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In this episode, Taren Grom, Editor of PharmaVOICE, meets with Shonda Anderson Williams, Modern Workplace Digital Transformation Leader, The Microsoft Corporation.

Taren: Shonda, welcome to the PharmaVOICE WoW podcast program.

Shonda: Thank you, Taren. It is great to be here and look forward to having a dialogue with you today on this fantastic Friday.

Taren: Likewise. Shonda as a leader in healthcare and life sciences digital transformation as evidenced by your title, what are some of the biggest trends you are currently tracking?

Shonda: There's a lot happening in the world. We're still in a pandemic as you know and we've got schools and things sort of starting this time of the year. The biggest things I'd say right now that are top of mind that I'm seeing is work from home. You've got healthcare professionals and traditional parents and a mix of potential even grandparents having to work from home and still needing care and with that, when you're exchanging personal data such as healthcare data and you have individuals who are having to share that information across technology, security is another area.

And the third thing is being able to collaborate, so collaboration tools that allow providers and payers and life science organizations' ability to collaborate across an ecosystem. and those are really, really big things that we're speaking at our customers about and they're asking us to help them sort of think about how can we participate and help translate some of the tech that's available, but also bring a really, really great perspective on how we can help leverage the technology into these different scenarios.

Taren: That's excellent. You know, the collaboration certainly I've been hearing about and certainly the workforce from home is a big issue, but the security piece of this I didn't even think about, considering the fact that so many people work in – within the pharmaceutical industry have to work in areas that do require that kind of security. And so that's an interesting wrinkle and complexity that I'm sure everybody is having to manage right now.

Shonda: Yeah, it's a challenge and as you'd imagine being in tech and being at Microsoft, one of the things that's not lost upon us is the world of hackers. And so when most of the world is doing what we're doing here in the United States, which is working from home and having to still perform and still do work and still be able to see patients and create medicine vaccines, it's

really, really important that we think about security and the data that has to be shared across multiple organizations and really being thoughtful about the processes that we had when we worked together in person to now being in a more virtual world that that information, that data is really transferred in a very secure way.

Taren: Absolutely. You know, we've been hearing it since it's about Zoom bombers and people who come in to, as you said, hacking into systems and it's so disruptive. So thank you for bringing that really important point to home because chances are we're going to be in this scenario for quite some time, so we really do need to think short term and longer term.

Shonda: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Taren: What are some of the biggest impacts you're seeing digital having on the life sciences? It's becoming almost ubiquitous now. Are we at a point where digital is becoming ubiquitous?

Shonda: Yeah, I mean I think digital is in the world we – in the current world and it will be in the world we live in for the foreseeable future. I think that the biggest impact is data. We talk about patient experiences and we talk about data, the information being able to be shared and using the collaboration stack. The fact is it's data, and so now you are in an environment where we have a tremendous amount of data and the biggest challenge and opportunity is how do we use that data to bring quickly, quite frankly bring insights that can move to improve patient care, systems that support those patients and quite frankly being able to quickly and better able to predict that different models that are needed to accelerate the development of medicine.

I mean in the pandemic we're living in now the race to find the vaccine is fast and it's very concerning for a lot of us as consumers and as humans, but the life sciences organizations and pharmaceutical companies that are spending hours and multiple man-hours trying to find a way to quickly provide a vaccine is really, really commendable. And they're having to take a ton of data in a short amount of time to bring a potential solution not only to you and I, but to the world, and I think technology is playing a really great part in that in being able to share, but also quickly predict, analyze and then get to a place where they can make decisions to create something that will help the rest of mankind.

Taren: What an awesome insight into where we are in terms what we need to manage in terms of data. Just as an aside, do you kind of giggle every time you hear that term big data? And what does that mean to you because isn't all data big now?

Shonda: Yes. Everything is data. I mean my Fitbit and my Apple watch and my – I mean everything is data. So there's big data. Yeah, there's no small data, if you will. There's data everywhere. And I think as an industry that's always been the norm. You have to be able to take on massive amounts of data in trying to accelerate insights out of that.

But today I think what's happened is (1) in this pandemic, there's a true need because there's lives by the thousands that are being lost. But it's also a place where you have technology

companies like Microsoft and others who are really vested and interested and committed to using tech for good. So we think about big data and being able to take this data into a place where we can actually use it for good, that's a beautiful thing for all of us because it ultimately means we can then be able to bring solutions back to the marketplace, to patients, to customers, etc., to help solve some of the biggest challenges we're facing today and more importantly what's to come.

Taren: Excellent. Let's talk about what's to come. What are some of the unique projects you're currently working on in terms of digital technology and data?

