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EGi Raw Talent Podcast

Laura Acklandiene (Equiem) & Karl Tomusk (EGi)

Karl Tomusk: This is Karl, and you're listening to the Tomorrows Leaders Podcast, and we're here with one of the many rising stars, L.

Laura Acklandiene: Laura. Should I have introduced that straight away?

K: Laura?

L: Yes.

K: How do you pronounce your name?

L: Laura, so it's spelled the same way as Laura, but I say Laura.

K: Right.

L: It's my childhood drama, someone made a joke as soon as I started learning English and I said, "No, I'll never be Laura."

K: Where are you originally from?

L: Well I grew up in Lithuania, but I moved to Australia nine years ago. So Australia's home for me, but then I moved to London back in September almost a year ago, and as of April I'm spending a portion of my time in North America too. Well traveled.

K: So you'll have all the accents.

L: Pretty much.

K: Nice.

L: Mix it in.

K: So we haven't actually introduced you, can you tell the listeners who you are and what do you do?

L: So I am Laura Acklandiene, Head of Business Development Global Expansion at Equiem. If you know Equiem, or if you don't, it's a company that provides building community apps for commercial real estate landlords. It actually started in Australia, that's where I joined the company. Then I moved to the UK to help with the expansion in this market.

K: Why did you get into it?

L: Pardon?

K: Why did you get into it?

L: I got actually excited about the idea, I didn't really come from the property background, I didn't know much about the buildings and the built environment. I actually used to think that the industries quite stale and pale, and boring. However, I was soon shown that I was wrong, and there's lots going on. Lots of exciting things going on, and all leads to landlords and managing agents, and technology firms focusing more and more on people. That really

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excites me. So with this platform, with what we are doing, we're actually helping various different property owners to engage people in their properties and make sure that they are feeling happier, more productive and more excited in the buildings where they live or work.

K: What angle did you come from?

L: In terms of background?

K: Yeah.

L: Different, so I was more in a marketing type role working for a luxury automotive firm. Before that I actually worked for a not for profit, so it's such a big mixture of various different backgrounds, various different stories and objectives different companies have. But I've always have an interest in working for a company that is passionate about something, that can create an impact and that's growing. Equiem, ever since I joined, not because I joined but overall, when I joined it was on a great trajectory to keep growing. We've been expanding so much, like last year when we expanded to the UK, at the very same time we also expanded to the US.

K: What do you think of the industry as a whole?

L: I think it's quite fascinating and now that I'm traveling more and more I try to make some comparisons, try to find some differences and there are some differences. What really excites me over here people want change, like landlords they do want to trial different things, they want to make sure that they're keeping up with the Jones. That they're not left out behind, they want to make sure that they have a recognizable brand and customers care about belonging to their buildings. Now what exactly they do to ensure this, it's a mixture, but it's still a very early journey and I hope to see more and more landlords experimenting with various different ideas. You won't know whether things work, will work or won't until you actually try to experiment, see what sticks, see what engages your customer, see what kind of return you can be getting out of that.

K: Where do you see the industry going in the next five, 10 years?

L: Oh dear, we should have the likes of Anthony Slumbers over here in the room and he can talk a lot about where the industries heading. I think there will be a lot of change, a lot of different business models considered in this market, and I think there will be definitely a lot of disruption. Not a big fan of such buzz words but there's a lot of concern that the way we are doing business in terms of landlords, how they're doing business, that will change. What is exciting is that again there's more and more focus on the people in the built environment. How are they feeling there? What are they thinking? What do they want? How to better support them to make sure that they're much more productive and much more exciting being where they are. So I think it's kind of a focus even to an extent of looking into the neuro scientific angles, like with the likes of the Centric Lab. I think and there'll be a lot of new things that we'll learn about each other, how to build buildings, how to operate buildings and make sure it's a sustainable exercise and it's engaging areas differently, individuals on a different level.

K: What is it like being relatively young, being female in an industry that is older, male, are there any challenges?

L: No, not quite. I'm obviously very much aware of all these different movements around me too. But so far I haven't had any challenges as such. We've been very fortunate, like Australia is well recognized in customer experience, and now that landlords want to talk the same language they've been welcoming this Australian firm coming and sharing our expertise. As a woman as well I do tend to think that I am considered well, because I do have the industry knowledge, I do understand what is it that I'm talking about. What is it that I'm selling and growing in this market, so that definitely helps.

