



Episode 10: Career Journey to Microsoft MVP With Elaiza Benitez

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- Tamara: Welcome Eliza to The Females in Tech Show. I am so excited to have you on the show. Before we get started, what is one thing that you're grateful for today?
- Elaiza Benitez: Being alive.
- Tamara: Oh, wow. That is so beautiful. That really touches my heart given the bush fires in Australia at the moment, and made me a lot more grounded and grateful for life, so that's really beautiful that you've said that.
- Elaiza Benitez: Yeah.
- Tamara: The next quick-fire question, can you tell us about a recent achievement or something you're proud of?
- Elaiza Benitez: Actually, last week I was a first-time speaker at Microsoft conference called Microsoft Ignite. It was really was an amazing experience. I presented three sessions all on Day One of the conference and that was really cool. I was very, very nervous leading up to it, so probably three weeks beforehand, as a speaker there is a thing called the speakers portal, and you can see the number of registrations to your sessions.
- One of my sessions kept increasing and increasing and I was thinking, "Oh no, I have never presented to that large number before". Once I did my first session, I was fine.
- Tamara: Amazing. That is unbelievable. What did you present on?
- Elaiza Benitez: I had three presentations. The first one is what we call a community-related trek. It was around my travels around the world for three and a half months, and along the way I met the Microsoft community as it something that I've always wanted to do, and this year I did it. Best time of my life. I've zero regrets.
- Then, my two other presentations were related on a product in the Microsoft Power Platform called Power Automate, and all three in one day. It was nice. It was tiring as well.
- Tamara: I can imagine. How did you deal with all the nerves?



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- Elaiza Benitez: I didn't, to be honest. The night before, which was Sunday, I actually couldn't sleep. One of my friends who happens to be a Microsoft MVP, Sean. Hello, Sean, if you're listening. He said, "You'll be fine. I know you'll do good." He was right.
- Tamara: Wow. He sounds like such a great ally. I know when I present a lot for Salesforce I rehearse and rehearse and rehearse and rehearse, and then when I get up on stage, it's similar to what I planned but I tend to just go with the flow and let the nerves run out of my system and just trust that I know the content that I'm talking about.
- Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. Exactly. I rehearsed leading up to the conference and once I was on stage presenting it was somewhat the same but not exactly the same from when you rehearsed. It all changes when you're in the moment.
- Tamara: Yeah. Absolutely. I like to read off the audience's facial expressions so I can sort of understand whether they understand what I am talking about and if I see someone looking a little bit confused, I might spend a little bit longer on that topic explaining what it is that I was trying to explain, so it is so different.
- Elaiza Benitez: That's a good tip.
- Tamara: Yeah. It's something I learned early in my career, because I'm presenting all the time in front of customers, and teaching them the platform and providing them with a really detailed solution handover, so they need to understand the product to excel in the product that I specialize in. I've learned to read their facial expressions because different cultures, some will put their hand up and say, "Yes. I get it." Others will say that they get it but don't really. Reading facial expressions really helped me.
- Elaiza Benitez: Okay. I'll remember that for next time.
- Tamara: Awesome. Is presenting something that you want to do more of? Did you enjoy it and want to go back again next year?
- Elaiza Benitez: Absolutely if I get selected again to go to Microsoft Ignite, 100% I would do it, and in terms of doing more speaking engagements, yes. I'd love to. I have actually submitted for Microsoft Ignite the World Tour. There are different destinations in the world or cities, and there will be both Microsoft and experts in the community such as Microsoft MVPs that will go there and talk. The one that's happening this week is in Paris.



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Tamara: Wow. Beautiful.

Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. I've seen tweets so far. I've got friends who are presenting as well over there.

Tamara: Wow. That seems like a spectacular opportunity. I really hope that you get it. I'm sure that you will. I'm sure that you absolutely rocked everyone's socks off at Ignite in Orlando last week. I'm really proud of you. It was awesome to see all of your LinkedIn updates. I got tears in my eyes with how impressive your journey was. So, on that, can you provide a detailed overview of your career journey and how you got to where you are today?

Elaiza Benitez: Sure. I think I'll start from the very beginning and because a lot of things throughout my life influenced where I am today. I'll start with my Dad. First of all, I'll introduce my background. I'm Filipino. Both my parents are Filipino, but I was born and raised in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates.

My Mum was a nurse, and my Dad was a chemical field engineer, and one day a Windows PC turned up at our house. I didn't take much notice of it until my Dad was using Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel. He showed me how the two products work. I was quite young, and over time I taught myself Microsoft Word. You take it for granted today in terms of what all the different icons mean, like there's a capital B which means bold.

Then, you have the little dots and the lines that represent bullet points, so over time I was able to figure out what each of those icons represented. Then, I would also type anything that I saw. I would type things from a book or paper. I would just match the letters of words and figure it all out, and then eventually, my Dad also got, I think it's called Britannica. It was an encyclopedia on CDs.

