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Children: MalamaDoe, Head of the Table. MalamaDoe, Head of the Table.

[0:00:33]

Sheila Long: Hello everybody, welcome to the Head of the Table podcast. My name is Sheila Long and I will be your host for today's show. Hi everybody, my name is Sheila Long and I'm the owner of MalamaDoe, a co-working community for women and I wanted to welcome you to today's podcast for the head of the table. I'm very excited to have our guest here today. Her name is Carol Hirschmugl and she is the owner of the Safely. So welcome to our podcast, Carol.

[0:01:08]

Carol Hirschmugl: Thank you Sheila. Lovely to be here.

Sheila Long: Alright well, you're a member of our community at MalamaDoe. It's a safe community where we promote collaboration for businesses to grow, expand and prosper. So we're just thrilled that you're here with us today so we can hear your story and just to help inspire other women business owners.

[0:01:29]

Carol Hirschmugl: Awesome. I'm looking forward to it.

Sheila Long: Great. Alright. So let's see. Why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and your business?

Carol Hirschmugl: Awesome. So I actually have two roles at present. I'm CEO of Safely. It's a new company startup out of a university which is my other role.

Sheila Long: Wow.

Carol Hirschmugl: I'm physics professor at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee.

Sheila Long: Okay.

Carol Hirschmugl: And at the university, I, with cofounder, discovered a new material.

[0:02:03]

Sheila Long: Wow.

Carol Hirschmugl: And with that new material, we identified a couple of years ago that this could help to improve lithium ion batteries for future electric vehicles.

Sheila Long: Okay, that's great. Wow.

Carol Hirschmugl: And so now we're in the process of taking that and identifying the product that we will make with it and testing that in batteries so that we can proceed with making new batteries that will improve the electric vehicles of the future.

[0:02:35]

Sheila Long: Wow, can you imagine that? So we would be able to - like how would they be improved?

Carol Hirschmugl: They would be improved mostly by faster charging and higher capacity. So we could drive farther distances and you could charge your battery within a coffee cup - drinking a cup of coffee.

Sheila Long: No, that's amazing. Wow. Can you imagine that? Like how long does it take now to charge?

[0:02:59]

Carol Hirschmugl: Right now, you really should charge batteries for 24 hours at least. And turbo charging is an hour.

Sheila Long: Okay, wow.

Carol Hirschmugl: You can turbo charge for an hour.

Sheila Long: Okay, but then yours would be when you're drinking your coffee.

Carol Hirschmugl: That's right.

Sheila Long: Awesome and then it's safer too?

Carol Hirschmugl: And it's safer battery, yes.

Sheila Long: Okay.

Carol Hirschmugl: And hence the name Safely, it's meant to be improving the parameters of the battery such that it will decrease the likelihood of short to the other side of the battery.

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Right now, graphite which we have used materials for this part of the battery for the last 35 years. And that material actually leads to - can lead to shorts which leads to those fires that we're familiar with from watching fires on planes, etc, from lithium ion batteries.

Sheila Long: So is that the graphite and then you guys are circumventing that somehow?

Carol Hirschmugl: And our material should circumvent that.

Sheila Long: Okay, wow, awesome. What a great thing coming out of Milwaukee here.

[0:04:01]

Great idea. It's great that you guys are thinking about commercializing it and everything. Alright. So I'm so glad that you're here to share this with our podcast with all of our audience too. So let's talk about - so your current position, you're the CEO, you said, of Safely?

Carol Hirschmugl: Yeah.

Sheila Long: Awesome and you're working at the university. So you're doing both things at the same time. So sounds like you're definitely the head of the table in different roles. So what does it mean to you?

[0:04:28]

Carol Hirschmugl: What does it mean to me? So head of the table has changed over time but what's really cool is that I'm a mentor for lot of people both in my job at university and in my job as CEO of Safely. I'm really guiding a lot of people to do their best.

Sheila Long: Wow, okay.

Carol Hirschmugl: And achieve goals that they wouldn't have achieved without having the ability to either work in our company or to get a degree at the university.

[0:05:01]

Sheila Long: You must just leave work everyday really like proud of what you've done or maybe not everyday.

Carol Hirschmugl: Maybe not everyday.

Sheila Long: Okay.

