**Motivational Mondays interview:**

**CeCe Morken – *Airing* 03.15.2021 (Part 2)**

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

**Max Irzhak** [00:00:02] Welcome to Motivational Mondays. I'm your host Max Irzhak and joining us for Part 2 of her interview is CeCe Morken.

If you haven’t already listened to last week’s episode, I encourage you to start there. We discuss CeCe’s rise to the top, all the valuable lessons she learned along the way, and her advice for students just starting off their careers.

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** [00:00:39] What makes a great leader? What skills do we need to learn along the way to become great leaders?

**CeCe Morken** [00:00:44] I think it’s recognizing that our job as leaders is to bring out the greatness and the genius in others. I think it’s about learning the value of ‘team’, that it’s what *we* do together as opposed to what any one player does, and so this discipline around hiring a team that will be all-star vs an all-star team. I think it’s about recognizing that life is a journey not a destination, so seeing that everyone has the opportunity to grow as long as they want to—no one’s ever fixed in a certain place. And i think it’s bringing forward our humility, and you know, showing that it’s okay to say “I don’t know, and i might need some help”—I think that gives everybody the opportunity to see that leaders are human. And you know what? That actually allows people to say “I can be that too, you see what she just did? I can do that too!” And that inspires the next generation.

And then the piece that i would mention that i’ll be candid with is the one i struggle with, and that’s to do less, better. You know, I think generally we take on too much. And then we don’t do anything well enough. And so, cutting back, and cutting back more, and cutting back to what’s the 1 thing that really matters… and let me be great at that one thing. Let me get that 1 thing done today. I think that’s an area that all—at least i know i could do better at—and i think most teams could. And it’s the role of the leader to say what’s the 1 thing.

**Max Irzhak** [00:02:21] That actually brings up a really interesting point. How can people get better at saying “no”?

**CeCe Morken** [00:02:28] Like anything, it’s a habit that we have to learn to build. So we have to start by saying no. And one of the things that we encourage our team to do—and by the way, i'm not saying we’re there—is when somebody brings you something and says “hey, can you do this?”—and especially if it was a leader—”I'm happy to do that… what would you like me to stop?” So here’s the list of priorities i have... we’re not allowed to have more than 5, so you pick which one you would like to take off. And so I think if leaders start to role model that, we’ve now started to say “here’s our priorities, and here’s the things we decided to stop doing”. So we have to just articulate that out.

I had somebody say to me something that i thought was great that i may have said earlier. Which is if you can’t get through everything in your day, then you haven’t picked the critical few. Which i think is great. So it’s constantly reprioritizing, and relooking, but it’s also when something new comes you just have to get comfortable saying no.

**Max Irzhak** [00:03:28] I’ve heard you say that 10 out of 10 times you would hire someone who was a “learn-it-all” rather than a “know-it-all”. Can you elaborate on this?

**CeCe Morken** [00:03:36] I believe that, again, all of us are a work in progress. And so we all have things to learn and to get better, and if you believe you have all the answers, it’s very difficult for new information to get in—and what that means is you became stagnant. You’re the best you’re ever going to be if that’s who you are is a know-it-all, if you’re the one who fires off all the answers in a meeting, and you never say “tell me about that, what do you mean by that; should we go explore; could we run an experiment and learn and see if we’re right; could we stop talking and actually get out of the building and go see if this works?” Then you’re starting to expand your horizons; but the person that sits there and just fires off the answers, well then they’re done learning and that means that’s all we’re going to get—and i don't know anyone who wants to be that person.

**Max Irzhak** [00:04:28] From a leadership perspective, how do you motivate those around you to get them to believe in your mission and follow your vision?

**CeCe Morken** [00:04:36] The best visions are about others. So if you think about ours “improve the health and happiness of the world” it’s pretty hard not to get behind wanting to make a difference in that. Then you unpack how did I get to the strategy and the priorities of that, and it develops something called ‘shared consciousness’—and this actually comes from General McChrystal when he was leading the various forces in the Afghan War. And shared consciousness is important because it means we all have the same pieces of information—that way you understand how we got to this strategy and priorities. When you don’t unpack that for people, then they’re left wondering what was going on in your mind. So it’s this transparency around here’s how I'm making the decisions I’m making. And I find that’s what gets people on board.

