

Angela Gill Nelms on Sustainable Innovation in Healthcare and Technology | Transcript

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Speaker 1

Welcome to Green Building Matters, the original and most popular podcast focused on the green building movement. Your host is Charlie Cicchetti, one of the most credentialed experts in the green building industry and one of the few to be honored as a lead fellow. Each week, Charlie welcomes a green building professional from around the globe to share their war stories, career advice, and unique insight into how sustainability is shaping the built environment. So settle in, grab a fresh cup of coffee, and get ready to find out why. Green building. Green Building Matters.

00:33

Charlie

Hey, everybody. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters podcast. I'm your host, Charlie Cicchetti. I've got the easy job. Once a week, I just interview an amazing person in and around sustainability, maybe wellness, real estate. And sometimes you've seen it's going to be a. Lately, a trend for me is technology, tech startups. You know, I mean, we talk AI, we talk tech. And I've got someone that also went to Georgia Tech, a friend of mine here in the Atlanta area. She's a superstar. And I've got Angela on the podcast today. How you doing?

01:06

Angela

I am great. Thank you so much for having me, Charlie.

01:09

Charlie

Well, I know a little bit of your story. I can't wait to learn more. I know you're a great, not just storyteller, but, you know, you're. You're a high achiever and you're just fun to be around, and you're a very ambitious person. And I

just can't wait to kind of, you know, let our listeners learn more about you. But if you would take us back. So where did you grow up and go to school?

01:26

Angela

Awesome. So I moved from the north to the south when I was like six or seven. Okay. And that's important because I think some of my genetics and the way that I've navigated being very candid in conversations has a very northern hit, like, hereditary perspective on it. And then the way that I've learned to build relationships, and some of that is some of the southern graces that I grew up with. And so growing up in Griffin, Georgia, which is a town south of Atlanta, if people know about Griffin, they probably just know about the college football teams and the NFL players that have come from there. And it was public school education. You know, I had three brothers. I had a brother that is, or I still have a brother who's a year older than me. We were always arch enemies.

02:13

Angela

And the three of the four of us, he went to mit and the rest of us went to Georgia Tech. And I will say that an interesting part of my story is growing up just a little bit of family dynamics led me to really have this focus on the human condition and helping to make people better, either from a health wise or from an education wise. So I, I was always kind of back and forth, do I want to be a teacher? Do I want to be a doctor? Do I be a teacher? Do I want to be a doctor? And yet the Air Force when I was in high school, they did this really fun thing back in the 90s where they would give you a test and based on that test is what they would give you a scholarship in.

02:53

Angela

And they gave me a scholarship in electrical engineering. And I said, absolutely not. Like engineers are nerds. They, they definitely have, you know, pocket protectors and tape on their glass and I on their glasses. And so I initially was like, never mind, you know, I'm going into the medical

space now in 1992 and 93 is when I graduated high school. No one knew about biomedical engineering. So I will say had I known back then, biomedical engineering was a thing that's what I would have done because it really married my engineering brain with my passion for advancing the human condition. However, I will say that as all stories are, I don't regret my journey.

03:39

Angela

My journey helped me build a lot of resilience, determination, and when I did then go to school at Georgia Tech for biomedical engineering, as a 29 year old single mom, I was really focused on how can I drive something towards success. And so that's really how I made it to Georgia Tech. I will say that Georgia Tech completely changed my life. It really helped me see how I could be a solid leader in the space and constantly learn from people and solve real world problems with the ability to pivot when need be.

04:13

Charlie

And I know you love Georgia Tech. That's both of our, that's our alma mater. And so it just sounds like, you know, you ended up there, you grew up south of Atlanta and you ended up at Tech. So biomedical engineering, I mean, you know, is that a last 10 years, it's grown a lot. I mean, when did that maybe option really start showing up? It sounds like, you know, you were early in that movement 20 years ago. So I don't know. When did that show up?

04:37

Angela

That's a great question. So I don't know the exact answer to the question. I will tell you that there are lots of people who started in biomedical engineering in theory, named different things, often at different universities back in maybe even the 80s. But at Georgia Tech, the program now just celebrated 25 years and they're the number two in the nation. And so I think there was really this shift in that period of time, about 25 years ago or

30 years ago when you. They first came up with this idea of starting the program at Georgia Tech and Emory was really having a hardcore focus on the core sciences and bring in the health care part.

05:18

Angela

And one of the things that I think is fascinating is that when I was graduating in biomedical engineering, which was in 2007, between 2004 and 2007, kind of those years, industry had no idea what a biomedical they, it was almost hard to get a job because they thought we don't know what biomedical engineers do. And really we came in and showed them that because we were forced to go into the other disciplines and take like their hard classes and ours, we really were a team that could learn anything and collaborate with people across different areas. And that really has been one of the key factors that has helped biomedical engineers, at least at Georgia Tech, we like almost always win the Capstone projects now. And I think it's that interdisciplinary and tapping into both sides of the brain that really have allowed it to expand.

06:11

Angela

And so I use this example recently because Georgia Tech, it has a new college coming and it's a college of arts that also ties arts and science technology together. And I said to them, now you're going to need to think about how you explain to the industry what the value is of your students, because that was the hardest thing in biomedical engineering. And now those individuals know. But in those early days it was very confusing.

