

Episode 9 - Arlene Dickinson in conversation with Lisa Zarzeczny

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Lisa - Hello everyone and welcome to episode 9 of Elevate Live. My name is Lisa Zarzeczny and I'm the co-founder and vice president of programming here at Elevate. And I'm really excited to be your host for this week's episode. Now up this week we have none other than Arlene Dickinson herself here to talk to us about a very very important topic all about reinvention both personal and professional and don't worry we'll make sure that we leave lots of time so that you get to ask Arlene some of your most pressing questions around this topic or anything else on your mind.

If you don't have a question but if you see something that you think should be asked just give it an upvote and we'll make sure it moves to the top of our list next week. Make sure that you tune in for Elevate Live. We've got the co-founder and CEO of unicorn cloud company Box on show. Aaron is going to talk about work unleashed where when and how work is changing obviously a very important topic at this time. But now I am so excited to introduce our guests for this week's episode Arlene Dickinson Arlene is an accomplished investor.

She's an accomplished entrepreneur you probably know her for her role as a dragon on CBC hit show Dragon's Den. She is also the general partner of district ventures capital and I don't know where she found the time but she's also the author of three best selling books. Her latest book Reinvention really has formed the basis of our conversation here today. But personally why I'm so excited to welcome Arlene to the show is I've been a personal fan of hers for a very long time as I've been coming up in my own professional career. I've always looked to Arlene I've always seen her on TV, played this big role, I've seen her build these incredible companies and give back and support the community and support our ecosystem. And as I've watched her do that I've thought to myself maybe I can do that too. So with that being said Arlene welcome today's show.

Arlene - Thank Lisa It's a real pleasure to be here awesome.

Lisa - Alright well let's dive in. I'd actually like to start with your own personal story. You've shared it before and I found it really touching. You've talked about being 30 years old and finding yourself in a really tough situation when you were unemployed with a high school diploma you had just been recently divorced and had lost custody of your four kids and then fast forward a short time later and you'd completely retreat and both your personal and your professional life.

You founded ventures communication and not only started a company but you scaled it to employing 50 people. And so my first question to you is how did you do that. How did you get from point A to Point B you know bringing herself out of a a less than stellar situation and building a business from scratch.

Arlene - You know it's interesting you know when I think back on those days I often kind of go you know that was that was such a time in my life where I really had to dig deep and figure out what it was I was capable of and you know I really believe that there are moments in our life when things happen that actually create the need for us to reinvent ourselves or to change.

And For me it was the situation I found myself in which was you know I didn't have university education I wasn't skilled in anything. And I had no money and so necessity was what drove me. I mean I still had joint custody of my children and I needed to provide for them and myself and my dad had taught me very at a very young age that we needed to rely on ourselves and our own hard work and our own efforts to take care of our families and so I found the will to do that and actually it was simple because I didn't have any other choice.

I mean I'd love to say it was because I had this big plan but I didn't have any other choice. I got invited to joint venture. It was a company that had already been in business for a few years Lisa and so I got invited to join as a partner but that meant that I could come and work for free because I couldn't afford me. And I had and take that leap and go ahead and try and that's what I did.

Lisa - Well you certainly managed to accomplish incredible things so again I mean kudos to you. I think that's just such an inspiring story you know. Fast forward a little bit again. I mean you go and you help Venture Communications grow into an incredible business that it continues to be. And then Calgary gets hit with a devastating flood. And so you were once again forced to transform and reinvent your business and yourself. And let's talk about the aftermath of that flood. What helps you to succeed after that setback that you know that happened at a point in my life.

Arlene - I mean to everybody who's who's listening to this I mean you think that at some point in business that you can kind of take your foot off the gas or your eye off the you know you can you can kind of relax a little bit because you've been doing it for so long and things are gonna be fine and you feel a little more calm about you're going to survive.

And so that was where I found myself when that flood happened. I had been in business at that point for almost 30 years. And you know it was one of my businesses I was doing many other things venture was one of the businesses I had and I wasn't you know working full time. And then that flood happened and I really had to reassess whether or not this business that had actually brought me to where I was in my life was when I was going to continue to support. And it actually just took me by surprise Lisa I would that you I'm bumping along I'm doing my thing I'm building businesses I'm having fun I'm investing I'm all this stuff and then a flood happens the last thing I would have expected in Calgary and it was just it it just took me by such surprise and it was really difficult. And so I had to kind of think about do I shut the business down or do I continue to build it and grow it and I just thought about all the people I employed and the opportunity to reinvent it and I decided to rely on my team and to come up with an idea of how we could we could get out of this mess we were in basically because the business was

in such dire straits and it took a lot of effort and a lot of work but it was the best thing at the end of the day that could have happened to us because it made us rethink everything. Like literally everything we had to rethink who we were what we wanted to be and how we were going to become a different type of agency moving forward

Lisa - Wow. Incredible. And so I want to dive a little bit deeper into kind of that process of reinvention because I think that's really important and in your book you lay out the four C's to reinvention our audience loves practical and actionable insights. They ask for it all of the time from our guest speakers and so tell us more what are the four Cs.

