The following is a conversation with Jeanie Vermette, who was a long-time CEO, president and chairman of IBM. And for many years, she was widely considered to be one of the most
powerful women in the world. She's the author of a new book on power, leadership, and her life story called Good Power, coming out on March 7th. She is an incredible leader and human being, both fearless and compassionate. It was a huge honor and pleasure for me to sit down and have this chat with her. And now, a quick few second mention of your sponsor. Check them out in the description. It's the best way to support this podcast.
We've got Athletic Greens for Health, ExpressVPN for Privacy and Security, and the Inside Tracker for Biological Monitoring. Choose wisely, my friends. Also, if you want to work with our team, we're always hiring, go to lexfeedman.com slash hiring. And now, on to the full ad reads. As always, no ads in the middle. I try to make this interesting, but if you skip them, please still check our sponsors. I enjoy their stuff. Maybe you will too.
This show is brought to you by Athletic Greens and the AG1 Drink, which is an all-in-one daily drink to support better health and peak performance. I've drank it twice today already. It's delicious and it's a refreshing start for usually the second work session of the day. I start the day with a cup of coffee and just deep, deep, deep focus on the hardest task of the day.
And then I break the fast with Athletic Greens, either with a workout before or if I'm not working out that day, just with a kind of mental break. A friend of mine has recently been pushing me to meditate and so I've been taking that midday point as a kind of another opportunity to return to what I usually do in the morning, which is repeat the mantra for the day. But I do it less mantra-like and more just calming my mind and thinking about all the things I'm grateful for, really focusing on the gratitude part. Anyway, so that's associated with Athletic Greens. And also later on in the day, usually I'll take another Athletic Greens and I'll do the same when I'm traveling. I got the travel packs and I got, I guess, the non-travel pack version at home. They'll give you one month's supply of fish oil when you sign up at athleticgreens.com slash lex.
This show is also brought to you by ExpressVPN. I've used them for many years to protect my privacy on the internet. It actually takes me back to the early days of the internet for me, my own personal experience and it was shadier and darker and more dangerous but also more exciting
and it was unclear what the internet is going to become. And so there's that hacker, I guess, ethic. There's also a kind of deep sense of freedom before big companies came in and tried to figure out how to make a lot of money and really through that process of capitalism able to get kind of control. But I'm actually very, very happy to a degree that internet has maintained its freedom but still I think some of the initial days of the real kind of almost anarchic freedom has dissipated somewhat. I think about that sometimes and I think that's what a VPN represents to me is a kind of statement of freedom, of protecting your identity, of respecting your privacy. To me it's a powerful statement. It's an important one to remember and it's one I'll probably return to time and time again. Anyway, go to expressvpn.com slash lexpod for an extra three
months free. This show is also brought to you by Inside Tracker, a service I use to track biological data. They take a blood test from you and that blood test gives you a bunch of information about your body and there's all kinds of information you can get from blood data, DNA data, fitness

tracker data, all that kind of stuff and basically analyze what can be optimized about your body. I think there's a lot of interesting approaches to the way you optimize your body. It's important to have that data and it's important to make the right decisions based on that data but not over obsess about the data and that's a really nice balance. Now, if you're just completely blind and just kind of hope everything's going to turn out okay until you end up in a hospital, that's not the way to go. So the balance there for me is you should be taking blood tests like with Inside Tracker and getting information about your body that you can get from that data and then make decisions based on that and then that's it. Pick the low-hanging fruit of that fruit tree that represents the problems of life. I guess what that horrible metaphor means is that you should fix the easy problems and that means the things that are obviously wrong based on the data you collect from your blood. Okay, get special savings for a limited time when you go to inside tracker.com slash lex. This is the Lex Friedman podcast. To support it, please check out our sponsors in the description and now, dear friends, here's Jeannie Rometti.

You worked at IBM for over 40 years starting as a systems engineer and you ran the company as chairman president and CEO from 2011 to 2020. IBM is one of the largest tech companies in the world

with, maybe you can correct me on this, with about 280,000 employees. What are the biggest challenges running the company of that size? Let's start with a sort of big overview question.

The biggest challenges I think are not in running them, it's in changing them and that idea to know what you should change and what you should not change. Actually, people don't always ask that question, what should endure, even if it has to be modernized, but what should endure and then I found the hardest part was changing how work got done. It's such a big company. What was the parts

that you thought should endure? The core of the company that was beautiful and powerful and could persist through time, that it should persist through time. I'd be interested, do you have a perception of what you think it would be? Do I have a perception? Well, I'm a romantic for history of long-running companies, so there's kind of a tradition as a AI person. To me, IBM has some epic research accomplishments where you show off D-Blue and Watson, just impressive big moonshot challenges and accomplishing those. But that's, I think, that's probably a small part of what IBM is. That's mostly the sexy public-facing part.

Well, certainly the research part itself is over 3,000, so it's not that small. That's a pretty big research. But the part that should endure ends up being a company that does things that are essential to the world, meaning think back. You said you're romantic. It was the 30s, the Social Security system. It was putting the man on the moon. To this day, banks don't run, railroads don't run. That is at its core, it's doing mission-critical work. That part, I think, is at its core, it's a business-to-business company. At its core, it's about doing things that are really important to the world becoming running and being better.

Running the infrastructure of the world, so doing it at scale, doing it reliably.

Yes, secure in this world. That's like everything. In fact, when I started, I almost felt people were looking for what that was. Together, we sort of, in a word, was to be essential. The reason I love that word was, I can't call myself essential. You have to determine I am, right? It was to be essential, even though some of what we did is exactly what you said, it's below the surface. Many people, because people say to me, well, what does IBM do now?

Over the years, it's changed so much. Today, it's really a software and consulting company. Consulting is a third of it. The software is all hybrid cloud and AI. That would not have been true, as you well know, back even two decades ago. It changes, but I think at its core, it's that be essential. You said moonshot. It can't all be moonshots because moonshots don't always work, but mission critical work. Given the size, though, when you started running it, did you feel the sort of thing that people usually associate with size, which is bureaucracy, and maybe the aspect of size that hindered progress or hindered pivoting? Did you feel that? You would, for lots of reasons. I think when you're a big company, sometimes people think of processes, the client themselves. I always say to people, your process is not your customer. There is a real customer here that you exist for, and that's really easy to fall into, because people are a master to this process, and that's not right. And when you're big, the other thing, and boy, there's a premium on it, is speed. In our industry, you got to be fast. And go back like when I took over, and it was 2012, we had a lot of catching up to do and a lot of things to do, and it was moving so fast. And as you well know, all those trends were happening at once, which made them go even faster. And so pretty unprecedented, actually, for that many trends to be at one time. And I used to say to people, go faster, go faster, go faster. And honestly, I've tired them out. I mean, it kind of dawned on me that when you're that big, that's a really valuable lesson. And it taught me the house, perhaps more important than the what. Because if I didn't do something to change how work was done, change those processes,
or give them new tools, help them with skills, they couldn't. They just do the same thing faster. If someone tells you, you've got hiking boots, and they're like, no, go run a marathon. You're like, I can't do it in those boots. But so you've got to do something. And at first, I think the ways for big companies, I would call them like blunt clubs, you do what everyone does, you reduce layers. Because if you reduce layers, decisions go faster. It's math. If there's less decision points, things go faster. You do the blunt club thing. And then after that, though, it did lead me down a long journey of they sound like buzzwords. But if you really do them at scale, they're hard around things like agile. And because you've really got to change the way work gets done. And we ended up training, God, hundreds of thousands of people on that stuff to really change it correctly on how to do it correctly. That's right versus because everybody talks about it. But the idea that you would really have small, multi-disciplinary teams work from the outside in set those sort of interim steps, you know, take the feedback pivot, and then do it on not just products, do it on lots of things, it's hard to do it scale. People always say, oh, I got this agile group over here of 40 people. But not when you're a couple hundred thousand people, you got to get a lot of people to work that way.
So the blunt club thing you're talking about. So flatten the organization as much as possible? Yeah, yeah, I probably reduce the layers of management by half. And so that has lots of benefits, right? Time to a decision, more autonomy to people. And then the idea of like faster clarity of where you're going, because you're not just filtered through so many different layers. And I think it's the kind of thing a lot of companies, if you're big, have to just keep going through, it's kind of like grass grows, you know, it just comes back, and you got to go back town and work on it. So it's a natural thing. But I hear so many people talk about it, Lex, this idea of like, okay, who makes a decision? You've often heard nobody can say yes and everybody

can say no. And that's actually what you're trying to get out of a system like that. So I mean, your book in general, the way you lead is very much about we and us, you know, the power of we. But is there times when a leader has to step in and be almost autocratic, take control and make hard unpopular decisions? Oh, I am sure you know the answer to that. And it is, of course, yes. It's just fun to hear you say it. It's fun to say it. Yeah. You know, because I actually, A, there's a leader for a time, but then there's a leader for a situation, right? And so I've had to do plenty of unpopular things. I think anytime you have to run a company that endures a century and has to endure another century, you will do unpopular things. You have no choice. And I often felt I had to sacrifice things for the long term. And whether that would have been, you know, really difficult things like, you know, job changes or reductions, or whether it would be things like, Hey, you know, we're going to change the way we do our semiconductors and a whole different philosophy. You have no choice. I mean, and in times of crisis as well, you got to be, I always said, it's not a popularity contest. So that's none of these jobs are popularity contests. I don't give your companies got one person or half a million. They're not popularity contests. But psychologically, is it difficult to just sort of step in as a new CEO? And because you're fighting against tradition against all these people that act like experts of their thing. And they are experts of their thing to step in and say, we have to do it differently. When you got to change a company, it's really tempting to say throw everything else out back to that what must endure, right? But I know when I took over to start, I knew how much had to change.

More I got into it, I could see, wow, a lot more had to change, right? Because we needed a platform, we'd always done our best when we had a platform, a technology platform, you will go back in time. And you'll think of the mainframe systems, you'll think of the PC, you'll think of perhaps middle where, you know, you could even call services a platform. We needed a platform, the next platform here to be their skills. When I took over, if I, we inventor who had modern skills for the future, it was two out of 10 people for the future. Not that they didn't have relevant skills today, but for the future, two out of 10 yikes, that's a big problem, right? The speed at which things were getting done that has to, so you got so much to do. And you say, is that, is that a scary thing? Yes. Do you have to sometimes dictate? Yes. But I did fine. And it is worth it. I know every big company I know, my good friend that runs General Motors, as she's had to change, go back to what is them, them, you know? And when you do that, that back to be essential, we kind of started with, hey, it's be essential. Then the next thing I could do with the team was say, okay, now this means new era of computing, new buyers are out there and eh, we better have new skills. Okay. Now the next thing, how do you operationalize it? And it just takes some time, but you can engineer that and get people to build belief. And for the skills, that means, that means hiring and that means training? Yes. Oh boy, that's a long skills is a really long topic in and of itself. I try to put my view in it. I learned a lot and I changed my view on this a lot. I'll go back at my very beginning, say 40 years ago, I would have said, at that point, okay, I was always in a hurry of interviewing to hire people. I don't know how you hire people. 40 years ago, I'd be like, okay, I got to fit in these interviews. I got to hire someone to get this done. Okay, then time would go on. I'm like, oh, that's not very good. In fact, someone once said to me, hey, hire the best people to work for you and your job gets a lot easier.

