



For Cloud Professionals, part of the On Cloud Podcast

David Linthicum, Managing Director, Chief Cloud Strategy Officer, Deloitte Consulting LLP

Title: Increasing cloud diversity: empowering female leadership in the cloud space

Description: The cloud space is expanding at a torrid pace, and the need for talent to support that growth is critical. However, there's a gap in the talent pool at many companies: women are underrepresented, both in technical and management positions. This underrepresentation often results in hobbled growth and stymied innovation. In this episode of the podcast, David Linthicum and guest, RightSciences CEO Sarah Blankinship discuss how companies can hire, retain, and develop more female cloud leaders and how those leaders can help businesses grow and innovate for a more impactful future.

Duration: 00:19:30

Operator:

This podcast is produced by Deloitte. The views and opinions expressed by podcast speakers and guests are solely their own and do not reflect the opinions of Deloitte. This podcast provides general information only and is not intended to constitute advice or services of any kind. For additional information about Deloitte, go to [Deloitte.com/about](https://www.deloitte.com/about). Welcome to On Cloud, the podcast for cloud professionals, where we break down the state of cloud computing today and how you can unleash the power of cloud for your enterprise. Now here is your host David Linthicum.

David Linthicum:

Hey, welcome back to the podcast, your one place to find out how to make cloud computing work for your enterprise. This is an objective discussion of industry thought leaders who provide their own unique perspective around the pragmatic use of cloud-based technology. Today on the show, we have Sarah Blankinship. Longtime technical leader and entrepreneur, Sarah's the founder and CEO of RightSciences, a US biotech firm that engineers plant-based wellness products for consumers. And today we're going to learn about RightSciences and hear about the Women in Cloud Summit that just took place in January in Washington State. So, welcome, Sarah. How are you doing?

Sarah Blankinship:

Thank you so much for having me. Coming at you from sunny Seattle today. Doing great.

David Linthicum:

Actually, we're having 60-degree weather here in DC area, so I'm not that jealous of you guys. So, what do you do during your day? That's something I'm always interested in hearing. You wake up in the morning, go to work. You know, what's a typical day like for you?

Sarah Blankinship:

Right. So, RightSciences is a modern-day life sciences company, and we create wellness solutions. And what that means in my case is I create a wellness sticker. So, my day consists of potentially going to the lab to watch our production, to make sure everything's being quality controlled and we're on track. Or it might be meeting with customers, partners or possible collaborators in our quest to patch the planet.

David Linthicum:

Nice. So, why does RightSciences exist? What's your vision for the company? Why did you start it?

Sarah Blankinship:

Yeah, great question. So, I spent a couple decades in tech, as you referenced. A bunch of years at Microsoft in their security and cybersecurity divisions primarily. And then I went down to Zynga down in the Bay area, and one of the things I love to do is help companies make better decisions with data. And I was happily doing that in tech when my mom had a stroke. And really, I started RightSciences because I needed to find my mom a clean, trusted, tested solution to help her solve her problem. And really, then I turned that product into a set of products, a licensing component, and a set of wellness data that we use to understand what we're going to work on for our consumer set next.

David Linthicum:

So, what are the examples of the products that you make?

Sarah Blankinship:

So, our flagship product is a wellness sticker, and we make a transdermal patch called the SIVApach, S-I-V-A patch. And – but really what we are is able to make any plant into a transdermal patch. Any plant or essential oil that will go through your skin layer can go into a transdermal patch. So, really, what we're thinking about are the questions why. Why haven't we been taking more of what we need for our daily wellness regimens through our skin layer or through some other ways than we traditionally have? So, we're just looking to disrupt with some of our products and technologies as we look to innovating and wellness in the future.

David Linthicum:

Let's talk about Women in the Cloud. Not physically in the cloud, but Women in the Cloud Summit 2020 which just took place. Where did it take place, by the way?