In terms of change it's funny you know, each year we approach and we think, ah it'll be such a huge growth year because this adoption is definitely growing, in what we are doing and what a lot of other tech firms are doing. But again, a lot of landlords are concerned making decisions, they are concerned making the wrong decision and they do get confused because there are so many different stakeholders that do want to be involved in making that kind of decision about technology. Especially if that technology is visible and touched by a lot of different stakeholders.

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K: How do you convince people that it's something that they should be embracing, and that they're not just going to be collateral damage on the side?

L: That's a good question you need to understand what motivates them on an individual level as well as on a business level, what is it that they are trying to achieve? Only then you can actually tailor the message and make sure that what you are mentioning to them is relevant to them. It's very easy to go on a spiel and just talk oh we've got that and that, look at this list of benefits, or this list of features. They useless in themself, you need to understand what is extremely important to them. Often it will be the likes of give me straight away an exact figure, or what is your ROI like? The trouble that a lot of property technology firms are facing, we sometimes can't give that exact figure because we have not existed for such a long time to significantly prove it. Or if we come up with some figures, you know they may not be statistically valid.

As an economist my background, actually you know I often look at all these different figures and laugh at them. But this is not the only criteria that landlords should be considering, you need to think about your brand, how you want to be perceived, what do you want to be known for? How do you want people to feel in your buildings? What kind of measurable change you would like to drive? What kind of revenue you would like to start generating through introducing various different services in your environment.

K: What inspires you? Or who inspires you?

L: Oh dear that's a good question, I should have been ready for such a question.

K: Such an obvious one.

L: I know, but you don't reflect on that often enough. I must admit our CEO, Gabrielle McMillan is quite an inspirational woman. She actually introduced me to Equiem and the concept of engaging customers in the built environment, and that got me really excited. I've seen her together with the wide team growing the business and expanding the business, and rethinking trying to stay ahead and lead in the way we are approaching what is it that we are doing. So that's been remarkable, that kind of experience trialing different things and then being recognized in the industry by our peers, by our competitors, by our clients how good we are in terms of again, engaging people, providing content, providing data about people in the building. That's been significant, so I'm very proud of where the team has been going. Gabrielle McMillan again, she's a great force within our business.

K: What's your aspirations?

L: I love the idea that what I'm doing is making an impact, making an impact within the business and within the wider society. I love being at the forefront of implementing some kind of a change in the industry, so that always excite me. I couldn't be in an environment where I'm just given a task, lets say to sell something that's not extremely impactful. So that really gets me excited, and at the same time as I'm doing that I'm progressing in my career, obviously I'm quite excited about opportunities to work with the team, leader team and keep growing the business on a global level.

K: Would you ever consider an industry that isn't property anymore? Or are you married to it now?

L: It's funny, you know I've been thinking about that. I'm actually very much in love with the property industry. I can't see myself leaving. I'm not saying that I won't, maybe I will, but at the moment there's just so much going on. So many opportunities, especially if you have a mind, if you're interested in technology and intersection between technology and the built environment and people, that is fascinating. So I think I'll stick around for a bit.

K: Now as our rising star, it has the word star in it, what's your favorite constellation in the night sky?

L: If I only knew them in English. I used to love watching constellations when I was little. I used to have a book and take my binoculars, that's what I had, and look at them. What's the one with the Northern Star, what's the name in English?

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K: Don't ask me, I don't actually know anything about constellations.

L: That's the one.

K: Yeah, lets just call it that.

L: Sure. Northern Star, in Australia I do miss seeing Northern Star, so I do like any references to it.

K: Nice. Skittles or Starbursts?

L: Well I guess you're talking about lollies, and I'm a dark chocolate fan so neither.

K: Are you?

L: 90% chocolate.

K: Is there any chocolate out there named after stars?

L: Not sure, but I fell in love with the one Leonidas, I don't know what Leonidas means. I'm sure there will be some star called Leonidas as well, that's a Belgium chocolate, fell in love with it.

K: I think that's covered everything very nicely. Thank you Laura.

L: Thank you Karl.