX, Virgin Galactic, et cetera. I think that's going to be amazing when it opens up, you know, speaking of things that "Who knows when they're really coming?" *laughs* But I think that's absolutely spectacular. I have a good friend who is a designer and she's actually doing this project right now. You would love this, you should check out her Instagram, she's Hillary Coe and she's right now living on one of those volcanoes on the big Island of Hawaii in this fake Mars pod setup that's supposed to mimic a science station on Mars. And she's like testing out all the space suits, and the equipment, and all the things so that they can be better designed functionally. She's posting about her work on her Instagram (@hillarycoe). It's super interesting. Just seeing it, it's so striking to see someone who I know completely kitted out as an astronaut, walking on what looks like the surface of Mars. And so it makes it very real, and I would love to see that technology happen in our lifetime.

ALISON DEAN (31:42):

I feel confident that is probably going to happen in our lifetime.

MEGAN PRICHARD (31:44):

What do you think? Are you going to be taking a flying car to work every day before you go into space? What's your bet?

ALISON DEAN (31:50):

I mean, how old will I be if that's happening?

ALISON DEAN & MEGAN PRICHARD:

Both laugh

ALISON DEAN:

Okay. If you were to venture a guess, when do you think that that's happening?

MEGAN PRICHARD (31:57):

I'm hoping in 10 or 15 years you'll be able to pay a somewhat annoying sum of money to go up into space. I think that's realistic.

ALISON DEAN (32:02):

I think that's realistic. But an annoying amount of money? Yes. I wonder when it will be accessible for everyone else?

MEGAN PRICHARD (32:08):

Good question. That's a good question. I don't know. That, that still feels like, you know, we'll be old ladies when that happens. *laughs*

ALISON DEAN (32:15):

Yeah, that's what I'm imagining too. So besides space travel — any other innovations that you've seen or heard about...

MEGAN PRICHARD (32:24):

I'm really into the biotech space. I don't know if you've seen these, but there are prosthetics that they are actually plugging into your nerves. And so you can move a prosthetic arm using your own, basically, thought patterns? Which is absolutely incredible. That's super cool.

ALISON DEAN (32:37):

That is super cool. Okay. So I want to transition now into lessons that you've learned, because you are the leader that you are, and you've been in leadership roles for much of your career. What important lessons have you learned from your mentors that you're carrying with you as you lead these new projects?

MEGAN PRICHARD (32:54):

I think the importance of making sure that your team understands your mission has been the biggest thing that I've taken away from my mentors. Because ultimately I think people are most engaged in their work and most, quite frankly, inspired by it when they understand the mission and they're really aligned around what they're doing and they're excited by it. Making sure that before we start any big endeavor — a new project — people understand why we're doing it, and they see the value in it. The impact that this has, has been a big, big takeaway for me over time.

ALISON DEAN (33:30):

How would you describe your leadership style?

MEGAN PRICHARD (33:33):

You know, historically I've always described myself as a 'servant leader,' really using that philosophy of empowering people to do their best work, and then really bringing it all together. And so I feel like that's

definitely continued to be the case over time. But I've found, as I've stepped in more to some of these businesses like flying cars and like autonomous vehicles, I've needed to be a bit more of that visionary leader who is able to get people excited behind the mission, who is able to say, all right, “I see the light at the end of the tunnel. I know where this is going.” When you don't have an actual running business and you need to motivate people for years, you need to have that vision, and you need to be able to show people the slow drum beat of progress and make sure everyone stays excited.

ALISON DEAN (34:23):

So I talked to the CIO of Trader Joe's, who's a transformational leader, and he's writing a book about transformational leadership —

MEGAN PRICHARD:

Hmm...

ALISON DEAN:

— and I think that that's a book you should read, too, because what you're saying right now: It's like the hybrid of visionary leadership but also still being that servant leader that's empowering the people that are reporting into you. He actually asked me to edit that book, so...we'll see...

MEGAN PRICHARD:

Oh, how fun!

ALISON DEAN:

Well, he was being funny. *laughs*

ALISON DEAN & MEGAN PRICHARD:

Both laugh

ALISON DEAN:

Is there anything else that you're feeling especially passionate about?

MEGAN PRICHARD (34:52):

Other things I'm feeling passionate about? I mean, I continue, as you know — this was how we met — to feel very, very passionate about empowering diversity in tech. To continue to see that, especially in the aviation industry, and also in the autonomous rideshare industry, the auto industry...places where you don't see a lot of women, you know, and you are seeing more underrepresented minorities, but, just making sure that in these areas — that will quite frankly be leading a lot of the transformation that we see

in coming years — that we are getting diverse voices in the room, so that we can develop and scale these services in a way that is equitable, and that is community-centric, and has all voices represented.

ALISON DEAN (35:33):

How much of your current role is working with HR, or whoever is in charge of D&I within Ford, to ensure that at least in your business segment, it's something that's a priority?

MEGAN PRICHARD (35:45):

Yeah, absolutely. We just got a great new head of DEI, is what it's called at Ford. Her name's Clarinda, she's absolutely amazing. And she used to be a city planner as well. And so she just has a lot of deep knowledge about the product. and how to drive good outcomes. So I'm actually executive-sponsoring one of our goals for this year, which is to make sure that we're including diversity and inclusion as part of all aspects of our products and services. That's been super interesting; you know, when you're talking about physically designing, like I said, the geo-fence — where it's going to be, that's somewhat obvious, how you address DEI issues with that. But when you're talking about you have a team of a hundred software engineers who are making, you know, something specific to how a door will unlock? That's a little less obvious. It's been a fun challenge to really think around how we can make all aspects of the business just very accessible.

ALISON DEAN (36:44):

Any final thoughts?

MEGAN PRICHARD (36:46):

I mean, thank you very much for having me. It's been great to speak with you about this in particular, because, you know, I very much value our conversations and our banter. It's been fun to, to really just have this convo with you.

ALISON DEAN (37:00):

Oh, I loved chatting with you also. And I just want to say thank you for being on “The Breakthrough.”

Thank you for streaming “The Breakthrough,” brought to you by TheoremOne. The show is produced by Blake Veit, managed by Mikaela Berman, and designed by Erica Saurey. Please reach out to Elizabeth Miotke for press inquiries. Find us wherever you listen to podcasts and for more great content, follow us on Twitter and Instagram @breakthrupod. That's break-T-H-R-U-P-O-D. I'm your host Alison Dean — until next week!