



Episode 11:

Why Physical Exercise is Key to Improving Mental Health With Heather Opdam

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Tamara: Heather, I'm so excited to have you on the show.

Heather Opdam: Yay.

Tamara: And just standing in front of me, which is very new. I've never had a guest come into my apartment for one.

Heather Opdam: Very exciting, very special.

Tamara: Before we get started, what is one thing that you're grateful for today?

Heather Opdam: Oh, my goodness, how do I even shortlist that? I'm very, very grateful that I have an extremely supportive husband and two really, really healthy teenage boys. Sounds very simple, but to me, that's everything. So yeah.

Tamara: Yeah. Yeah, you've told me a little bit about your husband.

Heather Opdam: Yeah.

Tamara: And he seems amazing.

Heather Opdam: He is, I'm so blessed to have him.

Tamara: And he might be attending the show as well, as a guest.

Heather Opdam: I know I've already given him a heads up. No pressure.

Tamara: The next question is, what's a recent achievement or something that you're proud of?

Heather Opdam: Recent achievement, so last week, for the organization, I work for VMware, we had our annual events here in Sydney at the ICC. And I was really, really proud that in the keynote, our global CEO had highlighted the work that we've been doing with AWS and the Black Dog Institute. And it was fabulous because of the great platform with global eyes looking at what Pat has to say, who is our CEO. And I was just very blessed that they chose that initiative to highlight the Tech For Good in the region. So that was my biggest accomplishment so far.



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- Tamara: Yeah. And I was lucky to have attended the event as well.
- Heather Opdam: That's right.
- Tamara: And it was spectacular. I was so impressed just with the grads having the opportunity to speak and introduce, well your CEO, for starters...
- Heather Opdam: That's right.
- Tamara: And just the way that it was laid out and the artificial intelligence and my mind was blown. It was incredible.
- Heather Opdam: And I loved it as well. It's the first time that we've actually had our grads introduced. So, at the very beginning of the keynote, introducing the land, what have you, I should know better than that, but you know, when you introduce. And yeah, bless her, the grad that did the introductions for the keynote, she's what, 23?
- Tamara: Wow.
- Heather Opdam: Just out of university, in front of 2000 people. Incredible opportunity, but good on her for putting her hand up and just nailed it. And then we had some of our architects who were doing the demos for a technical again on stage, just out of university. So, it's wonderful to see my organization that's invested in the future, and having them on that platform and that stage to be able to shine has been fantastic.
- Tamara: Yeah, it was incredible. I mean, I wish I had that opportunity as a grad.
- Heather Opdam: Same, no kidding.
- Tamara: Yeah, but good on them. And the grad that introduced the session that I was in, she was incredible-
- Heather Opdam: Oh, wasn't she?
- Tamara: She was so witty-



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- Heather Opdam: She's a hoot.
- Tamara: Yeah. And then she has so much confidence, it was spectacular, it was awesome.
- Heather Opdam: She was putting Pat in this place, definitely. She's like got the finger going, no, no, no. Good on you.
- Tamara: Well at least she could get away with that, she pulled it off well.
- Heather Opdam: Exactly... tell me what you think, right? She didn't hold back, it was great.
- Tamara: Yeah. So, I want the listeners to get to know you a little bit better. Can you share your career journey from where you are today?
- Heather Opdam: Absolutely. So, I actually fell into the ICT industry by accident. Growing up, I was surrounded by teachers. My Mum was a teacher, my sister, a couple of my uncles', my auntie and my cousin. So, it made sense just to follow into my family's tradition, for a vocation. I came to Australia from Canada over 20 years ago, backpacking and I got into the ICT industry. So just as a fluke. And I love people, so I kind of applied that skill. And I've had a sales career over 20 years in Australia and New Zealand. So that's where I started, started off on the phones and just taking orders and then I moved into managing the inside sales team. And then yeah, went from there. And then I've had various roles from managing a team, to being an individual contributor. And then yeah, it's just blossomed from there. And totally by accident, but I think taking a very, I guess not a neutral degree in university, but something that was quite broad that I could apply my skills.
- Heather Opdam: So, I took sociology and anthropology, and then statistics, so I could apply that in basically whatever I chose to do. So, yeah, it was by accident, and I wouldn't change it for the world.
- Tamara: Wow, that is incredible. And it's funny, so many people have that sort of career path where they just happen to fall into IT.
- Heather Opdam: Absolutely.



