**Kristin Tucker PodCAST Transcript**

**Kara Snyder:**

Hello, and welcome to the podcast, a podcast produced by the College of Applied Science and Technology at Illinois State University. I'm your host, Kara Snyder, and I serve as the Assistant Dean of Marketing, Communications, and Constituent Relations for the College. Each episode, we're sitting down with an alum of a college, and today we have a chance to talk to Kristin Tucker. Kristin is an Information Technology alumna and currently serves as Managing Principal for TDK Technologies. Welcome, and thank you for being here.

**Kristin Tucker:**

Thanks for having me, Kara.

**Kara Snyder:**

Well, let's start at the beginning. Why did you choose ISU?

**Kristin Tucker:**

I was familiar with ISU because my mom is an alum, actually a Illinois State Normal University, but I also had a cousin who was in the, at the time, Applied Computer Science program, so became more familiar with the program then, knew that lined up pretty well with what I wanted to do in my career, and there I was.

**Kara Snyder:**

So tell me a little bit about that because you are what I consider to be a woman and what we consider to be a male-dominated field, right?

**Kristin Tucker**

Very much so.

**Kara Snyder:**

So how did that look for you? How did that feel when you found your major and found your fit when you were on campus?

**Kristin Tucker:**

You know, I have always been one of those people who have more guy friends than I had girlfriends. So I tended to hang out more with guys than girls anyway, and just never let it get in my way. My two best friends on campus, still very dear friends today, are both guys. And it just is something that's never bothered me. I now run a technology consulting firm, so I live and breathe in the male dominated field every day and have for, gosh, closing in on 30 years now. So it's just part of who I am.

**Kara Snyder:**

When you think about that and think about your amazing career in that industry, is there any advice that you would give to students who identify as female if they are considering a career in a male dominated industry? What advice would you give them?

**Kristin Tucker:**

I would have to say, believe in yourself, believe in your capabilities, and don't let anybody tell you any differently. I, like a lot of women I know in this field, have had men tell me that I don't know what I'm talking about, or mansplained me, or tried to take credit for things I've done, and I stand my ground and make sure that credit goes where credit is due, and there's certainly a time and a place for those conversations, but just don't let anybody walk over you.

**Kara Snyder:**

That's great advice, thank you. So tell us when you're thinking about your time on campus, you mentioned these friends that you made, what do you miss the most about that time in your life?

**Kristin Tucker:**

We were on campus at a much different time. All of our all of our coding work for programming classes was done in a computer lab. So there were lots of late nights huddled around dumb terminals working through problems and all of that kind of stuff. And it was nerve wracking, and it was frustrating when things weren't working right, and all of that. But the 3 of us had a great time together along with our other classmates, and that time was just very special.

**Kara Snyder:**

So tell us, then, as your time on campus wrapped up, what did that initial job search look like for you? And where did you end up?

**Kristin Tucker:**

The program itself really position me for my first real job, if you will, after college. Applied computer science, of course, had a required internship or co-op, and I did 2 co-op terms at Monsanto, in Saint Louis. Through my time at Monsanto I met the people who ran a locally owned consulting firm here in town and they hired me straight out of school, and I've just never left this part of the industry. I worked for that 1st company for about 5 months. Long enough that a group of people I met there decided to start their own consulting firm was the second consultant they hired there. My mentor and boss told me I'd have more than 10 years of experience in less than 5 if I lived through it. She didn't lie on either of those counts. Was there for 11 years, and then a couple of partners, and I started TDK technologies.

**Kara Snyder:**

And so tell us, you know, I introduce you as managing principal, which sounds important, but I'm curious to hear you explain, especially for our listeners that are outside of the information technology industry. What does that mean? How do you spend your days? And how do you describe your job to someone outside of the industry?