I don't know if anyone remembers that from the '90s. I would just use Encyclopedia Britannica for school projects. Just run with things, typed in things like USA or some type of species of plants. Fast forward to High School, I went to High School in New Zealand because we moved to New Zealand in the year 2000, and one of the school subjects was ICT, Information Communication Technology, and towards the end of High School, the numbers dropped.

My two teachers, one was called Mr. Hunt and the other was Mr. Cher. I think they were both from the UK. Mr. Cher was from Scotland and I think Mr. Hunt was from England and both of them said that I had a knack when it comes to the subject. They were the ones who encouraged me to continue with something related to IT at University, so that's what I did.



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I did a degree in Information Systems, and I did a double major in management, and in my final year of my undergraduate degree, the School of Information Management. That's the department of the major I was doing a degree in. They said that they have a research program. It was called the Undergraduate Research Development Program and only a few students would be selected as candidates.

Then, you would then have to do your research and write a paper and all of that. I did that with some other students. I think there was only 8 or 10 of us.

Tamara: Wow.

Elaiza Benitez: Then, my supervisor, David Poole.

Oh no! I think I got his name wrong. Oh no it was so long ago. He liked the work that I did, and he said, "You know, I think it's actually good enough to be..." Oh, it's David Pauley. There we go. That's his name. He said, "I think this is good enough to be submitted in a journal.", which is an academic journal.

Tamara: Wow.

Elaiza Benitez: We went for it. This was back in 2008, and we submitted it. I think it's called the Americas Conference of Information Systems, AMCIS. It got accepted.

Tamara: Oh, my gosh.

Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. That's when my first public speaking happened, because part of being published in that journal required you to attend the annual conference. In the year 2009, it was in San Francisco, so I was the youngest of all the presenters at that conference.

I was quite nervous. My Dad was kind enough to fly over and meet me there. He actually recorded the presentation. But to this day, I haven't watched it because I was just like, "Oh, I don't know what I'm doing. What am I doing here?"

I was with my supervisor as well as other people from the University because they were presenting as well, and afterwards, I remember going out with my Dad and we celebrated at the hotel bar. I think I had a Lemon Drop Martini but to be honest, I didn't enjoy it. It was too strong for me.



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But then the other cool thing that happened in 2009 was I decided I wasn't ready to start the corporate life. In the year 2008, I went along to one of the Career Fairs at the University.

Tamara: Yeah.

Elaiza Benitez: I spoke to a bunch of organizations and one of them was a New Zealand IT company, and the person I was talking to at the time, Emily McKenna. Oh, sorry. No. It was another person in HR who then left but Emily McKenna was the replacement. The lady told me at the time that they had a scholarship for students in their final year of University and she recommended that I apply for it. I did.

Then, I went in and had my interview with Emily McKenna from HR and Emma Barrett, who was the general manager at the time for the Wellington Office and they liked me. Then, I got the job. The scholarship part of the requirement was to work for them when I can during the break, and so I did that as well.

Then, by the time I finished my honor's year of my postgraduate study, they then made a role for me so that I could join them.

Tamara: Wow.

Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. But I remember that year was quite difficult for people, all students graduating from University to get into the IT industry because a lot of the roles that were going at the time were Developer roles. I'm not that type of person. I still went along to the graduate boot camp interviews, but didn't make the cut, which I knew because I was like, "There's no way. I can't make it. I don't code."

But because they knew what I was like, they wanted me to stay. Then, I got a role as a Sales Administrator. I worked alongside Bruce Smith, who's still here in Wellington and that's how I got my foot into the IT industry. Eventually I moved from Sales into Managed Services, but in between, I worked for a client of the company, and because I was doing well the client asked if I could stay on for an enhancements project, which I did and that turned out well, and then I moved to Melbourne.

Tamara: Wow.



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Elaiza Benitez: That's where I worked for the last six years, and then I moved back home to Wellington. It's been really good.

Tamara: What were you doing in Melbourne?

Elaiza Benitez: I moved to Melbourne because the company I started working for originally, the one that I got the scholarship with, and hired by them after University, they didn't have any roles in the delivery team, which is the team that responsible for building solutions for clients. I happened to be in Melbourne for the week of my 25th birthday, and I did 3 interviews while I was there and got 2 job offers.

Then, I was like, "Okay. I'll do it. I'll move to Melbourne." That's when I started working on the delivery side of projects in the IT industry. From there, I became better and now I'm a Senior, so it's been good.

Tamara: Wow. Is that where you learned Microsoft Dynamics?

Elaiza Benitez: I actually learned Microsoft Dynamics, back then it was called CRM Microsoft Dynamics, here in Wellington. Then I moved to Melbourne and continued with it. It was rebranded to Dynamics 365, and in the last three years, that's when the Microsoft Power Platform came around.

Tamara: Amazing. Has anyone inspired you throughout your career?