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- Tamara: And it's something that really played on my confidence levels, not having studied computer science and thinking that I was 10 steps behind everyone else. But that's not the case. When you're passionate, you can learn anything and learning on the job is so much easier than learning at university.
- Heather Opdam: Absolutely. And it's not always knowing the answer, it's knowing where to find it. And being very open and honest. Because especially, you and I, we're in very technical IT roles that your credibility will be questioned if you say something and it's not accurate. So just to be open and say, hey, you know what, don't really know the answer, but I'll absolutely find it for you. And do that. Make sure that you follow up and what have you. But even still, like I've said to my boys who are 13 and 15, because they're not questioning what do I do for career, and I've said to them and this applies to IT as well is, they may not actually even have your curriculum in the universities or colleges or TAFES yet. Because especially in IT, things are obsolete within two to three years. So, it's just really having those skills where you can be adaptable to change and just to innovate. And don't get so caught up in the actual speeds and phase. Because that you can learn on the job, like you said. It's more the framework on how to actually apply what you've learned, and address your customers' needs.
- Tamara: Yeah, and I find students who are at school get so much pressure in-
- Heather Opdam: Agreed-
- Tamara: ... their ATAR score or whatever, New South Wales Queensland OP.
- Heather Opdam: That's it.
- Tamara: Whatever it is. So much pressure on their score to get into a university where you may not actually use the skills, or the theory that you've learned in university in the job that you have in the future. I know the skills that I learned at university has taught me how to learn, it's taught me discipline-
- Heather Opdam: Exactly-
- Tamara: ... and that's been really vital in my role today. And yeah, it's really sad to say how much pressure there is, and the mental health that Year 12 students go through and the amount of stress.



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- Heather Opdam: Even before that. My oldest son who's now 15, even a couple years ago, he was tossing and turning in bed going, "I don't know what I do with my life." I'm like, "Sweetheart, I don't know what to do, and I'm in my 40s. Don't worry about it, you can change dude. There's so many options out there." And I guess one piece of advice I've given which is really, it's hard to always do, but is find something that you love doing, and you know the saying I'm terrible at quoting but anyway, you won't have to work a day in your life. If you can be passionate and want to jump out of bed and make a difference, in whatever way that is, then try and grasp that. And if you can make a living out of it, fantastic, even better.
- Tamara: Yeah, absolutely. So, what does your day in the life look like now?
- Heather Opdam: It's funny, I actually don't have a typical day in the life. Because I look after partners across Australia and New Zealand. So, when I'm here in Sydney, I mean, I could be in the car at 7:30, at my desk at 8:00. And then in and out of the office, throughout the day attending meetings. Or I could be waking up in a hotel room in Melbourne, or in Brisbane, or in Auckland, again, seeing customers. So that's actually what I love. I don't have a typical, quote, unquote, day. And our company, because of the solutions that we actually develop, we're very much about you can be anywhere, at any time. So, I'm not forced to be in one place or the other, as long as if I dial in for a meeting that I'm attending and I'm present. It doesn't necessarily matter where I am. So, there's actually not a typical day, if that makes sense, which is kind of exciting. But then it's really challenging at times to plan, because you just have to be ready for whatever the day brings, right? If you have escalations, which I think you know about...
- Tamara: Yeah.
- Heather Opdam: There goes your whole day, right? You've got to just prioritize on what's important for the day.
- Tamara: Yeah, absolutely. And so, for the listeners who don't know what a senior business manager is, and how someone in sales is still in IT...
- Heather Opdam: Yeah.
- Tamara: Can you just elaborate why the salesperson is still considered as a woman in tech or tech role?



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Heather Opdam: Absolutely, good question. So, it's funny because I'm not very technical. And I've been in the ICT industry for over 20 something years. And it's funny because I always get the technical alliances. So, I work for a software vendor and I have on and off for over 20 something years. And so, the relationships that I have are with technical people, but where I guess my skill set best lays is building on the relationships, getting the executive sponsorship from both organizations, creating a methodology and a framework that we can actually write joint business plans for and with. And it's basically leveraging their technical skills with our technical skills, and delivering an outcome for the customer. So, whilst I don't have the technical skills, I can draw upon the resources in my team and my partner's team to make sure that we're delivering the best results for the customer. If that makes sense.

Tamara: Yeah, no, it does.

Heather Opdam: Which is what makes ICT so exciting. You don't have to be always so technical, and there's so many different skills that are needed desperately. And I guess in other areas I can translate, which I think you understand 150% between what the technical requirements are versus what the business outcomes are that we're trying to drive. So that's a whole other skill as well. So, translating the two is a role that I play as well.

Tamara: Yeah, thank you so much for sharing that answer. Because I do think that there is this false misconception that IT is people knowing how to code-

Heather Opdam: Absolutely-

Tamara: ... and sitting in dark room with a hoodie on, and yeah, some of those roles are, but there are so many other roles that fall into the tech space as well.

