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Lakshmi (00:21):

Welcome to the future of business podcast, where we take you on a journey to explore the diverse range of sectors and stories embedded in the Oxford MBA and beyond, and how they will shape the future of business. This is lame and I will be hosting our conversation today with princess AA.

Princess (00:37):

Hello

Lakshmi (00:39):

Princess? Yes. That is her real name. That is usually how she introduces herself to anyone she needs.

Princess (00:44):

Yes, I do. Yeah. Um, it's my little tagline. <laugh> that is princess and yes, that is my real name.

Lakshmi (00:51):

Perfect. Um, so princess is here, um, as a friend, a fellow MBA, and, uh, one of our inaugural lead loss scholars this year, she's exte for America, ex peace cops, ex Fulbright. There's no fellowship that you can find in the us that she's not done. <laugh>, uh, she's ex Walmart. She's an tech entrepreneur in the making. And that right there is why we really wanted to have her in the podcast. This one is very close to home for me. Uh, it is about the future of education. I used to work with each for India before coming killed. And so, uh, I'm just so happy that this is gonna be my last podcast this year, uh, to end on a note that's so close to home.

Princess (01:28):

Oh, that's awesome.

Lakshmi (01:30):

Um, thank you so much for being here princess and thank

Princess (01:32):

You for having me. I'm super excited. I'm excited. And what better person to engage on this topic with Sarah?

Lakshmi (01:40):

That's perfect. Um, you have done many things and you've been to many, many places, uh, and we will try to go into as many of it today. Uh, but I wanna start off with something as touchy-feely, as we can get to touchy-feely <laugh>, uh, like, because it is the experience that you have with each, from America. That's closest to me. Mm-hmm <affirmative> and I teach tri India. We always believe one day all children. So could you tell us, uh, you know, we, we said one day all children will obtain an excellent education mm-hmm <affirmative> and I just wanted to hear, like, what does excellent education mean for you?

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Princess (02:09):

So for me, I would say excellent education looks like a combination of like practical skills. So money management. I know for me, I didn't learn how to, for example, manage a credit card or what a credit score was, which in the United States, in places like the United States, um, who have the same credit score system, it's a huge deal. Like it impacts whether you get a car like rent a car even, or buy a home or rent a home. Um, and even sometimes it affects if you get a job or not. So those are really big things that I think should be, you know, provided in classroom settings. Um, and then also like advancing knowledge is another thing that I think is extremely important. So, um, just skill sets that's outside of these maybe BA basic necessities and then developing interest and natural talents, um, from the actual participants, the children themselves, like they have natural talents that sometimes get dampened, um, by this very strict curriculum that doesn't allow them to express themselves freely. So I think for me, it's like a combination of those three things, practical skills, advancing knowledge and developing, uh, natural abilities and talents.

Lakshmi (03:16):

That is, that is very, very comprehensive. And thank you for sharing that. And I think it's also really nice to be, uh, in Oxford at the side business, Columbia MBA, because I think as you were talking, I was thinking about the number of people working on things like this. Mm-hmm <affirmative>, uh, just off the top of the mind, I'm thinking of TA who's one of the school scholars this year who runs origination, Africa and imagination, Africa aims, um, you know, establishing in Africa where all young people are equipped to create opportunities for themselves and others mm-hmm <affirmative> and the kind of opportunities that you spoke about. Um, and there's also, um, last year, uh, from the previous cohort we had, uh, uh, Luna come out, Luna was, uh, again, an app, um, founded by jazz and Joe, uh, to help teens through puberty. And the recently, uh, won a grant, uh, as well of about 50,000 pounds.

Lakshmi (04:04):

I think mm-hmm <affirmative>. So I think just like to be in this place, to see all of them, like, you know, come up with different kinds of solutions that's required and not just children's education. Uh, we have Izzy, uh, Isabel ha ho, who is working currently, she's working on building a financial education app for women, which speaks directly to, uh, you know, the issue that you were speaking about. Yes. And, and then there's you <laugh>, you are working on, um, global language learning platform for adult education as well. Yes. So that is really exciting as well. Do tell us about that. Yeah.

