

EPISODE 126**[INTRODUCTION]**

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[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:31] SD: Welcome to The Mentor List. I am Sharon Daly, Managing Director for Mentor List Talent. And I am co-hosting today's episode with a good friend and the Director of Mentor List Digital and Advisory, Peter Jackowski.

[00:00:45] PJ: Thank you, Sharon.

[00:00:47] SD: We are ecstatic about today's episode. We are diving in deep on a topic I am extremely passionate about and loving at the moment. And we're in leadership with a focus around the tech industry. On the show today we have Dr. Catherine Lopez. Welcome, Catherine. Dr. Lopez worked in the data and analytics domain for more than 20 years internationally across a wide range of sectors. She has a unique suite of skills, including a deep technical background, focused business delivery mindset, strong storytelling communication, and excellent leadership skills. Her specialties are in machine learning, analytics transformation, data strategy and management, and end-to-end delivery.

Catherine is an entrepreneur in the AI and data analytics space, and an advisor for startups. She is also an active mentor and advocate for supporting women in data analytics and data science, and bridging gaps between academia and industry.

Welcome, Catherine.

[00:01:50] CL: Thank you, Sharon.

[00:01:51] SD: So, Catherine, we've just been for coffee. And you managed to have two chocolate biscuits as well. So I think we're ready to go, safe to say.

[00:01:59] CL: Yes.

[00:02:00] PJ: Energize.

[00:02:01] SD: Yeah, we're pumped.

[00:02:03] PJ: Excellent.

[00:02:04] SD: So, Catherine, we've talked there about your background, your career, heavy in the data and analytics space as well. Can you talk us through your career and your journey as a woman in leadership?

[00:02:17] CL: Think about my career and a journey – Hopefully that did sound like a job interview explaining why stories. So I started from the early 90s, so in the 90s. So that time, the information systems was very new. So I started my study when I was back in China at that time. From their own words, basically, there was very new industry. And not really many people know what information systems and data warehousing and database. So from there, I spent a little bit time of working in the American company, where actually they offered the opportunity for me to explore the field. But in the meantime, you're going to see, it's very interesting when I look back in my career. And I get bored easily if I don't progress. But in the meantime, I like to teach. So that's where I spent quite a number of years in the university. I started teaching very early on in

my age. So then when I gone back after I spent years in the industry, and I went back to university to teach what I learned, what I practiced. But in the meantime, I can use the time to progress to another more advanced field, so that more to the business intelligence and business systems.

Then went to another one, which is, again, at the time I already came to Australia, in more to what we called data mining. Then moved to machine learning, and went to another part, which is AI. So that's in the early beginning of 2000. Yeah, so at that time – Again, this is a sad thing, where not really many people even in the research area, even in university academic environments, and not many people practice in that field.

Again, myself, and I like to practice, I like to do the real thing in commercial environments. So I spent a quite long period of time juggling between these two. So I was teaching at the university. And then I want to practice. And I remember, I applied for the grant, and the title was Get Your Feet Dirty. And it's because I really want to bring the commercial application into the education. And so then people can practice and learn what they use for their career to move on. They can use when they go to the real workforce on site to a university.

So I spent a number of years in Australia. Then got opportunity, went to U.S. So I went to U.S. That started more on the consulting, and also started more on the technology, actually backend R&D and development. So during that years, and I found, well, there is a big gap actually in the leadership. There are so many people in the tech company, all male, but I did. Actually, find my role model when I was in U.S. at that time. So that's where it actually inspired me. And I say, “I want to grow in the tech environment,” or in the data analytics environment, and help more women and also myself to apply what we learned and to lead other people. Yeah, so that's also – Well, I had two children during that time. Then, after a few years, I came back to Australia. So that's the time actually I started a job, and that was quite funny. I came back to visit my parents. And I landed myself a job and then went back to U.S. And the quit my job and brought my children back to Australia. So, during that time, after I came back to Australia, it's just natural soil for me to grow, because I have a lot of network here. One of my ex-student, was working in that. And they recognize me, and also my ex-colleagues, and then they worked somewhere else. So that is a point where I started to think more about how to actually lead or how to be a role model myself, and for a women in the tech field.