Shonda: Yes, like right now the biggest thing is that's probably most interesting for me is with data is thinking about how do we visualize that data, so you've got a lot of data points, but how do you take this into a visualization stage to where it can be used to organize perspective insights and then being able to be transferred to other organizations and if I sort of bring the life sciences view into the provider view, I think about things like telehealth and virtual health. I think about things like virtual rounding or virtual visits. All of those are based off of data being needed to be provided to a clinician or physician to be able to improve and/or accelerate care for a patient or improve an entire care, connected care thing.

And so using data if you will as the base in being able to take that data and visualize it in a way that can help individuals that are in positions like our physicians and clinicians to do better work to help improve the patient experience is really, really interesting and we have a lot of customers that we're working with today that are looking at things like telehealth to do that in person, but more importantly if the world as we know it today does not change, we all are going to be work from home for a majority of the time, how will we be able to provide that same level or better care virtually.

And we have the doctors and physicians, the clinicians, they are going to be continuously be using the technology that they are familiar with, but now you've got new devices coming into place, but you know the end of that is how do you then make healthcare ubiquitous and access to healthcare ubiquitous across the world in different markets, different scenarios and different cities in rural or urban areas are even more challenged. And so we're trying to figure out how do we take these big concepts and then apply them to some of the most challenging and difficult situations because we want to provide access to healthcare to everyone.

Taren: Those are big goals. I mean that's a lot to think about.

Shonda: Yes, it's a lot. But you know we, and along with, like I said, there's a lot of other technology companies and partners we work with, we're in a position to play a role and that's the most exciting thing as I think about my role and my team at our organization and the company, those are things that I think it's really, really powerful that we can play a part in helping provide a role and our solution in that particular challenge that all of us are facing.

Taren: It's an interesting concept, a company like Microsoft partnering with another technology company, but maybe that's not something that would have been done 5, 10 years ago. But now you are all working towards a common goal and to me that's very aspirational.

Shonda: Yes. It's a new time and let's be clear, big data is big data. Quite frankly, our customers, the life sciences organizations, pharmaceutical companies, all the way to payer provider, med device companies, they require that. They are looking to us to partner with them and that partnership means working across ecosystem of their different partnerships that they work with or solution providers that they partner with and a lot of what we see are kind of non-traditional folks that we at Microsoft may be had not worked with in years past and some of it are in places like we had announcements recently that Microsoft is partnering with Salesforce. They're running their platform in our environment and those are new things, but those are needed because our customers are looking to us to lead and help them transform and that may require us to think a little bit more broadly, but it's exciting because at the end our customers which ultimately end up being patients we play role in improving that experience.

Taren: That's wonderful. Shonda, let's talk about your role in the technology field. Obviously, this is not a field that is filled with women and more women of color. How are you paving the path for others? When I talk to other women who are in the tech field, often they are an n of 1 sitting in a large conference or in a meeting. That's got to be challenging I would think. How are you paving the way? How have you managed this?

Shonda: Yeah. I mean it is definitely a somber point at times when you are the only one, but the fact is my voice – I have a voice at the table, but I also have an opportunity to bring others along. So there's a couple of things that I've done and continue to do. One is I'm really big on mentoring. I'm really big on connecting with younger, what I like to call early in career, so someone who's just starting their corporate experience or considering joining a corporation like Microsoft. So I really spend time mentoring and sharing my experiences and helping provide perspective to them on what they potentially about to encounter, how to think about coming into an organization like Microsoft and what that means, but the other thing I do that has been really valuable to me is I really try to help connect different individuals to my network to help create opportunities for them to broaden their perspective.

And so I think it's important as I've been in this industry for quite some time in the tech world specifically, it's really, really fantastic to have developed a vast network of folks you work with, some really, really smart folks. So I think as I pay it forward is connecting some of those earlier in career young ladies and connecting them with those folks and giving them a place to explore, to ask some of the questions and giving, quite frankly, my network which doesn't necessarily look like me the opportunity to connect to individuals that may not necessarily be in their network or on their radar – so almost sort of I'd say just sort of playing a role of a connection with that.

And then the other thing I'm doing actually within the organization today is we have a big focus on the diversity and inclusion at Microsoft and I lead our DNI efforts for healthcare and life

sciences business for the US under our regulated industries team. And I spend a lot of time just making sure we are building opportunities and we're being open to have some of the most challenging conversations and so we've all had in year of 2020 which has included the pandemic but also some of the racial and social injustices that have been done and really taking a point to have those conversations and bringing our leadership at the table to talk about what that means and how that is affecting our organization, our team members and what role we can play to continue to develop young women of color, young men of color, but also the broader organization and being better at being an advocate and an ally in the world today.

