

EPISODE 817

“DB: Have I experienced headwinds? Yes, absolutely. Have I experienced unsupportive environments and unsupportive people in very challenging environments? Yes, absolutely. But I also, every step of the way had people who were supportive and encouraging and enabling.”

[INTRODUCTION]

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FT: We're talking to one of the world's most accomplished and active individuals in the world of cyber security. Dr. Diana Burley, named one of eight women to watch in IT security. Dr. Burley is a full professor of Human and Organizational Learning at George Washington University, she's an in demand speaker and prior to joining GW, Dr. Burley managed a multimillion dollar computer science education and research portfolio and she also led the Cyber Corps Program for the US National Science Foundation.

She has a terrific personal story of succeeding as a woman of color in a male dominated field and how her family and professors helped to encourage and guide her. She and I also discussed all of the steps we can take to actively protect ourselves from the ongoing cyber threats, well-known companies have had large breaches and we are also targets as we shot furiously online this month, hackers will be working nonstop to interfere. Dr. Burley has great advice on how we can stay safe.

Here we go, here's Dr. Diana Burley.

[INTERVIEW]

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FT: Dr. Diana Burley, welcome to So Money, it's such an honor to have you on the show as we round out 2018. It's a privilege to have on such an accomplished woman as yourself on So Money, welcome.

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DB: Thank you, I'm pleased to be with you.

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FT: I just finished, listeners just heard your introduction, your bio, in short, such a resume. You're a recognized cyber security expert, you're a full professor at George Washington University. Before that, you ran a multimillion dollar computer science education and research portfolio, you led the Cyber Corps Program, you've testified before congress. When you were a little girl, what were your dreams?

I mean, I wanted to be a waitress, I never thought that what I was doing now even existed. At what point did you really open up your eyes and your mind to the possibilities of getting so far in your career?

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DB: Well, I'll be honest with you. I certainly did not dream about becoming a cyber-security person, I didn't even know what that was. I think that my real goal was to be a lawyer. I wanted to argue.

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FT: Do you find yourself kind of in that situation still as in your role as a professor and a corporate leader at one point. That's still playing out.

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DB: It's all about making reasoned arguments and having evidence to back up your points and so I guess in a way, my dream has come true, it's just labeled a bit differently than I had anticipated.

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FT: Well, tell us a little bit about the current state of cyber security. You are premier expert and you lead a lot of conferences, you have a lot of discussions with others about this issue. A lot of times I feel like the everyday person is – this is not information that's necessarily privy to us. We just kind of get all the warning signs when it's too late.

Our accounts have been hacked or you know, things like that and so, what can you say to listeners about – what should we know about cyber security today, good and bad?

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DB: I think that one of the things that listeners should be aware of is the role that they play in securing their own personal data. You know, this is unlike other fields where you really leave it to the care of the professionals, right?

There is a lot of work that we as consumers, as individuals can do to protect ourselves. Things like updating our software, you know, when you did an update on your phone or you get an update on an app and you just – you're slow to do that, you really shouldn't be because often, that's what is preventing bad actors from being able to get into our systems is because somewhere, the technologist have found a vulnerability and they fixed it and they're relying on you to now update your device.

As consumers and individuals, we can play a very critical role in our own security. We update, we make sure that we use passwords that are what we call strong, not the name of your dog,

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FT: I know what a cyber secure – how would a hacker know our dog's name? I mean, I always wondered about that. Really, do they think about these things, do they look at your facebook profiles?

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DB: They really do and there is something called social engineering and that is all about getting into your head, understanding how to get you to reveal your personal data without actually having to use any technology at all. They really can. Actually, very easily and very quickly.

Find out pieces of information about you, your dog's name, your kid's name, the school that you went to, those kinds of piece of information that we don't really consider to be private, you know? It's not a big deal to tell somebody what your dog's name is but in fact, if you then use that as a password, it's pretty easy to figure that out.

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FT: What led you to specifically, this area, cyber security. You wanted to be a lawyer. Did you actually pursue law and then pivot or at what point did you see yourself –

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DB: I was derailed from removing into that law direction pretty early on. I went to school for really, the fields we call it socio-technical systems so it's that interface between technology and people. When I went to graduate school, I was very interested in understanding more about that interface. Understanding how the technology changes the way that we behave and the way that we interact with each other.