Okay, I should spend more time on this topic, spend more time on it. Then it was like, okay, hire experts. Okay. Okay, hired a lot of experts over my life. And then I was really like an epiphany and it really happened over my tenure running the company and having to change skills. If someone's an expert at something and has just done that for 30 years, the odds of them really wanting to change a lot are pretty low. And when you're in a really dynamic industry, that's a problem. And so, okay, that was kind of my first revelation on this. And then when I looked at hiring, I can remember when I started my job, we needed cyber people and I go out there and I look, unemployment in the US was almost 10%. Can't find them. Okay, it's 10% and I can't find the people. Okay, what's the issue? Okay, they're not teaching the right things. That led me down a path and it was serendipity that I happened to do a review of social corporate social responsibility. We had this one little fledgling school in a low income area and high school with a community college, we gave them internships, direction on curriculum. Well, behold, we could hire these kids. I said, hmm, this is not CSR. Like I just found a new talent pool, which takes me to now what I'm doing in my post, you know, post retirement. I'm like, this idea that don't hire just for a college degree, we had 99% of our hires were college and PhDs. And I'm all for it. So you're very don't. I'm deeply offended. No, you should not be. And I, you know, I'm vice chair at Northwestern, one of the vice chair. But I said, I just really like aptitude does not equal access. These people didn't have access, but they had aptitude. It changed my whole view to skills first. And so now for hiring, that's kind of a long story to tell you, the number one thing I would hire for now is somebody's willingness to learn, you know, and you can test, you can try different ways, but their curiosity and willingness to learn hands down, I will take that trait over anything else they have. So the interview process, the question, everything changed, the kind of things you talked to them about is try to get at how curious they are about the world. I mean, there's what we triangulated around it, lots of ways. And now look, they're at the heart of it. What it would do is change. You don't think of buying skills, you see, you think of building skills. And when you think that way, with so many people, and I think this country, many developed countries being disenfranchised, you got to bring them back into the workforce somehow, and they got to get some kind of contemporary skills. And if you took that approach, you can bring them back into the workforce. Yeah, I think some interesting combination of humility and passion. Because like you said, experts sometimes lack humility if they call themselves an expert for a few too many years. So you have to have that beginner's mind and a passion to be able to aggressively constantly be a beginner at everything and learn and learn and learn. You know, I saw it firsthand when we were beginning this path, you know, down the cloud and AI, and we said, and people'd say, oh, IBM, you know, it's existential, they've got to change and all these things. And I did hire a lot of people from outside, very willing to learn new things. Come on in, come on in. And I sometimes say shiny objects, trained and shiny objects, come on in. But I saw something, it was another one of these, you're not a shiny object, I'm not saying that. It's a, but I learned something. Okay, some of them did fantastic. And others, they're like, well, let me school you on everything. But they didn't realize like we did really mission critical work. And then break a bank. I mean, they would not understand the certain kind of security and the auditability and everything

they had to go on. And then I watched IBM people say, oh, I actually could learn something. Some are like, yeah, okay, I don't know how to do that. That's a really good thing I could learn. And in the end, there was not like one group was a winner and one was a loser. The winners were the

people who were willing to learn from each other. I mean, it was to me, it was very stark example of that point. And I saw it firsthand. So that's why I'm so committed to this idea about skills first. And that's how people should be hired, promoted, paid, you name it. Yeah, the AI in general, it seems like nobody really understands now what the future will look like. We're all trying to figure it out. So like what, you know, IBM will look like in 50 years in relation to the software business to AI is unknown, what Google will look like with all these companies, we're trying to figure it out. And that means constantly learning, taking risks, all of those things. And nobody's really skilled in AI. Because you're absolutely right. That's right. Couldn't agree more with you on that. You wrote in the book, speaking of hiring, quote, my drive for perfection often meant I only focused on what needed to change without acknowledging the positive. This could keep people from trusting themselves. It could take me a while to learn that just because I could point something out didn't mean I should. I still spotted errors, but I became more deliberate about what I mentioned and sent back to get fixed. I also tried to curtail my tendency to micromanage and let people execute. I had to stop assuming my way was the best or only

way. I was learning that giving other people control builds their confidence. And that constantly trying to control people destroys it. So what's the right balance between showing the way and helping people find the way? That is a good question. Because a really flip answer would be, as it gets bigger, you have no choice, but to just, you know, you can't do it. You have to tell or show. I mean, you've got to let people find their way because it's so big, you can't, right? That's an obvious answer. Scope of work. Bigger it gets. Okay, I've got to let more stuff go. But I have always believed that a leader's job is to do as well. And I think there's like a few areas that are really important that you always do. Now, it doesn't mean you're showing. So when it has to do with values and value-based decisions, I think it's really important to constantly show people that you walk your talk on that kind of thing. It's super important. And I actually think it's a struggle young companies have because the values aren't deeply rooted. And when a storm comes, it's easy to uproot. And so I always felt like when it was that time, I showed it. I got taught that so young at IBM and even General Motors that, in fact, I write, I do write about that in the book. The first time I was a manager, I had a gentleman telling dirty jokes. And not to me, but to other people. And it really offended people and some of the women. This is this is the very early 80s. And they came said something, I talked to my boss, I'm a first time manager. And he was unequivocal with what I should do. He said, and this was a top performer. It stops immediately or you fire him. So there are a few areas like that that I actually think you have to always continue to role model and show, right? That to me, isn't the kind that like, when do you let go of stuff, right? So the values and relationships with with clients. Yeah, whatever you're in service of. And the other thing was, I really felt is really important to role model learning, right? So, you know, I can remember when we started down the journey. And we went on to this thing called the Think Academy, IBM's longtime motto had been think.

And we said, okay, I'm going to make the first Friday of every month compulsory education. And, okay, I mean, everybody, like everybody, I don't care what your job is, okay, when the whole company has to transform, everybody's got to get kind of have some skin in this game and understand it. I taught the first hour of every month for four years. Now, nice. Okay, I had to learn something. So, but it made me like, okay, if I can teach this, you can do it, right? I mean, you know, the kind of thing. So it was a compulsory Thursday night education for you.
I'm a little better prepared than that. But yes, you're so right. Yes. So you, you prepare. Yeah. So like personality wise, you like to prepare? Yeah, but there's roots in that go back deeply, deeply, deeply, deeply. And I think it's an interesting reason. So why do, why are you, you're prepared, my friend? Yeah, yes, you are. You prepare for your interviews?
Sure. The rest you wing? Yeah, I wing. But that's okay. I mean, you don't have to prepare everything. I don't prepare everything either. No, but I unfortunately wing stuff. I save it the last minute. I push everything. I'm always almost late. And I don't know why that is. I mean, there's some deep psychological thing we should probably investigate. But it's probably the anxiety brings out the performance. That can be. That's very true with some people. I mean, so I'm a programmer and engineer at heart. And so, so programmers famously overestimate or underestimate,
sorry, how long that something's going to take. And so I just, everything always underestimate. And it's almost as if I want to feel this chaos of anxiety of a deadline or something like this. Otherwise, I'll be lazy sitting on a beach with a peanut colada and relaxing. I don't know. So that we have to know ourselves. But for you, you like to prepare. Yeah, it came from a few different places. I mean, one would have been as a, as a kid. I think I was not a memorizer. And my brother is brilliant. He can, he read it once, boom, done. And so I always want to understand like how something happened. It didn't matter what it was I was doing. Whether it was algebra, theorems, I always wanted, don't give me the answer. Don't give me the answer. You know, I want to figure it out, figure it out. So I could reproduce it again and didn't have to memorize. So it started with that. And then over time, okay, so I was in university in the 70s. When I was in engineering school, I was the only woman, you know, I meet people still to this day and they're like, Oh, I remember you. I'm like, yeah, sorry, I don't remember you. There were 30 of you, one of me. And I think you already get that feeling of, okay, I better really study hard because whatever I say is going to be remembered in this class, good or bad. And it started there. So in some ways, I did it for two reasons. Early on, I think it was a shield for confidence. The more I studied, the more prepared I was, the more confident. That's probably still true to this day. The second reason I did it evolved over time and became different to prepare. If I was really prepared, then when we're in the moment, I can really listen to you. See, because I don't have to be doing all this stuff on the fly in my head. And I could actually take things I know and maybe help the situation. So it really became a way that I could be present and in the moment. And I think that's something a lot of people that in the moment, I learned it from my husband. He doesn't prepare by the way at all. So that's not it. But I watched the in the moment. The negative example. No, no, no. And I'm not going to change that, as he says. Yes, of course. He's a type Z, I'm an A, okay? So love works. And I have been married 43 years and that seems to work. But that idea that you could be in the moment with people is a really important thing. Yeah. So the preparation gives you the freedom to really be present.

So just a linger on the, you mentioned your brother. And it seems like in the book that you really had to work hard when you study to sort of, given that you weren't good at memorization, you really, truly deeply want to understand the stuff and you put in the hard work. And that seems to persist throughout your career. So, you know, hard work is often associated with sort of has negative associations, or maybe with burnout with dissatisfaction.
Is there some aspect of hard work at the core of who you are that led to happiness for you?
Did you enjoy it? I enjoyed it. So I'll be the first. And I'm really careful to say that to people because I don't think everyone should associate G to do what you did. You have to, there's only one route there, right? And that's just not true. And I do it because I like it.
In fact, I'm careful. And as time goes on, you have to be careful. As more and more people watch you, whether you like it, you're a role model or not, you are a role model for people, whether you know it, like it, want it, does not matter. I learned that the hard way. And I would have to say people, hey, just because I do this does not mean I do it for these reasons, right? It's a really explicit. And I'd come to believe, usually when people say the word power, I don't know, do you have a positive or negative notion when I say the word power, we'll just do it. Probably negative one. Yeah.
For some stereotype or some view that somebody's abused it in some way. You can read the newspaper,
somebody's doing something. Personal people, like I'll ask people, do you want power? And they're like, oh, no, I'd rather do good. And I think the irony is you need power to do good. And so that sort of led me down to, as I thought about my own life, right? Because it starts in a, like many of us, you know, you don't have a lot, but you don't know that because you're like everybody else around you at that time. And I want to end tragedy, right? My father leaves my mother homeless, no money, no food, nothing for kids. She's never worked a day in her life outside of a home. And I, the irony that I hear I would end up as the ninth CEO of one of America's iconic companies. And now I co-chair this group 110. And that journey, I said the biggest thing I learned was you could do really hard, meaningful things in a positive way. So now you asked me about why do I work so hard? I ended up writing the book in three pieces for this reason. When you really think of your life and power, I thought it kind of fell like a pebble in water. Like there's a ring about you really care about yourself and like the power of yourself, power of me. There's a time it transcends to that you are working with and for others. And another moment when it becomes like about society. So my hard work, I'd ask you, one day sit really hard and think about when you close your eyes, who do you see from your early life, right? And what did you learn? And maybe it's not that hard for you. I mean, it was, it's funny the things then, if I really looked at it, it's no surprise what I do today. And that hard work part, my great grandma, as you and I were comparing notes on Russia, right? And never spoke English, spoke Russian, came here to this country was a cleaning person at the Wrigley Building
in Chicago. Yet if she hadn't saved every dime she made, my mother wouldn't have a home and wouldn't
have had a car, right? What did I learn from that? Hard work. In fact, actually, when I went to college, she's like, you know, you really should be on a farm. You're so big and strong. You know, that was her view. And then my grandmother, another tragic life, what did she do though? And

think how long that's in the 40s, the 50s, she made lampshades. And she taught me how to sew, right? So I could sew clothes when we couldn't afford them. But my memory of my grandma is working seven days a week, sewing lampshades. And then here comes my mom in her situation who climbs her way out of it. So I associate that with, well, strong women, by the way, all strong women. And I associate hard work with how you are sure you can always take care of yourself. And so I think that the roots go way back there. And they were always teaching something, right? My great grandma was teaching me how to cook, how to work a farm, even though I didn't need to be on a farm.