Arelne - Well when the flood happened you know I was trying to figure what to do. I actually was turned to the same business strategies that and advice that I would give to clients and that process that structured process of reinvention helped me to reinvent not just the company but myself and so the first one is **counterintuitive**. I mean it's very counter intuitive because in business we we tend to you we want to move forward all the time. We want to just keep going we're always thinking about the future and it's same in life. And we really have to do is we have to think backwards. We have to reexamine what got us where we are what are the things that led us to the place we are at. And by understanding that which is counterintuitive as opposed to wanting to move forward you have to think backwards by doing that you start to understand how you got where you are and that's retrospection is and introspection is very difficult to do and none of us like to do it because none of us really want to you know think about all the bad things and the mistakes we've made but that's actually what helps us.

So that's step one step two is I call it **currency** which is you know What is it you're good at? We all are good at something and whether that's you're talking about personal reinvention or professional reinvention, figure out what your currency is and by that I mean you know the thing that you have that nobody else has everybody has a skill. Everybody has a talent. Everybody has a gift. Everybody has a different perspective. And when we can find what our currency is whether it's you know whether we're good at baking whether we're good at helping people, whatever that thing is I mean we all have a skill. So figure out what your currency is you know figure out what your past is being figure out what you've learned from your past and what your currency is today.

The third C is to understand your **core purpose**. You know we talk a lot in life about finding your passion but I really believe that when you find your purpose; you're why, the reason that you get out of bed every day and understand that, you can start to figure out how you want to reinvent yourself to serve that purpose. And so finding your purpose is I believe fundamental.

And then the final C is **context** and when I say that if you think about the context of the world we're living in particularly this is true today as we think about the context of what's going on around us you can't reinvent yourself in a silo. You have to reinvent yourself in the context of everything that's happening in the world. And what does the world need and what can you give the world back? And so you know as we think about reinvention if you think about you know

being a little bit counterintuitive to think backwards before you can move forwards currency you know what is it you're good at finding your core purpose and then putting it all in the context of the world that you're living in and applying that then you can reinvent yourself in a meaningful way. It is a process, it is not easy work. It is not something you just get up one day and say hey I'm going to be you know a skydiver. You've got to learn how to. You've got to learn how to skydive before you can become one. So I think anything that you want to do you've got to you've got a trade yourself four and reinvention is no different, it takes planning and it takes process but it is possible.

And the other thing I'd say that I don't I talk a lot about in the book, Lisa is one of the key elements is I believe it is saying that out loud you know sometimes things aren't real until we actually say them we want to.

We want to be something and we think that our heads we don't dare say it out loud because then you know people might think we're crazy but it doesn't matter if people think we're crazy it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks of your aspirations but when you start to say it out loud and let people hear you and you repeat it to yourself and you say it out loud to your friends and family and anyone who will listen it starts to cement the path that you need to move forward because it starts to define the goal that you have not just in your own head but everyone else starts to understand it and support it as well.

Lisa - Yeah I just I couldn't agree more I love that and I agree with your comment too I don't think you know as many times as I would say that I wanted to be a skydiver out loud that that would ever ever come true for me. And so I want to step back because you referenced it and I think it's really important right now and I think a lot of our viewers are looking for this advice. This idea around context, you know, life within the past three months has changed so much. When we were hit with a global pandemic and as companies are looking to pivot their operations it's a whole different landscape out there today and it might be a whole different landscape in six months time in a year's time you know we're not really sure.

And I think that's one of the challenging things that context is shifting so so rapidly and when you look at today's world or start to look into the future what opportunity is do you think people trying to reinvent themselves or their companies should be attuned to right now?

Alene - You know it's a question I've asked almost daily and I think part of the opportunity is in this situation we're in the world. I mean there's so much going on there's a whole other conversation to have probably around things that are happening because I do think society in itself needs to reinvent itself.