06:36

Charlie

Okay, well, you knew the last 25 years. I got out of tech in 2004, so then I went the kind of construction route as you know, green buildings and then tech startups here in Atlanta to our listeners. Atlanta is known for film in the last, you know, 12 plus years, electric vehicles, but also tech startups and some amazing colleges right here in our backyard. So you mentioned

Capstone. I know that had big influence on you. So how did that also propel you to what was next?

07:07

Angela

Oh, that's great. So for the listeners, Capstone is what Georgia Tech calls is senior design project. And when I completed mine, I had a couple of things that fed into. And I think that I love entrepreneurs who, when I ask them, why did you become passionate to this? And it has some kind of spirit within them. And so I was a, I had a special needs daughter. I was in my last year at Georgia Tech preparing for Capstone and because of my daughter's disability I had observed this challenge with hydrocephalus shunts that they were basically, the doctors would modify the intensity of how much. And a hydrocephalus shunt is. Is something that drains fluid out of the brain when it has excess fluid, because that excess fluid causes pressure.

07:54

Angela

And that drainage, the amount that's drained and the speed at which it's drained is really important because if you turn the hose on too much, then you don't have those fluids that are necessary to remove toxins from the brain. Okay, well, back in those days, the way that shunts happened is it was basically very symptomatic. The kid is not doing well, so you turn it up or down. And I thought, I want to create a hydrocephalus shunt that's a fully enclosed system with solenoid valves and pressure sensors and a readout. So doctors are actually not just hearing the symptoms, but they're actually seeing real data. And then I realized that at that point, when I did my senior design, every team, they just did their senior projects in their discipline, which meant that I would work with four other biomedical engineers and develop this.

08:45

Angela

And I thought, that seems insane. I think in order to do what I want to do, I

need someone from, like, computer science, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, and biomedical engineering to have this fully enclosed system. And so I went to the person who was in charge of the projects, Dr. Paul Benkesser, and I asked him if I could form this interdisciplinary team. And he said, if you can talk the other departments into doing it, then you can. So I learned my first lesson in that, you know, you get an opportunity if you ask for an opportunity. The second lesson is, you really need to have a compelling story and what's in it for them. And so I went to the other departments and convince them to let us do it. Now they made us do three projects and three papers.

09:28

Angela

But come Capstone, which is Senior Design Day, our team had a fully closed loop system. And everyone else in BME said, this isn't fair, she had all this. And he said, well, she asked and you didn't. And then what I learned is that by doing that and kind of pushing the status quo, then you can also open new ideas for teams. And so now there is a separate division for the awards that are given that are fully for interdisciplinary teams that really throw that. And when I look at building companies or building other teams, I now have learned the benefit of surrounding myself with people who know things that I do not know.

10:08

Charlie

There's so many things in life you don't know, unless you ask and look at where you launch that. And I don't know, I wish when I went back to college, if I went back, I'd take it all so much more seriously in those office hours. And it sounds like you leaned in, maybe that helped. Maybe going back right after you had a little bit more school, hard knocks and just real life and it's like, okay, so I really respect that a lot. So let's talk mentors. I love to ask my podcast guests just sometimes a mentor, right? Somebody you look up to, maybe they're on stage, you read the material. Sometimes it's someone that you meet with, they challenge you, they open doors for you. As you look back, have you had any mentors?

10:46

Angela

Yeah, I have a couple that. Well, first off, I think of mentors as kind of as if you think of a board of directors and having people that fit the area that you're looking for mentorship. So for example, if I'm looking for mentorship and spirituality, I'm going to go to someone who. That's what they specialize in. Or finance, I'm going to go to someone who's that. And then you have kind of like your humanity focused mentors. And so one early on or two were really tied to Medtronic. My first job was at Medtronic. One was Michael Birnbaum, who had spent his basically his whole career at Medtronic. And he was really passionate about helping students graduate and get their first impactful job.

11:30

Angela

And so it was really watching him, the number of volunteer hours that he did for people that made no difference to him at his stage of his career was really like, okay, that's what I want to be like at some point in my career. So I started. He got me my first job at Medtronic and I started at Medtronic. And then when I was at Medtronic, I'll lead to my second person that was a mentor. And at Medtronic really going back to biomedical engineering for the 2020 or let's see, the 10 year symposium, which was in 2010. We I was asked to speak at the symposium and I just graduated three years early and they wanted me to speak about the future of biomedical engineering. I really wish I still had that deck because for what I said.

12:15

Angela

But what I did know is that sometimes I think the best way to consider what's going to happen in the future is to look at the way that some things happened in the past. And I was at Medtronic and I thought, you know, I want to interview Earl Bakken, who's the founder of Medtronic and retired in Hawaii. And how was I going to do that? And so going along the lines of everything's a no unless you ask, I sent it. I realized he still had a Medtronic

email and sent him an email and fully did not expect to hear anything back. Right. And one day I'm finishing proctoring a surgery at a hospital, and I answer the phone. This is before caller ID listeners. I answer the phone and this lady says her name and she says, earl Walken wants to talk to you.

13:00

Angela

Can you please hold? And I spent time talking to the person who invented the pacemaker and, like, really built in the moral and the values into Medtronic and made it what that. What it was at that time. And the lessons I learned from him that I've carried throughout my career is one he said, when you're on a plane, just talk to the people around you. He said, you just never. And it was really that mindset of if you're in a room with different people, talk to those other people, even if you have to push outside your comfort zone. But then the second one is never be too big for your purchase. I mean, seriously, he was so humble and so kind. He didn't know me from anyone, and he just responded and answered.

