

EPISODE 24

[0:00:00.9] NA: Welcome back to La Vie en Code. A podcast dedicated to the self-educated web developer. I'm your host, Nicole Archambault.

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:11.2] NA: In the last episode, I introduced you all to my special guest Kim Crayton who is a powerhouse in so many ways. Kim is a good friend and a mentor of mine and she's also an advocate for diversity, inclusion and safe spaces in tech. To take her business to the next level, she's pursuing a Doctor's of Business Administration in Technology Entrepreneurship.

Now, she has years of working with learners of all ages, skill levels and abilities. While the work that she's focused on historically has been kind of zoomed in on diversity and inclusion, Kim and I also talked about how she pivoted somewhat to pull business into the picture, to better leverage her own strengths and help other businesses meet their maximum potential as a global force.

Kim helped us to understand why business plays such an enormous role in achieving both diversity and inclusion in tech and she even backed us up a bunch of times to make sure that we all understand those definitions of these very nuanced terms and issues.

In this episode, we'll continue that discussion with some more of Kim's great examples of what the tech industry can look like with and without the help of people like her. If you haven't listened yet to episode 23, I recommend you backup and check out the first part of our conversation before moving on to this one.

Kim explains and defines a lot of things that will help you to understand what exactly she's talking about in this half. Okay, let's jump right in

[INTERVIEW]

[0:02:05.8] NA: We've identified the problems so far. We've seen that this really is a business issue, it's a community issue as well, it's something that new web developers need to be aware of because they could join a toxic company, a toxic community that will affect their thinking and the products that they create and also, the way that they learn to factor things like their code because even code which is designed for human beings and not machines, needs to take a lot of different factors in a consideration.

Now that we're shifting from identifying that problem into offering a solution which is approaching this from an economic standpoint which I'm going to be completely honest, it makes so much sense and yet it makes me very sad. Because it means that our problem wasn't a great enough problem to begin with in a lot of cases

You know, where it had to be approached from an economic standpoint but also there's a part of me that says, that's there whether or not they decide to do the right thing. You can decide to do the right thing as a company and you can also really make moves to build your company around this.

You can start from the ground up. I know I was listening to – you mentioned your podcast as well which I wanted to touch on. I'm so sad also to hear that that's going to be discontinued but I understand fully why.

Kim, you have a great episode on there that you directed to me to where you walk a new startup founder through, I think his name is Andrew, and you walked him through the process of looking at diversity and inclusion as an issue and addressing this from an economic standpoint from the ground up.

Can you tell me how that was – that experience of working with somebody from the beginning was different from what you know who is uncomfortable with where they might be headed versus where it's being more reactionary to a problem.

What did they gain out of addressing that early on versus addressing it later on?

[0:04:21.9] KC: Okay, before I get to that, I want to bring up and you talk about code is human and then I'll talk about that.

[0:04:30.2] NA: Absolutely.

[0:04:31.9] KC: I, again, I'm going to shift and disagree with you on a little bit here when it's about – when we're talking about humans make code. We're quickly moving to where code makes code. I'm talking about AI and machine learning and so if we don't improve our issues with inclusion and diversity, biases, conscious or unconscious will quickly and there, we'll see it now will be encoded into these programs.

Just as you and I have a conversation and somebody who is biased against either black women or let's say native American woman because that's what we are. They can pick up this podcast and learn something and like, that's an interesting point. You cannot reason with a computer.

Once a computer is encoded with conscious or unconscious bias and that computer is designed to replicate itself and to learn and to build our net, how do you get that out of the code? That's a huge question that for me, is the holy grail of questions I'm answering, I'm asking and trying to get answers to right now. Specifically about tech. And why is this to me is important on a business level.

Because, these machines, again, we like our lives to be easy, but let's say there's someone who is coding, who believe that all ducks are superior to human and they figure out a way to code that and if there is a duck who interacts with this computer, they get preferential treatment before humans.

