

AWS_S1E03Emma_V3

Speakers: Geetha, Emma, & Constance

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Emma: Especially these days when we're such a globalised, interconnected world, you really need to be able to work with people with different backgrounds. So, I think it's a good skill to be exposed to that early in your career.

Geetha: Hi, I'm Geetha. If we want to keep growing this diverse and inclusive AWS, we have to think of the future. It's not enough to set short-term goals. Instead, we need to look further.

We have to be asking what do we want this workplace to look like in 5, 10, 15 years and how do we want our employees to interact with each other?

And who represents the future in this equation? It's those at the start of the careers in the cloud.

Today I'm diving into early career development at AWS. I want to see how AWS is preparing and nurturing new talent for tomorrow, providing a platform to learn about the cloud and our status as a company dedicated to diversity and inclusivity. Welcome to Here at AWS.

Emma: AWS is my first sort of real full-time job. I've had a few different roles, but AWS and Solutions Architect is my first full-time proper adult job.

Geetha: This is Emma.

Emma: I joined through a grad program called Tech U. I joined as a graduate straight out of university in 2021.

Geetha: Tech U is a space to learn, try things out and make mistakes.

Emma: Tech U is the six-month graduate program where everybody who's doing a technical role at AWS, so be it solutions architect or professional services or a technical account manager, they'll come into Tech U, to give you that foundation knowledge of AWS, it really gives you a bit of a crash course of the role.

There's simulations of customer conversations, group projects and need to build demos. So, it really gives you a crash course of what your day-to-day job would be like.

So, people come in with different backgrounds. There's sometimes people with really strong computer science backgrounds or data science background like myself, but lacking some other areas.

So, I think that Tech U is a good way to level set and then also get hands-on with AWS. And also, in that sort of safe environment with everybody at that point in your

journey. And also, as said, those sort of simulated customer conversations and role plays.

And also, just doing it in two weeks. So, each topic was in a two-week sprint. So, at the beginning of the sprint you would go from having little knowledge of the topic or concept and then by the end you should be able to present to a customer about it.

So, I think that also reflects my role at least as a solutions architect. I often have to quickly get up to speed with the topic that the customer's interested in and be able to advise on it. So yeah, I think very much helped with the role.

Geetha: Tech U is also an environment where people from all walks of life come together. Students can be calling in from anywhere in the world. Was this diverse international classroom important for Emma's growth?

Emma: I think really important and especially these days when we're such a globalised interconnected world, you really need to be able to work with people with different backgrounds and a good skill to be exposed to that early in your career. Yeah, especially at a large organisation like Amazon, people could be dialling in from anywhere.

Geetha: I'm curious if you're still in touch with people that you graduated with.

Emma: Yeah, yeah. So, when we reach different milestones like promotions or featuring a talk at a conference or something, we always congratulate each other and keep in touch sort of those milestones.

And then just also, what are you up to? So, some people have already gone into sort of specialised roles so sometimes can reach out to them with some questions, keep in touch especially around those milestones as we go through our career.

And it's exciting to be like, "Hey, I was with them in Tech U and look at them now." So, no it is cool.

Geetha: What would they think about you doing a podcast?

Emma: They'd probably say that makes sense. She always would have something to say. That makes sense.

Geetha: It sounds like Emma had a really great experience in Tech U, but were there barriers along the way?

Emma: Yeah, so I guess this is a really interesting question as well. So, my family actually is in tech. So, I sort of was around tech all my life. I was aware of it, we're a bit of a nerdy family, sort of aware of what a career in tech could look like.

But I wasn't necessarily interested in it. I didn't necessarily want to do that when I was in various stages of school. I always was interested in STEM.

So, for example when I was in high school, I really wanted to do physics when we were choosing our subjects and I was at an all-girls school, and they wouldn't let me

do physics or let me go to the boys' school to do physics. As there weren't enough students at my school to have a class run.

So, they wouldn't let me do it because the career counsellor, she said, I am a girl, I'm competing with boys across the state. My schools won't be as good, so do I really want to do that?

And so, when I shared this with my parents, they were like, "That is not okay. We are moving schools so you can do your physics and computer science."

So, moved schools at sort of the end of high school to be able to do my physics and computing, to be able to get into the sort of the course I wanted to do at university. That's sort of the telling me I couldn't do something sort of motivated me and made me want to do it more in a way.

But then when I went into university, I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted to major in. When I first entered it, I thought I wanted to do mathematics, so that's sort of what I was focused on. Then I did a computing elective and I really, really enjoyed that.

So, I ended up keeping computing through my undergrad and sort of ended up majoring in data science. So, that's what I graduated with because it's a bit of a fusion of statistics and computing. So, it was sort of best at both worlds.

Geetha: This is really interesting to me. Emma's path to tech as a young girl was not straightforward and those comments from her teacher are quite shocking, underestimating her because of her gender. What did it feel like for her to hear that?

