**Motivational Mondays interview:**

**CeCe Morken – *Airing* 03.08.2021 (Part 1)**

**Music intro** [00:00:00-00:00:01]

**Max Irzhak** [00:00:02] Welcome ladies and gentlemen to a *very* *special* Motivational Mondays.

In celebration of International Women’s Day, I’m honored to be joined by the C-E-O of Headspace — one of the world’s most popular wellness apps, helping millions of people calm their mind, and take control of their stress.

It is my honor to introduce the *new* leader of Headspace and one of the most accomplished executives in the tech industry: CeCe Morken!

**Max Irzhak** [00:00:24] Let’s talk about your rise to the top.

From startups to global brands, you’ve been in the industry for over 30 years.

While you’ve had a lot of success, I’m sure it wasn’t smooth-sailing and there were many challenges along the way.

What lessons did you learn in your career that you wish you learned sooner?

**CeCe Morken** [00:00:41] One of them was leadership is about helping others to do their best work. It’s actually not about you. And I started in sales and marketing, and I learned this construct of self vs other. And shortened it to S-focus or an O-focus. And that you added more value the further on the continuum you were to “other”. And the same thing happens for leadership. It’s all about bringing out the genius in others, it’s not about you.

The second one i learned was the value of “we vs me”. And this one was a great lesson about hire an all-star team, not a team of all-stars. And I'll give an example. I did an interview just recently where the person was amazing. But as i went deeper into the conversation, they were all about “me”, meaning themselves, and that wouldn’t make us an all-star team. And i liken this to the story about geese flying in formation, and you may have heard this story. They fly in formation, when one gets tired, they go to the back and they draft off the other geese. And the other ones honk to keep them encouraged and to move them forward. And that’s to me what makes up a team.

**Max Irzhak** [00:01:56] What was the main thing that excited you about Headspace and made you want to take the leap?

**CeCe Morken** [00:02:01] Two things excited me about Headspace, if you don’t mind me going off of the one thing. But it was a highly purpose-driven company. So, just the vision itself “to improve the health and happiness of the world” and understanding the impact this could have in youth… that was for me, for my next chapter, highly motivating.

The second piece of that was I love an opportunity to develop leaders, it’s where my energy comes from. And so, having a company that was moving the startup stage to the next stage of growth, with a group of young leaders, that’s super inspiring to me.

**Max Irzhak** [00:02:42] One of the things I try to demonstrate on this show is that there’s no such thing as an overnight success.

Everyone takes a different path, but the common denominator is that people work their butts off, and fail many times along the way.

Can you tell us about your favorite personal failure? Meaning something that *seemed* like a failure at the time but set the stage for something much better in your life.

**CeCe Morken** [00:03:04] I can. And this was a period where I made decisions for the wrong reason. And I actually think this is important for others to hear. So, I was working for a company that I loved, in a great position. But in my mind, I needed to be a General Manager. I can’t tell you why. I was intrigued with the title. I needed to run a P&L. And so I was recruited away to go work for a company. It was a good company, but when I got there, I found that the culture didn’t match me, the actual product that we developed was not inspiring to me. And so, i had this great title, and i was running a P&L, but i didn’t have passion for what i was doing. And i lasted about a year. And i would even say that even that year was too long because i was doing something in a robotic manner because i didn’t have passion for it.

And so, the good news from all of that (other than that I once again met some great people to learn from)… but the good news from that is it taught me such a strong lesson: that titles have absolutely nothing to do with success. It is all about doing something that *you* have passion about, something *you* believe in, and then goodness will come. At the end of the day it’s did you feel great about what you accomplished, about moving something forward—it has nothing to do with titles.

**Max Irzhak** [00:04:40] A lot of people think that being a leader means you have all the answers… but almost every leader i’ve had on this show says the complete opposite. That in reality it’s *really* about having a hypothesis, testing it, and being *open* to being proven wrong.

What’s your take on this? Do you think leaders should have all the answers?

**CeCe Morken** [00:04:58] Oh i love this question, and i love the fact that you mentioned hypothesis because im 100% about hypothesis-driven innovation which is what we call it at Headspace. You know leadership is it’s a journey, it’s not a destination. And I'm a big fan of the work that Carol Dweck did at Stanford which is about a growth-mindset, versus a fixed-mindset. So, nothing is, you’re not born a certain way, you don’t innately have a certain capability—all of us can learn different things.

And that especially applies to leaders, and so the aspect of humility is one of the other big learnings i had. So i can remember a time in my career when i was trying to do a business presentation, and our results weren’t where they needed to be. And i was asked by a board member (probably my very first board member / board meeting), you know what i thought about “x y and z”, and i honestly didn't know the answer, but i didn't say that. And instead, I tried to come up with some answers in the moment which probably had absolutely no credibility.

And what i learned from that was all i needed to say was “I don't know, and i need some help here because im just not sure what to do next.” And when you do that, it shows that you’re authentic because you’re super human, and 9 times out of 10 somebody can help you with the answer. And certainly as a leader the odds are your team has more of the answers than you’re ever going to have. Our job is to pull that genius out of them, not to be the ones barking out all the answers. But it was a great lesson for me. And it’s a core part of being a leader.