Heather Opdam: Absolutely. And I think it's really important for our listeners to understand that, especially if you're not currently in the ICT industry. Because there's that perception, that we've got the pocket protectors, and we're locked in a room with a hoodie and what have you. There're so many different roles. And if you think of any organization, there's an HR department, there's a marketing department, there's sales, there's technical, so there's many, many different roles that you can apply your skills to, that isn't necessarily technical. However, if you are technical, there's a huge wealth of roles available as well.



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Tamara: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So, what would you say that contributed to your success so far?

Heather Opdam: Yeah, I think it's just having an open mind. Again, I went back to being good with change. So, I think, because especially in our industry, things are changing, like you wouldn't believe. Whatever we've just created today may be obsolete in the next few months. So, I think just being open that I'm not always going to know what's going to happen in the next six to 12 months, but just embrace that change, try and be innovative.

Tamara: Yeah, that's great. And if you can elaborate, you are in such a senior role. And I would assume that there are a lot of males in those similar roles. How have you dealt with that growing up into the corporate ladder?

Heather Opdam: Yeah, that's a great question. So, I guess that stems back from my childhood. I am the youngest of three girls, with a single Mum. So, I've just learned that I can do anything. In fact, I had to do stuff even if I didn't want to. So, growing up in Canada, where there's a lot of snow and it's minus 20, 30 degrees, if we had to get the car out of the driveway, one of us had to shovel to get that car out. So, you just get on with it. We would just take turns doing that. And then the summer equally, we have to mow the lawn. I know it's typical, quote, unquote male roles in the past, especially in the '70s, which is when I grew up. But I do remember very clearly actually, I was in high school, I think it was about Year 10. And I had another student come up to me. And he was shocked, and he said, "Oh my gosh, I was on the bus the other day, and I saw you mowing the lawn." And I was like, "Uh-huh (affirmative)." And bless him, his culture, because he was from the Middle East, and he was new to our school, and new to Canada.

Heather Opdam: In his culture, women never did that type of role. And so, I can understand where he was coming from, but my response was, "Well, I didn't see you get off the bus to jump and get that mower out of my hands and mow it for me. So, someone's got to do it." That's basically how I've applied, I guess everything throughout my life is, I've never thought that I couldn't do it. And rightfully or wrongfully, when I see there's discrimination or people are kind of... men are treating the women differently, I just ignore it, and I just keep going. Because I know I'm capable. Like I said, sometimes I do things that I wish I didn't have to do, but you just do it, right?



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- Heather Opdam: So, I've kind of always had that philosophy that I can do whatever that is necessary with myself. And then I can leverage people around me, whether they're male or female. But at the end of the day, I know I can get through it. So, I've just applied that.
- Tamara: Yeah, beautiful. And it just shows that I'm sure when you were younger, and you going through that, and having to mow the lawn, and pull your car out from the snow, there would have been times where you would have thought, I really wish I didn't have to do this. And it would have been really emotional for you. And I think we'll dive deep into that a bit later. But it just shows that even though that was such a tough time, there's been so many benefits for you. And you've built this mentality of I can do anything. And if you were to have that time again and know that at the time, just having that faith that, I'm going to learn something from this and it's going to be a really beautiful experience. And I'm going to learn and grow so much from this and it's going to help me in my career. So yeah, it just shows that even tough times there are benefits from it.
- Heather Opdam: Absolutely, and that's what kept me going. I'm like, surely there's a reason that I'm shovelling snow at minus 20 when I'm 15, and all my girlfriends are out going... I'm like, surely there must be something. So, I just tried to hold on to that, and just have that strength inside to just keep going.
- Tamara: Yeah, yeah. Great. So last year, you won the Women in ICT Community Award. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?
- Heather Opdam: Absolutely. So first of all, I was very shocked, because there were some incredible nominees. And just by the way, huge congratulations to you, for being on the list-
- Tamara: Oh, stop-
- Heather Opdam: ... yay, this year. Which is fantastic. Yeah, so I was completely shocked. It's a bit of a mixed emotion for me, to have a women in IT event full stop, because we are isolating 50% of the community. So, I kind of have mixed feelings about having a women only initiative or focus. But if it gives us the platform to expand that conversation, to not just gender, but to age or to religion or to experience or what have you, then why not? So, I thought, you know what, let's just again look at the positives. So, I was really, really blessed that the industry honoured



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me with this award. And the reason being from the feedback was that... a few things. So first of all, obviously, helping the women, fellow colleagues in the industry and mentor and what have you. I also headed up the Diversity Inclusion Council for VMware, which is the organization I work for, for two years.

