

## Here at AWS - Tanuja Randery transcript

Speakers: Geetha Annamalai & Tanuja Randery

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**Tanuja:** We got to demystify tech. Tech isn't about purely a coding thing or purely marketing, there are so many exciting jobs in tech. When I grew up, by the way, my father was a tech entrepreneur, and I would follow him around, and that's how I got my excitement about tech.

**Geetha:** Hi, I'm Geetha. So, far, Constance and I have spoken to some truly amazing employees. We've seen a detailed cross-section of AWS. We've looked at inspiring personal stories, learn about career paths, and discovered how our ID&E policies push this company forward.

Affinity groups, mentors, community programs, there's so much worthwhile work going on in and outside our offices. There has also been some great advice on how to navigate a career in this industry, but there's somewhere we haven't been yet. I think it's time we went to the top.

In today's episode, I want to discover what someone in a really senior position sees when they look at AWS. What does it take to get there, and what do they feel about ID&E at AWS? What's working and where can we make more progress? Welcome to Here at AWS.

**Tanuja:** So, I love connecting people, I love connecting concepts. I do it because I love problem solving, but I really want to help people. And for me, that's what brings me energy, is being with people and inspiring them and connecting them, and enabling their journeys.

**Geetha:** That's Tanuja, Managing Director at Amazon Web Services, Europe, Middle East, and Africa. If you want to know where AWS is and where it is going, Tanuja is the best person to talk to. But she's also had an interesting personal journey. So, first of all, I wanted to know how she made her way to AWS.

**Tanuja:** So, maybe a very quick, the ten-second version of my career. I was born and raised in India, I wanted to do my master's in the U.S. It was the big thing, everyone wanted to go to the U.S. and do their MBA. So, that's what I did.

And then I stayed and worked in the U.S. for many years. I've spent half my career in very strategic roles. Be that transformation, strategy, M&A, both at classic consulting organisations like a McKinsey, but also within big companies leading large transformation programs.

And then I spent half my career actually doing the things you talk about when you write strategy, which is operating businesses, operating regions, divisions, startups. And if I close that out, I would say I've done that internationally.

Initially with McKinsey, I've spent about 10 years at McKinsey working both in the U.S. as well as here in London, and worked alongside tech companies actually most

of my life, which is wonderful. And that's kind of where I got my tech bug, let's call it that.

And then I worked for EMC in the U.S. as again, a head of strategy in M&A. I moved over to Europe about 19 years ago. I've been in the telecom sector for almost 15 years, leading a number of businesses for British Telecom, Colt, which is City of London Telecoms.

Did a bit of a stint in Schneider Electric. I don't know if you know them, but they are an industrial tech organisation. And I think that's the other angle. It's both international, but I've also moved sectors.

So, Telecom's tech as well as Schneider Electric gave me a breadth of sort of sectors as well. And then most recently, I went back to McKinsey, I boomeranged back into McKinsey, and then I got the call from AWS.

**Geetha:** So, why AWS?

**Tanuja:** Well, look, initially, I must say, when I first got the call, I was at McKinsey and I really enjoyed what I was doing because I was working with big enterprises and businesses on helping them on their transformation journey and really business transformation journey, which we know is in fact, the thing we have to address.

But every single time I did that, with any business that I worked with, technology was always essential to helping them make that transformation journey. And I realised just how difficult it was for these companies to absorb.

And so, when AWS called me, I thought here's an opportunity having spent all my life either running businesses or helping them with the strategy on business transformation, is to connect the dots through to the digital and technology transformation by going over to the other side, and actually help businesses understand how they can embrace the technology.

I had to reflect on it, and then I realised that it was absolutely something I wanted to do also because I was super impressed by what the cloud could do in terms of enabling society's biggest challenges.

Be that sustainability or be that digital skills, and of course, inclusion in all its forms. So, in addition to the business transformation, I was super excited about the impact on society at large.

**Geetha:** Working at a really high level, Tanuja has a detailed map of the company, what is shifting and what's important.

I really wanted to talk to Tanuja because she doesn't shy away from leading the tough conversations around diversity and inclusion. She's very vocal about what we're doing right and what we can be doing better.

**Tanuja:** So, if you look at the numbers broadly — and this is not about Amazon and AWS numbers, but broadly, if you look around us; what you tend to see is that you've got almost 50% plus gender diversity, let's take, at the beginning of the funnel.