[00:06:56] PJ: That's really interesting, Catherine. There's so much in there to unpack and better understand. Could you share a bit in terms of, you mentioned, you're a role model, or a person that you're looked up to? Could you share a bit more in terms of that person, and perhaps give us some insight please?

[00:07:12] CL: Oh, hopefully she – Later I will share this podcast with her as well. Her name is **Dr. [inaudible 00:07:18]**. So she is retired now. And then she was the VP for the R&D in the software, statistical software company in U.S. That is which one the best company before Google was ranked number one. Yeah, and so she's such a person where I saw assessable. She grew her career from the technical standard of being a technical person in the company. She had really good and a depth of knowledge in her field. Then basically her leadership style is what I admired. And then she is very reachable and accessible. She led us through the difficult times and turbulence time by providing the transparency. And we trust her.

And so in the meantime, also, she is really helpful in that situation. There is no hierarchy between the – So one is as a developer, of she's the VP. And she is always there. And also the one important thing is she has a vision. So she led us through the R&D and the development. She had the vision. In the meantime, she's a mother, and it just wonderful like to look at her. She never stopped pushing us and even herself.

[00:08:48] SD: Wow! That's awesome. Yeah, and I agree. There's a common theme there when you mentioned in other inspiring leaders. Trust is something that always comes up once you have trust in someone, and their journey, and what they're doing. It's half the battle, isn't it, of learning from someone when you trust them as well? I hear that a lot that people are inspired by people in particular that they trust. So, yeah.

And, Catherine, you mentioned earlier that because of your journey, you want to be there for women, particularly in the data and analyst analytics field. And I know that you support STEM as well. So I want to ask you as a champion of diversity, particularly helping women and supporting women, what is your perspective on one thing businesses and individuals can focus on to maximize their impact?

[00:09:41] CL: Well, this is a hard question, because I come from analytical background. And so that's quite often the answer. Please, excuse me, if I'm talking in a nerdy way. They quite often say, "What is the most important factor?" or "Which lever to pull and so I can maximize my benefit or profit?" I think this is really hard. If I think about it, I will say it's like of human for ourselves and organization. Really important that number one thing is the mind. So the mind of, say, stay focused. But you have to have a growth mindset. If you stay focused, deliver what you can deliver, then you bring the trust. But also you'll have a growth mindset. So when you have a growth mindset, you are more open to accept a difference. You're actually more open to see the possibilities. So that's what I think that we as an individual, or as organization, is most important for me, I can think of.

[00:10:50] PJ: Yeah, the growth mindsets, it's really interesting. It seems to be critical, especially in these challenging times right now to have some positivity and optimism and to be able to see the opportunity. Perhaps, Catherine, you could share with us a practical example around that growth mindset and how you've enacted that in your career.

[00:11:12] CL: So, I think, in my career, and well, I think in many, many ways of like they would call 40's midlife crisis, right? And I'm going to mention, say that, since we're just talking about just say that women turned 40, don't have your mind to give you the restriction, to coach something, say, you cannot do it. So that's the same thing where I will say that's a career transfer, which I have always at beginning I like to teach, help other people, but always contributed as individual contributor.

And a lot of times when I was applying for the leadership role, and then the feedback that were given to me said, "Look, you're being too technical." So that was a really big challenge at that time. And so I doubted myself as well, and I say, "Really, this is what I'm good at. And is if that's a barrier for me to progress in my career? To go on the leadership journey." And so I spoke to a couple of my mentors. I say, "No. Trust yourself, and in there are opportunities." And as someone who has the growth mindset can see the potential in you, and then also you see that yourself, you practice it, right? You don't need a title to practice the leadership. So then I would just keep on pushing and pushing, and keep on practicing. So it's not someone which is you, being a leader, doesn't mean that you definitely will have that title. So that is the growth mindset

of you don't – They see something where you shouldn't go. You seek that opportunity. And resilience, you don't give up. So with a growth mindset is not necessarily easy to practice I think.