Heather Opdam: So, from what was a monthly phone call, with about 30, 40 people across the eight branches in Australia and New Zealand, once a month to formalizing a business plan. You know, what does success look like, and then really formalize that. Get executive sponsorship, if you will. And running that for two years. And then the methodologies that we came up with has actually now been applied globally, with VMware. They saw that framework and really wanted to expand on that, which is really, really exciting. The other thing, which is really personally and very near and dear to my heart is the mental health. Our Managing Director, Alistair Diaz is incredibly supportive of this initiative that I keep expanding on. But yeah, so basically, we were launching a solution with Amazon Web Services in the region about two years ago. And they have what's called the AWS summit. And so, we were working together, the two organizations, on the technical side, on what we're going to showcase to the market.

Heather Opdam: I was brought in as the diversity and inclusion lead, to talk about, maybe is their focus that we can have on giving back to the community. So, after a few conversations, we very quickly realized that our values were aligned when it came to mental health. So, we had a stand, which is called Exercise Your Mood, which we'll probably talk about in a moment as well, which I'm very passionate about. How exercise can really help your mental health as well. So that started a huge initiative with both AWS and the Black Dog Institute. And we've done many things since then, a ride most recently from Cairns all the way up to the tip of Cape York. So, 650 kilometres on a mountain bike.

Tamara: Wow.

Heather Opdam: Again, I know it was-

Tamara: I don't know how you did it.

Heather Opdam: Well... and I mean, because you only do it because you like to ride. I'm like, I had to buy a bike for the thing. I don't ride, because the rest of the 50 riders were riders. So, I was learning on the job, like what's car back? There's this, there's



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that, rolling, I'm like, oh my gosh. Plus, there's snakes going by and wild horses and very little road. So, it was like off-road. We had five days without any connection, so there was no WiFi. We were in the middle of nowhere, which was an incredible experience, because we actually went to an Aboriginal School, which was fantastic. It was really, really nice. So up in Queensland, the government along with one of our tour guides, he's amazing, is running an initiative. It's called The Bike Bus. So, you ride your bike to school to get the kids active. Because unfortunately, there's a lot of mental health and abuse challenges in those smaller communities. And in the Aboriginal communities, to get them active to help them deal with the stresses from home and what have you.

Heather Opdam: So, we stopped off in a school and chatted about that with them. And then it was really cute, because they had a police escort through the town. So, we had the police go through and I lent my bike to a little boy, bless him, who didn't have a bike, he couldn't afford one. So, he rode mine, and I was for a good reason, sitting in the back of the paddy wagon, cheering them on. And it was just really great. We camped, basically. So, we'd ride for the day, and then we'd camp. One spot we camped, and it was just a beautiful family on their farm. And basically, they'd lost their nephew to suicide about four years ago, five years ago. And Emma, bless her, she's now started what's called, Walk The Corrugations. So, the community in Cape York, they do a 42-kilometer walk over a couple of days, just to raise awareness for mental health.

Heather Opdam: So, along the way it was beautiful. We had campers who would stop us and give us money for the cause, for the Black Dog Institute. And just people sharing their personal stories of them themselves or the family members that are dealing with mental health illnesses. So that was really beautiful. Again, that was something that VMware and AWS sponsored with The Black Dog. I've taken a long time to explain that, but I'm so passionate about it.

Tamara: Yeah, I can definitely see it in you, and in your words and your energy. And yeah, I watched the video that you sent me, and we'll provide that in the links and the show notes if we can.

Heather Opdam: Awesome, absolutely.



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- Tamara: And yeah, it was just so beautiful to watch it. And I got goosebumps all the way through, and it's such a great initiative. Yesterday at Salesforce, we had a mental health session and they shared some statistics with us, along with some really great links and where you can get help, which I'll definitely share in the show notes. But the statistics were one in six women in Australia will experience depression. And one in three women will experience anxiety during their lifetime. And then eight Australians, every single day will commit suicide. And it just... like my heart sank, I got a bit emotional. I could not believe the statistics around it. And yeah, it is such a huge issue. But I do personally believe we can do a lot to help solve some of those mental health issues, which...
- Heather Opdam: Absolutely, that's it.
- Tamara: Yeah.
- Heather Opdam: Well yeah, the stats are frightening. So, you will see in the video as well, and the Black Dog have done an incredible job... and we'll talk about them in a moment as well. But they've done incredible amount of research. Yeah, one in five Australians will suffer from a mental illness this year. Half of us in our entire life will have some kind of mental illness, so you know the person to your left, to your right or you yourself. And suicide is the leading cause of death in Australians from ages 15 to I think it's 44.
- Tamara: Oh my Gosh.
- Heather Opdam: The leading! That's shocking. And like you said though, a lot of it can be preventable. By doing an hour of exercise a week, you can reduce depression by 12%. And again, we have research to show that. The good news is we're aware of it now, a lot more people are talking about it. And hopefully, we'll be able to bring that number down significantly together.
- Tamara: Yeah, yeah. So why is mental health so important to you?
- Heather Opdam: Yeah, we were just seeing in the video, my father took his life when I was three. So, it's very near and dear to my heart. As I mentioned growing up with a single mom and two older sisters, that was hard enough, in the '70s, which I keep saying, but being in a single household there, that was quite challenging anyway. But suicide, just the stigma attached to it. It's much more talked about



