



S3E6 Transcript/Quotes

Heather Salazar

... Because I think it is truly knowing what you're passionate about. I hope to God, you don't have to get cancer to know your why, that's not the goal. Right?

Heather Adams

Of course.

Heather Salazar

Okay. What brings you joy? Is it serving in a soup kitchen? Is it coaching people like me? Is it finding out about PR and marketing? But living the same life every day for 70 some years and calling it a life, if you're not passionate about it, that's not for me.

Heather Adams

Preach. Hey, friends. My name is Heather Adams and my passion is developing the women coming behind me. I want to help you navigate and build a life you love. I'm a busy wife, mom of two teenage boys and a 25-year publicity veteran who's launched more than a 100 New York Times best sellers and placed marquee thought leaders, celebrities, and change agents in the headlines and on all your favorite TV shows and media outlets. I run a seven-figure business where we solve all your communication needs from PR to social media events to branding and strategy. I'm giving you behind-the-scenes access to the best of the best in all the areas of life that we are juggling as busy working women, you'll hear from the people who are saving me and my very own business, as well as all my tried and true strategies and lessons to make you and your business known. I want to be the most generous female CEO who is linking arms with you and passing along all my best learnings so you can lead a life that you deeply love.

This, sweet friend, is the Make Me Known podcast. Every single one of us has got a story and all of us that are entrepreneurs and leading businesses we have a founder story of how our organization started, but when's the last time you let the why behind that founder story, you let it drive your decision making in your business? When did you last revisit your mission and your values and your vision for your company? Have you recently reevaluated the heart behind your organization and what your culture really says about you as a business and a brand? On today's episode of the Make Me Known podcast, I'm joined by the CEO and president of PRG, Pink

Ribbon Girls. Her name is Heather Salazar and she is convicting me and challenging all of us to really take everything back to the foundation of our organizations and our brands and our businesses, and that's the why.

That's that fire that lit in our belly all those years ago when we started this idea and this business was a little bitty seed that was starting to bud. She's encouraging us to let that direct every single decision and our path as we grow and evolve as businesses and brands and organizations. I can't wait for you to get to know Heather and hear her personal story of how she got involved with PRG and why it is such a passion for her personally. What a convicting and powerful story she has. I can't wait for you to hear it, but I was also reminded at the end of the day, it all goes back to that DNA of where Choice started and where you specifically started. That's the why the mission, the vision, the values that we have, and that heart behind all of it. Join me in welcoming Heather Salazar to the Make Me Known podcast. Heather, thanks for being here.

Heather Salazar

Thanks so much for having me.

Heather Adams

I'm so excited for everybody to get to know you and to hear more about PRG, but before we jump into it, will you just give everybody a little CliffsNotes version of you and how you got to PRG and the mission behind the organization?

Heather Salazar

Yeah. Thanks so much. I always thought I would change the world, but in a totally different way than I am now. I always thought I would solve generational poverty, that was my mission.

Heather Adams

Oh.

Heather Salazar

I worked with inner city kids. I started an after school reading program that I got to meet President Clinton and for the thousand points of light. So I just always thought these kids are so precious and I just want them to have the support and not lose the whole bridge of the gap that we make our kids do in the summer and all of those things.

Heather Adams

Totally.

Heather Salazar

So I got married young and it was still always my plan. I was like, "Oh, I'll do this after I have kids." I had a plan, Heather. I like things to go-

Heather Adams

I hear you.

Heather Salazar

... to plan. So my plan was not to get married until I was 30 and then my husband at 18. he was in the military and my mom was like, "You're not going to live somewhere until you know for sure." So we got married at 19-years-old.

Heather Adams

Oh, my gosh. Well, so much-

Heather Salazar

I know.

Heather Adams

... for 30. Yeah.

Heather Salazar

So much for 30. So this year we've been married 29 years. How crazy is that?

Heather Adams

Congratulations. That is a huge accomplishment.

Heather Salazar

Thank you. He was in the military, I finished school and I still had an agenda. Okay. I'll give you four years and then I'll go to New York City and I'll do my thing and that was our plan. All of a sudden, I'm schlepping through school in Florida, and I'm taking 20 credit hours at a time and I'm sick. I can't get better. I can't get better. I go to the military doctor, which is a whole different experience for someone who was not raised near the military, and he's like, "You're at the wrong doctor. You're going to have a baby." I was 21.

Heather Adams

Oh, my God.

Heather Salazar

We got married at 19, and I was so sad and scared because I had all these dreams. So then I wasn't going to have a baby until 30. That was my next thing. I wasn't going to have a baby until 30. So I say this because I do think I have a strong faith. I think, "Gosh, how sometimes plan B works out so much better than plan A ever could."

Heather Adams

Exactly.

Heather Salazar

And so-

Heather Adams

God's plan is always better than ours, isn't it?