My grandma taught me, you know, here's how to sew, here's how to run a business.

And then my mother would teach us that, look, with just a little bit of education, look at the difference it could make, right? So anyways, that's a long answer too. I think that hard work thing is really deeply rooted from that background. And it gives you a way out from hard times. Yeah, you know, I think I've seen you on other podcasts say, I thought I did. Do you want a plan B? Didn't you say no, you would not like a plan B? Yeah, I don't know. Because you're like, I would prefer my backup against, am I remembering? You have a story like that. You seem to like, at least certain moments in your life seem to do well in desperate times.

True enough. True enough, that's true. I learned that very well. But I also think that maybe this isn't the same kind of plan B. I think of it as, like I was taught, like, always be able to take care of yourself. Don't have to rely on someone else.

Sure. And I think that to me, so that's my plan B, I can take care of myself. And it's even after what I lived through with my father, I thought, well, this set a bar for bad. After this, nothing's bad. And that is a very freeing thought.

The being able to take care of yourself is that you mean practically or do you mean just a self-belief that I'll figure it out? I'll figure it out and practically both, right?

Right. So you wrote, quote, I vividly remember the last two weeks of my freshman year, when I only had 25 cents left. I put the quarter in a clear plastic box on my desk and just stared at it. This is it, I thought. No more money. So do you think there's some aspect of that financial stress, even desperation, just being hungry? Did that play a role in that drive that led to your success to be the CEO of one of the great companies ever?

It's a really interesting question because I was just talking to another colleague who's CEO of another great American company this weekend. And he mentioned to me about all this adversity. And he said, all right, I said to him, I said, do you think part of your success is because you had bad stuff happen? And he said yes. And so I guess I'd be lying if I didn't say, I don't think you have to have tragedy. But it does teach you one really important thing is that there is always a way forward, always. And it's in your control.

I think there's probably wisdom for mentorship there, or whether you're a parent or a mentor, that easy times don't result in growth. Yeah. I've heard a lot of my friends and they worry that my kids have never had bad times. And so what happens here? So I don't know, is it required? And why you end up not required, but it sure doesn't hurt.

You had this good line about advice you were given that growth and comfort never coexist. Growth and comfort never coexist. And you have to get used to that thought.

If someone said that they think of me like one of the more profound lessons I had in the irony is it's from my husband, which is even more funny.

Actually, you could just steal it. I mean, you don't have to give him credit. Oh, I have. I have shamelessly, as he'll tell you. Okay. So the story behind growth and comfort never coexist. But honestly, I think it's been a really freeing thought for me and it's helped me immensely since mid-career. And as I write about it in the book, I'm mid-career and I've been running a pretty big business actually in the fellow I work for is going to get a new job. It's going to get promoted. He calls me and he says, hey, you're going to get my job. I really want you to have it. And I said to him, no way. I said, I'm not ready for that job. I got a lot more things I got to learn. That is like a huge job around the world. Every product line, development, you name it, every function, I can't do it. He looked at me. He says, well, I think you should go to the interview. I went to the interview the next day. Blah, blah, blah. Guy says to me, he looks at me and he says, I want to offer you that job. And I said, I would like to think about it. I said, I want to go home and talk to my husband about it. Guy looked at me. Okay. I went home. My husband is sitting there and he says to me, I went on and on about the story, et cetera. And he says, do you think a man would

have answered it that way? And I said, he says, I know you. He's like six months, you're going to be bored. And all you can think of is what you don't know. And he said, and I know these other people, you have way more skill than them and they think they could do it. And he's like, why? And for me, it internalizes feeling that, and I am going to say something as a bit stereotyped that it resonates with many, many women. And I'll ask you if it does after, is that they're the most harsh critic of themselves. And so this idea that I won't grow unless I can feel uncomfortable. Doesn't mean I always have to show it, by the way. So that's why growth and comfort can never coexist. So I got, I was like, he's exactly right. Now, the end of that story is I went in and I took the job when I went back to the man who was really my mentor looking out for me. And he looked at me and he

said, don't ever do that again. And I said, I understand. Because it was okay to be uncomfortable. I didn't have to use it. I mean, now I would take stock of the things I can do, right? And really think, or I look for times to be uncomfortable. Because I know if I am nervous, like, I don't know if you're nervous to meet me, we never met in real person.

I'm still terrified.

No, you're not. But then you mean you're learning something, right?

Holding it together.

So that to me matters.

I think it's interesting, maybe you could speak to that, the sort of the self-critical thing inside your inside your brain. Because I think sometimes it's talked about that women have that.

But I have that definitely. And I think that's not just solely property of women in the workplace. But I also want to sort of push back on the idea that that's a bad thing that you should silence because I think that anxiety, that leads to growth also, that's like this discomfort. So there's this weird balance you have to have between that self-critical engine and confidence.

Yeah, I think that's a good point.

You have to kind of dance because if you're super confident, people will value you higher. That's important. But if you're way too confident, maybe in the short term, you'll gain, but in the long term, you won't grow.

Very good point. So I can't really disagree with that. And to me, even when I took on jobs,

I always felt people say, well, is it, you know, what point are you confident enough?
And I came to sort of believe, again, a theme of my beliefs that if I was willing to ask lots
of questions and understood enough, that's all I needed to know.
Let me ask you about your husband a little bit.
So you're right in the book. You're right in the book. He's just jumping around.
And like I said, I'm a bit of a romantic. So how did you meet your husband?
So I met my husband when I was 19 years old. So I was a young kid.
And I met him when I had a General Motors scholarship. So I was at Northwestern University
through my first two years, had a lot of loans, financial aid. And a professor said, hey, you
should sign up for this interview. They're looking to bring forward diverse candidates
through their management track. Now, these programs don't exist anymore like that.
They will pay your tuition, your room and board, your expenses, Northwestern, other Ivy League
school, these very expensive schools. And I think you'd be a good fit. I am eternally
thankful for that advice. I went in, I interviewed, I actually got the scholarship.
I mean, without it, I'd have graduated with hundreds of thousands of dollars of debt.
So part of that was in the summer, I had to work in Detroit. I lived in a little room
by a cement plant. Not theirs, but I mean, that's all I could afford.
It's very romantic.
Very, very romantic. And the person who owned the house said, hey, I'm having a party,
you're not invited. I'm going to fix you up with someone tonight.
And that turned out to be my husband. And so it was a blind date is how we very first met.
And then it was over. The story was written. If it's okay, just zoom out to, you mentioned
power and good power a few times. So if we can just even talk about it, your book is called
Good Power, Leading Positive Change in Our Lives, Work and World. What is good power?
What's the essence of good power?
So the essence of it would be doing something hard or meaningful, but in a positive way.
I would also tell you, I hope one day I'm remembered for how I did things, not just for what I did.
I think that could almost be more important. And I think it's a choice we can all make.
So the essence to me of good power, if I had a contrast, good to bad, let's say,
would be that first off, you have to embrace and navigate tension. This is a world we live in.
This is a world we live in. And by embracing tension, not running from it, you would bridge divides
that unites people, not divides them. It's a hard thing to do, but you can do it.
You do it with respect, which is the opposite of fear. A lot of people think way to get things done
is fear. And then the third thing would be, you got to celebrate some progress versus perfection.
Because I also think that's what stops a lot of things from happening. Because if you go for
whatever your definition of perfect is, it's either polarization or parallelization. I mean,
something happens in there versus, no, no, no. Don't worry about getting to that actual exact
endpoint. If I keep taking a step forward of progress, really tough stuff can get done. And so
my view of that is honestly, I said it's like a memoir with purpose. I'm only
doing it. It was a really hard thing for me to do because I don't actually talk about all these
things. And nobody cares about your scientific description of this. They want the stories in
your life to bring it alive. So it's a memoir with purpose. And in the writing of it, it became
the power of me, the power of we, and the power of us. The idea that you build a foundation when

you're young, mostly from my work life, the power of we, which says I kind of, in retrospect, could see five principles on how to really drive change that would be done in a good way. And then eventually
you could scale that the power, really, of us, which is what I'm doing about finding better jobs for more people now that I co-chair an organization called 110. So that essence of navigate tensions, do it respectfully, celebrate progress, and give me indulge me one more minute, these sort of, again, it's retrospect that I didn't know this in the moment. I had to learn it. I learned it. I am blessed by a lot of people I worked with and around. But some of the principles, like the first one is says, if you're going to do something, change something, do something, you got to be in service of something. Being in service of is really different than serving. It's super different. And I just had my knee replaced. And I interviewed all these doctors. You can tell the difference of the guy who's going to do a surgery. Hey, my surgery's fine. I really don't care whether you can walk and do the stuff you want to do again. But because my surgery is fine, your hardware is good. I actually had some trouble. And I had a doctor who was like, you know, this doesn't sound right. I'm coming to you. The surgery was fine. It was me that was reacting wrong to it. And he didn't care until I could walk again. Okay, there's a big difference in those two things. And it's true in any business you have. A waiter serves your food. Okay, he served his food. He did his job. Or did he care you had a good time? So that thought to be in service of it took me a while to get that like to try to write it to get that across because I think it's like so fundamental. If people were really in service of something, you got to believe that if I fulfill your needs at the end of the day, mine will be fulfilled. And that is that essence that makes it so different. And then the second part, second principle is about building belief, which is I got to hope you'll voluntarily believe in a new future or some alternate reality. And you will use your discretionary energy versus me ordering you. You'll get so much more done than the third change in endure. We kind of talked about that earlier. Focus more on the how and the skills. And then the part on good tech and being resilient. So anyways, I just felt that like good tech, everybody's a tech company. I don't care what you do today. And there's some fundamental things you got to do. In fact, pick up today's any newspaper, right? Chat GPT, you're an AI guy. All right. I believe one of the tenants of good tech is it's like responsibility for the long term. It says so if you're going to invent something, you better look at its upside and it's downside. Like we did quantum computing. Great. A lot of great stuff, right? Materials development, risk management calculations, endless lists one day. On the other side, it can break encryption. That's a bad thing. So we worked equally hard on all the algorithms that would sustain quantum. I think with chat, okay, great. There's equal in there are people working on it, but like, okay, the things that say, hey, I can tell this was written with that, right? Because the implications on how people learn, right? If this is not a great thing, if all it does is do your homework, that is not the idea of homework as someone who liked to study so hard. But anyways, you get my point. It's just the upside and the downside. And that there could be much larger implications that are much more difficult to predict than it's our responsibility to really work hard to figure that out. I was talking AI ethics a decade ago and I'm like, why won't anybody listen to us? That's another one of those values things that you realize, hey, if I'm going to bring technology in the world, I better bring it safely, right? And that to me comes with when you're an older company that's been around,