Sarah Blankinship:

Well, it was at the Microsoft Redmond campus here in the Pacific Northwest. And Women in Cloud is such a unique platform. It's really a set of public-private partnerships that are aimed at bringing more women and businesses into economic opportunity that is the cloud. So, you're familiar with the statistics, you know, by any measure, the economic opportunity in the cloud is expected to be somewhere in the trillions of dollars in the next five years. And one of the challenges that any company has is finding access to those opportunities. And if you follow the statistics on women and funding, women-founded companies achieve about three percent of the funding. And those statistics are also true in the economic access to cloud opportunities. So, Women in Cloud was started to directly provide more women-founded and led companies to get enterprise procurement contracts. Yeah, so we need funding. We also need contracts at scale. So, that's what this platform was built to do.

David Linthicum:

So, what can organizations do to promote women in obtaining their leverage in cloud skills to get into the marketplace or perhaps, you know, spread out more in the marketplace, expand their position?

Sarah Blankinship:

Yeah, that's a great question. So, I think companies now are really starting to look at their business filters and how they're engaging with the broader community. So, think about the business filters you're using to ensure you're leveraging your platform for equity. So, are you making efforts to highlight cloud companies with diverse founding teams or with diverse boards? Some companies are not IPOing any non-diverse teams anymore. Or, if you're funding companies, are you funding diverse cap tables? For example, our cap table is primarily women and people of color. We want to grow teams and technologies that reflect the world that we live in, so we're really looking to tap and engage partners that look like the diversity of the world. So, how I would encourage you to think about it is what have we always been doing the same way, and how can we be doing it differently that might help folks that haven't had the traditional access to economic opportunities, to a platform, to a way to accelerate their product or technology into a different set of opportunities? So, I think we all need to start asking ourselves why and then innovate from there.

David Linthicum:

Yeah, I think the "why" thing is what people haven't figured out. I think everybody knows what they want the end state to be. They want it to be equality and they want it to be a balance of including everybody into every opportunity out there. It's just the ability to get to that state where everybody has a difference of opinion.

Let me change directions. If I went to Women in Cloud Summit and I was talking to the women there, what would they tell me that's their biggest impediment to being successful in the market, and how can the industry in general overcome it?

Sarah Blankinship:

Great question. So, you'll find thousands of people working for the greater good. So, I think people are trying to figure out how can they do well and do good, and that's a balance we're all looking for. They're also looking for champions. We want actual champions that are enterprise leaders. You know, my

champion at Microsoft that the accelerator matched me up with is not necessarily a woman. I'm not looking for the best female champion; I'm looking for the best champion. So, I think we specifically need champions, and we need companies and leaders to start providing metrics or start suggesting metrics that companies can polarize around so that we can then see if we're on progress towards plan.

David Linthicum:

Yeah. We just started something that was interesting. It's a program, and what it is, is basically allowing people to reenter the workforce after many years away. And so, say a woman or a man makes the choice to take care of their kids and become more involved with their community and, you know, all the value that comes in with that. And then 20 years in, the kids are gone, and now he or she wants to get back into the workforce and make, in essence, make the best way that they can and kind of reinvent their career, restart their career, so to speak. And, this provides the ability for them to do that, gives them the training that they need, you know, whether it's cloud training or whatever technology is going to be important at the time, and then provides them employment or ways in which you can, in essence, move into the business and, in essence, restart your career. Do you think there's not enough of that going on? If someone's coming back to the workforce, they haven't been working for 20 years, they may not be considered for the jobs and they may be absolutely more talented than the people who were hired. So is this a step in the right direction or what other kind of programs can we offer?

Sarah Blankinship:

Oh, absolutely. So, I think you're seeing folks in the space like Cindy Gallup, who's happily counting down her year until she turns 60 this year on social media. Vicki Saunders of SheEO changing systems. Karen Kahn, iFundWomen. Sally Kracek. All of these folks are providing access to not just women, but older folks, like you said, that are a huge untapped demographic and resource that we will need to be successful as we look into the next couple decades of work here. Yeah, I think we need to make more effort to integrate experts that maybe have been out of play for a bit and understand that if it hasn't been done here, it hasn't been done, is probably not the mentality that's going to win moving forward.