Heather Salazar

Yes. Yes. I hate that sometimes. So we got married and we had Christian and I didn't want my kids to be super far apart and I always wanted a large family. I say that because we moved back, my mom's neighbor was a midwife who delivered this baby, the mom was looking for her home for her baby. She had stage 4 breast cancer. She was 23, 23.

Heather Adams

Oh, my gosh.

Heather Salazar

I called all these people, I'm going to tell the unscripted version on here. I called all these people in my church in my community that were struggling with infertility et cetera. They had a problem with the color of her skin. I had a problem with them-

Heather Adams

I guess so.

Heather Salazar

I couldn't sleep and I couldn't sleep. Steve was like, "What is your problem?" My husband, and I said, "I can't sleep. I'm thinking about this mom with no support. I cannot sleep. Will you please just meet her?" He said, Heather, you just had me get a vasectomy. I thought we were done having kids." I said, just meet her, Steve. We'll help her. We're probably not going to take the baby, just meet her". She wanted to the grocery store because she could take the bus there. She pulls up there and she's the most neon pink wig and she's 100 pounds sopping whether. She walks up to my husband and she's like, "I need help with my baby and I need her to have a

better life than me," and that was it. I didn't have to say another word. His heart melted in the puddle.

Heather Adams

I guess so.

Heather Salazar

We went in, got her some groceries. We got an attorney the next day and we filed for legal custody. Five weeks later, we had a new baby. Heather, the thing I get disappointed in myself the most is I didn't know anything about breast cancer, so I didn't know if it was a lifestyle thing. I had never known someone so young with breast cancer. I didn't know young people could get breast cancer, so I still wasn't worried about anything, because I'm like, "Oh, that would never ..." So we took care of her for the next year. She got to visit with the baby. We took her to treatment and she passed away right after she turned 24-years-old.

Heather Adams

Oh, my God.

Heather Salazar

To this day the fact that I tell this story so much, to this day, it's the hardest thing I've ever done, to watch someone that's 24-years-old die, who's scared who doesn't have education as far as, and what do you call it? Do not resuscitate, a DNR. She wouldn't sign that, and so it was just such a hard, horrible time. The nurse would say, "Tell her you're going to take care of the baby. Tell her you love her."

Heather Adams

Yeah, she was a mama who was advocating for her baby knowing she wasn't going to be around to raise her. Right?

Heather Salazar

Right. Right, and knowing all of those things. She said, "Heather," before she left, she would say things to me before she got more and more sick, she would say, "I'm going to do big things. You got to make sure she does big things. Make sure she gets to Disney World. Make sure she can win American Idol if she wants to," those were her things. It was hard. Lexi struggled a lot. Being neglected a lot is a whole different world. I say the inner city kid part beforehand, because I thought, "This is no problem. I've worked with this since I was 15-years-old."

To have someone in your life that's truly been neglected, that truly hasn't had what she needed as a baby, when her mama didn't have what she needed because she was in the foster care system is a hard, hard thing. It took a year to get Lexi, we have a close-knit family. It took a year

before she would stay at my parents, before she would trust anyone and I mean a year of 24/7, she was on my hip. So about a year after Alexis passed away, we went on our first anniversary trip and I did my first ever self breast exam, because Alexis said, "You better do a self- breast exam. Young women get breast cancer, Heather." I still didn't take her that seriously, honestly. I found a lump, and me being me, I wasn't even still worried. Steve was like-

Heather Adams

Oh, my gosh, Heather-

Heather Salazar

... I wasn't, because literally I was like, "There is no way God is going to tell me to adopt this baby," my four kids, my four kids, because they were with us all the time when we took her to treatment, "would watch this mama be so sick and I would get the same breast cancer. No way." Four days later I got the exact same kind of aggressive breast cancer. So I say it for two reasons; one, talk about plan B being so much better than plan A is, think about it, I was 31. So I didn't want to get married until I was 30, and I didn't want to have my first kid until after I was 30, but I wanted a large family. So just the fact that I still got that and I still get to be here to watch them grow up-

Heather Adams

Right.

Heather Salazar

... it's crazy.

Heather Adams

So PRG comes out of all of that, right?

Heather Salazar

Yes.

Heather Adams

Because you have this story of number one, a child that you've adopted, who you have raised since she was little bitty baby-

Heather Salazar

10-months-old, yep.

Heather Adams

... who her mother died at a very young age of breast cancer, then you personally are a breast cancer survivor. You have this organization now that serves people who have either breast cancer or gynecological cancer and your goal is to help them with things that other people don't do for them, right?

Heather Salazar

Right.

Heather Adams

This is what makes PRG so distinctive.

Heather Salazar

So one person, I guess I found out last weekend that you and I have in common, is so I went to treatment with Stefanie Spielman.

Heather Adams

Yes.

Heather Salazar

She and I just became really fast friends and I was so happy. She was a young woman with breast cancer, shared her story on Oprah, just to give a little contact, husband in the NFL. I didn't know that for a month. I met her for lunch and had no idea who she was. 2005-

Heather Adams

She was just another woman battling cancer like you were.

