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Welcome

TO ELLE VATE, the 16th edition of GRIT – a special editorial dedicated to celebrating the bold journeys of women entrepreneurs. In a world where uncertainty is a constant companion, many women founders face similar challenges: navigating ambiguity, overcoming obstacles, and boldly stepping into the unknown. Rather than being deterred by the complexities of an ever-changing landscape, these trailblazers harness uncertainty as the spark for innovation and growth.

In the realm of entrepreneurship – and indeed in life – being comfortable with the unknown isn't about having all the answers; it's about having the courage to act even when those answers elude us. This ability to make decisive moves amid ambiguity often separates the good from the great. It reminds us that while the challenges of the modern world may be daunting, they also present us with unique opportunities to forge new paths.

In this edition of GRIT, we celebrate the inspiring stories of women who have embraced uncertainty and transformed it into something remarkable. Their journeys are a testament to a resilient spirit that not only endures but thrives amid shifting landscapes and unforeseen obstacles. We feature in-depth conversations with remarkable leaders, like Alycia Calvert, CEO of Ernst and Young, and Linda Hasenfratz, Executive Chair at Linamar, who share how they turned obstacles into opportunities. In addition, we spotlight our brilliant alumni – Diana Virgovicova, whose mission for clean water is transforming lives; Azia, who is pioneering awareness and treatment for pelvic pain disorders; and Maayan Ziv, dedicated to creating a more accessible world for everyone, among many others.

As you read these stories, we hope you'll find inspiration in the shared challenges and triumphs that illuminate the path to endless possibilities.

Happy Reading!



Jaskaran Chauhan Editor



NEXT Canada gave me the mentorship and resources to turn my vision into a thriving business, and as a proud alumna and donor, I'm committed to empowering the next generation of founders.

MEGAN TAKEDA-TULLY (NEXT Founders, 2022)

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1. ARLYNE JAMES is the founder and CEO of My Dorm Store, an online platform providing affordable dorm essentials. By partnering with universities, it offers tailored move-in packages, simplifying dorm setup for students. Passionate about accessibility, Arlyne is redefining the student housing experience.

2. EMILIE CUSHMAN is the co-founder and CEO of Kira Talent, an admissions platform helping higher education institutions assess applicants holistically through video and timed written assessments. A recognized leader in edtech, she was named to Forbes' 30 Under 30 in Education and the EY Entrepreneurial Winning Women[™] North America Class of 2021.

3. LAUREN LAKE is the co-founder and COO of Bridgit, a software company transforming workforce management in construction. With a civil engineering background, she helped develop Bridgit Bench, a leading workforce planning platform. As a leader in a traditionally male-dominated industry, Lauren brings a unique perspective on resilience, innovation, and high-stakes challenges.

4. MICHELLE MCBANE is a seasoned venture capitalist with over 20 years of experience investing in early- and growth-stage companies in ICT and health. She brings a strong background in operations, product development, sales, and marketing across engineering and scientific industries. As the co-founder of StandUp Ventures, she leads investments in early-stage health and technology startups. Michelle holds an MBA from McMaster University and a B.A.Sc. in Chemical Engineering from the University of Ottawa.



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175 Bloor Street East, Suite 1800, South Tower Toronto, ON M4W 3R8 <u>NEXTCANADA.COM</u>

> 6795 Rue Marconi, Suite 200 Montréal, QC H2S 3J9

> > **PUBLISHER** NEXT Canada Kyle J. Winters, CEO

EDITOR Jaskaran Chauhan

GUEST WRITER Ajayvir Cheema

Eng C. Lau



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Bridge to an Accessible Huture

Maayan Ziv AccessNow (NEXT 36, 2016)

RANSMUTING ADVERSITY INTO ADVANtage is a skill Maayan Ziv has mastered in her journey of founding and running AccessNow, a leading global accessibility platform. AccessNow identifies, maps and promotes public spaces that are designed for accessibility to people with disabilities.

As a person living with muscular dystrophy, Maayan candidly admits that it wasn't always easy being the only person in the room with lived experience of disability. But she learned early on that being different could be her greatest strength. It allowed her to stand out and offer perspectives that left a lasting impression. It fueled her creativity, resilience and adaptability, shaping the formidable entrepreneur she has become. community she serves but also stakeholders, companies, and governments who genuinely want to foster disability inclusion.

However, the path to success was fraught with challenges. "When I started building my company, the representation of disabled women in entrepreneurship felt close to nonexistent," she recalls. "I had no exposure to incredible women with disabilities like I do now."

Ziv faced biases and stereotypes that often clouded perceptions of her capabilities. Many people made assumptions about what she could achieve before even meeting her. Yet, she quickly learned that her conviction, accomplishments, and passion for her work spoke louder than any preconceived notions.

In 2018, Ziv encountered a particularly challenging period when AccessNow struggled to reach new audiences and secure

Her journey is not just about building a successful business; it is about fostering a movement for inclusion and social justice. Maayan is driven by the desire to carve out a space where others like her could feel a sense of belonging and representation that she wished she had seen in the world around her. Though the blueprint for a business model

When I started building my company, the representation of disabled women in entrepreneurship felt close to nonexistent. I had no exposure to incredible women with disabilities like I do now."

for AccessNow evolved over time, what remained a constant guiding light for Maayan was her values and alignment with the disabled community. In time, this steadfast commitment to her moral mission earned her the trust and credibility of not just the partnerships. The pressure of funding felt overwhelming, and she grappled with exhaustion and uncertainty about the future of her company. "I was genuinely worried about the future of the company and my health," she admits. Despite these obstacles,



Ziv's unwavering belief in AccessNow's mission kept her going. She understood that driving systemic, long-lasting change in accessibility would take time and persistence.

Ziv's approach to overcoming barriers was rooted in her commitment to the community she serves. She shifted her strategies, sought funding from new sources, and most importantly, refused to give up. "AccessNow is about driving systemic, long-lasting, measurable accessibility," she emphasizes. This focus on meaningful impact rather than rapid growth has been a cornerstone of her leadership philosophy.

Through AccessNow, Ziv aims to inspire other women, particularly those with disabilities, to pursue their goals and create change. She believes that true equity occurs when society embraces the idea that everyone has the right and ability to succeed on their own terms. "I want to show other women that they can create change even if they don't see someone like themselves represented yet," she asserts.

Ziv's journey is a testament to the power of resilience, creativity, and conviction. By navigating the complexities of entrepreneurship while advocating for social justice, she has carved out a unique space in the tech landscape. AccessNow not only addresses the practical needs of individuals with disabilities but also serves as a catalyst for cultural change, challenging stereotypes and promoting inclusivity.

As AccessNow continues to grow, Ziv remains committed to her mission. She envisions a future where accessibility is a fundamental aspect of all environments, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their abilities, can participate fully in society. Maayan Ziv is not just building a company; she is leading a movement that champions the rights and dignity of individuals with disabilities, proving that meaningful and lasting change can be brought about with unwavering determination and a values driven vision.

Passion

Julia Kirouac Nud Fud (NEXT Founders, 2019)



UD FUD IS STEERED BY ITS FOUNDER. Julia Kirouac's unflinching commitment to purity in food. A torchbearer for the cause of Holistic Nutrition, Julia is on a mission to improve lives through food. Her company offers a variety of food products exclusively made from organic, raw, vegan, paleo, tree

nut-free, gluten-free, grain-free and non-GMO ingredients.

Nud Fud was born from Julia's desire to act against the practices in the food industry. She wanted to create an alternative to the harm being done to our bodies by the nutritionless food being produced en masse for profit at the cost of food purity.

She is uncompromisingly committed to purity and even willing

to accept very slow progress if it ensures that their offerings of organic and clean foods meet the most stringent of health standards. Even reversals of progress could not deter her from pursuing active innovation in perfecting their product line.

Her passion for better nutrition has only grown with age while the experience has taught her

to be open to engaging in more dynamic problem solving. She acknowledges the hurdles in her path with unassuming honesty.

"The industry is so broken and antiguated that it ends up needing way too many resources which are far too scarce in this country for an industry as undervalued by society as food is. A government, unwilling or incapable of reeling in gross misconduct of the retail oligopolies they helped to create. A public that is unaware of what to eat, or how they get their food. Lastly," she says, "we have a private sector unwilling to invest in our food systems and our food sovereignty."

She feels people are getting sicker and completely addicted to the food the conglomerates are incentivized to push out enmass. No one company can fix problems of this magnitude alone. But Nud Fud is fighting the good fight with unwavering zeal.

Julia believes that the various diet trends that come and go can perpetuate ignorance around diet and nutrition. But real food is here to stay. And longevity in the food industry depends on access to capital, tons of grit, patience, passion, and a product that is decent to taste.

When it comes to entrepreneurship, Julia appreciates that men and women both bring their unique strengths to work and

The industry is so broken and antiquated that it ends up needing way too many resources which are far too scarce in this country for an industry as undervalued by society as food is..."

> she considers women to be better stewards of capital. Not a fan of Micro Grants, she hopes to see more meaningful sums of capital supporting women across all industries.

> While balancing the demands of motherhood with the demands of running her manufacturing business, Julia makes time for good sleep and home cooked dinners, proving that she puts into daily practice her company's philosophy of better living through holistic nutrition.





Promising Personal Home Care

Chenny Xia

Gotcare (NEXT 36, 2014)

EALTHCARE ACROSS CANADA IS PLAGUED

by stark disparities. Many older adults linger in hospital beds parked in hallways, because they cannot receive the necessary level of care in their own homes. The ones most affected by these gaps in the system are the elderly and people living with disabilities. It

gets worse in remote communities, where access to care is even more challenging than in urban settings.

Chenny Xia, along with her co-founder, Carol MacDonald, built Gotcare to confront these harsh realities of Canadian healthcare by offering a smarter caring solution. Her commitment to ensuring access to personalized home care, regardless of location, has been a driving force in her entrepreneurial journey. Governed by a deep empathy towards the needs of a patient, Gotcare is ushering in a change in the severely undervalued care economy. company has currently expanded its services to over 100 remote areas, overcoming various logistical and regulatory challenges. As a woman leading a health-tech company, Chenny Xia emphasises that care work is not gender-neutral. In today's world, women shoulder the vast majority of caregiving res-

Strategically advocating for the care economy, Gotcare secured

funding to enhance its technology and service offerings. The

ponsibilities at home and in families. Gotcare's services and programs are therefore designed to alleviate the caregiving load that disproportionately falls on women, thereby addressing these deep-rooted disparities.

Chenny Xia believes in devising creative solutions to reignite the collective desire to see patients not just survive but truly thrive. When faced with outdated biases she chooses to view it like an energetic dance between optimism and fear, where the goal is to find common ground in shared beliefs. For her, all conflicts are

Gotcare integrates technology and home care through a co-design approach, tailoring care plans to the unique needs of each patient. They use Al to match patients with care workers based on factors such as language, cultural compatibility, and

Imagine how much more comforting it would be for your grandmother, who only speaks Farsi, to be cared for by someone who speaks her language..."

professional experience. This personalized matching facilitates a smoother transition from hospital to home, enhancing the comfort and trust in the care relationship.