Elaiza Benitez: Definitely. In terms of the Microsoft MVPs, there was a female, Irlene Ghazni, She's based in Singapore these days. She was awarded, I think maybe in 2014, and to me that was inspirational because I'm pretty sure she was the first female MVP in the Business Applications category.

I remember thinking, "Wow. If she can do it, maybe one day I can do that." That happened last year, I was awarded. Another person that's been influential in my career is Sophie. She's based here in Wellington. When I started out she was the one who gave me this book to learn Dynamic CRM, and then whenever I had questions she answered them. She showed me how to do particular configuration in Dynamic CRM, and if it wasn't for her, I don't know if I would know what I know today.

Tamara: Wow.



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Elaiza Benitez: She was really patient, and we're still good friends today. I admire her because these days she's a mother and anyone who's a working mother, I have so much respect for. I'm not a mother myself yet, and I always think, "Wow. How do they do everything? They're superwoman." They have like super powers, because my sister has two young girls now, and I see her in terms of how she handles her kids and works at the same time, and I honestly don't know how people do it.

I know that when I become a working mother, I'll be leaning on, not only family but friends as well. Sophie is a working mother and it just shows that even when you're a mom, you can still excel and do well in your career. It's not something that will hold you back, and it shouldn't be something that holds you back either.

Tamara: Yeah. I think that's really important as well. Every single female is different and some females like to be that stay-at-home Mum and good on them, and other females like to pursue their career and do somehow manage to juggle it all. A lot of the mothers that I asked, how do they do it? They all say, "You just get better at the time that you have to do your work and you just become a whole lot more productive," and because you're juggling so many things at home, you learn to juggle so many things at work.

I still have no idea how they do it, but it's an exciting phase and definitely something that I'm looking forward to as well.

Elaiza Benitez: Another person who has been influential in the last year and a half is my former manager in Melbourne, Lisa Andrews. I'm going to say it. She's a badass. She's awesome and she's also stylish in her own way.

What I mean, fierce, as in she's one of those managers that gets things done. She doesn't just walk the talk, she actually gets what she says she's going to do, done, and for someone in her role, which is very demanding because she was the overall Delivery Manager in Australia. It can be quite stressful, but she was very good at it and she's actually now taking a break from the IT industry and moved up to Byron Bay and opening her own gelato shop.

Tamara: Wow.

Elaiza Benitez: I know. A big change. I'm just like, "Wow. She's so awesome." The way I describe her to people and friends is that she's like Jessica Pearson from the TV show, Suits. She's just awesome.



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Tamara: Wow. She sounds amazing.

Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. She really is.

Tamara: Now, what would you say is the most pivotal moment in your career so far?

Elaiza Benitez: One that springs to mind is, in my second or third year when I moved to Melbourne. After I went away on holiday, I was assigned to a project and that project turned out to be quite challenging. I can't disclose details, however it was challenging to the point where multiple colleagues left including contractors, and I was the last one standing. I knew if I made it through that project, I could make it. I can do anything from that point onwards because it was really, really tough and I came out of it, what's that saying, "You have to walk through mud and walk out smelling like roses"

Tamara: I love that. I'm so going to use that.

Elaiza Benitez: That's what happened, and until this day, I'm still friends with one of the key stakeholders from that project, even after I left that company. I met with them because they wanted to say thank you and they gave me a gift as a token of their appreciation, and I appreciated it too because it was hard. When I looked back, I could have left but I stayed and I wanted to make sure that it would go live even though there were issues, and it worked out well in the end.

Tamara: That's super powerful.

Elaiza Benitez: It's one of those things where you look back and no matter how many errors, you sunk into it, it's something you feel good about even though you may not have felt good about it at the time.

Tamara: I think that can relate to things that are happening in your personal life as well, and something that I like to remind myself when I am going through a big challenge is, "Tamara there are so many learnings and benefits from this experience, it's only going to grow and make you stronger, and the universe has set you up for this because you're strong enough to get through it", and the feeling when you get through it, and I'm sure you had it at the end of that project.

It's a moment where you can be so proud of yourself. It's really beautiful that you can also see that great things happen from challenges as well.



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Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. The friendships that I formed with the people that joined the project was pretty good. One of the females who joined the project, as well as the company towards the end, I'm still friends with her today. Her name is Stacy. These days she works for Microsoft and she's based in Shanghai.

Tamara: Wow. That would be very unique over there.

Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. I'm hoping one day I can go visit and see her, and she can show me around.

Tamara: Amazing. Now speaking of Microsoft, last year you were recognized as Microsoft MVP. What is that?

Elaiza Benitez: It's a person who has received an award from Microsoft, in recognition of their expertise and their community contributions. When I say expertise it could be technical, and it can also not be technical to some extent, but it's basically someone who evangelizes Microsoft, as well as help others in the community when they reach out. When I was awarded, it was in May of last year.