Heather Salazar

Exactly.

Heather Adams

Yeah.

Heather Salazar

There was not as much internet, 2005, you didn't just Google search everything.

Heather Adams

That's right.

Heather Salazar

Anyways, she and I went to treatment and when she told me in our second treatment together that she was stage 4, I was devastated and scared because she looked so normal, so healthy. She and I legitimately had the exact same diagnosis, both stage 1-

Heather Adams

Oh, my gosh.

Heather Salazar

She said, "Heather, Chris and I have been advocating for this drug because it will save your life. I didn't get it until late stage and you can get it as stage 1, and we've put all this money and research into it at Ohio State and worked with people in California," which is so crazy, because now they're on my board too, "and you'll get this drug." It wasn't quite cleared through the FDA yet for early stage cancer. I went ahead and did the four hard chemo and our girls would sit there and watch Veggie Tales together.

Heather Adams

Oh, my gosh.

Heather Salazar

Our two girls are the exact same age, while we got poisoned, we always said, while we got poisoned. Fast forward, I go through my treatment. I get the drug that Stefanie fought for and she and I remain close. Then right before she passed away, about a month before she passed away I went to her house and I really thought she was going to beat it. I really did think she would be the one, 11 years, her attitude, she lived every single day like there was no tomorrow and that is the huge gift that she gave me.

When we were in treatment, she would talk about how she would do the research side of things and I could help with the care side of things. But when she got worse, I didn't want to deal with the Pink Ribbon, I didn't. I didn't want to deal with breast cancer. I didn't want to wait for the other shoe to drop. When I saw her one month before she passed away, she only said two sentences to me and she held my hand and she looked me straight in the face, and that was the only time, the whole hour that she even woke up. She said, "Don't use my deathbed as an excuse. You know your purpose." I cried the entire way home from Columbus-

Heather Adams

Oh, my gosh.

Heather Salazar

... like sobs. I popped a blood vessel I was crying so hard [inaudible 00:14:18]

Heather Adams

I guess so. It's like the ugly cry for sure.

Heather Salazar

Yeah. I went home and wrote a grant that night-

Heather Adams

Which is so crazy, Heather, because I worked with Chris on his book-

Heather Salazar

I know.

Heather Adams

... telling her story. I obviously didn't know Stefanie at all, but I worked with Chris to share that and to now be partnered with you, it's just God's fingerprints are on every bit of that.

Heather Salazar

I told Steve that, my husband, when I got home. Maddie and I just went to coffee, her oldest daughter, probably a month ago because I meet with her regularly, because it's just hard. Even Ohio State's done so many great things in Stef's honor, but I remember Maddie being like, "I just want her to be prom dress shopping with me." That's the realities of what we're dealing with.

Heather Adams

Exactly, Exactly. I love that. She said that to you, like she said, "You know your purpose," because that's exactly what we're talking about today is-

Heather Salazar

Yes.

Heather Adams

... how to know your why and your purpose. I think so often, Heather, we skirt past that when we're running a business and we're leading a team and all of that and we lose sight of it. But you really believe it is crucial to know why behind your business.

Heather Salazar

Mm-hmm.

Heather Adams

Why do you think that's so important?

Heather Salazar

I think it's so important because you know as well as I do running a business or an organization is hard-

Heather Adams

Oh, my gosh.

Heather Salazar

For me, your why is what keeps you going. I don't want to be overly dramatic, but it is truly a gift. Fast forward, a little bit, a different Stefanie story. I wasn't close to Chris, I was close to Stefanie.

Heather Adams

Right.

Heather Salazar

So fast forward five or six years, Kara, my third child is playing AAU, and I realized it's against ... I could cry talking about it, Macy Stefanie's third child and Chris is coaching. I sat in the bathroom and cried the entire game because I'm like, "Why do I get to watch my kid and she doesn't get to watch hers?" We don't know those answers, Heather, but we know we're called to make a difference and that is my why.

Heather Adams

Yeah. That's why PTG exists, and-

Heather Salazar

Yeah.

Heather Adams

... that's what drives you still to this day.

Heather Salazar

Yes.

Heather Adams

I can just imagine, Heather, on repeat in the back of your mind, is Stefanie saying that to you over and over, "When things get hard when you're going through a tumultuous season, when

you're trying to figure out how to take the next step," well, it's constantly probably in the back of your head. How does somebody determine their why? What questions should we be asking ourselves? If you're talking to me and you were like, "Okay, Heather, we're going to figure out what your why is," how would you encourage me to determine that. For those people listening that maybe don't know, or maybe they haven't put their finger right on the exact thing, what would you say?

Heather Salazar

Because I think it is truly knowing what you're passionate about. I hope to God you don't have to get cancer to know your why, that's not the goal. Right?

Heather Adams

Of course.

Heather Salazar

Right. So the goal is one thing that even is just like, "Okay, what brings you joy? Is it serving in a soup kitchen? Is it coaching people like me? Is it finding out about PR and marketing? But living the same life every day for 70 years and calling it a life, if you're passionate, that's not for me.