13:40

Angela

And then I would say a third mentor was a boss that I had at Medtronic and his name was Jason Moore. And he really taught me how to be a compassionate but transparent and confident leader. And following his leadership style, when I contrasted it to some that were not so amazing, it helped me learn how I wanted to build my leadership style and listeners.

14:03

Charlie

That's how you find mentors. So, holy cow. Way to just reach out. You never know. And I love every bit of that. Thank you for sharing that story. Mentors are so important. Hopefully, as this podcast episode comes out, some will pick up on this and hear that you gave them a shout out. So, okay, help connect the dots of the career. So, Medtronic and then what were the next couple chapters there?

14:26

Angela

Well, the great thing about Medtronic is I was proctoring cases for clinical studies for advanced devices while they were being tested in humans before they were approved by the fda. So in that role, I got an opportunity to see a lot of other potential devices. And one thing I observed is there's this common trend of individuals thinking, I should develop this amazing widget. Okay. And then they never get an end user in the loop. And so I think this goes across all entrepreneurship, right? Is they develop this amazing widget, and they don't actually talk to the people who are actually going to use it or actually going to pay for it. And then they roll it out as their beautiful baby, like we like to say.

15:10

Angela

And then it comes to the people who are actually going to use it, who then say, this will never work because of X, Y, and Z. And so when I was at Medtronic and I observed that repeatedly, I thought, you know what I want? I need to get a broad perspective of information, and I need to see what it's like on the other side of the field. So I got an opportunity to run research for the interventional cardiology at Emory. And when the doctor called me, he called me because he needed someone, and he knew I knew everyone in the state. In clinical research, I just, like, you love to connect people. And so he decided I would connect him to someone. And I said, hey, I'll do it.

15:53

Angela

And I still remember where I was standing when I was having this conversation with him. And this is what, circa 2012, maybe somewhere around there. And I said, here's the deal. I will do it, but I will only do it for two to three years. And during this time, I will help teach your teams the best practices in clinical research that I had learned from these 60 different hospitals and 100 different physicians. And I also want to learn these things. And so it was the best thing. I also took a huge pay cut, which I

thought, in my mind, this is like getting a master's degree. And so I'm gonna. That's how I'm gonna decide that it's okay to do this, because I'm gonna learn something that you really can't pay for. And it was amazing. It was.

16:35

Angela

Had I not done that, then when Ryan Jones came to me with his. This little software startup idea that he had, I would have not had the knowledge from a sponsor side, from a site side, you know, a payer, a hospital side. I wouldn't have had all these. All of these things that you just learned through experience. I wouldn't have had those. And, you know, so it then led me to jumping into software. When he gave me the opportunity, which I did, I said my. I reacted to the software idea the same way I acted to the engineering opportunity in high school. I know nothing about software. There's any more nerds. And so, yeah, well.

17:14

Charlie

And soon the rest is history. So I know that brought you back, I believe. Georgia Tech, atdc, some accelerator roots there, right? So can you talk a little bit about that? And Florence and just how the heck did you figure out software, a tech startup?

17:28

Angela

I think it's a reminder that if you know how to solve problems. So I would say to all of your listeners that my favorite thing is surround yourself with people who want to solve problems and be in the mix of that, who want to be constant learners. And if you want to solve problems and you know how like a process to do it, and you want to be a constant learner and you want to add impact to the world. And so when Ryan first brought me Florence Healthcare to look at the software, their beta version, I going back to my comment about like my maybe northern spin on things, I looked at the software and I said, okay, here's the good news. What? There's a huge

need for efficiency in clinical research and what you've built will not work, but if you do this.

18:12

Angela

And I gave him a list of things because I was being recruited to be a head of product at some companies in Silicon Valley. I said, if you do these things, I'll test out your product. And he said to me, wait, you're leaving Emory? Come work with us. And I laughed, just like in high school and said, I don't know anything about software, but I knew a lot about the end user and I saw this as the opportunity to do something I always wanted to do, which was build something with White Glove customer service and how better to do it than in software, because software, as you know, is not known for White Glove customer service and build a company that employees love to work at. And so those two motivators and the fact that I knew clinical research, I just jumped in.

18:54

Angela

And then I was fully transparent in the beginning that I knew nothing like Charlie. Seriously, my second week there, he had me do Sprint planning. And then after I did Sprint planning, he said, that's really what I expected in Sprint planning. And I said, well, that doesn't surprise me because I have no idea what Sprint planning is and all I did was Google it. And this is what I came up with.

19:16

Charlie

This is before ChatGPT. Yeah, I guess.

19:18

Angela

Yes, definitely before. I remember it would be funny because in Stand up the team, especially developers, whenever I would actually make a reference that was appropriate for software, which became more and more

frequent as time went on, they were giving me such great kudos and they gave me such grace. And I also was just like, I'm going to laugh at myself because that's all I can do.

19:41

Charlie

And that's, I can tell you just want to put yourself in those positions and you're going to learn. You're a fast learner. I can tell that. Okay, so then you keep building on that. Some tech companies, tech startups. And you know, I'll go ahead and ask. I've noticed you mentioned customer service. You are passionate about customer service. And maybe that's even more the southern India. I'm not sure. But I've just noticed that. And along that is teams and so we will fill in the blanks and talk more about what else have you worked on, what are you doing today? But yeah, where did you first get that? Hey, customer service. I mean you love it.