Funny story to that, I was in the office at the time and we were doing our first UAT deployment. For those of you listening, UAT stands for User Acceptance Testing. That's when we move what we've built from a development environment, into a UAT environment, so the client can do what they need to do to confirm that what they're expecting is working, and if not, then we go and fix them.

We were doing our first UAT deployment, and something didn't go to plan so we needed a bit of time to fix it, and have another go at deploying. While my team was doing that, I was like, "Oh, I haven't checked my junk emails in a while." Because sometimes emails go through to my junk email, and there was an email that came through about the discount on Satya Nadella's Hit Refresh.

I think some eBook, so I was like, "Oh, okay. This is obviously spam because I'm not an MVP." Then, a few e-mails down that's when I saw the congratulations email. I was like, "What?" and turned to my colleague, Caden, and he was like, "What?", I turned to him, and I said, "Is this what I think it is?"

He read the email, and then he was like, "Yes." We hugged it out and he was like, "Congratulations." I was just in awe. I was in shock.



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Tamara: Wow. That's really special.

Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. To become an MVP, someone needs to nominate you and that can be someone from the existing Microsoft MVP pool, and then it gets reviewed before you're approved, and it's announced. It's a really special moment. It's something that I think all of us Microsoft MVPs will remember the first time when we received that email and was like, "Yay."

Tamara: Amazing. Now, you were one of the first female Microsoft MVPs. How did you feel?

Elaiza Benitez: I was actually the second. My friend, and another Microsoft MVP. Mark Smith said there was a female in Sydney for a short period of time, and when she joined Microsoft, it gets revoked.

Tamara: Really?

Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. Once you join Microsoft, and he said it was a long time ago. I can't really edit that on my Twitter because you can't edit it, but I do have that as an asterisk in my blog post and on my YouTube video as well. One of the weird things I did, I don't know why I did it, but it's quite cool when I look back.

I did an unboxing of my MVP award because it's so YouTube, right? I mean, you have other people out there on YouTube that do unboxing of things that they receive, or the latest gadget, so I was like, "Why don't I do it for the Microsoft MVP award?" It was actually quite fun. I've captured that moment, and so I can just look back whenever I doubt myself.

Tamara: That's beautiful and we'll link that YouTube clip in the show notes for anyone who wants to watch it. Now, what's the criteria for becoming an MVP? Do you have to fulfil a certain number of implementations, or is it just what you give back to the community, and then your level of knowledge in Microsoft?

Elaiza Benitez: It's the latter. You need to have activities that count towards contributing to the community. That could be through the form of a blog post. You could be doing webinars. You could be presenting at things like User Groups, or conferences and events. There are also different sites where you can participate in Forums. This is when anyone around the world asks questions and people can answer them.

You can meet people in the industry, for example, if you went and spoke at a school or University, and you're showing how a certain product works. That counts as well. But, yeah,



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it's basically showing your level of knowledge for a product, or different products, and through that, you get recognition.

My opinion on how you can become a Microsoft MVP, and the really cool thing is that since I was awarded there's another two females in Australia in the Business Applications category that I'm in. One of them is Ashley Culmsee, based in Perth. I believe is the youngest Microsoft MVP ever.

Tamara: Wow.

Elaiza Benitez: The other one is Lisa Crosbie. She was awarded earlier this month, and I'm hoping another friend, Elaine will also be awarded.

Tamara: Wow. That's spectacular. Do you have to be technical to be an MVP?

Elaiza Benitez: I don't think so. In the Microsoft world, you can have what you call Developers or Technical Consultants, and then you can have people who are the term of "functionals". Functional Consultants are experts who don't necessarily have a development background, but they still have a strong knowledge on how to configure a particular product, whereas a Technical or a Developer knows code and programming.

You can either be one, or either, or both. You don't exactly have to be 100% technical.

Tamara: All right. Amazing. If someone was looking to pursue a similar career path as you or wanting to achieve a Microsoft MVP status, what advice would you give them?

Elaiza Benitez: If they are new to the workforce, for example, a graduate. So, you've completed your degree or I don't know what they're called in Australia or overseas, but here in New Zealand there's things like a polytech so it's not exactly University but it's some type of educational institute where you can still get some type of diploma or certificate at the end of it.

My advice would be to engage with a Microsoft partner and see if they have any graduate programs or internships, and if you're someone who is currently a working professional and you do want to get into the Microsoft space based on a particular product, you can usually sign up for trials online, and then there's a lot of learning material out there.

For example, there's a website called Microsoft Learn. They have different learning paths, and in each learning path, it will have some type of module. You can read as well as watch



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the videos, and then they have a mini quiz at the end to test your knowledge. It's all about just playing with the product really, just getting that hands-on deep dive and because you're in a trial environment, you're not going to mess up anything so you're safe.

Tamara: That's really great advice. Why did you choose Microsoft Dynamics or was it just something that you fell into?

Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. It was something I fell into. I mean, the company that I first joined in Wellington in New Zealand, they were a Microsoft partner. A Microsoft partner means a company that is building and developing solutions using the Microsoft stack. One of the products that the company was competent in was Dynamics CRM or Dynamics 365. It's what it's called now.

I got into it because the sales team was using it internally and they wanted to make some changes to it, which I gathered and turned it into a working solution or process. I learned that from Sophie. The person I mentioned earlier. That's how I fell into Dynamic CRM. It was mainly through that role and the company.

Tamara: Wow. Last year really seemed to be your year because you also won the technical award for the Women in ICT Awards. What was that like?

Elaiza Benitez: That was a pretty cool moment. What happened towards the end of the year. All of the females at the company I last worked for in Melbourne received an email from our marketing person and she emailed saying, "Hey, there's this annual awards event for women in technology and here are the categories. If you want to submit, go ahead and fill out the form." Then, she can review it and she'll make it sound better.

I did three. One of them was the technical category, which I didn't think I would get because for me, technical means someone who knows code and knows how to do program which is something that I'm not. We submitted it. She emailed to let me know saying, "Hey, you've been chosen as one of the nominees." I was like, "What?"

The award ceremony was in Sydney at the Ivy Ballroom. I flew up on a red-eye flight and I checked in early at my hotel, got dressed, and went to the office for half a day, and then headed over to the venue. For me, I wasn't too worried if I wasn't awarded because I saw it as an amazing event to be a part of and I wanted to have a chat with other females who were there so that I can understand their career journey and path, especially those who were more in higher up positions as me because it's always interesting to see what their story is.



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I was simply happy to be there, and then it came to them announcing the awards and when they announced my name, I was like, "What?" Again, actually, having to film this and so it's on my YouTube channel. It's just one of those things where I was like, "Oh, you know what? I want to film this because this thing's never going to happen again." I did it. I'm actually glad I did because, again, like my unboxing, it's something I can look back on as well in the future.

The technical award category is in recognition of someone in the IT industry who has a depth of knowledge and they are pretty good at what they do. The full details are on their website and they have the awards again this month I believe. I don't know if it's the same venue, but the finalists are up and the event will take place later this month. It'll be nice to see who gets awarded this year.

Tamara: Amazing. You've had a very interesting career path and I'm sure you've seen some challenges along the way, what are some of the challenges that you have faced both professionally and personally throughout your career?

Elaiza Benitez: Professionally, goes back to what I said earlier where I wasn't able to progress into the team that I wanted to join in New Zealand, but at the same time, I had a greater desire to work outside of New Zealand to experience what projects were like, which is why I moved to Melbourne. But when I looked back in it, it was the catch 22 because I was deemed that I did not have the experience but I can't gain the experience if I'm not given the opportunity to do so.

I was very thankful that I didn't move into delivery because if I didn't, I don't know if I would have ever moved to Melbourne because I felt once I moved to Melbourne because it was a different type of environment when it came to clients, I learned a lot. I don't know if I would have learned those things when I was here. But it's nice to be back home in New Zealand.

Another issue that I find is sometimes you do see it as a female when females react to certain scenarios, it's sometimes seen as us being difficult but when a male reacts in a similar manner, it's seen as a positive trait such as being assertive. Yeah. It's something I tend to see every now and then.

Then, I also listened to Sam's podcast. She's the last person that you had a chat with when I was packing for Ignite. One of the things that I resonated with when she says that, when she was talking about how you can have a female speak in a meeting, and it's completely



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overlooked, and then your male counterpart will say the exact same thing, and then that's listened to because it's funny because that actually happened to me today.

Elaiza Benitez: I was like, "Ooooo-ah!" Are we still at that age. I was like, "Oh, man."

Tamara: Did someone stand up and say, "Hey, Elaiza just said that five minutes ago?"

Elaiza Benitez: No. But it's okay. It was an internal discussion but it's all right because I had a chat with my colleague afterwards, and I was like, "Yeah." We were on the same page afterwards" Yeah. It was just one of those things where it's like, "Oh, man. That's exactly what I said."

Tamara: Yeah. It's funny. It happens more often than you think. I know when I work for some projects and I've got a project manager who is a male, and then I've got myself who implements some of the products for Salesforce and I'll be in a room with the client and the client will be talking to the project manager the whole time when I am the one answering the questions, and even when I answer, they're still looking at the project manager, and I'm like, "Hmm."

Elaiza Benitez: That's awful. Yeah. I think I would be frustrated in your shoes, in that type of situation.

Tamara: Yeah. I think, initially, I was, and then I just learned that sometimes it just takes a little bit of time and perseverance, and then when things go wrong, they come crawling, and then respect you as the subject-matter expert because you know how to fix the problem that's arisen. I think I'm a little bit more relaxed about it particularly when it is different cultures.

Tamara: But, yeah. It's funny when things go wrong, and then they respect you all of a sudden and will listen to you, and then you think, "Yeah. I wish you respected me at the start of the project."

Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. Because I'm always cautious as well because I tend to look younger than my age and sometimes I feel when I've started a new project, I'm not taken seriously, but then after they've spent time with me that I think that's when they realize, "Okay, Eliza actually knows her stuff so let's start listening to her."

Tamara: Yeah. My partner had the same issue. Actually, he's very lucky and he looks very, very young but he got gray hair very early. When he was 30 and only then did he start to get the respect from the clients that he worked with because prior had a similar issue as you. In



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that they took a longer time to respect him. It was to the point where he had to show you his value, and then they started listening, so very similar to you. So guys get it as well.

Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. Okay. We're not alone.

Tamara: Now, what does your typical day look like at the moment?

Elaiza Benitez: At the moment, oh, wow, still trying to adjust. Normally, I wake up so my alarm goes off at 5:45, I snooze for a bit, and then I have a shower, do my hair and makeup, and then I have my breakfast. Then, I carpool with my aunt and uncle into the city, and then I'm at work. Then, after work, I usually go to the gym, and then I'll come home and eat, and then I'll catch up on messages or have some playtime with ideas in my head that I can have it go with regarding Power Automate which is one of the products in the Microsoft Power Platform, and then back to bed.

Pretty much in routine. I'm that type of person that sticks to routine because that's what keeps me sane.

Tamara: I'm the same. I love traveling but I love being at home because then I'm in my routine and I know when I need to get up, what bus I need to catch when I need to leave the gym, and I just ... Because everything else at work when you're working on multiple projects can be a little bit of chaos at times so everything else just needs to be structured. I feel somewhat sane.

Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. Exactly. I love being home. I don't know about you but when I was younger, I used to want to go out, have drinks and stay out late but, now, I like, "Nah. I want to be a creature of comfort at home." I think it's so important to exercise when you have a busy day because it just helps you, I suppose ... I don't know if relax is the right term because I'm pretty sure people listening would be like, "Whoa. No. Gym does not make me feel relax." But it allows you to release some energy after sitting down or thinking about work and your client.

It's your you time. It's time when you can focus on yourself and just chill out in a way.

Tamara: Yeah. I completely agree. If I don't exercise I feel like I get a lot more sluggish throughout the workday and I feel a lot more unmotivated. I don't know what it is. It's like endorphins are released into my body and it gives me energy throughout the rest of the day because I gym in the morning. I can't gym after work. I'm too exhausted.



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But, yeah. There's so many studies on what exercise does for the body and productivity. I couldn't live without it.

Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. I totally hear you. One of the most surprising things about me is that I actually have a no TV lifestyle.

Tamara: I love that.

Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. Ever since I moved to Melbourne I haven't had a TV, and now that I'm back, I haven't had a TV and I don't have any subscriptions to any streaming service like Netflix. That's completely out of my life. When people talk about the latest episode or some reality TV show, I'm like, "I have no idea what you're talking about."

Tamara: I love that. My partner and I, we were writing down what our dream home looks like a few years ago and one of the things that we discussed was not having a TV. We were debating because his son has an Xbox but I just ... I love the idea of not having a TV because when you do have Netflix and/or Stan or whatever you have, you can spend hours behind the TV, and those hours could be used in ...

It could be used to achieve your goals. It could be used as you time. It could be used with your friends. There's so many things that you could be doing rather than sitting down and watching TV. I think I might push a little bit harder to get the TV out of the apartment.

Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. Go for it. It's surprisingly easy. Well, for me, it is. It's so funny. Even when I travel now, for example, last week. I'm in a hotel room and there's a TV there but I've never turned it on. Last week, I didn't turn it on at all because it's something that I don't do anymore and the only I see or watch anything is if I'm at someone's house or if I'm on the plane. That's when I'll catch up on whatever's being in the movies or what's on TV.

Tamara: That's awesome.

Elaiza Benitez: Yes. I definitely recommend it. Go for it.

Tamara: Okay. I'll have a conversation with him after this and his sons over tonight as well so I'll be discussing that with him, I'm not sure how well that would go.



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Fingers crossed. Moving on, you spoke a little bit about your YouTube channel and I've looked at it and I love it but can you tell the listeners a little more about what it's about and why you started it?

Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. Sure. I started YouTube channel back in 2014 and it was something that I had been wanting to do for a long time because a lot of the people I followed in our community, in a Microsoft community did a lot of blog posts and the only videos that were on YouTube was recording of webinars, but no one at the time was doing how-to content and I held back and one day ...

The story behind it is one day I commented on someone else's post that they posted on LinkedIn to show that they had a new video. That person is Ben Husk. He's based in the UK. I think the comment at the time, I said was, "Oh, I wish ... I've always wanted to do videos but have been afraid to do so."

He actually messaged me later on saying, "Hey, if you want to get started, go for it. The hardest thing about doing videos is actually getting started." He gave me some advice and after that he moved back and forth. I was like, "Okay. I'll do it." I did. Then, after a few videos as well as blog posts, he gave me constructive feedback.