Heather Adams

Preach.

Heather Salazar

I think it's truly taking the time to figure it out, and I think you can relate too. It doesn't mean that you're not going to get your butt kicked, because God knows I've gone through the seasons, even now, sometimes that I'm like, "Wow. Wow."

Heather Adams

Right. Here's what I wonder is, how you take that why? All those years ago, when I started Choice, all those years ago when you started PRG, I'm getting ready to celebrate eight years.

Heather Salazar

That's so awesome.

Heather Adams

Thank you, but sometimes you can lose sight of it. So how do you take that why, that passion, that fire that's in your belly for why you started the company all those years ago, how do you take that and direct every step so that it aligns with your focus and your goals and your operations and the way you build your team? What do you do practically?

Heather Salazar

I think practically two things: one thing that I learned early on both to cope with cancer and actually dealing with things, so think of one of the hardest things you've dealt with in Choice. I don't know what it is. Hiring for me sometimes, choosing moving forward, my biggest thing sometimes I think is I wait too long, because we're a nonprofit, to make a decision; not to make a decision on growth, to make a decision on, "We do need qualified people at this level, even though we are a nonprofit."

Heather Adams

Right.

Heather Salazar

For the longest time I was super like, "Oh, I can coach them, Heather. I can get them there," and so for me, it was that. So one thing when I have a really bad situation, whether it's even with health, one coping mechanism I have is for 15 minutes. So for 15 minutes, I can think the worst. "I'm going to go to Buffalo and this and that and I might fail, and what if it uses our money and what if it uses this?" I literally can go there, because I used this as a coping mechanism, Heather, when I was sick, because I was so afraid my kids would have to bury me. So for 15 minutes when I couldn't get past it, I would say, "Okay, well I'll even let myself visualize that." Then after that-

Heather Adams

All the worst case scenarios in 15 minutes-

Heather Salazar

Yeah, right.

Heather Adams

... you think through it-

Heather Salazar

And then-

Heather Adams

And then you're done.

Heather Salazar

Right, and then after that, that's it, because if not, then you are not even honoring the people that you're working for by truly living your day. Even things I've talked to you about, those questions and making those decisions for 15 minutes, I'll be like, "I don't know. We are hiring two executives. Is that a great thing? Yes, it is." It's also sometimes I think it is just the next right answer, the next right answer.

Heather Adams

Yeah. I you've said that to me before that that a lot of times is what drives you is like-

Heather Salazar

Yes.

Heather Adams

"Okay. Let me just take the next step and make the next right answer. I had the privilege of being with you recently at your board retreat where you had a three-year strategic planning session. Let me just say, first of all, wow, at the people who are on your board-

Heather Salazar

Right.

Heather Adams

It's like a who's who. One of the guys who's on the board left the board meeting to go meet with the President of the United States and then I'm sitting in the room. So I'm like, "Why am I here?"

Heather Salazar

Yeah, me too. Me too. I was like, "How are these people here for an organization that I'm believing in?"

Heather Adams

I know-

Heather Salazar

It's crazy.

Heather Adams

It's crazy. One of the things you did on the first day is you began this strategic planning retreat with revisiting your mission and your vision for PRG.

Heather Salazar

Mm-hmm. Yes.

Heather Adams

Did it need reevaluating? Did it need rephrasing in any way? Did it need updating any way? Does your mission and your vision for PRG come from that why that you have deep within you?

Heather Salazar

Yes. Yes. 100% yes. I think I even shared that at the board retreat with you. Sometimes when it gets hard, and I remember the first person that said to me when she was doing really poorly at the end, her name was Patty Noel, I always give her honor. I said, "This is hard." When you serve so many metastatic disease people, you serve them longer. It's hard. You don't have any control of their outcome and she said, "I just want to ensure, Heather, that while anyone's alive, I just don't ever want them not to feel supported. I want to make sure no one travels this road alone."

Heather Adams

Yeah. I remember you saying that.

Heather Salazar

Right, and some things can be very cliché, but truly, what we do by providing three meals a week for your entire family and house, clean products, a vacuum that's lightweight. Heather, when you have the mastectomy, you can't even move your arm up here. It's the craziest thing.

Heather Adams

Well, and we were talking about that at the retreat, those are things that other organizations don't necessarily do for breast cancer patients. It's bringing them healthy meals. It's getting them rides to the treatment. Y'all were giving me the stats of the people that can't get-

Heather Salazar

It's crazy.

Heather Adams

... to treatment so they miss their appointment.

Heather Salazar

Radiation or, right.

Heather Adams

... or chemo or whatever it is. Then the house cleaning kits, the peer-to-peer support so they're not in it alone. That's crazy.

Heather Salazar

I love it. All of that is a part of what you're serving. One of the things that I think really distinguishes y'all is you're caring for the people who are caring for the patient, right?