20:20

Angela

I do. I bleed customer service. I think it is when I. It's a great question. I really think it harkens back to, you know, one thing is I think you know this, right? I was at a very abusive childhood. And so I, I never was really the center of positive situation environment and I didn't ever feel like my voice could be heard in some of these sorts of things. And I knew how frustrating that was. And then once I learned and went to one, I don't even remember what the first place was that I saw that people were really treated like amazing and the places cared about them and they were actually trying to develop something to help make them better. I just immediately got involved in that. And I think, you know, maybe it's the Girl Scouts.

21:06

Angela

You know, I got my silver award through the Girl Scouts. I almost got my gold award. But so I tell people, seriously, just finish your gold or your Eagle Scout or whatever. But. But yeah, I just learned how it felt to serve and be served. And when it made me feel really good, I wanted to offer that to

other people. And so at one point I also learned that it also makes a big impact on business and how you can grow. Because I used to say, look, if you're gonna bus tables at McDonald's, you should be the absolute best table busser at McDonald's has ever been. And that's how you can continue to grow your brand. And so then I graduated. When I graduated, I think the big shift was reading the book Rating Fans by Ken Blanchard and his.

21:52

Angela

The topics that he had in there and starting to think about companies like Nordstrom and some of those and thinking about the experience. They saw humans as humans and they saw problems as an opportunity to make an impact. But I said, I'm all in. And you know, most recently, my favorite book in the customer experience Sage is Make youe Brand Legendary by Scott Wozniak. And it is the book that I like to give to people to say, hey, this is what you do to really make an impact. And I just know that when team members, like, really, if team members are able to give great customer service, they actually like their jobs more.

22:29

Angela

So here you have those customers who are referring you and bringing in new business and you have team members that are staying because they like what they're doing and they go home at the end of the day happy with what they're doing. So it's a win.

22:42

Charlie

All right, So I can tell that background has made appreciate great team, great culture, having people just feel respected, heard in their opinion, but also customers. Right. So thank you for taking us there. Okay, let's keep talking career and you know, what were the next few things and then let's talk present day. So fill in some gaps and let's talk about what's keeping you busy today.

23:03

Angela

Awesome. Awesome. So I had that amazing experience at Florence and I was employee number four. I stayed until we raised our series C and they had 100 employees. And that was a great adventure there, right? I think 250 employees, something like that now. And then I spent some time. One thing is that this is my story about Silicon Valley is that I graduated from Georgia Tech. And when I graduated, keep in mind, I had a special needs 5 year old. I had \$80,000 in credit card debt because that's how I paid for most of my education. And I, like this girl, needed a job. It was part of my family. And so that's why I selected the Medtronic job. It was safe, it was a huge company and it was in Atlanta and. But I always had an early bucket list thing. Charlie.

23:52

Angela

I always had on my bucket list. I'm a biomedical engineer. I love building things. I want to build a medical widget in Silicon Valley. And my analogy to country music is I tell people what happened is it's kind of like if you play country music and you think you have to go to Nashville to play country music. That's how my drive to Silicon Valley was. Now, I did not want to go until after my daughter graduated high school so she could stay in Georgia near her dad. And then after she did, I got recruited to go become CEO of a biopharmaceutical company in the pancreatic cancer space and was also a public company. So there was a lot of growth and challenges in a lot of areas. And it was in Los Altos, Silicon Valley, California. And I got out there and I learned.

24:44

Angela

I learned a lot. I learned about a different type of board. I learned about how challenging it is to run a small public company with all of the financial implications that you have to tie to that. I also learned the challenges of building a company in a different area, in a different state that has that the

rules are very different between Georgia and California. And I also realized this, much like that country music singer gets to Nashville, they then realize they can do country music anywhere. And I realized I could build medical device companies anywhere. And I really had this pivotal moment where I was frustrated with the people I was hiring in California.

25:28

Angela

And just be in my experience, my n of 1 this is Angela's experience, is that I wasn't seeing the grit and determination and passion there that I remembered in Atlanta. And then I thought, well, maybe it's just me. And times have changed since COVID because this was past Covid. But I came back to Atlanta for a board meeting and some teams at Georgia Tech presented and I saw that fire in them and I just said, you know what, here's the deal. I want to move back to the Atlanta ecosystem, back to Georgia and I want to be a part of helping to make startups, entrepreneur and technology in Georgia a ten times more success. And so that's when we met with the last software company that was a part of. And so I was a part of that company for a little bit.

26:14

Angela

And then I was recruited to Georgetown Emory for my current position running the Biolocity program.

26:20

Charlie

Well, I love these different industries, I love the Nashville analogy. So hopefully our listeners realize that. But you're back in Atlanta, you're back strong and yeah, why don't we talk present day, you know what's keeping you busy today?

26:33

Angela

Yeah, absolutely. So what Biolocity is, it is a culture funded program that is

joint between Georgia Tech and Emory. It's founded in biomedical engineering. Between those, however, we have reaches in many different departments and disciplines between the two schools. And what it is it provides non dilutive funding, up to \$200,000 grants, two projects that have where the IP is at Georgia Tech or Emory. So it's someone who's at one of these two universities and they're in like a lab or in a, I don't know, a software area. And they have a technology that has the potential for commercialization in the healthcare space.