Princess (04:32):

That's very exciting. Yes. Um, yeah. Connects you so I'm working on it with a classmate, no play, um, in a friend, um, so connects you is a language learning platform that essentially enables employees of multinational companies to engage with their peers in different offices around the world. So through our platform, coworkers in different countries have conversations with each other around common interests. So that could be business topics based on their industry, but also could be shared hobbies like sports or poetry. So things that you may not engage on with your coworkers at work. Um, and this is all done through the medium of language exchange and language learning in 2020 alone companies worldwide, we're spending over 357 billion on learning and development resources for their employees. So they understand that this is a real issue. And international companies especially are really trying to figure out how they can refresh their company culture in an era where more and more people are

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working remotely and barely interact with their coworkers outside of like emails and zoom calls and things of that nature.

Princess ([05:34](#)):

So when you layer on top of that, this need and desire for more diversity and more inclusion, a lot of these large organizations simply just, they don't know where to start. And for me, it's really clear because of my background. I've worked internationally, my entire career and learning the local language. Wasn't just a way for me to get my job done, but also to build really meaningful relationships with people and help us to better understand each other's culture. So when I joined peace Corps in Costa Rica, for example, the conversation with my host mom in broken Spanish, when I first got, there was completely different from the conversations that her and I had, or the project partners that I worked with had, um, when I became fluent in Spanish, uh, we learned so much more about each other and we really had like a newfound respect for one another. So that same warmth and respect and intercultural understanding is something that we want to bring to large corporations via connects you. And it's also a fact that as you said, learning a new skill, a new language, um, and understanding cultural nuances opens up a whole new realm of opportunities for professionals and businesses alike. So we believe that it's like a, a game changer.

Lakshmi ([06:40](#)):

Oh, it is. It absolutely is. And, um, at risk of always simplifying this mm-hmm <affirmative>, could I ask if this is something like a dual lingo meets Bumble?

Princess ([06:50](#)):

Yes. So some people hate that analogy, but I actually think it's a very like clear way to describe it because we wanna make sure that's like a clear interface, something that's seamless, that's fun to interact with. Um, and the whole part of it is, um, the unique aspect of it is the immersive communication experience. And so Bumble, why we kind of use that as an example is because you get to like have video calls and video dates with people and they're trying to make, um, especially during the pandemic, try to make those date experiences, bring those into your home. And that's what we're trying to do with language learning, like, bring that immersive experience that you would have like go into a different country and bring that into your home while also connecting with your coworkers in a different way, in like a very meaningful way, build those relationships.

Lakshmi ([07:35](#)):

Yeah. No, absolutely. And I also, like, I wanna take a step back there and I wanna actually remember the time that, you know, when I just left each India mm-hmm <affirmative> I do think it was like, you know, a peak of COVID and like, it was all virtual. Well, we were personally already a work routine mm-hmm <affirmative> that still didn't, uh, you know, stop us from feeling burnt out. Uh, there was a big issue, like with just people leaving jobs or like, you know, a lot of people just going through a lot of different things. So I completely hear it when you say about like culture and this was like a non-profit right. Mm-hmm <affirmative>, uh, if you, if you look at like for-profit jobs, if you look at jobs that were a little bit, even further detached from the ground, I can totally imagine how burnt out in, you know, just, uh, the great recognition mm-hmm <affirmative> and whatnot.

Lakshmi ([08:15](#)):

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So we've heard so much. And actually I did not know that the numbers were in billions, so that is yeah. Very surprising to know, uh, can totally see the product. And I'm also thinking that, uh, while it's amazing that this is what connect you is solving for mm-hmm <affirmative> I do think there's more aspects to this problem, right? Like for instance, even in teach India, we did automate a lot of the rules. And I think there was like a lot of fear about people losing jobs, but of course, like we always had new things to do because as a nonprofit, you are under resource, so you just make up space for more things mm-hmm <affirmative>. But I do think there is a fear of things getting automated and people losing shops in general in the market. And even that does mean adult reskilling. Like can people pick up new skills, boot camps are more popular these days. Yeah. Are you using those trends also, like, you know, um, be big in the future of education?