Heather Adams

So the caregivers are getting a lot of support and help and not in it alone because of your organization.

Heather Salazar

Right. Yes.

Heather Adams

How many of you are constantly looking for ways to continue to develop as a business leader and owner? How many of you are looking for a community of women to gather together and surround yourselves with who are in the same situation? They're running a business, they're leading a team, they're managing a home, they're doing all the same things that you're doing, and you need to link arms with those women. Well, friends, let me invite you to the 2023 Choice Summit. Y'all, this is my favorite, favorite, favorite thing. We created the Choice Summit for Women, just like me, who were running businesses and leading teams and managing homes and wearing all the hats.

What I was finding out of conferences is that either one, they were so expensive that I either couldn't afford to attend or maybe one person from my team could go; or two, I could afford to attend them, but the content was not rich. It was not strong and compelling. I felt like, "I've just wasted my time and money and energy." So the Choice Summit is a value-rich experience right here in Nashville, Tennessee, just outside of Nashville in a little community called Franklin that we love. It is an idyllic and charming town. We're hosting it on April the 13th of 2023 at the beautiful Greystone Quarry.

We already have marquee speakers lined up for you and I cannot wait for you to hear who they are. But listen, if you want to be allies and not competitors with women who are in the same season of life, who are facing the same challenges and who also want to grow and learn just like you, then come to our summit. I am telling you, I am promising you that it is a value-rich experience unlike any other. For female entrepreneurs, leaders and influencers go to choicemediacommunications.com, click on our summit tab at the very top to get more information and to buy your ticket now we can't wait to be with you next April. When you think about that mission that you have at PRG and just even just revisiting it recently, how does somebody know, other people are going to be in other industries at other different kinds of

businesses, how do they know when they have nailed their mission that is the driving force that they should be laser focused on?

Heather Salazar

I think about that a lot, actually, which is so crazy. When I first started, I literally said, "I'm never going to fundraise, and I'm going to know every single mom's kids because I don't want them to be scared like my kids were. So I'm going to spend around half-hour to 45 minutes with everyone we serve," when I delivered the meals by hand.

Heather Adams

Oh, my gosh. You did not-

Heather Salazar

Literally-

Heather Adams

... did not think you'd be a \$9 million organization serving a lot more people.

Heather Salazar

No, and continuing to grow, but you know what it was? So one time I had to make a really, really difficult decision. I would say this is probably when we were at 500,000, and I realized I was willing to go down on that decision. I was willing because

Heather Adams

It was your hill to die on.

Heather Salazar

It was my hill to die on. It was the fact that, "You know what? Patty Noel doesn't be here to fight for this, and Eugenia is in hospice and has a kindergartener. I don't anything to, and this is my hill to die on," and it happened again, actually during COVID. COVID was scary for a nonprofit. We actually provide these services and guess what didn't stop in COVID? Cancer, unfortunately. So everybody around us stopped all their services and someone came to me from our team and literally said, "Heather, I know this is scary hard, and we give everyone three meals a week, but we have basically 45% of the people that are at the food insecurity line. They used to get two meals a day at school, and it's going to take the school in the company, in the country a while to pivot. So I think we should give them five meals a week."

Heather Adams

Oh, my gosh.

Heather Salazar

Which increased us 30 to \$50,000. Heather, I kid you not, every day, an event was canceling that brought in 50,000, 60,000, 30,000. I was physically sick and we didn't know anything. We didn't know about PPP. We didn't know about whatever.

Heather Adams

Right.

Heather Salazar

I said, "You're right. These people are scared to death. Their electric's getting turned off, that none of the help was. So if we're going out, we're going out, sticking to our mission." So we increased it for three months to five meals until the schools could overcompensate and say, "Come ... " The buses started delivering meals and things like that. So I thought, "That's my hill to die on. If we don't get through COVID and we don't have an uncertainty, at least I'm not an uncertainty that has to go to chemotherapy treatment alone." Heather, I needed an army, I was so high maintenance. My friends needed to come, my mom. I need to be dressed up. These people had to walk in there and masks and gloves and this, and get chemotherapy by themselves, and they didn't know how they were going to feed their kids. I was like, "We're going for it," so I do think it's the hill to die on.

Heather Adams

It just proves that when your mission is so clear and it so instinctually that you know what the things are that are the hills to die on and what's not, right?

Heather Salazar

Right.

Heather Adams

You knew during COVID, "This is the thing that if this takes us down, I'm going to go down with taking care of people," right?

Heather Salazar

Yes. I remember that with COVID for us, we had every single one of our clients in crisis simultaneously, right? So-

Heather Adams

Yes, you did.

Heather Salazar

We had nonprofits that had lost all of their fundraising. We had speakers who no longer had speaking engagements. We had authors who had books launching, and there was no trips to New York and all the media was all of a sudden virtual and nobody to sell books. It was just everybody had something different that they were navigating and we were trying to help them all simultaneously. I remember looking at our team and saying to our team, "I want our reputation at the end of all of this to be one of helping people when they were hurting. I don't care if we make a dime off of it," right?