"Imagine how much more comforting it would be for your grandmother, who only speaks Farsi, to be cared for by someone who speaks her language. I often cite this example because it perfectly illustrates how technology can enhance and sustain trusting, meaningful relationships throughout the care continuum." shares Chenny Xia in her own words. anchored around the question: Can we help the skeptical and weary embrace a state of hopefulness and open-mindedness?

Throughout it all, Chenny Xia keeps up with the demands of her job and remains rooted in her own personal 'why' by being in nature, practicing mindfulness and attending routine retreats.

Chenny Xia envisions Gotcare as a leader in creating relationshipdriven healthcare experiences. She aims to maximize the use of appropriate technology while fostering trust and collaboration among patients, caregivers, and healthcare providers. ...investors don't just fund products - they fund people and their ability to execute."

Revolutionizing Reproductive Healthcare

Parnian Majd

Fibra (NEXT 36, 2022)

ROUND BREAKING INNOVATION often

traces its origins to the moment the right person asks the right question. For Parnian Majd this moment transpired when she asked herself, why aren't there any wearable devices to monitor reproductive health? As a biomedical engineer, she had worked

extensively with wearable devices for heart and brain health. But even though the technology for it existed, no one had conceived of a wearable device to track female reproductive health.

With first hand experience of the long waiting times, invasive procedures and high costs just to get minimal insights about reproductive health, she knew she had identified a major pain point in the lived experience of countless women. The desire to address this disconnect propelled Parnian Majd to create a noninvasive, automated solution that seamlessly integrates into daily life. Thus Fibra was born.

Fibra's smart underwear uses advanced textile-based sensors to monitor key reproductive health parameters like temperature and vaginal pH. Through a seamless app experience it provides real-time, accurate data to help women track their cycles and optimize fertility. Offering a comfortable, user-friendly alternative to traditional methods, Fibra is making the journey to conception less stressful.

This empowers women to better understand their bodies, identify fertility windows, and take control of their reproductive health without the stress and barriers of traditional methods. Fibra bridges the gap between women and the data they need, effectively shifting the narrative from reactive healthcare to proactive, personalized wellness.

And this is only the first step towards many more milestones. Beyond fertility, Fibra is planning to expand to pregnancy detection, pregnancy monitoring, STD/UTI detection and monitoring, menopause and cervical cancer detection.

Historically, women's reproductive health has been underfunded, stigmatized, and overlooked, leaving many to navigate critical aspects of their health with limited tools and information. So it was a huge win for Fibra's driving philosophy when it secured \$1.25M in its pre-seed funding round. It was testament to the power of persistence, storytelling, and clarity of vision that reflected in Fibra's pitch to investors.

One key lesson that Majd shares emphatically "...investors don't just fund products – they fund people and their ability to execute." Along with their innovative idea, she advises fellow entrepreneurs to articulate the broader problem they're solving and why they're uniquely qualified to tackle it.

Recognising that women often face additional scrutiny, she emphasises the critical importance of being prepared with data, a well-researched market strategy, and clear financial projections. "Seek out investors who align with your mission and values – these are the partners who will champion your vision and support your growth."

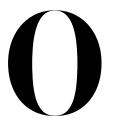
To support more women in leadership roles within the tech industry, Parnian is a proponent of systemic changes and equitable access to funding and resources. She recommends mentorship programs, targeted investment funds and accelerator programs focused on female founders to guide and empower them early in their careers.

Beyond technology and commerce, Fibra is fostering dialogue and awareness, breaking down taboos, and highlighting the importance of investing in women's health. Fibra aims to revolutionize the way society views and approaches women's health and fertility by normalizing conversations around it. As the femtech industry grows, Fibra is committed to creating tools that support not only fertility but also the broader journey of reproductive health through future features like pregnancy detection and menopause monitoring. Clearly, the revolution in reproductive healthcare is just getting started and Fibra is leading the way.

You can find out more about Fibra at their <u>website</u> and <u>socials</u>. For pre-orders, see <u>this link</u>.

A Haven of Healing

Azia To Dilato (NEXT 36, 2024)



FFICIAL ESTIMATES REVEAL that as many as 20 percent of the female population is afflicted by pelvic health issues. Our pelvic floors are crucial to not just sexual intimacy but also everyday activities like sitting, walking or jumping. And yet, pelvic health remains an undervalued field in healthcare. Azia To,

a sex and pain reprocessing therapy educator, experienced this first hand. Her 7 year journey with vaginismus, exposed to her the glaring gaps in comprehensive care for pelvic health.

Keenly aware of the mental and emotional toll of coping with a pelvic pain disorder in isolation, Azia felt impelled to create a safe space for others who shared her pain. Teaming up with Ellie Hong, her co-founder and a pelvic floor physiotherapist with over 8 years of clinical practice, the duo created Dilato – an online platform to provide counseling, education, treatment and a sense

of community to people struggling with pelvic pain disorders.

Dilato helps its users overcome pelvic pain and achieve pain-free intimacy through expert-designed video courses and support. Employing a holistic biophysical approach, Dilato offers its users a space where the emotional and social aspects of the physical symptoms are addressed openly.

Pelvic pain disorders result in lower quality of life due to mental health struggles compounded by the pressure women feel to care for others while battling their own pain in isolation. Their personal experiences often get walled in by guilt and shame creating a negative relationship with their bodies. This is why the app prioritises emotional check-ins integrated with modules created by sex therapists and psychologists.

Dilato's modules are designed to help women develop an awareness of how their nervous systems relate to their pelvic health, providing guided training to tune into their bodies and gradually release the trauma and stress stored by their pelvic floors.

From a direct to consumer model, Dilato expanded its reach by partnering directly with doctors and gynecologists and now aims to impact nearly one million women in the next two years by integrating their app into healthcare systems. This will enable patients to access Dilato's guidance from their first visit to a pelvic floor physiotherapist or family doctor.

The entrepreneurial journey is an uphill grind at the best of times and being a queer woman of color in a male dominated tech space has often compounded those challenges for Azia but her focus stayed undeterred. "... I've found that by standing firm in my mission to normalize women's sexual health and rights, I

Pve found that by standing firm in my mission to normalize women's sexual health and rights, I attract like-minded individuals who share my vision for change."

attract like-minded individuals who share my vision for change."

Azia believes that candidly sharing the ups and downs of her healing journey has helped her build a community that values authenticity and vulnerability over superficiality.

For women entrepreneurs looking to innovate in the women's health space she believes finding community is crucial. She re-



commends joining accelerators or attending networking events that can help you connect with individuals who share your vision.

"Speaking out has helped me connect with founders and stakeholders who are passionate about making a positive impact. It's essential to articulate your intentions clearly; if you keep your ideas private, others may not understand your vision or how they can help you achieve it."

Emphasizing that many women's pain is often dismissed both

statistically and personally, and that stigmas still exist around menstruation, sexual and reproductive education and rights, Azia envisions a wave of increased proactivity around women's health issues in the coming years.

And Dilato is positioning itself to lead from the front in promoting accessible solutions for women and empowering them through knowledge so they can effectively advocate for themselves in clinical settings and in everyday life.



Clean Water for All

Diana Virgovicova

Xatoms AI (NEXT 36, 2022)



T 23, DIANA VIRCOVICOVA'S professional profile glitters like a bejeweled tiara adorning a deserving head. Her achievements have been acknowledged with prestigious scholarships, historic awards and soaring accolades. But every recounting of her journey begins with one pivotal experience that still rever-

berates within all her accomplishments.

At 14 years of age, while backpacking with her mother in Asia, Diana witnessed black rivers and the plight of women forced to use contaminated water for lack of a better option. "I saw young girls using this polluted water during their periods and getting sick, ... and decided that I want to dedicate my life to solving this problem." It is humbling to imagine the depth of emotions felt by her young mind.

Such was her dedication to her mission that in merely three years, she developed a novel photocatalyst that could purify water using sunlight. Photocatalysts are materials that change the rate of a reaction on exposure to light. While photocatalysts existed that could eliminate contaminants from water, they reacted to UV light which isn't easily accessible. Diana developed a

photocatalyst that could decontaminate water using only sunlight – an abundant natural resource. By age 17, she had taken a giant leap forward towards her singular goal – clean water for all.

This breakthrough gained her international recognition and a scholarship to study Computer Engineering in Canada. In her second year at University, she joined NEXT36 and began her entrepreneurial journey. This is where Xatoms was born with a mission to provide affordable sunlight-based technology for water purification and reduce water-related deaths worldwide."

For someone who identifies as an engineer first, leading a deep tech start up in its early stages, brought the challenge of balancing both technical and business responsibilities. But by embracing the learning process and taking feedback seriously, Diana was able to leverage her team's coachability to succeed at fundraising. Now leading a bigger team as CEO, Diana primarily focuses on bringing investors on board and expanding their pilot projects.

With simple and affordable designs using modular, lowmaintenance technologies, Xatoms aims to make their water purification solutions accessible to all. Collaborations with UNESCO and Water.org ensure that these solutions reach underserved and remote communities across the globe. "For me, this is not just a technology company; it is a company that

For me, this is not just a technology company; it is a company that can change lives, especially those of women and girls."

can change lives, especially those of women and girls." Deeply empathetic towards women and girls all over the world who spend countless hours travelling in search of water, Diana is committed to changing their lives with easy access to clean water. Once freed from the burden of basic survival, she hopes to see these young girls devote their youth to learning and education and aims to establish scholarships and initiatives to empower them.

Empowering Conscious Construction

Sheida Shahi

Adaptis (NEXT Founders, 2022)

T TAKES A KEEN EYE TO IDENTIFY invisible gaps. Working as an accredited architect in Ontario, Sheida Shahi recognised a gaping disconnect in the demands of planning complex retrofits in buildings and the tools available to do so. Was it possible to create a solution that would empower consultants to thoroughly process complex datasets to make

informed decisions about an asset? Sheida Shahi was convinced that this could be done and she found backers who believed her.

With this conviction she began her PhD in 2018 and took a deep dive into research. She joined forces with Aida Mollei, a fellow PhD researcher, and together they concluded that the market needed tools to help building owners and consultants make more cost effective and emission conscious decisions for their capital projects. Leveraging years of exhaustive research and industry experience while exploring data driven methodologies to improve the design decision-making process, Sheida Shahi and Aida Mollei co-founded Adaptis.