Emma: I guess it really depends on sort of your personality, how you can take it. That school counsellor could have been like, "You won't get good grades, you won't be able to compete with the guys." And I could have gone, "Yeah, that's a good point. So true, so true."

But instead shared it with my family and they were like, "That is not okay." Yeah, it's just funny to look back at it and go, "Oh wow." Imagine if I did listen to them and go, "Hmm, maybe that's true."

I guess you really need to trust in yourself, and you know yourself the best. It's good to get guidance and mentorship and things, but sometimes if it feels off trust your gut.

Geetha: Emma had a really supportive network. In fact, a very close member of that network is also an employee at AWS.

Emma: My dad actually works at AWS and had a long career at another tech company. Yes, I think it is a really interesting dynamic we have that we work together. I guess he's mostly Frank, the dad to me when I see him at home and on the weekends. So yeah, very much can draw the line between Frank, the colleague and Frank, the dad.

But yeah, it's quite a funny, nice experience working with him. So, he actually also works sort of managing early careers in a different organisation and team, but he

really can see what I've gone through in my early career for me and that can sort of help him in his job.

Yeah, he's always supportive. I've gotten an award or something. He's always very supportive and excited.

Geetha: It makes you think, what if Emma didn't have the supportive network she did. Maybe she wouldn't have changed schools, maybe she wouldn't have gone to Tech U.

As we know there are still imbalances in the tech industry. There are things that need to change. So, where does Emma think those changes need to happen? How do we make it so more have access to a career in tech? How do we make it so less young women are deterred?

Emma: Yeah, I think really getting people at that beginning of the funnel is a really important element of addressing that imbalance.

And so, i.e., getting people early in their career, getting people signing up or considering computer science as an option in school and sort of changing that perspective of what a career in tech could be and how having that tech literacy is an important skill to have. As said, sort of every job is a tech job or will be touching tech.

So yeah, I think that sort of at school level, at early career, there's more diverse folks coming through the pipeline and proactive work being done to help create a more diverse and also reflective workforce.

I.e., we're building tools that everybody uses. We can't just be having one perspective with respect to the building and the designing. It's so important to have a diverse group of builders. School in Tech U, early in the pipeline. Getting people interested in working in tech is so important.

I was just talking to a colleague about this today that usually, we just think about a career in tech, just coding, but there's so much more to it. Tech can really be anything that you want it to be, any interest that you have. Tech is a part of it these days.

So, I guess sort of that once realised that you can bring your passion to tech, like tech can also be your passion, but e.g. if you're interested in what have you, sports, or music, tech has a role in it.

So, having that tech literacy is important. And then also with respect to what a career look like, it's changing all the time and it could sort of look like anything, which I guess makes it a bit unclear. It's not like being a doctor or an accountant and you have that sort of path. Tech, it really does change and there's different pathways into it.

But yes, it can be unclear and confusing to navigate this world. I see other people internally, their job role. It's like, whoa, that's interesting. What does that even mean? So, even in tech I'm learning about different elements and components to it.

Geetha: It's clear that Tech U gave Emma a really good foundation for life at AWS.

Emma: I think in Tech U, I think a really important skill that I still use is that sort of fast paced side of things. So, sort of going from not knowing much to being able to research and find information and be able to be a bit of an expert on it in a short amount of time.

That sort of side of self-learning. But also knowing when to and how to ask questions. I think Tech U was really helpful in that going from not knowing much to knowing enough to present on it and build a solution around things. So, learning how to learn in a way.

Geetha: So, does Emma recommend the experience to others?

Emma: Yeah, so I think a really nice thing is I am often asked to either be an onboarding buddy or mentor for the new wave of Tech U folks or interns coming through.

So, I always try and reach out to them even if I'm not officially their mentor, I will give them some wisdom and other times where I feel like could provide some help or mentorship or guidance or advice.

I try and also reach out, not always waiting for other people to reach out to me. I go and actively reach out to the new folks as well.

I would say just do that learning to get that experience. See what you like and what you might want to sort of go deeper on, I think is an important lesson I've learned.

Just sort of there's always learnings to be had. If you do an internship or a project and you're like, "Actually I really did not like that," that's still a learning. You've learned that you don't like it. So, advice is seize opportunities and again, learn.

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Geetha: A brighter future always starts with the people that are going to inhabit it. With programs like Tech U, AWS are supporting a diverse group of future employees.

Thanks so much to Emma for a fascinating discussion and thanks to you for listening. It's always so fun to chat with new people from this AWS family.

Constance: Exactly. No one here is just an email address. Everyone is building something, and they all have a story to tell.

Geetha: That's it for now. So, don't forget to subscribe.

Constance: And hey, if working up here in the cloud seems like fun, why not check out our websites in the bio? You may just be the person we're looking for.

Geetha: We'll see you next time on Here at AWS.