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Speakers: Karine Vasselin, Kanisha Vincent, & Gerrit Bottemöller

Karine: At Capgemini, everyone is in the game. We shape a common passion for sports, and we build inclusive futures for all, on and off the field. In this series, we will be hearing from amazing athletes, and inspiring role models, how they break stereotypes and overcome challenges in sports and in the workplace.

I am Karine Vasselin. I am leading the Group Diversity and Inclusion agenda, I do para triathlon myself, and I will be your host.

Today, I have the pleasure to have with me Kanisha Vincent, an international rugby player, and Gerrit Bottemöller, a sailing champion, and my colleague in Capgemini.

In this episode, we'll explore together what it takes to pursue excellence in sports and in the workplace, learn about teamwork and how we can apply it in our daily lives.

So, hello Kanisha. Thanks so much for joining us today. You're an international rugby player, a sports performance specialist, a referee, and now, even the Vice President of Trinidad and Tobago Rugby Union. So inspiring.

Could you tell us more about your love and passion for rugby?

Kanisha: Hi, Karine. Sure thing. So, I actually used to play hockey and netball in high school, so I played a lot of netball. I really love it as a sport, it was non-contact, very different from what rugby actually is.

I did a youth camp in, I think it was 2011 or 2012, and they had a learner sport segment, and they introduced rugby as one of their sports. And from the first introduction, the ball, the tackle, the hits, it was something that I really wanted to explore more.

And I went down to our local rugby club and got into the sport. But getting into it at the TTOC level, the Olympic youth camp level, that's where the passion for it really struck. And from there, it kind of just ballooned, a year after I made my first national team.

And I've been to the Central American Caribbean games, the PanAm games. We've had countless championships in Rugby Americas North, which is the region that Trinidad and Tobago is in. And it's been a journey.

In 2019, actually, I retired from playing ('retired', my friends would say) and I picked up refereeing, which was a new challenge. It was excellent. It was a way to continue to give back to the sport.

So, rugby has really taken me on a journey from playing to refereeing, and now, at the administrative level. And it's really a culmination of all the things that I've ever wanted to do.

I get to play, I get to have fun, I get to give back to my community, and I get to be involved with my community, and it ties everything up in a really nice bow for me in that way.

Karine: So, what about you, Gerrit? You've had an impressive track record as well because you've been sailing for over 40 years, and you have also a very challenging senior director role within Capgemini.

Gerrit: Yeah, hello everybody, and hello Karine, and thank you very much for having me here. I'm really feeling honored to talk about my passion because like Kanisha said, it's a passion all of my life.

It started in childhood. I'm really living since over 40 years now, and it has become really a part of my mindset and my professional life in Capgemini. And so, sailing is, for me, a high performance sport, yes, of course, but also kind of a mindset, a behavior.

So, when it comes to sailing, it's all about passion, but also being inspired, motivated, being patient. If there's no wind, you need to wait, you need to be ready for it – when the wind comes and hits you.

And then it's about, of course, discipline, it's about endurance, it's about the tactical positioning of your boat, of yourself within the race, against your opponent and anticipate what can happen. And this is the interesting part of sailing.

And then there is a technology part of it, and that's why I combined it. Why are we sailing? Why can't we be faster than the wind? Why can't we be faster two, three times now than the wind? And what's the methodology behind it?

So, I studied engineering and I took that sailing part as one of my hobbies, but then I got an offer from one of the professional teams in the Nordic and becoming a kind of a semi-professional during my school time and my college time, university time. And I won several championships like the German one, the European and world champion.

But sailing is kind of a lifestyle and it's kind of a mindset. And I combine it today with the work with my clients and my teams. Yeah, being always passionate and always being motivated actually to take the best out of the situation, but also making impact.

And that's why it's so interesting for me actually to combine these two things: my passion for sailing, and the passion for my clients being an engineer and strategy advisor.

Karine: Great, Gerrit. So, you're mentioning mindsets, but you also referred to technology as a key enabler for sports.

Kanisha, you were part of the first cohort of Capgemini's Women in Rugby Leadership program. And so, what parallel can you draw between high performance in teams in sport, and in the workplace as well?

Kanisha: I think what marries the two in terms of high performance in teams and sport, then high performance in teams in the workplace is that there's a position for everyone, and we need everybody to be able to do their jobs the way that it needs to be done or to the highest level for us to be successful as a team.

Rugby specifically is the kind of sport that is for everyone, and there are different jobs that people need to do in order to achieve the goal, which is scoring tries and winning games.