Adaptis is a powerful software platform that uses AI powered generative design algorithms to create and analyze thousands of design options for new buildings as well as renovation, retrofit and adaptive reuse options for existing buildings. These options are optimized for both environmental impact (energy use, carbon reduction, waste) and cost-effectiveness

At the heart of their methodologies lies a vision of cyclical sustainability that encapsulates the entire lifespan of a building. Coupled with this foresight, is a deep sensitivity to a building's relationship with and impact on its environment.

"As the only whole lifecycle decarbonization platform for

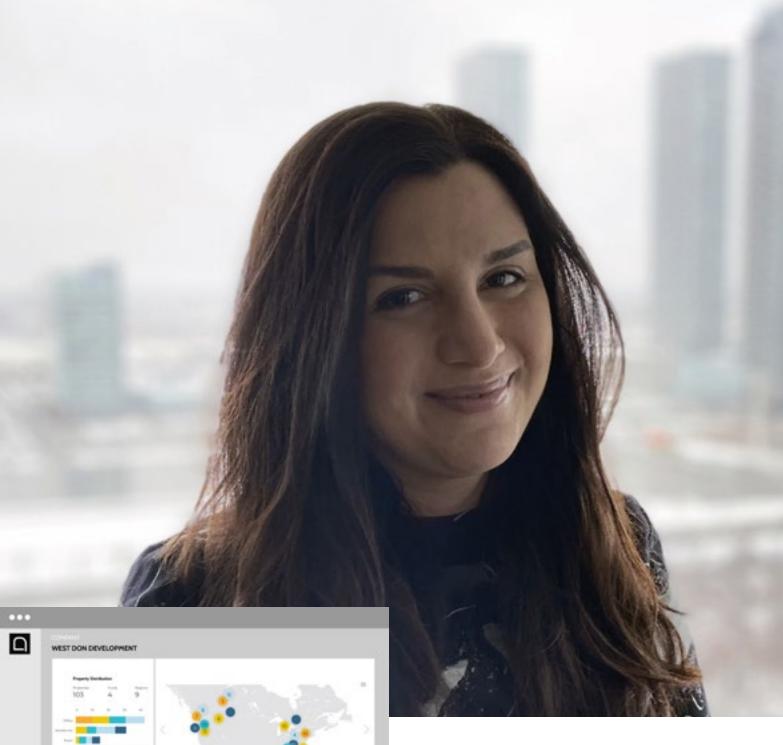
buildings in the market, Adaptis also offers cost-benefit improvements in capital expenditure and whole lifecycle costing by optimizing Whole Life Cycle (WLC) carbon across various metrics (e.g., upfront embodied carbon, use stage embodied carbon, operational carbon, end-of-life, and circularity)" states Sheida Shahi.

Construction accounts for nearly 40% of global energy related emissions. By offering a comprehensive, data-driven approach to decarbonization Adaptis creates a definitive pathway to reduce construction related emissions on a massive scale. In just two years, Adaptis has completed over 300 building assessments, enabling a total greenhouse gas emission reduction of 108,600 tonnes of CO2 equivalent over the lifespan of these buildings.

Moreover, Adaptis achieves 20x faster optimization of building performance scenarios by combining advanced AI and machine learning algorithms. This enables rapid identification of optimal solutions for stakeholders through an analysis tailored to a client's requirements and delivers actionable insights that maximize ROI.

Adaptis has established Sheida Shahi as a leading force in construction technology. She hopes to see the world of deep tech make the same meaningful strides in inclusion and diversity as she has seen in the field of architecture. She would like to see the number of female founders in science based companies grow at a faster pace and believes that a lot of work is required to encourage female founders to leap in the tech world. While hiring for her own team, she makes a conscious effort to foster diversity and considers it a privilege to empower diverse voices to share their perspective.

However, she cautions that starting or participating in startup culture is a significant personal and family commitment. To keep





knowing that you are not the only one going through neverending complexity, is sometimes all you need to push forward."

For more information, <u>click here</u>

up with everyday demands of being a startup founder, personal growth must be prioritised along with professional development. She believes achieving balance is a crucial challenge for women working at the intersection of complicated traditional spaces like design, engineering and tech. "Learning to pick the right battles, compromise effectively and relying on a network of support, and knowing that you are not the only one going through neverending complexity, is sometimes all you need to push forward." Sheida advises.

Looking ahead, Sheida envisions a future where every built building benefits from the Adaptis platform to optimise its cost and carbon performance at every stage of their lifecycle. If your primary goal is to cash out or make tons of money, this might not be the right path. Entrepreneurship requires passion for the day-to-day work and a clear mission to sustain you through the challenges."

Making Magic Slippers

Dani Kagan & Victoria Marshman

Mave & Chez (NEXT Founders, 2024)

T SOUNDS LIKE THE PLOT of a fun besties movie – Dani and Victoria, two long time friends, fail to find a stylish slipper for Dani's pain relief. So they decide to make one. Together they end up building a boutique brand unlike another. This is the true origin story of Mave & Chez, Dani Kagan and Victoria Marshman's footwear brand for stylish and supportive slippers.

"Maves", as Dani and Victoria adoringly call their creations, arose from a need for pain relief married to an unwillingness to compromise on style.

Distressed by pain in her feet and lower back during her pregnancy, Dani consulted a podiatrist who recommended slippers designed for orthopaedic comfort. An exhaustive search of the market revealed that available options could either look good or feel good, but not both. Dani and Victoria immediately recognised that there was an urgent and unmet demand for stylish and comfy at-home footwear for women. Echoing the desire of countless women who had been in their shoes before, they wanted slippers that looked great and felt even better.

So they rolled up their sleeves and set about creating a solution to meet that need. With nearly 14 years of experience building businesses together, this dynamic duo was uniquely suited to the task. Dani spearheaded the product design and Victoria led marketing and business operations. After pouring nearly three years into its development, they successfully created the slipper that met their desired standard and branded it Mave & Chez.

It is evident that these slippers have been designed with a lot of care and attention to detail. Using premium materials and an arch focused construction, the design boasts a Dual Insole Technology to address foot swelling and collapsed arches. Available in a range of colors and prints, these chic slippers are a perfect blend of fashion and functionality. Dani and Victoria have clearly succeeded in manifesting their vision: a stylish pair of slippers, so durable and comfortable, that whether you wear them indoors or outdoors, they make your feet feel at home.

With a great product powered by charismatic co-founders, it is no wonder that Mave & Chez succeeded in securing deals in Dragon's Den Canada. In addition to being a pivotal validation of their company's mission, Dragon's Den was an intense learning experience for both Dani and Victoria: "The feedback and exposure from the show have been invaluable in shaping our growth strategy and reinforcing our commitment to delivering value to our customers. We're incredibly grateful to have Michele Romanow as a mentor and champion for our brand."

While their brand is receiving love from investors and customers alike, Dani and Victoria are as committed as ever to giving back. Whether it's raising over \$5000 for women's causes like Redwood Shelter and Rethink Breast Cancer or donations worth more than \$250k to support victims of human trafficking in Canada, philanthropy is integrated into their business model. In total, they have donated over \$300k to Canadian Charities over the past decade through their marketing campaigns and events.

To other women dreaming of launching their own businesses in the competitive fields of fashion and lifestyle Dani and Victoria's advice is simple, "Do it for the love of the journey. If your primary goal is to cash out or make tons of money, this might not be the right path. Entrepreneurship requires passion for the day-to-day work and a clear mission to sustain you through the challenges." These words capture the essence of Dani and Victoria's grit which powers them in their labour of love.

A Powered Precision

Amy Lorincz vopemed (NEXT AI, 2023)



OR AMY LORINCZ, it all began with a simple question: *How can we improve surgical visualization to make procedures safer and more efficient*? This question that emerged while interviewing 21 surgeons as part of the Stanford Biodesign framework was only the beginning. Through these conversations, Amy identified

a critical gap in minimally invasive surgery – one that existing tools had yet to address. The result was vopemed, a company on a mission to empower surgical teams with cutting-edge, Aldriven vision-enhancing tools. Their flagship product, CLARIS, is a real-time software solution designed to improve visualization during surgery, allowing surgeons to operate with greater precision and confidence.

Every founder faces unforeseen challenges, and for Amy, fundraising proved to be one of the most demanding. What was initially projected as a smooth process extended four months longer than planned, testing the resilience of the vopemed team. However, persistence and strong relationships turned the tide. Early supporters from Vitruvius Innovation played a crucial role in guiding vopemed through the complexities of fundraising, ultimately helping the company secure \$2.29M CAD in pre-seed funding. This milestone validated vopemed's vision and provided the necessary runway to accelerate innovation.

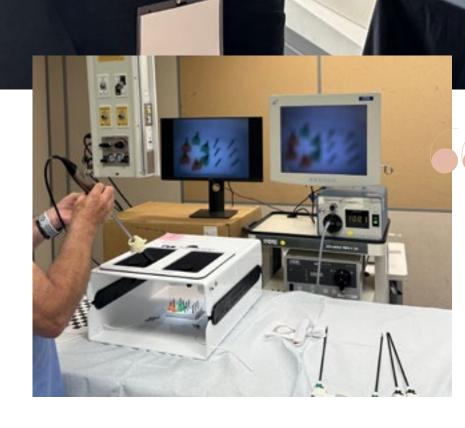
Although CLARIS is still in its pre-market phase, early data already suggests its potential to revolutionize the field. In Robotic-Assisted Laparoscopic Prostatectomy procedures, CLARIS has demonstrated an ability to reduce smoke in obstructed segments by 43%, significantly improving visualization for surgeons. Better visualization translates to fewer errors. Studies indicate that 9% of surgical injuries stem from inadequate visualization – a problem CLARIS is designed to mitigate. The demands of leading a MedTech startup are immense, but Amy has found ways to stay grounded. Whether it's hiking in the mountains, backcountry camping, or pottery, spending time outdoors provides a vital reset. "These moments remind me of the importance of balance," she reflects. "Taking a step back often leads to the fresh perspectives and creative solutions needed to tackle complex challenges."

The MedTech industry remains a male-dominated space, and for female founders, the path to success is often met with additional hurdles. Only 2% of women-led startups secure capital, a figure that rises to just 26% for those with a male co-founder. Rather than being deterred by these statistics, Amy has remained steadfast in her approach – focusing on delivering results and proving impact. She credits mentorship, peer networks, and strong allies as key factors in navigating the challenges of entrepreneurship.

Looking ahead, Amy envisions a future where vopemed's CLARIS is a standard tool in every operating room – bridging the gap between AI and surgical practice. The goal is to redefine how minimally invasive procedures are performed, setting new benchmarks for safety, efficiency, and surgical precision.

"What excites me most," she shares, "is the opportunity to harness AI and computer vision technology to deliver real-time, transformative solutions. The potential to improve patient outcomes on a global scale is what drives us every day."

Vopemed is not just building a product – it's driving a paradigm shift in surgical visualization. As the MedTech industry embraces AI-driven solutions, CLARIS is poised to become a cornerstone of modern surgical practice, ensuring better outcomes for both patients and clinicians. With a strong foundation, a resilient team, and a bold vision, Amy Lorincz and vopemed are leading the charge in transforming the future of AI in surgery.