Understanding how we influence the design and use of the technology. Very early on, I realized that I had a tremendous interest in understanding those aspects of technology and so I just followed that passion and it led me to where I am today.

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FT: You're singular in your role as a woman, as a woman of color in this industry and I know you get this question often because I think it is a very obvious differentiation, you know? Let's be honest, there aren't a lot of women in a lot of areas that pertain to math and science and engineering and so forth. Why do you think that is, do you feel like you ever had any headwinds as you trail blazed essentially into this role.

Was it always very supportive in your circumstance? Do you think that there's a misnomer out there that those industries don't want women or they're not women friendly or do you think it's that women don't like these, what is it? What is going on?

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DB: You know, I think it's a combination and so, have I experienced head winds, yes, absolutely, have I experienced unsupportive environments and unsupportive people in very challenging environments, yes, absolutely. I also, every step of the way, had people who were supportive and encouraging and enabling.

I think that sometimes we get caught up in the very large sense of, "Well, maybe the masses look at me differently or are making it hard for me" and we forget that there are individuals along the way, whether they look like us or not, who are willing to help guide us and shepherd us along and so I've been very fortunate that I was always able to, in the midst of stormy environments, find people or those people perhaps found me, who were willing to help continue pushing me forward.

I was very passionate about the work and one thing that I say to people and to young women and young men of color and not. Is that, when you are passionate about the work, and you work hard toward achieving, you will always be able to keep moving forward.

It may not be in that particular organization, it may not be on the specific path that you're on but you will be able to provide opportunities for yourself and options for yourself that allow you to maneuver through the environment and continue your forward movement.

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FT: You were on the Elevate Podcast recently and you talked about how for you, you had a great professor and when you were at Carnegie Melon and you know, I think mentors and sponsorship is so important for everybody particularly women. What was it that she instilled in you?

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DB: She encouraged the work ethic. I don't want to say she instilled it in me but she encouraged it in me and I always think about her because it wasn't that she was easy. She was very tough. But I did not see her being tough on me as doing anything other than preparing me to face the tough environment that I would enter into.

I think that sometimes, we mistake toughness for, "this person doesn't like me or doesn't want me to succeed," when in reality, if you were going into a tough environment, you want to be trained in a tough environment. You want people to build you up and make sure that you were strong enough to withstand whatever comes at you because sometimes, challenges come at you and sometimes you were unsuccessful in meeting those challenges but it's not necessarily because you are not of quality or your work is not of quality.

Having her at the same time be both supportive and tough allowed me to develop that strength that said, in any environment, I won't question my ability. That's I think the key is that you have to be built up strong enough that you don't question yourself. Even in the face of very significant challenges because that's how you were able to extend those challenges and to continue to move forward and to recover from the failures that you will inevitably have.

Because we all have those. It's not the failures that define us, it's how we react and respond to those.

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FT: That's so true. That fear can really keep us from going out beyond where we're so comfortable.

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DB: Yes, absolutely. We often seek mentors who are soft on us because we mistake that for caring and preparation. I think that we have to recognize that growth is not necessarily comfortable. When you are able to recognize that you have to stretch and to have someone who pushes you but who is also there to support and help you move yourself forward.

You position yourself so that you're able to not just survive but to thrive in those – or during those uncomfortable periods because those are really the periods of growth. In a field like cyber security where we are constantly in an evolving environment and uncertain environment, the threat environment, you know, we cannot necessarily predict what type of threat is going to occur or when it's going to occur or how it's going to occur.

Knowing that you can manage in the face of uncertainty is a critical success factor for being able to continue moving forward in the field.

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FT: I'd love to transition to money, you know? You have such clarity and have accomplished so much in your professional life and I wonder if your financial life mirrors that in some way. It could totally not. Some people have said like nope, my money situation is a complete other story. I want to know what's your money story and do you feel like you've been able to carry over some of this "fortuitiveness" into your financial life?

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DB: I do. I won't say that it is as clear as my professional life certainly. But I do think that I've been able to carry some of that over and in part, because of the way that I was raised, my father was the chief financial officer for HJ Heinz growing up. He understood money and taught me about money and I was very fortunate that I had someone at home who was able to put lessons,

instill lessons in me and allow me to have some clarity and some sense about the things that I wanted to do and to be able to do financially that has allowed me to move myself into a fairly good position in that way.