If it wasn't for him, I don't know if I would do it, and so, Ben, if you're listening, thanks. Because he was that person behind the scenes for me. That's something I'm grateful for and because of that, these days when someone reaches out to me, I always remember that moment and I always try and help that person as well on the side because you'll never know that if they're going to be the next Microsoft MVP or the next superstar in the Microsoft community. That's something always I'm mindful of.

In terms of my YouTube channel, it's around Dynamics 365, and then in the last year, it's around Microsoft Flow, which is now called Power Automate. It's just been really fun. I've really enjoyed it. It's something that I will probably continue doing now that I'm not traveling anymore. Before I moved to New Zealand, I traveled for three and a half months and met the Microsoft community along the way. That was pretty cool.

Tamara: That's unreal.

Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. I don't know if many people would travel for three and a half months and not work at the same time but that's something I did. I really liked it.



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- Tamara: Yeah.
- Elaiza Benitez: It's something I always wanted to do and it's just one of those things where I was like, "You know what? I'm going to do this year."
- Tamara: That is awesome. Yeah. I think I would be terrified. I like to control things.
- Elaiza Benitez: Trust me. It was very, very scary and unsettling because I have been working in the last 10 years. I never took a proper break and this was my first actual break of just traveling and not thinking about working. I actually cried when I closed the door to my apartment for the last time because I lived in the same apartment in Melbourne for six years. I was renting.
- I had formed a good relationship with the landlord, the property manager. It was hard seeing it empty and I was like, "Oh, no. I'm leaving." But then once I was in the plane I was fine. I loved it. It's something I would recommend to anyone who's in the right place of mind and in time just to do it. Just don't think twice about it. Just do it.
- Tamara: I love that. It's definitely on my bucket list. I wanted to spend three months in South America.
- Elaiza Benitez: Oh, wow.
- Tamara: Yeah.
- Elaiza Benitez: Yeah you should.
- Tamara: Yeah. Because it's so big and I just don't feel like you could do it all within the annual leave that you have. I would like to either drive or I don't want to fly places because I just feel like you miss out on so much so, yeah. Hopefully, one day I can take that off on my bucket list because it's just ... The photos that I've seen there are just amazing. Yeah. One day.
- Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. I haven't been to South America myself but same as you. I've seen photos and was like, "Oh, it'd be so nice to see Argentina or Chile or Brazil."
- Tamara: Now, what's next for you?



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Elaiza Benitez: Oh. Well, I've actually started a new role this week. I've joined a company in New Zealand called Zeta. They are another Microsoft Partner in New Zealand. Traditionally, they were experts in data analytics, and then over the years they moved into the business application space so today has been day two and tomorrow is day three.

Tamara: Wow.

Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. It's actually been quite nice. I know people at the company and one of them, I reconnected with ... I think back in 2006 because he came to Sydney for some training and I went to Sydney as well, and so we caught up, and he always said, "When you come back to New Zealand, let me know because we love to have you on the team." That's what I did. I've joined them. I don't think I'm going to be doing any travel for the rest of this year.

I've done a lot so I'm happy to rest for the next few months, and then March next year is when it's the annual Microsoft MVP Summit. This is when all the MVPs around the world fly to Seattle, and we spend a week at Microsoft for some secret squirrel sessions.

Tamara: Wow. That sounds awesome.

Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. It really is so my first time was this year in March. It was such an amazing experience because I met people who I looked up to and it was one of those things where in your head you think that they're like these stars, they're these superstars, and then they're actually just like you. They're like us. They're just normal people with families and issues and smiles at the same time. It was really good.

I'm really looking forward to the new MVPs that have been awarded this year to experience their first time because, yeah, again, it'll be such an amazing thing to remember for the rest of your life.

Tamara: I'm so excited for you. It almost makes me, I probably shouldn't say this but swap from Salesforce to Microsoft.

Elaiza Benitez: At Salesforce, you have cool things too. I mean, there's ... What's the annual conference? Is it called Dreamforce?

Tamara: Yeah. It's actually coming up next week. I haven't been yet. Fingers crossed, one day I will. But, yeah, they've got Barack Obama speaking and the CEO of Apple. They've got such amazing speakers there this year.