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now. But back then, not at all. And the fact that my dad's family was a Catholic family, that was considered a sin. So, to the point where, and I don't want to get too much into religion, but they wouldn't bury him if they knew he had taken his life. So, I found out years later at my grandfather's funeral, which is my dad's father, when we were burying my grandfather, standing on my father's grave, when somebody got up and said, "It's such a shame about Ferdinand..." which is my grandfather's, "... son's accident."

Heather Opdam: I said to my mom, I think I was about 13 or 14, I said, "What accident?" She said, "I'll tell you later." But basically, my dad's family had lied, and said he had a hunting accident and the gun went off, or something. I just thought, well, good on mom, by the way, for just being completely honest. Because had I found out when I was 13 or 14, I would have been having to relive that whole thing. So, I always knew what we were dealing with. But I just maybe question communities that judged you on such a traumatic event for anybody, but not to be able to talk about it. So, it was a lot of mixed emotions growing up. It was definitely not something I recommend for anybody. It was really, really tough, but I guess you can... once you feel more comfortable, which I'm at that stage of my life to give back. And the more you share your stories, the more you realize there's so many other people who have been affected.

Heather Opdam: Maybe not your direct parent, but a brother, a sister, a loved one, somebody you know. And yeah, that video that they showed last week, it was pretty intimidating. And I felt very exposed. I had said to our managing director, because I've worked with these people for over 20 years, and there's 2,000 people. And I've basically gone out and shared my personal story and I had a quite... still to this day, people are sending me heaps of messages. But a lot of people like I said, made jokes, "I thought you actually just loved riding a bike, and that's why you did the ride." But they actually then in the same breath, shared a story that they had. So, I think by talking about it, although I felt uncomfortable, that's nothing compared to losing somebody who didn't feel comfortable enough reaching out and speaking about it. And getting the help they need. So, if that's the worst of it for me, then I'll keep talking about it. Because it's important that we help those that are in need.

Tamara: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much...

Heather Opdam: Oh, that's okay. That's all right-



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Tamara: For sharing and being vulnerable. Not only just to me and the listeners, but in front of 2,000 people at VMware, at the conference, that is incredible. And a lot of people, I think would be very grateful for you sharing that story, so thank you.

Heather Opdam: No, that's okay.

Tamara: Yeah. And it does happen to more people than you know. Like I've had two friends who have committed suicide successfully. So, it is a really big issue, and I'm really grateful that you're here today, so we can talk about some of the ways that we can help our mental health. Which brings me to my next question, you have done a lot of research around the two topics of mental health and exercise. Can you share some of your findings?

Heather Opdam: Absolutely. So, as I had mentioned earlier, I believe I gave you the stats there, but one in five Australians this year will suffer from a mental illness, 50% of us in our lifetime, and research has shown especially with the Black Dog... so the Black Dog Institute, just to give you a bit of background on them. They are actually a medical research organization, non-for-profit here in Australia. And not only do they provide mental health awareness, which is fabulous, they're actually working on data to prevent mental health illnesses. So, they're working with the government and with the universities on how do we collect all this data, for example, in your social media feeds and what have you, and pre-empt either a carer who's looking after somebody who's at risk, or even that individual as well. I mean, we track our physical fitness, so why aren't we tracking our mental fitness?

Heather Opdam: So, the Hackathon, which is one of the reasons that I understand I got the award for last year that we did at the vforum last year, was to address that. Basically, a problem that we were trying to solve for was, by 2020 we'd like young Australians to track their mental health, like we track our physical health today. So, we had all these coders in and what have you, and it was really, really great. And the apps that were presented to us were just amazing. So, we're still working through that with the Black Dog Institute, because they've created some apps as well. So, we're trying to use technology to help individual, especially young Australians, to hopefully prevent before they even get to a point in their life where they're confused, and they're not sure where to go and what resources they can draw upon.