you realize that society gave you a license to operate and it can take it away. And we see that happen to companies and therefore you're like, okay, like why I feel so strong about skills. Hey, if I'm going to bring in, it's going to create all these new jobs, job dislocation, then I should help. I'm trying to help people get new skills. Anyways, that's a long answer to a good tech. But the idea that there's kind of in retrospect a set of principles you could look at and maybe learn something from my sort of rocky road through there.

But it started with the power of we and there's that big leap, I think that propagates through the things you're saying, which is the leap from focusing on yourself to the focusing on others. So that having that empathy, you've said at some point in our lives and careers, our attention turns from ourselves to others. We still have our own goals, but we recognize that our actions affect many that it is impossible to achieve anything truly meaningful alone. So it's, to you, I think, maybe you can correct me, but ultimate good power is about collaboration. And maybe, you know, in large companies like delegation on great teams.

The ultimate good power is actually doing something for society. That would be my ultimate definition. So it's about the results of the thing.

Yeah. But how it's done, right? The how it's done. And so, you know, when you said a leap, do you think people make a leap when they go from thinking about themselves to others? Do you think it's a leap or do you think it kind of just is a sort of slow point? I think the leap is in deciding that this is, it's like deciding that you will care about others. That this is like, it's like a leap of going to the gym for the first time.

It's, yes, it takes a long time to develop that and to actually care, but the decision that I'm going to actually care about other human beings. Yeah. Yeah. At least, like, yeah, it just feels like a deliberate action you take of empathy. Yeah. Cause sometimes I think it happens a little, it's maybe not as deliberate. Yeah. It's a little bit more gradual because it might happen because you realize that, geez, I can't get this done alone. So I got to have other people with me. Well, how do I get them to help me do something? So I think it does help happen a little bit more gradually. And as you get more confident, you start to not think so much that it's about you and you start to think about this other thing you're trying to accomplish. And so that's why I felt it was a little more gradual. I also felt like I can remember so well, you know, this idea that, again, now we're in the 80s, 90s, I'm a woman, I'm in technology. And I was down in Australia at a conference. And I gave this great speech, again, meet power of me, you know, I'm thinking I give this great speech, financial services, this guy walks up to me after I think he's going to like ask me some great question. And he said to me, I wish my daughter could have been here. And in that moment, and I in at that point up to then I'd always been about look, please don't notice I'm a woman, do not notice that I am I just want to be recognized for my work. Crossing over from me to we like it or not, I was a role model for some number of people. And maybe I didn't want to be but that didn't really matter. So I could either accept that and embrace it or not. I think it's a good example of that transition. I did have a little epiphany with that happening. And then I'm like, okay, because I would always be like, no, I won't go on a women's conference. I won't talk here. I won't, you know, no, no, no. But then I sort of realized, wait a second, you know, that old saying you cannot be what you cannot see. And I said to myself, well, oh, wait a second, okay, I am in these positions, I have a responsibility to, and it's to others.

And that's what I meant. I felt like it can be somewhat gradual that you come and you may have these like pivotal moments that you see it, but then you feel it and you sort of move over that transom into the power of we. You're one of the most powerful tech leaders ever. And as you mentioned

the word power, you know, the old saying goes power corrupts and absolute power corrupts. Absolutely.

Was there an aspect of power that was

that you had to resist its ability to corrupt your mind to, to sort of delude you into thinking you're smarter than you are that kind of all the ways that that's very dangerous. I agree with I mean, I think you got to be careful who you surround yourself with. That's how I would answer that question. Right. And people who will hold the mirror up to you can be done in a very positive way, by the way, doesn't mean, you know, but that we're sick of fans. You cannot have that, right? I mean, it's like, I would say to someone like, hey, listen to me, tell me, I mean, tell me what would make me better or do something or I have a husband that'll do that for me quite easily, by the way. You'll always tell me. So he's the one that kind of can give you some criticism. I have, I have been surrounded myself with a number of people that will do that. And I think you have to have that. I had a woman that worked with me for a very long time. And at one time, we were competitors. And then at some point, she started to work for me and stayed with me for a creative way. And she was one of the few people that would tell me the truth. And, you know, sometimes I have like enough already. And, and she'd be like, do not roll your eyes at this. And you absolutely have got to have that. And I think it also comes, it'll go back to my complete commitment to inclusion and diversity, because you got to have that variety around you, you'll get a better product and a better answer at the end of the day. And so that to resist that allure, I think it's around who, about who you surround yourself with. Current politics would say that too. So you, you write about in general, you value diversity a lot. So can you speak to almost like philosophically, what does diversity mean to you? Diversity to me means I'm going to get a better product, a better answer, I value different views. And so it's inclusion. So I always say inclusion, diversity is a number, inclusion is a choice.

And you can make that choice every single day.

That's a good line.

I really believe, and I've witnessed it, that I've had when my teams are diverse,

I get a better answer. My friends are diverse. I have a better life. I mean, all these kinds of things. And so I also believe it's like no silver thread. There's no easy way. You have to authentically believe it. I mean, do you authentically believe that, that diversity is a good thing?

Yeah, but I believe that diversity, like broadly.

A thought? Are you very broadly defining?

Yeah. So like there's, you know, sometimes the way diversity is looked at with the way diversity is used today is like surface level characteristics, which are also important. But they're usually reflective of something else, which is a diversity of background, a diversity of thought, a diversity of struggle. Some people that grew up middle class versus poor, different countries, different motivations, all of that. Yeah, it's beautiful and different people from very different walks of life get together. Yeah, it's beautiful to see.

Well, like sometimes it's very difficult to get at that on a sheet of paper of the characteristics that defines the diversity.

I know. So it is. It's just like, oh, I can't hire exactly for, or if I'm trying to, in, but I do know one thing that when people say, well, I can't find these kind of people I'm looking for, I'm like, you're just not looking in the right places.

You have to open up.

You have to really open up new pools.

Yeah, you have to think, like everybody, you don't have to have a PhD, just like you said. I'm sorry to say it. I know it's very valuable, but you have, trust me.

Well, it could, just like you said, it could even be a negative. So you mentioned, like for good power, you are a CEO, you were a CEO for a long time of a public company. Were there times when there was pressure to sacrifice what is good for the world for the bottom line, in order to do what's good for the company?

Yeah, there were a lot of times for that. I mean, I think every company faces that today in that, I always felt like there's so much discussion about stakeholder capitalism, right? Do you just serve a shareholder? Do you have multiple?

I have always found, and I've been very vocal about that topic, that when I participated, the business roundtable wrote up a new purpose statement that had multiple stakeholders. I think it's common sense. Like, if you're going to be 100 years old, you only get there because you actually do at some time, balance all these different stakeholders and what it is that you do, and short-term, long-term, all these trade-offs. And I always say, people who write about it, they write about it black and white, but I have to live in a gray world. Nothing I've ever done has been in a black and white world hardly. Maybe things of values that I had to answer, but most of it is gray. And so I think back lots of different decisions. I think back, you would well remember your student of history, IBM was one of really the originators of the semiconductor industry and certainly of commercializing the semiconductor industry. Great R&D and manufacturing, but it is a game of volume. And so when I came on, we were still manufacturing R&D and manufacturing our own chips. We were losing a lot of money, yet here we had to fight a war on cloud and AI. And so, okay, now shareholders would say, fine, shut it down. Okay, those chips also power some of the most important systems that power the banks of today. If I just shut it down, well, what would that do? And so, okay, the answer wasn't just stop it. The answer wasn't just keep putting money into it. The answer wasn't, we had to kind of sit in an uncomfortable spot till we found a way. I mean, it's going to sound so basic, but you as an engineer understand it. We had to separate, it was a very integrated process of research development and manufacturing. And you'd also, you'd be perfecting things in manufacturing. And these were very high performance chips. We had to be able to separate those. We eventually found a way to do that so that we could take the manufacturing elsewhere and we would maintain the R&D. It's a, I think it's a great example of the question you just asked, because there was, people would have applauded. Others would have been, this was horrible. Or we had a financial roadmap that had been put in place that said, I'll make this amount of EPS by this date.

There came a time we couldn't honor it because we had to invest. And so, there's a million of these decisions. I think most people that run firms, any size firm, they're just one right after another like that. And you're always making that short and long tension of what am I giving up?

Well, what is that partnership like with the clients? Because you work with gigantic businesses. And what's it like sort of really forming a great relationship with them, understanding what their needs are, being in service of their needs? In service of, yeah. Very simple. Honor your promises.

And that happens over time. I mean, in service of, you know, which is often why you could work with competitors, because if you are really in service of you and you need something, it takes two of us to do it. That becomes easier to do because I really, we both care, you get what you needed. And so, I can remember during one of the times I was on a European trip. And at the time, a lot of, and this is still true about views about technology and national technology giants and global ones and the pros and the cons and countries want their own national champions, quite obvious. I mean, if I'm for answer Germany. And there was a lot of discussion about security and data and who was getting access to what. And I can remember being in one of the, I was with Chancellor Merkel, had met her many times, she's very well prepared, very well prepared every time you would know. And I started to explain all these things about why, how, you know, how we don't share data, how who it belongs to our systems never had backdoors. And she sort of stopped me. Like, you're one of the good guys, like stop. Now, that wasn't about me personally. She's talking about a company that's acted consistent with values for decades, right? So to me, how you work with those big kind of clients is you honor your promises, you say what you do when you do what you say, and you act with values over a long period of time. And that to me, people say we're valued, it is not a fluffy thing. It is not a fluffy thing. I mean, if I was starting a company now, I'd spend a lot of time on that. And, you know, why we do what we do and why some things are tolerable and something, you know, what your fundamental beliefs are. And many people sort of zoom past that stage, right? It's okay for a while. And never sacrifice that.