What excites me most is the opportunity to harness AI and computer vision technology to deliver real-time, transformative solutions. The potential to improve patient outcomes on a global scale is what drives us every day."

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Acrylic's paintings are incredibly high fidelity, and recreate not only the final outcome, but also the artist's creative process."

Unshackled

Chloë Ryan Acrylic Robotics (NEXT 36, 2021 & NEXT AI, 2022)

N THE WORLD OF PAINTED ART, Acrylic Robotics has created a paradigm shift in the same league as what the invention of the printing press once did for written text. Founder Chloë Ryan is leading the vanguard into the uncharted territory: the art and technology of painting using robots. With AI guided precision machines developed by Acrylic Robotics, vality painted art can now be scaled and automated like

high quality painted art can now be scaled and automated like never before.

These painting robots can mimic an artist's brush movements stroke for stroke, authentically recreating each painting from scratch. This makes it possible for multiple buyers to own identical and authentically recreated paintings. Like literary novels, music albums, or movies, paintings as an art form can now aspire for an equally wide reach among art lovers. Moreover, using AI, the robots can recreate any image or idea into a painting in the unique style of an artist you love. That artist will receive credit and compensation for each recreation in their style. Making their painting style a valuable commodity just like painted artwork unlocks a fresh passive income stream for artists.

Acrylic Robotics is on a mission to make high quality painted art accessible to the vast majority of art lovers. This is in stark contrast to the art gallery ecosystem in which a handful of artists create paintings for ultra wealthy collectors. As Chloë states, "My goal was to make it easier for artists like me to earn a living without relying on the traditional gallery system, which restricts access and inflates prices. At the same time, I wanted to make highquality art more accessible to the general public." This ultimate goal serves as a driving inspiration for this company.

Chloë's journey began as a young artist who realised how commerce in the art world was rigged against independent artists making it virtually impossible for talented artists to make a living off their art. Her desire for a solution to this problem found fruition when she pivoted from learning art to studying mechanical engineering at Mcgill University. This is where she conceptualised and developed the prototype of a robot that could paint. Realising it's importance early on, she honed her entrepreneurial acumen at NEXT36, Canada's flagship program for top 36 young founders, where she eventually founded Acrylic Robotics.

Being an artist herself, Chloë is keenly aware of the emotional

thread that connects the artist, the art and the art lover. She sees Al as an artist's tool, and not as an artist's peer. Any concerns about the dilution of artistic intent or style are instantly dispelled with one close look at the recreated paintings. The quality is incredibly identical and actually recreates not just the final outcome but the journey of the painting's creative process on canvas. With guarantees that artists shall retain all rights to their works, more and more artists are embracing this new model with excitement.

This success however, has been hard fought. Looking back at the journey of her company, Chloë calls out a pattern of bias against female founders while fundraising which she observed during the time she was looking for investors in her idea. During their early pitches, Chloë and her co-founder noticed a stark difference in how their idea was received. "In the earliest days, when we were a two-woman founding team, we had our male intern present the technical slides during pitches," she recalls. "We quickly noticed that when he presented, the questions focused on business strategy, assuming the technology was feasible. But when we presented, the conversation often turned into skepticism about whether the technology could even work. Same slides, same information – completely different reactions."

This bias, she explains, stems from "pattern matching" in venture funding. "Investors subconsciously look for founders who resemble past success stories," she says. With so many examples of young male engineers leading deep-tech startups, it's easier for investors to believe in the next one. "But when they see a 20-year-old female founder from Montreal in robotics, they don't have any existing patterns to draw from – which makes it much harder to gain their confidence."

Rather than letting skepticism slow her down, Chloë adapted. "Understanding these dynamics has shaped how I approach leadership... building undeniable proof that the technology works – because sometimes, you have to show people before they'll believe."

Having grown from all the challenges in her journey, Chloë Ryan continues to lead Acrylic Robotics in pursuit of her goal. As she shares in her words, "That's the movement I want to champion: making art more accessible, stripping away the intimidation factor, and celebrating the idea that beauty and creativity should be part of everyone's world, not just a privileged few."



A Decade of Impact: **A Decade** of Impact: **A**

MICHELLE McBANE, Managing Director at StandUp Ventures and a long-time mentor at NEXT Canada, sat down for a candid and heartfelt conversation with ALEXANDRA McGREGOR, Chief Programs Officer, in celebration of her remarkable ten-year journey at NEXT.



MICHELLE: Let's start by talking about your 10 incredible years at NEXT. Talk to me about your early career and what initially drew you to NEXT Canada?

ALEX: When I came to NEXT I didn't know the first thing about startups and I couldn't tell you what a venture even was. I was an English Lit/History major in university and my background professionally was in the non-profit sector. I worked previously on national programs at Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada and before that in education programs at The Fraser Institute, which incidentally is where I first met Claudia Hepburn, one of our Co-Founders at NEXT. After a fulfilling six years in programs in the non-profit sector, I made a terrible mistake in taking a corporate job for more money and immediately regretted it. So, when the opportunity presented itself to come to NEXT, I jumped at it. I'd been watching the early days of what was then The NEXT 36 as some of my friends at the Fraser Institute had come over to work with Claudia, and you could just tell something special was happening here.

Tell me about a pivotal moment from year 1, another from year 5, and perhaps one from this year that you can share.

Oh that's easy. In year one, the great accomplishment was making it through alive! That year was a blast, and there are lots of now-familiar faces in the ecosystem from that year – great cohort. Year 5 would be launching NEXT AI – it really felt like we were in the right place at the right time, with the right people to take advantage of the early AI wave and deliver value to founders building AI companies.

But by far the most pivotal moment this year, and in all years, happened just last week with the largest gift the organization has ever received, \$11 Million from Tim & Frances Price and Reza Satchu & Marion Annau. It's a total game changer for the organization and we're still walking on clouds over what this represents.

What does this gift represent for NEXT and your team?

Well first of all, it's mind-blowing. People don't realize NEXT is a charity and one that is not publicly funded or attached to any universities. While this allows us to operate with great autonomy, financial stability can be precarious from year to year.

So right off the top, \$11 Million is sustainability like we've never experienced before. It will re-energize our thinking on venture creation and growth, and it gives us permission to cast a more ambitious and long-term strategy for the organization. I can't even begin to convey how excited we are and when you asked earlier what it means for the team, it's a tremendous vote of confidence in the work we are doing, and we intend to do everything in our power to make it count for future cohorts and alumni.

If there's a common trait or traits you can point to in the successful founders you've worked with, what would they be? Can you highlight a few alumni who really stand out in your ten years?

That's like picking your favourite kid and saying it out loud – it's too hard to pick a few, I could honestly list off fifty. In terms of common traits, the best are deeply curious, intelligent, have an above average drive and work ethic, and are motivated by a desire to build and a need for freedom.

You know all the alumni and have watched them come into the program as 21-year-olds with no startup experience to now achieving great success. Tell me about the importance of the alumni and a few stories from the early days versus their successes now.

It's like you can have all the right ingredients and sometimes the missing piece is just time. I remember when I first started we had like three alumni who had achieved some modicum of success and we'd have to keep asking them to come back on the carousel and help us promote the program. Because the program is only as strong as the people we can recruit, the program we deliver,













and the alumni who emerge. And in those early days...the startups fail and a part of you worries the thing isn't working. Now, when we have a gathering of alumni and I look around, I'm almost star-struck because the group is so impressive, and they've become household names and builders in the ecosystem. Alumni are the superpower of the organization long-term. They are increasingly prominent in our programming, whether as mentors, guest speakers, or case protagonists in classes, and that's something that just wasn't possible in the early days.

These are some of the brightest, passionate builders in Canada and they also happen to be really good people – so it's hard not to feel optimistic about Canadian tech when you're around them, despite what you hear in the media disparaging Canadian tech.

I want to talk more about the Canada first angle, I mean that is actually really deeply embedded in NEXT. We hear this from the leaders of NEXT and the Board. What does that mean to you?

Conceptually, NEXT was born out of a desire to reduce the prosperity gap between Canada and the US. Our mission is to increase Canadian prosperity through entrepreneurship – so that ethos is deeply embedded in our programming. When you look at GDP comparisons today the picture is worse, not better. So yes, the problems are big and real from an economic and political standpoint but again, when I look at the alumni and many great founders in Canada more broadly, I think we have much to feel good about and need to keep pushing in the direction we want to go. Rome wasn't built in a day.

Outside of the alumni founders, are there other people, maybe staff, board, or advisors who've had a particular impact on your journey here?

A huge part of what makes NEXT Canada special is Reza and Ajay and their commitment to the organization and its people. They are both once-in-a-generation individuals who operate at the highest level, so it's really a privilege each year to see how they think, and to witness the impact they have on the founders while in the program and years down the road. They are both a huge part of why I've been here ten years and why I love my job.

I'm also so grateful to our CEO, Kyle who is our longest serving CEO. Kyle's steady leadership and trust in our team has created an environment for our programs to thrive.

And then overall, the person who has had the greatest impact as a mentor and friend, is Peter Carrescia, who is one of the best people in Canadian tech and some one I never stop learning from.

Any parting thoughts for our reader?

I just wanted to thank you Michelle because you've been a constant throughout all of this too. I remember very clearly when you joined on as a mentor at NEXT and how many founders you've supported in your career. This issue is in celebration of women entrepreneurs and what a champion you've been in the ecosystem for so many.

EMPOWERING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS:

Unlocking Potential and DUUE Success for OHEN Entrepreneurs in AlaGa

THE DYNAMIC WORLD of entrepreneurship, women are increasingly breaking barriers, leading innovative ventures and making significant contributions to the economy. However, the journey to entrepreneurial success is often loaded with unique challenges. Recognizing the need to support and empower women entrepreneurs, EY Canada is putting programs in place to unlock the potential of women-led businesses.

They're focused on supporting women founders who have built profitable companies and are eager to scale sustainably. It provides access to a wealth of resources, helping participants navigate obstacles and achieve their ambitions.

EY Canada brings together an exclusive network of trailblazing entrepreneurs and leaders of high-growth companies. They benefit from a tailored executive education program with year-round activities designed to accelerate business growth. In addition to guidance on non-financial, long-term value creation that aligns with their growth strategies, women entrepreneurs are given the opportunity to enhance brand visibility through exposure to influential business community members, thereby building trust with investors, employees and customers.

Together, we can shatter glass ceilings and create a more inclusive and dynamic business landscape," highlights Brenna Daloise, Partner, EY Canada.