Taren: You know when we talk about diversity and inclusion, we're really starting to hear these terms of equity and not equality and we're really right now at a crossroads I would think in my opinion in two different ways, the pandemic for sure, but also we're at a culture of crossroad in our country. So on top of everything else you're doing, what are you doing in terms of Microsoft's DNI efforts?

Shonda: For me to be a leader in this space, I'm just one person. So one of the things I think was really important was to really ensure that we had a diverse team, the team of resources to help support this priority and so it's not me. I just have a passion for it, but I also know that I can't do it alone. And so we are doing things like going out into different communities and sponsoring organizations, different universities and/or schools and creating opportunities for them to learn tech. So Microsoft has a big initiative right now with scaling of 25 million people. You may have seen some of those articles in the news or on LinkedIn; that's a real priority for us and we believe in access for everyone.

So that's something that as a company we've done, as an organization we've done, but also internally we have a community that I've been a part of called Blacks at Microsoft. We have HLS community just for that set of individuals. And what we've done is really sort of understood exactly what the challenges are – and I have to tell you Taren, some of the challenges are generational. So being an African-American female who's a little bit more seasoned is I'm having a different experience than those who are new to the organization or newer in their career.

And so bridging the conversation between what are the needs of the community within Microsoft and our healthcare and life sciences business and what are the things that they would ask of our leadership team to commit to to be accountable to. It's worked out really, really well in that we've been able to (1) have a conversation with our leadership. They've been able to understand some of the things that are probably they may not be aware of because they're not experiencing it. And then what are the things that we can do to improve the experience and the culture.

One of our leaders, actually our RVP Patty Obermeyer, started a process when the pandemic hit and some of the social unrest and things sort of happening right after George Floyd. She created a session called Caring Hours, and those caring hours were really, really simple. We got on a call in gave people space to talk and express what was happening, and just that opportunity

(1) was just a big deal, but (2) for others to hear that may not really be aware or be able to understand some of the emotion and some of the concern with some of their partners or peers in the business.

Those are things that we sort of I would say commit to as a DNI priority, but also hiring, retention and recruiting are equally important and putting programs and process in place to ensure we have a program but more importantly, accountability within ourselves as leaders, not just myself, again, others to ensure that we're doing this and we're making a part of who we are not just a project or a program that the company may decide to do.

Taren: That's wonderful. That really is just taking a look back to see what it's like to walk in somebody else's shoes and appreciate the experiences that others have who may not look like you that don't come from the same place, that don't have the same perspectives or experiences. That's amazing work that you're doing there. Congratulations.

Shonda: Thank you. Thank you.

Taren: In addition to all of that, you also are managing teams and I'd love to know what are some of the tools or techniques that you used to effectively lead and manage your teams at Microsoft?

Shonda: Well, one thing we use is teams. So I literally live in teams. It's kind of funny I was telling someone recently when this platform evolved we move from Skype to teams and it was a journey. But today I can tell you my life, my engagement with customers with my direct employees, leaders and the broader organization and partners, it's all on teams and so we use teams as a way to connect, collaborate, get work done, but as a technique I think within the technology is great, but checking in, just having a moment to check in with people is really, really important because we're remote.

I lead a national organization. I live in Texas and so I'm not able to see even when we didn't have a pandemic, I'm not able to be with everyone everyday every time. And so really using moments to check in one on one, creating a culture of a destination spot and so I'm really big on leadership and excellence and building great culture. And so one of the themes is I want our organization to be a destination spot so when people want to come to Microsoft, I want them to think I want to be a part of healthcare and life sciences and that's because we are a great place to work, but we get to do amazing things with our customers and you also get to work in a place where we can be valued and you can really truly live out your dreams, your passions, your aspirations.

So finding those connection points are really, really important. And the last thing I'd say to lead and manage, I have high expectations because there is high expectations of me, but I really have high expectations of our team because of our talent in making sure that we're continuously developing that talent and giving them opportunities to grow and to stretch in new and different ways.

Taren: Amazing. I think you're right. All those points are awesome and in making it a destination for your people and I like the fact that you have high expectations for your teams because you're all working towards that common goal with patients. So it's so important. And as you're looking to build your teams, I ask this to a lot of the leaders that I speak to, what are some of those qualities you look for in those team members?