You would never sacrifice that. I don't think you can. So there was a lot of pressure when you took over as CEO, and there was 22 consecutive quarters of revenue decline between 2012 and the summer of 2017. So it was a stressful time. Maybe not. Maybe you can correct me on that. So as a CEO, what was it like going through that time with the decisions, the tensions in terms of investing versus making a profit? I always felt that that sense of urgency was so high. And even if I was calm on the outside, because you have one of the world's largest pensions. So so many people depend on you. You have a huge workforce. They're depending on you. You have clients whose businesses don't run if you don't perform, etc. And shareholders, of course, right? And so, but I also am really clear, this was perhaps the largest reinvention IBM ever had to undertake. Yes. I had a board that understood that. In fact, some people, some of the headlines were like, this is existential, right? I mean, nobody gives you a right to exist forever. And there aren't many texts. You're the student of it. They are gone. They are all gone. And so if we didn't reinvent ourselves, we were going to be extinct. And so now, but you're big and it's like changing, what's that old saying? Can I change the wheels while the train's running or something like that? Or the engines while the plane's flying? Exactly. And that's what you have to do. And that took

time. And so, you know, Lex, do I wish it would have been faster? Absolutely. But the team worked so hard. And in that timeframe, 50% of the portfolio was changed. It's a very large company. And if you would, I also divested $10 billion of businesses. So if you would look at that growth rate without divestitures and currency, which now today, everyone talks about currency. Back then, we were the only international guy. Net of divestitures and currency, the growth was flat. It's flat, great, no. But flat for a big transformation, I was really proud of the team for what they did. That is actually pretty miraculous to have made it through that. I have my little nephew one day and he would see on TV occasionally when there'd be criticism. And he'd say, you know, Auntie, does that make you mad when they talk mean? And I just looked at him and I said, you know, he says, how do you feel? I said, look, I'm doing what has to be done. And I happen to be the one there. And if you have great conviction, and I did a great conviction, I knew it was the right thing. I knew it would be needed for IBM to live its second century. And so in my successor, they have picked up, gone forward. I mean, you go back, we did the acquisition of Red Hat. I mean, we had to find our way on cloud, right? We were late to it. So we had to find our way. And eventually that led us to hybrid cloud. We did a lot of work with Red Hat back in 2017. Oh, we'd always done a lot of work with them. Actually, we were one of the first investors when they were first formed. But that was 2018. You know, we took quite a hit for even, you know, oh, it was the largest to then software acquisition ever. But it is the foundation, right, of what is our hybrid cloud play today and doing very, very well. So, but I had to take a short term hit for that, right? Short term hit for a very large $34 billion acquisition. But it was for all of us, it was the right thing to do. So I think when you get really centered on, you know what's the right thing to do, you just keep going, right? So the team had the vision, they had the belief and everything else, the credit system doesn't matter. So don't, we didn't always have exactly the right, you know, this wasn't a straight arrow, but stay down, you know, you're right, keep going, okay, made a mistake. You know, there's no bad mistake as long as you learn from it, right? And, and keep moving. So yes, did it take longer, but we are the largest that was there. Could you maybe just on a small tangent educate me a little bit. So right had originally is Linux, open source distribution Linux, but it's also consulting. Well, it's a little bit of consulting, but it's mostly software district. It's mostly Linux. It was mostly software. Yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely. So, but today, IBM is very much this, you know, services, most IT services in the world is done by IBM. There's so many, so many varied so basically, if you have issues, problems to solve in, in business, in the software space, IBM can help. Yes. And so in that my last year, our services business, we broke it into two pieces. And one piece was spun off into a company called Kindrel, which is managed outsourcing, keeping things running, and they're off creating their own company. What IBM then retained is really the part I built with PWCC, the big consulting arm. And so today, the IBM of today in 2023 is, you know, at least ending 2022 was 30% consulting and the other 70% would be what would you consider software cloud AI. So hybrid cloud and AI is the other and some hardware, obviously still the main frame is modernized, alive and kicking and still running some of the most important things of every bank you can think of practically in the world. And so that is the IBM of today versus perhaps, you know, in Red Hat is a big piece and an important part of that software portfolio. And they had some services with them for implementation, but it wasn't a very, very large

part. And it's, it's grown by leaps and bounds, you know, because originally, the belief was everything was going to go to the public cloud. And at least many people thought that way. We didn't. In fact, we, I mean, we tried, we cured a public cloud company, we really tried to work it. But what we found was a lot of the mission critical work, it was tuned for consumer world, it wasn't tuned for the enterprise. So then time is elapsing here, though, and you got to be of scale. And we didn't have any application, remember, we're not an application company. So it wasn't like we had an office, we didn't have anything that like pulled things out to the cloud. And so as we looked for what our best, what we really back to who you are, we really know mission critical work. We know where it lives today. And we know how to make it live on the cloud, which let us down hybrid cloud, you know, that belief that the real world would turn into, there'll be things on traditional that'll, you'll never move, because it doesn't make sense. There'll be private clouds for, you know, have all the benefit of the cloud, but they just don't have, you know, infinite expansion. And then there'll be public clouds, and you're going to have to be public clouds, and you're going to have to connect them and be secure. And that's what took us down the path with red hat, that belief. The structure of that is fundamentally different than something that's consumer facing. So the lesson you learn there is you can't just reuse something that that's optimized for consumers. Very interesting point. It doesn't mean consumer companies can't move up into the enterprise, because obviously they have, right? But I think it's very hard to take something from the enterprise and come on down. And because it got to be simple, consumable, all the things we talked about already. Plus you have to have the relationships with the enterprise. Yeah, very different. Yeah. I mean, you know our history, right? At one time, we had the PC business. And, you know, the short answer to why would we would not do that is it's a consumer facing business. We were good at the enterprise and that consumer business, A, highly competitive, got to be low cost, all the things that are not the same muscles necessarily of being in an innovation driven, you know, technology business. Yeah. But what is now Lenovo, I guess that's what's just been told. That's right, Lenovo acquired it. You're extremely good at

that. So, but not as good as you're saying is at an enterprise or it's not, it was, it was very good at their PC world. Yes. But I wouldn't, and they can sell into the enterprise. Yeah. Right. But you as a consumer can go buy a Lenovo too. So look at, look in China, right? Look in other places. So that's what I mean by consumer, you know, an end device. And that was a big decision because it would have been one of the last things that had our logo on it that sits in your hands, right? So when a new generation says, well, what does IBM do, right? Was that a difficult decision? Do you remember? This is a long time ago now. It's like 2005. Yeah. So they're all difficult because it's not only things as people, but it's back to knowing who you are is how I would sum that up as, right? And we were never great at making a lot of money at that. And you can remember originally as the IBM PC, then there were IBM clones or you, they even called IBM clones back then as the field became highly, highly competitive. And as things commoditized, we often, as they commoditize, we would move them out and move on to the next

innovation level. But because of that, it's not as public facing, even though it's one of the most recognizable logos ever. Yeah. Isn't it true? That is very true. That is actually a very important point. And that is branding, as you say, one of the most recognizable in a very highly ranked

brand strength around the world. And so that's a trade off. I mean, I can't, you know, because there was a time you'd have something of IBM in your home or a cash register as an example, you'd walk into a store. Actually, they're still in places. That went to Toshiba.

Can you speak to consulting a little bit? What does that entail to train up to hire a workforce that can be of service to all kinds of different problems in the software space, in the tech space? Yeah. What's entailed in that? I mean, you have to value a different set of things, right? And so you've got to always stay ahead. It's about hiring people who are willing to learn. It is about, at the same time, in my view, it's what really drives you to be customer centric. Maybe you can educate me. I think consulting is a kind of you roll in and you try to solve problems that businesses have, like with expertise, right? Is that the process of consulting? Somewhat, right? So that's okay. So fair enough. When you say that we're consulting, it's a really broad spectrum. I mean, I think people could be sitting here thinking it does any, it could be, I just give advice and I leave to all the way to I run your systems, right? And I think it's generally people use the word to cover everything in that space. So we sort of fit in the spot, which is we would come in and live at that intersection of business and technology. So yeah, we could give you recommendations and then we'd implement them and see them through because we had the technology to go to the implementation and see them through.

And at the time back then, that's what, you know, there'd been five of those that had failed, the companies had bought other consulting firms. And so we were, okay, that was the great thing about, I mean, the harrowing thing about it was here, please go work on this. None of the others have ever succeeded before. And yet on the other hand, the great promise was you could really, clients were dying at that time when we were doing that to get more value out of their technology and have it really change the way the business worked. So I think of it as how to improve business and apply technology and see it all the way through. That's what we do today still. Yeah, they see it all the way through. Yes. So let me say it's almost like a personal question. So that was a big thing you were a part of that you led in 2002 that you championed and helped, I should say, negotiate the purchase of Monday, the consulting arm of PricewaterhouseCoopers for $3.5 billion. So what were some of the challenges of that that you remember? Personal and business. At that time, PW really had to divest. And so they were in parallel going to IPO, right? So we sort of swept in at that point and said, and we've been thinking about it a long time and started to work on that as an acquisition. So kind of balancing which way would they go IPO

or acquisition? And so the challenges are obvious and part of it's why they went with us as an acquisition. Big difference to be a private firm than a public firm. Very big. I can remember one of the guys, we asked somebody, how long you've been with IBM and the person answered 143 quarters. Okay, that's a little enlightening about a business model, right? So we had the challenges of being private versus public. You have the challenge of when you acquire something like that, as I say, you acquire hearts, not parts. They could leave. I mean, you could destroy your value by them leaving. They can walk right out the door. I mean, yes, you can put lots of restraints, but still that you have there. And then we had to really build a new business model that people in clients would see as valuable and be willing to pay for. And so we had to do something that lived at that intersection and say that how this was

unique is what we were doing. So you had the people aspect, you had that they were going to be private or public and they had always been private their whole life. And then you had the business model. And the others had all failed that had tried to do this. So yeah, it was a tough thing to do. What about the personal side of that? That was a big leap step up for you. You've been an IBM for a long time. Yeah. This is this is a big sort of leadership, like very impactful, large scale leadership decisions. What was that like?