[00:13:26] PJ: That's great insight, Catherine, I think that notion of you don't need the title to actually do it and to live those values and demonstrate leadership, demonstrate optimism, growth mindset, regardless of where you're at in your journey. I think that's really great advice for listeners. That's awesome.

[BREAK]

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[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[00:14:29] SD: you mentioned through your career, obviously key things for you, were growth mindset, resilience. If you were to look back on your career and your former self, what advice would you give do you think?

[00:14:43] CL: That's so hard question.

[00:14:46] SD: You're welcome.

[00:14:50] CL: All right. So I think for the listeners, this is really truly from my heart. And if I think what advice I can give it to myself or in the early career, and I will say I'm not blaming myself at that time. But I will say, really actively seeking out mentor opportunities. Now, I know we are in the Mentor List podcast. But it is really, really important. And I didn't do that. And I think this is one lesson I learned. And one of the reason was to motivate me to give back and also try to encourage people to do so. I spent too much detour in my career, if I have done that. So, for actively seeking mentors to guide me through in the career possibilities I want to go. And

I think there are a lot of opportunities, and a lot of pitfalls or lessons I could avoid. However, life is a journey. There is no straight line.

And the thing is at that time, you don't really have much social network, no Facebook, and no LinkedIn. And I think that that is something where, if you look back, and I will put myself into, I say more open. More open and, say, vulnerable. And I wasn't. So I was worried or kind of maybe ashamed if I open up **[inaudible 00:16:26]** and then they think I'm stupid. So this is actually during my early career days. I would say, "I want to be A+ all the time." But you won't. Yeah, so I think that's where I realized I'll get to myself.

[00:16:42] SD: Yeah, that's fantastic. Because I know listeners will hear you and they will all relate, because we all go through a bunch of that. No matter where we are in our careers, we all go through that moment of doubt. So, I totally relate, and I'm sure our listeners would relate as well to that, Catherine. So, yeah.

So what I wanted to ask you as well is, as a leader, for our listeners, what habits have served you well throughout your career as well as a leader?

[00:17:12] CL: Oh. I think there were quite a few. But if I think about it for my career and also as a leader, the first thing, I would say integrity. So, integrity is – So this is something which is that I quite often think about it, right? So you take less share of your credit, or the credit. You take a little bit more of – More share of the blame. So that I have the integrity. And that's with a message I send to people who work with me. And also accountability, which is I follow through. So that's really, really important to build the relationship and build the trust. So this is something where I keep on reminding myself that served me well in my career, I think is work ethic. It's really work ethic of there is my dedication to work. And also, how much effort would I put in the time? And, basically, is infectious, right? So it's the energy and the dedication and people will get influenced by you, by watching you what you do. They get motivated as well.

If I think about the third thing, I'm a super organized person. And I think, to work with people, and to get a large scale project down, and always your life actually running multiple lines of your parenting career. And also you have to look after your elderly as well from our culture. So that is

organizational time management, organizational skills and time management is really critical for me.

[00:19:14] PJ: Yeah, it's really, really interesting. And I think listeners will relate to those challenges, be it family, commitments, caring for parents, or caring for relatives, especially in this COVID context that we're living in right now. That's awesome, Catherine. Like are you able to share, how do you strive for balance in that context? Because I can only imagine how difficult that is for you. And obviously, you've had a great deal of academic study as well in your journey too, which I know personally is a huge undertaking and commitment. Do you have any advice for people in terms of managing yourself and balance? And what can you share with this place?