27:14

Angela

And through a very competitive process, they can then submit to us for to apply for our cohorts which are annual and then they will competitively go through a process where we will pick the best teams and if the teams are Selected, they can get funds, as I mentioned, currently up to \$200,000 non dilutive, which entrepreneurs like us love that word. But the non dilutive part in the funding isn't actually the special part because then what we do is we help project manage them for a full year with entrepreneurs and residents who are assigned to them. So we meet with them every two weeks, helping them drive towards commercialization. And I just love this because I can say, I mean, Charlie, I literally learn new technologies and new science and new ways to think about advancing health care every single week.

28:09

Angela

I sit in a lot of meetings where I sit there and say, okay, I have no clue what you just said, but I can give you this business perspective or this, you know, and really have an opportunity to help those teams that are very research focused because that's where they've been, and help make that shift into a business mindset and understand, okay, this is what the VC or the your next funding source needs to see. And so we really work with them to identify what are the key inflection points that they need to reach during this journey. How can we help them get there so they'll be set up for success so that their technology has a chance to actually make it to helping humans?

28:50

Charlie

Well, two great colleges here in the Atlanta area and you get to work with both of them. And I know, you know, business, you have a great business knack and you've got great energy. For those young entrepreneurs that have an idea, you're right, you need some early funding, you know, and so in that world is that going through devices, early software development, hire a first employee, I don't know. What do you recommend if someone lands that up to 200k?

29:15

Angela

Oh, that's a great question. And I will say that it could be yes and yes to what you just said, or it could be absolutely not to some of those. And it really depends on looking at the type of technology. So we have some teams that are software teams. We have teams building MRI technologies, We have some AI teams building advanced algorithms for disease identification. We also have teams that are developing diagnostic products for improved drug test or blood testing and some items in that area, as well as some teams developing the next phase for a drug. So you can imagine if someone is developing something for a drug versus a, let's just say, software program. The needs of the two of those are very different.

30:00

Angela

And so we bring in an entrepreneur residence with them and really help drive towards what does the next step look like sometimes. And we also try and identify is This a a company or a team that's set up to be a startup or is this a licensing play? And either one of those is fine. It could be an example where it's a piece of software that you're going to then turn around and license out to GE Healthcare and so this team is really going to just build it up until they hand it over and they license it out to that industry partner. Or it could be that it's a team that's then going to roll out and become a startup

company. And those conversations are very much as well. Charlie, like, okay, what are the key first hires we need to make?

30:47

Angela

Who should be fractional? When should I have a consultant versus someone who's actually on the team? How should we write our documents for what the cap table and equity should look like? How do we incorporate, you know, some of those types of things? So it's really the heart that makes it special is that there's not one size that fits all, but there is a project management style that fits all. And it's really looking at the technology. Where is it at right now and where does it need to be to get a meaningful inflection point so that they can get follow on funding from someone else or just roll out to them roll out to a new startup or as I mentioned, a licensing play.

31:24

Charlie

Super exciting. Let's talk sustainability. This is a podcast where we talk about green buildings, healthy building. You know, I'm curious, kind of what you've seen in and around sustainability on your journey and how it may be all ties together.

31:38

Angela

I love that and I love the passion that you have for sustainability. Often when I talk to teams, I say, okay, you need to look at certain projects and problems and determine which ones you just need to do something really fast for to get to the next hurdle. And it doesn't really matter what you do and which ones are you really making a scalable, sustainable, robust, long term play for? And when you're looking at that one, when you're looking at that and setting up a company, right, being very strategic and thinking that we want to be sustainable, then we're going to make these investments now and we're not going to do things that are going to be disparate, that are going to cause problems.

32:15

Angela

But I think also if I were to shift more into what it looks like for a medical device space, it's also having conversations with teams who are creating, let's just say they're creating a new test, that is a blood test and talking to them about, okay, well, what is disposal of this look like? What does disposal in the lab currently look like? What are the new regulations that might be coming out which may impact that? So you're set up to align with any of those missions that those hospitals have and whenever. And also, I mean, anything about sustainability, any way that you can take health care dollars and reduce them so you're actually getting patients out quicker, so they're spending less time in the bed in that.

33:02

Angela

That environment that you have, then you're actually creating both a sustainable life for them and also one for that hospital that then reduces so much of the energy and so much of the work that they have that they can actually move towards the next individual.

33:19

Charlie

I see that, and I love that. I'm going to ask a bonus question. I think you've been in a lot of medical facilities, a lot of hospitals over your career, and, you know, in a perfect world, we bring in more natural light. We definitely have more fresh air, but I don't know who's getting it right. What are a couple facilities that maybe stand out? Maybe they're elite certified, maybe not, but I don't know. What have you seen? It's like, okay, I'm sick. I want to go there. I think I'm going to heal up a little faster in that layout. Anything come to mind?

33:45

Angela

Oh, my gosh. I love this question. If you asked me this question, circa

2012, when I was in all those, I literally had styles I had a list of. But I think it is, you know, there is, I think, one. If we could model more of our hospitals after the way that some of the newer children's hospitals are built. And I say that. That so many of them are built with those bright colors. And I'm thinking of the new Arthur Blank hospital and those open environments and trying to think of how do we keep people engaged in a positive mindset while they're in this? You know, how do we distract them? How do we do some of these things? I think that is a model that I would go after.