Princess (09:00):

Yeah. So my most recent role prior to the MBA and I'm still, um, working part-time in this role was, um, is as an economic development specialist for the island of Hawaii. So the county, so it's a, um, civil servant position and it's within the research and development department for the county. And so what we're trying to figure out is how do we prepare, how do we support educational institutions as they prepare for the future of work? And especially when you look at tourism heavy, um, communities, um, such as the island, IE, that has a lot of influx of, of tourists, they are experiencing already this, um, automation revolution, essentially in all, all aspects of the, of the sector. So one example of this is I went to a restaurant the other day, um, on the island and well, the other day being last year, <laugh> part to the NBA.

Princess (09:53):

But yes, when I went there, essentially what I saw was that my tray, like I ordered on the screen as I sat down to boot, um, and then my food, instead of it coming out from a, you know, a waitress or a waiter, it came out on this tray that was like automated. And then it's, you know, acts for our dirty plates and we put it on the, you know, the conveyor belt. And it was just like, even that job is now being, um, automated, which is great because it's convenient and it's cool. And, um, you know, there's a lot of, you know, positive aspects to that, but it's also for a lot of people worrisome because that used to be their jobs. So now we're trying to figure out how can we support, um, re-skilling and also in the case of Hawaii, trying to figure out how do we do it in a way that is still culturally relevant in the sense of even bringing back these, you know, previous traditions, the traditions that makes Hawaii truly what it is, um, you know, whether it's through the agricultural, um, practices from native Hawaiians or, you know, other industries, how can we, um, support that and, um, do it in a way that yeah, it's still technologically advanced.

Lakshmi (11:05):

No, absolutely. I think that makes so much sense because I'm also thinking like, while I spoke about automation is one transition mm-hmm <affirmative> and we spoke about like, you know, virtual work is another transition. I think the more you think about it, there is climate transition. Mm-hmm <affirmative>, uh, like what, what happens to like tourism mm-hmm <affirmative> in that context, right? Like sustainable tourism. What does, what does that mean for businesses? What does that mean for employees? Yeah. What does that mean for adult reskilling? There's just so much to be figured in this ecosystem and it's just such a complex problem and

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Princess ([11:32](#)):

Trying to figure out what's over hype and what's actually happening now, because I think there is a lot of fear, um, which is, you know, grounded in reality, but there's a lot of fear that's grounded in like sci-fi movies or like <laugh>, or just, absolutely. Yeah. So it's kind of like trying to balance those expectations and, um, yeah, just trying to re-skill as quickly as possible so that, that we can make sure that people have jobs.

Lakshmi ([11:54](#)):

No, absolutely. And I think, uh, you know, one thing is to survive and the other thing is to thrive. Exactly. Uh, so like, you know, I think in terms of being proactive, I was recently talking to like, um, our career culture, uh, in, in for FinTech mm-hmm <affirmative> Sean me. And he was saying how he's encouraging, uh, like revenue and Monso to go in and do like high school programs to encourage more girls to take up like stem mm-hmm <affirmative>. And I know there are, uh, you know, there are programs that are encouraging more women to enter, uh, blockchain. Yes. Right. So, um, in that sense, I'm thinking when we talk about sustainable tourism, when we talk about like, you know, automation mm-hmm <affirmative> do you think, um, I mean, I did ask you the question about adult reskilling and I know you're working in adult learning right now. Mm-hmm <affirmative> but do you think, um, just because you worked with the Hawaiian government, the county before, and like, you also have experience with teach for America, you you've had education with school education, so I'm just wondering how early should you go in, like, how OUS is this process?

Princess ([12:49](#)):

So, yeah, it definitely starts from primary school and I can use language learning as a quick anecdote because that's something that I'm, I'm really passionate about as you can see what connects you. Um, but yeah, so one example is the fight, um, or one example of the fight for like better primary school education resulted from the Hawaiian language and how that was banned from school instruction in, um, about 1896 after the us government illegally over through, um, the Hawaiian government and how that, that ban from, you know, the language, their culture being banned from the education system, how that impacted native Hawaiians in particular was very significant and created this colonized colonialized view of quality education in Hawaii. Um, and so activists had to really fight hard to lift the ban, prohibiting the language from being taught in schools. And they officially won that fight in 1986 about, but that struggle still persisted even in 2019, um, as recent as that for a language to be reincorporated and not that looks down upon. So it's something that is extremely important.