So, when people come into the workforce, and if you look at our ECT, by the way, talent, I'm super excited. We've just brought in a next round actually of graduates and there's 50% women in that. So, you get this phenomenal group of women joining us at the front of their careers.

But then what you tend to see is there is a leaky pipeline. And by the time you get to senior roles, broadly speaking, that number can go from 50, all the way down to 20. In some cases, even 10% in really, really senior executive roles.

So, what's super important for us to do is make sure that not only are we recruiting women in at the front, we're actually managing and helping them manage their career through the process. And sponsoring is really critical, we'll come onto this, I'm sure.

But I think mentoring is fabulous, but it's super important for you not only to receive feedback as an individual and support and challenge, but also, to have someone who actually creates opportunities for you and opens the doors, and I had that certainly in my career by the way.

I remember very specifically this person I used to work for at EMC who then went on to become the CEO of Colt, and brought me along with him to be his head of strategy and transformation and then gave me my first P&L job. And I couldn't have done that without that level of sponsorship.

So, I think sponsoring is really critical to move people around the pipeline. And then it's really important that we are inspiring, providing education to our managers. because the frontline managers back to your point, are really the people that make all the difference.

Because right now, I will say to you that while we are doing much better today than we were, I don't think we are where we need to be in the tech industry at large in terms of having women at the most senior levels in organisations.

And particularly, by the way, I would say in the technical side of things, only one in three graduates today are STEM graduates. That's a problem. Only 19% of ICT specialists in Europe are female. So, we really have to inspire the generation in terms of coming into tech jobs.

**Geetha:** Tanuja knows about every layer of AWS, and over her time here, she's seen some incredibly positive changes.

**Tanuja:** If I go back to the start of my career, and I think that's why there's a lot of positivity here, and you'll probably hear that in me. I think we've made a ton of progress. We are starting to get there in terms of having a lot more minority women and minorities at large, not just female. So, I think we are improving, absolutely improving.

We are very committed by the way, at AWS and Amazon to this whole area of diversity and inclusion. I mean, we've got amazing programs here in terms of helping people return to work.

We have this exciting program that we've introduced called Leadership Circles, which allows managers to share best practices and ideas and learn from other leaders. We've got this great podcast series that we've introduced — not this one, but it's called Inclusion Podcast and it's absolutely lovely to see what people are doing there.

Coming back to the core of the question, what have I seen? When I started my journey, I was very much often the only woman in the room. I was one of very few female leaders at McKinsey in the early days, I remember being at EMC and the boardroom was all men.

In fact, I have a funny story if I could share with you, and it's probably one of the tips I would provide the women listening to this or the men listening to this is I was in a boardroom at EMC — all men, all senior people, I was slightly more junior.

I was working at McKinsey at that time, and the CEO asked a question of his team. He said, "Did any of you hear about this rumour of our competitors acquiring this business?" And there was dull silence in the room, like none of them had done any research.

I had done my research. And so, I thought to myself, I said, "Good Lord, do I get up now and say something?" I mean, I was feeling somewhat intimidated. And I said, "I've got to speak up because I have the information that he needs."

So, I got up and there was silence in the room because all these men thought I was crazy to even speak up or get up in the boardroom, but I did. And I said, "This is what was announced in the press today." And that's all I said, very fact-based, no opinions, and I sat down. And I remember the next day, Joe tapping me in the cafeteria and saying, "You need to come work for me."

So, that was my big break, just taking that opportunity. But it was very lonely. There were very few women around to be able to share with. Today, things have really progressed. On my management team, by the way, 50% are women, which is amazing. So, I think things have progressed, things have evolved, policies have evolved.

I think organisations have woken up to the fact that by the way, if they want to address their digital skills gap and their skills gap at large, they have to bring women and minorities, and broad forms of diverse individuals into the workforce.

We cannot deliver against the goals of productivity and enhancement and growth and innovation without embracing the entire population.

**Geetha:** It's great to hear how progress is being made within AWS, and Tanuja is keen to keep shaking things up.

**Tanuja:** So, look, I think two or three things I would call out. I think one is there's a lot more work to be done. I think we all believe that. One, it's about, as I said, inspiring the next generation of talent. So, we've got to get young girls in the ages of 12 to 15 already getting excited about tech.

And you know what, we got to demystify tech. Tech isn't about purely a coding thing or purely marketing. There are so many exciting jobs in tech. When I grew up, by the way, my father was a tech entrepreneur, and I would follow him around and that's how I got my excitement about tech.