**Max Irzhak** [00:06:45] Today on March 8th, we celebrate International Women’s Day.

A couple of fun facts:

* Just a few weeks ago, the CEO of Bumble became the youngest female to take a company public on the stock market.
* In 2021 a record number of women joined leadership positions in Congress.
* We now have the very first female Vice President of the United States.
* And of course, we have you, who is absolutely dominating this space as a female CEO.

... What a tremendously inspiring time for young women!

My question is: What can we do as a society to maintain that momentum, and make sure that more and more women continue to rise in leadership roles?

**CeCe Morken** [00:07:24] Well, there are several things that you’re starting to see happen already, and so, one of the great things about our society is we push on people to do things. So there is such a huge expectation right now on Boards, especially public Boards, that you must have 50% of your Board be women. Which is outstanding because when you get women on a board, then they’re role models and mentors for people within that organization. So i think that’s huge. There’s regulations that are now starting to drive some of that activity, which i also think is huge. And you’re also seeing sectors that had not traditionally been women, like technology, graduating more and more women in these fields. And you know most of us, most companies, are now running with diversity targets, so literally we are holding ourselves accountable to this and we’re actively recruiting at schools that have done a great job in promoting women. So i actually think we’re on a good path, and what i find super exciting to see where it can go.

One of the things I always encourage, if you don’t mind me taking it a little further, because it’s one thing to get everybody in the door. It’s another thing to get voices heard. And one of the things that I still see as a challenge is women’s voice being heard in the meeting room. And you know it can be easy to be dominated by voices of people that are bigger than you or the voice is more robust than ours. And one of the greatest things that i saw happen last year was a woman who stopped someone else, who was interrupting another woman who tried to say something multiple times, and said “Stop, so and so has been trying to get in—please let her get her point across.” And it was so powerful that it changed the whole setting for the meeting, and i think as women, the greatest gift—and this was one woman doing it for another—that we can give each other is to play that role, and to help make sure voices are heard.

**Max Irzhak** [00:09:46] You’ve had, and continue to have, an amazing career and are an inspiring leader to men and women of all ages… What is your message to college students who are just starting off their careers?

**CeCe Morken** [00:09:58] My very first message is to find something that you believe in. And I find that to be the most important thing because in order for you to give something your all, it has to be something that you believe in, or it will feel like work for you. And there’s nothing better than doing a job that doesn’t feel like work. So, my very first thing is—to the degree possible—make sure it is something that you have passion about.

And now the role within the organization, whether you choose to be an entrepreneur and start your own, or whether you choose for an employer, I would not worry so much about the role. You should fall in love with the company and the purpose. Roles change over time, and you could move around an organization—so i would never worry about that. Make sure that you’re in love with the company, its mission, its purpose—i think that’s a great way to get started.

The second thing I would say is volunteer for the thing that no one else has volunteered for in the company that you believe in. Because you will stand out as the person who took that role that no one else raised their hand for, and then you know, consistent with the rest of what we talked about, use your voice to give credit to your teammates and be a super-inclusive team member remembering that it’s “we” not “me” that makes a difference. And again, when you’re the one saying “hey i want to tell you about the great work my team did and let me call out their name”... everybody will remember you.

**Max Irzhak** [00:11:44] You mentioned following your passion. Is there a time when chasing the paycheck starts to take priority?

**CeCe Morken** [00:11:53] I don't think so. I think it is too important to do the thing that gives you passion, because you will be so much better at it, and so much happier. And the paycheck, to me, shouldn’t be the motivation. I told you the story of when i made a choice like that, and i realized that i had given up things that were much more important to me. So I think passion about what you do will bring you much more than a paycheck.

**Max Irzhak** [00:12:31] CeCe, thank you *so* much for taking the time to sit down with us today, for being a role model to millions of young women around the world, and for all that you’re doing to promote the conversation around mental health.

It has been an absolute pleasure.

**CeCe Morken** [00:12:46] It has for me as well, Max. This is a great organization. Thanks for having me.

**Max Irzhak** [00:12:51] Absolutely. As a final question, how can people get started with mindfulness and meditation? Is downloading the free Headspace app the first step? Should they check out the Netflix series?

**CeCe Morken** [00:13:03] Thank you for asking. You know, I think both of those are great. So i would watch the Netflix special, it’s a great easy way to do it. Please download the app, there’s a free trial in it. We also have a discount for students, which is less than $10. So all of those would be great, and I hope you enjoy it. And by the way, watch John Legend, because we launch with him on Monday.

**Max Irzhak** [00:13:29] And as CeCe mentioned, as an added bonus for all of our listeners still in college, there is a special student discount that you can take advantage of right away. Just follow the link in the description below to get Headspace for just $9.99 for the entire year.

And I also encourage all of our listeners to watch the “Headspace Guide to Meditation”, a fantastic new series now playing on Netflix!

As always, thank you everyone for joining us today. We’ll see you next week on Motivational Mondays!

**Music intro** [00:13:57-00:13:59]