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- Heather Opdam: So yeah, and there has been studies again, Black Dog Institute has done many studies. When we were on the ride, we all wore Fitbits. So, we were tracking our physical fitness, but we also had two surveys. One at 6:00 in the morning before our ride for the day, and then one in the afternoon or evening, just to measure what our emotions were. And we're still waiting for the White Paper, so I'll make sure that I share that link with yourself and you can share it with the listeners. But we definitely hand-on-heart believe there's a relation between your physical fitness and your mental health. So, we're very encouraging of that. Black Dog Institute also have what's called Exercise Your Mood. So, this year it was in May, and it's basically getting everybody as active as possible to help reduce the percentage or the rate of depression, as well. So, there's a lot of science behind that, that's proven that, that will absolutely help.
- Tamara: Wow-
- Heather Opdam: And there's a connection between the two.
- Tamara: Wow.
- Heather Opdam: Yeah, so it's really... I mean, I've always known that, I don't know about you, but I've always felt when I'm feeling down, if I go for a run or I do something, I don't need drugs or alcohol.
- Tamara: Yeah.
- Heather Opdam: Me, it's the physical fitness.
- Tamara: Yeah.
- Heather Opdam: My husband even says, "You haven't gone for a run lately, have you? You're really grumpy." Like, "Oh, dude, you're right, actually, I just need to." And yeah, so I find myself, that's how I got through... what I did in my childhood. I played competitive soccer.
- Tamara: Yeah.
- Heather Opdam: So, through my teens, yeah, that was my out. Was just to do something physical that would help my mental health.



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- Tamara: Yeah, I definitely see a difference in myself as well. And I think a lot of women would feel this as well, is mental health in the way that you look at yourself. I think women really struggle with insecurities, and there's days where I just cannot stand to look at myself in the mirror, and it's because I haven't been to the gym in a week's time. Because I've just been sitting down at my desk and just feeling grumpy and then as soon as I get to the gym I'm like, oh, I'm actually not that bad, I love my body.
- Heather Opdam: Exactly. After swinging yourself, right? Yeah, I can do this.
- Tamara: And then I'll be like dancing around the kitchen and Joel's like, "Oh my gosh, you're such a weirdo."
- Heather Opdam: Yeah, you should be working out.
- Tamara: So, on that, how does it affect both, for you personally, on your professional and your personal life?
- Heather Opdam: Yeah, it's interesting, because I don't find my body, physical or mental, can tell the difference if I'm at work or if I'm at home, I think it just affects me all the time, because that's who I am. So, I don't even know if it can distinguish the difference. If I'm not well at home mentally, chances are, it's going to be really tricky to go into a boardroom meeting and go, "Everything's great, let's..." I mean sometimes you have to put that on, because even if you have like the flu, you sometimes you just have to keep going. But I find it affects everything. It's just who I am, no matter where I am, if it's work or if it's home, they're all interconnected. So that's why it's so important. It doesn't just help your professional career, it helps your personal career and vice versa. So, I think it's an all-around thing, I don't know that I could differentiate the two. Because it is me, and wherever I am, which is work or home. What would what yourself, do you...
- Tamara: Yeah, I definitely think if things aren't right at home, I actually can't work. So, if Joel and I have had a... we don't call them fights.
- Heather Opdam: Discussion?



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- Tamara: Yeah! A discussion, yeah did I tell you about that? Yeah, so we stopped calling them fights, but if we've had a discussion, then I really struggle at work. And then I'll get work, and then I'll just be texting him like crazy, trying to work it out. But it's hard to work it out over-
- Heather Opdam: Yeah, of course it is-
- Tamara: ... text message. So, I definitely do think it does affect me both, but I always thought that I could ignore whatever was happening at home, and I got really good at that when I was younger. Because I also had a few experiences with friends and family having mental health issues, and I got very good at pretending like everything at home was okay. And then being at work, nobody knew anything. But since I have become so much more open and vulnerable, and in a relationship where I can share my complete self, that's become a lot harder. But I'm really grateful for that, because it makes me work on myself and my mental health and adding those extra self-care practices, and go to the gym and things like that. I can't hide from it, anymore.
- Heather Opdam: And it's really hard to sustain that mask as well. I'm the same, I'll be honest. Like I said, last week was really big because I'm always... well, feedback is I'm always positive and happy and dah dah dah.
- Tamara: Yeah.
- Heather Opdam: And people that's why I think it really shocked them last week with that video, because people were like, I actually had text messages like, W-O-W, oh my God had no idea. Because you're always so positive. And that's, I guess my way of dealing with it. But you can't sustain that forever. And something's got to give. And the good news about especially where I work, VMware, we're very much about bring yourself to work. So, I don't want to have to wear a mask. And even though some people think they are wearing a mask, you know darn well something's not right. Even at work and you're going ehhhh. And I'm a bit put off by what they've just said, but then I go, okay, there's something else going on, because that's unusual for them. Or what have you. So even if you think you're wearing a mask, someone else will probably... chances are, can see that there's something not right.