[00:19:55] CL: So, that's something where I'm still working on and trying to improve. And I heard about the juggling balls, right? So you just have to say this is a prioritization of juggling balls. And some balls, they are the crystal balls. And some balls, they are the rubber balls. And some balls, you don't really – If they break, they break, right? So this is really important. I printed a juggling ball picture right next to my office desk. In my home office, and because that is a reminder for myself and say, “Look, I digital, or this Trello, or this timetable, and a calendar to organize my timetable, it's just the tools. But at the end of the day, it's you making the decision what area and who or what you get the most important – The time you get to them, right?

In general, the important thing is, think about it, this is not only about balancing. It's about where you want to go and all what is your life. So if you imagine that's your career, right? If your career is that's where it's the direction I want to go towards AI, but in the meantime, I want to stay in technology. And plus, I want to grow the business domain knowledge. So you already have three balls to juggle. And so that's the direction you have to balance. So the life is much more than that. So that is where you spend time, where you put your energy, and we're going to see the result, right? So that is the part where people just have to – I spoke to one of my mentees and they say, list, put it down. If you can measure it, you can manage it. If you don't measure it, you cannot manage it. You don't know how much you're putting in. You don't know how much you're getting out.

[00:21:59] PJ: Yeah, spot on, Catherine. I absolutely agree.

[00:22:03] SD: Yeah. It's funny when I hear you talk, it's relating so much to myself. And I look back and like what I used to do about things. And I'd always – Sure, some of our listeners will do this as well. You start a task or something you want to do, and you never complete it. So I started this thing, I remember, where I looked at the bigger goal, like you were saying, and then what I would do for the bigger goal, because that looked so overwhelming at the end. I was like, “How do you even get there.” And I would put three things on a post-it note and put it on my fridge. And there were three things towards that goal, but they were small. And so I would take those off for that month and go, “Okay, that's the next one. Okay, the next part of this to that big goal is another three things.” And it's like that management of whatever noise is happening around that, those three things have to be done, whether it's personal, whether it's workwise, it's all relevant. So I think for listeners, they relate to what you're saying and how you manage it and look at it as well. So that's fantastic. Yeah, I love that.

[00:23:03] CL: Thank you.

[00:23:04] PJ: And how about, Catherine, you've had some really interesting life experience in terms of you mentioned the US, Australia, China. Like in a cultural sense, how have you been able to assimilate so well into such different cultures and different environments? What are your learnings from that please?

[00:23:21] CL: I think this is really, really challenging question for me. But I enjoyed to be in a multicultural environment, right? So what I grew up, as I felt I was always an outsider. So my family, like my aunt, they were ambassadors to the other countries. So I was exposed to all different culture at that time. So I learned very early on different cuisine, and different use – That people use chopsticks, and that we learned used to fork and a knife and how should you sit. I mean, this different tradition, and the other tradition. So I think at that time, and I was always curious about something is different. That is never have that – I think of curiosity. Curiosity helped me to open, and open is to try. So once you start trying it and you really started to appreciate or learn, understand what is going on somewhere you're not used to. Something you have never learned. So that is one thing. I think in practical sense, another what I got exposed to.

But in the meantime, while I was young, I grew up from my mom's side is very academic background. And so we read everything. You got to learn about Africa. You got to learn what is in America, whatever the book we can find. We just have to learn as they, "That is you." You learn something, which is you don't know. There is no limit. From that perspective, and the books actually opened your eyes. And I didn't even have TV until where I was like teenager at that time, and only limit channel. So that's the limit is.

The more thing you have never experienced, and after you read it, and the more thing I want to learn about it. So then, like what I came to Australia, so we're just spending – So don't hold back yourself into your patient home. So we're talking about an actually story actually, in the cafe, and say there is never say, "Oh, I –" You say, "Don't care." But I was telling my children something you don't have to like it. But you should have open mind. At least you try it. So that is the modern culture thing, which is happens to be like my husband was born in Brazil, but he's an American.