This year, EY Canada is shining the spotlight on four exceptional women entrepreneurs from Canada, each leading innovative and impactful businesses:



From left to right: BRENNA DALOISE – Partner, EY Canada. JULIE BEDNARSKI – Founder and CEO of Healthy Crunch. CAITLIN MACGREGOR – CEO of Plum. COURTNEY WATKINS – Owner of Mine & Yours. FLORENCE LEUNG – Principal of Catalyst Agents. MIRANDA FRANCOUR – Director of People and Culture of Hillberg and Berk

FLORENCE LEUNG of Catalyst Agents

From Vancouver, Florence leads Catalyst Agents, a marketing firm that serves upscale brands in North America. They offer comprehensive cross-cultural marketing services, including media planning, digital marketing, influencer campaigns and social media management.

JULIE BEDNARSKI of Healthy Crunch

Based in Mississauga, Ontario, Julie heads Healthy Crunch, a company dedicated to making everyday foods healthier and delicious. Their products include granola bars, crispy squares, seed butters, chia jams, and more, all designed to offer nutritious alternatives without compromising on taste.

COURTNEY WATKINS of Mine & Yours

Courtney runs Mine & Yours, a luxury resale boutique that operates through physical stores, online platforms and popup shops in Vancouver and Toronto. They specialize in buying, selling and trading designer clothing and accessories, offering sustainable ways to monetize wardrobes.

CAITLIN MACGREGOR of Plum

Caitlin MacGregor is the founder of Plum, a talent assessment platform that uses psychometric data to help employers make better hiring decisions. Plum aligns talent potential with growth opportunities, transforming how companies identify and nurture talent.

As these inspiring women continue to break new ground, they pave the way for future generations of women entrepreneurs to follow in their footsteps and achieve their dreams.



Women who created a legacy at NEXT Canada:

CANADA CELEBRATES THE

legacy of remarkable women who have shaped its journey and continue to make an impact beyond its walls. These trailblazers share how their time at NEXT influenced their paths, shaping them into the leaders and changemakers they are today.

Olivia Lunderville

Former Program Manager at NEXT Presently, Manager, Programs at DMZ

What is your current role and what excites you about it?

I currently manage the incubator program at DMZ, where I work closely with early-stage founders to support their efforts in building and expanding their businesses. The most exciting part of my role is witnessing their evolution as they overcome challenges and bring their vision to life. Being part of this transformative process is both inspiring and fulfilling.

What key learning from your past role at NEXT has helped you with your current function?

A key learning from my time at NEXT Canada was the importance of focusing on founder development - equipping entrepreneurs with the tools, resources and education they need to build successful business. By prioritizing this foundational work, I've been able to support startups more effectively and help founders better navigate challenges as they scale their business.



What is one of your proudest accomplishments when you were at NEXT?

One of my proudest accomplishments at NEXT was planning National Selection Weekend for the Next36 program. As one of the cornerstone events, it was a significant responsibility and an incredible opportunity to advance NEXT's mission of empowering entrepreneurs. My four years at NEXT were pivotal in shaping my career; they introduced me to the tech and innovation ecosystem and surrounded me with extraordinary leaders and founders who inspired my passion for this space - one that continues to drive me years later.





Former Director of Growth & Innovation at NEXT Presently, Strategy & Partnerships, Keynote Speaker, Amazing Race Canada S8

What is your current role - and what excites you about it?

I am currently the Head of Integrated Markets, Partnerships and Company Support at the CAN Health Network - it's a long, convoluted title that really means I work with an amazing team that helps develop meaningful relationships with enterprise as well as drives company success in Canadian health care. What excites me is that we are always building. Whether it's working with our great partners on solving their business challenges and expanding their markets within the healthcare industry or it's working with founders and amazing Canadians on their market penetration and expansion - every day is different! It's truly a really exciting space to work and to look at Canada's healthcare sector as an economic driver creating jobs and building GDP.

the context and problem space before designing a solution, and iterating and staying open to feedback along the way is crucial to success - whether you're an entrepreneur, a facilitator, working on a startup team, or inside of a larger organization!

What was one of your proudest accomplishments when you were at NEXT?

I was at NEXT for five and a half years, so it's really hard to choose a single one! A few that stand out are: Helping to launch NextAl in Toronto and Montréal, launching the Canada. ai website & community and taking home the Startup Canada award for Collaboration of the Year, and re-designing the Next 36 Startup Weekend to include more diversity, women & design representation, and launching the NEXT Alumni Ambassador program! All of these were shared wins and collaborations with amazing NEXT staff, alumni, and community partners, to whom I owe so much for incredible learning experiences, friendships, and career milestones.



Ainsleigh Burelle

Former Marketing & Community Manager at NEXT Presently, Innovation & Experience Design Strategist at Bridjr

What is your current role and what excites you about it?

Currently, I'm an Innovation & Experience Design Strategist at Bridjr – a human-centered transformation consultancy that helps organizations achieve their growth goals through clientcentricity. I'm so excited by the opportunity I have in this role to create positive change, and in many ways I was led here through my early experiences at NEXT. My focus is on designing experiences and services that are future-ready, alongside the stakeholders who use them and are impacted by them the most, so what's not to be excited about? In a world that's complex and rapidly changing, I'm motivated to use the tools of co-design, foresight, and data to shape a more kind and resilient world.

What was a key learning from your past role at NEXT that has helped you in your current function?

I took away so many lessons from my time at NEXT – both directly through my role, and indirectly through immersion in the entrepreneurship community. All have contributed to and helped shape my views on innovation, design, people, leadership, and technology. The biggest learning I carry with me today is probably that innovation isn't Innovation (with a capital 'I') until people are using it to create or receive value. So the importance of speaking to users, creating with users, taking time to understand

What was a key learning from your past role at NEXT that has helped you in your current function?

NEXT Canada really set me up for my career and helped me find a passion in creating new, and embracing, challenges that come. As the Director of Growth and Innovation, I was able to build out new programs and explore how to extract revenue and value from different industries leveraging our amazing insights and connections to emerging technology. It didn't always result in success, but the process of finding what spaghetti actually sticks has helped me build resilience and also understand the importance of trust and relationship management. I've established many friendships from my time at NEXT that are still in my life today - from colleagues all the way to partners and collaborators.

What was one of your proudest accomplishments when you were at NEXT?

It's a full circle moment because my proudest accomplishment was actually developing the foundations of CAN Health within NEXT. Almost 10 years ago, I was able to explore this vision with Dr. Dante Morra and the previous NEXT CEO, Sheldon Levy. To truly see the success of this concept and how it was put to paper within the NEXT Canada walls - it's truly an amazing feeling! The best thing is, there's still more success to pull from this and I can't wait to see where it goes from here!



Jenn Patterson

Former Chief Marketing Officer at NEXT Creator of GRIT Magazine Presently, Growth Consultant, Business Builder & Women's Health Advocate

What is your current role – and what excites you about it?

After helping my sister course correct and scale her food service business mid pandemic, I've since had the opportunity to help several other early stage businesses grow through my consulting business. There is so much that excites me about working alongside scrappy, passionate entrepreneurs, but I especially love helping them bring their big ideas to life. Along the way, I've caught the founder bug and I am excited to share that I am launching my very own venture in women's health, coming next Spring!

What was a key learning from your past role at NEXT that has helped you in your current function?

Don't be afraid to move fast and break things. At NEXT I shed the shackles of my corporate life and learned to run a business like an entrepreneur. I still pride myself on my organizational abilities and ops chops, but I work far more quickly, creatively and with a lot more passion.

What was one of your proudest accomplishments when you were at NEXT?

I was really fortunate to be at NEXT during a transformative phase with a really strong leadership team. Despite some really intense headwinds, including a global pandemic, we managed to reinvigorate the brand, launch new channels (hello, GRIT) and move to a virtual learning environment. I am so proud of how the entire team and our alumni handled this seismic shift.



AMONG THE WORLD'S BEST

Dr. Foteini Agraioti and RBC's AI Leadership

THE EVER-EVOLVING LANDSCAPE of artificial intelligence, few names resonate as strongly as Dr. Foteini Agrafioti. As the Chief Science Officer at RBC and Head of Borealis AI, she has been a driving force behind RBC's ascent to global AI excellence. Her contributions not only solidify RBC's position as a trailblazer in AI but also exemplify how ethical and innovative AI can transform industries.

A VISIONARY LEADER IN AI

Dr. Agrafioti is widely celebrated for her groundbreaking work in Al and biometric technology. Before joining RBC, she co-founded Nymi at NEXT Canada under the NEXT Founders program in 2013, where she pioneered the development of HeartID, a biometric authentication technology that identifies individuals based on unique cardiac signals. With a Ph.D. in Electrical and Computer Engineering from the University of Toronto, her academic and entrepreneurial achievements have made her a prominent figure in the Al community.

At RBC, she has steered Borealis AI, the bank's AI research institute, toward addressing some of the most complex challenges in financial services. Her leadership reflects a commitment to innovation, ethics, and delivering meaningful client experiences through AI.

RBC: AMONG THE WORLD'S TOP AI-DRIVEN BANKS

RBC's AI initiatives have earned it global recognition. The bank recently ranked #3 overall and #1 in Canada for AI maturity in the Evident AI Index, which evaluates 50 global financial institutions on Talent, Innovation, Leadership, and Transparency. RBC was one of only two banks to rank in the top 10 across all four pillars, showcasing the bank's holistic approach to AI excellence.

Dr. Agrafioti's influence is deeply tied to this achievement. Under her leadership, RBC has made significant strides in the Talent and Innovation pillars, the two most heavily weighted areas in the Index. The bank's AI training programs and innovative projects, many of which are spearheaded by Borealis AI, have played a crucial role in this progress.

A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP

As RBC continues its journey to redefine what a bank can achieve with AI, Dr. Agrafioti remains at the helm, exemplifying visionary leadership and a commitment to ethical innovation. RBC's recognition in the Evident AI Index reflects not just technological advancements but also the bank's unwavering dedication to its clients and communities.

Through her work, Dr. Foteini Agrafioti has cemented her position as one of the world's foremost leaders in AI, inspiring a future where technology serves humanity with responsibility and purpose. With her guidance, RBC is not just keeping pace with the world's best but setting the standard for what's possible in AI-driven banking.



LEADING WITH PURPOSE

A Conversation with **AACY LOCKHAPT** on Leadership, Legacy, and Championing Women Entrepreneurs

ANCY LOCKHART'S LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP, philanthropy, and community building has left an indelible mark on Canada's cultural and entrepreneurial landscapes. As the former Board Chair of the Royal Ontario Museum, she played a pivotal role in advancing one of Canada's leading cultural institutions. Her dedication to fostering innovation and education is reflected in her contributions to organizations across the arts, healthcare, and entrepreneurship. In this exclusive interview for GRIT, Arlyne James sits down with Nancy to discuss her remarkable career, her commitment to fostering innovation, and the lasting impact of NEXT Canada's initiatives.