David Linthicum:

So, what about the thought leadership aspect of cloud computing or any technology? I noticed that at the conference they're promoting women as thought leaders in the space, and that seemed to be something incredibly positive. There's a lot to learn out there doing it, probably not enough. How can they take the first steps in becoming a thought leader in the space?

Sarah Blankinship:

Right, that's a great question. Well, probably the first step is believing you can be, and I think for a lot of us, we haven't seen a lot of thought leaders that maybe look like ourselves. And I know for my company and for RightSciences, we're a category creator. We're pioneering in different technologies and form factors and ways to solve the traditional problem set that hadn't been seen before. So, I think we're going to have to be really innovative with how we think about the systems that we're creating that are employing people, or also the value that we're assigning to that work as well.

David Linthicum:

Yeah, I'm looking at the thought leaders you had there, these are some of the bigger names in the business. So, how can people get involved if they want to participate in these conferences and become a speaker, an attendee, to gain a benefit from them? So, what were the steps that you would tell them?

Sarah Blankinship:

Right, right. Well, I mean, keep in mind this started small. This started with a group of women, half a dozen women, and now it's an accelerator, it's an online community, and it's an annual summit, you know, that's going beyond Seattle into Chicago, New York, India, Canada in terms of the accelerator. So, the accelerator itself will have global reach here as of 2020, so I would encourage any company that even thinks they're a B2B company to apply to the accelerator. There's coaching, there's an online community, there are so many opportunities to be involved that are beyond speaking and are just as powerful. There's mentorship, there are opportunities to place a product or a service into this network. So, basically, you know, community@womenincloud.com, hit that e-mail if you want to ask questions about that. And just join in.

David Linthicum:

So, what about other women's groups that are getting traction right now. Are you guys working together or are they just two separate organizations doing different things, addressing a different part of the market?

Sarah Blankinship:

Well, that's the beautiful thing about these groups is, there's such a huge ecosystem nobody really has to compete. So, the Girls who Code are hitting a slightly different demographic than the Women in Cloud. The Women in Cloud are aimed at helping companies attract a million dollars of economic opportunity in their first year, and that's by unlocking procurement contracts. And Girls who Code are creating that vehicle that engages a demographic into this sector early on in a way that we haven't seen before. And we're seeing ways companies that are gamifying how you learn to code and new systems that are helping entrepreneurial thought be supportive and flourish in the teens and tweens, so that we can be building our future leaders now. So, you know, again, there are a ton of different programs that are really serving impactful, interesting, different and powerful parts of this population that need attention.

David Linthicum:

So, what are the big topics that were being talked about at this year's summit?

Sarah Blankinship:

Well, the new cohort of talent in the accelerator class was a big draw. There was also a pitch competition. Mary Heather Lines and her company, a SaaS company, won that. And also it was really – it was less about specific topics and more about the number of connections. So, I probably made 30 or 40 connections at this conference in that one day that are potential procurement deals. That's what we're looking for. We're looking for ways to actively engage the ROI to our bottom line. So, this, in terms of ROI density, is a hugely valuable conference if you're looking to grow any sort of cloud vehicle.

David Linthicum:

So, do you think it's a matter of getting women in more leadership positions and breaking the glass ceiling, so to speak, which will allow women to be brought in underneath them Do you think it's a matter of putting women on boards of directors, CEOs, CROs, things like that?

Sarah Blankinship:

Yes, I definitely think we're going to need to see women in a material and impactful way in all of those spaces. You know, we need them as VCs, we need them as LPs, we need them as folks that are on the board, and more than one. And we need to create some metrics to help create that equity that we're not driving toward ourselves. So, I think we need to create all of these paths and then also keep in mind there's that missing rung. Women generally don't get promoted into that first level of management, so there aren't that level of opportunities. So, looking for where you can be supporting folks that are going to be valuable in terms of your demographic, that haven't been in the workforce. You know, we're just going to get creative with how we motivate and reward our workforces moving forward.