So I think in the academic background, and we have really – We have a lot of people with very diverse the background, especially for people who went through the PhD. During the time when was the US, and that was we call a special village, because there's the high tech, high tech village in the system on the East Coast that most concentrated, PhD concentrated neighborhood. And if during the school holidays, you don't find many people there, because everyone was from somewhere else. So that's you have so many neighbors and also people work from all different backgrounds. So naturally you started learning different culture, and a different type of food. I always think you are what you eat. So that's something where I do think this is really important to the diversity. Now, this you cherish in which the merge yourself. And don't be scared. Don't be scared. Because, fundamentally, we're all human beings, and people are kind to each other. That's what I truly believe, right? So that is something where the barrier between the culture. But there if you have something common to share, quite often, again, that's food, and you're going to structure your conversation. And you start talking about sports. So I do think this is really, really important come to the environment for your careers. Because everything is interconnected.

[00:27:55] SD: Absolutely. Absolutely. Do you have a favorite quote that you live by as well, Catherine? life?

[00:28:01] CL: Oh, I like – It's not necessarily in life. But this is where I service my team often, and actually quite often this is a two together. One is I think they were from Robert Ingersoll, that thing called, "We rise by lifting others." But in the meantime, I always use these two together. The other one is Africa proverb, is, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

[00:28:38] SD: Yeah, powerful.

[00:28:39] CL: That's the two things which is I think they all complement each other. And that's where I live by with, especially in societal, or the social **[inaudible 00:28:51]** human beings. And especially now think about what I came through the journey about individual contributor. But now, I think is more important to bring people together, and we grew together, and we go far.

[00:29:09] SD: Wow! That's powerful. I like that.

[00:29:13] CL: Yeah, actually, when I like to learn and try new things, I didn't have the patience. I didn't have the patient like in my early 20s. I want to go for, I go sprint, right? So that is if I go long distance running or relay with my friends, and I won't be able to go there so fast, which is I have so much things I want to learn. But I think a turning moment maybe 30, 40s, and then especially when you have children, you realize there is some more factor or dimension in your life, not just like you run one, with another one sprint. It's not like that anymore. And also just think about it, what do you really passionate about? And the one thing I found myself is I like to help others and what I used to teach. Actually, I like to say people learn something, which is I can share, but it's only limited, teach one subject.

So now, after 30 or 40s, and I started saying, "Look, I really want to mentor. Like you teach people how to fish, instead of give them fish, right? So that is I started thinking more and more how actually is instead of myself running fast, I want to run with more people. Life is the long journey.

[00:30:30] SD: Absolutely. And, yeah, going back to what I said earlier, where I had the big dream, and I wanted to run to it. But then I stopped and made three points. And then just was

like, "Start with these, and enjoy the journey." It's about enjoying the journey, isn't it, as you get to the big goal?

So, Catherine, look, it has been an absolute pleasure having you on the show today. And I applaud you for what you're doing for women in the data and analytics space. It's fantastic to see. And thank you for being so transparent today and sharing your story and being open and honest. And I applaud your open mindedness and your leadership skills. And your journey has been just amazing. And the insights into who you are as a woman and as a leader has been great. So thank you for being on the show.

[00:31:12] CL: Thank you for having me, your compliment is just too kind for me.

[00:31:17] SD: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for joining us on this show. Until next time, listeners, This is The Mentor List.

[00:31:25] PJ: Thank you for joining us today at The Mentor List. If you'd like to hear more or speak to us about recommending our next interview guests, come on through to mentalist.com.au. You can also find out more about our suite of mastermind series taking shape in your area, your industry and your discipline. We look forward to welcoming you to one of our events very soon. Stay tuned for another great show.

[OUTRO]

[00:31:53] ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to The Mentor List. If you like what you're hearing on the Mentor List, the best way to support the show is to just take a few seconds to leave a rating and/or comment over on iTunes. You can also find further information about this show and links to further episodes at mentorlist.com.au. Until next time, this is The Mentor List.

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