Heather Adams

Right.

Heather Salazar

Because so many people were calling saying, "What do I say to my team? How do I keep selling when people are losing their jobs and people are losing their lives?"

Heather Adams

Everything.

Heather Salazar

All of the people that were coming to us for those things, and I said, "We're going to help them. Even if they can't pay us, we're going to help them."

Heather Adams

And it was scary for you.

Heather Salazar

It was so scary-

Heather Adams

It had to be scary for you too, because you still have to pay your people. I still have to pay my people and all that. Yeah, exactly.

Heather Salazar

Right. I remember thinking, "Oh my gosh, I'm responsible for these families that work for me." I just never looked at it like that, because we [inaudible 00:30:51]

Heather Adams

You're responsible for everybody's mortgage, not just your own now.

Heather Salazar

Yes.

Heather Adams

I know it was so hard.

Heather Salazar

Yes.

Heather Adams

Well, one of the things I love about P is I think there is so much heart behind your organization. Do you feel like that heart combined with your why is what helps you develop the culture of the team?

Heather Salazar

Mm-hmm, and I think it's the hard work value and it's figuring things out. I don't know about you, but the biggest thing that I've grown in and I think just drives the culture so much is when I'm like, "I handled that wrong. I handled that wrong. I'm sorry. I want you to know I'm learning. I'm trying to get better, but I am sorry." That seems to be the biggest two things that stick out to me. One, two of my mentors, one you met, Nicole.

I knew John her husband before I knew Nicole and I was freaking out over that one issue I was talking about, I go, "I don't know what to do. This could be bad PR." I didn't even have a PR company. I was like, "This is going to be bad for this. How do we save this?" He looked at me and he said, "You know what?" He had just gone through something really big with his company and he said, "When I don't know what to do, Heather," and I don't even know if I'm going to be able to invoice it correctly," and he's huge compared to me, he said, "I get up the next morning and I do what we're good at. I pour concrete."

Heather Adams

Oh, I love that.

Heather Salazar

"I do what we can [inaudible 00:32:13]"

Heather Adams

Yes.

Heather Salazar

Yes. I'm like, I get up in the morning and I do what I'm good at. I serve meals. I provide these house cleaning kits, and the biggest thing was the peer support because mental health definitely during COVID. Then Ditki, who you got to meet too, really impressed and she goes, "Sometimes I think the two most important words that I don't want you to forget of the English language when you're leading," and I said, "What?" She said, "I'm sorry."

Heather Adams

Isn't that the truth? I have had to do that over and over and over again. I did a survey with my team last year because we had some transition on our team, and so I did a survey with the women who had stayed and were still here trying to care for them and find out the answers. I was deathly afraid of what the results-

Heather Salazar

Me too.

Heather Adams

... were going to say. "What are they going to say about me? I'm the only consistent here. I'm clearly the problem."

Heather Salazar

I know.

Heather Adams

There were things that they shared, it was information. It was so helpful and insightful. One of the things I learned that I had not handled well was when someone was leaving, I didn't allow everybody to mourn the loss because we're so close, and we have this really tight work environment and collaborative culture. I just was like, "Let me fix the problem and move on to the next thing," and so I had to say, "I'm so sorry. I didn't handle that well." Then the next time there was a transition, because there's always going to be transition-

Heather Salazar

Always. Right.

Heather Adams

100% of the people are not going to say 100% of the time, that's inevitable.

Heather Salazar

No.

Heather Adams

That's really hard for me, but that's inevitable. But the next transition I said, "Okay, I learned from y'all in this survey that I didn't handle this well, the last time, we're going to do it differently this time. Based on what you shared with me, here's what we're going to do." I think that I'm sorry that you're talking about and saying when you're not doing something correctly or when you've learned and to do differently, you earn so much relational equity with your team.

Heather Salazar

You do. You do. I'm working on that culture as we've grown. And one time I was speaking at a women's conference in California and this lady who created MyChart, basically, she's like a Mecca. She said, "For the longest time," and I related to her in this, not the brain MyChart part, but she said, "For the longest time, I forgot that it wasn't me and three other people in my basement trying to create EPIC." I think it was EPIC, the charting system for hospitals. I thought, "That is so me, Heather." Sometimes I come in and I'm like, "Why would programming want to hear from me?" I forget that we do make that presence of how the office is, how things are, because sometimes I do still see PRG as this-

Heather Adams

As this little bitty thing, yeah-

Heather Salazar

Yes.

Heather Adams

... in somebody's garage still.

Heather Salazar

Right.

Heather Adams

Exactly.

Heather Salazar

So I thought that was so important, I'm like, "Oh, my."

Heather Adams

When you think about the women who are listening to our show, they're entrepreneurs, they're business leaders, they really aspire to build strong and successful organizations just like you have. They're women like you met at our Choice Summit when you came to our summit-

Heather Salazar

Yes.