ARLYNE JAMES: You've held pivotal roles, such as Chief Administrative Officer at Frum Development Group and Vice President at Shoppers Drug Mart, where you oversaw operations in vastly different industries. How did these experiences shape your leadership style and approach to navigating complex challenges?

NANCY LOCKHART: There's a maturing process in terms of one's leadership style. Early on, I had my own business with about 100 employees when I was in my 20s. My leadership style back then was immature and quite top-down. As you mature, gain more



Arlyne James CEO & Founder, My Dorm Store Mech Eng, UofT

ARLYNE JAMES is the founder and CEO of My Dorm Store, an innovative online platform offering affordable dorm essentials like bedding, and décor. By partnering with universities, colleges and private student residence, My Dorm Store provides tailored move-in packages and year-round carepackages and dorm essentials, simplifying the dorm setup process for students nationwide. Passionate about accessibility and convenience, Arlyne is transforming the student housing experience with her practical and stylish solutions.



confidence, and learn more, you develop a leadership style that is hopefully more inclusive and better at recognizing the skills and strengths of your employees.

When you transitioned from being in hands-on operational roles to serving on the boards of Canada's top companies, how did you draw on your executive experience to provide strategic guidance? What do you believe is the most critical trait of an effective leader in today's business environment?

I think the most critical trait for a leader is to listen and to have a broad view of the market and the world. Transitioning from an operational role to a board role is an interesting switch because one is very hands-on – you're in charge of telling people what to do or deciding the strategy. As a board member, however, the board approves the strategy, but someone else develops it with input from the board. That famous saying, "nose in, fingers out," very much applies at the board level. You want to ask questions, understand, and provide input, but it's not your job to execute. Overreaching happens if you get too involved in the work of the executives or the CEO you've hired – they're there to do the job, and you need to let them do it.

Having a broad, general interest is also important. Boards are made up of people with different skill sets – you might have a financial expert, an industry expert, or others with various areas of expertise. Together, they provide the best possible counsel and input. It's very different from an executive role.

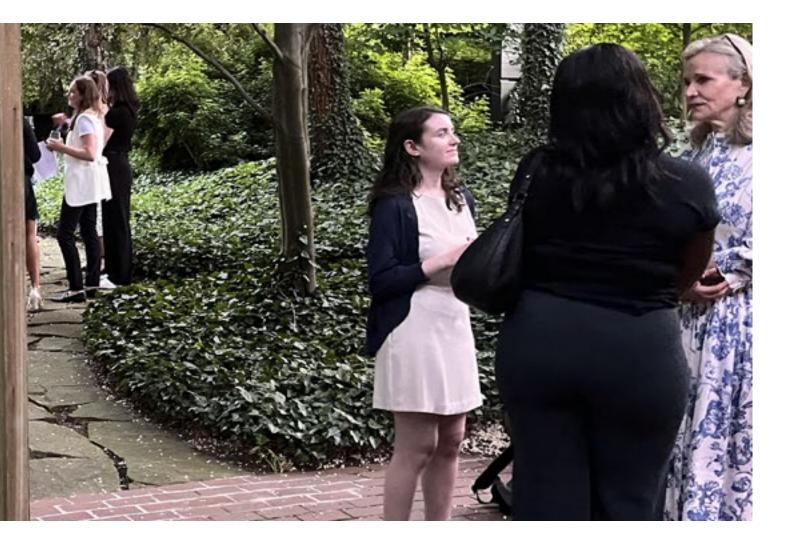
You've been such a passionate advocate for women entrepreneurs through your work with NEXT Canada, especially with the garden parties you've hosted over the years. What inspires you to champion women in business?

Nancy Lockhart: I think women need an extra push and extra help in business. While there are many programs that support women, being a woman in business is still quite different from being part of the old boys' club, which still exists to a large degree. Providing a space where women can come together to discuss their goals and frustrations is both meaningful and helpful.

As someone deeply invested in improving the student experience through my dorm store, I've come to appreciate how essential thoughtful and supportive environments are for young people. With Alignvest Student Housing's focus on purpose-built student accommodations, how do you see your work shaping the way students live and thrive during their university years?

Well, we've sold the best in housing, so I no longer play a role in shaping the university experience. However, while at Alignvest, our team focused heavily on making the housing safe, accessible, and conducive to studying. We included features like wonderful study carrels in the buildings and well-equipped mailrooms where students could easily receive packages from Amazon or elsewhere, allowing them to focus on their studies.

We offered amenities that truly supported students, and having access to your great product, which made moving in easy, quick, and affordable, was another valuable benefit. We also rented furniture specifically suited to those spaces, such as high beds with ample storage underneath, ensuring students had room to keep their belongings organized. This helped minimize distractions and



created an environment that supported their academic efforts. I believe we played a significant role in providing a comfortable, student-friendly living environment.

The recent sale of Alignvest Student Housing marks a significant milestone. As Chair of the Board, what are your hopes for how this transition will impact the future of students living in Canada, and what legacy do you think Alignvest leaves behind in this space?

I think we've sold the company to a really good organization, Forum Asset Management. Forum already had experience with student housing before acquiring ours, and I believe they are highly motivated to provide the same level of amenities and safety that we prioritized. I think we can be proud of who we sold the company to and feel confident that they will maintain the standards we set.

Thinking about the next generation of female leaders, what legacy do you hope to leave for the next generation of female leaders, and what practical advice or actionable steps would you recommend to young women striving to excel in leadership?

Work hard. Don't sweat the small stuff – easier said than done, I know. Maintain a high moral standard, avoid getting involved in petty disputes or inappropriate relationships, and always keep looking forward to the next opportunity. Help others rise behind you, because, as the saying goes, you don't advance unless the people coming up behind you are at least as good as you, if not better. Never be afraid of capable people. Has there been a moment in your career that really stands out – something that taught you a surprising lesson about yourself or shaped your journey in a big way?

I think I've had many pivotal moments in my career. In my early career, as an entrepreneur, I owned a drugstore business. We faced significant challenges – it was based in Alberta because it was the only province where you could own a drugstore without being a pharmacist. However, Alberta's economy was highly volatile, and during a downturn in Calgary, we had very low retained earnings. Despite having a thriving business, we struggled with cash flow. I was very young at the time, and we ended up selling the business to Shoppers Drug Mart.

Looking back, with the knowledge I have now, I realize I could have kept the business going. But you learn these lessons too late sometimes. That challenging period taught me more than almost any other time in my career. You learn how to adapt, swallow your pride, do what needs to be done, pick yourself up, and move forward. That was a pivotal time for me.

I've also had other moments where my career took unexpected turns. On a couple of occasions, I decided to move on from roles due to differences in moral values. I believe you have to stay true to your own values and ethics. If you see something wrong, you can't be complicit. While it may be difficult in the moment, staying true to your principles ultimately serves you well.

Having a strong moral core is essential – not just in business but in life. You can't separate the two; you can't be moral in your personal life and immoral in your professional life. Consistency in your values is key.



France Awards, The Legion of Honour to Heene Desmarais

ÉLÈNE DESMARAIS, Chair of the Board of Directors of HEC, Chair of NEXT AI Montréal and one of Canada's most influential leaders in the field of AI has just been elevated to the rank of Knight of the Legion of Honour, a prestigious distinction awarded by the French Republic.

President Emmanuel Macron of France presented the insignia to her during a ceremony in Montréal on September 26, 2024.

The Legion of Honour, the highest honorific distinction awarded by France, rewards outstanding merits in the service of the Nation. The spotlight was on Mme. Desmarais' formidable career, which has been marked by her constant innovation and abiding commitment to deepening Franco-Canadian relations. In addition to her accomplishments as a businesswoman, the following

contributions to society earned her this prestigious decoration:

- Founder of the Centre d'entreprises et d'innovation de Montréal
- Co-chair of ScaleAI, Canada's AI Global Innovation Cluster
- Contribution to the creation and expansion of the Creative Destruction Lab and Next Al Montréal, to support the development of national and international players in the artificial intelligence sector
- Participation in the founding of Forum IA Québec, an organization that promotes Québec's artificial intelligence ecosystem in Canada and abroad
- Setting up of the International Center of Expertise in Montréal on Artificial Intelligence, a key player in the global partnership on artificial intelligence jointly initiated by Canada and France
- Active involvement in the health sector (Board Member of the CHUM) and in the promotion of cultural activities (Deputy Chair of the Board of Directors of the Montréal Symphony Orchestra)
- Contribution to the creation of the Conference of Paris, an extension of the International Economic Forum of the Americas

On behalf of the entire team at NEXT Canada – congratulations Hélène on this well earned recognition.



LEAPing Forward: Driving Linamar's Growth

Linda asentatz

THIS EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW, Lauren Lake sits down with Linda Hasenfratz, the Executive Chair of Linamar Corporation, a global leader in manufacturing with a focus on precision engineering and innovation. Under Linda's leadership, Linamar has grown into one of Canada's largest and most successful industrial companies, with operations in over 20 countries.

Linda's approach to leadership is rooted in a strong cultural foundation, a relentless drive for operational excellence, and a deep commitment to sustainability and innovation. Her role as Executive Chair encompasses everything from long-term strategic planning to overseeing cost-saving initiatives and fostering the next generation of talent within the company.

This candid conversation between two women leaders provides a rare look at the principles that have shaped Linamar's success and how Linda continues to inspire those around her.

LAUREN: I grew up in Stratford, Ontario, studied civil engineering at Western, and co-founded Bridgit through NEXT Canada. With your strong connection to Western's engineering program, I'd love to hear more about your early inspirations. What did you want to be when you were a kid?

LINDA: Well, at one point, I wanted to be an astronaut – when I was very young. But as I got older, especially in high school, I really loved science and math. That led me to study science at university. I went to Western as well and did an undergrad in chemistry.

When I graduated, I went into the pharmaceutical industry. In hindsight, I wonder why I didn't study engineering. I loved math, physics, and science, and engineering would have been a pretty obvious choice, considering where I've ended up.

One of the reasons I didn't pursue it is that engineering isn't well understood at the high school level. I don't know about your experience, Lauren, but in my high school, counselors didn't talk about engineering. It wasn't even discussed – what it is, what it entails. We knew what science was, but engineering is just applied science. Some universities even call it that.

I think if it were better explained, more people would be interested. That's a regret of mine – not going down that road. But, anyhow, here I am.

I can relate to discovering engineering almost by chance – it's not a well-understood profession. When you were a kid watching your dad build his business, what stands out most from that experience?



Lauren Lake

COO & Co-Founder at Bridgit, Forbes 30 Under 30

LAUREN LAKE is the co-founder and COO of Bridgit, a trailblazing software company revolutionizing workforce management in the construction industry. With a background in civil engineering and a passion for optimizing operational efficiency, Lauren has helped Bridgit deliver innovative solutions like Bridgit Bench, a leading platform for construction workforce planning.

Lauren's firsthand experience as an entrepreneur and leader in a traditionally male-dominated industry gives her a unique perspective on resilience, innovation, and navigating challenges in high-stakes environments.