So, you know, unlike in my career earlier, where I said I was changing jobs, I said I wasn't comfortable, etc. So now here, fast forward 10 years. And I'm like, okay, honestly, how I felt inside? On one hand, I did what I learned, like inventory, what you know how to do. Like, you have some good strengths that could work here. The other part of me said, boy, this is a really high profile. And I felt, and I can remember saying to someone, like, this is going to kill me or catapult, probably nothing in between. And that wasn't terrifying to you. That was okay. You were okay with that. I was okay with that because I felt I knew enough, you know, like these things I had in a day, the one thing I felt I knew the best consultants of any worth their weight, they really do care that they deliver for an end client. And and I felt I understood service to a client so well, that what it meant to really provide value. So I knew we would have like something that I knew the PWC people more than anything wanted to deliver value to those clients they had next to then developing their people that those were like the really two things and that I could and I also knew they felt they could do better if they had more technology and we did. So there really was a reason, you know, that I could really believe in. So I authentically believed back to that point. And I also felt I had built some of those skills to be able to do that. But I wouldn't call it terrifying. But but make no mistake, like, it was very hard. And it was it turned out to be extremely successful. By the time we ended, it was worth 19 and a half one time I stepped I ran it for, oh, goodness gracious, quite a long time, I'm going to say seven or eight, nine years. And we were 19 and a half billion dollars, it made $2.7 billion in profit, it was very consequential to IBM. But the fact that it was consequential is also very I mean, there was a time as we moved through it, I can even remember it. We just weren't meeting the goals as fast as we should. And some of it was clients were like, Oh, now you're IBM. So it means some some things, I knew what happened, but they happen so much faster, it'd be things like clients would say, Oh, IBM cares about a quarter, so let's negotiate every quarter on these prices. And, you know, when they were private, they didn't have these issues. Well, that had an impact on margins really fast. And and so that ability, a lot of challenges, you pick them up right away. And and and I thought, Oh, boy, I mean, if I don't get this turned around, this is really a problem. And in the team learned a lot of lessons. I mean, I learned people I had to move out that I learned that when people don't believe they can do something, they probably won't do it. So so, you know, we wanted to run the business at a certain level. I really did have some great leaders, but they didn't really believe it could do that. And I finally had to come to terms with if you don't really believe in something, you really aren't going to probably make it happen at the end of the day. And so we would change that we would have to actually get some more help to help us on doing so. But when then it turned, and I can remember the day that we started really getting the business to hum and start to is almost like, finally, and I gave the team this little plaque, this little kind of corny paperweight thing. And I'm gonna believe it. Remember, it was Thomas Edison. And he said, many of life's greatest failures are people who gave

up

right before they were going to be successful. Yes. And it's so true. I mean, there was also a governor of Texas, who's past, but she had said, someone said, what's the secret of your success? And she said, it's passion and perseverance when everyone else would have given up. And I feel that's what that taught me. That taught me, no matter how bad this gets, you are not giving up. Now, you can't keep doing the same thing like the doctor, this hurts, oh, then stop doing it. You can't keep doing the same thing. We had to keep changing till we found our right way to get the model to work right. And client work, we never had an issue and kept so many of the people. And now we are 25 years almost later. And a number of them run parts of the IBM business still today. So it's that old Maya Angelou saying, when you say, what do I remember? They'll say, you won't remember the specifics of this, but you'll remember how you felt. And that's kind of how I feel. And I think they do too. The whole team does of that. I'll get anniversary notes still on that. When you've been through something like that together with people.

So during the acquisition, the way you knew that people, it's the right team are the ones that believe that this consulting can grow, can integrate with the IBM and all that.

Yeah, I was lucky. Look, I did things that helped that. I mean, I knew that people joining us would feel more comfortable if they had people leading it that they recognized, et cetera. But again, I learned those that didn't then, I eventually had to take some action out. But PWCC had a lot of really dedicated leaders to it. And I give them a lot of credit.

Well, it's amazing to see a thing that kind of start at that, that very stressful time. And then it turns out to be a success. That's just beautiful to see. So what about the acquisition itself? Is there something interesting to say about the, like, what you learned about maybe negotiation? Because there's a lot of money involved too. To me, it was a win-win. And we both actually cared the customer's got value. So there was this, like, third thing that had a benefit, not them, not a... There was this third thing. And then next to that...

I like how you think that people would have the wisdom or what it takes to have great negotiation. But yeah, so it's a win-win is one of the ways you can have successful negotiation.

But it's like obvious to even say that, right? I mean, if you can, back to being in service of something, we were both in service of clients. So in and then, I always say, when you have an negotiation with someone, okay, both parties always kind of walk away a little bit. Okay, that's good. If they both walk away going, yeah, I should have got a little bit more, okay, but it's okay if I should have got... Okay, they're both a little, little fussy. When one walks away and thinks they did great and the other one did horrible, they usually is like born bad. I mean, because they never worked that way. And I've always felt that way with negotiations that you push too far down and you usually will be sorry you did that.

So don't push too far. I mean, that's ultimately what collaboration and empathy means as you're interested in the long-term success of everybody together versus like your short-term. And then you get the discretionary energy from them versus like, okay, you screwed me here. I'm done, right? So let's even rewind even back.

Oh, no. Oh, no. Do you feel like this is a nostalgia interview? Oh, no.

Let me just ask the romantic question. What did you love most about engineering, computer science, electrical engineering? So in those early days, from your degree to the early...

I just, I love that logic part of it, right? And you do get a sense of completion at some

point when you reach certain milestones that, you know, like, yes, it worked or yes, it, you know, that finite answer to that. So that's what I loved about it. I loved the problem-solving of it. Computing. What led you down that path with computing in general? What made you fall in love with computing with engineering? It's probably that back to that desire, wanting to know how things work, right? And so that's like a natural thing, you know, math. I loved math for that reason. I always wanted to study how did that, you know, how did it get that to work kind of thing? So it goes back in that time. But I did start when I went, when I started in Northwestern, I wasn't, I was already in the engineering school, but my first thought was to be a doctor, that that was far more noble, that I should be a medical doctor until I could not pass human reproduction as a course. And I thought the irony that I could not, I'm like, I got all these colored pencils, I got all these pictures. This is not working out. I'm going to stick to math. It was the only course in my four-year college education I had to take pass, fail. Otherwise, I, I risked, you know, impairing my, my, my great point average. Engineering it is. So, but after about 10 years, you jumped from the technical role of systems engineer to a management, a leadership role. Did you miss at that time the sort of the technical direct contribution versus being a leader, a manager? That's an interesting point. Like I, like I said, I've always been sort of a doer leader, you know, so. So you never lost it. I never really did. Even, you know, and I think this is like really important for today. The best way people learn is experientially, I think. Now you may, that's being a generalization because their people can learn all different ways, right? Right. So I've done things like with my whole team. They all had to learn how to build cloud applications called a code off. And so, you know, I don't care what your job is, write code, you know. And I remember when we were trying to get the company to understand AI, we did something called a cognitive jam. Okay, there's a reason we picked the word cognitive, by the way, instead of AI. Today we use the word AI. It was really symbolic. It was to mean this is to help you think, not replace your thinking. There was so much in the zeitgeist about AI being a bad thing at that time. So that was why we picked a mouthful of a word like cognitive. And it was like, no, no, this is to help you actually. So do what, you know, do what you do better or do something you haven't yet learned. And we did something called the cognitive jam. But the whole point was everybody in the company could volunteer, get on a team. You either had to build something that improved one of our products or did something for a client or did a social self social issue with AI. And again, this goes back now, 10 years. And people did things from bullying applications to, you know, railroad stuff to whatever it was. But it got like 100,000 people to understand, you know, viscerally what is AI. So that's a long answer to my belief around experiential. So do you ever give it up? I don't think so. Because I actually think that's pretty good to get your hands dirty in something. You know, you can't do it, you know, depending what you're doing, your effort to do that will be less. But so even as CEO, you try to always get your hands dirty. I've played, I mean, still, I'm not saying I'm any good at any of it, you know, anymore. But to build up intuition. Yeah, it's that really understand, right? And not be afraid of. Yeah. Like we mentioned at the beginning, IBM research has helped catalyze some of the biggest accomplishments in computing and artificial intelligence history. So D blue, IBM D blue

versus Kasparov chess match in 96 and 97. Just just to ask kind of like what your perception is, what your memory is of it? What is what is that moment like this seminal moment? I believe probably one of the greatest moments in AI history when the machine first beat a human at a thing the humans. Do you make a very interesting point? Because it is like one of the first demonstrations of using a game to like bring something to people's consciousness, right? And to this date, people use games right to demonstrate different things. But at the time, it's funny. I didn't necessarily think of it so much as AI. And I'll tell you why. I was and I'm not a chess player, you might be a chess player. So I'm not expert at it. But I think I understand properly of chess that chess has got a finite number of moves that can be made. Therefore, if it's finite, really what's the demonstration of a super computing, right? It's about the amount of time and how fast it can crunch through to find the right move. So in some ways, I thought of it as almost a bigger demonstration of that. But it is absolutely as you said, it is was a motivator, one of the big milestones of AI, because it put in your consciousness that it's man in this in this other machine, right? Yeah, I mean, so you saw it as just a challenging computation problem. And this is a way to demonstrate hardware and software computation at its best. Yes, I did. But the thing is, there is a romantic notion that chess is the embodiment of human intellect, I mean, intelligence, that you can't build a machine that can beat a chess champion in chess. And the fact that I was blessed by not being a chess expert. So it's just a computation problem. It's a computation problem to me. Well, that's probably required to not be paralyzed by the immensity of the task. So that this is just solvable. But it was a very, I think that was a powerful moment. So speaking just as an AI person, that was that reinvigorated the dream. You were a little kid back then though, right? At 95? Or you had to be like, were you remember it actually at the moment? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. What did you think at the moment about it? It was awe inspiring, because especially sort of growing up in the Soviet Union, you think, especially of Karek Esparov and chess, your intuition is weak about those things. I didn't see it as computation. I thought of it as intelligence, because chess for a human being doesn't feel like computation. It feels like some complicated relationship between memory and patterns and intuition and guts and instinct and all of those. If you watch someone play, that's what you would conclude, right? And so to see a machine be able to beat a human, I mean, you get a little bit of that with chat GPT now. It's like language was to us humans. The thing that we kind of surely, the poetry of language is something only humans can really have. It's going to be very difficult to replicate the magic of the natural language without deeply understanding language. But it seems like chat GPT can do some incredible things with language and in natural language dialogue. But that was the first moment in AI. They're all the AI winters from the 60s of the promise of the, it was, wow, this is possible for a simple set of algorithms to accomplish something that we think of as intelligence. So that was truly inspiring that maybe intelligence, maybe the human mind is just algorithms. That was the thought at the time. And of course now, the funny thing what happens is the moment you accomplish it, everyone says, oh, it's just brute force algorithms. It's silly. And this continues. Every single time you pass a benchmark, a threshold to win a game, people say, oh, well, it's just this, it's just this, it's just this. And that, I think that's funny. And there's going to be a moment when we're going to have to contend with AI systems that exhibit human-like emotions and feelings. And you have to start to have some difficult discussions

about, well, how do we treat those beings? And what role do they have in society? What are the rules around that? And this is really exciting because that also puts a mirror to ourselves to see, okay, what's the right way to treat each other as human beings? Because it's a good test for that.

It is because, I always say, it's a reflection of humanity. I mean, it's taught by what man, you know, bad stuff in the past, you'll teach it bad stuff for the future, which is why I think, you know, like efforts to regulate it are a fool's errand. You need to regulate uses not, you know, because it's not the technology itself is not inherently good or bad, but how it's used or taught can be good or bad for sure, right? And so that's, to me, we'll unveil now a whole different way of having to look at technology.