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- Tamara: Yeah, it's something that I'm teaching my partner's son at the moment, is that hurt people hurt people.
- Heather Opdam: Absolutely.
- Tamara: So, when someone is going through something difficult or has gone through an experience, they're not going to be their best version of themselves, and they're going to retaliate, they're not going to be nice. And it's about understanding those red flags and being able to address it in a loving way, and asking them if they're okay.
- Heather Opdam: Absolutely. And not take it personal, because I know you watch and go, "Oh my gosh, they spoke so rudely to me." Actually, I don't think has anything to do with you.
- Tamara: Yeah.
- Heather Opdam: And I'm the same, by the way, I'm like, hmm, that was very rude. I'm very strict on my matters. Where are your manners? And then I'm like, actually, there's something more behind that. And I have got to stop thinking about me, because it's not about me. They're clearly going through something. And if I can be as open and helpful as possible, then I think hopefully, that will benefit the situation. So yeah.
- Tamara: So, to get your advice, for the listeners who don't really exercise, and don't really know what to do to help improve their mental health, what are some things that they can start doing today?
- Heather Opdam: Yep. Great question. I would say first of all, don't boil the ocean. I know people are like, "Oh my gosh, okay, I've got to get a new running outfit, and dah, dah, dah..." If you can't run, go for a brisk walk. If you can't brisk walk, go for a slow walk, and just build up. Because if you try and say, "Well, first of all, I don't have enough time and dah, dah, dah..." Try and fit it into your day as well. You've got to grab lunch some point, don't get it from the cafe downstairs, maybe go an extra two blocks, and just walk out there and back. And then once you get your fitness up a bit more, you might be able to do a quicker, maybe a little jog and what have you. But just try not to get too intimidated about the end goal. How



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about you just start today and just start. I guess, give it a try and stop finding excuses, because we're all good at that, aren't we?

Heather Opdam: Missing out on the perfect situation. You just want to go, maybe tomorrow or no, not now or what have you. Just seize the moment and just try. Just go for a five-minute walk. That's five minutes more than you went yesterday. And build it up, and don't expect miracles overnight, because it is a journey. And you're going to have ups and downs, and you could be feeling really, really fit and then for a couple months, maybe not so much. So, it's just... but keep at it, and don't give up. And even if it's something small, you'd be amazed. And if you can't fit... because I find with physical fitness, you have a defined goal. I want to go five kilometres for example, what have you. Mental fitness, it's not as easy to do. I find for me, that's more me time.

Heather Opdam: So, if you can find some time to be on your own, fabulous. But if not, combine the two. So, if you're going for a walk, use that as your mental break as well.

Tamara: Right, yeah.

Heather Opdam: Yeah.

Tamara: Yeah. And I think variety is a good one there as well. In my teens, I always wanted to be a good runner, because all the skinny girls were runners. But I can't run to say my life, honestly.

Heather Opdam: Unless you're being chased, right?

Tamara: Or unless you have incentives, Joel and I did a... he did a 10 K, and I did 5 K, and I trained for ages, for ages. He didn't train at all, and he's just a natural, freak runner. Anyways, we both gave each other incentives afterwards. So, if you reach a certain time, then we'll do this, this, this and this.

Heather Opdam: Ooh, that's exciting.

Tamara: Yeah. And it was only because of those incentives, but I was a bolting, I was running so hard and at the end, I was dead. It was a great challenge, but it's not something that I really enjoy. I much prefer to go to the gym and do some



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weight training or some HIIT training. I love pilates. For the listeners out there, if running doesn't work or walking doesn't work, try something else.

Heather Opdam: Or swimming, there's no weight bearing. Because if you have problems with your knees running, I used to work in physio, got me through high school and uni, it was my job.

Tamara: Oh, wow.

Heather Opdam: Yeah... in sports medicine. And running's actually really tricky on your body. The only reason I do it is because when I'm traveling, I can bring my sneakers and there I am, right? But it's actually really quite challenging on your body and your joints. So, swimming, there's no weight bearing, but you've got the resistance of the water. There's so many different activities that you can be doing like you said, variety is great as well. So yeah.

Tamara: Yeah, and doing it with people too, is also a great way. It keeps you accountable and you can have some fun along the way.