Lakshmi ([13:57](#)):

Yeah. Yeah, no, that makes a lot of sense. And that rings a bell. Um, as well as I think about like, you know, just the struggle that for instance in the past year is like in Singapore, in Sri Lanka, there's been a lot of struggle about TA uh, education, uh, you know, also being a part of the curriculum for people from thet mm-hmm <affirmative>. And even in India, there's a view that, you know, in Taina there's a view that English education is better. Obviously there's been a lot of activists who have been fighting against it, but there's also been a lot of tension there because students who go to like TA education, feel like class 10 or class 12, and suddenly have to adopt to like English education, college level. They've had a lot of struggle there. And even these tri India, we've had conflicts to say, are we going into classrooms and saying that we value English education and math education and like, you know, being a good employee over like training you to be like entrepreneurs. Yeah. So like in recent years, I think arts education and

entrepreneurial education has become more important. As you said at the start as, you know, how you would value excellent education. So I think that we are coming a full circle in terms of how it should be. That makes a lot of sense. And I'm, I'm really, really keen to hear more about any other trends that you've seen, like, you know, uh, at a primary school level, like, you know, what other factors are at play there that makes this struggle really hard? Um,

Princess (15:11):

Yeah. So when we look at the education system in the us, for example, there are a lot of social inequalities, um, that affects primary education. And then that gets perpetuated as that child grows up and tries to get a career. So when I reflect on my time at teach for America, for example, I was in Louisiana, new Orleans, Louisiana working on the strategy and operations role there. And something that was shocking is just how unequal the, the education system is. When you think about suspension rates, for example, um, for black students, it's three times more likely, um, black students are three times more likely to get suspended for the same disciplinary issues displayed as white students in the us. So that kind of creates, um, a, an opt out of the system, essentially, because once you get suspended often, especially then you're now it it's, there's a barrier back to the school, essentially, because now you're influenced by what's happening maybe in the streets or what's happening around you.

Princess (16:13):

And then you see that you're not being valued in a system and you feel like you're being kind of worked against, so there's that issue. And then there's also the issue of, um, you know, minority students being more likely to be placed in special education because of disciplinary disciplinary issues and teachers who don't come from the same culture as them, um, not understanding how to deal with students from a different culture. So instead they place them in special education classes, which are oftentimes under resourced. And then there's just the, the, yeah. And so one last example that I'll quickly share is, uh, redlining. And a lot of people don't associate red language for those who are not aware, redlining is a discriminatory practice in which services, so that can be financial or otherwise are essentially held withheld from a specific community. And so, um, speaking of education, the practice of redlining has a huge impact on the quality of education for certain demographics, because in this instance in the United States, um, minorities are usually the, you know, recipients of redlining, the victims essentially of redlining. And so they are put into specific neighborhoods essentially, and these neighborhoods are oftentimes active limited, and therefore the schools that they attend are active, limited and under resourced. So it has a huge impact from, you know, small primary education to the rest of their lives, essentially.

Lakshmi (17:46):

Yeah, yeah. That is, um, I, I I'm, I'm I'm, this is not the first time I'm hearing about this because I've always there when you shared about this in the government relationships club, but this has been the first year that I've heard about this. Um, and it's still shocking, uh, you know, that this exists and there is such a systemic issue at play. And, you know, um, there, there's this, uh, saying in TA, like we, we all, we all grow up thinking kind of, which means everything that you dream has to come true. And it makes you believe that, you know, oh, you just work hard and you, you know, mm-hmm, <affirmative> you reach it. And it's not, it's not, it's not that, not for everyone. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. And I think every time I hear it, that's what comes to my mind. I'm, I'm so grateful that we have these conversations.

Lakshmi (18:25):

I'm so grateful for you for sharing. Uh, but this is not the note that I want to end on, obviously mm-hmm, <affirmative> um, I do want us to end on something more positive. Uh, can you talk to us about, like, what do you see as solutions to like, you know, systemic issues like this? Um, yeah. Just from your experience, what have you seen working? What gives you hope? Right? Because you are in educational opportu, still in the domain, you still wanna continue in the domain. Mm-hmm <affirmative> so how are you not yet burnt out? What keeps you going?