What about another magical leap with the early days of Watson with beating the Jeopardy Challenge?

What was your experience like with Watson? What's your vision for Watson in general?

Yeah. And it was really inspired by first chess, right? And Casparoff. And then you come forward in time. And, you know, I think what Watson did, because you used a really important word, AI had kind of waxed and waned in these winners, right? In and out, in and out. Popular or not, more money last month, you know, in and out, confidence, no confidence. And so I think that was one of the first times it brought to the forefront of people like, whoa, like it humanized it, because here it is playing against these two gentlemen. And as you did lose it first, you know, and then finally, finally won at the end of the day. And but what it was doing is making you say, Hey, natural language is actually understanding natural language is one of the first demonstrations of natural language support. And bit of reasoning over lots of data, right? And so that it could have access to a lot of things come up with a conclusion on it. And to me, that was a really big moment. And I do think it brought to the conscious of the public, and in good ways and bad, because it probably set expectations very high of like, whoa, what this could be. But and I still do believe that it has got the ability to change and help us, man, make better decisions that so many decisions are not optimal in this world, you know, even medical decisions. And it's right or wrong, what took us down a path of healthcare first with our AI. And and we took many pivots. And I think there's a really valuable lesson in what we learned. One is that I actually don't think the challenges are the technology. Yes, those are challenges. But the challenges are the people are the people challenges around this, right? So do people trust it? How will they use it? I mean, I saw that straight up with doctors and like, meaning they're so busy in the way they've been taught to do something. Do they really have time to learn another way? I saw it was a mistake when you put it on top of processes that didn't change kind of like paving a cow path. Didn't work. I mean, it was all human change management around it that were really its biggest challenges. And another valuable lesson we picked back to you said you think of IBM as moonchops, we picked really hard problems to start with. I think you see a lot of technology now starts with really simple problems. And in by that, it probably starts to build trust because I start little, it's like, oh, I'm not ready to, you know, outsource my diagnosis to you, but I'll get some information here about a test question. So very different thinking. So a lot of things to learn, we were making a market at the time. And when you make a market, you know, choice of problem you work on

gets to be very important. When you're catching up, well, then it's a scale game. So very different thing. And so, but Watson proved, I think, I mean, I hope I'm not being too, I think Watson brought a back out of winner for the world. And that since then, there's just been, you know, one company after another and innovations and people working on it. And I've no regrets of anything that we did, we learned so much. And we probably rebuilt it many times over, it made it more modular. And today, to IBM, Watson is more about AI inside of a lot of things, if you think of it that way, which is more like an ingredient versus it's a thing in and of itself. And I think that's how it'll bring its real value, you know, more as an ingredient, and it's so badly needed. And even back then, the issue was so much data, like, what do you ever do it, you can't get through it, you can't use it for anything, you know this well, it's your profession. So we have to have it. So that's that's going to propel it forward. So it's part of the suite of tools that you use when you go to enterprise and you try to solve some problems. Yeah, so AI for security, AI in automated operations, AI in your robotics, AI on your factory, you know, I mean, it's, it's all part of. And I think, and that's why even to this day, thousands, I mean, thousands and thousands of clients of IBM still have the Watson components that it's the AI being used. So it became a platform is how I would say it, right. And an ingredient that went inside and consultants, like you said, had to learn, I had, they had to learn, don't just put it on something, you got to rethink how that thing should work, because with the AI, it could work entirely differently. And so I also felt it could open up and still will open up jobs to a lot of people, because more like an assistant, and it could help me be qualified to do something. And we even years ago saw this with the French banks, very unionized, but that idea that you could, in this case, the unions voted for it, because it felt people did a better job. And so, and that's this part about being really dedicated to help it help humanity, not destroy it. Speaking of which, a funny side note. So Kubrick's 2000 Space Odyssey,

what do you think about the fact that HAL 9000 was named after IBM?

I really don't think it was. I really don't. It could be more fake news.

It's more fake news. I have done, I've researched this, tried to find any evidence and people have talked to, was it really one letter, it was one letter off, right?

So people don't know H is one letter off of I, A is one letter off of B, and then L is one letter off of that. I think that's a solution found afterwards, but here's what I think it more was.

I do think it's one of the early demonstrations of evil AI, can be taught bad.

I could push back on that because it's presented as evil in the movie because it hurts, the AI hurts people, but it's a really interesting ethical question because the role of HAL 9000 is to carry out a successful mission. And so the question that is a human question, it's not an AI question, at what price? You humans wage war, they pay very heavy costs for a vision for a goal of a future that creates a better world. And so that's the question certainly in space. Doctors ask that question all the time under limited resources who allocate my time and money and efforts. I agree. I like I said, I've spent a decade talking about this question of AI ethics, right? And that it needs really considerable, not just attention, because otherwise it will mirror everything we love and everything we don't love. And again, and that's the beauty in the eye of the holder, right? Depending your culture and everything else. With what you're doing and what you're going to do, how do you think about it? Do you think about the AI you're going to develop

as having guardrails dictated by some of your beliefs? Yeah, for sure. So there's so many interesting ways to do this the right way. And I don't think anyone has an answer. I tend to believe that transparency is really important. So I think some aspect of your work should be open sourced, or at least have an open source competitor that creates kind of forcing function for transparency of how you do things. So the other is I tend to believe, maybe it's because of the podcast and I've just talked to a lot of people, you should know the people involved. I agree 100%. As opposed to hide behind a company wall. Sometimes there's a pressure, you have a PR team, you have to careful investors and discussion and so on. Let's protect. Let's surely not tweet. Like in you form this bubble where you have incredible engineers doing fascinating work and also doing work that's difficult complex human questions being answered. And we don't know about any of them as a society. And so we can't really have that conversation. Even though that conversation would be great for hiring, it would be great for revealing the complexities of what the company is facing. So when the company makes mistakes, you understand that it wasn't malevolence or half acidness and the decision making is just a really hard problem. And so I think transparency is just good for everybody. And I mean, in general, just having a lot of public conversations about this is serious stuff. It's that AI will have a transformative impact on our society. And it might do so very, very quickly through all kinds of ways we're not expecting, which is social media recommendation systems. They at scale have impact on the way we think and the way we consume news and our growth, the kind of stuff we consume to grow and learn and become better human beings, all of that. That's all AI. And then obviously the tools that run companies in which we depend, the infrastructure in which we depend, we need to know all about

those AI decisions. And it's not as simple as, well, we don't want the AI to say these specific set of bad things. It's unfortunately, I don't believe it's possible to prevent evil or bad things by creating a set of cold mathematical rules. Unfortunately, it's all fuzzy and gray areas. It's all a giant mess. I mean, you think about it like a knife. A knife can do good and a knife can do bad. It's very hard. You can't ban knives. You can't ban knives. And that this is, I think back, it was, I don't know, 15, 16, we did principles of trust and transparency. Notice the word transparency, that belief that with AI, it should be explainable. You should know who taught it. You should know the data that went into training it. You should know how it was written. If it's being used, you have a right to know these things. And I think those are pretty, to this day, really powerful principles to be followed. And part of it, we ended up writing because here we were when we were working on particularly healthcare, like, okay, you care who trained it in what? And that's sort of simple. That comes to your mind. You're like, yeah, that makes a lot of sense for something important like that. But it just in general, people won't trust the technologies, I don't think, unless they have transparency into those things. In the end, they won't really trust it. I think a lot of people would like to know sort of, because a lot of us, I certainly do suffer from imposter syndrome, that self critical brain. So, you know, taking that big step into leadership, did you at times suffer from imposter syndrome? Like, how did I get here? Do I really belong here? Or did you were you able to summon the courage and sort of the confidence to really step up?

Hmm. I think that's very natural for someone like no matter like the bigger the job gets. You turn and you look to the left and the right, and you see people around you and you think,

what am I doing here? Right? But then you remember what you do. And there's no one else doing it. And so you get that confidence. So I do hear a lot of people talk about imposter syndrome, right? And I kind of, actually, this past year, I've spent some time helping people on that topic. And part of the story is that you have to believe you have a right to be like anyone else does if you've prepared for that moment, you know? And so it's a bit more of a, I know it's hard to say it like a confidence thing more than anything else. So yes, there are times I look around, but then I think, wow, I'm in a position to make something change. So I can't say I have ever really dwelled on that feeling for long.

Okay. So you just focus on the work. I have an opportunity. I'm going to stop talking. You know, it's good or bad. I just focus on the work. Yeah. Good or bad. Yeah.

One important lesson you said you learned from your mom is never let anyone else define you. Only you define who you are. So what's the trajectory, let's say, of your self-definition journey of you discovering who you are from having that very difficult upbringing?

You know, they say pivotal moments happen and you don't realize it when they're happening. So most of my, I feel like most of my self-discovery, it's been like, something happens in a year or two or some number later, I look back on it and say, you know, I learned this from that. It's like not in the moment always with me. That could just be how I am. So I feel like it's been, know yourself is a good thing, right?

I've actually heard you say that on a different podcast when you ask people questions, you're like, well, it depends, you know, like know yourself a bit, right? And it's hard to know who you are though. There's a lot of things like you said, like for me, there's moods when you're super self-critical, sometimes you're super confident, and there's many, sometimes you're emotional, sometimes you're cool under pressure, although those are the same human being. Yeah, and I think that's fine. Self-awareness, that's different.

Was there societal expectations and norms regarding gender that you felt in your career? You've spoken to that a little bit, but was there some aspect of that that was constraining, empowering, or both? I chose to never look at it. Now, whether that is right or wrong, and again, I'm a product of the 70s and 70s and the 80s, where I think I was surrounded, all the other women around me viewed our way to get ahead was just to work hard. Work hard, work hard, and that was the way you differentiated yourself. And that's obvious, it did help. I mean, there's no doubt about it. You learned a lot of things, which qualified, opened up another door, opened up another door. I'm very mindful that I have worked for companies that are very steeped in those values of equal opportunity. And so, nothing remarkable about that. I mean, when I was a wee kid, I'm taught, hire a diverse team. I get evaluated for it. I get evaluated if my team has built up their skills. So, when you're really formative, you're in a culture that that's what it's valuing, right? So, it becomes part of you. So, I say sometimes to chagrin did I ever feel I was held back for that reason? Now, were there plenty of times when I write about a few of the stories in the book, I'm laying cables at night and the guys are at the bar. Now, I didn't really want to go with them to the bar anyways. They'd be like, we'll be back to get you, you know, bye. And I'm like, okay. I mean, I learned a lot, so it didn't. Now, all that said, back to my earlier story about being a role model, you know, it would be foolish to not believe that there were times that that mattered. And I would say two things, even not that long ago, you know, a colleague called me and I was talking about media and about women

CEOs and said, do you notice that sometimes when it's a woman's CEO, they call the person by name.