34:29

Angela

I would tour some of the latest and greatest children's hospitals and figure out how we could then convert our existing hospitals into that.

34:37

Charlie

There you go. Okay, we're going to do a quick look back, and then I look forward. What's on the highlight reel? What else haven't we covered that you're just really proud of?

34:46

Angela

I love this. So one of the things, I think a couple of things, and when I look back at my life, like, what are some pivotal moments that really stand out to me? And one is the day that Steve McLaughlin, who is still currently the provost at Georgia Tech, although he's about to leave as provost because he got a president's position. But the day that Steve invited me into his office and told me I was going to receive the Georgia Tech Alumni Distinguished Alumni Award, I cried that day.

35:17

Charlie

Day.

35:18

Angela

But he told me, and I cried. And I had already received the Young alumni award in 2010. But the thing is that coming up, you know, I had so many years when I first started college, when I actually went back to get my degree, and in the media in between those, I had so many people that were kept saying, you'll never graduate. You'll never. And I know there were times in my head I also thought that. So to graduate from a university like Georgia Tech and to get that award from them, it just felt like, yeah, I'll get teary now thinking about it. So that was one moment that really stood out to me. Another moment that really stood out to me is when I received our very first Best Company to Work for award. Like those pictures for those scenes.

36:01

Angela

And I'm so glad we got so many photos. We're just like, yay. Like, we've actually accomplished something early on, and that's that particular startup that we really wanted to make an impact on. And then I. I think another one is when I finished my time at Emory, I, you know, I resigned because I was going to work at. At Florence. And one. One of the doctors I worked with was like, well, you'll be back in six months. Because that idea of this document management company and software, it'll never work. This is like, it kind of worked. And. But what also happened is I resigned, Charlie. And literally the next day, I get a call from one of the PIs, one of the doctors running one of the clinical trials there, his admin, who said, hey, there is this lady from the fda.

36:49

Angela

She wants to talk to you about an inspection. And I thought it was a prank because I was really close to the doctor, got a log, and I was like, you guys are really funny because I just resigned, right? And sure enough, no, it was. She said, do you want me to forward you the email? And I said, yes, or to be the email. And so I got the email. And the cool part of this moment is that first off, I said, okay, well, I don't want the FDA to know I've just resigned. So I called every HR and I said, okay, let's remove my resignation

right now. I'll stay through the FDA inspection. And then I'm leaving right after. And so I did that.

37:26

Angela

But the key thing was too, like, at the end of the inspection, when I was talking to the lady, we nailed it. And I was able to see how some practices like optimizing systems and some of those advances that I had put into play that were very strategic for a very scalable method, how they improved clinical research and advanced that particular trial so much in our area, were the highest enrolling site. And it was just kind of affirmation that I needed to then go in and take that knowledge into the world.

37:56

Charlie

Well, congratulations on all of that. And talk about just not even doing the right thing. Just the kind of person you are to go back and say, no, time out, Let me go help. Let's get this done, and then I'll move on to what's next. That's really cool. Okay, so now let's talk about the future. I love to ask my guests, especially in your industry, hey, what's next? What are you reading up on now? And you're in a unique position. You're seeing all of the great ideas, but what's standing out? What are you getting excited about?

38:22

Angela

Well, I think that a. I am personally really excited about the potential for AI. I was just in Boston, and were just at a College of Engineering board meeting and talking about it. And we've been talking about AI advancements for the past at least two years at Georgia Tech. And I'm excited because the appropriate use and the appropriate guardrails around it can really revolutionize the way that we think as humans and the way that we build teams and processes and how we're way more thoughtful and we can provide opportunities that we would never think of before. So really, the focus on AI I'm a big fan of, and I think it's good to have a healthy fear of

things because it allows you to then build in those guardrails. But doing that is really crucial.

39:14

Angela

I think, really looking right now at speed to efficiency. So how can we, within the ecosystem, get teams instead of it taking. And this is also where AI comes in, right. Instead of it taking 25 years to get a drug to the market, seeing different things that are being integrated into the systems, to then reduce that down to 10 or even eight years and things. So speed, efficiency is big. And another thing right now, especially we're recording this in April 2025 in the US is the reality that we need to be very creative in our funding opportunities and be thoughtful about what additional partnerships can we make so that we can diversify where funding for research comes from and how we can be very thoughtful about what that looks like, both now, in the future.

40:07

Angela

I think part of it is being able to tell better stories about the successes we've had and why those successes matter, and also speaking with partners across the different industries to say, okay, what really matters to you and what have you nailed and how can we use that to become creative in those areas? And so I think really the final piece of it is we will see success in the teams, the cities, the states, the organizations, the ones that learn how to use and embrace the ability to pivot to solve problems and to hire people who want to be lifelong learners. Those key things, I think, are going to drive our space to the next level of success.

40:50

Angela

And we're trying to focus on so much of that in the state of Georgia to really, I hope that 20 years from now, when you're interviewing me on your podcast, we're talking about me leaving a legacy of really revolutionizing a

lot of how startups are successful in both Atlanta and in the state of Georgia.

41:09

Charlie

Well, we will.

41:10

Angela

So I just put that out there at the end of the.

41:12

Charlie

So what you did there. All right, well, hopefully we're at some exotic beach location and this or that, and let's just chill. It'd be great.