So, it's really about how do we help women take risk, raise their hands up, speak up more, really lean into these discussions. And that means creating a more inclusive culture, by the way. In a very positive manner, I think we are making progress.

I'm an optimist anyway, very, very much so. I actually believe as the world evolves and as you see the changes with generative AI as well, the skillset that we now need is actually no longer just a purely data and engineering only skillset. We need all the skillset; we need the softer skills as well.

So, there's a phenomenal time to be a woman, a phenomenal time to be a minority, a phenomenal time to be just a human being. I think there's so much that we need to do together to really be able to change society at large.

**Geetha:** Tanuja's really enthusiastic that things are going in the right direction. She's also trying to drive change outside of AWS. Can you tell me a bit more about the Power Women Network?

**Tanuja:** Yeah, thanks for asking actually. It's a labour of love. I used to be in the energy industry, so I think I mentioned I was leading Schneider Electric's UK and Ireland business. And when I got into that business, I realised that there was super few women in the industrial sector broadly.

So, if you look around at energy, power, utilities — by the way, again, this is changing. Now, it's very different than it was, but in those days there weren't. And so, I started this network, Power Women.

And actually, the word power came from the energy industry. It was meant to bring together senior women and meet sort of once a month around a topic. And we didn't meet, by the way, to talk about diversity.

We met to talk about innovation. We met to talk about how we could improve the skills gap. We met to talk about sustainability. We met to talk about restructuring. But my goal was the following, it was to create a senior, very senior.

So, these are all women who were either reporting into CEOs or were at that level of their career to create a peer-to-peer network so that they could exchange ideas in a very safe environment, that they could call each other and ask for advice, that they could be challenges to each other.

And at the same time, I created the network so that we, this group would take on the responsibility of inspiring the next generation of female leaders. It's wonderful to see how they support each other.

And I'm excited because we also launched something called Next Generation Power Women Network, where we are mentoring a group of younger early career talent.

And at the same time, we've also launched a Power Women Speak Podcast, where I interview CEOs and senior women on their journey, just like you're doing now.

**Geetha:** Tanuja has this acute awareness of the greater mission for a better AWS. Part of that is increased representation, but from senior leadership down to graduates, we've all got to be actively involved in improving AWS.

**Tanuja:** All my colleagues here within AWS and Amazon, I think together, we're making a big difference in terms of what we do. So, we can't pat ourselves on the back and think we've got there because we haven't. And being vocally self-critical as we always are at Amazon, there's a lot to do.

So, yeah, I think, look, if I could give more time, I would. I have a rule that I use in terms of time management, which is called 40/40/20. Someone taught me that early in my career.

And it's 40% of your time with teams. It's 40% of time with your customers, your stakeholders, your partners, your understanding their requirements so that you can do better. And then it's 20% of your time on reflection, on learning, on strategizing, on giving back to society. So, I try and follow that rule.

It's never always perfect by the way, let me tell you. There are weeks, it just gets blown up. But as long as you've got that somewhere in your mental model and you keep coming back to it, I think it's helpful.

**Geetha:** It's a tricky one to answer, but I wanted to ask Tanuja about the company's future in terms of ID&E. What are the goals for those like her making the big decisions?

**Tanuja:** So, I think we need to continue to do the things we're doing. When you've got something working, you just put more fuel on it. We have made a commitment to train 29 million people for free around the world.

It's hundreds and millions of dollars of investment by the way that we're making. And that's across all the programs I mentioned. Whether it's GetIT or re/Start or we do a lot of work with universities, we do a lot of work with our customers.

We have machine learning universities that we're working on and a variety of bursaries and other programs. So, that's one. Continue doing what we're doing there because that commitment's critical.

By the way, we've trained 13 million already, so we've made a lot of progress towards this goal. So, I think that talent development, the way we recruit, the connection to our leadership principles, all that we need to keep doing.

**Geetha:** It's fascinating to hear from a leadership perspective the work that is being done. Talking to Tanuja, you get a sense of where we're headed as a company. I feel positive about what comes next. And you know what, the sky really is the limit.

**Tanuja:** I think we are in a unique position to be able to orchestrate conversations and help people see the best practices that exist in being able to really enable career journeys for a more diverse group of individuals.

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**Geetha:** Thanks so much to Tanuja 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 website in the bio, you may just be the person we're looking for.

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