It was a great opportunity to see my dad's business grow from literally the basement of our home. Over the years, he managed to expand it while wearing a lot of hats and working long hours. But he always made time for our family, which was important to him and my mom.

He always came home for dinner, even if he had to go back to work afterward. Family dinners and vacations were a priority. I remember that balance he maintained – building a business while ensuring he had time for his family.

For me, grit is toughness, resilience, and the practical tackle challenges without losing sight of

I love that. It's hard to do. You went to Western for chemistry and then did your MBA at Ivey. At that point, were you already thinking about working at Linamar?

By the time I started my MBA, I was already working at Linamar. I graduated from Western in 1989 and worked in pharma for about a year. I was in sales, doing well, and proving to myself that I could succeed without my dad giving me a job.

But I realized that turning my back on something my dad created was a mistake, and I wanted to be part of it. At the time, the company was doing about \$100 million in sales. I thought, "If I play my cards right, I could run a \$100 million company one day."

I started at Linamar and worked my way through every discipline in the company to gain a well-rounded perspective. I began on the shop floor, running a machine, then moved to quality, engineering, materials, accounting, and estimating – almost every area. I did that for two years before stepping into middle management roles like materials manager and accounting manager.

In 1994, I started my first plant, and around that time, I began my MBA through an executive program, attending classes every other weekend. My MBA was the perfect complement to the practical knowledge I gained at Linamar.

Understanding the business from different perspectives is invaluable. It's how entrepreneurs learn – by wearing all those hats. I had firsthand experience in each role, so when I became a general manager, I knew what was realistic to ask and understood the interactions between departments.

That experience inspired a program we call LEAP – Linamar Entrepreneurial Advancement Program – which rotates young leaders through every area of the company, including international stints, to prepare them for leadership roles. It has been hugely successful, and many graduates now run plants. The program, which lasts three to five years, focuses on developing young leaders with inherent leadership qualities.

That makes a lot of sense. We see some of our construction company clients doing something similar—rotational programs to give people exposure to different areas over a few years. Was the idea of moving between roles or divisions something your dad came up with to give you that exposure, or was it something you pushed for?

No, it was my dad's idea to move me around like that and also to start on the shop floor. Family companies can sometimes make the mistake of parachuting their kids into senior roles, and that undermines respect within the organization. I started on the shop floor, so no one can say I didn't earn my way up. Of course, I was given opportunities – I'm not naive about that – but I had to prove myself at every step.

I had to perform on the shop floor, in the quality department, in engineering – wherever I worked. Every six months or so, I moved to a new job, sometimes even to a new plant with a new team. Each time, I had to fight for respect again because I was young, female, and the founder's daughter – three strikes against me before I even started. I had to prove I was smart, capable, hardworking, and a team player, and you can't prove that by saying it. You have to show it through your actions.

I remember my dad saying, "The only job you start at the top is digging a hole."

My uncles told me early on, 'If you want to be an engineer, you need to understand how things work on-site.' So, they put me on job sites doing whatever was needed – manual labor, epoxy injections, overhead chipping. It was tough, but figuring things out and proving myself gave me so much confidence.

Like you, I was young, female, and part of a family business, which comes with unique challenges but also valuable lessons. Your dad was a big advocate for succession planning, and you worked across the company and pursued your MBA. At what point did the conversation about you taking over begin, and who started it?

That conversation started right at the outset, when I told my dad I wanted to work at Linamar. From the start, we discussed the possibility of me stepping into a leadership role, but we also agreed there were no guarantees.

We decided we'd evaluate two things at every step: willingness and capability. I was aspiring to a leadership role, but I needed to ensure it still aligned with my aspirations, and he needed to feel I was capable of advancing. I think that's crucial because unsuccessful successions often happen when someone is promoted beyond their capabilities or pushed into a role they don't truly want.

We had an HR advisor who taught us about "skill and will," and that concept stuck with us. We'd evaluate whether someone was struggling due to a lack of skill or a lack of interest because the solutions are very different.

How did this approach with your dad shape your own succession plan when you transitioned the CEO role to Jim Jarrell?

Another key principle my dad believed in, which has informed how we approach promotions at Linamar, is setting people up for success. It's easy to promote someone beyond their capabilities, and sometimes people you think will excel in a new role struggle.

A better approach is to give people more responsibility incrementally. For example, if you're preparing someone to manage a plant, you might start by giving them one production line. Once they're succeeding, give them a second line, then a third, until they're essentially running the plant. Then, you can formally promote them to general manager.

That's how I approached things with Jim. As far back as four or five years ago, I started giving him responsibilities typically associated with a CEO. By the time we transitioned roles this August, he was already doing the job. It wasn't a dramatic shift because we had gradually evolved into those roles.

Of course, there are still adjustments. For example, I no longer have a team reporting to me; Jim does. But overall, the transition has gone very smoothly because of the trust and strong working relationship we've built over 25 years. We communicate well and know each other's strengths, so if something is off, we can address it quickly. That trust is critical to a successful leadership transition.

mindset to the bigger picture.

That makes a lot of sense. Someone once told us that when you make a promotion, it should be obvious to everyone, and that really resonated with us.

You touched on your role as executive chair earlier, but what else has changed? What does your role look like now, and what's your vision for Linamar in this position?

As executive chair, I'm primarily focused on four areas.

First, strategy – developing and refining our long-term vision for the company.

Second, government and investor relations. I've retained leadership over both of these areas, though Jim is becoming more involved than he was previously.

Third, cost savings and culture-building. This includes a program my dad pioneered, called CAT (Cost Attack Team), which is a cornerstone of our company's culture and success.

CAT involves visiting a plant with a small team to analyze every detail of a production line – from process layout and operator positioning to tooling costs and scrap issues. We aim to improve financial performance, quality, and safety. It's a hands-on, collaborative effort that's highly effective.

What I love about CAT is how much it accomplishes. It's an incredible teaching and learning opportunity. We bring ideas to the table, not just from our own expertise but from best practices observed at other plants. For example, if a plant is using an innovative tool or method, we can share that knowledge with others. The real-time exchange of ideas during a CAT exercise is far more impactful than a database or email chain.

It's also delivering results. This year, we've implemented \$42 million in cost savings through CAT – well above my \$35 million target. So far, we've identified nearly \$90 million in opportunities. If we continue on this path, our implementation levels will surpass expectations.

Another aspect I enjoy is the exposure to young talent within the company. Through CAT, I get to work directly with junior engineers, technicians, buyers, and quality staff – people I wouldn't normally interact with. It's amazing to see them in action, recognize their potential, and actively contribute to their development.

Lastly, CAT reinforces Linamar's unique culture. My dad instilled a "do it today" mindset – don't delay what can be done now. During CAT exercises, we embody this ethos. For instance, if we identify a cost discrepancy, we'll call the supplier on the spot to negotiate better terms. It's about addressing both big ideas and small changes that add up to significant impact.

Overall, I love this work. It combines teaching, learning, culturebuilding, cost-saving, and talent development – everything I'm passionate about.

Congratulations on exceeding such a big target!

This publication is titled GRIT, and that's something NEXT instilled in my business partner and me. What does grit mean to you, and how has it helped you through challenges when giving up might have seemed like the easiest option? What Does LEAP Stand For?

At Linamar, LEAP represents the company's commitment to innovation and continuous improvement. It stands for "Linamar Engineering Advancement Program," a cornerstone of the company's strategy to nurture talent, drive technological advancements, and stay ahead in the competitive manufacturing industry.

Through initiatives like LEAP, Linamar fosters a culture of learning, leadership, and cutting-edge development, ensuring that employees are equipped to take on new challenges and propel the company forward.

we wanted to define our leaders. These include being passionate, motivating, planning effectively, executing well, communicating clearly, and – most relevant here – having edge.

Edge is about handling tough situations, making difficult decisions, and managing crises. To me, that's what grit is all about – toughness, resilience, and a willingness to face challenges headon. It's deeply embedded in our leadership DNA and something we actively seek and cultivate in our leaders.

In manufacturing, every day brings new challenges. Whether it's a crisis with a supplier or a customer, you need leaders who can stay calm, assess the situation, and respond effectively. Grit is essential for navigating these moments and maintaining longterm success.

I'd also add that grit is closely tied to business acumen – the ability to stay practical and realistic. Sometimes people get swept up in rhetoric or focus on aggregate data that doesn't tell the whole story. For example, someone once told me, "If you want to make data meaningless, aggregate it," and I think that's true.

You might see a trend line that looks stable, but if one area is excelling while nine others are struggling, you've got underlying problems to address. Grit includes stepping back, questioning assumptions, and digging into the details to uncover the real story.

So for me, grit is toughness, resilience, and the practical mindset to tackle challenges without losing sight of the bigger picture.



CALVERT on Leadership, Resilience, and Driving Change

MILIE CUSHMAN, co-founder and CEO of Kira Talent, interviews Alycia Calvert, Chair and CEO of EY Canada, about her groundbreaking journey as the first woman to lead a Big Four professional services firm in Canada. With a 25-year career at EY, Alycia has held roles such as Chief Operating Officer and Managing Partner for Markets & Accounts, earning a reputation for exceptional leadership and deep client relationships.

Alycia shares pivotal moments from her career, insights on resilience, and her vision for fostering inclusivity in leadership while driving meaningful change through EY's entrepreneurial ecosystem and Ripples program.

EMILIE CUSHMAN: You're the first woman to lead one of the Big Four accounting firms in Canada. What does this milestone mean to you personally, and how do you see it inspiring other women aspiring to leadership roles in traditionally maledominated industries?

ALYCIA CALVERT: I recognize that this is not just a personal achievement, but a milestone that represents the progress and potential for women in leadership roles. I hope it inspires other women to pursue leadership positions with confidence and determination, knowing that their aspirations are within reach because of their capabilities and hard work. By seeing more women in these roles, we can continue to foster an environment where diversity and inclusion are at the forefront, ultimately leading to stronger and more innovative organizations.

Starting as an intern in 1992 and now becoming CEO, your journey exemplifies persistence and resilience. What were some pivotal moments where you had to summon extraordinary GRIT, and how did those moments shape your leadership style?

Early in my career, I took a job opportunity with EY that landed me in Calgary. Moving from London, Ontario, out to the Prairies and then eventually to Toronto helped me to build extraordinary grit both professionally and personally. Going somewhere new meant adapting in a demanding industry to a new environment, team and clients — all while raising my young daughter away from family and friends. Though it came with challenges, it's a pivotal decision I owe much of my success to and recommend to anyone who has the chance.

Whether it's a move to a new city, role or industry, seek out the opportunities that push you out of your comfort zone. While it may seem daunting at first, these moments are what help us to become better, more resilient and adaptive leaders.

What are some key lessons you've learned throughout your career that you believe are critical for the next generation of women leaders? How do you hope to use your platform to amplify their success?