Heather Adams

What is your best piece of advice to them around their why, their mission, their culture? What's the most important thing you want them to be aware of because you're down the road from them?

Heather Salazar

Yeah, so I think two things. One is, it's okay to mess up and no one's going to think about it as much as you. Fail fast, fail forward. Seriously-

Heather Adams

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Heather Salazar

... because if you're not failing, are you really taking risks to grow? Because think about how many things could have failed in PRG or Choice or whatever if you didn't take the risk? That's number one. Number two, for me, I had to get help on this from a therapist at one point, because I think I was like, "Oh, my gosh. So-and-so's calling me and they have cancer and I have to talk to them right now because I don't have cancer." I was missing out on the most important things to me, my kids, my whatever. I missed half the soccer game by being in the car. I couldn't almost justify that in my head because I felt so privileged to be alive.

Then finally someone said to me, "Heather, they're going to be so happy when you call them during the work hour. They're not going to be like, 'Oh, my God, you didn't answer your phone at 10:00 PM?'" So for me, I didn't fight this hard to live to not see my kids. So there are some just coveted lines in the sand that were really hard for me to grow up, like put in, but my life is so much better. I'm a better leader. I am a better mentor to people going through cancer. I'm better at who I am and what I do by saying no and being there when I need to be present.

Heather Adams

I think particularly women who are at the beginning stages of launching a business or an organization deeply resonate with this because you feel like you have to be everything to everybody-

Heather Salazar

Yes.

Heather Adams

... or everything's going to be thrown out and this is going to be a wash and your business is not going to be successful, right?

Heather Salazar

Right.

Heather Adams

But I have found, and it took me a while to learn this too with a lot of therapy and executive coaching like you-

Heather Salazar

Yes, I have too.

Heather Adams

... is when you draw those boundaries, people respect and admire that so much, and it sets you up to be a healthier, better version of yourself when you are invested with them, right?

Heather Salazar

Right.

Heather Adams

Because you're getting filled up in the things that are good for you so that you can pour into somebody else when it's time for you to do that.

Heather Salazar

Yes.

Heather Adams

Yeah.

Heather Salazar

My kids are grown and in college, but I don't want them to think I wasn't there for them. One thing you're going to love Heather is when those boys go to college, the one thing is I tell Steve, "The freshman year, all of a sudden we're the best parents ever." I think they realize-

Heather Adams

I can't wait for that.

Heather Salazar

... everything they took for granted. It was the best. They're like, "Mom." I kid you not. I got to tell you this whole story. Lexi, our youngest, the one we adopted who's just so precious. I'm literally getting ready to leave for the board retreat. She got a job in between soccer at Plato's Closet. Thrifting is the new thing.

Heather Adams

Uh-huh.

Heather Salazar

Like, "Mom, I need help." I'm talking to the biggest donor. "Mom, I need help. It's really important." So I call her. "I have to fill out this paperwork. Do I check Married/Filing Jointly?" That was her question. I'm like, "Did you get married?" She's like, "Mom, I'm not joking here. It has to be right." I go, "Oh, my word, Lexi." So I think asking those questions and them feeling confident, which doesn't mean you had to do it all right. I had to miss some things to go my big events, and you get that.

Heather Adams

Of course.

Heather Salazar

So I just think having fun, working hard, making history-

Heather Adams

Oh, I love that.

Heather Salazar

... that's kind of it.

Heather Adams

I love that. All right. I've got two questions that I ask every one of our guests. I would love to ask you those as we wrap up our time. The first is super easy and you're going to love, and it's so helpful to our listeners.

Heather Salazar

Okay.

Heather Adams

What was something that you are currently obsessing over? It could be a new lipstick. It could be a show you're binging. It could be a great pair of jeans you just discovered, but anything? Something that you are currently obsessed with?

Heather Salazar

So one thing I am obsessed with actually came from Choice Summit after my time, there. I'm like, the one thing I kept taking home over and over, "I'm worthy of the body I have," because I'm not super happy about the last few pounds. So literally I'm like, "I'm going to work on these clothes. I have too many clothes and I am going to feel good every day. Every day I'm going to feel good."

Heather Adams

Yes.

Heather Salazar

So that's been huge, and that's a gift you gave me recently.

Heather Adams

Oh, my gosh. Well, Alison Lumbatis who said that, she was a speaker at our summit this year. Alison said I started sobbing when she said that. But she said from the stage, "You deserve to dress the body you have now."

Heather Salazar

Yep.

Heather Adams

She was like, "Quit waiting till you're a certain size and look a certain way to dress the body you have. You deserve to dress the body you have now." It was so liberating, wasn't it?

Heather Salazar

It was.

Heather Adams

Oh, my goodness.

Heather Salazar

It was crazy because you know it, but you don't. I'm like, "From here on out, I'm wearing what I want to wear."

Heather Adams

Yes.

Heather Salazar

You know what else is funny? I shouldn't go off on this tangent really quick, but I think corporate America and I would hire people in and they would come from bigger places. At PRG our dress code is, "Dress for your day."