Then we encode that machine, this is a thing with Nicolas, I'm standing because I don't want to get political. The first thing that popped in my mind were very political topics and I don't want to go down that road. I'm talking about duck evolution.

That machine is built to replicate itself and I'm going to give you an example in just a second. So that if you're not a duck, you don't get the full benefit of this machine. Well, the chances of a duck interacting with the computer are pretty slim by duck evolution.

That means that no human who interacts with this machine will ever get the full benefit of what this program was designed to do. That was a theoretical thing. Let me give you to concrete of that. Facebook had an AI project that it started and the overreaching, just a very surface explanation of it is, this is why if you've seen the conversations between Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg going back and forth, this is what this is coming from because Elon Musk is saying, Mark Zuckerberg really doesn't understand the complexities of the algorithms that create this stuff.

He shouldn't be careful as he's doing it. They created a program that was designed to create other programs that it could talk to because, now, we can say this is an inclusion in diversity issue but because you can't plan for every eventuality, they did not specify how this computer was to communicate, what it did was create other programs in a language that humans couldn't understand.

These computers were talking, communicating, not talking, communicating back and forth but the humans who created these programs could not understand the language. So, they shut it down. Now, you can believe, Elon Musk or some of the larger partners of AI communities saying they shut it down because they were frightened by it. Because this was an unintended, because this is an aha, this is it. This is one of the reasons that inclusion and diversities are so important because there's usually unintended consequences that happen when you have it, thought about it with diversity.

These are the things that this is an unintended consequence. Or you can believe Facebook's reason is they shut it down because they're shifting focus and this is no longer – this project was not a priority. Either way, a program will create it, they created other programs that humans couldn't understand. That's frightening for a lot of people.

I don't want to address that because that's huge to me, that's a great reason why to me, I'm working on the – this leads into the business end, why I'm focusing on business. Inclusion and diversity efforts will fail and continue to fail and are failing now because, these changes have to come from the top organizational change has to come from organizational leaders, you can

have as many people, as many other levels working their butts off, campaigning, being advocates, being allies, being champions, you can put whatever name you want on it.

But if organizational leaders are not willing to make a commitment to inclusion and diversity, which includes providing resources, making it clear to all stake holders that this is a change you're going into, this is the direction we're going into, it's going to be uncomfortable but either you're with us or you're not. These things are continued to fail.

So, the reason why I like working with new or young companies when they're thinking about these things because there are usually already in the iterative process. I said before that your business and your product is not – I mean, your product or service is not a business. As you're iterating your product or service, a lot of people are using the agile method. An iterative process where every two weeks, they're putting something out there, getting customer feedback, learning from that and being on their next cycle, they're using that.

Why not use that information to also inform your culture? How you will interact with your employees, what would be the things that you would hire for? What kind of clients do you want? What kind of customers do you want? How do you want your customers to interact with your business? Putting words about – like vision and mission and purpose statement on a website are just adjectives. Adjectives cannot be measured, you cannot operationalize or take action on an adjective. They need to be concrete and so it's easier, it's hard work but it's easier to do at an early stage of your business because you're already in the iterative process.

All you're doing is adding a different cycle, a new cycle to it so as you get information back from the product or service, you ask additional questions, not just about the part of the service, you can ask your customers, how do you feel about the relationship you have with the ordering process?

If they work with somebody to support, what was that relationship like? How does the value, if we value, if we're trying to keep something and we valued our customers learning, we can do a latent skill with this upscale that you know, one through 10, did this product help you learn something? If it did, what? That kind of thing, because know that the things, that are going back to knowledge. If you just taken that information and doing nothing with it, it's just information.

You need to be able to use it, turn that information into knowledge so that you can write processes for your organization, you should not be hiring people without understanding what your core values are and figuring out how you will measure those core values.