41:19

Angela

I know. I love it.

41:20

Charlie

I love what you're doing. And, you know, I want our listeners to get a peek into kind of what. What helps you stay super productive and ambitious. So kind of the rapid fire part of my interview here. Angela, what would you say is your specialty or gift?

41:34

Angela

I think my specialty or gift is being able to see humans as humans. Not as an opportunity for something for me, not as someone who, like, is being a jerk, whatever, but instead what is at the core of who that individual is and being able to understand.

41:56

Charlie

That a lot more than, you know, we've known each other for a little while. I mean, I like to give the benefit of the doubt. Do you think that's related or break it down a little bit?

42:04

Angela

Absolutely, absolutely. I love the analogy. When you think of when you're the one in a car and you get cut off by someone, like, wow, that person's just being a jerk, like, da, da. But when you're in a hurry to go somewhere and you cut someone off, then it's okay. And so what I try and think is if someone cuts me off, I think, okay, that person probably has something super urgent they have to get to, and they may make me 30 seconds or two minutes slower than what I need to be. But in the grand scheme of things, that's just. Just fine. And I think it's that giving the benefit of the doubt and understanding that typically when people respond in a harsh manner to something, it's actually not what that situation is, it's the problem.

42:53

Angela

It's underlying challenges that they really just need compassion for.

42:56

Charlie

There you go. That's. And we've got a lot of traffic and a lot of crazy drivers in Atlanta, so I'm gonna start practicing on that one now. Okay. So do you have any good habits, routines, rituals that help you stay on point?

43:08

Angela

My favorite is gratitude list. And as I mentioned, I find that when I get behind doing my gratitude list, I have a couple things that I've done is that I have one friend that we send our gratitude list back to each other. So we list five things we're grateful for. And my favorite thing about that routine with her is that when I get her list, it helps me remember things I didn't even

think to be grateful for when she put something on there. And then also, I started last year this another gratitude program or activity with two of my friends. And it's every day, just pick one thing you're grateful for, write it on the note card, and put it in a jar.

43:46

Angela

And then at the end of the year, last year, I was able to have dinner with one of the two of these individuals, and we just pulled out some highlights of our previous year and shared them with each other, like, the stories about why we thought it was so great. And for me, I mean, I thought last year was a kind of a challenging year. You know, I moved cross country and had all these other factors that played in. And so it was really refreshing to me to remember all the things throughout the year and the moments that were really special and to reflect. So gratitude is one of them. And then doing a morning devotional and trying to get up and having mindful mornings.

44:25

Angela

I think that's the only time of our day that we actually have full control over before people start inserting stuff into it. And so those two habits are very critical. And then I think the third one is I have learned Now I turned 50 this year. I wasn't always good at this, but I've learned at. In each moment, when a challenge comes, instead of going through the rabbit hole of all the negative parts of it, is instead looking at the situation, like, I don't know, maybe a podcast episode that had no audit look at the situation and saying, okay, here's where we're at right now, what's the next best decision I can make? And not looking back, just saying, okay, we're going to do this, we're going to do X, Y and Z, but we're going to move forward.

45:10

Angela

And that positive mindset is really helped save my whole mental health.

45:15

Charlie

A lot of wisdom that you just delivered there, that is fantastic. And I remember now when I was on your podcast is about gratitude. While I also do some gratitude in the mornings, the fact that you share that with that friend and I think you sync it up and you can see each other, I mean, talk about taking it one step further. So to our listeners, I challenge you to do that. The gratitude jar. I mean, it's amazing because, you know, we get a lot of anxiety in the world right now. We get a lot of overwhelm probably in our day to day lives. Physiologically, you cannot have both of those emotions, gratitude and overwhelm. And gratitude is the antidote to overwhelm. So thanks for taking us back there. Okay. Bucket list.

45:53

Charlie

I think you and I are both big fans of the bucket list, so I don't know, what are some things on your bucket list?

45:59

Angela

We are both big fans of the bucket list because you know what? I also think we're both, here's the deal, we're not just big fans of bucket list to just write one and put it out there and let it go. We're big fans of actionable bucket list where we get excited to be able to check things off of the bucket list, which is really important characteristic to list there. And so what's next on my bucket list? Well, one I have also told lots of people, because I'm putting this into existence, is that I hope to be able to build a legacy so that Georgia Tech will finally give me the third award in the series, which is the hall of Fame award.

46:34

Angela

So I'm putting that out there that I want to make a big enough impact that they feel that strongly about that because I'd like to have the trifecta. And

another thing is really, I want to be able to show the work that I've done as a female and have it inspire other people. So Georgia Tech just put together the Pathway to Progress program. And it's really this art exhibit that you can walk through and you can see like the astronauts that people who came through Georgia Tech, they're females and it has this cool thing where it's like mirrors so the little kids can like see themselves in it too. So I'm hoping to one day also make it on the pathway to progress. So those are like two career things. And then I want to write two books.

47:22

Angela

So I want to write a memoir and a leadership book that make New York Times seller without me having to pay for it, you know. And then I think the fourth one, I know you asked one or two, but I'm an overachiever, so I feel I have my alto saxophone out in my office and I want to get back to where I can actually legitimately play saxophone. Like I was really good in high school and then I stopped it and I really want to get back.