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- Elaiza Benitez: What? Barrack Obama as a speaker or guest speaker.
- Tamara: I know. I'm devastated that I couldn't go this year but maybe next year, fingers crossed. We'll see.
- Elaiza Benitez: Oh, I hope so. I hope you do go. Yeah. I've seen tweets usually like around the conference week and it does look fun.
- Tamara: Yeah. It's five days. People say they like walk like a marathon in those five days.
- Elaiza Benitez: Oh, yeah. I can relate. Microsoft Ignite was all walking and sore feet but totally worth it.
- Tamara: Yeah. Now, how can people support, follow or connect with you?
- Elaiza Benitez: Okay. For my YouTube channel to search for me, all you need to do is enter my first name Elaiza, and then my last name Benitez, and then you can hit the subscribe button. I also have a blog. It's benitezhere.blogspot.com. By the way, I always get grief from others because they're like "why are you still on that platform. You should be a WordPress or Squarespace" but it works for me.
- Then, you can also follow me on Twitter. I'm @Benitezhere and, yeah. If you want to connect with me on LinkedIn that's fine. Just leave me a note and say, "Hey, I listened to you on the FIIT Collective Podcast." Yeah. I'll accept it.
- Tamara: Amazing. Thank you so much for that and we'll provide links all that in the show notes as well. Now, we're going to change gears a little bit before we end the show with some rapid-fire questions. Are you ready?
- Elaiza Benitez: No. Yeah. Of course, I'm ready.
- Tamara: What's one thing we can do to achieve gender equality in the tech industry?
- Elaiza Benitez: Well, I think the wider issue is treating everyone equally regardless of gender. What I mean by that is we need to be more embracive of all races, what their gender is, and whether they have any disabilities and if there are companies today that don't support it and that employee needs to leave and find a company that is more understanding because it's true, in terms of everyone can only be their best when they feel loved and wanted in the



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company and if the company can't accept who they are, then that's the error of the company and not the employee.

Anything I say will not change the mindset of those types of companies and it's their loss. It's their loss if they can't see a person for who they are especially if they're highly competent for their role, and as humans, we need to be more kind to another otherwise we'll be extinct.

Tamara: That warms my heart so much. I love that. It's so beautiful. Okay, next question. What's one piece of advice you would give yourself at the age of 25? Wait. Are you older than 25?

Elaiza Benitez: Yes.

Tamara: Okay. I probably should have checked that before.

Elaiza Benitez: No. That's all right. This is actually a crack up because it would be learn how to ride a bike. Now, again, this is another surprising thing because my parents ... I'm the youngest in my family. I have a brother and an older sister. They never taught me how to ride a bike. They taught my sister and my brother but not me, so 'til this day, I can't ride a bike.

My brother always gives me grief because he always says, "If there is a zombie apocalypse. You're going to die, because you can't ride a bike." I'm like thanks.

Tamara: Okay. If I ever come to New Zealand, I am going to teach you how to ride a bike. I'll bring mine.

Elaiza Benitez: Okay. Sounds good.

Tamara: Okay. Next question. What do you wish they had taught you in school but didn't?

Elaiza Benitez: Graphics design. I would love to be able to create my own graphics using something like Photoshop, and that's something I think I will learn at some point because there is ... What's that platform? I think it's called Skillshare.

Tamara: I'm not familiar of that.



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- Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. There's a platform called Skillshare, and you can sign up for courses and learn how to do things. Yeah. That's something I've always wanted to do.
- Tamara: Amazing. Udemey is a really good one as well. They've got really cheap courses on absolutely everything. Cool. Last question, if you can recommend one book for females in tech to read, what would it be?
- Elaiza Benitez: Well, okay, honestly, I haven't read a book in so long but at the conference at Microsoft Ignite, a lady called Shona Bang. She gave me a book ... I don't know if I'm pronouncing it right. It's called Haben, H-A-B-E-N. I can send you the link. It's a memoir of author and she happens to be the first deaf-blind woman to graduate from Harvard Law.
- Tamara: Wow.
- Elaiza Benitez: Yeah, and so these days she's an advocate for people with disabilities so I've started to read the book. It's actually quite interesting. Shona told me it's really good. I'm sure by the time I finish it I'm going to be like, "Wow. This is really inspirational." Again, that's something that I think we all need to be mindful of is that there are people in this world today who do have disabilities, and we need to be more aware of that and not treat them differently.
- Tamara: I couldn't agree more. Well, thank you, Elaiza, so much for having, well, being on the show. I've had so much fun and your career journey and advice is so inspirational. I know the listeners will absolutely love it. Yeah. That ends the show for today. Have you got any final comments?
- Elaiza Benitez: Yeah. Actually. Before we end, I think I'm going to say something. So Gahn, if you're listening in Melbourne, you are the best project manager. Okay. Now, that we have that in a record, I know who play this part for eternity.
- Tamara: I love that.
- Elaiza Benitez: He's going to laugh when he hears this. But, yeah. I really enjoyed this. I look forward to seeing others that you have a chat with because I always think it's interesting hearing other people outside of my usual community or my world in the IT industry. It's a really cool podcast. I'm glad that we've connected. I hope that I can meet you one day.



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- Tamara: Yeah. I'd love that. Joel and I are planning to go to the snow in New Zealand again next year. I've got such an amazing guest interview list backed up until March next year. Yeah. I hope you find it really inspiring and valuable as well.
- Elaiza Benitez: Thank you. I look forward to hearing the upcoming episodes, and I'll let you know when I finally learn how to ride a bike.
- Tamara: Yay.