Shonda: Yeah. One of the things that I really gravitate to is someone who has a growth mindset and that's sort of a buzzword. There's a book about it and we've probably talked about it over the many, many years, but truly someone who comes in and sort of brings a bit of a challenger perspective because even as a new hire into Microsoft if you're graduating from college and you just met the organization, you're bringing a perspective that we don't have and you're bringing maybe in a set of experiences that we don't have.

And so I really look for individuals and leaders who are bringing something different and sort of I'd say challenging our norms because we do as much as we want to be connected to our customers and we are vested in learning and continuing to be better, we still live in a bit of a bubble. And so having individuals who are bringing maybe a different diversity of thought, diversity of experience is really important, also someone that's coachable, someone who is willing to take the feedback and address it and/or decide if they want to put in a practice, but they were willing to take the feedback and know that we are a culture of a learn-it-all not of a know-it-all. As smart as we are and as much talent as this company has, we are a learn-it-all and I am looking for people who have that desire to learn and because we're in healthcare I'm looking for individuals who are truly looking to make an impact and change the world in how we reimagine healthcare and if you can speak to that, if you can have a point of view and a perspective, those are going to be the folks that I'm going to be seeking out for roles in the organization and on the team.

Taren: Well, I can imagine with the way you articulate that and the passion behind it, your email must be ringing off the hook – if you can mix that metaphor. That's amazing. Thank you so much for sharing those insights. I think it's tremendous. I like to also ask the question of wind up that way back machine, is there anything now that you wish you had known as you were moving up the ranks, anything you would have done differently in your career journey.

Shonda: I think I've had just an amazing career and it has everything to do with the people that surrounded me, the individuals that made the decision to make a bet and hire me, the leaders I've had an opportunity to work with. But I would say as a female and as a woman leader, I look back and there were probably moments that – and I've coached to this – and I have daughters so I always tell them be authentic and bring your whole self to the team, to the organization, to the company because that really is your different value proposition and there's a balance of aspiring to have a certain set of skills or to operate in a certain way, but there's nothing like when you are in a place where you can truly be authentic with who are, what you are aspiring to do and what your passions are. Those things come out.

And when I speak about that, what I'm really sort of referring to is you can really hear and see and feel, even if not in person and not on video, when a person is being authentic because something about them oozes out and that draws you to them in one form or fashion. So be authentic with your true self, what you expect. Obviously in my role and in others, you have to perform. So there's a part of the job where you have to perform, but there's also a part of who you are that you expect the company and your leadership team to do in terms of supporting and inspiring you. So really be authentic about who you are and I never forget that – and if I would have found that sooner, maybe things would have turned out differently. But if I were to look back now I would say that's the one thing that I really coach and encourage young women, especially in the technology field, to do. And change is great for the sake your change and improving, but do not lose yourself in this process.

Taren: What is a wow moment that helped shape your career?

Shonda: Yeah. I will say that there's probably many moments. Probably the first major moment was when I became a manager and had the responsibility of people and the desire to want to lead, but also be responsible and accountable for a set of individuals was a huge step for me in terms of the company having confidence in me and me having confidence in myself, that I could actually help be responsible and develop others to their aspirations and ambition and that has continued.

Taren, for me it's been as my career has developed and the leadership roles have continued, my ability to play a part in someone's development and I get to see them off or I get to see them go do bigger, better things and be great leaders, those to me are always moments that I relish because like a parent if I had a part that I played in helping that person find their thing in terms of their opportunity to grow and to be developed or to lead, that to me is really, really fantastic. And when I've had individuals come to me and thank me, I will tell you when I've developed them or I've had to have those tough conversations that they weren't in the right job, that I had the wherewithal and the courage to have the challenging conversation and the individuals coachable enough to take that feedback and thank me for the fact that they were not maybe in the best place.

And so it boils down to my wow moments are really about people and from the onset of being a leader or a manager the first time to even in the moment I am today, the recognition that I have received even recently it's because of the people and the place that I am in that I get to work with them and develop and inspire and I will tell you that the feeling is mutual. I get to learn from them and I'm inspired by them and that's what fuels my fire to continue to push and to challenge and to really hold firm in terms of us being a place where we want people to come work at Microsoft.

Taren: You can't see me, but I have a big smile on my face. I can't imagine the people you have met and mentored and they just, they must be just so grateful to you because what an amazing leader you are. So, thank you so much for sharing so much of your personal journey as well as your great leadership insights with us today for our WoW podcast program.



Shonda: Thank you, Taren. It has been a pleasure. I salute you for continuing the charge to have these conversations to bring these different voices in because collectively the voices are powerful. Individually, it is – I'm in awe at some of the other stories and so we salute you and thank you for taking this on and making it real and being an inspiration to the rest of us.

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