I mean in general we need to really be thinking about so many things that are happening in the world. But I if you're in business right now and you're thinking about the context I would say that one of the things you need to do is really you have to kind of rework the old and and you have to get yourself ready to launch yourself or relaunch yourself into the future. We don't know exactly

what the future is but we do know that what was is probably not going to work into the future and this is a chance for you to look at your digital assets to think about your Web site to think about how you interact with clients think about what it is you want to be. This is a chance to reinvent your businesses and you're yourself and a lot of people over at the beginning of this pandemic say no you know, don't make people feel like they have to change right now just get through it and that's true too, you have to be able to be strong enough personally to be able to withstand it. But I think this is maybe a bad analogy but I'm going to use it anyhow which is if I wanted to lose weight as an example and you know I would say it's going to take me six months to lose that weight that's going to take forever to do it.

So it's just seems daunting to me. So it's going to take too long so I won't focus on it cause it's overwhelming to me. And then six goes by and I think gee that six months happened I wish I'd focused on my fitness and my health over those last six months. I mean how many of us regret that we didn't take the time that we had to do something good with it. So I would encourage everybody to think about taking this time to think about the assets you have to relaunch yourself to to work on wanting people to be able to do business with you.

That may seem odd but I think one thing that we don't spend enough time on is deciding whether or not we're creating something that people will want to interact with and people will want for the future and that takes entrepreneurialism and that takes courage and that takes a little bit of understanding what people are needing right now and thinking about the Zeit Geist of what is going on out there and applying your skills to that.

And again that's the context the world is changing. But at the core of it humans have a fundamental needs, fundamental desires, a fundamental belief in what's happening in the world is going to get better and we all want hope. So you know apply all of those things to what you can help people get to a place that they actually can to live better lives. It's complicated but it's actually not you know because at the end of the day we all are pretty basic in terms of what we need to feel good about ourselves and when we can help people get there I think we win both emotionally and socially

Lisa - Yeah I think that that's great and that's something that we as a company that elevate thought a lot about with what you said about really trying to provide value to our partners and customers even if there wasn't a clear path to monetization but we wanted just to make sure that we were trusted in it and a valued partner to these organizations and when we see some of the feedback and what's coming back from from our viewers I'm so incredibly touched by it.

We had someone write in and say you guys have no idea the intellectual lifeline you're providing right now and not just encouraged all of us all the team who's been working so hard on what you know elevate live week after week to continue down that path of provide value first and really work to deepen and strengthen relationships with all of our partners

Arlene - I commend you for what you guys are doing because I think that creativity is fundamental to us getting through this and encouraging creativity whether it's intellectual stimulation or whether it's helping people to apply creativity in a way that they aren't right now to help them get out of the mindset of negativity that's out there and not thinking about monetization but thinking about doing the right thing and helping people I think that's the change that we all need to see. Certainly we're all in businesses and we all need to make money but at the end of the day if we start at a place of trying to help others and to figure out a way to build an organization that people will want to be associated with then everybody will win totally.

Lisa - So I want to touch on what you said, something that really resonated to me and I want to dive in a little deeper you know I think in reinvention you said you know after the flood and when you were really forced to look back you found that you weren't the entrepreneur that you aspired to be. You know I look at that and I'm like but you were so successful? So can you dive in. What did you mean by that. What does being an entrepreneur mean to you?

Arlene - You know that was probably the most unexpected outcome of the reinvention process for me, was really understanding that I wasn't the entrepreneur that I thought I was. I mean I was running a great small business and I was involved in small businesses as I invest and all those things but for myself I wanted to do something that I thought was possible and needed to happen, that no one else had done before.

And I kept thinking about my you know a fund and Canada that was going to focus on the food and the health space and consumer goods and I kept thinking about it and thinking about it. But I would get no's and I would get people telling me that I was crazy for even thinking about it because now people invest in technology they don't invest in food, the returns aren't the same all of these things, and I kept thinking about it and then I finally decided that if I really wanted to reinvent myself I had to take a bigger risk I had to dream in a way that didn't kind of temper myself and I had spent my career being told no a lot. I started to marginalize my own expectations as a result, I was happy I was successful but I wasn't really pushing any boundary and barriers around doing something that no one else had done before and to me that is true entrepreneurialism it's the it's the dream to do something that you see that nobody else sees and then having the courage to kind of push through that.

And I hadn't really done that. And so I set out to raise a fund that I was a female general partner in Canada that the odds were stacked against me I was doing it in a space that people weren't finding sexy because it was food and health companies. I was doing all of these things but at that moment, I realized that that's entrepreneurialism and that's that big leap that you take where you put everything behind it because you believe so strongly in something that you're going to go at it. And I had been as I said running great businesses and investing. But I wasn't.

Lisa - Well you know it's so incredible to see that that boldness that risk paid off. Right. And so you know one of the things that I wanted to chat about was more about District Ventures Capital because you know you've had a pretty big accomplishment recently on April 6th just this past

year district ventures you announced that you closed your first fund of 100 million dollars. And I just want viewers to be really aware of how monumental that is.