How, when an applicant comes to you, it does not matter gender, race, whatever, if they meet these things and if they don't meet these things. Because this is the values that we have a measurement for. Because measurements are concrete, did not subject it, adjectives are subjective. When you're talking about a company that's been around forever and they haven't looked at these things, it just takes longer because now you have just a long leap hill, that is a whole lot of historical stuff that someone like myself needs to go in and look at and figure out, what did you put in place at the beginning or did not put in place at the beginning or in the middle that caused this.

Does this policy you wrote 10 years ago still apply to how you're doing business now? If not, why are you still using it, if it does tend to be changed, those are things, that's supposed to totally different conversation and a more complex conversation and a more expensive conversation and that, the pushback I'm getting and why I'm choosing to no longer exclusively focus on inclusion and diversity and focus on helping businesses become better.

Because, I believe that companies that are able to do this are going to be able to compete better with companies that don't. I'm focusing on really helping a global community with gaining these fields and knowledge because at a company in, maybe in Columbia, is able to opportune, their values and they know how – what the relationship they have with their customers on a measurable level and not just about how many units or how much that cost, it's so much more than that.

Then they will be pushing the envelope for change because they, when now be competing with companies that don't have these things and they will be more innovative because they're using this information as knowledge and they're measuring it and they are – will be able to differentiate themselves and not have to differentiate themselves on dollar.

Because if you differentiating yourself only on money, it goes to the part you can charge to the left. Whose services are cheapest? Walmart did not does not have a great customer experience

but because they're cheap, people keep going to them and that's why I love that Amazon is now competing with them with whole foods.

Amazon does not need to make money with whole foods for them to compete with Walmart on customer service and providing better quality foods and services to people, that is thinking innovatively, that is differentiating yourself, that can only happen if you have a team of people who is thinking very hard on this term, but out of the box.

[0:15:35.0] NA: We've seen how the companies can now make this change to – I see now especially; I've been learning every step of the way during this conversation. That it is really a business approach that has diversity and inclusion as part of its components.

Are there other components of this business approach outside of diversity and inclusion that you focus on in your work, just to kind of give a little bit more of a big picture?

[0:16:06.6] KC: Yes. This is why I don't want to be thought of as an inclusion and diversity person. I have three tenants or things that I focus on, one is, I call scale, that's providing process management help. Process management is, how do you operationalize certain things. If your process is, part of your business is customer intake, what does that process look like, what are the different pieces, what are the different parts of information that's your staff, your employees need to have to make sure that your customers when they're in the intake process will receive it a consistent quality.

The next is evolve. This is about the – a lot to do with inclusion and diversity because it's about organizational culture, how can you use organizational culture for competitive advantage? The third thing is recovery, although we don't want to think about crisis, when we plan for them in ahead of time, we have better experiences. We know what to do when something happens.

The pivot that I'm making that I haven't spoke about and this will sum all this up for you in understanding why I think this is so important. What I'll be focusing on now is I call it, 'Biz Ed for All.' Business education for all.

What I want to do is to provide quality business school education for global business community. Right now, I wouldn't have learned all these things had I not gone to business school, as I said, it was a bunch of information out there, I wasn't learning what I needed to. But only because I now understand the business behind the product of service and that a part of the service is not a business, am I able to now communicate and as you said, educate you in this conversation.

It's only because I learned, I practiced, I focused. This is what's missing from most startup incubators or accelerator programs or everything else. This is what most business owners, entrepreneurs, founders are missing. We focus so much on marketing, customer acquisition, hitting capitals, VC, all these other things but those things are not a business.

If you don't have the processes in place, you cannot scale your business and this, historically, has been the domain of the privileged. You have Harvard business school, you have NYC business school, you have Stanford business school, even the fact that I am in business school, it's costing me a lot of money to get this education.