Heather Adams

Oh, yeah. I love that.

Heather Salazar

I'm all about trendy jeans and a cute sweater. I'm not going to be in business pants every day. Sometimes I love my flares, and so I think that for a while I was like, "Am I not doing it quite right?" But I'm like, "No, this is who we are. We can dress for our day." If I have a huge presentation, that's one thing, and it's just been a really great fun phase I've been in, actually, since I got back from Choice.

Heather Adams

That makes me happy. I'll have to tell Alison you said that.

Heather Salazar

Me too. Yes you will.

Heather Adams

Okay. Last question, you know this about me. I really believe in developing the women who are coming behind us. I want for it to be a wider, easier path than what you and I had-

Heather Salazar

Me too.

Heather Adams

... to navigate. What is one tool, one resource or one piece of advice that you would give to those women who are coming behind you?

Heather Salazar

Every day starting about two years ago, so right before COVID and I got tested for illness, every day I wake up, I do my devotions and I write down five things that are important to me. One thing that was very shocking to me, and I think because I am a little bit Pollyanna, I didn't know 77% of all self-talk was negative. So I always say, "Take the mirror, look at yourself," and I make my kids do it every day, every day, "You are worthy. You have huge plans. You are going to do big things."

Heather Adams

You are worthy. You have huge plans. You're going to do big things.

Heather Salazar

Right.

Heather Adams

Say that to yourself every day.

Heather Salazar

Yep, every day in the mirror, "You are worthy." You can personalize it, but for me, you "You are worthy. God has big plans for you and you're going to do big things. God has big plans. You're going to do big things." I say it every day, and then I go on, because this was a really hard thing for me, Heather, and I shared a little tidbit about it. "I am an excellent wife and I am an excellent mother." Even though PRG has grown, and this, because the haters can come out. Every day I tell myself that, that's my goal. "I'm an excellent wife and I'm an excellent mom," because I think sometimes as women, we think those can't coincide.

Heather Adams

You know what I love about that? Jen Hatmaker in her last book-

Heather Salazar

Yes.

Heather Adams

... had a chapter about body, her body, and talking to your body positively. Since I read that chapter and worked on that book with her, I look at myself in the mirror and celebrate what my body looks like, regardless of this ... She has done a lot for me. She's delivered two children. She's climbed trees. She's ridden bikes. She's walked down the aisle. She's done a lot for me, right?

Heather Salazar

She's healthy. She's healthy. You're raising her your kids.

Heather Adams

Looking at her in the mirror and saying, "Thank you. Thank you for what you've done for me today. Thank you for what you're going to do for me today." I love adding what you just said to that, those mantras that are so self-affirming. That is such, such good counsel. I love it.

Heather Salazar

So one thing's I do that with my girls. The boys are already out of the house, but I do that with them. Lexi will say, "I'm an excellent person. I am beautiful in my Black skin," because it took us a little while to get there. "I am an excellent soccer player." I think it's just so important. I physically write it down, even when I'm running late. I physically write it down. It takes two seconds.

Heather Adams

Well, yeah. But there's something about that that we believe in our head when we write it down-

Heather Salazar

Yes.

Heather Adams

... isn't there?

Heather Salazar

Yes.

Heather Adams

Yeah.

Heather Salazar

Yes.

Heather Adams

My therapist says, "In order to change the narrative, you tell yourself in your head, even if you don't believe it and your brain doesn't know the difference so your brain believes it." I was like, "Oh, my gosh, so good. So good."

Heather Salazar

I agree with that.

Heather Adams

Heather, thank you. This has been tremendous. I am so honored to have had you on the show. I love this conversation around determining your why, how to take your purpose to build your culture and to help you make decisions and all of that. Thank you for spending time with us.

Heather Salazar

Oh, thank you so much for having me. What an honor and a privilege to be your guest.

Heather Adams

Of course. Oh, my gosh, y'all. Wasn't that so good? Oh, I just love that conversation and I sincerely appreciate you listening. If you loved it too, will you do me a huge favor? Go wherever you listen to your podcasts and give us a rating and a review. It helps more people like you find the Make Me Known podcast and it boosts us in the ratings and we would be so grateful for your encouragement and kind words. Thanks, y'all, so much for listening today. We'll see you next week.

Quotes:

- “So I say this because I do think I have a strong faith. I think, ‘Gosh, how sometimes plan B works out so much better than plan A ever could.’”
- “I sat in the bathroom and cried the entire game because I'm like, ‘Why do I get to watch my kid and she doesn't get to watch hers?’ We don't know those answers, Heather, but we know we're called to make a difference and that is my why.”
- “COVID was scary for a nonprofit. We actually provide these services and guess what didn't stop in COVID? Cancer, unfortunately...So if we're going out, we're going out, sticking to our mission.”
- “ Fail fast, fail forward...Because if you're not failing, are you really taking risks to grow?”