I think it's one thing when you look at raising you know multi millions of dollars when you talk about enterprise SaaS if you talk about artificial intelligence. But as mentioned you know the food beverage and health is a completely different sector and one hundred million dollars is almost unprecedented so you know congratulations first of all, but then what was the biggest hurdle in raising that fund?

Arlene - I hadn't raised a fund before, I'd invested as I said on my own and other funds and I'd invested in angel investing and early stage investing but I'd never raised a fund and you would think because I I'm a dragon and I have profile you would think it would be pretty simple to go out and raise capital well I got to tell you it's not.

It was hard it was hard work and I and I feel blessed that I did have the kind of warm welcome of people knowing who I was. So I didn't have that barrier but I had the barrier of not ever having raised a fund before I had the barrier of trying to do it in these sectors and industries that people were not investing in. And I had the barrier of it being a female first time fund and a new space a new sector. And so these were major hurdles that I really had to find investors and peace that we're going to believe in.

And the thesis of the fund and I understand the importance and the value of food and health as it related to not just societal good but financial ability to provide return. And I never had somebody no's in my life eyes I went meeting after meeting after meeting I continually was knocking on doors that that whole would take 100 no's to get to the 1 yes, man that is so true you guys like you're gonna get a lot of nose you're gonna get a lot of people you it's well that's nice and if another lead investor come along and you let us know how that goes for you.

I mean Canadians are very good at polite no's let me tell you I've heard lots of very polite no's very kind knows but at the end of the day no's and I just learned to just keep going and partway through I I was starting to raise and, I'll share a story I was I was at about 16 million dollars and I had in my mind I had always had in my mind that I wanted to raise one hundred million dollars and people kept telling me that it was too big that it was a first time fund and you know you can't raise a hundred million dollars like don't even go out there and say that you want to raise one hundred million dollars is too much and I didn't understand that I thought what why is that too much like that should be feasible.

This is a huge opportunity. I mean there's U.S. funds in this space that are billion multi-billion dollar funds why in Canada can't I raise one hundred million? But I kept hearing that and hearing. So finally I had to just kind of change my goalposts for what I said but I never changed the goalposts in my mind of what I wanted to do. So I'd say to people I want to get to twenty five million dollars and meanwhile I'm thinking I'm going to get a hundred million dollars come hell or high water. But I wouldn't say it out loud because people were you know they weren't as keenly

believers I almost quit at a million because I thought I'll never get twenty five million dollars isn't going to be what we need.

We need to really have this fund big because it's got to be big enough to create an equal system around it all the other things that I wanted to do to help support the deal flow for the fund. So I called a friend and I said I can't do this anymore. I've had so many meetings and things are not going well and I just you know I don't want to raise a 25 million dollar fund, I want to raise a billion dollar platform. You know I want to get to a billion dollar platform that's what I want to get to.

And he paused me on the phone and he said to me Arlene you know, smarten up like yeah it's hard. And yeah you've been at this for a couple years of fundraising and yeah you haven't gotten there yet but you have a vision that's real and important and so get up tomorrow, put your pants on. Go there. Keep raising. Keep at it, don't quit. And because I had people like that who encouraged me I stayed at it.

Lisa - Wow. I mean I think back I think that's where I mean knowing your core purpose and knowing your why to get out of bed every day and to continue to do that and go to bat and get turned down time and time again becomes so important. And those in those situations. And so you made reference to it I mean district Ventures is a really unique company and a unique model you know with a fund of course with investment with an accelerator as well and the companies that you're supporting are again within that kind of food beverage health and wellness space. It's you know, it's no secret that the hospitality sectors, restaurants have been hit so hard by Covid 19, what have you been hearing from your companies during this time?

Arlene - You know we we our portfolio is actually really interesting. I mean many of the companies we're dealing with are doing very well through the pandemic because they provide They have staples are they their products or ones that people are seeking out right now. I mean the food and health space has become a very important space in all of our lives. We're all thinking about what we're consuming, we're all thinking about our health and our well-being. So the thesis of the fund is actually playing very well into a condition in the marketplace that is very unfortunate but what's happening is these businesses, these Canadian businesses, these small businesses for the most part are doing are surviving and doing quite well.

But there are some of them and I'd say in general, there's a little bit of fear. They don't know what's going to happen and how they are going to get through this. There's distribution models change, it's harder to get listings, it's harder to build the businesses. Capital is definitely difficult to get a hold of, I mean there's lots of programs out there but are they going to come soon enough? You know there's businesses at every stage along the way and outside of the food and health space the businesses I'm talking to are very concerned because they're basically being put into hibernation.