Emilie Cushman Co-Founder & CEO of Kira Talent

EMILIE CUSHMAN is the co-founder and CEO of Kira Talent, an admissions platform that empowers higher education institutions to select applicants holistically by integrating video and timed written assessments.

A passionate advocate for innovation in education, Emilie has been widely recognized for her entrepreneurial achievements. She was named to Forbes' 30 Under 30 in Education and was selected as one of the women founders for the EY Entrepreneurial Winning Women™ North America Class of 2021, a prestigious program that supports high-potential women entrepreneurs as they scale their businesses. Emilie's work continues to transform how institutions identify and nurture talent.

Sticking with the rule of three, there are a few lessons I have learned and committed to throughout all levels my career. Firstly, don't underestimate the power of initiative. I've learned that you can't wait for someone to hand you opportunities – you must seek them out and show that you're ready and equipped to tackle them. Know your worth and advocate for yourself to push to the next level.

Secondly, be adaptable. It's no longer status quo to simply react to emerging trends – you must be able to spot them as they emerge and stay ahead of the curve. Be receptive to change and build the skills and capabilities needed to capitalize on their potential.

Lastly, seek mentors who challenge and uplift you. I'm fortunate to have a community around me of family, friends, mentors and colleagues who continue to provide the honest feedback and encouragement needed to pursue the belief that I can achieve



At EY, creating a positive and lasting impact is not just an aspiration – it's our purpose. We understand that to build a thriving Canada, we need to create opportunities that allow all communities to prosper. And that entrepreneurs play a big role in this equation.

anything I set my mind to. And now, as a leader, I see it as my responsibility to do the same for others.

You've emphasized EY's role in driving social and economic growth. Could you share examples of how you see the firm contributing to meaningful change in Canada, particularly for under-represented communities?

At EY, creating a positive and lasting impact is not just an aspiration – it's our purpose. We understand that to build a thriving Canada, we need to create opportunities that allow all communities to prosper. And that entrepreneurs play a big role in this equation.

For 30 years, we've been recognizing Canadian founders and entrepreneurs with the goal of building and supporting a diverse and inclusive ecosystem that helps enable entrepreneurial growth at every stage of business. Through our EY Entrepreneurs Access Network, we help Black and Indigenous leaders access learning and networks to transcend barriers and scale their businesses.

On top of this, entrepreneurship is a key pillar within the EY Ripples program. Through this platform, our people can offer their time, expertise and passion to support not-for-profits and social enterprises. In 2024 alone, our people across Canada volunteered over 25,000 hours in support of 50+ pro-bono projects. One example includes participating as judges in the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business's annual Indigenous Entrepreneur Pitch Competition, which supports high-growth potential Indigenous entrepreneurs.

If you could go back to the start of your career as an intern at EY, what advice would you give to your younger self about navigating challenges, embracing opportunities, and staying true to your purpose?

Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. The biggest opportunities in my career came from saying "yes" to challenges I wasn't sure I was ready for.

Leading a major firm like EY comes with immense responsibilities. How do you manage your time and prioritize selfcare? When you're not driving growth and innovation, how do you like to spend your time to recharge and stay grounded?

I've never liked the term work-life balance, because it's never a perfect balance. There will be times when your personal life needs you more and others when work requires extra attention. Being able to show up fully present in those moments will require you to take a step back and understand what you need to prioritize in order to be most successful.

My greatest advice is simple: make time for the things that bring you joy. For me, that's hiking with my daughter or walking my two dogs, Simon and Sadie.

Are you ready to shape

your future with confidence?

The better the question. The better the answer. The better the world works.



WINGS Istening

We're turning up the volume on the women who keep things running behind the scenes – executive support, interns, and the operational powerhouses who make it all happen. From insightful business deep dives to feel-good storytelling, here's what they're listening to when they hit play.





Marie Snyder Executive Assistant, Som Seif

Julia Louis-Dreyfus's **Wiser Than Me** has a few seasons now, and I love the breadth of interviews of women writers, artists, actors, politicians, activists, scientists, athletes, models, etc. sharing their insights and learnings, both personal and professional from the perspective of long life lived. Of course, Julia inserts plenty of humour and self-deprecation and finishes each episode by de-briefing with her mom!



Sandy Kechichian,

Expansion Pack – Office of the President at Shopify

In one of the recent episodes of **Superwomen with Rebecca Minkoff**, she interviewed Chelsea Hirschhorn, Founder and CEO of Frida, and spoke about the realities of raising children and how her company prepares women for motherhood. I am recently back at work after having my first baby and it has been the most challenging journey I have embarked on! Balancing a career, being a good mom, and everything else life throws at you is not for the faint of heart!



LLCVC

SISTERADOD, STORTTELLING & SELF-CARE

Alyana Satchu, Student & Former NEXT Canada Intern

The Hey Girl Podcast feels like an intimate conversation with a friend. It's soft, thoughtful, and full of real, vulnerable stories from women of all backgrounds. I find it creates space for deep, honest reflections on self-care, creativity, and personal growth which really resonates with me. Plus, the focus on women's voices, community, and self-love aligns so well with my own interests and the kind of impact I want to have in the world.



Neha Lalany Founder, The Venture Dairies and Former NEXT Canada Intern

One of my favorite podcasts right now is "**Gen She**". It spot-lights young female founders who are breaking barriers and innovating to build incredible businesses, with guests such as Canadian founder Lillie Sun, who is building Ditto! It's a great source of inspiration in my week, and I always walk away feeling motivated by the stories and insights shared by the girls behind the scenes making moves in the startup space.Airbnb, PayPal, etc.



Nat Brkic

Entrepreneurial Scholar, Morrissette Institute for Entrepreneurship and Former NEXT Canada Intern

Starting my morning commute with **The Most Innovative Companies by Fast Company** has been a game changer. Yasmin and Josh share valuable stories about innovation and insights into how companies are rethinking strategies to stay ahead. Good listen for understanding the power of bold leadership in shaping the future of business – or to get a boost of energy in the morning.founder. More women-led ventures are making headlines and reshaping industries worldwide. At NEXT Canada, we've identified ten exceptional women-led ventures poised to drive meaningful global impact.

Founders

By MAUD RAZAFINDRAMBOA (left) Lead – Ventures, NEXT AI, Montréal and STEPHANIA STEFANAKOU (right) Senior Venture Manager and Program Marketing Lead, NEXT Canada



Klaudia McDonald Co-Founder and COO BOBO

NEXT AI (Montreal), 2024

An Al-powered platform designed to provide parenting support tailored to different stages of a child's development. Bobo's mission is to alleviate the mental load of parenting by creating a digital "village"





Vishar Yaghoubian CEO & Founder TOOTHPOD

NEXT 36, 2024

Which is aiming to improve global oral hygiene through designing a smart dental gum that cleans the mouth when there is no access to a toothbrush or toothpaste through anti-inflammatory, anti-microbial, and remineralizing agents.

Eunice Wu Co-Founder and CEO

NEXT 36, 2023 & NEXT AI (Toronto), 2024

Asepha revolutionizes the way clinicians can reference literature and guidelines by using retrieval-augmented generation to provide succinct answers.



Which is a behavioral

engagement platform designed to assist investment brokerages in increasing their assets under management. Finliti is redefining wealth management by combining behavioral finance with cutting-edge AI technology.

Mahshid Yassaei Co-Founder and CEO TALI.AI

NEXT AI (Toronto), 2021

An impact driven company created to empower clinicians with a voiceenabled virtual assistant that sits on top of their Electronic Health Records (EHR)

Wendy Xiang Co-Founder and CTO ANALYST3 NEXT 36, 2024 A venture that stream market mapping an

A venture that streamlines market mapping and company research with Al. Their platform generates detailed, real-time market maps based on the most current data available, ensuring an unmatched level of accuracy and reliability in the information they provide.



focused HR innovations

Sarah Lambert

Amanda Arciero

NEXT AI (Montreal), 2020

A company transforming

HR processes through Al-

recruitment, and health-

powered tools. Her expertise

lies in workforce optimization,

Co-Founder and VP of Operations

Co-Founder and CEO ORA MEDICAL NEXT AI (Montreal), 2022 A Montreal-based startup revolutionizing physical rehabilitation for children and adults with walking disabilities. Leveraging her background in physiotherapy, she developed





Elise Tastet Founder TASTET

empowers patients

NEXT AI (Montreal), 2020

"Homy," an Al-powered walking

aid that accelerates recovery and

A Montreal-based online guide highlighting gourmet experiences and restaurants. Combining her communications background and a passion for gastronomy, she built the platform to provide curated recommendations based on quality, ambiance, and service

Anne Hunger Co-Founder and COO GLUXKIND

NEXT AI (Montreal), 2022

A Vancouver-based company creating Al-powered baby strollers. With a focus on innovation and parenting solutions, the company's products aim to support families with intuitive and safe technology







O I

Community Next canada community Making headlines

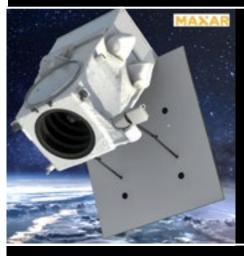


Michael Del Balso, TECTON AI Tecton moves mountains of data to AI models automagically



Ted Fleming, PARTAKE BREWING

National Music Centre launch limited-edition non-alcoholic beer with acclaimed musician Tess Roby



James Slifierz skywatch

Maxar + SkyWatch announce global availability of Maxar imagery on the SkyWatch platform



Chenny Xia gotcare

Gotcare receives B Corp certification



How Kindness Built KindWorks





Joshua Liu seamlessmd

Behind the Scenes: A checkin on Cornwall Community Hospital's use of SeamlessMD **OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS**, our alumni have captured attention for their achievements in capital raising, team expansion, innovation, and inspiration. Click on the headshots below to explore their accomplishments.



Patricia Thaine private ai

The Power List: Al



John Marzo, AIRFAIRNESS One of top 50 Hottest Companies at Collision Conference in Toronto

Jean Amiouny, SHAKEPAY Shakepay wants to drive Bitcoin adoption in Canada

Jeff Munzar Nomic Bio

Nomic Secures \$42M in Oversubscribed Series B to Expand Access to Protein Profiling





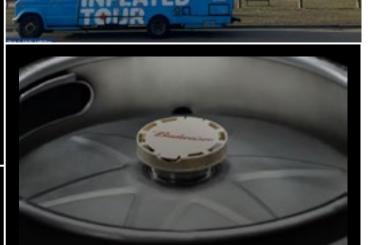
Myra Arshad Alt tex

Myra Arshad recognized as Forbes 30 under 30, North America 2025

Niraj Mathur BLUMIND

Blumind Hints at Big Chip on Roadmap





Nuha Siddiqui, ERTHOS Giving the Plastics Industry an Al-Driven, Biobased Upgrade

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