**Kristin Tucker:**

We're a a partnership, and we're a a limited liability company. So managing principal is essentially the president of the company and as a service organization. We don't have inventory sitting on shelves or anything like that. We provide software development project management analysis services to our clients across the country. So the easiest way for me to explain my job is, I heard cats. There are a lot of humans in my world, and no two days are alike. I have a responsibility for all of the back office functions. So making sure business and the human benefits or and insurances are all in place, making sure everyone is getting paid on time. Working with our clients, and especially new prospect clients, to understand where their challenges are, and if there is opportunity for TDK to help them solve those problems, working with our recruiting team to find top notch talent to help provide those services to our clients. So it's really a wide variety of things that I get involved with every day. And like I said, no two days are alike.

**Kara Snyder:**

So as managing principal president of this company. How would you describe your leadership philosophy?

**Kristin Tucker:**

Surround yourself with the smartest people you can find and listen. Ultimately, the decisions typically rest on my shoulders. But I'm not making them alone. I have a lot of respect and a lot of faith in our team. So it's it's a lot of have a conversation and make sure I've got as much context as possible and as much information as possible, so that I'm making the best and the best decisions that I know how.

**Kara Snyder:**

So what would you consider to be the most favorite part of your job?

**Kristin Tucker:**

As much as I talk about herding cats and a lot of humans, and all of that. It's really our people that keep me fired up and engaged, and ready to do more. When we started the company more than 24 years ago, our philosophy was, if we take care of our clients, and we take care of our people, everything else takes care of itself, and we've really proven that out to be true, we started a technology company on the heels of the.com bust. And 5 months before 9/11, and we're still here, closing in on 25 years later.

**Kara Snyder**

Isn't that interesting? Because the changes that you've seen, and I would guess how nimble you've had to be over those over the course of time. Tell me about a challenge that you've faced throughout that time.

**Kristin Tucker:**

Oh, gosh, This this one goes in a direction that most people don't expect. There were 3 founding partners myself, my husband, Terry, and my current partner, David Kass. Terry, David and Kristen clearly were technology people and not marketing people, because that's how we got to TDK. About-- gosh, let me think--when TDK was not quite two years old, Terry was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor, and over the span of the next 18 months we balanced between treatments and options, and all of that kind of stuff for him and trying to keep myself engaged in the company, and really David held down the fort during that year and a half so that I could focus on the family. Unfortunately, after a year and a half in that fight we lost him to an infection—yes, to an infection-- and we just kept rolling forward from there. But trying to figure out how to keep the company running when your life partner as well as your business partner, is going through that type of a catastrophic illness. It’s definitely not for the faint of heart.

**Kara Snyder:**

Well, first of all, let me say how deeply sorry I am for your loss. I'm sure that was incredibly painful and very hard to go through looking at that through a leadership lens. I'm curious how you took that experience and let it bring compassion to how you lead your team and how you help others that might be going through a similar hardship.

**Kristin Tucker:**

It definitely had a big impact. We consider ourselves a people first organization. When you're a service company, if you're not focused on your people, then you're completely missing out. So making sure that we are taking care of our people, every step of the way is priority one. We unfortunately have had a couple of situations along the way where people in our company have had catastrophic illness, and at that point, the most important thing I could do was make sure that our insurance and every other program that we had that could support them. Was as buttoned up and as rich as it could be, so that they weren't having to think about being able to afford what they needed, or how's the family going to be taken care of if I'm not working, or any of those things, making sure that we can at least help take that off of their plate so they can focus on their health is the most important thing in those scenarios.

**Kara Snyder:**

And I'm curious when I think about our students that might be entering the job market going through the job search process, you know these days careers, it's so easy to be connected. 24/7. So, thinking about your background and thinking about how you approach leadership, what advice do you have for those students that are maybe also looking to be part of a company that puts people first and has respect for balance, and understands the importance of family. How would you recommend that they go through the job search process? Are there certain questions they could ask? I'd be curious to hear your thoughts on that.