I mean the programs we've got are helping them kind of keep the lights on and they may help them keep some people employed but a lot of these early stage innovative companies don't have a lot of employees. They have no credit rating they use their credit cards, they've got

personal guarantees everywhere. So it's very hard for early stage innovative companies whether they're in food or health or tech or any industry any sector to be able to understand exactly how to navigate through these times. And so I would encourage you to you know again you're going to have to think hard about can you pivot.

Can you can you talk to somebody who's going to support you, can you think of new ways to make sure that you're getting capital in the door but just shuttering down for a few months while we're going through a pandemic is not going to be a solution because when you come out of it you're gonna have to be ready to be able to grab the marketplace that is there. So it requires a lot of heavy lifting and a lot of strategy and most of these companies are seeking that kind of help right now so look for mentors look, for strat strategic assistance. You know I think marketing is as pivotal right now to making sure that your markets even understand you exist and your digital presence is very very important.

Lisa - Yeah. I mean in addition to all of that what we've been hearing a lot is that for many founders and business leaders this is the first time that they've ever gone through or experienced a crisis like COVID 19 and so their you know asking themselves so many questions that they just don't have the answers to. So I think you know finding a mentor or people who have experienced recessions or or kind of disruptions before is a great start.

What other lessons can we learn from this crisis to help us emerge stronger both as you know and there's three levels of that, I think as individuals as companies and our opportunity as a society right now?

Arlene - You know this last week as I said earlier this last week has just been such a sobering week for all of us. Relative to what's happening in the world and in society and I guess you know reinventing requires all of us to think hard about what we can do to change. And just like business needs to change.

People need to change and we need to think hard about the role we all play in helping others move forward. And so I would say that you know part of me wants to say on the positive side, ignore the news if you can. Don't spend so much time focusing on the news that you get. You get this inertia as a result of it. If you get too much negativity, if you get too focused on all of the things people or other people are saying then you don't know how to act for yourself. So I would say you know try to not focus so much on the news and on your Twitter feeds on your Instagram feeds and that you get kind of lost in others views and thoughts and don't take the time to just really kind of censor yourself.

And I believe that I said it earlier but I believe creativity is as this is a secret guide here. So go back to playing with your kids and go back to listening to what your kids are saying and go back to thinking about what you what matters to you and go back to the fundamentals and caring about what people are actually experiencing and helping them. So I think if you start there you can get through this. But we do need to focus on staying creative staying innovative you know

listening to podcasts listening to you know joining elevate sessions like this where you're hearing from people who have experienced the hardness and the hardship of recessions and challenges and all of those things and learn from them but also kind of use your own brains to think about a path forward that's going to work for you.

Lisa - Yeah I think finding creativity becomes so important and it's something that we've heard from from other leaders as well we had Mark Cuban on the show a few weeks ago when we asked him out of everyone right now who are you getting your inspiration from.

And it was touching. He said his kids he said he was drawing all of his inspiration, creativity, love and passion right now from kids which I thought was a really touching story to hear from him. Last question here and then we'll move over to our next segment but something that I wanted to make sure we brought up, you're very active on social media. You've got a really large following and a large presence. And recently you raised half a million dollars for the Calgary food bank on Twitter. And so I just, you know I want to commend you for this and ask you know why did you choose to do this. Why did you think you know Calgary Food Bank is the recipient and why do you think it received so much traction online you know.

Arlene - Thanks Lisa I mean I. Thanks to everybody who contributed to that campaign, it touched me in so many ways it was just so amazing to get their support we did get in. You know what started off as me talking to my family and saying you know we need to do something where we live in a city and Calgary in Alberta has been hard hit because the energy sector and that's already had impact on employment rates here and the economy here obviously and then on top of that we've got the Colbert happening and so we had all of these things happening and the unemployment rate here was quite high.

And I could see the need and I was talking to the food bank and I realized that they were getting 400 calls a day from people looking for food on top of their already busy need that they were serving and it just struck me. I saw another campaign that was happening and Ottawa and I thought I can do something I talked to my family we said well let's talk to the mayor. Let's see if we can get the mayor involved and we'll do a dollar for every re tweet and we'll give ten thousand dollars.

And I saw immediately that we got to 10000 tweets so fast. I thought, there is a huge need out there. And people were saying well what can I do to help? How can I support? And so I reached out to my network and I literally had no shame, I called everybody I could call, I talk to everybody I could call across the country, said hey we have a need here this is a big need in Calgary. And people just, they dug deep. Everybody you know from a dollar to ten thousand dollars everybody gave.