What I want to do is democratize business school education. I'm still trying to figure that out. I'll be starting with the podcast and just providing just your every particularly, people from under represented and marginalized communities, because I actually started a scholarship with them for some business owners in Columbia where I've given them 20 hours of my time to help them through their process if you talk about, that I worked with and enter about. It's going to be really specific where I'm looking at the really specific parts of their business. That was kind of generic because I didn't get to see anything about Andrew's business but this is going to be very specific where I'm helping them get started and that's where we need to go, because again, as you can see, because of what I've been able to explain, it's going to be businesses that have inclusion and diversity as a part of everything else that helps them become a business that is going to really use a needle on this issues and so that is why I want to focus and I want to focus on business owners and potentially educate business owners, who are members and under representative the margin lies maybe because today, we are able to compete with your companies that are all white male [inaudible], they're going to kick butts.

[0:20:20.0] NA: And I appreciate you flushing out the rest of your approach because this is your business and I completely understand the fact when you and I had first talked, I knew coming into the conversation that diversity and inclusion even as a little bit of your background, a part of it was not an area that you probably even wanted to go into and most people of color really don't, I mean we end up there and I think a lot of folks are thinking, "Oh Kim", or anybody out there that's is talking about diversity and inclusion so openly that must be their career choice, that must be their area of focus. No, people of color wanted to do something else and we found that diversity and inclusion had to be a part of our conversation because we were educating people about it anyway but we are doing it for free in a lot of cases and spending our emotional labor and so if you start to build a business out of it I think there is a funny look that crosses people's face.

But they understand there is a need for it but it's like I know that that wasn't your first choice and that isn't most people's first choice but it's important and actually packaging it as part of an approach to businesses, an economic approach, an approach that will build their business into something that will stand the test of time as opposed to something that's just existing with some adjectives, as you said, that really don't convey the company's true practices and you know the practice in what they are saying that they practice really have to be on the same page as well.

I'm also thinking from a standpoint of a new web developer, how do we know how to identify or how can we identify a supportive, inclusive, stable, what you would consider a good company that has come out or a properly built up or rehabilitated company even, they come in a lot of different – a good company can come in a lot of different forms in terms of how they have handled a lot of these issues previously, how can we identify a company or a community that is going to be a non-toxic environment and to identify that they are really doing the right thing?

[0:22:44.0] KC: The first thing I tell people all the time do not allow this industry to define your value. Take time and define your value and then you go and find organizations that match your value. Again, your value cannot be adjective. You need to be able to, life is not miserable. What does nice mean? Anybody has a different definition of nice so you need to be able to define those things to yourself and when you are having an interview, ask those questions.

So if someone says nice, the thing you can do is you need examples of what you mean by nice and being able to measure that against what you are looking for. That is the biggest mistake new developers have because they are so excited to get jobs and then two months later, in some parts it might be two months, two weeks into it they are feeling miserable. They're like, "Oh my god I made a mistake," also be okay with the fact that you can leave.

No one needs to stay in a toxic environment and in this industry thankfully it's not frowned upon to leave that job. If you find yourself in a job and what they told you is not true or you're realizing, "Hey this is not where I need to be," because you'll never know that thing until you get into it. So you don't know what you don't like until you have to get rid of it. It's okay to walk away. I have to give myself permission to walk away from my podcast and focus in on inclusion and diversity.

Because as you and I talked about before, I have a philosophy that I try to live by. My motto is "I don't want to be right, I want to be happy," and doing this exclusively to inclusion and diversity would not have given me either. I wasn't right and I wasn't happy. I had to make hard decisions and decide, although and you know I did not want to do this, as a black person, as a black female who grew up in the South I've been dealing with this all my life so no, I didn't want to do this.

But I did it because it needs to be done. I have to admit, my ego was stroked because people kept asking me and that's how I got sucked in and you'll find that that is what you are going to do. Somebody is going to like this, "Oh you're doing this? You're new," blah-blah-blah. Be nice but know what your boundaries are, know what your values are, measure the values so that you can say, "Yeah? I'm glad you appreciate my skill over here but A, B and C," and if they don't meet A, B and C then thank you but no.