Carol Hirschmugl: But you know, there is a lot of good things and then the discussions with people and speaking with people and helping everyone see a way forward is really inspiring. It is.

Sheila Long: Okay. Alright. And how about at Safely? Do you view it as the head of the table or is that something that's down the road?

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Carol Hirschmugl: So both mentoring as well as - I'm in the position along with my cofounder identifying how we go forward, how do we take this discovery. So what happened was we had this discovery, we have a patent and we thought people would be lining up at our doorstep to license this --

Sheila Long: Yeah, wouldn't you think?

Carol Hirschmugl: -- but we're so far away from having a product with just this discovery that we realized that the only way to go forward was to actually figure it out for ourselves.

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And so we have undertaken this situation of starting the company and demonstrating and making more and more of this material and demonstrating it in applications. And so what that requires of me is that I'm directing the people who are figuring out how to make those prototypes as well as how to make more material as well as being the person out there who is presenting what we are to the community and so all of those pieces of what I'm doing as the head of the table.

[0:06:30]

Sheila Long: Wow, that is great. It sounds like it's a long road too but you're handling it well, right? Just doing one thing at a time.

Carol Hirschmugl: We're on the road.

Sheila Long: You're on the road. You're heading down the path.

Carol Hirschmugl: Yeah.

Sheila Long: So do you have any role models or life influencers?

Carol Hirschmugl: Oh, I've lots, yeah. And that comes back to mentorship. So I had really important mentors when I was doing my PhD.

Sheila Long: Okay.

Carol Hirschmugl: I had four scientists actually who I was working with. One in particular was my PhD advisor and he taught me what life was as well as --

[0:07:06]

Sheila Long: Oh really?

Carol Hirschmugl: -- what science was. He was a really inspiring PhD mentor. And then in addition to that, I was working very closely with three other scientists and so I got to see four different scientists and how they approached science and how

they approached life and so that gave me a really deep insight into how to pick and choose things that would work for me.

[0:07:33]

Sheila Long: Okay, wow.

Carol Hirschmugl: And it was very inspiring.

Sheila Long: Okay.

Carol Hirschmugl: And then of course my family, my husband and my immediate - my siblings, all of them have been super inspiring for me as well. My siblings are all very accomplished. I'm the last one to start a business --

Sheila Long: Oh really? Oh cool.

Carol Hirschmugl: -- out of seven of us.

Sheila Long: Oh no way, you've seven siblings?

Carol Hirschmugl: Yeah.

[0:07:59]

Sheila Long: Okay and they've all started businesses?

Carol Hirschmugl: Been involved with or started businesses of their own, yeah. We're kind of entrepreneurial. And then my husband has been absolutely rock for me for the whole time that we had been together.

Sheila Long: Awesome.

Carol Hirschmugl: All of those people have been my support system.

Sheila Long: Great. It's so nice to hear like you have people who will back you up and just people you can see what they've done and then people who you can just rely on when you just need like someone to listen to. That's great.

[0:08:35]

Carol Hirschmugl: That's right.

Sheila Long: Do you have any like great accomplishments?

Carol Hirschmugl: So accomplishments, so there is two pieces to this. The first piece is about ten years into being a professor, I identified novel new microscope that I could build.

Sheila Long: Awesome. Wow.

[0:08:56]

Carol Hirschmugl: I built a one of kind microscope. I had a 100 plus scientists from all around the world come and work with me to use that microscope and to discover new things.

Sheila Long: Okay.

Carol Hirschmugl: One of the discoveries was the discovery of this material --

Sheila Long: Interesting.

Carol Hirschmugl: -- as well as slew of other things and it's a way too big of a story to get into at the moment.

Sheila Long: Okay. Alright. Wow.

Carol Hirschmugl: But it was really awesome experience that I just - that was a big key thing for me.

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At one point, however, funding for certain aspects of this program disappeared and that led me to developing this material. So my next challenge was we had this material and we decided that we wanted to figure out how to take this material to market and so I actually figured out how to take what we had learned at nanograms and scale it up by a billion fold.

Sheila Long: Okay.

[0:09:58]

Carol Hirschmugl: And that's what I did with my time after I finished using the microscope and developing that microscope, I spent my time doing some chemistry and figuring out how to do that billion fold scale up.