Princess (18:53):

Yeah, so for me, that's why I created, um, my social enterprise, um, business U so essentially business U is a program that I started in new Orleans Louisiana, because I saw that a lot of the businesses, the successful ES in Louisiana, in new Orleans in particular, um, were not owned by, you know, African Americans, which make up 60% more than 60% of the population of new Orleans, at least at the time. Um, and so I wondered what the reasoning for, you know, this was, this is just something that just naturally happened, but after talking to different community members and different business owners, what I saw a pattern was that there was very limited resources on entrepreneurship. And so, um, I decided to create business to you as a means to teach youth about entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship as well. And so what gives me hope when it comes to reflecting on the education system and looking at these like disproportionate, um, or these, these inequalities essentially is being able to be on the ground essentially.

Princess (19:57):

Um, I've worked on the policy end of education. I've worked on, um, you know, with non-profits and things of that nature and governments, but actually being able to look at the students and see their face light up when they get something is an amazing experience. And actually being able to adjust my curriculum, I create the curriculum and being able to adjust it based off of the feedback that I'm getting from the students, because they feel comfortable talking to me about not getting something or not feeling like something is necessarily the most relevant or the most up to date when it comes to today's, um, you know, business climate, like they are so intelligent. And so having this type of, um, interaction with them is very motivating because it's like, wow, look at these leaders and look at how comfortable they are with communication. And, you know, I wish that I've had that skillset and that, um, room to have that skillset when I was younger. So, so that's what motivates me to see that they have that comfortability and they feel like they can really be leaders.

Lakshmi (20:53):

I absolutely love that. I, I love hearing about student leadership and like faces getting lit up. I mean, that is the kind of thing that, you know, you live for. It's been a while that I've taught, but I think that's the kind of thing that really kept me going as a teacher as well. And, uh, today what keeps me going is people like you, uh, people like you, uh, who are creating these solutions, right? Like, of course you can't solve for everything there's so much. And, um, like you said, even in India, again, every country has its own problems. So in India it's a little bit different. There's a rural, urban divide. And even within urban, like for instance, even within NIAS to work with each, for India, Chen, even in Chen, like we had north Madras and south Madras and, um, south Madras just attracted more funding because it was situated near the it parks.

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Lakshmi (21:36):

Okay. And so it companies used to be willing to fund more to south Madras schools because it meant their employees could come over the weekend and like spend time with the kids. Mm. But not Madras schools would not attract the same kind of funding. It would not attract the same kind of teachers mm-hmm <affirmative>. So I think, I think some of these issues that you speak about are like sort of pervasive, but some of them are very specific to context mm-hmm <affirmative> so there's just so much, and of course, no one entrepreneur can solve it all. Uh, but the hope is always going to be that, you know, you all plan these seeds here and there, and they all come together in some form. And, um, I also wanna call out like, uh, two other entrepreneurs from teach for India who really inspired me. Um, one actually is the person who I stole that kind of maple, uh, instance from basically they went on Gotham, Inia from teach for India.

Lakshmi (22:23):

They went on to create carnival, which is literally dream mm-hmm <affirmative> based on that very, uh, poetry that I mentioned, they went on to create, like they took on five schools in Carou, which is rural India, rural Tahu. And they're now leading for like over three, four years now. Um, and there's another group of, um, you know, young people from teach India who are like focusing on arts education. Uh, so Gisa leads this program called slam out loud, and she's now in Howard and she was named 30, under 30 last year. Um, and so I think just hearing people like you, like, you know, just continue to believe that there is a change that we can create and it's worth fighting for, and you are making strides every day and I'm really, really happy to yeah. Just be here and hear your journey and, oh,

Princess (23:08):

Thank you. Thank you so much for having me. This was such a fun experience and I, I love to have these engaging conversations. So thank you.

Lakshmi (23:15):

Thank you so much princess. And, uh, thank you everyone who tuned in to listen. Uh, this is the future of business podcast. And like I said, this is my last episode, but this is not the only episode we have out there. There are more episodes coming this year and we've been very happy to bring these episodes to you. Uh, if you don't already follow us on Spotify or apple podcasts or wherever you get your podcast from, please do follow us. Thank you so much for your support.