And when it's a man, they call the company out, not the person's name exactly associated with the issue. And I said, yeah, well, I think you have to just understand much of what you do, it will be magnified because there are so few of you. And sometimes it will be, you know, really can be blown out of proportion, right? And so that can happen. And you got to learn which in which way. Now, all that said, on gender, it is an interesting thing with the book. As I've talked to, you know, having a book, it is one of my best friends, the first reaction is I can't wait for my daughter to read it. I say, well, that's interesting. Do you think you could read it? It's an interesting reaction. And as here I am 40 years later, that's an interesting reaction, right? And I say, no, the book, I really worked hard to write it for everyone. I just happen to be a woman, right? But there's still that there. And so, look until I think people see and never feel that they have a, it doesn't even matter whether there's a woman, it could be another diverse group that feels it. It's okay to ask those questions. And that's why actually, I'm okay talking about it because there were times I felt it, right? There were times in my life on my looks or my weight or my clothing or endless numbers of things that people would comment on that they would not have commented on, if it was someone else.

Now, on the other hand, when there's so few of you and, you know, there's good and bad. I mean, there's benefit to that too, right? If you do good work, you'll be recognized. It's easier to be recognized. And so a pro and a con, and I think I've just grown up believing like my advice to young women, go into engineering, not because you're going to be an engineer. It teaches you to solve problems and anything you do is going to be solving problems. Things like that are what I take away from that in that journey. It is interesting that, you know, I hear from women that even on this podcast, when I talk to incredible women like yourself, it is inspiring to young women to hear. I mean, you like to see, you talk to somebody from Turkey and then Turkish people all get excited. It's so true. So you get like somebody that looks like you, somebody that in the category could be tiny or it can be huge. That's just the reality of the world.

It is the reality of the world. And the work I do now to put this group called 110, put one million black employees into the middle class without college degrees, get them the right skills, upwardly mobile jobs. So one of my last years, we had been working on, it just did regular leadership session at IBM and had our black colleagues, we're talking about what did it feel like to be a black leader. And here, these are extremely accomplished people. And I can remember very well when telling a story about, look, I felt if I failed or succeeded, it's not just me. It came from a country in Africa. I felt like the whole country is on my shoulder, my success or failure. That's a burden. I mean, like, I don't feel that burden. Not true. As a woman CEO, I did feel like, you know, even the headlines when I was named said, you know, her appointment will either, you know, her success or failure will be a statement for the whole gender kind of thing. And I didn't dwell on it, but I meant that's, but I could see how people, like you said, it could be a small group, could be whatever. And so that is a lot of pressure on people and they need role models. You are a role model for people. Look at what you're able to do. You do these podcasts, you understand your science very well, you're very well prepared, your ability to translate it to people, you know, that's not an insignificant thing. And you may

think, Oh, you know, is that about the power of me? Not really, right? And you obviously believe you don't do this because you just like sitting at a microphone, you do it because you think, okay, if I can get people to say things that are really valuable to other people, they're going to learn something. I assume that is, I mean, you never told me my interpretation is, that's why you do this podcast that you feel like in service of other people that you can bring them something unique by the way you do this. Now, I should ask you, why do you do it? That's my impression. By the way, can I just comment on the fact that you keep asking me really hard questions? I'm really honored by it. As a fan of podcasts myself, what I hope is to talk to people like you and to show that you are a fascinating and beautiful human being outside of your actual accomplishments also. So sometimes people are very focused on, you know, very specific things about, like you said, science, like what the actual work is, whether it's nuclear fusion or it's GPPT. I just want to show that it's because I see it at MIT and everywhere, it's just human beings trying their best, they're flawed, but just realizing that all of these very well accomplished people are all the same. And then so then regular people and young people that they're able to see, you know, I can do this too. I can have a very big impact. Yeah, exactly. It's like, we're all kind of imposters. We're all like trying to figure it out. Do a certain degree. So let me just ask you about family. You wrote that my family still jokes that the reason I never had children on my own was because I had already raised my family. They're right. So this is talking to you upbringing, but in general, what was your, you know, leading a giant company, what was the right place to find a work life balance for you to have, have time for family, have time for away from work and be successful. So I had to learn that. And I might have said, you know, you're the only one that can determine your own work life balance. Companies are innate things. I mean, they will take everything they can from you. And it's not a bad thing. They just will as well bosses. I mean, you give it, we'll take it. And when people ask for, you know, I need roof, I'm like, okay, I had to come with terms with the criminal was me, if I needed that balance, I had to set those boundaries. And so when I comment about a family, because I am in extreme awe of people with children who work, it is a extremely hard thing to do. I watch my siblings, I love my nieces and nephews and who, you know, the emotional, their pain is your pain every minute of a day. And then you still have a job on top of it. And so when my mom had to go back to school and had to work, I was the one. And so when she couldn't go to the teacher meeting, I went to the teacher meeting when, and so in some ways, there's an age gap between my brother and I and my other two sisters. And so I'm still they still call me mama bear even. I mean, I'm extremely protective of all of them. And it is as if I had raised them. And my mom did a great job raising them, I didn't, but I was there. And so when it came time to have children, and my husband came from a family where his father died and was raised by a single mother, very, very similar endpoint, different reasons why he ended up, you know, his father had not abandoned them. And I don't want people to believe to do my job, you can have no children. That is not right. I know other great women CEOs, Marilyn Houston, who ran Lockheed Martin, extremely technical company, Mary Barrow, who runs General Motors, Ellen Coleman, who run DuPont, these are all my friends to this day. And they've been fantastic mothers and husbands, good parents, right? And so I talked

about it because it was a choice we made. And so, you know, we both felt, look, we'd reached a point where for his reasons, what he had to do, I'd already felt that way. And that we were comfortable just being great aunts and uncles. And I'm a great aunt, you know, I like to think that for my little guys and all, and they're older now, but lots of them. And there's no doubt, though, the choices we made, Mark and I, that made it easier for me to focus on work. I mean, it's just math, you know, when you've got less people to have to take care of. And so I'm very considerate of that. And I think much of it informed many of the policies I put into because I had such great empathy for those who then still had these other responsibilities. And I desperately wanted them all to stay in the workforce. So I can remember, and my siblings have been more successful than I, by the way, I mean, to my mother's credit. And my one sister who, you know, went to Northwestern, has an MBA, built some of the most sophisticated systems. She spent her whole career at Accenture and just recently retired as a chief executive of all of consulting. But at one point, she took off time to be disbanded with her family. And then went back to go back to work. She's talking to me and she's like, I don't know if I should go back to work. You know, maybe the life's, you know, technology goes so fast. It's been a few years. I'm sitting there like, what are you talking about? I'm like, you know, look at her credentials, they're far outstanding. I'm like, and I thought to myself like ding, one of those moments, if my own sister feels that way with all her credentials, I'll bet I went back to work the next day. And I said, Hey, pull for me, all the people who've left for parental reasons and or whatever family reasons, and didn't come back. And it began a program of return ships. And I can't tell you how many men and women was because they didn't feel confident to come back. They thought technology passed them by. Okay, we said it's three months, you could stay one month, three months, doesn't matter. Well, a lot of people like one day, they're like, you're right, not that much happened. Well, it happened, but I caught up. I actually know more than I think, you know, and I, so it was a long answer to your question about, I didn't, but I am so empathetic. And I am in awe of what they are able to do. So, and it made me then, I think more empathetic to the policies and the like, around that topic. So you could keep great people in the workforce. So you mentioned your friends with Mayor Barra, the CEO of GM. I didn't mean to name drop. So don't I love her. She's amazing. So I just wanted to, I'm just curious. Tell Mary she should do your podcast. We'll make it happen. She's a great leader. I always, I tell Mary what I think of her is I think she's one of the most authentic leaders out there, most authentic. I mean, she's just very different companies, huge challenges. I worked there first though, remember, right? So I'm very, you know, in some ways I'm very beholden, right? You know, I'm very appreciative of what they did. I mean, Mary and I are circa the same, well, I'm a bit older. So, but circa that genre. Do you exchange wisdoms? Oh yeah. Yeah. When you do anything hard, it takes time in perseverance, like we talked about. And you can get that, where do you get the fuel for it? You can either get it from your attitude, or you can get it from your network or your relationships. And I'm a firm believer relationships are from what you give, not what you get. Meaning you give, trust me, they will come back at the time they need to come back to you at these moments in life. If you focus on how can I bring Lex value, there'll be a day I need Lex, he will be back. And so to those women, to me, relationships are not transactional.

And it's a proof that to this day, even though I'm no longer still active as a CEO, these are all still my friends. And they're, we are friends, all of us. And I can remember some of them when I first became a CEO, calling me and saying, Hey, it's a little lonely here. So let me talk to you. And then when they became, I did the same for them. And then they remember, and they do for the next generation. And so it's a very supportive, almost to a T, any of the women you could name who have been CEOs, I would say, almost to a T have all been very supportive. In fact, a number of us work on a little, another non for profit right now called journey, which some women who had started the fortune's most powerful women had started, which was, could we get more women, particularly diverse women, but women in general, to more quickly be into positions of leadership and power. And so many of the women you named and more, you know, we all dedicate time mentoring in kind of creating this little group of fellows every year to do this friendship and love is core to this whole thing, not just the success, but just the whole human condition. Let me ask one last question, advice for young people, you've had a difficult upbringing, a difficult life, and you've become one of the most successful human beings in history. What advice would you give to young people or just people in general who are struggling a bit, trying to figure out how they can have a career they can be proud of or maybe a life they can be proud of? I feel like a life you can be proud of is just one if you leave something a little bit better. It doesn't have to be big, you know, that's a life well lived, right? It was Churchill who said, we may, it was how you might remember better than I, you make a living by what you get and you live a life by what you give something to that effect. But my advice would probably, when I'm asked this, I would tell them to ask more questions and give answers. Just, just focus on being a sponge. And it's funny, I asked my husband the same question the other day, I said, Hey, we're talking to somebody and people were just asking this and he sort of paused for a while and he said, I tell him patience. I said, what do you mean? And he said, I see so many young people like they're in such a hurry to somewhere, I don't know where. And that if they just had patience and let life unfold, I think they may be surprised where they ended up. And actually, I think that's a really good answer, to be honest. Along the way, keep asking questions, keep that childlike curiosity. I know it sounds so easy to say, it's just so, you know, it's like, like you said, the obvious things. Yeah, I think they tend to be the most profound. You're an incredible human being, your inspiration is so many. Thank you for helping run and contribute to one of the great companies that brings so much good power to the world. And thank you for putting in the hard work of putting it all in the great book. So, and thank you for talking to us. This is a huge honor. Thank you for doing it. You did a lovely job. Thanks for listening to this conversation with Genie Rometti. To support this podcast, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now, let me leave you with some words from Eleanor Roosevelt. Do what you feel in your heart to be right, for you'll be criticized either way. Thank you for listening and hope to see you next time.