Sheila Long: Wow. It's like funny how life just takes you down to a different path, right?

Carol Hirschmugl: Yeah. Life has its path that opens doors and closes doors at the time we need them.

Sheila Long: Like you had all those siblings starting businesses, you're doing your own thing and then you had this great invention and then it leads you to another invention and now you're a business woman.

[0:10:27]

Carol Hirschmugl: There we go.

Sheila Long: Yeah but you still have all the support and all of those people helping you out along the way.

Carol Hirschmugl: Yeah. And I will say the other thing that's really amazing is my cofounder of the company. If we weren't doing this together, she is a fantastic cofounder.

Sheila Long: Okay. Do you want to like talk a little more about it?

Carol Hirschmugl: I can talk a little bit more about Marija.

Sheila Long: Okay, so what's her name and let's hear another story.

Carol Hirschmugl: My cofounder is Marija Gajdardziska-Josifovska [0:10:53].

Sheila Long: Oh my goodness, okay.

Carol Hirschmugl: That's bit of a mouthful.

Sheila Long: Alright.

Carol Hirschmugl: She is also dean of the graduate school at UW Milwaukee --

Sheila Long: Okay.

[0:11:00]

Carol Hirschmugl: -- and a physics professor as well.

Sheila Long: Okay.

Carol Hirschmugl: So we have a history of working together for the last 20 years.

Sheila Long: Wow, that helps. You definitely know each other.

Carol Hirschmugl: So we know each other. And it turns out we do have - so we have lot of similarities but we have found out what our complementarities are which is really critical when you think about who to work with when building business. You need people who have different visions --

Sheila Long: Okay.

Carol Hirschmugl: --who have different approaches to something.

Sheila Long: Alright.

Carol Hirschmugl: You can't all be from the same seed because if you're, then you don't have enough diversity to make a good business.

[0:11:35]

Sheila Long: Okay.

Carol Hirschmugl: And so we spent a long time wondering what that was for us and we actually identified it that one of us is much more conservative in our thinking and one of us is much more willing to be a risk taker or look at things from a much bigger point of view and be more thinking outside the box.

[0:12:01]

Sheila Long: And that's nice to have each other.

Carol Hirschmugl: It's great to have each other. We know how to talk to one another but we also can appreciate when each of us brings that to the table. Sometimes that's really difficult for people to accept that from other people but if you develop this trust and understanding in other areas then when that type of stuff happens, one speaking outside the box, one is within the box, you can actually start to appreciate that from one another and those things are really critical to making a good business.

[0:12:30]

Sheila Long: Yeah, it sounds like mutual trust and just that common appreciation because so many times as the business scales, you find that you may need different team members but you've that 20 years of experience, so that's nice that you can know and trust the person that you're working with and really value their judgment.

Carol Hirschmugl: Right, right. That's been really key.

Sheila Long: Alright great, what a great story. Thank you so much for coming on our podcast today and I hope you enjoyed it. It was so great to hear your story.

[0:13:02]

Carol Hirschmugl: Thank you Sheila. I really enjoyed sharing my story and look forward to future great successes at MalamaDoe.

Sheila Long: So we're really inspired with everything that you're doing. Where can people get in touch with you or find you on social media? How is that coming?

Carol Hirschmugl: I'm on LinkedIn.

Sheila Long: You're on LinkedIn? Okay. Carol Hirschmugl. H-I-R-S --

Carol Hirschmugl: C-H-M-U-G-L.

Sheila Long: Okay, so you're in LinkedIn and then you guys do have a website but you're not actively tweeting.

[0:13:34]

Carol Hirschmugl: I'm not actively tweeting.

Sheila Long: You're moving the gram from milligrams or nano or whatever. You're busy. Okay.

Carol Hirschmugl: We're busy.

Sheila Long: Okay, alright. So thank you to everyone else and our audience for tuning in. So at MalamaDoe, we encourage women to be heads of their own table. We want women to be in charge of their work and their destiny. So you can find us at malamadoe.com or we do have active Twitter and Facebook accounts as well. So thanks everyone and thank you Carol.

[0:14:06]

Carol Hirschmugl: Thank you.

Sheila Long: Thanks to everybody for listening to the Head of the Table podcast. Please feel free to look for us wherever you find your podcast and let your friends know as well. Thanks everyone.