And then, as soon as you’ve got that done, you’re enabling them to take it forward and let them be accountable for carrying it forward and give them a stretch-goal to go after.

**Max Irzhak** [00:05:46] Did you have mentors in your life who helped you get to this point? And how can people find their own mentors?

**CeCe Morken** [00:05:54] Yes, I definitely had mentors. Whether they were official or not is a different story, but they’re people that I admired and I watched and I read their work and I continue to read their work. And I continue to stay in touch with them. And you know it’s like any relationship to me. Most people if you ask them to be a mentor for you, you need to be clear on what you want them to be a mentor for. So when someone just asks me if i’d be a mentor, i need to understand “am i a good fit for you”. You know, what are you trying to accomplish? And if you can be clear on that, then most people are happy to do that if they understand with clarity what you want done, or saying “you know that’s not going to be something that i'm going to be the best person for, but let’s talk about who might be, let's talk about those characteristics.” And so i think asking is a huge form of flattery, but i think it needs to be done with clarity. Like what do you actually want to get out of this because it’s an investment on both parties.

**Max Irzhak** [00:06:58] Let’s take you back in time. Knowing the success you’ve reached today, what would you have changed along the way to get to this point quicker?

**CeCe Morken** [00:07:07] I would’ve learned humility faster. I think when you are first starting out—and candidly i never asked for any of the roles i got, so i probably moved into some of them insecure that i was ready, which i think is different than if you asked for the role. And so i probably tried to show that i had all the answers, and i mentioned this earlier. And I would've embraced humility and vulnerability sooner.

**Max Irzhak** [00:07:40] You just mentioned an interesting point there. Can you talk to me about imposter syndrome? How do you suggest people fight that feeling of thinking they don't belong or they’re not prepared for the situation; they don’t have the tools to handle the situation?

**CeCe Morken** [00:07:55] I go back to this growth mindset and learning to appreciate yourself because every one of us has genius in us—every single one of us. We have that thing that’s our genius, and one of the things that we do is we identify that in each of our leaders. So their peers identify “this is the thing about you that I think is your special power that the rest of us are going to leverage from you”. And then we also go through and do an assessment—first of ourselves and then of others to say “and this is the thing that i think you have an opportunity to work on”. And then we’re super clear with everyone that that’s what it is so everyone knows what you’re working on. Like I published mine, and it’s funny the first time I ever published even a review of mine somebody said “you published your review?” And it’s like, well it’s not like you guys don't know what my faults are, so why shouldn’t i just be candid with you that i know too, and i'm working on them. And i think when you get to that level of appreciate yourself for what you are, accept what people and ask what your genius is, and then talk about the things that you’re working on—then you get to this comfort level of we’re all a work in progress, and i'm going to lean into the things that are my strengths, and i'm going to work on the things, or i'm going to lean on other people for the areas that i have an opportunity on. But it’s sort of a vulnerability aspect of accepting that we’re always on a journey to be a better version of ourselves.

**Max Irzhak** [00:09:29] And how do you actually identify your own unique strengths? How do you find that superpower?

**CeCe Morken** [00:09:35] Personally, I ask others. So I like to ask others what they see, and then look for the commonality in that, and then I lean into that. Because it goes back to the “self” and “other” focus, it’s really not important what i think about myself. It’s really important what others think I'm adding. So I like the feedback from others.

**Max Irzhak** [00:09:57] What is one thought you want our audience to walk away with? What is some *actionable* advice?

**CeCe Morken** [00:10:05] I’m going to be pretty consistent here Max, and since we’re talking a lot of this group to students who will be future leaders—which by the way is what gives me the most hope in our future is looking at the youth of today and where they will take us going forward—and that causes me to say continually strive to find your purpose. You know, it may change over time, but if you find that thing that is bigger than yourself, and the place that you want to make a difference, again, to me that’s what leadership is all about—that’s how you’ll get to leadership. And leadership isn't about the title, leadership isn’t necessarily about leading people, it’s the degree of impact you can have and you can have that impact, I think, most strongly if you find your purpose at any given time.

**Max Irzhak** [00:11:00] 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** [00:11:14] It has for me as well, Max. This is a great organization. Thanks for having me.

**Max Irzhak** [00:11:19] Absolutely. And 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 new Netflix special?

**CeCe Morken** [00:11:31] 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** [00:11:55] 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** [00:12:23-00:12:30]