[0:25:11.0] NA: I could see how a lot of people are coming in here would want to assimilate. Anybody I think joining a new community, a new group, a new environment is going to want to assimilate to a huge part. We're socialized to it, it's hardwired in us even because we want to find our people. We want to be included and it can be dangerous. You know when you don't have that compass and I realized also that you need to apply that same morality. Your own individual morality. Allow yourself the opportunity to grow and to change that as you learn more

but if you wouldn't do something outside of tech, why would you do it inside of tech for your first job? If you wouldn't behave a certain way in public, why would you behave a certain way in a community forum? It is a little bit puzzling to me why sometimes those values do change between tech and outside of tech or that people don't just consider their values at all.

They're very important to me and I know to you as well. We are conscientious of how we approach our interactions with other people and yet vocal about the problems that we face and we also offer solutions for those problems. That's not everybody though and I think a lot of folks probably encounter these issues in work place and their first job in a community for open source development and they don't even recognize that they are those problems at first.

They just assimilate, so I really appreciate your attention given to just what the landscape of these industry can look like because we don't know sometimes comparatively and young developers especially too, where they are especially green, you know coming out of school maybe even high school, people are starting younger and younger with self-education. So we don't think about businesses. We don't think about businesses past the point that they'll offer you a paycheck and that you have to fit in with your new job.

They even use the term 'culture fit' which I hate. I am a culture add if I am going to be somewhere. I need to be appreciated as the person that I am with my own opinions, my own perspective and that's what I would offer as advice to any of the listeners really that are from under represented and marginalized communities. We have to be able to speak up no matter where we are and it has to be with conviction and it often takes courage.

As Kim said, these are very uncomfortable issues for a lot of us to face but I encourage new developers and career changers of all walks to embrace that discomfort and learn how to become comfortable with the discomfort because it means that you are being given an opportunity to do something differently than you have always done it and that is a scary thing but doing something differently, tech offers us a lot of opportunities every day to do things differently.

Some of them are great ideas, some of them aren't and I think we have seen that diversity and inclusion in all cases has been the great thing to do. It has been the right thing to do and it

covers right. Do you want to be right, do you want to be happy? We can all be happy and right by following a lot of the information that Kim's talked about and Kim, I want to thank you again for taking the time to educate us because I know that this is emotionally exhausting.

I know that in a lot of cases, you're not getting paid for the work that you do and that's a problem. You know it is the recognition, it's becoming known in a niche but for what you know exactly and how do you make your life out of that? I understand it all too well as somebody who is largely still not reaping benefits besides just being happy doing what I am doing and spreading knowledge to people and you are also a teacher as I understand.

So that's, being an educator in this industry offers us some really interesting opportunities, what are you up to next and where can find your work? Where can we hear your words, where can we see Kim from this point forward?

[0:29:36.2] KC: Well Kim is always on Twitter. So my Twitter handle is @kimcrayton1 and that's where you can find any information that I'll be bringing about the 'Biz Ed For All'. I hope to have that podcast started in January because actually I want it to be a multilingual. So I am going to start bilingual with Spanish and I want to set an example of where. If I am talking about I want to democratize business school education for all, then just having start in English is not democratizing it.

So I am in the process of figuring out how to create a bilingual product or process when I am not bilingual. So again, it's stepping outside of my comfort zone, getting very uncomfortable and doing things that will benefit the community. So that's one of the things that I'm working on. So if you really – and I have a website, kimcrayton.com but if you really want to know where I am, same thing is on Twitter @kimcrayton1. I mean on Instagram.

But if you really want to keep up with me and know what I am thinking and what's going on, you can follow me on Twitter and you'll be up to date and know when things will hit. That's how people found out about the scholarship that I am offering. I just put things on Twitter, I also blog on Medium under Kim Crayton but again I just post it to Twitter. So LinkedIn but also on Twitter. Also I want to end with this and usually when I am doing my presentation talks, I get really forceful about this.