47:49

Charlie

Oh, I love it. I love every bit of that. And you're right, you gotta put it out there. And what bucket list, you know, it's important I found to share with those around you, even people you're just meeting. You know, I've got my bucket list of things showed you categorized. And one of them, I have a sports category and I wanted to sit courtside at a game and I shared that with a business friend. It happened to be that he had courtside season tickets and he gifted it to me for my birthday a few years ago. And I just, it was just amazing. And so you just put it out there.

48:21

Charlie

You never, you never know who might have that intro or that connection or at least that encouragement or have you thought of maybe not quite bucket list for our listeners, you know, with our big Jeep fans. Okay. To our listeners. I also drive an electric car, but doing an electric car of some type

for 12 years. But I gotta love my Jeeps. I drew. I grew up in the North Georgia mountains and I don't know, what do you love about Jeeps? Connecting to the outdoors? What is it?

48:48

Angela

You know, I hiked on four or five of the seven continents and I love the outdoors, I love the mountains, I love the country. And I love my Jeep because with it I can go anywhere I want to go. And it is that moment that there are no boundaries, there are no things holding you back. If you want to get next to that creek side creek side, you can do that. And so I, I really love the feeling of that. And I got my first Jeep in 20. It was, it was 2010 Jeep, I think somewhere like that. And I just have been a Jeep girl ever since. And I, I love my Jeep, as you know. And hey, when you can take other people out and go trailing and go through some fun adventures, then it's even better.

49:40

Charlie

You've got a great teeth. Okay, there we go. I Love it. So I love to ask my listeners, is there a book you'd recommend or maybe a podcast or documentary? Just something that you want to share.

49:50

Angela

Okay. I am obsessed with a new book and it is the book called Any Dumbass Can Do It. It's written by Gary ridge, the former CEO of WD40. It's a leadership book and it talks about. It's like basically leadership CEO from a billion dollar company. And the wisdom and the humor and the humility in this book. I've already now read it three times. I heard him on the podcast, a London podcast called Leadership Enigma Podcast. And I heard him interviewed on it and I thought I need to check out this book. And I just love it because some one of the things I will say I'm grateful of having growing up with three brothers is a female engineer, is that I was like, well, I

was never intimidated by what boys could do. And that was really important as a female engineer, right?

50:46

Angela

Because I was just like, why? I saw them. Like I changed my baby brother's diapers. Like I saw them. They're humans just like me, right? And the thing I love about this book is he really just helps people realize that really those people leading all those instances, they're just humans. And here's a better way to be a better leader as being as human as possible.

51:08

Charlie

I've not read that. What a fantastic recommendation. I'm going to go get my copy. Maybe audible, but it sounds like you want to back up. And hardcover too. You recommended some books earlier. I'm going to put links to all of those in the podcast. Show notes. This has been fantastic. Just a couple more questions as we start to wrap up. As you look back on your career, Angela, is there anything you wish you'd have known earlier?

51:28

Angela

I was thinking about this because at one point I almost said I wish I'd known in high school about biomedical engineering. But the reality is this, you know, when you made the comment about it, I was way more successful when I went back as a 29 year old single mom and I had that grit that I needed to be what I. What I needed to graduate as. So that's not it. I think wish. What I wish I would have known earlier is that I needed to stop worrying about what other people thought I was. And what if other people thought I was good enough or stopped trying to prove I was good enough early in my career?

52:03

Angela

Because the minute I stopped worrying about that and I just focused on

being myself and focused on saying, hey, I don't know, this you know, or laughing if I fell or realizing I made a mistake, hey, I'm gonna own up to that mistake. I'm gonna apologize. I'm gonna do all of that. I think I wish I had known earlier that most people don't focus on us as much as we think they are. They're really focusing on themselves. So just focus on just doing the right thing, the next best step.

52:34

Charlie

So smart, simple. What's. Common sense isn't always common practice. So thank you for that reminder. Okay, last question. Someone's listening right now. I know they're getting inspired by your story. Let's say they're jumping in right now, maybe to your industry. Any words of encouragement as we wrap up?

52:51

Angela

I would say surround yourself with other good humans who are focused on trying to make a positive impact in the world around them. And if you surround yourself with the right people, if you learn how to. One of the phrases I say is every time you say yes to something means you're saying no to something else. So choose your yeses wisely. And that's in the things you're obligated to do. That's in the jobs that you're doing. It's also in the relationships that you have in your life. So surround yourself with amazing people like you, Charlie, that I can call and say, hey, I need advice on this situation. And I know you're going to tell me maybe not what I want to hear, but what I need to hear. So I think do that.

53:42

Angela

Say yes to the appropriate people to be in your life, and then spend time really building those relationships.

53:49

Charlie

It's kind of like your own personal board of advisors. And that's something I've heard from you ever since I first met you. You know, everybody please reach out. Connect with Angela on LinkedIn. Let her know what you thought of the podcast. If you're in and around Georgia Tech or Emory, you're just curious about this field. I mean, you got to reach out. And like you said, you just got to start talking to people and be around really positive people. And you're right there at the top of that list. So thanks for sharing your story on the podcast today. I know this is gonna be fun. I didn't know it was going to be this fun, and I had a blast. So thank you for being on the show today.

54:19

Angela

Well, you are amazing. I know you are super busy, and I know you have some amazing guests, so thank you for allowing me to say yes for this opportunity to have a chat with you.

54:30

Speaker 4

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55:06

Charlie

So.