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FT: On a scale of one to 10, would you give yourself 10 being great with money, one being I think, well, you know, you're not a one but just -

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DB: I cut myself in the tub four times.

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FT: Nice, I like that.

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DB: Seven or eight.

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FT: Spoken with confidence. We're approaching the holidays and our show is sponsored by Chase Slate and they're asking, they want me to ask you and I'm curious, what are some of your gift giving traditions, you know, do you have any plans around spending this time of year?

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DB: I don't have specific gift plans for sure but what I try to do each year is to set a budget early in the year as to how much I think I want to spend for the holidays and to put that money aside, I stick pretty close to that, I do go over probably a couple of hundred dollars or so, you know, not

tremendously over but I try towards the beginning at least, you know, before we get to the second half of the year.

Just have in my mind, “okay, this is what I think I want to spend, this is what I think I can do this year” and just kind of put that money off to the side so that I don’t go too much into debt. I think that my family knows that at this point. I tell people, “Hey, don’t buy me anything expensive because it will not be reciprocated.”

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FT: This is not tit for tat okay?

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DB: That’s right. Don’t be mad when you get homemade cookies.

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FT: Right. I think treats are sometimes the best thing. I love getting food and wine around the holidays. I mean, it’s not good for my waist line but I think it goes a long way because things, you get bored with but in experience of opening up a bottle of wine or sharing cookies with a friend.

I think that is a memory that you create ultimately and can go a long way. It’s priced -

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DB: Absolutely. I have found, certainly as I have gotten older, that the experiences are the things that really matter and it’s not the cost of the gift and so I really try to hold onto that.

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FT: Yes, well what has been your So Money moment? You know a time where you just felt you really hit the nail on that financially speaking.

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DB: I would say probably when I bought my first home alone. So you know probably too much information for the listeners but not like many of us, I am divorced and I had certainly purchased homes with my husband but being able to purchase a home especially living in the Washington DC region, being able to purchase, to get a mortgage and purchase the home on my own was a very significant accomplishment for me and it made me feel very good that I was managing my money properly.

That I was able to take care of not just current needs but building a profile and also being able to show my children that you can accomplish goals if you set your mind to them and you live accordingly and it means that you may not be able to buy every single new item that you see on the street but foregoing that immediate pleasure that is often very short lived can reap great benefits in the longer term and so being able to do that I think was really what would be my So Money moment.

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FT: We were learning now that divorce has actually declined recently but not for good reasons. Couples can't afford to break up, you become co-dependent financially or one person is very dependent on the other person and divorce is expensive.

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DB: It is.

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FT: So you just live in misery I guess unfortunately.

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DB: Yes, I think that that's certainly the case for a lot of people and so it is something that you have to think about and certainly something that you have to think about when you are young and beginning to just consider what the next ten years or so of your life might look like. We often only think about one aspect, right? We only think about love or we only think about what we want to do together and you certainly don't want to go into anything with the end in mind.

But you just want to keep in mind what your goals are professionally, personally, financially, always keep those goals at the forefront of your mind and use them to make decisions because you don't think that that \$7 coffee from Starbucks really makes a difference but it really does when you start to think about what your longer term financial goals are and what you can do if you didn't buy those drinks or if you bought those but cooked at home.

Or whatever the tradeoffs are that you think are important in your life, it is just important to think about those tradeoffs.

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FT: That better be one good seven dollar coffee that's all I'm saying. \$7? What Starbucks are you going to? I guess that is like a venti-venti, I don't know.

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DB: You know my daughter is in college and she came home and she was concerned because there was no juice bars and the juice bars that she had been going to were \$13 a cup and I thought, "I don't know what kind of juice you're drinking but we don't do that here."

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FT: Yeah I'll peel an orange for you and I'll just up a lemon and orange.

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DB: I'll squeeze it for you.

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FT: Yeah, let's make some lemonade. Let's make some old fashioned lemonade. Dr. Burley, thank you so much for coming on the show. It's been such a pleasure to learn from you and thank you for sharing all your insights with us. We are going to do our best to protect our own financial information. I was just on the Today's Show talking about that as this time of year.

We're doing a lot of shopping online and you know, the hackers, the bad actors are running rampant at this time of year but there are some best practices and we thank you for the advice.

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DB: Thank you so much. It's been a pleasure.

[END]