And within nine days we had five hundred twelve thousand dollars raised and it was because people want to help each other through this and we all can understand and commiserate and empathize with people who don't have food to eat right now. I mean that should be nobody in

Canada and. And so it was a cause that mattered to me, I was, we were very very poor when I grew up. Groceries were a luxury to us. And I understand what it's like to not have food in your home.

And so this was something that mattered to me to see what I could do to support the community and it really, we gave ten thousand dollars that was in the scheme of things what we ended up with was five hundred and twelve thousand dollars that gave Foodbank the ability to give two and a half million dollars worth of food to the community.

Lisa - Wow I just think that's so incredible. So again kudos to you and to everyone who donated and supported and and and I think we can continue to keep thinking about how we can support our communities as agents like those when they need it the most right now.

OK. We are now going to move over to our highly anticipated Rapid Fire segment. This week is invest or pass. So Arlene, our viewers have sent in their business pitch ideas and we'd like to see if you would invest in that company and that idea. Or if you are going to pass on it and one sentence as to why OK.

So our first company is well beings. It's a corporate wellness platform for keeping remote workforces healthy.

Arlene - I would invest I would invest because right now we're all trying to find ways to make sure that our our workforces are mentally and physically healthy and happy. So yeah I'd invest awesome

Lisa - OK, this is an agro tech vertical hydroponic modular farming system. Invest or Pass?

Arlene - Invest. I have looked at this type business before and I love it because you know being able to grow produce and be able to provide fresh produce into remote communities in particular in Canada is critical and I love the notion of this and I have seen businesses the space and I've invest so invest

Lisa - OK. Amazing. All right we're two for two. OK. The next idea is a personalized AI. Driven nutritionist bot that checks on eating habits daily.

Arlene - I might pass on that one only because it's a really crowded space right now and a lot of people trying to do that and not that you couldn't also be really successful at it but I think yeah I probably would pass

Lisa - OK. All right. No hard feelings there. And on to our fourth and our final pitch it is a marketplace for Zoom based health and fitness classes.

Arlene - Oh, I'm feeling bad. Private pass on that too because only because there. So there is a lot of there are a lot of people doing exactly this. And then it would be really hard to kind of make sure that you were consolidating all of the right ones. And you're also going up against some fairly major, I'm not saying that you shouldn't because I actually like businesses going big businesses but this is a tough one because I think it's going to take a lot of effort and a lot of time to really get it going. So sorry, now I feel really bad.

Lisa - No hard feelings no hard feelings ok. We also polled our audience to find out what pitch idea they thought would be the most successful. And it came back a resounding, they wanted to invest in the corporate wellness platform so that was what our audience had to think about those four ideas.

Arlene - Yeah and makes sense. Okay.

Lisa - Awesome well thanks Arlene now, right before we kick off and get to our Q and A and see what questions you've got four Arlene. We want to zoom bomb this week we've got Kayla Isabelle Kayla is the executive director four Startup Canada Startup Canada is one of my favorite organizations. It's a national organization that supports entrepreneurs and founders as they grow and scale their businesses in all areas of Canada. And I mean talk about baptism by fire. Kayla started this new role at Startup Canada two weeks before the global pandemic hit, here in Canada we instituted a work from home. And so we wanted to give Kayla the opportunity to ask arlene what's on her mind these days.

Kayla - Fantastic thank you Lisa and thank you to the entire elevate team for organizing these incredible sessions week after week really really incredible see this program come to life. And thank you Arlene for taking the time like you Lisa I've been so inspired by your story. I'm sorry Arlene, your multiple moments of reinvention and really taking advantage of those moments to reassess everything. Many entrepreneurs that we're speaking to at the moment are in that space and under this specific context that's more important than ever.

So my question is really looking in addition to this idea of reinvention what comes next for startups when they look to grab that future marketplace? And you know, it's sort of an unknown future future space but my question is twofold as we restart the economy under this new context what roles do you see entrepreneurs particularly startups playing in the future of Canada's prosperity as a nation? That's sort of the first section of the question and then to specifically looking at women indigenous entrepreneurs marginalized communities you're speaking about that earlier and the importance of really championing and advocating for voices. How do we rebuild an entrepreneurship ecosystem with a stronger foundation post COVID 19?

Arlene - Great questions I think. Listen the startup community is integral to an economy and I believe that innovation have that very very important child group of people who are willing to start businesses at a time when things are hard to begin with in the past. But even worse today and so keep the community sacred and supported and funded and encouraged is to me the

most important, because that innovation, if we lose that person who is thinking about doing things differently and has the courage to step into that then we lose the opportunity to really have the future economy and so from my belief is startup and early stage companies need a ton of support right now that we have to support them that we can't ignore them that they are under a lot of fire and we have to do everything we can to give them the tools they need so that they can survive because they they really are the future of our economy and so I'd say let's let's support them.