And being in the rugby team has taught me how to deliberate, how to compromise, how to have certain conversations, as well as how to be a leader when necessary. And then how to have the empathy for your teammates, to be able to pull people along to ensure that everybody's on the same page, we have the same mindset so that we can achieve the goal.

And I think through my time at Capgemini, I definitely had a lot of support. One of the strengths of the programme is it being a team. We have all the cohorts come in from rugby around the world.

We have Capgemini at our backs. We have the opportunity to have mentors, and the ecosystem that's created in that way is really what is necessary to have the success that you need at any level.

Karine: Kanisha, given your personal journey, how does one excel as an individual compared to being a part of a team?

Kanisha: Thank you, Karine. This is actually a question that I've gotten a few times since I started refereeing because I moved from being part of a team to being an individual at a high-performance level as well.

For me, my mindset has always been just to do my best regardless of where I was at. And I think for an individual to excel coming out of a team, you have to surround yourself with people who make you feel team-like.

And I would say as you move into the individual realm, you do have to be able to set your own goals, you have to get through your session, you have to go to work, and then you have to train again. And when you do that on your own, it's easy to feel very alone and it's easy to feel like you're very burnt out.

Like, "What am I doing this for? This is so hard, why did I choose this?" And I think making sure that your goals are set and achievable for you, smarter goals, ensuring that you have people that are supportive, that make sure that if they see you lagging, if they see you looking a bit sad, a bit under the weather, they're able to pull you up and help you move forward.

Karine: Great. So, it sounds like a fuller coaching approach, and precisely Gerrit, you seem to be very experienced in leadership and coaching. So, can you tell us what it takes to create a high-performance team?

Gerrit: It's most likely three things you need to bring together. I think it's the why, what, and how. If you look, everything starts with the purpose. And Kanisha also mentioned it, it's about winning. It's about taking the next step.

So, it's all about what do we want to achieve? Milestones we want to achieve. And if you have a purpose like winning the America's Cup – when I got asked to become a member of the first German America's Cup team, it was not the purpose of winning the America's Cup.

It was the purpose of getting the team together, designing and building a state-of-the-art boat, and glueing this team of engineers, of sail designers and sailors together actually to learn as much as we can over the next four years, and then starting an attack to win the America's Cup.

So, there was a big vision, but the purpose of this first was gaining knowledge, skilling up, building capabilities.

So, second, it's about the what: how you bring the people together, which kind of capabilities you need, what kind of mindset. You have to play and moderate the team, but also the atmosphere in the team when you have got the highs and the lows.

In high performing teams, if you look at this, and they've done a lot of studies after the America's Cup, sailing the America's Cup, and it's super interesting to see high-performing teams are super fast in going through the change curve actually of losing, and then coming back on the next day, which creates some momentum of winning.

And then it's about the how. Being a leader does not mean you tell everybody what they need to do and what they are not to do. It's about actually forming the purpose and living it by example.

And this is what I also translate into my daily work with my teams and my clients, and giving the teams freedom actually and skill them up. So, leadership is about reading the team, reading the highs and lows, and reading and supporting also their best performance for that day. And you need to do that every day.

Karine: Precisely. We are convinced in Capgemini of the importance of bringing the best of yourself at work. And for this, we need to be in a safe and inclusive workplace.

What can you tell us about diversity and inclusivity of technology, sports in the workplace?

Kanisha: I would say anybody anywhere can play rugby. All you need is a couple friends and a ball, and sometimes you don't even need a ball. It's immense in terms of how many versions are available to be played.

There's touch rugby, there's flag rugby, there's TagX, there's wheelchair rugby, there's beach rugby, there's rugby fives, rugby sevens, fifteens, super rugby. The possibilities are endless, and there's a bit of something. There's also deaf athletes who play rugby as well.

So, rugby really centres itself on inclusivity. I could particularly say that as a women's leadership scholar in partnership with Capgemini, rugby took the mantle on to move women's leadership forward within the sport, and in essence, around the rule when it comes to putting women in leadership positions to give them the opportunity and the confidence to continue to do that elsewhere. And I think that in particular, rugby really shows people what we could do.

So, when it comes to really moving the way forward in the quest to bring some equity within the sporting workplace, and then within the regular working landscape, we try to make these strides forward as best as we can ensuring that everybody is accounted for, that people feel comfortable and safe. And that rugby is a space where people could come to feel included, trying to make sure that everybody has a voice and that they're able to be heard, listened to, and understood.

Karine: It seems that really, we are breaking the barriers in rugby. Thanks so much for joining us today. We're already at the end of this episode, but we learned so much from your inspiring stories and recommendations.