**Kristin Tucker:**

It's interesting. Technology, generally speaking, isn't an 8 to 5 job, you know. If you have a new system being implemented, you get down to crunch time in the development cycle, in the testing cycle, you get to implementation and that all, depending upon the industry, has to be done off hours, all of that kind of stuff. So expecting a balance every day at work, I don't know that that happens in this industry as much. But it's making sure that that you are asking about what does workload look like, and how do projects get scheduled, and how are the 3 pieces of project management really handled? Because in in any project you have 3 variables, you have resources, you have quality, and you have time. And you can control one of them, you can constrain one, and then the other one is what it is. So if they are most tightly managing the budget either your timeline is going to go on forever, or you're not going to have enough people for the project, or something like that. So it's making sure that that you really understand. How do they run projects and decide who's working on what and how aggressive they are in their schedules and those types of things, so that you are walking in to any organization, eyes wide open.

**Kara Snyder:**

And on the flip side of that thinking about you as a supervisor. What do you look for when you go to add someone to your team. Are there certain qualities, characteristics, certain things that stand out to you in the interview process?

**Kristin Tucker:**

Yes, so technology is always a moving target. Right? It's not like accounting where the tools and processes used in accounting have been around for hundreds, if not thousands of years. So someone who is inquisitive, someone who loves to learn, we talk a lot about hungry and smart, you know. Where's that next thing? And and how am I going to pick it up quickly so that I can contribute? Those are the things that really drive, what we're looking for.

**Kara Snyder:**

That's so helpful. Thank you.

Well, Kristin, we are going to finish with a speed round. So I want you just to go with your 1st instinct on these questions, and that'll let us get to know you a little bit better. Are you a morning person or a night owl?

**Kristin Tucker:**

I am a night owl, 100%.

**Kara Snyder:**

Is that something we can blame on your time at ISU? I'm picturing you and your friends, you know, in the in the room, doing coding and—

**Kristin Tucker:**

There exactly there, there could be a little truth to that.

**Kara Snyder:**

What's your go to snack?

**Kristin Tucker:**

Probably white cheddar popcorn.

**Kara Snyder:**

What's your coffee order?

**Kristin Tucker:**

Iced tea.

**Kara Snyder:**

Best trip you’ve ever taken?

**Kristin Tucker:**

Our on our honeymoon, my husband and I went to Tahiti, and there are no pictures I have ever seen that does French Polynesia justice. It is just, incredible.

**Kara Snyder:**

Oh, that sounds amazing. How long did it take you to get there? How long's the flight?

**Kristin Tucker:**

It's a little short of going to Australia, but it’s a really long time.

**Kara Snyder:**

Yeah, but worth it, I’m sure.

**Kristin Tucker:**

Oh absolutely we actually flew from St. Louis to LA, and spent a day and a half, I think, in LA, just to break it up a little bit.

**Kara Snyder:**

Sure, gotta strech your legs and adjust to the time zone a little bit at a time.

**Kristin Tucker:**

Exactly.

**Kara Snyder:**

And I ask everybody that comes on the podcast… Avanti's gondola or Pub II cheese balls?

**Kristin Tucker:**

I lived in Colby Hall, which I know is no longer there. But we were right across the street from Avanti's. I have to go gondola all day long.

**Kara Snyder:**

Can’t beat it.

**Kristin Tucker:**

Nope!

**Kara Snyder:**

Well, one last question for you. If you could give one piece of advice to a college student, what would you say?

**Kristin Tucker:**

Take the opportunity early to try new things, to really figure out where your passions lie, because if you find a career in something that you're passionate about, work is not work.

**Kara Snyder:**

Well, that is great advice. Thank you, Kristin, and thanks again for being here.

**Kristin Tucker:**

Thanks for having me. I appreciate it.

**Kara Snyder:**

That was Kristin Tucker, managing principal for TDK technologies. Join us next time on the podcast for more stories from our cast alumni.