I mean to your other question I'd say COVID 19 has had a disproportionate effect on women and people of color and I imagine that includes entrepreneurs and on whole and I think we have to look out for entrepreneurs from marginalized communities and make sure that we're creating conditions for them to be successful. You know I would be remiss if I didn't take a moment to just talk about what's happening around this. I'm super hopeful that this public unrest that we are witnessing creates real change and particularly for black entrepreneurs. You know the narrative is changing and people are becoming more aware of the injustices that the black community has been facing. But the reality is that permanent and positive change takes time.

And so my hope is that we take this pivotal time and in history and that we think about what we can do not just for the near-term but obviously for the long term and that we think hard about helping all black entrepreneurs, people of color entrepreneurs, female entrepreneurs any marginalized community any community of entrepreneurs who require support and assistance that we're really focusing on that not just now but into the future because now with the latest being shone on it but it's what we do with it next that actually is going to matter the very very most. So this is very important to me and I think racial injustice and racial inequality and what we're seeing in the world right now needs to be addressed and I'm glad that people are paying attention.

Lisa - Thank you so much Karly for Zoom bomb this week. OK. Now we get to move over to our audience. Q and A OK so Arlene, one piece of advice for non-essential businesses during this time?

Arlene - I can't say it enough like Focus on your your digital strategy. You may not be an essential business as it relates to everyday news that people have. But if you have a service or a product that people could use, can help their life be better in some way or could actually increase their happiness quota or whatever that you offer, you have to be present online. So I would say focus on your digital presence focus on your ability to be seen located and heard from digitally so that people can find you. Too many people don't have ignored their digital presence in the past few years and I think now is the time to focus on it.

Lisa - I couldn't agree more. I know in talking with other media outlets and companies, we've been hearing that that Internet and website traffic has spiked three times so it's just incredible and a great place to focus. OK. We have Joe from Montreal. Joe is celebrating his sixty first

birthday. So happy birthday Joe. Of course we've got to ask your question and so Joe wants to know what communication style leaders should be adopting during this time?

Arlene - Well first of all Happy birthday Joe. Transparency, authenticity you know having regular check ins with your team making sure that you're telling them you know what you do know, offering them hope and encouragement I think the number one thing we can do as leaders is just be transparent and accessible and communicate more than less I think those are the key things. Authenticity and honesty are very very important right now.

Lisa - Awesome thanks Arlene. We've got a question coming in from Carl and Carl is asking what is your view of the role of formal education in promoting success? The cost of post-secondary education continues to be out of reach. So I think at the end of the day you know when you're evaluating what you should do next or if post-secondary is a good option for you. But you know how much do you attribute success to post-secondary?

Arlene - You know, I have honorary degrees and I'm really grateful for them but I never was able to go to university, I had to start working when I was quite young. And so I didn't get a chance to. But my father was had a decent education and he actually created the first self based software system in the world.

And he believed very much about people's ability to learn at their own speed and in their own ways and he created a platform for that and was really ahead of his time, became an entrepreneur very late in his life. And so education was very very important. We were told it was important and I believe it is critical. And I would urge anybody to get an education and to continue to educate themselves. But if you can't get an education by going to university post-secondary school that doesn't mean you have to stop learning, that doesn't mean you can't go online and continue to excel and teach yourself new things and a new ways.

But I do think it's important. I wish that education was free to everybody in this country. I think it should be. I think it is a right not a privilege and it's something that I would love to see changed. I don't know if it will happen in my lifetime but I do believe that university education should be accessible to everybody not just to people who have money

Lisa - Agreed. I couldn't agree more. We've got a question coming from Gavin and Gavin is saying you know post COVID 19 companies will need to re-evaluate their supply chains. And so do you think made in Canada is the new solution?

Arlene - I think made in Canada's is so important right now because of this very issue and supply chains are fragile that the breaking apart in many places there's a lot of disconnection between being able to get the access to the goods and the ingredients we need and Canada is this nation. And I can only speak right now. Let me just talk about an ingredient perspective from the food space. Canada and the space we have not just the innovation in those spaces but we have the raw ingredients to be able to turn them into products and export them. So I think made in Canada is critical, I think our export opportunity is enormous. I don't believe I have a

fundamental belief that no stick should leave this country without value being added to it. In other words we should not be just shipping our commodities all around the world for people to then turn into products so we can buy them back. So I think made in Canada is critical. I'm a huge advocate for this I believe strongly that we can't support Canadian companies enough. There is a global base of business out there yes. But Canada can be a game changer as it relates to food, health, innovation, technology. There's so many places that we can win if we just focus on supporting Canadian business.