David Linthicum:

So, during the next Women in Cloud conference, what do you think we're going to be talking about?

Sarah Blankinship:

Well, I think we're going to be seeing more success stories. There's more economic opportunities, there's more hands being held down for us to grab onto and come up and be aware of more opportunity. So, I think we're seeing the proliferation of good, and we're seeing that impact different corporations and impact participation. You know, if every big cloud company is participating except for one, it's like that shame of the peer pressure makes everybody behave better, right. So, the bigger this movement gets, and that's providing access to folks who haven't had it before, in cloud and other business opportunities, the better off we'll all be.

David Linthicum:

Yeah, I think so too. Ultimately the talent's everywhere and you have to be able to expand the talent, find the talent, and also the ability to kind of get around certain areas and groups that probably haven't been utilized as much as they can, but there's other diversity efforts that are going on at other companies and governments and things like that, and so that's a step in the right direction. So, anyway, question for you. How will you use the information from the summit to better your own company, RightSciences, this year?

Sarah Blankinship:

Right, so we're going to definitely follow up on the connections that we made. So, we're looking at, you know, in wellness and life sciences, sometimes potentially a several-year sales cycle. So, now I'm potentially years ahead of where I might have been, so I'm going to use this information to connect with folks, understand where the opportunities are, and to pursue options and opportunities that I didn't know about before. And with a different set of folks than I would have known, had we not been participating in Women in Cloud. So, now that we have the online community and the accelerators that keep feeding in talented companies and groups, those companies and groups offer tools that we could use. You know, I have a sales CRM tool that's a benefit of one of the cohort members of the company. So, everybody that comes into this Women in Cloud network helps everybody else that's in the network itself. It's really a wonderful effect.

David Linthicum:

Well, where can we find more about Women in Cloud on the web and more about your company?

Sarah Blankinship:

Right, so womenincloud.com or community@womenincloud are the contact info for Women in Cloud. And then you can follow us @RightSciences on Instagram or Facebook, and info@rightsciences.

David Linthicum:

Yeah, so Sarah has a very impressive LinkedIn profile as well, so I urge you to check that out. So, anyway, if you enjoyed this podcast, make sure to like and subscribe on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. Also check out our past episodes, including On Cloud podcast hosted by my good friend, Mike Kavis, on his show, "Architecting the Cloud," and also Mike wrote a book by the same name that I urge you to check out as well. And if you'd like to learn more about Deloitte's cloud capabilities, check out www.deloittecloudpodcast.com. And if you'd like to contact me directly, you can reach me at David Linthicum, D Linthicum, L-I-N-T-H-I-C-U-M @Deloitte.com. So, until next time, best of luck in building your cloud computing projects. We'll talk again real soon. Take good care. Bye.

Operator:

Thank you for listening to On Cloud for Cloud Professionals with David Linthicum. Connect with David on Twitter and LinkedIn and visit the Deloitte On Cloud blog at www.deloitte.com/us/deloitte-on-cloud-blog. Be sure to rate and review the show on your favorite podcast app.

Visit the On Cloud library

www.deloitte.com/us/cloud-podcast

About Deloitte

The views, thoughts, and opinions expressed by speakers or guests on this podcast belong solely to them and do not necessarily reflect those of the hosts, the moderators, or Deloitte.

As used in this podcast, "Deloitte" means Deloitte Consulting LLP, a subsidiary of Deloitte LLP. Please see www.deloitte.com/us/about for a detailed description of our legal structure. Certain services may not be available to attest clients under the rules and regulations of public accounting.

This publication contains general information only and Deloitte is not, by means of this publication, rendering accounting, business, financial, investment, legal, tax, or other professional advice or services. This publication is not a substitute for such professional advice or services, nor should it be used as a basis for any decision or action that may affect your business. Before making any decision or taking any action that may affect your business, you should consult a qualified professional advisor. Deloitte shall not be responsible for any loss sustained by any person who relies on this publication.

Copyright © 2020 Deloitte Development LLC. All rights reserved.