Heather Opdam: Exactly. Or even sign up for a... I did the... it was the 7 Bridge Walk with a girlfriend. And just sign up for something, and then you have something to aim for. Maybe you don't want to tell everyone you've signed up for it, it's just for you. But yeah, just to have something to aim for helps too, because then it makes you kind of stick to a schedule.

Tamara: Yeah.

Heather Opdam: Yeah.

Tamara: Great. Okay, so before we get to our quickfire questions, our closing questions, is there anything else that you want us to talk about that we haven't spoken about so far?

Heather Opdam: I don't think so.

Tamara: Okay.



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- Heather Opdam: I think yeah, we've been chatting and chatting. I'm probably talking too much.
- Tamara: No, no, no.
- Heather Opdam: So, it's all good.
- Tamara: Okay. So how can people support, follow or connect with you?
- Heather Opdam: Well, excellent question. So hopefully, you'll be providing my links, but I am on LinkedIn. So that's pretty much the platform that I use most. But I'm happy to share any details of myself. And yeah, if you do see an event, I'm still very active in the Diversity and Inclusion Council at VMware, we do a variety of initiatives. So please look out for that. Maybe they can send a note, I can give you my email or what have you, and I can put you on a list. So, when we do have these initiatives, I can make sure that you're included.
- Tamara: Great, thank you.
- Heather Opdam: Yeah, pleasure.
- Tamara: That's amazing. Okay, so to our quick-fire questions, are you ready?
- Heather Opdam: Yeah, I'm ready. Go on.
- Tamara: Okay, what is one thing that we can do to achieve gender equality in the tech industry?
- Heather Opdam: Great question. Oh, there're so many. But I would actually say, we should start speaking to girls in school. So, in kindergarten to year six.
- Tamara: Oh, wow.
- Heather Opdam: Because I know we've been doing a lot of initiatives in the industry around universities, but by then, or even high school, by then they've probably already chosen their subjects. So, I think we start at the beginning, and then the whole way through, they can choose those subjects when they have electives. And then just talk about the variety in the industry as well, because as we know I'm



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very not technical, but I've always had technical roles. And that's okay, because they're skills that the organizations can draw upon.

Tamara: Yeah, yeah. Great. And what's one piece of advice that you would give yourself at the age of 25?

Heather Opdam: Stop worrying about tomorrow. There's nothing you can do, you can't control it, what if, what if... oh my gosh, what is... You know what? Just seize the day, because you do have control of today. So, make the most of where you are and the moment. Stop worrying about tomorrow, because it'll all work out.

Tamara: Yeah, yeah. Beautiful. Trust the universe. What do you wish that they had taught you in school, but didn't.

Heather Opdam: You know what, I think funny enough, mental health. Because I think now it's becoming more prominent in the curriculum. So, I've seen, even what my sons are doing in high school. But back when I was in school, and I think the Canadian curriculum is very similar to the Australian, there wasn't that... we did the physical fitness. It was actually compulsory, which is a plus. But we didn't actually have the mindfulness and the meditation and the taking care of your mental health as well, which I wish they had done more of.

Tamara: Yeah, yeah, great one. And if you could recommend one book for females in tech to read, what would it be?

Heather Opdam: It would be *The Widow Clicquot*.

Tamara: Okay.

Heather Opdam: So that's by Tilar Mazzeo. And it's about the Yellow Label, so I love champagne. So Barbe-Nicole Clicquot Ponsardin, and she was an incredible woman who was an entrepreneur. And back in those days, was unheard of for a woman. And she's very inspiring. Plus, I love her products, which is amazing champagne. But she was a really inspirational woman. Her husband had died, and she basically took on this company.

Tamara: Wow.



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- Heather Opdam: And just did some incredibly innovative things with the Russian government and what have you. So it was just very, very inspirational, especially for her day. Well before there was the whole breaking the glass ceiling, she was miles ahead of that.
- Tamara: Wow, I just got goosebumps.
- Heather Opdam: I know!
- Tamara: I haven't heard of it.
- Heather Opdam: No, I know. And everyone's... because my girlfriend got it for me because she knows I love the champagne, it's my fav Verve. And so, she bought me the book, and it was just so inspirational.
- Tamara: Yeah.
- Heather Opdam: Yeah, she was just very innovative and well ahead of her time.
- Tamara: Yeah.
- Heather Opdam: Yeah.
- Tamara: Awesome. Well, I've had so much fun today.
- Heather Opdam: Thank you.
- Tamara: It's been a lot of fun and yeah, I can't wait to get your hubby on the show as well.
- Heather Opdam: Yay, sounds great. Thank you so much for having me Tamara.
- Tamara: No, my pleasure.
- Heather Opdam: Appreciate it. Okay.