Lisa - Agreed. I think a lot of companies right now are really refocusing their efforts to say you know is my supply chain local and if not then how can I make some changes so that I can always have access to the kind of goods that I need to distribute to make money.

So yeah. Thank you for that answer. We've got Mark Stevenson and his question to Arlene is what are your thoughts on what recovery looks like for the food and hospitality industry?

Arlene - Yeah I mean listen in the food space, in the consumer goods space, the last mile space of retail, I think it's going to continue to grow and do well. I do think in the hospitality space there's going to have to be a shift in terms of how people are thinking about their kitchens and their and their business models. I know I have been speaking to many people who are Russ ranchers who are saying that their back door is now much more significant than the business they were doing out of their front door or in other words their delivery services they're supplying meal kit companies their opportunity to work directly to the consumer in their in their homes.

These are the ways people are thinking about restaurants and hospitality in general. The hotel industries and the travel industries and those industries I think are going to go through a seismic shift. It'll be interesting to see how they reinvent themselves so that they can make sure that they survive through this but people will still I believe want to travel people will still need to stay in hotels. I think we're going to have to have different processes models and protocols in place so that people feel safe doing so.

Lisa - Yeah thanks for that. We've got our final question from our viewers and this is coming from Karen. Karen is fundraising for her beauty tech company. She's struggling with the emotional battle and uncertainty and so she's asking what advice would you have for founders like Karen?

Arlene - Karen I feel your pain. There's those days where it's very hard. I have had moments where I really to feel like it can be overwhelming and I would get back to my earlier comment around trying to find some time in the morning if you can to focus on things that are going to help your brain to disconnect from the negativity and the depressing, all of this whether it's listening to a podcast whether it's going for a walk whether it's just playing and drawing and coloring whether it's reading a book anything that has nothing to do with what's actually happened in the world so your mind can actually re-engage itself and think differently and less news, less news is better right now. We don't want to see one hundred articles on the same

story in order to understand what the story is and I think you know kind of taking your time away from that is very very important. I find physical activity and working out and eating well has been critical for me to help me survive through this. So I would encourage you to really think hard about what you're putting in your body are you treating yourself well self care is is very important through this period of time so I can't stress that enough whether it's meditation whether it's mindfulness Whether it's listening to you know apps that are providing meditation or anything like that to kind of disconnect I think is critical so hang in there. We are going to get through this I know we will. I know it's going to be okay on the other side of this and it's gonna be a little different but it's gonna be fine and we just have to hold on to that belief and provide ourselves and let ourselves feel once in a while like this is pretty shitty you know pull the covers over your head it's OK to stay in bed for a day one once in a while because you're feeling down but then try and get up and motivate yourself by doing things that are gonna help your mind to refocus and reenergize itself.

Lisa - Yeah I love all of that Arlene. Thank you so much. I mean I know for us that elevate this past week we launched a wellness challenge. We launched a step challenge and I can't tell you you know how nice that's been how how how important that's been for even my own mental state, of getting outside every day for an hour to hour walk really just allows you to change perspective and so I think you know how we are treating our physical and mental wellness during this time it has to take priority.

OK that is all all the time that we do have for today's show Arlene. Thank you so much. This has been so informative for myself for our viewers as we start to think about how to reinvent us as individuals and start to think of pivoting companies. Given this this new landscape of COVID 19. Is there anything else that you'd like to leave our audience here with today.

Arlene - No I really appreciate Lisa, the opportunity to talk to so many of you. And for the opportunity to talk about things that matter and I do want to wish everybody success through their own reinvention and tell you that at the end of the day who you are and what you believe in and what you aspire to belongs to you and to make sure that you treat yourself well and to continue to dream big and to continue to believe that you can do what it is you need to do because We we sometimes lose faith in ourselves.

And so I would start with have faith in yourself and give yourself encouragement and believe in you and play that tape in your head over and over again that you're good enough and you're strong enough and that you can get through this and and I and I wish you nothing, All of you nothing but well.

Lisa - Well Arlene before you go we've got a little surprise for you. We've got you know as our appreciation we planted the Arlene Dickinson forest. It is in the Great Lake Lawrence region and as my fellow co-founder and our CEO Razor Soleman reminds us every week, there is a climate crisis that we need to address and so knowing that by being on our show today that you've done your part today thank you so much.

Arlene - That's so lovely thank you.

Lisa - OK and thank you everyone for joining us this week. Make sure you tune back in next Wednesday at 12:00, we've got Aaron Levie the co-founder and CEO of Box on work unleash it's gonna be a great episode. I want to give a big shout out and thanks to our entire production team for pulling together today's episode and want to tell everyone, all of our viewers, stay healthy, stay safe and take care of each other.