I am just going to be honest. If you are not on Twitter, you need to be. Twitter is where you need to be at and so what I usually do is while I'm speaking, have people take out their phones, download the app and make me their first tweet because so much of tech happens on Twitter and if you are not engaged and you don't have to tweet, you just follow people that say things that are interesting to you so that you're kept engaged. I have gotten so many opportunities, met so many great people.

Things that I never have known about had I not been on Twitter and follow somebody or whatever. Twitter is where it is. I cannot say that more and more, you do not have to engage with trolls, you don't have to do any of that, twitter for me is business, I don't do any personal tweeting on there.

If it's something personal, business related, personal then nothing about my life. You can be very obscure that way, you don't have to be on there sharing your – it's not Facebook but you need to be on Twitter, I mean, I just can't say that enough.

[0:32:35.2] NA: Yup. A thousand percent agree, I actually wrote a medium article myself on the importance of leveraging Twitter for your web development career when especially as a career changer, it just allows you to get in front of people and to –

[0:32:54.1] KC: I'm sorry.

[0:32:54.5] NA: Go ahead, that's okay, go ahead.

[0:32:56.9] KC: When you said the advice for newbies. If you are about to interview with a company, you need to go find some people who maybe on LinkedIn and see who works there, go on their twitter page and see what kind of stuff they're tweeting about. That tells you the culture.

[0:33:17.4] NA: That's really good advice. There is no quicker way to find out if somebody's – you know depending on the company, they might be in the person, they might be a lot more

careful about what they say about the company directly but you can certainly tell a lot about their mood, about their perspectives, what they've learned from where they are. Yes.

You know, new web developers should be aware of that.

[0:33:38.5] KC: Yeah, go to LinkedIn and see what people work there, or go to their twitter page and see, not the company because you have to have official stuff for the company but look at their twitter page, the individual people in the twitter page and see what they're talking about in their everyday life because as you said, you are not a culture fit, you're a culture add and so are they. What are they adding to their culture, you can't tell me a racist lead, a racist behavior at the door when they get to work.

[0:34:07.6] NA: Kim, thank you again so much for coming on the podcast. I know I keep thinking to myself, "There's another topic that I could totally go into," but if nothing else, I want to have you on the podcast again so that we can talk some more about the work that you'll be doing as you face – you've had an opportunity to face more challenges. You can tell us how you overcome them, your perspective is invaluable but mostly because you're willing to give it. It's a lot of work for people to give their perspectives especially marginalized groups. I can say that personally, it is a lot of work but we're willing to do it and we hope that people will listen and read and watch.

[0:34:47.5] KC: Yeah, I'll be blogging about that this expense, so definitely, yeah.

[0:34:52.3] NA: I hope that you do and let's just keep in touch.

[0:34:55.1] KC: Thank you so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:35:00.3] NA: Isn't Kim amazing? I really hope that you absorbed some new information as a result of this discussion with Kim and I today as I definitely did. I am more than happy to be corrected, backed up, whatever by somebody who really knows their stuff and Kim definitely does.

I just knew that she will be a great guest for the show for talking about this issue in particular because she's so easy to learn from and she provides some great, really unifying examples of issues that can just seem very subjective and very abstract at times.

As Kim and I both acknowledge too, we know that these are not easy topics to discuss. Just know that you're not alone in feeling uncomfortable and the fact that you're here and listening and learning makes all the difference in the world to us. Now, go out there and share some of what you learned today with another person in the industry.

They probably don't think of diversity and inclusion in terms of business and economics. You know, something that can make or break a business that you or friends of yours maybe working for or even starting yourselves.

For more really helpful information, check out Kim's work at kimcrayton.com. Until next time my friends, Peace, love and code.

[END]